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1.3.4. Herders and farmers and communal militias

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: October 2021

Among the non-State actors of persecution or serious harm, herders and farmers participating in armed groups and communal militias have become increasingly relevant. Herders' groups are mainly composed of Fulani Muslims, while the farmers are mainly Christian, particularly in the Middle Belt and southern states. In the North-West and North-East there are also Muslim farmers. The origins of the conflict are rooted in the difficulties to access natural resources such as water and land. Nowadays, it also has profound ethnic and religious implications and is becoming more politicised.

Long-standing tribal, ethnic, religious and community disputes have also continued to lead to violence, conflict and unrest, involving communal militias. The lines between the farmer-herder clashes, inter/intra-communal clashes and banditry are becoming increasingly blurred in the North-West and North-Central.

Growing insecurity has led to groups of farmers and herders forming militias, which are often backed by political, religious or ethnic leaders. In north-western Nigeria herders have found protection and support in so-called 'bandits', whilst farmers are supported by community and state-sponsored vigilantes. Clashes between vigilante groups and the herdsmen are on the rise. Community vigilante, civilian self-defence militias, and youth groups have also started reprisal attacks against other armed groups [Security situation 2021, 1.4.1.1].

Between 2015 and 2018, it has been estimated that at least 3 641 people have been killed and 300 000 have been displaced as a result of the conflicts. Severe violations of human rights are reportedly committed by both, herders' and farmers' militias, including mass killings and mass destruction of houses, crops, cattle, etc. Fulani militias are also reported to have committed rape, maiming, abduction, robbery, eviction, burning down villages, pillaging etc. Vigilante groups have faced accusations of taking the law into their own hands, acting illegally and participating in extrajudicial killings. [Security situation 2021, 1.3.2.2.]

Attacks by Fulani militias are reportedly well planned, increasingly premeditated, using weaponry including machine guns and AK 47s. Herders use less sophisticated weaponry. The Yan sakai vigilante group is reported to use locally made guns, machetes and clubs [Security situation 2021, 1.3.2.2].

The farmer-herder conflicts centre around Nigeria's Middle Belt (encompassing states in North-Central, North-West and North-East regions). Violence has also expanded to the South-West and South-East regions [Security situation 2021, 1.3.2.2, 1.4.1.1].

Nigeria Watch recorded 1 012 fatalities due to inter-communal violence in 2019, related to clashes over land located in boundary areas, grazing spaces, chieftaincy and market issues, as well as sharing formula for royalties paid by oil companies. In 2020, Nigeria Watch reported 700 fatalities due to inter-communal clashes. [Security situation 2021, 1.4.1.1]

[Additional COI references: Security situation 2018, 2.3.9, 3.2.2; Targeting, 3.7.2]

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