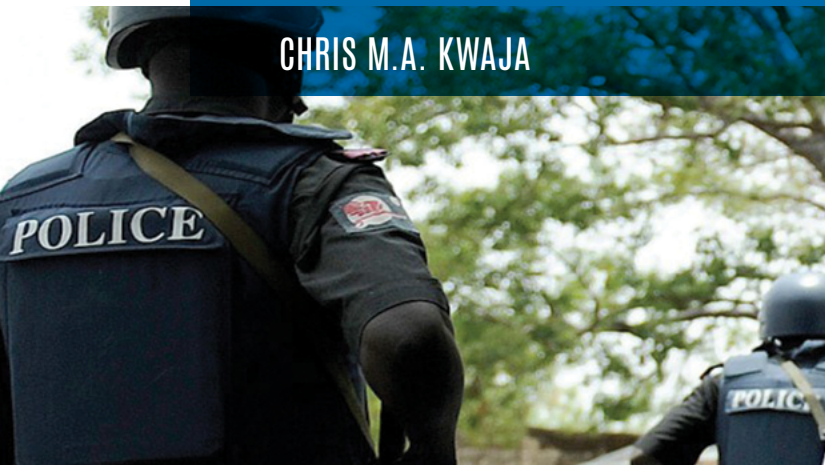


SEEKING SECURITY AND STABILITY:

AN ANALYSIS OF SECURITY RESPONSES
TO FARMER-HERDER CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE
BELT REGION OF NIGERIA

CHRIS M.A. KWAJA



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ABOUT THE FORUM ON FARMER AND HERDER RELATIONS IN NIGERIA (FFARN)

This policy brief is a product of the Forum on Farmer and Herder Relations in Nigeria (FFARN). FFARN is a network of academics and practitioners from governmental and non-governmental institutions who work on peace and conflict/security issues in Nigeria and who have experience responding to farmer-herder conflict at sub-national, national, and/or regional levels. FFARN provides a monthly platform for interdisciplinary exchange and joint identification of areas for additional research and practice to generate strong evidence for multilevel policy influence on farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria. Search for Common Ground is the convener of FFARN.

Members of FFARN represent academic and practitioner institutions, including:

- Abdulsalami Abubakar Institute for Peace and Sustainable Development (AAIPSD)
- Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies, University of Jos
- Centre for Ethno-Religious and Peace Studies, Federal University, Wukari, Taraba
- Centre for Peace and Development Studies, Benue State University
- Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ilorin
- Centre for Women, Youth and Community Action (NAWYCA)
- Civil Organisations Research Advocacy and Funding Initiatives Development (CORAFID)
- Conflict, Peace and Security Program, Department of Political Science, Kaduna State University
- Department of Partnership, Peace and Conflict Resolution (PPCR), National Commission for Nomadic Education
- Global Sentinel
- Institute for Peace Studies and Social Rehabilitation, University of Abuja
- Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ibadan
- Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR)
- Innovative Strategy for Human Development
- Interfaith Mediation Center
- Kaduna State Peace Commission
- Pastoralist Resolve (PARE)

- Peace and Conflict Management Unit, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps
- Peace and Security Network
- Plateau Peacebuilding Agency
- Search for Common Ground (Search)
- Select independent gender, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding experts
- Society for Peace Studies and Practice (SPSP)
- United States Institute for Peace
- Veritas University, Abuja

During its meeting in March 2018, the FFARN members examined the impact of past and current security responses to farmer-herder violence in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. The academics and practitioners jointly identified the need to assess the security response with an objective of identifying the positive or negative impacts it has or may have on the context, the conflict, and intergroup relations in the region. Over the months of April, May, and June 2018, FFARN members analyzed the response using primary and secondary sources of information as well as the personal observations of scholars and practitioners who work actively in the context in which security responses were deployed.

This policy paper is the result of a joint effort by scholars and practitioners from its design and development to peer review, and validation by experts within and outside the FFARN. Search for Common Ground appreciates the contribution and support of all members of the FFARN, as well as the staff of Search for Common Ground - Nigeria and Search's Global Affairs and Partnerships (GAP) Team for their contribution to the development of this policy brief. The FFARN and this publication were made possible, in part, by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York. However, the statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Middle Belt region of Nigeria has experienced escalating tensions between primarily sedentary farmers and nomadic and semi-nomadic herders, groups that both seek access to the region's fertile land for crops and cattle grazing. This tension between farmers and herders has led to significant violence. The conflict has claimed six times more civilian casualties than the Boko Haram insurgency in 2018,¹ with 1,300 deaths recorded in the first quarter of 2018 alone,² and has triggered the displacement of 300,000 people. The recent violent clashes in Plateau State's Riyom, Barkin Ladi, Jos South, and Bassa have made headlines around the world, drawing attention to this ongoing crisis.

In response to the conflicts and criminality that have resulted from the fractured relations between farmers and herders, detailed in our 2017 report *Past is Prologue: Criminality and Reprisal Attacks in Nigeria's Middle Belt*, the Nigerian federal government deployed the military to stabilize the region and increase security. This action was supported by Section 217(c) of Nigeria's 1999 constitution, which allows for the deployment of the military when "acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President."³ Such deployments take place when the sophistication and complexity needed for an operation exceed the capacity of the police. In this case, the deployment was justified by the significant access to and use of weapons by those involved in the attacks on communities, which in instances has overwhelmed the police. Despite the military deployment, there has been a surge in the activities of criminals and in violence against civilians across the Middle Belt in recent months, particularly in states such as Adamawa, Benue, Plateau, and Taraba, as well as in Zamfara State in the northwestern part of the country. While our 2018 report *Response to Conflicts between Farmers and Herders in the Middle Belt of Nigeria: Mapping Past Efforts and Opportunities for Violence Prevention* discussed security responses, it is clear that given the uptick in violence and the persistent conflict, this specific set of responses warrants a deeper analysis.

This policy brief examines the state security response to violent conflicts and attacks between farmers and herders in the Middle Belt region. It identifies the following four key dynamics that have resulted from the security response to the current crisis:

- Strained relationships between the security and civilian populations. Many civilians do not trust the military or feel that it serves their interests. This results from concerns that some military personnel have abused the rights of local populations, including through excessive use of force. Despite these tensions, the region has seen low utilization of existing opportunities for improved civil-military relationships, such as engagement of traditional, religious, and civil society organizations to link military actors with communities and build understanding and support for military operations among civilian population.

1 <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/27/africa/nigeria-herdsmen-boko-haram-report/index.html>

2 International Crisis Group (26 July 2018), *Stopping Nigeria's spiraling farmer-herder violence*, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence.pdf>

3 Nigerian Constitution (2014), "Chapter 6, Section 217 - Establishment and Composition of the Armed Force of the Federation," <https://nigerian-constitution.com/chapter-6-part-3-section-217-establishment-and-composition-of-the-armed-force-of-the-federation/>

- Need for increased training for military members deployed on operations in the Middle Belt. Some military members deployed on operations in the Middle Belt lack sufficient training on effective communication with civilians and understanding of the rules that guide their conduct while carrying out operations. This fuels tensions, undermining the ability of the military to carry out their operations and also build relationships with civilians. Additionally, differences in orientation, training, and discipline among troops weaken efforts towards inter-agency collaboration, particularly within the military, police, and Department of State Security (DSS). Finally, the military is increasingly exceeding its original mandate of providing security and crime prevention and is becoming involved in conflict management roles that are typically carried out by the police and other non-state actors, a role that many military members are not trained for.
- Lack of clarity within civilian populations about military's role and procedures to make complaints. Though the military has been deployed for an internal security operation, much of the civilian population does not properly understand its mandate, role vis-a-vis other actors, or exit strategy. Additionally, civilians lack awareness of communication channels where they can report complaints and receive information about how complaints have been subsequently addressed. However some example of collaboration between security personnel and community were recorded which.
- Rivalries and disagreements within and between security agencies. Inter-agency rivalries between and among the agencies within the military, as well as with other security agencies including the police, have become a major roadblock to successful internal security operations in the Middle Belt region.

Based on these ongoing dynamics surrounding the security response to farmer-herder conflict in the Middle Belt, this report makes the following recommendations to the Nigerian government, security agencies, civil society, and communities.

- The government, the military, and communities should create and support mechanisms to strengthen civilian-military relations in the context of the involvement of the military in internal security operations and security management in the Middle Belt region;
- The military should ensure that all of its personnel involved in special operations are subjected to clear and consistent rules and policies that guide their conduct during operations and that sufficient training is provided to all of its personnel;
- The government and military should ensure that the role of the military during internal security operations is clearly defined and communicated to civilians, particularly those in the communities where such operations are to be undertaken. This includes clarity on the Rules of Engagement (RoE) guiding military operations, both for military personnel and civilians. Civil society can assist in sharing information with communities and fostering dialogue between communities and security actors;
- The government should invest in inter-agency collaboration between security actors, including members of the military and the police, to avoid agencies operating at cross-purposes and ensure complementarity and coordination;

- The federal and state government, with the support of relevant international and national non-governmental organizations, should invest in developing a community-based security architecture, which institutionalizes the role of the traditional structures and mechanisms involved in fostering peace and security. Particularly important are those structures and mechanisms in place that facilitate dialogue, mediation and other dispute resolution mechanisms, including promoting civil-military relations at the community level;
- Traditional, civil, and religious leaders should be empowered to constructively engage military members and leaders and proactively foster improved communication and relationships within their communities;
- Civil society organizations should monitor and document all cases of human rights violations against the civilian population, ensuring that the National Human Rights Commission and other relevant institutions, both national and international, take appropriate steps to ensure compliance to International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law by the military while conducting internal security operations.

Nigeria and its citizens should lead any efforts to reduce tensions and promote stability around security operations in the Middle Belt, but the international community should support these recommendations through its policies, diplomacy, and development and security support.

BACKGROUND



In recent years, the Middle Belt of Nigeria has seen repeated and increasingly common instances of violent conflicts between farmers and herders. Both groups seek access to the region's fertile land, the former for crops and the latter for grazing and pasture. This dynamic is compounded by factors which have led to increased tensions over resources, including climate variability, environmental degradation, socio-political upheaval, and open-grazing prohibition laws that are viewed by herders as contrary to their interests. These conflicts, which started as low-level clashes confined to a few rural communities, have since spiraled into a deadly crisis that is inflaming ethno-religious hostilities locally and nationally. The Middle Belt region has numerous minority groups, which give it a heterogeneous, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic character.⁴ This diversity has been manipulated and exploited by various actors within the conflict, including both farmers and herders, dividing communities along ethno-religious lines and disrupting the delicate ecosystem of diversity in the country.

Despite a recent uptick, conflict between farming and herding communities is not a new phenomenon in the Middle Belt. Clashes between these two agro-producing groups, who are critical to food security in Nigeria,

have been ongoing since as early as 1970s. However, in the past, these clashes tended to be small scale and isolated. Today, both groups remember a time when they had a symbiotic relationship that kept cattle fed and farms fertile.⁵ More recently, the clashes have become increasingly violent and more common, due to competition for natural resources; weak community-based dispute management mechanisms; criminality resulting from the increasingly high financial value of cattle; instrumentalization of identities; weak governance systems; ineffective security and law and order mechanisms; climate variability; and environmental degradation, among other drivers. The progressively fractured relationships between farmers and herders has wide ranging implications for food security, livelihoods, and the overall security of the region. The conflict continues to become more and more complex and protracted, with groups taking security and conflict resolution into their own hands, resulting to redress real or perceived grievances.⁶

The frequency and intensity of these deadly conflicts and clashes between 2015 and 2017, resulted in the killing of 470 people in cattle rustling related incidents and over 1,425 people due to clashes between farmers and herders in the Middle Belt.⁷ The first quarter of 2018 saw 1,300 deaths as a result of this conflict.⁸ The blurry lines between conflict and organized crime has also allowed more general criminality to thrive, with criminal activities associated with destruction of farm lands, deadly attacks against communities, and armed robbery leading to the death of 901 additional people between January and April 2018 across several states within the Middle Belt region.⁹



The prevailing security challenges in the Middle Belt include the proliferation of small arms and light weapons) from both internal and external sources, isolated and coordinated attacks against communities, cattle rustling, destruction of farmlands, armed robbery, kidnappings, and violent confrontations between the farming and herding communities.

The Nigerian federal and state governments face tremendous pressure to stem this rising insecurity and identify a durable, long-term solution to the conflict and resulting criminality. The primary tactic the government has used to respond to the current situation has been the deployment of security agencies across the region.¹⁰ By using justifications rooted in Nigeria's constitution, the military has been deployed within Nigeria to complement civilian forces through targeted operations in the Middle Belt.

5 B. Ademola-Adelehin (27 September 2017), Nigeria: Conflict in the Middle Belt, Testimony before the Thomas Lantos Human Rights Commission, Washington, D.C., <https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/sites/humanrightscommission.house.gov/files/documents/Ademola%20AdelehinTestimony-%20SFCCG.pdf>

6 Forum on Farmer-Herder Relations. (2018), report of a workshop on Conflict System Analysis of Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria.

7 O. Onubogu, (27 September 2017), Nigeria: Conflict in the Middle Belt, Testimony before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, Washington, D.C., <https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/09/nigeria-conflict-middle-belt-oge-onubogu-testimony>

8 International Crisis Group (26 July 2018), Stopping Nigeria's spiraling farmer-herder violence, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence.pdf>

9 Daily Live (30 April 2018), "901 Killed in Middle Belt Since January," This Daily Live, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2018/04/30/901-killed-in-middle-belt-since-january/>

10 Kwaja, A.M.C and Ademola-Adelehin, B. (March 2018) <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Responses-to-Conflicts-between-Farmers-and-Herders-in-the-Middle-Belt-FINAL.pdf>

Security Responses in the Middle Belt Region

Nigeria's police have the primary responsibility for internal security in the country. The federal government controls the police force, which has over 350,000 personnel.¹¹ Section 4 of the Police Act provides that police are responsible for the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property, and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged within the country.¹²

Despite the police mandate as lead agency for internal security, the government has also deployed the military to respond to this internal crisis because of its severity and the lack of police capacity to adequately respond. This has been justified by the assertion that the police are not sufficiently equipped to effectively respond to the threats.¹³ The legal backing for this action can be found in Section 217 (c) of the 1999 Constitution, which provides the conditions and basis for the involvement of the military in internal security operations in Nigeria. It enables the military to play an active role in "suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President but subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by an Act of National Assembly."¹⁴

Against this backdrop, the military has become increasingly dominant in the space of civilian protection and the maintenance of law and order within Nigeria. To date, the military has been deployed on internal security operations in 28 of the 36 states in the country. For the Middle Belt, the military is visible in the entire region. As reported by a military member, "we are doing both military and police duties right now, and this is due to the fact that the security challenges on ground are above the capability of the police."¹⁵

In response to the region's rising insecurity, the federal government launched four major military operations in the Middle Belt to quell violence resulting from farmer-herder conflict and criminality. These include Special Task Force (STF) - Operation Safe Haven (OSH), Operation Harbin Kunama (Scorpion Sting) I and II, Operation AyemAkpatuma (Cat Race), and Operation Whirl Stroke (OWS). By design, these responses are part of a wider framework for the military's response to internal security challenges, under specialized military operations code-named Special Task Force (STF). Established in 2010, the STF represents a coordinated response by the military, bringing together the different services within the armed forces, including the Army, Navy, and Airforce, as well as other security agencies such as the Nigeria Police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), and the DSS. Within the framework of their involvement in internal security operations, the goal is to harness their different resources and expertise in tackling the problem under a unified command structure led by the Defense Headquarters.¹⁶

11 While it is easy to ascertain the number of police or military personnel, it is difficult to attain exact figures about military and police-related spending by the government because this information is often classified.

12 Republic of Nigeria (2014), The Police Act, available in <https://lawsfnigeria.placng.org/laws/P19.pdf>

13 International Crisis Group (19 September 2017) Herders against farmers: Nigeria's expanding deadly conflict, Report No. 252, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/252-herders-against-farmers-nigerias-expanding-deadly-conflict>

14 Nigerian Constitution (2014), "Chapter 6, Section 217 - Establishment and Composition of the Armed Force of the Federation," <https://nigerian-constitution.com/chapter-6-part-3-section-217-establishment-and-composition-of-the-armed-force-of-the-federation/>

15 Interview with a military member in Abuja, 6th June 2018.

16 Ayoola, I.O.H (2013), The role of the STF in internal security operations in Plateau State, Lecture Delivered at the University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria.

Major Military Operations in Response to Farmer-Herder Conflict in the Middle Belt

Special Task Force (STF) - Operation Safe Haven (OSH)

The STF engagement in the region gained the code name Operation Safe Haven (OSH) in 2010. Beyond peace enforcement in the context of conflict manipulated along ethno-religious lines, the OSH was designed to address farmer-herder conflicts, including containing acts of organized crime that resulted in deadly attacks against communities in Plateau State. In response to the increased clashes between farmers and herders in the southern part of Kaduna State, the mandate of the OSH was expanded to cover Kaduna in 2017¹⁷ because of the proximity of the southern part of Kaduna to Plateau State, coupled with the similarities between the conflicts.¹⁸ According to the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Tukur Buratai, three key documents guide troops on operation: the policy directives on the comprehensive program to improve compliance in domestic and international laws guiding the conduct of operations; the directive on standing rules of engagement and standing rules for the use of force; and the policy directive on arrest, detention, and interrogation.¹⁹ These documents highlight the commitment of the military to ensuring its personnel discharge their duties according to established principles that borders on professionalism and respect for human rights. The deployment of OSH in Plateau State reportedly contributed to deescalating violent farmer-herder conflict, prevented violent attacks, and provided succor for vulnerable communities. However, there are reports that security agencies that are part of STF-OSH and tasked with protecting at-risk farmer and herder communities, have committed crimes and human rights violations, such as physical torture, extortion, and sexual and other forms of gender based violence, against the communities they were deployed to protect.²⁰

Operation Harbin Kunama (Scorpion Sting) I and II

In July 2016, Operation Harbin Kunama I, which in the Hausa language means “scorpion sting,” was officially launched in Dansadau Forest of the Maru Local Government Area (LGA) of Zamfara State. The operation was designed to dislodge armed bandits who have turned the forest into a base for cattle rustling; carried out market raids and attacks on villages and travelers on highways; and conducted kidnappings in Zamfara as well as in the neighboring states of Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, and Niger for several years.²¹ Limited information is available on the success of the operation; however, the continued escalation of criminal activities in

17 Ben Agande (20 April 2017), “Army Launches Operation Harbin Kunama II in Southern Kaduna.” Vanguard News, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/04/army-launches-operation-harbin-kunama-ii-southern-kaduna/>

18 Kingsley Chukwuka (15 July 2017), “OP Safe Heaven takes over Southern Kaduna,” <https://dailytimes.ng/op-safe-heaven-takes-southern-kaduna/>

19 Agency Report (12 April 2018), “Nigerian Army presents three documents to guide troops’ operations,” Premium Times Nigeria, www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/264793-nigeria-army-presents-three-documents-to-guide-troops-operations.html

20 Chris M.A. Kwaja and Bukola I. Ademola-Adelehin (March 2018), Responses to Conflicts Between Farmers and Herders in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, Search for Common Ground, <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Responses-to-Conflicts-between-Farmers-and-Herders-in-the-Middle-Belt-FINAL.pdf>

21 Daily Trust (18 July 2016), “Operation Harbin Kunama as welcome relief,” Daily Trust, <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/editorial/operation-harbin-kunama-as-welcome-relief/155806.html>

Zamfara State suggests the operation was unsuccessful.²² It was replaced with Harbin Kunama II in April 2017. Harbin Kunama II was designed by the Nigerian Army to be carried out between April 18 and April 22, 2017. Maj.-Gen. David Ahmadu, the Army's Chief of Training and Operations, announced the operation was meant to aid civil authorities in combating armed banditry, kidnapping, civil unrest, ethno-religious crises, and other security challenges in the North-Central and North-West zones.²³ The operation covered BirninGwari, Kyambane forest in Kaduna State, and "contiguous areas in Plateau, Lame Burra forest in Bauchi State, and Falgore forest in Kano State."²⁴ The effectiveness of the operation could not be fully assessed as the issues that necessitated it persist.²⁵ As noted above, in 2017, the mandate of the OSH was expanded to cover Kaduna State in 2017, thereby replacing Operation Harbin Kunama II.²⁶

Operation AyemAkpatuma (Cat Race)

The Nigerian Army announced the launch of Operation AyemAkpatuma on February 7, 2018, mandated to quell farmer-herder violence, kidnappings, and other criminal activities across states in the Middle Belt region outside of OSH's scope. Maj.-Gen. David Ahmadu announced the new measures and noted that the 44-day exercise would run from February 15 to March 31, 2018. The operation, which covers Benue, Kaduna, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, and Taraba states, involved raids on communities, groups, and persons suspected of violence or criminal activity; cordon and search operations; and checkpoints. In the words of a military officer with the operation, "this is a very complex operation and the military has a duty to ensure both the protection of civilians and arrest of the criminals or perpetrators of the conflict."²⁷ There is the concern that despite the military onslaught against the criminals, some cases of attacks against communities continue to persist. However, a significant reduction in the number of overall attacks across the states was reported and some credit was given to collaboration between security operatives and community members in some of the states. For example, in the words of one security personnel, "much of the intelligence we use came from citizens, which contributed to the success we have achieved so far."²⁸

Operation Whirl Stroke

The Defense Headquarters launched Operation Whirl Stroke (OWS) in May 2018 as a counter to the current armed "herdsmen" attacks²⁹ and other criminal activities across Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba, and Zamfara

22 Agency Report (12 April 2018), "Scores killed in fresh attack on Zamfara villages," Premium Times Nigeria, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/264807-scores-killed-in-fresh-attack-on-zamfara-villages.html>

23 Tanimu (13 April 2017), "Next Week Nigerian Army Set To Conduct "Operation Harbin Kunama II"," Nigerian Television Authority, <http://www.nta.ng/news/20170413-kunama/>

24 Emmanuel Okogba (17 January 2017), "Southern Kaduna crisis: Army to conduct "Exercise Harbin Kunama II"," Vanguard News, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/01/southern-kaduna-crisis-army-conduct-exercise-harbin-kunama-ii/>

25 Sahara Reporters (30 March 2018), "Bandits Kill 32 In Zamfara Village," Sahara Reporters, <http://saharareporters.com/2018/03/30/bandits-kill-32-zamfara-village>

26 Ben Agande (20 April 2017), "Army Launches Operation Harbin Kunama II in Southern Kaduna." Vanguard News, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/04/army-launches-operation-harbin-kunama-ii-southern-kaduna/>

27 Interview with a military officer with the Operation Cat Race in Benue State, 2nd June 2018

28 Interview with a military personnel, 15th August 2018.

29 Most media reports and analysis of the attacks against communities are linked to what has been termed "suspected herders," though organized herder groups, such as the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), have repeatedly denied the involvement of its members in such criminal acts. In cases where they claim responsibility for such acts, the justification is that they are reprisals in response to cattle that were rustled

States. The operation, which is still in place, is made up of troops from all the military services (Army, Navy, and Air Force), and also includes the police and the Department of State Services (DSS)³⁰. According to the Defense Headquarters, “the OWS is a full-scale military operation in collaboration with other security agencies to completely restore law, order, peace and stability to the affected communities.”³¹ Two operations of OWS in Benue and Nasarawa states reportedly apprehended suspected armed attackers and destroyed an alleged criminals camp close to Benue river.³² Though the OWS has recorded some success in terms of its ability to restore law and order, there are concerns relating to the extent to which their military high command monitors cases of rights abuses against the civilian population.³³

Increased Spending on Internal Security Operations

As a result of the internal security operations above and the corresponding increase in deployed military personnel, Nigeria has also witnessed an uptick in security-related spending. Funding allocations for internal operations (shown in Table One) highlight a steady rise in the amount of money dedicated for this purpose.

Table One: Allocations for Military Internal Security Operations in Nigeria³⁴

| Year | Cost (Billion Nigerian Naira) |
|------|-------------------------------|
| 2014 | 24.12 |
| 2015 | 42.17 |
| 2016 | 21.00 |
| 2017 | 25.00 |
| 2018 | 75.00 |

This approach has been criticized for neglecting the role and mandate of the police while investing heavily on internal security operations, comprised mostly of the military. As such, the military has seen significant budgetary increase to discharge responsibilities that are statutorily the mandate of the police.³⁵ Though the police have the primary directive for internal security, its role in internal security operations is low. The situation of the police = today is one that is ill-equipped, ill-trained, and ill-remunerated to function optimally.³⁶ This is largely attributed by civil society to the neglect of the police by the government.

30 George Okoh (19 May 2018), “Defence Headquarters Launches Operation Whirls Stroke to Flush out Killer Groups in Benue,” This Daily Live, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2018/05/19/defence-headquarters-launches-operation-whirls-stroke-to-flush-out-killer-groups-in-benue/>

31 Akham Papa (19 May 2018), “Nigerian Army To Launch ‘Operation Whirl Stroke’ On Herdsmen In 4 States,” Naija Loaded, <http://www.naijaloaded.com.ng/news/nigerian-army-to-launch-operation-whirl-stroke-on-herdsmen-in-4-states>

32 Hope Abah (19 June 2018), “Operation Whirl Stroke records success in troubled Benue,” Daily Trust, <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/operation-whirl-stroke-records-success-in-troubled-benue-257063.html>

33 Interview with a resident of Benue State, 15th August 2018.

34 BudgIT (2018), Security Proposed 2018 Budget, <http://yourbudgit.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/SECURITY-PROPOSED-2018-BUDGET.pdf>

35 N.S.G. Pwajok, (13 March 2013), Policing in a federal state: Wither Nigeria? Distinguished Public Lecture in Honor of Da Jonah David Jang, Plateau State, Nigeria.

36 Civil Society Organization (2012), Civil Society Panel on Police Reform in Nigeria 2012, <http://www.noprin.org/CSO%20Panel%20Final%20Report.pdf>

IMPLICATIONS OF SECURITY RESPONSES TO CONFLICTS AND CRIMINALITY IN THE MIDDLE BELT

Scholars and practitioners have identified four key dynamics that have resulted from the security response to the current crisis: 1) strained relationships between the military and civilian population; 2) a need for increased training for military members deployed on operations in the Middle Belt; 3) lack of clarity within civilian populations about military's role and how to channel complaints; and 4) rivalries and disagreements within and between security agencies.

Strained Relationships between Military and Civilians

The deployment of military personnel (armed forces other than the police) to communities within the Middle Belt has led to strained relations between the military and the communities they are deployed to protect. This is the result both of the security response itself as well as perceptions between both groups about the other. As a consequence, communities and military members do not collaborate as effectively as they could, undermining the ability to increase security in the region. In the words of a military personnel, "it is not the intention of the military to be involved in internal security operations. It is not in the interest of the military and the civilian population to have strained relationship. If there is a strained relationship, it is not a deliberate act by the military. Having a cordial relationship between the military and the civilian population makes our work easy. We rely on them for successful operations."³⁷

Overarching tensions have resulted from military conduct while deployed in the region, in particular around human rights issues as well as perceived and/or real biases. The Nigerian military has been accused of excessive use of force, which refers to force that is above that which is reasonable and a prudent law enforcement officer would use under normal circumstances.³⁸ In one recent example in Benue State, citizens accused military personnel of killing civilians and destroying houses in a community in response to the death of their men while on duty.³⁹ A resident of Jos, Plateau State who was interviewed for this research, was of the opinion that under the platform of the STF-OSH, police conduct with civilians is different from army conduct with civilians, and that army personnel more often subject people to corporal punishment.⁴⁰ Though the military has consistently argued that its personnel are not involved in any form of misconduct, there have been reported cases of maltreatment of civilians,⁴¹ such as flogging and subjecting civilians into forced labor by military personnel on duty.⁴²

37 Interview with a military officer in Jos, Plateau State, 20th August 2018.

38 Hope Abah (20 April 2018), "Benue community accuses soldiers of razing village over killing of colleague," Daily Trust, <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/benue-community-accuses-soldiers-of-razing-village-over-killing-of-colleague.html>

39 Emmanuel Okogba (27 March 2018), "Benue tribal leaders back Danjuma, accuse FG, military of aiding takeover of Benue by herdsmen," Vanguard, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/03/benue-tribal-leaders-back-danjuma-accuse-fg-military-of-aiding-takeover-of-benue-by-herdsmen/>

40 Interview with a resident of Jos, Plateau State, 20th June 2018

41 Adekunle (17 July 2018), "Plateau killings: Military task force denies allegation of connivance with assailants," Vanguard, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/07/plateau-killings-military-task-force-denies-allegation-of-connivance-with-assailants/>

42 J.O. Para-Mallam and K.Hoomlong (2013), A critical investigation into the role of security sector agencies in the Jos conflict: Issues and

Some community members and former officials have also accused the military of personal bias within the conduct of their operations and even of knowing about and supporting violence conducted by criminals.⁴³ In response to these accusations, some communities mobilize to resist rather than cooperate with the military deployed to their areas.⁴⁴ Following the incessant attacks on communities in Taraba state, the former Chief of Army Staff, General TY Danjuma, accused the army of collusion and called on citizens to defend themselves against the attacks. He stated, “the armed forces are not neutral. They collude with the armed bandits that kill Nigerians. They facilitate their movements. They cover them. If you are depending on the armed forces to stop the killings, you will all die one by one.”⁴⁵ Statements such as these contribute to overall concern that the army cannot or will not adequately protect civilians. On his part, the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen Tukur Buratai set up a committee to investigate the allegations of bias as claimed by the former Chief of Army Staff,⁴⁶ which did not identify any wrong doing in its operations.⁴⁷

Overall negative perceptions of the military, stemming from concerns about misconduct and accusations of rights violations, have had the unintended consequences of breeding local resentment and further increasing divides between military and communities. One resident in Godogodo village of Kaduna State stated, “When the military was deployed to our community, we had a very bad relationship with them at the initial stage. At the slightest provocation, they will beat up our youths. Even when they see two young men quarrelling, they get involved in the matter by flogging them or asking them to do frog jump. They were treating our people like animals.”⁴⁸ According to the head of a local youth-based peacebuilding NGO in Jos, Plateau state, “The majority of security operatives have lost both respect and integrity in the sight of community members because of how they have conducted themselves and for their inability to prevent attacks and protect communities. Local community members believe security operatives act on vested interest of external actors, which impedes their responsiveness and professionalism. In fact, communities allege that security operatives⁴⁹ offer their expertise to either side of the conflict for personal gain or siding with one party to extort the other. Increasingly, communities resort to self-help to protect and defend themselves rather than wait for security operatives.” Other civil society representatives from Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba states had similar feedback on loss of respect and trust in the capacity of the military to prevent attacks and respond to distress call from communities in a timely manner. Many communities perceive security operatives to be taking sides with one conflicting party against the other, as reported by the leadership of the tribal associations representing the

strategies for institutional/security sector reform, Research Report, African Peacebuilding Network (APN) and Social Science Research Council (SSRC).

43 Interview with the Executive Director of a local youth-based peacebuilding NGO in Jos, 10th June 2018

44 Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) (2017), 2016 Strategic Conflict Assessment of Nigeria, Ibadan: John Archers.

45 Channels Television (24 March 2018), “Armed Forces Collude With Those Behind Killings, Says T.Y. Danjuma,” Channel Television, <https://www.channelstv.com/2018/03/24/armed-forces-collude-with-those-behind-killings-says-t-y-danjuma/>

46 Channel Television (10 April 2018), “Military Sets Up Committee To Investigate T.Y. Danjuma’s Claim,” Channel Television, <https://www.channelstv.com/2018/04/10/military-sets-up-committee-to-investigate-t-y-danjumas-claim/>

47 Matthew (18 May 2018), “Ty Danjumas Allegation: Panel Report Exonerates Nigerian Army,” National Heritage News, <http://www.nationalheritagenews.com/ty-danjumas-allegation-panel-report-exonerates-nigerian-army/>

48 Interview with a youth in Godogodo village of Jema’a Local Government Area, Kaduna State, 13th June 2018.

49 Interview with the Executive Director of a local youth-based peacebuilding NGO in Jos, 10th June 2018.

Tivs, Idoma, and Igedetribes in Benue State.⁵⁰ Lack of effective communication with community leadership by the military also deepens communities' suspicion of their activities.⁵¹

At the same time, communities themselves contribute to tensions and negative perceptions. In a situation whereby the civilian population becomes uncooperative with the military, particularly on issues related to information sharing, it becomes difficult for the military to effectively track and apprehend criminals. In many instances, these criminals seek refuge within the communities; for instance, the recent death of a military member in Benue State was linked to criminals who resided within a community there.⁵²

Traditional and religious leadership as well as civil society organizations are uniquely positioned to help build understanding and support for military operations among the civilian population. However, the role of traditional institutions in community-based conflict management and security is under-utilized in Nigeria, despite their wide-ranging influence at the community and state levels. This stems from the fact that the Nigerian 1999 Constitution did not prescribe a conflict management or governance role for traditional leaders; thereby inhibiting formal recognition, particularly among security actors, of their strategic positions to influence the community and state levels. The Nigerian government instead engages traditional leaders on an ad hoc basis and as “fire-fighters” to quell crises when they occur, without adequate support to institutionalize their role in management and prevention of crime and violent conflict in their communities.

Need for Increased Training for Military

Members Deployed in the Middle Belt

Some of the troops deployed for internal security operations have not participated in direct combat missions previously and have not been sufficiently trained on key skills such as weapons handling, communication, rules of engagement, humanitarian and human rights laws, and map reading. This lack of training is likely due to short training periods before deployment, which do not provide enough time or depth to fully orient troops, many of whom lack post-secondary education and require additional training to fully understand their roles and limitations.⁵³ Lack of training puts them at increased risk for incidents like those described above. Two key gap areas in training occur around orientation and around the expansion of their role into internal security operations.

By design, each security agency has its own unique code of conduct and ethics that guide its personnel, which are imparted to its members during their orientation. Because these internal security operations draw personnel from different branches of the armed forces and other security agencies, they present a challenge

50 Peter Duru (27 March 2018), “Benue tribal leaders back Danjuma, accuse FG, military of aiding takeover of Benue by herdsmen,” Vanguard, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/03/benue-tribal-leaders-back-danjuma-accuse-fg-military-of-aiding-takeover-of-benue-by-herdsmen/>

51 Ibid.

52 Samuel Ogundipe (20 April 2018), “Why Benue community was set on fire — Nigerian Army,” Premium Times, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/265643-why-benue-community-was-set-on-fire-nigerian-army.html>

53 There is a sense in which newly recruited soldiers (mostly secondary school certificate holders) are deployed for internal security operations with no prior experience beyond the six to nine month long training they were given in the field as recruits.

for coordination and planning, particularly when members are not aligned during one common orientation process. As a result, some of the individuals participating in operations lack understanding of the rules of engagement beyond the pre-departure briefings they are given by their own agencies prior to deployment.⁵⁴ In a situation where troops deployed for internal security management are not conversant with the relevant rules, such human rights and humanitarian laws, as well as tactics and skill sets such as weapons handling and communications, major challenges can occur during operations that exacerbate tensions with communities.

Tensions are even more likely to occur when mandates change beyond the scope of the traditional role for security actors, including the expansion of the military's role in the Middle Belt from crime prevention to also including conflict prevention. Some of the conflict prevention role that the military has been playing within the Middle Belt region includes monitoring the implementation of the movement of cattle between 6am and 6pm, restricting grazing to certain areas within communities to avoid encroachment on farmlands, and holding town hall meetings on peace with stakeholders involving the community leaders, farming and pastoralist communities among others. In most cases, the military has also taken on the role of mediation and reconciliation between farmers and herders.⁵⁵

The core mandate of the security operations does not include mediation and reconciliation, which are often long-term processes; however necessity increasingly pushed the military into this role, which they have limited capacity to perform. Especially as the low cadre of security operatives has limited training as mediators and peacebuilding in comparison with the officers who are trained on elements of conflict management. Currently military members are carrying out tasks that they are not fully equipped or mandated to do, and they lack significant and sustained training to enable them to do so successfully to avoid creating and exacerbating grievances and tensions.

Lack of Clarity within Civilian Populations about Military's Role and How to Channel Complaints

Many civilian residents of the Middle Belt, particularly those in the rural areas where violence occurs, lack a clear understanding of the role of the military vis-à-vis the police and other civilian actors, as well as how to escalate complaints when tensions and concerns arise. This may be due to low literacy rates, as well as lack of access to clear communication and information. Although mechanisms such as the National Human Rights Commission exist to handle civilian complaints, communication, and information, most civilians are largely unaware of their existence as well as their importance. This lack of awareness undermines the relationship between the security operatives and civilians and potential collaboration between the two to increase security by sharing warning signs or reporting incidents, following up on how accountability has been increased, etc.

54 In preparation for deployments, the personnel to be deployed are briefed either before departure or when they arrive. Through such briefings, they are informed of their mandate in the theatre of conflict.

55 With the deployment of the military to the villages, they become the most visible actors that the people report cases to for redress. Under such circumstance, the military becomes deeply involved in mediation and peacemaking.

As a result, civilians often fail to report cases relating to the misconduct of troops because they do not know how to access senior officers and do not understand the proper procedure for reporting. In the words of one civilian, “We only see the military officers in tinted hilux vans with soldiers that are armed around them. When we see them in such way, it becomes difficult to get close to them, even if you have complaints to make. For us in the communities, we are in separate worlds with the military. Since we cannot approach them, we have no business to do with them apart from distancing ourselves from them to avoid any trouble.”⁵⁶

Clarity is also lacking around the military’s exit strategy, handover to police, and timelines for the implementation of its mandate. Even among military members themselves, some do not have a sense of when the operation will end. One stated, “The first set of troops that were deployed to Plateau State in 2001, their mission was supposed to be for few months at the initial instance. Seventeen years after the military was sent to Plateau, troops are still on ground. They are deployed to almost all the local governments. They are now present in Kaduna, Nasarawa, Benue and other states in the country.”⁵⁷ A lack of clarity among security actors feeds into a lack of clarity among civilians about the role of the military.

Rivalries and Disagreements Within and between Security Agencies

Differences in training and orientation between the police and the armed forces (army, navy, and airforce) makes coordination and synergy a challenge for internal security operations and enable rivalries and disagreements to flourish. These result in inconsistent approaches by different security forces that can be problematic in the context of ongoing violence. Civil society members and academics have cited instances, for example, where conflict ensued between the Commander of the OSH and Commissioner of Police in Plateau State over who was actually in charge of internal security operations in the state. In the words of an individual interviewed for this research, “when the military takes over, the police are relegated to the background. You see military troops arresting and punishing offenders without handing them to the police for prosecution.”⁵⁸ State governors, who work closely with the police and the commanding hierarchy of the security agencies at the state level, often find themselves working at cross-purposes or inadvertently undermining one another. For instance, while the commissioners of police and heads of other security agencies are supposed to take orders from the governors, they often rely on directives from their superiors in Abuja. This conflict has most often occurred between the army and the police. The armed forces are trained for war, with little experience and training in civil engagements, while the police are statutorily mandated to handle civil matters in the context of law and order maintenance. As a result, there have been instances where personnel from different security agencies that were deployed under the same operations were involved in disagreements relating to how best to address an issue. According to a police personnel deployed to the STF in Plateau State, “We have had instances where civilians are punished by some of our military colleagues for offences that are purely civil matters, such as theft. For the police, this is an issue that should be taken to the nearest police. Unfortunately, some-

56 Interview with a resident of BarkinLadi, BarkinLadi Local Government Area, Plateau State, 14th June 2018

57 Interview with a member of the Special Task Force – Operation Safe Haven in Riyom LGA, Plateau State, 2nd June, 2018

58 Interview with a police officer in Jos, Plateau State, 23rd August 2018.

times our military colleagues prefer to handle it in their own way. That has created problems for us, as well as between the communities and the military personnel.”⁵⁹ One military member stated, “we were deployed to restore peace. Unfortunately, we are confronted with other civil matters, which places us at a position where we are deeply involved in conflict resolution or addressing crime related matters such as robbery.”⁶⁰

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the farmer-herder conflict in the Middle Belt region deepens, it is essential that the Nigerian government, security agencies, civil society, and communities collaborate effectively to reduce tensions, respect and promote human rights and security, and prevent violence. This policy brief offers recommendations to different stakeholders including:

The Federal and State Governments

- **There is the need for government to partner with the security agencies and communities, to consider creating and supporting mechanisms to strengthen civil-military relations in the context of the involvement of the military in internal security operations and management in the Middle Belt region.** One of the most important pathways towards improving relations between the deployed security operatives and the civilian population would require better training for the military and other security agencies, on issues such as human rights, international humanitarian law, and community outreach and engagement. Additionally, more formal and frequent collaboration between traditional, religious, and civil society leaders and military actors would help build trust and buy-in and establish a community security architecture. Furthermore, a robust civilian-military relationship would help in ensuring that both security actors and civilians have the relationships needed to undertake joint internal security operations planning, better identify and understand the root causes of conflict, conduct threat assessments and sensitization, and gather intelligence.
- **The federal government and the Ministry of Defense should ensure that the role of security personnel deployed during internal security operations is clearly defined and communicated to civilians, particularly those in the communities where such operations are to be undertaken.** All members of internal operations should be clear on their role, including specifically the respective roles of the military and the police. Under a mandate on internal security operations, the military should be restricted to its role of conflict prevention rather than also focusing on civil crimes and mediation. Where the military arrests persons involved in crime related activities, they should handover such persons to the police. This also includes clarity on the RoE guiding military operations, both for military personnel and civilians. The roles of the overall operation and each group within it, should be clearly communicated to civilians in affected areas and dialogue between communities and security actors should be encouraged to ensure two-way communication. Information should be readily available for citizens who wish to

59 Interview with a police personnel under the STF in Plateau State, 14th June 2018

60 Interview with military personnel under the STF in Plateau State, 15th August 2018.

report grievances or misconduct or ask questions about security activities. Civil society can assist in sharing information with communities and fostering dialogue between communities and security actor.

- **Members of the police should receive additional support in the form of improved funding and training.** Since internal security management is the primary responsibility of the police, the federal government should ensure proper funding of the police to increase training, operational resources, and long-term strategic development of the institution.

Security Agencies

- **The military should ensure that all of its personnel involved in special operations are subjected to a clear and consistent rules and policies that guide their conduct during operations and that sufficient training is provided to all of its personnel.** Once deployed to serve on a special operation, all troops should be subjected to the rules and order of the overall operation rather than their own unique branch of military or civilian security agency. This should be communicated clearly during orientation and throughout the mission in order to improve coordination and impact.
- **Investment in inter-agency collaboration between security actors, including members of the military and the police, should be a priority of the government to avoid agencies operating at cross-purposes.** The central pillar of inter-agency collaboration should be to engender mutual trust and respect in problem solving through tools such as joint trainings, regular coordination meetings, trust building, and more. This will foster a common sense of ownership among the various security agencies working towards a peaceful, secured, and stable country. Beyond having personnel drawn under the same platform of Special Forces for the management of internal security, they should be able to function in ways that make them pursue common goals, regardless of the services they represent.

Traditional, Civil Society and Religious Leaders

- **Traditional, civil society, and religious leaders should seek to constructively engage the leadership of the deployed security personnel and proactively foster improved communication and relationships within their communities.** These leaders are trusted and respected by the communities they serve and can be influential in connecting security actors with civilians, building relationships between the two, and increasing mutual awareness. Additionally, civil society organizations play key role in conflict management in the states, a role that could be enhanced by institutionalizing a community-based security architecture in local communities.
- **Civil society organizations should monitor and document cases of human rights abuse.** Once the military is deployed to manage internal security, they have a duty to uphold human rights and international humanitarian law. Civil society organizations should monitor and document all cases of human rights abuses against civilian population, with a view to ensuring the National Human Rights Commission and other relevant institutions, both national and international, take appropriate steps to ensure compliance by the military while on internal security operations.

International Community and Partners

- **The international community has an important role to play in supporting Nigeria in this effort.** While the security response to domestic conflicts is fundamentally the role of the Nigerian state, the international community can play a supporting role in encouraging the implementation of these recommendations through its policies towards Nigeria, diplomatic engagements, and development and security assistance.

CONCLUSION

The security response to farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria has been largely multi-faceted, involving civilian and security agencies tasked not only with preventing violence but also with advancing peace. The authors of this paper have utilized their academic and practitioner experience, research, and contacts to analyze the impact of security responses, in particular where those dynamics are undermining mission success, creating barriers to successful civilian-military collaboration, and potentially creating or exacerbating grievances. As the needs surrounding security and the prevention of violence increase in the Middle Belt, it is essential that Nigeria's institutions and citizens reflect on successes and challenges of past and current security responses and implement changes to better achieve the goals of peace and stability.

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