



SSRC



APN Briefing Note  
Number 31  
January 2021

## Peacebuilding Agencies and Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Nigeria's Middle Belt Region: Successes and Policy Challenges

By Maurice Ogbonnaya

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- **State governments in the Middle Belt region and donor agencies should direct** more resources and funding towards peacebuilding processes and initiatives while ensuring support to security agencies within the states.
- **Peacebuilding agencies should be strengthened** through the creation of appropriate legal frameworks to ensure the legitimacy and sustainability of their operations.
- **Federal and state governments should support** community engagement and advocacy by peacebuilding agencies working in close collaboration with local stakeholders; civil society organizations, religious and traditional institutions, and conflict-affected communities.

This policy briefing note evaluates the responsiveness of peacebuilding agencies to the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt region. Although conflicts have occurred between farmers and herders in the region over centuries marked by symbiotic relationships,<sup>1</sup> its resurgence since 1999 has assumed a worrisome trend. The Middle Belt states of Benue, Kaduna, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau, have been the epicenter of the conflict and in some cases, witnessed the complete takeover and renaming of conquered farming communities by invading herdsman.<sup>2</sup>

### CONSEQUENCES

By October 2015, over 2,000 people had reportedly been killed in the Middle Belt region while Nigeria sustained a US\$ 13.7 billion yearly economic loss between 2013 and 2015.<sup>3</sup> In 2016, an estimated 2,500 people were killed and 62,000 displaced. By January 2018, 168 conflict-related deaths occurred in Adamawa, Benue, Taraba, and Kaduna states.<sup>4</sup> In 2019, the conflict extended to neighboring Sokoto and Zamfara states, with an equally high death toll. A 2020 report put the death toll at 10,000 within a two-year period.<sup>5</sup>

The rising numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) due to the conflict, particularly in Benue, Kaduna, and Plateau states is of great concern. Outside

<sup>1</sup> Mark Moritz (2010). Understanding Herder-Farmer Conflicts in West Africa: Outline of a Processual Approach, *Human Organization*, 69(2): 138-148, Summer.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Amaza (2018). A Widening Conflict between Herdsmen and Farmers is Redefining Nigeria's Geopolitics, *Quartz Africa*, February 12.

<sup>3</sup> Mercy Corps (2015). The Economic Costs of Conflict and the Benefit of Peace: Effects of Farmer-Pastoralist Conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt on State, Sector, and National Economies, *Policy Brief*, July.

<sup>4</sup> International Crisis Group (2018). Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence, *Africa Report* N°262, July 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Nextier SPD* (2020). Herder-Farmer Clashes: The New Normal, *Daily Analysis*, June 2.

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the northeast region, these states have the largest numbers of IDPs in the country. As of October 2019, at least 160,000 IDPs were scattered across Benue state alone<sup>6</sup> and more were reported in Plateau state.

## PEACEBUILDING AGENCIES AS INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

Against the background of responding to the conflict in the region, the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA) was established in 2016, the Kaduna State Peace Commission (KSPC) in 2017, and the Adamawa State Agency for Peace, Reconciliation, and Reconstruction (ASAPRR) in 2018.

These agencies were established to facilitate strategic partnerships, coordinate conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes and initiatives, and promote the culture of peace and harmonious coexistence among various state and non-state actors and groups in the states. The agencies also have the mandate to build trust among groups, and between states and citizens given the weakening of inter-group relationships and the growing insecurity in the region.

## SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES

The agencies have recorded some successes. They have provided a non-kinetic response to conflict through dialogue and negotiations with the conflicting parties. The PPBA developed a 5-year Plateau State Road Map for Peace in 2018. It serves as a guide to the implementation of its peacebuilding activities, including the coordination and facilitation of several dialogue and mediation processes that have often resulted in the signing of, and expression of commitment to peace by conflicting parties. On December 21, 2020, the *Aten*, *Takad* and the *Fulani* of border communities in Riyom and Kaura Local Government Areas of Plateau and Kaduna states signed a Commitment to Peace Agreement supervised by the peacebuilding agencies. This was the high point of a series of dialogues and interactions pursued by the agencies in the two states. The ASAPRR, designed an early warning system and created a situation room through which it monitors conflict and responds to daily developments that may pose threats to security within the state.<sup>7</sup> The KSPC serves as a platform through which conflicting communities, especially nomadic pastoralists and farmers, find solutions to conflict. This has helped build some

<sup>6</sup> International Organization for Migration (2019). IOM Nigeria Displacement Tracking Matrix: North Central and North West Zones.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Dr. Bamiyi Agoso, CEO, Adamawa State Agency for Peace, Reconciliation and Reconstruction.

confidence in the Commission and facilitated social harmony and a reduction in conflicts.<sup>8</sup>

However, the peacebuilding agencies face three fundamental challenges. First, is the poor state of inter-group and state-citizen relationships based on trust deficits. Parties to the conflict do not usually consider these agencies to be neutral arbiters in the conflicts.

The second challenge relates to inadequate funding. In Plateau state, the agency has “little or no funding to support the implementation of its strategic plans and other programs.”<sup>9</sup> The other challenge is that governments in the region invest more money on security than on peace. While state governments are spending huge sums of money to support security agencies, not much has been done to support peacebuilding agencies that have the mandate to deal with issues that have the potential to reinforce the cyclical nature of violent conflict and insecurity in the region.<sup>10</sup>

The third is the challenge of legal status and legitimacy of operations. The ASAPRR has been disbanded since 2019 because the new government considers it illegal as it was not established by law.<sup>11</sup> Its disbandment marks a setback for activities and programs directed towards ensuring sustainable peace and security within the state.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- State governments in the Middle Belt region and donor agencies should direct more resources and funding towards peacebuilding processes and initiatives while ensuring support to security agencies within the states.
- Peacebuilding agencies should be strengthened through the creation of appropriate legal frameworks to ensure the legitimacy and sustainability of their operations.
- Federal and state governments should support community engagement and advocacy by peacebuilding agencies working in close collaboration with local stakeholders; civil society organizations, religious and traditional institutions, and conflict-affected communities.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Dr. Saleh Momale, former Commissioner, Kaduna State Peace Commission, and currently, Special Assistant (Technical) to the Hon. Minister, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Joseph Lengmang, Director-General, Plateau Peace Building Agency.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Dr. Chris Kwaja, Senior Researcher and Lecturer, Centre for Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Moddibo Adama University of Technology, Yola.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Dr. Bamiyi Agoso.