 

**Memorandum on the motion on tackling of the perennial conflicts between farmers and cattle herdsmen**

Submitted to:

The Joint Senate Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and National Security and Intelligence

By:

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**INTRODUCTION**

This submission is prepared by Mercy Corps Nigeria, The Pastoral Resolve (PARE) and Education as a Vaccine (EVA) to facilitate the motion aimed at tackling perennial conflicts between farmers and cattle herdsmen/pastoralist and for consideration of and reporting on any proposed legislation to address the conflicts.

Since 2012, Mercy Corps Nigeria has been working with local communities in the Middle-Belt states of Plateau, Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Taraba to address the sources of conflict through strengthening social and economic ties at community and sub-regional level-by integrating economic growth, governance and resource management into the reconciliation process. This approach works to ensure both sustainability and a reduction of conflict.

The Pastoral Resolve (PARE), a non-governmental organization focused on solving the perennial conflict between farmers and pastoralists occasioned by poor access and competition over natural resources like; land and water.

Education as a Vaccine (EVA) is a youth-led organization working in the most vulnerable communities to address development challenges affecting the wellbeing of young people, strengthening the capacities of communities, women and young people to reduce violence from resource-based conflict that can negatively impact education and health outcomes.

**RATIONALE**

This submission aims to examine the most critical issues that affect long-term solutions and lead to the escalation of violence which is gradually spreading across Nigeria and disrupting economic growth particularly in the Middle-Belt region. This is part of a larger effort to understand the economic costs of farmer-pastoralist conﬂict and the potential beneﬁts of peace in the Middle Belt, in order to inform evidence-based policy recommendations that promote long-term peace in the region. To also fully understand speciﬁc effects of conﬂict on communities and how to reduce violence while promoting long-term livelihood development in this context.

**KEY FINDINGS**

* Based on research, the average household affected by farmer and pastoralist conflict would experience at least a 64% increase in income, and potentially 210% or higher increase in income, if these conflicts were reduced to near zero.
* The loss of household income due to these conflicts results in up to a 2.9% loss in potential GDP for the study states, including both formal and informal economies.
* Nigeria stands to gain up to US $13.7 billion or N2.3 trillion annually in total macroeconomic progress in a scenario of peace between farmers and pastoralists in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Plateau alone.
* Reductions in farmer-pastoralist conflict are worth up to 2.79% of Nigeria’s officially reported GDP annually.
* States affected by farmer-pastoralist conflicts lost an average of 47% of taxes (Internally Generated Revenue, or IGR) due to these conflicts, through 2012.

Specifically;

* Plateau lost an estimated 75% of potential state revenue.
* Kaduna lost an estimated 22% of potential state revenue.
* Nasarawa lost an estimated 45% of potential state revenue.
* Benue lost an estimated 44% of potential state revenue
* Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Plateau have lost up to NGN 347 million combined in IGR, or taxes, due to the conflicts
* Agriculture—including crop farming and livestock rearing—and trade are the sectors hardest hit by farmer-pastoralist conflict and are also central to the Middle Belt and Nigeria’s economy.
* Existing coping strategies of pastoralist communities experiencing farmer-pastoralist conflict can be counter-productive to long-term growth.
* Pastoralists tend to cope with conflict by altering their movement patterns, which can reduce their ability to earn a living.
* Some livelihoods improvement strategies may fuel conflict.
* Income diversification efforts often require increased settlements for pastoralists, so they can adopt farming and other livelihood approaches. In some cases this increases their social bonds with neighboring groups, but in other instances leaves them more vulnerable to attack over land conflict.
* For both farmers and pastoralists, conflict gradually erodes a household’s or community’s ability to support itself in the future, reducing both their livelihood capacities and their resilience to future stresses and shocks.
* Communities tend to adopt reactive dispute resolution mechanisms— short-term responses to an incident to prevent it from escalating— rather than develop long-term transformative mechanisms to address the roots of conflict or provide a system for future dispute resolution.

**CHANGING IMPACTS OF CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE BELT**

**Trauma and Retaliation**

Conﬂict is exacerbated by trauma and transmitted to neighboring communities, continually expanding the circle of violence. This growing retaliation cycle manifests itself in two ways: farmer-pastoralist conﬂicts and broader tensions across identity groups. In general, some communities experiencing violence retaliate against communities that did not perpetrate the attack but that are part of the same ethnic and livelihood group as the alleged attackers. For example, one scenario reported is that if a member of the pastoralist community allows animals to destroy crops in a farming community and does not take responsibility for the damage, the owner of the crops from the farming community becomes angry. If the pastoralist responsible for the damage has by that time moved on with his livestock, the farmer may take this anger out on the next pastoralist who happens to come near his lands. The reverse of this example was also reported. A pastoralist who has been mistreated in one farmer community may become less concerned if his cattle feed on harvested yams or stray into crops as he moves through another location. As a common example of this, a pastoralist respondent reported being beaten badly and chased away from village water sources even though he had never been there before. Thus, trauma and pain contribute to increased conﬂict through retaliation across identity groups, expanding the group of actors affected by, and participating in, conﬂict.

**Identity, Culture and Resources**

These retaliation cycles tend to converge with identities, broadening the conﬂict further as revenge occurs along ethnic, religious, and political lines. Even though livelihood strategies across different groups have somewhat merged over time, with growing numbers of community members engaging in both farming and pastoralist activities, the discrete identity markers of ‘farmer’ and ‘pastoralist’ persist over time, reinforcing perceived group differences. People who have been settled in one place for generations and whose livelihood is based primarily on farming, still consider themselves and are considered by others as pastoralists because of identity factors such as their Fulani ethnicity and Muslim heritage. Similarly, the majority of the settled communities identifying as farmers are Christian from various ethnic groups. Thus, these different livelihood groups have become synonymized with religious and/or ethnic groups, and violence over time results in the erosion of trust, tolerance, and social and economic exchange across religious, ethnic, and livelihood groups.

**Governance and Security:**

The challenges for the state security sector in tackling conﬂict are immense. For small incidents, security agencies reportedly lack transportation and human resources to police large areas. They experience difﬁculty in responding to conﬂict due to a lack of witnesses to events occurring in remote rural locations, sometimes at night and far from urban-based police resources. For serious, larger scale conﬂict events that involve organized, mobilized, and well-armed groups, security forces were reported to lack resources to mount an appropriate response. Communities’ trust in state justice institutions has seriously deteriorated due to perceived biases in how different ethnic groups are treated, as well as a simple lack of justice administration. As a result, communities may be less likely to engage with security forces, thereby leading to conﬂict escalation as communities attempt to manage justice processes on their own. The overall ethnic-based political environment also creates a context in which politicians exploit tensions across identity groups to their advantage in mobilizing support in their political campaigns.

The fundamental elements driving conﬂict behaviors include the protagonists’ identity, livelihood priorities, and competition over natural resources. Where governance and security mechanisms are unable to manage, contain and resolve the violence, and traditional and community-led responses are not equipped to prevent conﬂict, a mutually reinforcing and intensifying cycle emerges.

**COMMUNITY CAPACITIES FOR RESPONDING TO THE EFFECTS OF CONFLICT**

Communities respond to conﬂict, in terms of conﬂict prevention and livelihood development. We saw four ways, all related to short-term coping: reactive dispute resolution mechanisms, livelihood diversiﬁcation, migration, and settling. While these coping strategies help people manage the onset of conﬂict and its effects, without the use of more adaptive or transformative strategies they do not constitute evidence of long-term resilience in these communities. Below we describe these four areas.

**Reactive Dispute Resolution Mechanisms**

Communities tend to adopt reactive dispute resolution mechanisms—short-term responses to an incident that prevents it from escalating—rather than develop long-term transformative mechanisms to address the roots of conﬂict or provide a system for future dispute resolution. For example, conﬂict management strategies involve leaders urging peace when conﬂict arises, or seeking to settle a dispute through traditional authority structures. Communities in a best-case scenario, following an incident in which pastoralists’ cattle have caused extensive damage to the crops of a farmer community, the local farmer community chief and the local ardo (pastoralist community leader) will contact each other and attempt to resolve the dispute. On a few occasions, religious leaders play a role, such as preaching peace, patience and restraint in their respective communities, in preventing communal violence from escalating. Even these reactive strategies are limited, however, as traditional mechanisms are mainly aimed at addressing issues within their homogeneous communities; respondents indicated these mechanisms are not effective or compatible across identity groups, except at the relatively trivial level, and they cannot ensure appropriate compensation or reconciliation to resolve intergroup disputes sustainably. Importantly, cross-community efforts to build peace and encourage a transformation in relationships in the long-term are relatively scarce.

**Income Source Diversification**

Communities experiencing ongoing conﬂict stresses were likely to adopt only reactive coping mechanisms in response to economic loss. Documented coping mechanisms include livelihood diversiﬁcation, which was particularly a key strategy of farmers linked to, but not exclusively caused by, conﬂict. Diversiﬁcation, both in terms of crop production and other strategies such as trading or beekeeping, help farmers recover from large-scale and frequent crop damages. However, farmers facing signiﬁcant losses due to crop destruction as part of the broader conﬂict cycles do not usually demonstrate deeper adaptation, such as changing their farming strategies. These strategies might include devising more efﬁcient land use approaches, building fences to protect crops, or working jointly with the pastoralists and government to delineate the migration corridors to prevent land encroachment on either side.

**Migration**

Pastoralists shift in their movement patterns as a way to prevent conﬂict while maintaining their lifestyle as closely as possible in the immediate term. First, pastoralists are increasingly moving along major highways rather than through traditional cattle routes, which reduces vulnerability to attack from farmers but increases vulnerability to motor vehicle accidents. Pastoralists are more likely to graze in coordination with other families, rather than travel within smaller family units. While this strategy increases their protection, these groups also move more quickly to avoid conﬂict, which negatively impacts cattle health. Pastoralists are also engaging less with farmer communities as they graze their cattle; this reduces their immediate vulnerability to conﬂict by decreasing interaction, but it damages relationships in the long term. Lastly, pastoralists are also grazing more at night in order to avoid confrontation with farmers, which increases the risk of crop destruction, a key trigger for conﬂict. Pastoralists are engaging less with farmer communities as they graze their cattle; this reduces their immediate vulnerability to conﬂict by decreasing interaction, but it damages relationships in the long term.

**Settling**

One of the most signiﬁcant coping mechanisms that pastoralists reported is settling. Settling is a strategy some pastoralists reported using in order to diversify their livelihoods and increase their economic security. Settlement reduces the risk of attacks and violence for pastoralists on a daily basis by limiting exposure to disputes around crop damage and cattle routes, and reducing vulnerability to attacks on migrants in transit. However, settlement shifts the type of risks that households may face, and the vulnerabilities to which a family is exposed, over different periods of time. For example, members of a farmer community in Kaduna noted that they had ‘more trouble’ with the settled, local pastoralists than the mobile groups; the latter only passed by occasionally whereas farmers reported issues with the settled pastoralists year-round. Settlement in a vulnerable context may mean households still face a more organized and concerted attack in the community. Such attacks tend to arise a result of the convergence of identity factors noted above, which leads to broad, large-scale violence aimed at the group identity level.

**MANAGING LONG-TERM RISKS**

Beyond the immediate impacts from discrete conﬂict events, our analysis indicates that conﬂict gradually erodes a household’s or community’s ability to support itself in the future, reducing both their livelihood capacities and their resilience to future stresses and shocks. This erosion occurs through multiple channels, including the weakening of social bonds across groups, undermining the ability of households to contribute to social insurance safety networks or offer support to other community members experiencing shocks or losses. Social safety networks are disrupted within pastoralist communities in particular, as communities become more dispersed to reduce risks associated with conﬂict. For instance, in one scenario reported frequently, part of the family migrates with cattle to one area, another takes cattle to a different area far away, while still other members of the extended families settle in urban centers.

In addition, conﬂict reduces productive assets such as vehicles needed to transport goods, along with households’ wealth and assets—either looted or destroyed through conﬂict—thereby affecting the inheritance of future generations. The following scenarios were reported across a plurality of communities: For pastoralists, cattle—usually households’ most signiﬁcant assets—are killed by farmers during conﬂict incidents. For farmers, entire harvests can be lost in one event as a herd passes through their land. During community-level, organized violence, houses and shops are burned to the ground and assets looted during the event. Victims then become limited in their ability to contribute to social safety nets such as community mutual support systems to assist one another in times of crisis, thereby reducing the wider community’s capacity to recover from shocks. For example, pastoralist respondents explained that when livestock levels were severely depleted from conﬂict, they are not in a position to give or loan animals to destitute families as per their tradition.

The ongoing stress of conﬂict—and fear of conﬂict—impedes livelihoods as it reduces investment and levels of economic risk-taking that might, under normal circumstances, provide much needed enterprise. That conﬂict also reduces resilience capacities is understandably a grave concern, as the impacts of conﬂict go beyond the immediate effects of income loss and actually weaken the abilities of communities to bounce back from stressful events. The reactive, short-term strategies communities reported adopting for livelihood preservation and conﬂict prevention were not always compatible, as livelihood diversiﬁcation for one group may incite conﬂict through immediate increased competition for resources. For example, expansion of agricultural land by farmers to increase their harvests and so reduce vulnerability from crop damage by pastoralists also exacerbates conﬂict by reducing available grazing land.

The study found few strategies designed to prevent or transform conﬂict in these areas. First, we saw few adaptive strategies such as organized conﬂict prevention and early warning mechanisms. More fundamentally, communities generally lacked conﬂict management mechanisms and transformative strategies aimed at addressing the fundamental structural issues driving the conﬂicts. Organized, participatory and formal local reconciliation processes after the resolution of a dispute, are almost nonexistent at the community level. This demonstrates the need for proactive steps that can help communities not only respond to losses, but also lay the groundwork for preventing conﬂict in a sustainable way and for managing resources in a way that will promote peace, rather than conﬂict. Such action can prevent the deterioration of household assets and community bonds that help communities withstand the stresses of conﬂict.

**STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS**

Among the many available options for reducing conﬂict and increasing resilience in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, government and its partners can focus on four general areas for long-term conﬂict reduction:

**Peacebuilding Mechanisms:**

The need for systematic, comprehensive and strategic peacebuilding programs that address chronic, resource-driven, community-level conﬂicts, as well as identity-based conﬂict dynamics at the state level, is overwhelming. Government can support improved peacebuilding through harmonizing potential gaps between security agencies and the justice sector at the federal and state levels; providing resources to interstate coordination efforts to holistically address cross-border conﬂict systems; looking into cases of human rights abuses, and establishing or strengthening early warning and response mechanisms that are integrated with federal security objectives and community approaches.

**Sustained Multi-Sectoral Programming**

Livelihood strategies and conﬂict management strategies positively reinforce each other. Multi-sectoral, multi-year programming structures offer the best opportunity to address interrelated conﬂict and livelihood issues simultaneously. Social and trauma healing should be incorporated carefully in conﬂict management activities to reinforce structural improvements in peace mechanisms and joint livelihoods development. Trauma healing and reconciliation programming can address some of the proximate drivers of conﬂict and reduce the transmittance of conﬂict from one community to another.

**Livelihoods Development**

Improved provision of government livestock extension services and facilities, in areas such as crop productivity, improved land quality, animal healthcare and disease management, more attention to the effects of climate change and diversiﬁcation of the agricultural sector will bring beneﬁts to all stakeholders and simultaneously reduce vulnerability for farmers and pastoralists.

**Land Use Planning**

Given the ongoing encroachment of farming, settlement, urban expansion, and other large scale development activity on pastoralist rangelands and migration routes, states should implement prior recommendations around land use planning. These prior recommendations include revisiting land tenure and land use policy nationally (and addressing disparities between groups considered “indigenes” and “settlers” in their ability to access to political ofﬁce and land ownership). These policy changes will be critical to reducing farmer-pastoralist conﬂict in the long term.

**In conclusion;**

Mercy Corps Nigeria, The PARE and EVA are ready to provide any additional information or clarification that the Senate or any of its relevant Committees may require towards the consideration and passage of any future legislation Should you require our support, we would be pleased to render it through the arrangement of community immersion visits and sharing of field experiences, including by providing relevant resource materials and comparative literature on our work around similar issues across the world.