

**Nigeria's pastoralist-farmer conflict: Assessing drivers across  
ecological and socio-political dimensions**

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## **Abstract**

In Nigeria, the pastoralist-farmer conflict has spiralled over the past decades and now ranks as the country's top national security challenge with fears it has already surpassed the Boko Haram terrorism in terms of impacts and spread. Thousands of people have been killed, tens of thousands more have been displaced and communities have been destroyed in the conflict that has not only devastated livelihoods but also threatened food security and national cohesion. Existing studies have examined the causes, yet these studies mostly consider the ecological and associated resource-use competition dimensions. However, there are socio-political narratives, which have dominance in the media and public discourses in Nigeria. Taking advantage of this gap, with political ecology framework and qualitative research method, this study illuminates the ecological discussion and expounds the socio-political argument. The findings reinforce the ecological explanations, but also show that there are deeper issues that form a socio-political context, which has further drawn out the conflict and makes it appear to be an intractable challenge. The study attempts to provide a basis to consider the combined ecological-socio-political factors in drawing solution and further studies by policy makers, development partners and scholars.

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**Desertification in Nigeria's North**

*Image: Gallo Images*

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Pastoralism is an aspect of agriculture concerned with the movement of people (pastoralists or herders) and animals (herds) from one place to another in search of grazing areas in terms of pasture and water (Fratkin, 1997; FAO, 2001; Salzman, 2004; Moran 2006). In sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, pastoralism is oriented towards cattle and still depends on movement of herds to grazing and water points (Blench and Marriage, 1999). During their spatial movements, pastoralists encounter sedentary farmers and natives alike with whom they usually have conflictual engagements over access to resources, namely land and water (Blench, 1994). In Nigeria, conflict involving pastoralists and natives, mostly farming families, is now a threat to national survival after an unchecked growth and spread over the past decades (Blench and Dendo, 2003; Jega et al., 2018). In terms of spread of impacts, it may have surpassed Boko Haram terrorism. It has also become a threat to the country's socio-economic wellbeing, including livelihoods and food security (Owolabi, 2016; Crisis Group, 2017). Exploration of literature reveals ecological as well as resource use-related factors driving the conflict (Swift, 1977; Watts, 1987; Blench and Dendo, 2003; Mohammed et al., 2015). However, there are other issues considered socio-political, namely the nature of state and the narratives related to ethno-religious expansionist agenda. These are recent, scarcely covered in the literature but are the dominant narratives in the Nigerian media and public discourses. The overarching task in this work is to explore the complex drivers and ramifications of the conflict across scales and socio-political and ecological dimensions using a political ecology framework.

#### 1.2. Statement problem, overview and justification of research

Nigeria opened year 2018 on a fatal note, with the press reporting pastoralists to have killed 73 persons in the farming communities of the Middle Belt Benue State on New Year's Day (CNN, 2018). By the end of January, 168 persons had been killed in the conflicts involving farmers and pastoralists across Nigeria, according to the Amnesty International (2018). The killings have continued and become regular features in daily reports within and outside Nigeria. Such spate of deadly violence is not new. In 2014, according to the Global Terrorism Index (2015), the conflict resulted in the deaths of 1,229 persons. According to one report, in 2016 the conflict claimed 44% of all fatalities in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>. Historically, the pastoral literature on Nigeria shows both cases of harmonious – for instance, exchange of cereals and dung - and conflictual engagements between pastoralists and farmers (Boutrais, 1974; Monod, 1975; Blench, 1994; Blench and Dendo, 2003; Umoh, 2017). However, over the past decades, the farmer-pastoralist conflict has grown, intensified, and spread, with profound implications for Nigeria's national survival (Jega et al., 2018), food security (Owolabi, 2016) and fears the country already grapples with a security challenge that is worse than the Boko Haram terrorism (Crisis Group, 2017). Virtually all parts of Nigeria are affected by the conflicts, including the oil-rich Niger Delta states in the south-south (Onyima and Iwuoha, 2015) but the main theatre of violence is

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<sup>1</sup> SBM Intel, 2017, 'A look at Nigeria's security situation'. [http://sbmintel.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/201701\\_Security-report.pdf](http://sbmintel.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/201701_Security-report.pdf).

the Middle Belt of Nigeria (Blench, 1994; Blench and Dendo, 2003; Umoh, 2017; Jega, 2018), where over 2000 people were killed and tens of thousands more displaced in 2016<sup>2</sup>.

In comparison with Nigeria's other violent conflicts, Boko Haram or Niger Delta militancy, say, a unique feature of the farmer-pastoralist conflict is that it involves protagonists from different ethnic-religious sections with a history of distrust and tensions. The pastoralists mainly belong to the Muslim-Fulani stock originating from the country's semi-arid North, which is a part of the Sahel ecoclimatic and biogeographic zone (Blench, 1994; Blench and Dendo, 2003; Epule et al., 2013). The farmers are indigenous to the semi-humid Middle Belt, statistically dominated by Christians who belong to several ethnic groups (Harnischfeger, 2008). **Figure 1** shows the semi-arid Muslim North and the semi-humid Middle Belt dominated by multi-ethnic Christians on the map of Nigeria. **Figure 2** illustrates the states, as sub-national governments are called in Nigeria, within the Middle Belt, worst hit by the conflicts. These states include Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa and (southern) Kaduna.



**Figure 1** Nigeria's map showing the semi-arid north and the sub-humid zone, including the Middlebelt

Source: International Crisis Group, 2017. Herders against farmers: Nigeria's expanding deadly conflict. Report No. 252. (Online). Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/252-herders-against-farmers-nigerias-expanding-deadly-conflict>. (accessed 27 May 2018).

For centuries, pastoralists drove their cattle east and west across the Sahel, the semi-arid zone south of the Sahara Desert that includes Nigeria's North (Blench, 1994; Blench and Dendo, 2003). However, beginning since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Fulani pastoralists have shifted their migratory routes southwards through the Middle Belt, where many Fulani families have settled, for 'best' pasture (Blench, 1994; Umoh, 2017). Over time, this movement has been induced by climatic variations and environmental changes, including the shrinking Lake Chad, droughts and desertification in the North. Other factors include vast grassy land in the Middle Belt and

<sup>2</sup> Relief Web's report on the conflict, 2017 <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-farmer-fulani-herder-violence-benue-kaduna-and-plateau-states-thematic-report>.

further south, better control of parasitic diseases (such as trypanosomiasis or sleeping sickness) southwards and attempt to evade cattle-tax (jankali) imposed by the British colonial government in the Northern Region (Stenning, 1957; Blench, 1994; Blench and Dendo, 2003; Shettima and Tar, 2008; Mohammed et al., 2015; Crisis Group, 2017; Jega et al., 2018). Then, the political and military success of the Othman Dan Fodio-led Fulani Jihad in the early years of the nineteenth century also cleared ways for the southward movement of Fulani pastoralists (Blench, 1994).

As pastoralists' movement grow, so does human population and, thus, expansion in the cultivated farmland, especially in the Middle Belt, even extending to transhumant routes, designated but left unreserved and poorly managed by the government (FAO, 1985; Mohammed et al., 2015; Jega et al., 2018).



Figure 2 highlighting the worst-hit Middlebelt states

Source: International Crisis Group, 2017. Herders against farmers: Nigeria's expanding deadly conflict. Report No. 252. (Online). Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/252-herders-against-farmers-nigerias-expanding-deadly-conflict>. (Accessed 27 May 2018).

The implications of all these are dwindling resources and competition for resources needed for expanding cultivation farming and pastoralism, resulting in conflicts between farmers and

pastoralists. However, this, environment and resource-use competition-related dimension, is one explanation, mostly popular in the literature, but unpopular in media and public discourse

Another perspective, which is dominant in the media and public discourses, and held among interest groups, is that the crisis is socio-politically underpinned<sup>3</sup>. By narratives emerging on the conflicts in the media and in public discourses, the indigenous communities have suffered bigger casualties, especially in Benue State, where, in 2016, agrarian communities were almost unceasingly attacked and killed by the suspected Fulani herdsmen in what became infamously known as the Agatu massacre. The two groups – the pastoralists and the farmers – are presented as perpetrators and victims, respectively, with the former seen as embarking on an expansionist mission through deployment of violence against their host communities<sup>4</sup> (Jega et al., 2018). This view has gained strength for several reasons. Historically, the Fulani had in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century overrun and established Islamic caliphate in Nigeria's North through a progressive-expansionist military campaign (the Fulani Jihad), led by Othman Dan Fodio. The campaign passed through the Middle Belt and contributed to the collapse of the Yoruba Empire of Oyo (in the present day south-western Nigeria) (Adeleye and Stewart, 1987; Ajayi, 1987; Blench 1988; Ochonu, 2015). Then, at present, Nigeria's government is headed by a Fulani Muslim, himself a pastoralist and patron of the umbrella body of the pastoralists, Miyetti Allah Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN). With government barely active in dealing with the conflict, it has variously been accused of supporting, encouraging or condoning the killings of other groups in the Middle Belt and beyond by the president's own ethnic and occupational group (Adekola, 2018).

However, how did the previous administrations headed by southern Christians approach the issue? The historical failure of Nigerian government including the previous administrations to combat the conflict is well documented in the literature and official reports. These pieces of evidence reveal a weak rural presence and negligence of the agricultural sector since 1970s when oil began to dominate the economy (Blench and Dendo, 2003; Shettima and Tar, 2008; Crisis Group, 2017; Umoh, 2017; Jega et al, 2018). Nevertheless, the dominant narratives are that the present administration is bias. Elites and opinion leaders alike as well as Christian leaders in the Middle Belt and southern Nigeria have just been a little short of accusing the administration of sponsoring the pastoralists as instruments of ethno-religious expansionist agenda of the Fulani. The state government of Benue and Taraba in the Middlebelt have promulgated a piece of law to stop open grazing by the pastoralists and set up militias to implement the anti-open grazing law (Punch, 2018a). However, the Fulani groups and leaders, notably the MACBAN, the Emir of Kano and the country's Defence Minister have also presented counter narratives. They have defended the pastoralists, saying they (the pastoralists)

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, [in a widely reported 24 March 2018 speech](#), Theophilus Danjuma, retired General, ex-deputy leader of the country and major voice in the Middlebelt, accused the Fulani pastoralists of ethnic cleansing against the Middlebelt and other parts of Nigeria and that they (the pastoralists) were being aided by the Nigerian Government represented by the Armed Forces and the Police. Danjuma received backing in the Middlebelt including from the region's [Youth Council](#) and the [Government of Taraba State](#). Popular newspaper, [Punch](#), and [Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka](#) have similar views, accusing the Nigerian Government of siding with pastoralists whom they say are on 'an ethnic cleansing agenda' targeted at expelling other groups from their land.

Also see Adeola, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

are the victims, that the media under-report cases of deadly violence against the Fulani and that transhumant routes have been taken over by farmers (Punch, 2018b; Punch, 2018c). All these have exacerbated suspicion and distrust among Nigerian groups, driven a resort to self-help in the form of raising local militias, and led unprecedented security fears.

While the ecological explanation is popular in the literature, gap exists with regards to not only the socio-political dimensions, but also the wider ramifications and sources of the conflict. The nature of the political elites, that control public affairs across the local, state and national scales, and their vested interests that draw out the conflict further, is invariably considered a significant factor. This study, therefore, extends the frontier of knowledge by exploring Nigeria's pastoralist-farmer conflict across the ecological and socio-political dimensions and ramifications. It argues that though the conflict is strongly associated with environmental and resource-use related factors, it has a deep historical, social and political context. By seeking an encompassing understanding of the conflict, it attempts to offer a basis for a basis for an integrated solution.

The study reviews the available scholarship, reports, records and documentation on the nature of state in Nigeria, socio-political trends, pastoralism, farming, environmental changes and the conflict. This approach illuminates the broader dimensions of the farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria.

## **1.2. Research question, objectives and issues.**

Overall, the research is to be an explorative study of Nigeria's perennial pastoralist-farmer conflict, examining the interplay of environmental-resource use problems and socio-political factors.

The foregoing prompts the overall research question: What are the drivers of Nigeria's pastoralist-farmer conflict?

The question interrogates the drivers as well as the nature of the pastoralist-farmer conflict. The following are, therefore, the specific research questions to handle the overall question in detail, widen perspectives, and shed more light on the research issues identified.

- a. Is Nigeria's pastoralist-farmer conflict driven by ecological factors?
- b. Is Nigeria's pastoralist-farmer conflict driven socio-political factors?

Ecological factors include environmental changes, resource-use competition, sustainability (Kegley and Blanton, 2010). Socio-political factors include ethnicity, religion, nature of state, role of government, politics and international context.

The covering objective, so, is to interrogate, deconstruct and extend the frontiers of what the existing literature holds as the driver(s) as well as the nature of the conflict. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- a. Examine the ecological realities of Nigeria's semi-arid North and sub-humid Middle Belt and the implications they have for the farmer-pastoralist conflict.
- b. Examine socio-political circumstances Nigeria and the relationship between the Fulani of the semi-arid North and diverse groups of the sub-humid Middle Belt and the implications these have for the pastoralist-farmer conflict.
- c. By understanding the complex nature and drivers of the conflict, attempt to offer a basis for solution.

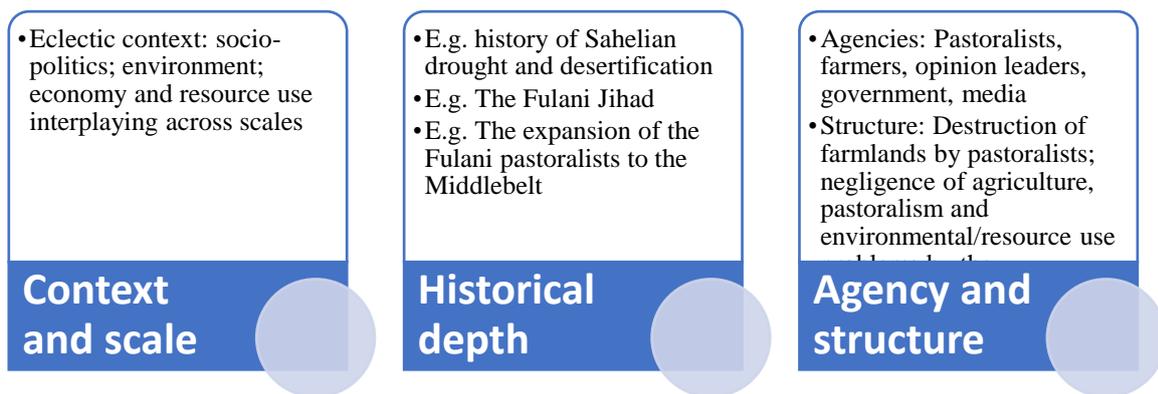
From the research question(s) and the objectives the issues, therefore, for the research will include: ecology (resource-use, environmental changes), socio-politics (nature of state, ethnicity, religion, group survival struggle, social history) and conflict.

### **1.3. Theoretical framework**

An analytical framework that accounts for complex human-environment interactions is suitable for the analysis of Nigeria's conflict involving environment-dependent protagonists – pastoralists and farmers. This framework is political ecology, an analytical social theory framework that helps in analysing and examining wide-ranging phenomena spanning the human-environment nexus and interactions (Brookfield and Blaikie, 1987; Zimmeran and Basset, 2003; Kalipeni and Oppong, 1998). As an eclectic framework, it provides analytical anchorage for studying environmental changes, the material and discursive struggles for resources and the social, political and economic sources and ramifications of these issues for different groups across scales (Peets and Watts, 1996; Bryant, 1998; Peter, 1999).

Political ecology approach has three elements which help illuminate analysis of complex dynamics of social and ecological changes. These elements are central to the discourse in this study (**Figure 3**) Taken from the scholarly works of Kalipeni and Oppong (1997) and Atkinson (1991) among others, these elements include context and scale; historical depth; and agency and structure.

First, context and scale refer to the social, economic, political and environmental contexts relative to a variety of scales ranging from the local to the global within which human agency and structure play mutually reinforcing roles (Atkinson, 1991; Bryant 1992; Blaikie, 1994; Kalipeni and Oppong, 1997). Thus, political ecology posits that human-environment relations vis-à-vis their ramifications can only be understood by analysing the role of socio-political and economic forces across levels. Second, as noted by Atkinson (1991), the complex interactions between environment and society are put in the context of local history and locally specific ecologies in which social and biophysical factors are addressed. Therefore, Kalipeni and Oppong (1997) further notes, a considerable depth of history is the usually the landmark of Political Ecology under the rationale that society-environment interactions may require longer periods of time to result in changed landscapes and behaviours. Third, while human agency refers to the actors that affect the environment and condition the nature of interactions, e.g., farmers, pastoralists, policy makers, and industrialists and so on, structure refers to the patterns in which the actions of the agents are channelled, like land degradation, encroachment, cooperation, say (Giddens, 1984; Atkinson, 1991; Kalipeni and Oppong, 1997).



**Figure 3: Elements of political ecology**

The political ecology approach can combine the concerns of ecology and broad political economy as well as the natures of their interactions. The elements of political ecology are relevant for the analysis of the social, economic, political, environmental and historical contexts of the conflict between the pastoralists and the farmers in Nigeria. They can also account for how these contexts condition the roles and patterns of actions of the actors, not only the farmers and pastoralists, but also the government, interest groups, elites and so on, across levels.

The political ecology approach is considered ahead of neo-Malthusianism. Neo-Malthusianism tends towards mono-causal environmentalist explanations, in which population growth and resource scarcity is assumed to directly lead to land-related conflict (Frecks, 2007). However, any adequate analysis of the pastoralist-farmer conflict in Nigeria must come to grips with not only ecological variables but also social, political, cultural, historical contexts in which the conflict occurs.

**Figure 4 Elements of the Political Ecology Framework and Links with Nigeria’s Conflict**

The political ecology approach has scarcely been used to analyse the conflict involving the farmers and the pastoralists in Nigeria. Although Okoli and Atelhe (2014) set out to adopt the approach in their work on the conflict in Nasarawa State, their focus is restricted (to a state) and the work does not maximally explore the strengths of the approach. For instance, the history of environmental degradation in the semi-arid North which compels movement of the pastoralists to the sub-humid Middlebelt is barely accounted for. Most crucially, the work is dominated by analysis of ecological problems and resource scarcity, while barely explaining the non-ecological socio-political dimension even though it is headlined ‘political ecology approach’.

### **1.4. Organisation**

The subsequent sections are organised as follows: literature review (chapter 2); methodology (chapter 3); empirical analysis of the historical depth, context, scale and structure of the conflict (chapter 4); discussion and conclusion (chapter 5).

## Chapter 2

### Literature review

This section examines scholarly works, including books, articles and reports, on pastoralism, its relationship with farming and the environment and the consequences of these relationships. The aim is to connect the Nigerian context, being the focus of this study, with related cases in other contexts, for instance, India, and the larger discussion in the literature.

#### 2.1. Pastoralism

Production of livestock is a crucial part of economies and major activity around the world (Galaty and Johnson, 1990). A marked difference exists between the approaches now dominantly used in the developed and developing countries (FAO, 2001). For instance, while Australia and North America mostly practise livestock production under conditions that use fenced ranges and unambiguous tenure, pastoralism remains extensively practised in the developing world, where African, Siberian, Mongolian, Tibetan, and Andes, among other, pastoral populations continue to herd their animals to grazing and water points (Fratkin, 1997; FAO, 2001). Thus, there is a conceptual distinction between pastoralism and non-mobile production of livestock. This distinction is widely acknowledged in the literature (Galaty and Johnson, 1990; Salzman, 2004). In their work with Overseas Development Institute on drought and livestock in semi-arid Africa and southwest Asia, Roger Blench and Zoe Marriage point to the traditional method that pastoralism is, noting that it is the dominant system of production in most Africa, though ranching is significantly used in Kenya, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa (1999:7). However, there is also an understanding of pastoralism as a covering concept for nomadic and sedentary production of livestock (Azarya 1996). This perspective sees nomadism and sedentarism as techniques of pastoralism (Shetimma and Tar, 2008). But further examination of literature shows the little significance of this view and that pastoralism is generally associated with opportunistic exploitation of resources and as a result flexibility and mobility (Swift, 1977; Fratkin, 1997; FAO, 2001). The following summary is therefore instructive:

“Pastoralism is the raising of livestock on natural pasture unimproved by human intervention. This movement of animals on the open range in pastoralism is thus contrasted with the provision of cultivated fodder for livestock, which is often associated with the stabilisation of animals in pens or sheds.”

(Salzman, 2004: 1).

#### 2.2. Categorisation of pastoral enterprises

In its working paper on global pastoral systems, FAO (2001) uses the degree of movement to draw a common categorisation of pastoralism, namely i) nomadism; ii) transhumance; and iii) agropastoralism. Nomads are exclusive pastoralists who grow no crops and depend on the sale or exchange of animals and their by-products for their needs, especially foodstuffs. In popular imagination, nomads are wanderers without logic. They move opportunistically and follow

pasture resources, with a balance knowledge of pasture, rainfall, disease, socio-political insecurity, boundaries and markets. They have established migration routes and only diverge in the face of drought, pasture failure or spread of epizootic (FAO, 2001). Various examples exist: Reindeer herders in northern Asia, Mongolian and Kazakh nomads in central Asia, Bedouin in western Asia (Ginat, 1984) and Somali and Fulani in Africa (Boesen et al. 2004; Blench 1994). Transhumance, on the other hand, is characterised by regular movement of animals between fixed points of complementary ecological zones to exploit seasonal availability of pasture (Stenning, 1957; FAO, 2001). Examples of this practice exist in but not limited to south Asia and the Sahel and West Africa. Banerjee (2009) describes the practice of transhumance among the Bhotia pastoral families in the mountainous state of Sikkim, India, who live between Samthong (a pastoral village) and Thangu from April to November every year. They migrate to lower altitudes during the winter months (from second fortnight of November till the onset of summer months when the snow melts). Similarly, among the pastoral Fulani of the savannah of the Sahel and West Africa, Stenning (1957) offers an example of the seasonal movement, southward during dry season in response to shortage of pasture; and northward during wet season to avoid tsetse. Transhumant pastoralists could have permanent homes where older family members remain throughout the year, but they do not hold property rights over the rangeland they explore for grazing (FAO, 2001). Literature also shows transformation of transhumance using modern transport system in many parts of Eurasia (FAO, 2001) and North Africa (Trautmann, 1985). For instance, in the United Kingdom, the transhumance of sheep between the lowlands and highland areas for rough grazing is conducted entirely by trucks that carry the animals from one grazing point to another. Many pastoralists in North Africa send their animals on transhumance by truck or train, while wealthier countries in the Persian Gulf, such as Oman and Saudi Arabia, make vehicles available at subsidized rates to assist pastoralists with animal transport (Trautman; 1985; FAO, 2001). But in West Africa, and Nigeria, there is no evidence this form of transformation exists, not even with the problem of controlling animals in increasingly densely settled and urbanised areas. Then, lastly, Mace et al (1993), Bonfiglioli (1993) and Crane (2010) have a unanimous description of agropastoralism as a combinable model of livestock production and farming adopted as survival strategy under uncertain ecological conditions. They also have a consensus that this model is commonly found in the Sudano-Sahelian zone of Africa, including Chad, Mali and Nigeria's north where the Fulani and Marka groups are found. They hold land rights and serve as links or brokers between mobile pastoralists (with whom they share ethno-linguistic identities) and sedentary communities (FAO, 2001).

The systems can be switched. For instance, the Fulani, who feature as examples of all the three systems examined above, can practise a system of regular transhumance for a long period, building up relationships – now mostly conflictual though – with farmers on their routes. However, in the case of extreme drought or disease stress, they switch to highly nomadic patterns, moving to new areas. Those who find new suitable environments settle and explore lands nearby and even up to urban centres or practise agropastoralism (Fricke, 1979; Morrison, 1982). But Blench and Dendo (2003) reckon that this process sedentarisation in places, such as the Middlebelt of Nigeria as an example, has created settlers-indigenes dichotomy and increased conflicts with the agrarian communities of which the Middlebelt is dominated.

In addition to the systems of livestock production examined in the earlier, there is also one described as enclosed or ranching, that is the land is individually owned and fenced (FAO, 2001). FAO (2001) further observes a shift from common ownership, prevalent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the present day fully enclosed in the United States of America. Riviere's (1972) work also describes a similar transition in northern Brazil where communal tenure is giving way to ranching. Apart from the developed global North, as far back as 1960s, ranching had become the dominant system in parts of South America, notably Argentina, Strickon (1965) points out.

Dunbar (1970) and Galaty (1990) note the attempts to implement ranching systems in Africa. In Nigeria, however, it has had a long and unsuccessful history (Dunbar, 1970; FAO, 2001). In a recent intervention, Jega et al (2018) point that that it would be impossible to abruptly end open grazing, for example, transhumant or nomadic pastoralism, but a suggest a commitment to a permanent settlement of pastoralists as long-term solution to the conflict involving them and farmers.

### **2.3. Pastoralists and farmers: cooperation and conflict**

The literature on pastoralist-farmer relations is awash with cases of cooperation and conflict (e.g. Horowitz and Little, 1972; Fratkin, 1997). Fratkin (1997) notes that pastoralists have interacted with sedentary farmers for millennia, with established practices of trade and symbiotic production such as the grazing of livestock on farms before planting sessions. Giving an empirical example of cooperation, Blench and Dendo (2003: 2) offer the traditional interdependent relationship between the Fulani pastoralists and farmers in Nigeria "based on the local exchange of dairy products for grains ... (and) access to cereal crop residues – something arable farmers may encourage because of the perceived advantages of manure as fertilizer."

However, decidedly more than cooperation, there are conflicts, violent and non-violent, between the two groups in many parts of the world (Van den Brink et al 1995; Fratkin; 1997), including India (Ciccotta and Pangare, 1994), Sudan (Manger 1988, Mohamed-Salih 1992), Somalia (Un- ruh 1991), West Africa (Waters-Bayer & Bayer 1994; Shettima and Tar, 2008), Azerbaijan (Yamskov 1991), and among Bedouins in Israel (Kressel et al 1991; Marx & Shmueli 1984; Meir 1996). These conflicts have a similar mix of driving forces: population growth, expansion of farmlands to grazing lands or routes, dwindling resources and consequent intense competition (Fratkin, 1997; Blench and Dendo, 2003; Shettima and Tar, 2008). With reference to Ciccotta and Pangare (1994) and Fratkin (1997), these problems can be illustrated with the example of the Gujars, the pastoralists in Gujarat, northwest India, whose plights over government neglect, shrinking pasture due to agricultural expansion and high population density (210 people/km<sup>2</sup>).

Shettima and Tar (2008) note the impossibility of restricting conflict between pastoralists and farmers to any region or any historical phase. However, they conclude that the problem is endemic in Africa and Asia where environmental, social, economic and political conditions have combined to predispose the two groups to competition.

## **2.4. Pastoralism, warfare and militancy**

An important theme in the literature on pastoralism as it relates to the present study focusing on conflicts with farmers is warfare and militancy. For a long time dating back to the ancient times, pastoral groups and warfare have been associated; FAO (2001) referred to the Herodotos' report of the Scythian horsemen 2500 years ago and how the raiders from Central Asia threatened Europe up to the Middle Age. Chatwin (1989) also describes the relationship of pastoralism and military cultures Asia. In West Africa, the Fulani launched a Jihad, a politico-military campaign, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which transformed the political map of the Sahelian region and, in the same region Tuareg pastoral people are historically associated with raiding (FAO, 2001; Blench and Dendo, 2003).

Okoli and Atelhe (2014) conclude that the Fulani pastoralists are manifestly militant because they are they driven by a do-or-die struggle for survival in an environment that is competitive and perceptively hostile to their collective sustainable livelihood. Citing the case of Nasarwa State in Nigeria's Middlebelt, they note that attempts by the settled native farmers to displace, disinherit, victimise or marginalise the pastoralists in their common ecological domain is an invitation to war. They further situate the militant posture of the pastoralists within the context of their worldview through which they consider any threat to their herd as a threat to their common destiny. This worldview is encapsulated in the following citation as credited to a Fulani-pastoralist: "Our herd is our life because, to every nomad, life is worthless without his cattle. What do you expect from us when our source of existence is threatened? The encroachment of grazing field and routes by farmers is a call to war" (cited in Abbas, 2012: 331).

These cases of warfare and militancy can help facilitate an understanding of the pastoralists with regards to violence and, as FAO (2001) notes, explain why much of the discourse on pastoralism is associated with crisis.

## **2.5. Pastoralists and the environment**

A theme in the ecological literature on pastoralism is adaptation, with emphasis on climate, (ir)rationality to land use and mobility of herds and humans, particularly in studies on Africa (Sperling and Galaty, 1990; Scoones, 1995; Fratkin and Roth, 1996), India (Casimir and Rao, 1985), and the Andes (Kuznar, 1991). It is noted that pastoralists are able to respond to fluctuating and patchy resources with cultural behaviours that include flexibility and mobility (Ellis and Swift, 1988). Another tendency takes a lead from Garret Hardin's thesis in the Tragedy of the Commons (1968), which holds that common property resources shared by pastoralists lead to overgrazing and environmental degradation, precisely desertification caused by the growing populations of the herds and the herders (Lamprey, 1976). Hardin's thesis, notes Fratkin (1997), had impact on the public understanding and scientific research on famine and environmental degradation in arid lands, with some environmentalists linking 'pastoral mismanagement' with southward expansion of the Sahara Desert. Thus, solutions were proposed to limit or stop common property regimes seen as key to problems of land degradation (Fratkin, 1997; Lamprey, 1983).

Fratkin (1997) captures the two directions from which the criticisms of Hardin's have emerged: social scientists and natural scientists. Social scientists (e.g. Behnke and Scoones, 1992) criticise Hardin's assumption that commonly held resources mean to restriction on use, arguing that communal land tenure systems in dry regions have mechanisms to regulate and conserve resources and their use to guard against mismanagement. Natural scientists (E.G. Glantz, 1987) question the ecological evidence in Hardin's thesis, saying the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s could be attributed to the large climatic disruptions such as those brought by El Nino/Southern Oscillation (ENSO). Nevertheless, these criticisms are largely not ignored in the development works on arid lands (Fratkin, 1997). Horowitz (1979: 27) quotes a USAID discussion paper on pastoral projects in Africa as dismissing the arguments against Hardin's thesis and observing that efforts to marshal further evidence against such arguments "(is) like trying to satisfy a skeptic that the earth is round, or the sun rises in the East."

## Chapter 3

### Research methodology

#### 3.1. Design and empirical context

As a general strategy towards the collection of valid evidence to address the research question(s) set in chapter 1.2, the study was designed to focus intensively on Nigeria's semi-arid North and the sub-humid Middle Belt. A preliminary review of literature and official and press reports (see 3.2), as well as previous knowledge gained from years of fieldwork in Nigeria as an investigative journalist, yielded an understanding which led to this design and focus. The following paragraphs present the details of the understanding derived from the preliminary review and previous knowledge.

It was gathered that the semi-arid North is the originating zone of the Fulani pastoralists and considerably impacted by environmental changes, including drought, desertification and a shrinking Lake Chad. On the other hand, the semi-humid Middle Belt, which is not beset by environmental degradations like the semi-arid North, has for decades received the migrating Fulani pastoralists originating from the semi-arid zone. Apart from the contrasting physical characteristics, both zones are socially different. While the Fulani who are mostly Muslims dominate the semi-arid North, Christians belonging to several ethnic groups other than Fulani, dominate the Middle Belt. Also, The Fulani of the semi-arid North are traditionally pastoralists, while farming is the dominant traditional occupation of the Middle Belt native groups. Both zones share a history of distrust and tension rooted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Fulani Jihad, politics and structure of colonial and First Republic Nigeria<sup>5</sup>.

However, the contemporary context that has emerged is that the Middle Belt now hosts Muslim-Fulani pastoralists, who have now settled there or explore the zone seasonally for pasture, and Christian ethnic groups, mostly formed of farming families, who are native to the zone. The Middle Belt, now beset by spiralling violence, is the main theatre of the conflict between the pastoralists and the farmers. The conflict affects virtually the whole of Nigeria, but the Middle Belt is by far the worst-hit and the Fulani pastoralists have more intensely penetrated the zone than any other part of Nigeria.

Considering the foregoing empirical details, the design of the research to focus on the two zones, sub-humid Middle Belt and the semi-arid North, yielded an analytical rigour.

#### 3.2. Data collection and analysis

This is a qualitative and explorative work. The study employed qualitative research approach exploring several sources namely official documentation, news reports and existing literature (Table 1) towards secondary collection of data to answer the research question(s), cover the research issues and meet the objectives set. The first step was a search for available information

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<sup>5</sup> In both eras, the Middle Belt minorities were under the defunct Northern Region dominated by the Fulani See chapter 4.1,2,3 for details.

using Google search engine, Google Scholar and the UEA Library, which yielded some preliminary understanding of the conflict that guided the research design as well as the choice of empirical setting (3.1). Then, having designed the research to focus on the semi-arid North and the sub-humid Middle Belt, further exploration of the existing literature, press reports and official documentation (Table 1) started and helped provide the data used in the study to address the research question(s).

**Table 1 Sources of data collection**

<b>Sources</b>		<b>Details</b>
	Existing literature	Pastoralism and farming in Nigeria and other places around the world to link the Nigerian case to a wider context, e.g. Blench, 1994; Galaty and Johnson, 1990; Moran, 2006. the Nigeria's country, semi-arid North's and Middle Belt's sociological, political and ecological characteristics, e.g. Kohli, 2004; Blench and Dendo, 2003; Umoh, 2017.
	Official documentation	Official reports and documents of the government (e.g. Ministry of Environment, 2013) and development organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (1985; 2004), Crisis Group (2017); Amnesty International (2018), and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007) on pastoralism, farming, ecology and resource-use, and the farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria.
	<b>News reports</b>	Reports of the CNN, BBC and Nigeria's local media such as the PREMIUM TIMES, Punch, Daily Trust and The Nation provided data to underscore the intensity of the conflict and particularly the pieces of evidence to explain the socio-political context of the conflict. For instance, speeches of the elites and opinion leaders and political interventions were sourced from news reports. The data from these had not been previously analysed.

The data collected from those sources were descriptively handled using deductive qualitative analysis and presented as themes in **chapter 4** leading to the discussion and conclusion (**chapter 5**) answering the research question(s).

The nature of the study justified the choice of qualitative method. Addressing the question(s) required not study of frequency and generation of rigid numbers, but exploration, detailed coverage, rich understanding and contextual analysis socio-political and ecological circumstances and interplay of these complex phenomena.

### **3.3. Ethical considerations**

The research did not involve fieldwork, primary data collection and talking or observing human beings. There was no involvement of accessing restricted, confidential or security information and going through administrative procedure or any organisation to access data. Therefore, ethical concerns such as possibilities of negative consequences like psychological stress or harm affecting participants, discussion of sensitive issues such as sexual abuse or drug abuse, and offering financial inducements, among others, did not arise. The researcher, on the advice of the supervisor, went through a checklist of ethical issues extracted from the website of the University East Anglia (<https://www.uea.ac.uk/international-development/ethics>) (**appendix 1**) and did not file an ethical approval form with the advice and permission of the research supervisor.

## **Chapter 4**

### **History, contexts and structure of the conflict**

This chapter focuses on the empirical parts of the study guided by the political ecology theoretical framework (1.3) and the research questions as well as objectives set in 1.2. Accordingly, the following themes are informed by the elements of the political ecology – scales and contexts, historical depth, and agency and structure (see figure 3) – and are drawn towards answering the research question.

#### **4.1. Nigeria: Nature of state and the challenge of addressing problems**

The opening chapter of this study acknowledges the environmental explanation for the perennial conflict between pastoralists and farmers in Nigeria relying on the existing literature (e.g. Stenning, 1957; Mohammed et al, 2015). However, the nature of Nigeria in socio-political terms continues to draw out the conflict, which, consequently, now appears to be an intractable challenge.

Nigeria is in West Africa lying at the extreme inner corner of the Gulf of Guinea from where it extends in the south to the Sahara Desert in the North (Coleman, 1963). It is an area of 923,768 km<sup>2</sup> (FAO, 2014), sharing international borders with Benin Republic, Niger Republic, Cameroon and Chad (Asiwaju, 1989). Created by Britain following the amalgamation of the protectorates of the Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914, Nigeria became independent in 1960 (Falola and Heaton, 2008) and now has an estimated 186 million population (UN DESA, 2017) from 45 million at independence, according to the World Bank data ([data.worldbank.org/country/nigeria](http://data.worldbank.org/country/nigeria)). The population is culturally diverse and ‘deeply divided’ as it is formed of over 400 ethnic groups (Olukaju, 1997: 12-13) which had existed independently before the British rule (Coleman, 1963; Kohli, 2004; Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

Nigeria is geo-politically divided into the Christian-dominated South and Muslim-dominated North. Then, there are three majority groups namely Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. The Hausa/Fulani belong to the country's North, while Yoruba and Igbo are in the South. However, existing with these majority groups in the two main divisions of the country are hundreds of minority groups. In the South, such minority groups, for example, Ijaw, Urhobo, Efik, Ikwerre, and Ogoni, among others, occupy the South-south or the oil-rich Niger-Delta, between the Yoruba (Southwest) and the Igbo (Southeast). On the southern fringe of the North, commonly called the Northcentral, there is the Middlebelt covering several minority groups. As the political and historical literature on Nigeria (e.g. Coleman, 1963; Kohli, 2004; Osaghae and Suberu, 2005; Ekanola, 2006; Ojie and Ewhrudjakpor, 2009) shows, distrust and confliction between the groups had started since the years before independence. Political activities were organised along the three main ethnic groupings but later the minority groups of the Middlebelt also formed a party over fear and suspicion of domination by the majority groups especially

the Fulani<sup>6</sup>. Geo-politically, both the Middlebelt and the Fulani exist in the North, with the latter being the dominant group. However, their relationship is, particularly, constantly characterised by conflict rooted in the history of the Fulani expansion southwards and of course religious differences<sup>7</sup>.

By the time of independence, Nigeria's artificial identity – as well as Britain's low commitment to integration and effective state - had bequeathed it several fundamental challenges (Kohli, 2004; Ekanola, 2006). The most prominent of such challenges was, and still is, that of integrating into a cohesive whole the hundreds of diverse ethno-national groups and strange bedfellows the British had subjugated and lumped together (Ibid). As the state perennially suffers legitimacy crisis (Macridis and Berg, 1991), the capacity of the government, worsened by acute corruption and poor work ethic, is undermined and poor (Kohli, 2004; Mimiko, 2010). (For a conceptual clarification, state capacity refers institutional capability of the state, manifesting through the work of its agencies such as the police, civil service and so on, to carry out policies that deliver goods and services to households and firms (Centeno et al., 2017; Ricciuti et al., 2018). Defined by a multiplicity of ethnic groups mostly constituted by Christians and Muslims, the dominant pattern of politics and assessing problems is the mobilisation of these cleavages. Thus, accumulating a degree of cohesion essential for stability and tackling national problems is a challenge Nigeria has ever grappled with. So, according to Mimiko (2010: 47), Nigeria is “basically a social formation that is defined by its failures.” This context of nature of state dovetails with the compelling image of instability and chaos that Nigeria continually projects.

The pastoralist-farmer conflict, prominent among Nigeria's problems, lies at the heart of the nature of the country – having no considerable level of cohesion and defined by poor state capacity. For an empirical context, prominent national figures like a former Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Professor Attahiru Jega, who also once led the country's association of university academic staff, and a former United Nations Under-Secretary General and former Nigerian External Affairs Minister, Ibrahim Gambari<sup>8</sup>, and the government have separately suggested ranching as a solution to the pastoralist-farmer conflict. On the other hand, prominent leaders in the South and the Middlebelt, mostly Christians, continue to ask their followers not to cede land to the Fulani for ranching as proposed by the government and other prominent leaders<sup>9</sup>. As further analysis will show, forming a common front that integrates cross ethno-religious lines against the problem is difficult and even the government continues to display low capacity in terms of security provision, for instance.

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<sup>6</sup> Northern Peoples Congress for the Muslim Northern Hausa-Fulani. National Council of Nigerian Citizens for the Igbo. The Action Group in Yoruba. Then, Joseph Tarka led the minorities, mostly Christian of various ethnic backgrounds, in the North to form the United Middle Belt Congress.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, the Shariah campaign of the dominant Muslim Hausa-Fulani group is bitterly resented and resisted by the Christian Middlebelt population formed of minority groups.

Also see Harnisfeger, 2008. Democratisation and Islamic Law: The Shariah Conflict in Nigeria.

<sup>8</sup> Attahiru Jega and others wrote a memo dated January 1, 2018, identifying a progressive process towards ranching that is stopping nomadism as a solution.

<sup>9</sup> Punch newspaper report of 23 July 2018. <http://punchng.com/oyedepo-to-buhari-resign-get-out-of-office/>.

## 4.2. The Nigeria's Fulani: A historical and socio-cultural perspective

The Fulani are an important African population found in several countries namely Benin Republic, Nigeria, Guinea, Chad, Niger Senegal, The Gambia, South Sudan, Sudan, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Cameroon and Sierra Leone (Stenning, 1957; Umoh 2017). They are known as Fula in The Gambia and Sierra Leone; Peuls by the French; and Fulbe in the German literature and regarded as the largest pastoral group in the world (Ibid). Their language is Fulfulde, but they also commonly speak Hausa language. Although discussed in various classic monographs (e.g. Stenning, 1957; Stenning, 1959) on pastoral clans in semi-arid areas, there is no certainty about the exact time the Fulani entered what is today known as Nigeria. However, Blench (1999) and Umoh (2017) document a general assumption that they first arrived as nomads in Nigeria's North in the fourteenth century from Senegambia and Futa Jalon in the present day Guinea.

In Nigeria, the Fulani may be divided sociologically into four categories<sup>10</sup>.

- First, the ruling dynasties of the Northern Nigerian Emirates, all owing allegiance to the Sokoto Caliphate, established following the Othman Dan Fodio-led Fulani Jihad or 'Holy War' of 1804-30.
- The second category is that of the settled Fulani, who are educated, politicians, civil servants, military officers, entrepreneurs, judges, bankers and so on.
- Third, there are those who are semi-sedentary, primarily farmers, but who maintain herds of cattle for which pasture has to be sought at a distance.
- The fourth category is the pastoral Fulani, who depend completely on their herds of cattle and are transhumant or nomadic.

Yet, for all the categories, cattle ownership remains a unifying heritage and it is common for the first three categories to entrust their cattle with the fourth category. So, while though the pastoral Fulani remain vastly poor in human capital conditions, e.g. education, they remain closely linked to and protected by the Fulani elite class formed of the first and the second categories. For instance, the association of the pastoralists, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, MACBAN, has the members of the first two categories, including Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari and the Sultan of Sokoto (the highest Fulani and Islamic traditional authority in Nigeria) as patrons.

The Fulani are traditionally Muslims. In 1804, led by Othman Dan Fodio, they successfully launched the Jihad, a political cum military campaign aimed at a rule based on the principles of Islam. Within 30 years, the Hausa kingdoms had fallen to them, marking the genesis of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Fulani Emirates now found in most of the Muslim North; they reached Yorubaland in today's Southwest and contributed principally to the collapse of the Yoruba's Oyo Empire (Ajayi, 1973; Adeleye and Stewart, 1987). As Blench (1994) and Blench and Dendo (2003) note, one of the effects of the Fulani political and military expansion was to clear a way for the southward movement of the pastoralists. Another effect which persists up

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<sup>10</sup> Based on the categorisation in Stenning, 1957, pp: 57.

to the present date is that Nigeria's other ethnic groups remain fearful and suspicious of an alleged Fulani domination and expansionist ambition. This effect is even more so in the Middlebelt, placed geo-politically in the North as a group of minorities.

In Nigeria, there are other pastoral groups, such as the Kanuri-related groups, the Yedina, the Shuwa Koyam, and the Uled Suliman (Blench and Dendo, 2003). The Fulani are however the best known and most numerous (Blench, 1994). In comparison with the Fulani, the other pastoral groups have mostly remained in the semi-arid far North around Lake Chad (Blench and Dendo, 2003). Comparatively, the other pastoral groups' restriction to their original areas, contacting farmers of their own ethno-religious background, has prevented conflict on the scale seen in the Middlebelt between the Fulani and farming groups of different ethnic backgrounds. Particularly, though, the Uled Suliman who are camel-herders who between the Lake Chad and Hadejia in the Northcentral, yet the potential for conflict between them and farmers is low because camels exploit vegetation (especially acacias) that is little useful to farmers (Blench and Dendo, 2003). The inter-group conflict commonly associated with the Fulani pastoralists is therefore not a phenomenon associated with other pastoral groups.

Culturally, the Fulani are known for martial bravery and disposition especially because of the group's successful Jihad that saw them establish Islamic theocracy in most of Nigeria's North and Ilorin, originally a Yoruba town. Particularly, however, the pastoralists have often become militaristic because of the nature of their practice. One, during traveling hundreds of miles herding their cattle, they protect themselves and their herds against cattle rustling and dangerous animals. Two, they ready themselves for vindictive violence when farmers seize or kill their cattle following destruction of farms. In practical terms, most of the instances of the violence, even when carried on a large scale affecting several lives and properties, primarily begins from direct confrontation between farmers and pastoralists after cattle may have destroyed farms when grazing<sup>11</sup>. Three, the manifest militant nature of the Fulani pastoralists should be understood with reference to their individual and collective worldview vis-à-vis survival, which has a lot to do with pastoralism (Okoli and Atelhe, 2014). For the average Fulani pastoralist, as noted by Okoli and Atelhe (2014: 80), "pastoralism is a way of living, which is reckoned with as a mark of common heritage. In effect, any threat to his herd amounts to a threat, not only to his survival but to his common destiny."

#### **4.3. Fulani pastoralists' expansion to the Middle Belt**

The Middlebelt designates the region that stretches across central Nigeria within latitude 6°24'<sup>1</sup> to 11°30' N and longitude 2°42'<sup>1</sup> to 15°00' E. The area occupies about 36.14 % of the total land area of Nigeria (Mage and Tyubee, 2017). It is sub-humid forming a transition zone between the humid coastal South and the semi-arid North (**See Figure 1**) (Waters-Bayer and Taylor-Powell, 1986). It is an important agriculturally productive and food producing part of Nigeria,

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<sup>11</sup> Attested variously in academic literature and press reports. For instance, 'selected incidents of Fulani/farmer clashes in Nasarawa State' in Okoli and Atelhe (2014). Also see BBC's report of 5 May 2016, "Making Sense of Nigeria's Fulani-farmer conflict <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-36139388>.

with one of the states within the region, Benue State, having 'Food Basket of the Nation' as an official sobriquet. It has an inherent high fertility of the soils and moderate and variable climate (Nnamchi and Ozor, 2009). Cereal crops such as maize, guinea corn, millet, rice, sesame, soya beans as well as tuber and root crops like yam, cassava, potatoes (Irish and sweet) are cultivated in commercial quantities without and with irrigation (Mage and Tyubee, 2017). The local populations are mostly and traditionally farmers.

The Middle Belt includes Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba States. It also includes the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and (southern) parts of Kaduna, Adamawa, Bauchi and Yobe State. The region is described as indeterminate because the indigenous population consists of numerous minority ethnic groups. This gives the zone a heterogeneous multicultural, multiethnic and multi-linguistic outlook that affords an eminent distinction between it and the principally Islamic semi-arid North (Harnischfeger, 2008). The population of the region increased from 18,169, 128, in 1991 to 24,437,467 people in 2006, the last time Nigeria had a census, representing 42% increase with an average growth rate of 2.8% (National Population Commission, 2006; Mage, 2015). Most popular among the Middle Belt groups are Tiv, Agatu, Igede, Idoma, Jukun, Mambila, Kuteb Chamba, Berom, Tarok, Eggon, Igala, and Bachama, among others. They are mostly Christians with a 'Christianity consciousness' formed since the colonial time, different from the mainly Fulani-Islam dominated semi-arid North (Barnes (2007). Under the British colonial rule, the Middle Belt was placed under the Northern Region dominated by the Fulani. Nigeria, then, had three regions as federating units – the North, the East and the West. (It was the same way the minorities in the oil-rich Niger Delta or South-south were placed under the Eastern Region dominated by the majority Igbo.). But even in contemporary Nigeria, the Middlebelt groups are still geopolitically located in the North and are regarded as Northern minorities.

Between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the southward movement of the Fulani pastoralists had started (RIM 1984; RIM, 1992, Blench, 1994). By 1986, the Fulani had already constituted 5% of the Middlebelt population (Waters-Bayer and Taylor-Powell, 1986). The expansion was motivated by a combination of factors.

The political and military success of the Fulani Jihad of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cleared a way for the southward of movement of the pastoralists. At this period, the pastoralists exploited the sub-humid Middle Belt in the dry season - when the rains came, the bulk of the herds would be sent northwards into the semi-arid zone to prevent diseases carried by tsetse and other biting flies (Blench, 1994). The expansion of cultivation in the semi-arid zone and the consequent pressure on the land degraded it. Farmers were obliged to move to regions of uncleared bush, which affected pastoralists who traditionally treated uncultivated bush as common resource. Pastoralists were then forced to seek new pastures, either further southwards (Blench, 1994). The vast high-altitude grasslands of Adamawa, Mambila Plateau, Jos Plateau, Fali Plateau in the Middlebelt provided attractive grazing for the Fulani cattle, alongside high rainfall and low disease challenge (Morrison, 1982; RIM, 1984; Boutrais, 1986). Then, the effects of colonialism such as improved security and control for diseases. Improved security meant motivation to migrate with low fear of armed attacks. The colonial regime instituted

both tsetse control measures and made available a range of new veterinary medicines. The tsetse control programmes themselves may have opened new pastures (Blench, 1994).

The Fulani expansion culminated in the sedentarisation of many of them in the Middlebelt and the transhumant and nomadic exploration of the zone by others. The sedentarisation thus led to indigene-settler dichotomy and consequent conflicts over land and access to political powers at the state and local levels. For instance, this is the case in Taraba State and Plateau State between the Fulani and such groups as the Mambila and the Berom (Blench and Dendo, 2003; Umoh, 2017). Elsewhere, also, nomadism and transhumance have led to conflicts between the Fulani pastoralists and the sedentary farmers over access to resources. Put together, fatal conflicts causing large scale killings and destruction of properties are now regularly reported in the press.

#### **4.4. Ecological context of the conflict**

##### **4.4.1. History of land degradation and expansion to the Middle Belt**

By ecological characteristics and agricultural potential, a semi-arid zone falls between desert lands where only livestock-based production is possible and a humid zone which supports both crop and livestock production (Scoones, 1995; Shettima and Tar, 2008). So, semi-arid zone could support both livestock production and cultivation, though by evolving strategies to cope with unreliability of rainfall. The initial expansion of cultivation was in Nigeria's semi-arid North, where the pastoralists were also confined to before their southward expansion (Blench, 1994). As the pressure on arable land in the zone became increasingly intense due to grazing and cultivation, soil fertility decreased, and farmers were obliged to move to regions of uncleared bush or to increase their holding size. That strategy by the farmers became problematic as it affected pastoralists who traditionally treated uncultivated bush as common resource (Blench, 1994). Consequently, the pastoralists had to shift their migratory routes southward to the Middle Belt. This initial expansion caused by the degradation of the land in the semi-arid North following intense pressure from both farmers and the pastoralists led to the seasonal exploitation of the vast grasses of the Middle Belt. However, some Fulani stayed in the Middlebelt all year round and eventually turned the zone their homes permanently (Blench and Dendo, 2003; Umoh, 2017). Then, some Northern farmers also migrated to the sub-humid Middlebelt as the fertility of the land up North decreased (Blench and Dendo; 2003). These group would join the indigenous population of farmers, thereby setting the earliest stage for the conflict and competition for resources between the cultivators and the pastoralists. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Mambila farmers complained in interviews about Fulani pastoralists allowing their cattle to trample on farms (Misgeod, 1925 cited in Blench and Dendo, 2003).

##### **4.4.2. Climate change effects: Drought, desertification and shrinking Lake Chad**

Nigeria is considerably impacted by climate change (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2015) with decreasing rainfall and increasing temperature. The mean air temperature in Nigeria between 1901 and 2005 was 26.6 °C while the temperature increase for the period was 1.1 °C, higher than the global mean temperature increase of 0.74 °C recorded since 1860 (Spore 2008;

IPCC 2007). The rainfall trend between in the same period shows a general decline with the amount of drop being 81 mm, though the semi-arid North is more acutely affected with (Odjugo, 2010). The semi-arid North has a long dry season from October to May and low rainfall (600 to 900 mm) from June to September (Crisis Group, 2017) compared to a trend of April to October in the Middlebelt (Mage and Tyubbe, 2017). This corresponds with the report from the National Meteorological Agency in 2008 that over the preceding 30 years the annual rainy season dropped from an average of 150 to 120 days in the semi-arid North (Crisis Group, 2017).

In the last six decades, over 350,000 km of the already arid far North turned to desert or desert-like conditions, a phenomenon progressing southward at the rate of 0.6km per year<sup>12</sup>. In Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states, estimates suggest that 50-75 per cent of the land area is becoming desert<sup>13</sup>. The pastoralists are indigenous to these states facing the problem of desert encroachment.

The Lake Chad is the major wetland in the semi-arid Sahel corridor, traditionally supporting over 11 million people, including farmers and pastoralists (FAO, 2004), across Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon (Shettima and Tar, 2008). However, the Lake now illustrates the environmental problem affecting Nigeria and which has implications for the farmer-pastoralist conflict. Climate change will alter all aspects of the hydrological cycle ranging from evaporation through precipitation, run off and discharge (Mcguire et al. 2002). The global warming and decreasing rainfall together with the erratic pattern of rainfall produce a minimal recharge of groundwater resources, wells, lakes and rivers in most parts of the world especially in Africa thereby creating water crisis (Shettima and Tar, 2008). In the Sahel, which includes Nigeria's semi-arid North, the Lake Chad shrunk in area from 22,902 km<sup>2</sup> in 1963 to a mere 1304 km<sup>2</sup> in 2000. This shows that what is left of Lake Chad in the year 2000 is just 5.7% of 1963 (Odjugo 2010). The Lake Chad and so many rivers in Nigeria, especially in Northern Nigeria, are in the danger of disappearing (Ibid).

These incidents of environmental changes and shrinking resources have forced millions of pastoralists and others to migrate southwards in search of land and water resources to graze their herds either seasonally or permanently in the Middlebelt. This has triggered increasing disputes over land and water use between pastoralists and the Middle Belt's growing population of sedentary crop farmers (Crisis Group, 2017).

#### **4.4.3. Population growth, expansion of cultivation and loss of grazing routes**

In Nigeria, it is common for pastoralists to exploit bushes around towns and villages as a common resource to graze their herds. This was even socially sanctioned prior to the colonial period - even in the Middlebelt, the main receiving point of pastoralists coming from the semi-arid North (Waters-Bayer and Taylor-Powell, 1986). However, then, in the absence of legal instrument and clear proper rights, conflicts would still occur between pastoralists and farmers

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<sup>12</sup> Federal Ministry of Environment, National Policy on Desertification and Drought, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) Federal Republic of Nigeria 2013-2017, op. cit., p. 6.

as cultivation expanded to the grounds pastoralists had treated as a common resource for grazing, and the latter too trampling on farmlands (Ibid).

In response to this problem, the law to establish grazing reserve for the exclusive or semi-exclusive use of the pastoralists, to encourage them to sedentarise and address the problem of their conflicts with farmers was promulgated in 1964 (Inagwa et al., 1989). However, only 113 of the 417 grazing reserves proposed by the Northern Region Government following the law have ever been gazetted and demarcated, while the rest have been lost to increasing population growth and associated demands of expanding cultivation, urbanisation and commercial interests (Crisis Group, 2017; Jega et al., 2018). However, pastoralists still complain that the successive Nigeria's Government have not taken steps to prevent encroachment of even the gazetted ones (Crisis Group, 2017). This has a socio-political dimension in that a few of the successor States to the defunct Northern Region that initiated the grazing routes in the 1960s are now in the Middle Belt and are not well disposed to open grazing.

Today, Nigeria's population is approaching 200 million from 33 million in 1933. Amid the growth, cultivation has expanded into abandoned grazing routes and previously uncultivated land exploited by the pastoralists as common resource. Cultivation has received supports from various government interventions such as the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) in the 1970s, National Fadama Development Projects (NFDPs) which have boosted dry season irrigated agriculture since 1993<sup>14</sup> and Anchor Borrowers' Programme<sup>15</sup> recently.

However, the country continues to face the problem of dwindling resources particularly in the semi-arid North because of environmental changes analysed in the previous sections. This problem coupled with the agricultural cultivation as well as other growing needs that come with population growth and urbanisation, has resulted in increasing competition for limited resources between the pastoralists and the farmers.

However, issues that are socio-political in nature, namely, ethnicity, religion, government role, and law, have masked these environmental and resource-use problems in the Nigerian media and public discourses. It is to these non-ecological factors that form a socio-political context that the study now turns.

#### **4.5. Socio-political context of the conflict**

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<sup>14</sup> The term fadama refers to any naturally flooded piece of land but applies particularly to valley bottoms. The NFDP's main objective was to promote agricultural production by exploiting surface and shallow aquifer water resources for small-holder owned and managed irrigation systems. In its first phase, the core implementing states were Bauchi, Gombe, Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. African Development Fund, Republic of Nigeria, Fadama Development Project, Appraisal Report, September 2003. The second and third phases (Fadama II and Fadama III) established projects in all states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), designed to raise the incomes of rural land and water resource users, on a sustainable basis. See Crisis Group, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> My investigative report on the government's agriculture and food security programme <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/224697-special-report-%E2%80%8Ehow-buharis-agric-programme-is-creating-jobs-pushing-nigeria-towards-self-sufficiency-in-rice.html>.

#### 4.5.1. Politics of ethnicity and religion

While confined to semi-arid North, the pastoralists share common ethno-religious identities and practice with the sedentary farming communities among which they move mainly Muslim Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri. In this case, there are also tensions between farmers and pastoralists as the semi-arid zone is acutely impacted by environmental changes. However, due to both groups shared cultural affinities and subscription to common ethno-religious authorities and values, such tensions are easily addressed, and violent conflicts are not common<sup>16</sup>.

However, the sub-humid Middle Belt presents a different case with the farmers and the pastoralists belonging to different ethno-religious divides and having a history of distrust and tension. As Suliman (1997) notes, “ecological borders are, in most cases, ethnic and cultural borders...ecological borders become ethnic and cultural lines of demarcation where people meet to cooperate or to fight.” In the context of the Middle Belt, there is an idea of indigenes and settlers with the former making ancestral claim to land and seeing the latter as intruders or usurpers (Blench, 1984; Blench and Dendo, 2003).

The Mambila, Taraba State, is suitable as a case study to illustrate how ethnicity comes to play in the conflict between pastoralists and farmers. There has been well over a century of bad relations between the Mambila people and the Fulani, who, according to Boutrais (1986) started the pastoral penetration of the vastly grassy Mambila Plateau in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Favored by the colonial authority in the Northern Nigeria, administration of justice remained in the hands of the Fulani Islamic elites (Blench and Dendo, 2003). Writing in 1925, Migeod (cited in Blench and Dendo, 2003) reported the complaints of the Mambila people that the Fulani pastoralists were allowing their cows to destroy crops, and he observed then that the laws were written in such a way as to favour the pastoralists. Rehfisch (1974:16), also reports this situation, and matters remained the same until the Local Government reforms and the return to democratic rule in the 1970s, which ushered in the rise to power of the Mambila people as well as other indigenous Middle Belt people to power at the state and local government levels.

Having gained power, the Mambila people, mostly Christian converts, seeing themselves as the owners of the land, and the Fulani as intruders, ensured the customary courts ruled by a Muslim (Alkali) became ineffective (Blench, 1984). They started using their authority to abrogate the Certificates of Occupancy earlier issued to the settled Fulani as an instrument of right to land and obstruct their (Pastoralists’) access to resources, for instance, the valley of River Donga, to graze their herds (Ibid). In 2017/2018, the Taraba State Government, like the Benue State Government, controlled by the indigenous people, promulgated anti-grazing law amid threats of resistance and chaos by the Fulani pastoralists who are the targets of the law<sup>17</sup>. While the law restricts open grazing, it purports to encourage the pastoralists to acquire land,

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<sup>16</sup> Blench and Dendo, 2003. I also observed this during my fieldwork in Sokoto and Kebbi States for an investigative report on Nigeria’s agricultural project, the Anchor Borrowers’ Programme, in 2017.

<sup>17</sup> [PREMIUM TIMES](#), 25 January 2018, reported the promulgation and then a warning the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, the umbrella body of the Fulani pastoralists, that its members could resist the law and the task force set up to implement it and that would lead to chaos.

with a defined property right, breed their cattle, thereby stopping movements which lead to straying into farmlands by the herds. However, Fulani see the law as one formulated to eject them from the Middlebelt which they had known as homes or, for others, zone of seasonal grazing for centuries in breach of their rights to movement and live anywhere as guaranteed by the country's Constitution. This is so because it is barely possible for pastoralists Fulani to have land sold to them by the local or state government or any indigenous family. In fact, there are exhortations from influential Christian leaders to the Middlebelt people not to sell land to the Fulani or allow their ancestral land to be taken by the government for any ranching project<sup>18</sup>. So, since the 1980s up to the present day, there have been major deadly clashes between the Fulani and the Mambila people. It is the case between the Fulani and other indigenous groups, such as Tiv, Bachama, Agatu, across the Middlebelt.

In Nigeria, religion is a very sensitive issue. It has caused incidents large scale violence in Northern towns following the introduction of Shariah by the Muslim political elites in various Northern States. One of such states where Shariah was introduced was Kaduna State, which though mostly ruled Muslims, has its southern zone as a part of the Middlebelt and dominated by Christians. While the consequence has been violent clashes in towns, in the rural areas, pastoralist-farmer clashes over access to resources are projected as (Fulani) Muslim-(Middlebelt) Christian battle in the media and public discourses (Blench and Dendo, 2003) even when the actual rural belligerents are just concerned about survival and resources. With ethno-religious substance, given Nigeria's larger dichotomies and problem of national cohesion, the situation becomes execrated. Then as the ethno-religious lines are the dominant patterns of political mobilisation, the country's political elites exploit the situation for their own gains either to retain or access power, while failing to confront the root problem of resource conflict.

#### **4.5.2. Role of government**

Previous studies look at the role of government with regards to the conflict from the perspective of its weakness in containing the conflict (Blench and Dendo, 2003; Umoh, 2017). This notion is valid and has been stressed in the present study (4.1). But how does the government add to the context of the conflict? Nigeria is a federation of a central government, state governments and local government areas. However, both the state and local governments which are the closest to the rural communities where the conflict mostly happens do not control the security apparatus. The policing is an exclusive role of the central government which is far removed from the rural communities. So, interventions by the government in terms of security are mostly reactive, taking a form deployment of security operatives after serious clashes and losses. So, there is a culture of not reporting incidents or disagreements to the police but instead protagonists engage one another in attacks and counter attacks.

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<sup>18</sup> Bishop Oyedepo, apart from accusing the Federal Government led by a Fulani of complicity in the conflict, urged the Middlebelt against yielding land to the Fulani pastoralists whom he called 'Jihadists' on a mission to dominate other groups. Punch, July 24, 2018 <https://punchng.com/oyedepo-to-buhari-resign-get-out-of-office/>.

However, although the conflict has been going on for decades, it has recently assumed a dimension of emergency and threat to national stability with allegations the government is backing the pastoralists for an ethno-religious expansionists agenda (Crisis Group, 2017; Adeola, 2018; Jega et al., 2018) This latest dimension corresponds with the inauguration of the present administration headed by a Fulani, who is a patron of the pastoralists' association, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria. The incumbent President's perceived sectional orientation<sup>19</sup> has impacted negatively on the country's fragile unity with implications that include a lack of cohesion to confront the problem and increased fear of Muslim/Fulani domination by the minorities of the Middle Belt. The government has proposed ranching projects across the country, requiring states and communities to yield land to enable pastoralists practise settled forms of animal husbandry. While it is assumed ranching would end movements that bring pastoralists and their herds to stray onto farmlands and trigger violence, sub-national governments and interest groups as well Christian bodies outside the semi-arid North, that is the Middle and southern Nigeria, are opposing this initiative<sup>20</sup>. The resistance is out of fear of domination. Incidentally, the initiative was proposed by the government with the name 'cattle colony' in a context of fear of domination among the minority groups. This does not only draw out the conflict further, it makes the problem seemingly intractable.

#### **4.5.3. International scale**

Nigeria is a member of the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS. There are two ECOWAS protocols observed to be a critical implication for the conflict: the 1979 Protocols of free movement of persons, goods, capital and services and the protocol relating to transhumance in 1998. These protocols, as they relate specifically to the subject of this study, allow pastoralists to cross into Nigeria's borders from such other ECOWAS countries as Niger and Mali. Nigeria has complained the observation of the protocols endangers its security and compound the pastoralist-farmer conflict as the country is unable to track the movement of the foreign pastoralists<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> He has been accused of lopsided appointments for instance appointing his kinsmen to lead the country's two most important security and intelligence agencies. He was on record declaring he would serve his own region more than other region on the basis of votes he received during the 2015 election [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mm\\_VEkyiKw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mm_VEkyiKw).

<sup>20</sup> The initiative has been variously rejected <https://punchng.com/oyedepo-to-buhari-resign-get-out-of-office/>, <https://punchng.com/yoruba-leaders-reject-cattle-colonies-back-ranching/>, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/255758-nigerian-catholic-bishops-reject-cattle-colonies-warn-war.html>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://thenationonlineng.net/buhari-urges-implementation-of-ecowas-protocols/>.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and conclusion

The drivers of the Nigeria's perennial conflict involving pastoralists and farmers have been studied towards answering the overarching question that the research engages using political ecology framework and qualitative research method. While the study finds that ecology, with its associated phenomena such as environmental degradation, resource-use competition and unsustainable population growth, drives the conflict, the relationship, i.e. between ecology and the conflict, is not simplistically linear. Rather, apart from ecology the conflict is also driven by a multiplicity of non-ecological factors such as ethno-religious and political circumstances which form a socio-political context (**Figure 4**). Therefore, in justification of the political ecology framework, this study rejects (neo) Malthusian mono-causal environmentalist explanation which tends to assume scarcity directly drives the conflict (Shettima and Tar, 2008).

In **4.3** and **4.4 (1-3)**, the study provides evidence of environmental changes, rapid desertification, drought and the shrinking Lake Chad, in Nigeria's semi-arid North and traces the historical depth of these phenomena. Accordingly, as the study finds, for instance, the semi-arid North's environmental problems such as drought and land infertility following overgrazing and intense pressure by farmers principally compelled the initial southward movement of the pastoralists to the Middle Belt with vast grassy land. However, with population growing geometrically, the challenge of sustainability would soon set in. Both pastoralism and agricultural cultivation are expanding causing an intense competition for limited land and water resources between farmers and pastoralists. The conflict that now tops Nigeria's list of national challenges stems from this competition for access to resources.

However, the study finds that a linear, simplistic explanation of the conflict against the background of environmental changes and resource-use competition is inadequate. A question may be about the reason why the encounters between farmers and pastoralists in the semi-arid Nigeria and in other national contexts such as India has not engendered devastating conflict at rate Nigeria's sub-humid Middle Belt has perennially witnessed. The answer to this, as the study further finds, is that there are factors such as social history, nature of state, politics, elite interests, law, ethnicity and religion. These factors form a socio-political context that further draws out the conflict and makes solution difficult to deliver. For instance, the study looks at the history of the Fulani Jihad the success of which helped clear way for the expansion of the pastoralists and served as the root basis of the mutual suspicion and distrust between the Fulani and other Nigerian groups. This history, Nigeria's challenge of cohesion and the perceived sectional disposition of the present administration have combined to pose a barrier to the implementation of the ranching projects by the government. The projects would require communities and federating units to yield parts of their ancestral land to the Fulani pastoralists to practise a settled form of animal husbandry. However, this policy move is being rejected across non-Fulani states over fears the Fulani have an ethno-religious expansionist agenda.

Clearly, there is a necessity for the policy makers in Nigeria to pursue measures that would mitigate the environmental, sustainability and resource-use challenges and help both farmers

and pastoralists as well as other classes of people adapt to the impacts of these problems. Examples of such recommended measure include recharging the Lake Chad and combating desertification to reduce southward shift of pastoralists and taking measures to combat population explosion. Progressive efforts should be made towards sedentarisation of the pastoralists and settled form of animal husbandry, for instance, ranching, because halting nomadic or transhumant herding of cattle would remove trampling on farmlands which primarily triggers the conflict in the rural communities. Pastoralism, as it is, is not sustainable in Nigeria. Children of pastoral families could hardly be enrolled in school to receive education because they are not settled. This results in the absence of the essential ingredients of membership of a civilised society guided by law. It may be the reason of not reporting incidents of cattle losses to the police, but, instead, resorting to self-help, carrying out vindictive violence on communities suspected to have stolen or killed their cows.

However, as the Nigerian case as shown, implementation of these ecology-related approaches will depend on the socio-political situation, which, as it is, further draws out the conflict and makes it appear an intractable challenge. It is important for the government to gain the trust and allay the fears of the country's constituent groups, especially the minorities, and address the challenge of cohesion to have a condition conducive to peace, reconciliations, negotiations and broad support for the ecology-related measures, say. The capacity of the state to secure the people, including the rural communities where the conflict happens, deliver justice, and pursue policies to deliver solutions will need to improve. Even so, in a polity where access to and retaining power depends on ethno-religious loyalties, it is hard for a political leadership that is nationalistic in scope and egalitarian in orientation and will be committed to the vision of cohesion to emerge in Nigeria. This circumstance has also led to the inversion of the role of the state (to become a locus of corruption at the expense of public good) by entrenched elites who have accumulated both political and economic powers to perpetuate their domination, thereby making it difficult for a capable state to emerge in Nigeria (Joseph, 1991; Kohli, 2004; Mimiko, 2010)

Formulating an integrated solution framework is another whole intellectual (and policy-practice) project that this study cannot really get into because of time and space allowed. However, as succinctly presented in the foregoing paragraphs, it should suffice to point to the necessity for Nigeria's policy makers and development partners to consider both the ecological and socio-political factors in addressing the conflict. Nevertheless, the study recognises the hurdles that would make this hard.

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## Appendix 1

### Checklist of ethical concerns not applicable to this study

	<b>Research that may need a full review:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1.	Does the project involve talking to or observing people		✓
2.	Does the project involve animals?		✓
3.	Does the project involve vulnerable groups (children, those with cognitive impairment, or those in unequal relationships e.g. your own students)?		✓
4.	Will the project require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited (e.g. students at school, members of self-help group, residents of Nursing home, prisoners)? Will you, for example, be accessing groups or individuals through an NGO or CBO with whom you are working?		✓
5.	Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the project without their knowledge and consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)?		✓
6.	Will the project involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, ethnicity, political behaviour) or involve interviews with elite individuals/groups?		✓
7.	Will the project involve access to records of a personal/ sensitive/ confidential information, or involve commercial confidentiality/national security?		✓
8.	Could the project induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?		✓
9.	Will the project involve administrative or secure data that requires permission from the appropriate authorities before use?		✓
10.	Is there a possibility that the safety of the researcher may be in question (and also locally employed research assistants)?		✓
11.	Does the research involve members of the public in participatory research where they are actively involved in undertaking research tasks (e.g. defining research questions, conducting data collection, analysis, reporting)?		✓
12.	Will the project take place outside the UK?		✓
13.	Will the project involve respondents to the internet or other visual/vocal methods where respondents may be identified?		✓
14.	Will project involve the sharing of data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given (e.g. secondary use of data)?		✓
15.	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		✓

