



**REPORT OF THE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER
REGIONAL PEACEBUILDING DIALOGUE,
NASARAWA STATE**

JUNE 15-16, 2021



1. Introduction

The recurrence of the protracted farmer-herder conflict which significantly impacted communities, Local Government Areas and States in Nigeria has become a major concern for all state and non-state actors. That trajectory over the years especially across the Middle Belt Region but with ramifications that extend beyond the Nigerian borders into the Sahelian Region is becoming more worrisome. The conflict, which has frequently been sparked by disputes over access to land and water, has resulted in serious consequences including huge losses of human lives, key assets and livelihood sources, and far-reaching negative consequences on the socio-economic well-being of affected communities.

The farmer-herder imbroglio has been attributed to ecological changes and climate-induced pressures, which threaten the peaceful coexistence of people across the Middle Belt and especially threatened the centuries-old ties that existed among the affected communities. This has further impacted the already strained security situation in the geographic region as it exerts unduly on the security apparatus and entire governance architecture in the affected areas.

The conflict situation has begun to threaten food security in the region, while the attempt to manage its unfolding complexity has further put a strain on the resources of states and local governments that have provided support to the internally displaced people. The prognosis of the crisis portends that in view of the climate change and related environmental concerns such as desertification, depletion of the lake chad, other basins and reduction of the rivers that recharge the wetlands, the crisis may not abate without strategic interventions. While the situation is already complex and difficult to manage, the corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic dealt an unprecedented blow on social cohesion and amplified the conflict drivers. It also hampered ongoing peacebuilding efforts and diverted resources to the wider health response.

UNDP recognizes the complexity and severity of the unfolding farmers-herders' clashes and subsequent crisis in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States and is committed in collaboration with other partners to peace, security and development across Nigeria. As such, addressing the conflict between herders and farmers remains a key strategic priority.



Group Photo: Regional Dialogue in Nasarawa State

The three middle-belt states of **Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba**, which are the hotspots of this conflict, have indicated a willingness to jointly address the increasing spate of insecurity affecting their communities. Consequently, UNDP in collaboration with WANEP Nigeria organised the Regional Multi-stakeholder Dialogue in Nasarawa State involving 134 (99 males/35 females) State and non-State interlocutors from the three States. Stakeholders from Plateau, Kaduna and Imo States were in attendance to share experiences on the performance of their Peace Agency/Commission/Bureau. The Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue was held with a view to discussing extensively the impediments to peace and stability in the Middle Belt Region and to recommend strategies conducive to lasting peace and security.

The activities at the 2-day Dialogue included a variety of strategic activities including welcome address by the National Network Coordinator (NNC) of WANEP Nigeria, Chief Bridget Osakwe and Mr Christian Okafor on behalf of UNDP and goodwill messages by the Executive Governor of Nasarawa State, HE Engr Abdullahi Sule and representatives of the Governors of Taraba and Benue States. **(see annex for photo)**



Governor of Nasarawa

State, HE Engr Abdullahi Sule and his Deputy Governor, Dr Emmanuel Agbadu Akabe

Key presentations were delivered by selected experts who addressed the delegates on major themes, as follows:

- a. "Achievements and Challenges of Peacebuilding Agencies in Imo, Kaduna and Plateau States", by the Director-General Imo State Bureau for Peace and Conflict

Resolution, Amb. Hon. Peter C. Ohagwa; the Chairperson/Director Kaduna State Peace Commission represented by Hajiya Khadijat Gambo; and, the Director-General Plateau Peace Building Agency whose paper was presented by a staff of the agency;

- b. “The Taraba State Peace and Conflict Management: the Journey so far - Gaps, Achievements and Progress Report in the State”, jointly delivered by the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Justice Barr. Apwenyang Y. Shitta and the Chief of Staff, Taraba State, Rt. Hon. Steven Gbana;
 - c. “Herdsmen and Farmers Clash and its Implication in the North Central Region”, by the Sarkin Bain Keffi, Mr. Dikko Tahir Bala;
 - d. “Contextualising Policy Options for Transforming the Farmer-Herder Conflict”, by Mr. Nathaniel Msen Awuapila;
 - e. “Collaborative Engagement to Peace and Security between Herders and Agrarian Communities; Field Practical Experience”, by Mr. Ebruke Onjite Esike;
 - f. “State and Non-State Actors Roles Toward the Establishment of Peacebuilding Agencies in Nigeria’s Middle Belt Region: Challenges, Lessons and Opportunities”, by Benue State Special Adviser on SDGs, Nepad and Development Cooperation Prof. Magdalene Dura, who was represented by Prof. Charity Angya.

Other activities at the regional dialogue include syndicate sessions that comprised of group activities by the delegates, and statements of commitment to sustain the regional dialogue by the delegates during the plenary session.

2. Objectives and Expected Outcomes

- 2.1. The specific objectives of the Dialogue were, to: collectively review emerging conflict risks and opportunities for collaborative prevention; explore entry points for inter-state collaboration in addressing cross-boundary issues like herder-farmer conflicts; assess progress made across the three states in sustaining peace and prevention of violent conflicts; and, elicit recommendations and commitment for sustaining the peace.
- 2.2. The expected outcomes from the Regional Multi-stakeholder Dialogue were, that: issues and the causes of different layers of conflicts and its management approach would be better assimilated within the broader peace building initiatives of the State and non- state actors; knowledge shared for enhanced legal and administrative processes for the establishment of Peacebuilding Agencies in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States; better understanding of the progress, and the nexus between the draft peace agency bill, the proposed peacebuilding

agencies, and the ICT-based Early Warning Early Response System; agreement reached on the mechanisms for sustained peace building dialogue for the three states aimed at achieving better approach to resolving conflicts, fostering social cohesion, and promoting mutual relation and economic interdependence; leveraging on comparative advantage of the various participants for symbiotic enhancement of the peace architecture in the states.

3. Major Highlights of Emerging Conflict Risks and Opportunities

The conference was declared opened by the Executive Governor of Nasarawa state, HE Engr Abdullahi Sule, at about 9:30 am, on June 15, 2021. Some of the key issues raised and discussed by stakeholders included the following:

- a. Peace has eluded all the States present at the meeting and the opportunity of the multi-stakeholder dialogue offers a desired platform to consider options for better and more sustainable peace initiatives;
- b. Issues of trust, justice and fairness exist in the States represented and there is need to ensure that these are restored and strengthened across all communities;
- c. The challenge of managing diversity in Nigeria is significant; division along ethno-religious lines are evident across communities and States and further impacting negatively on social cohesion. States are also further divided along the lines of minority and majority groups;
- d. Perception is a key issue that divides us as a people, not merely the fact of being a herder or a farmer;
- e. Citizens' attitude in handling issues of communal peace and security is critical; this also includes communities playing active role in governance, supporting the government to address issues of peace and security across communities;
- f. Corruption has become endemic in the society, and this is impacting the capacity to address peace and security challenges including the farmer-herder imbroglio;
- g. Farmer-herder conflicts are widespread across the North-Central zone of Nigeria and further explained by the Frustration Aggression theory;
- h. No legislation enacted or policy formulated in any State in the region or in Nigeria has ever sought to resolve or transform the farmer-herder imbroglio, but only aim to mitigate the rising violence trends; as a result, the situation has remained unresolved till date;

- i. Traditional (Bororo) Fulani herdsmen have maintained their traditional practice of cattle herding and are unaware that laws and regulations regarding land use have been modified and so they infringe on the ownership rights of landowners and farmers;
- j. Farmer-herder conflicts have existed since the biblical times and have traditionally been managed through mediation and negotiation, but these traditional methods have weakened in recent years;
- k. For a State like Benue, it is inappropriate to describe the farmer-herder situation as a conflict because armed herdsmen frequently attack and maim individuals, with women and children worst affected;
- l. The farmer-herder challenge is further worsened by porous international borders;
- m. Arms proliferation is a major security challenge across the region as it contributes toward worsening the already volatile peace and security situation in the region;
- n. Unemployed youths have become easy pawns in the hands of conflict entrepreneurs who feed fat on the farmer-herder crisis;
- o. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the farmer-herder crisis, it must be understood in terms of the context within which it operates including the reality of climate change and its devastating impact on livelihoods and wellbeing;
- p. Where traditional rulers are perceived to have been imposed on the people by governments, this tends to result in negative perception of their roles in directing the affairs of their people, including the handling of the farmer-herder conflict;
- q. Before the establishment of the Plateau State Peacebuilding Agency (PSPA), commissions of enquiry, white papers, etc had been produced as measures for addressing conflict, but they proved to be inadequate; the PSPA has provided preventive peacebuilding while also addressing the outcomes of violent conflict and encourages research, collaboration, dialogue, and a proactive response to emerging conflicts; the PSPA demonstrates convening authority, which is why it has developed a Road Map to peace, facilitates a peace architecture that engages all tiers of the state, and implements an early warning system;
- r. Taraba State has demonstrated commitment towards managing peace and security challenges; has adopted the system of ranching since the 1960 with

9 gazetted reserves; the State has relevant laws in place including the Taraba State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017; Taraba State Bureau for Peace and Conflict Management Law No. 11 of 2017; Taraba State Vigilante Services Law No.3 of 2002; the State, however, has faced challenges such as cattle rustling, experienced farmer-herder conflict from an international dimension as the State shares international boundaries with Cameroon, coupled with internal population explosion.

4. Key Recommendations and Entry Points for Inter-State Collaboration

Having duly considered all issues raised and discussed during the plenary and small group sessions, delegates and stakeholders at the meeting resolved and recommended as follows:

- The commitment to peacebuilding by the Nasarawa State Government is unflinching. This commitment led to the State hosting the inaugural multi-stakeholder dialogue;
- All States must go beyond Commissions of Enquiry and White Papers, etc, as measures for addressing conflict; rather, systems such as states and national-level peace building agencies should be put in place for ensuring the prevention and transformation of conflict at all tiers of the state;
- Expedite actions to finalise and pass into law the peace and conflict management laws of Benue and Nasarawa States;
- Sustain advocacy approach and mechanisms across the States and country on the nexus between the peace and conflict management laws, the peace agencies and the ICT-based early warning and early response systems (EWERS);
- Effective early warning systems and policies should be set in place in all affected states to complement and better institutionalise existing legislation and community mechanisms;
- There should be mutual respect for religious and ethnic diversity. This should be bolstered by harnessing cultural potentials to strengthen mutual co-existence and interdependence;
- Address issues of trust deficit, and justice and fairness concerns in the States; and see to full restoration and strengthening of justice systems to address multi-layers of crises including gender-based violence in the communities;
- Protect one another, see to it that all people are governed according to the laws of the land with the right to enjoy prosperity wherever they find themselves;
- Peace and conflict experts, not persons without the requisite competence, should be at the head of institutions with the mandate to address the farmer-herder conflict in the region and in the country;
- States in the Middle Belt, particularly the States of Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba should consider collaborating to curb cross-border movement of both cattle rustlers, bandits, kidnappers and armed herdsmen;

- Engage youths in the sensitization and implementation of the early warning systems put in place across the target states;
- Government at all levels should abrogate open grazing and should institute and enforce the use of ranching while also enforcing a justice system for all;
- Credible persons should be installed as traditional leaders and should in turn be empowered and provided adequate space to contribute to the management of farmer-herder conflicts in the region;
- Government at all levels should consider adopting the community policing approach;
- The Government of Nigeria should consider reviewing the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and the Protocol on Transhumance;
- Stop politicisation of the farmer-herder conflict and develop a short-medium-long term plan for meaningful resolution and transformation of the crisis;
- The Federal and State Government should put forth a legislation that provides for the use of information and communication systems for early detection, monitoring and control of cattle rustling and violent incidences involving farmers and herders;
- Establish in each State a peace agency or commission to see to comprehensive, conflict-sensitive handling of farmer-herder issues;
- Prohibit open grazing in all the states in the region and utilize a joint collaborative approach that would involve all the concerned states;
- Enforce the legislation that forbids the carrying of prohibited and unlicensed firearms and implement a disarmament programme to recover firearms in the possession of armed herdsman and other criminal groups;
- The State Governments should rehabilitate, empower and provide safe return of displaced persons back to their original communities;
- Provide trauma healing, mental health and psycho-social facilities and supports to affected persons to enable them fully recover from the impact of previous and ongoing attacks, and as a measure to mitigate future harmful activities;
- Sustain on a rotational basis bi-annually the multi-stakeholder regional dialogue to encourage ownership of the new initiative by the concerned States and to deepen the practice of joint collaborative initiatives in the region;
- Similarly, Government should strengthen state level peace dialogues and other local peace initiatives at the local government and community levels to facilitate early detection, management and transformation of conflicts, but most importantly entrench social cohesion, mutual economic interdependence among the people;
- Encourage the clear commitment of government at all levels geared towards sustainable peace building including by way of collaborative initiative to transform the farmer-herder conflict;
- More so, State Governments in the region should consider a regional approach to strengthening security with widespread sensitization on the roles and responsibilities of farmers and herders in promoting food security in the country.

5. Conclusion

- Benue State Government have graciously offered to host the next round of the regional peace dialogue in the month of December 2021.
- Having raised and discussed the numerous issues and further recommended way-forward, as the interlocutors deemed necessary, the 2-day regional multi-stakeholder dialogue was ended based on terms and key agreements as above, on June 16, at about 4:00 pm.