



Ending Nigeria's Herder-Farmer Crisis: The Livestock Reform Plan

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Principal Findings

What's new? In 2019, Nigerian authorities launched a ten-year National Livestock Transformation Plan to curtail the movement of cattle, boost livestock production and quell the country's lethal herder-farmer conflict. But inadequate political leadership, delays, funding uncertainties and a lack of expertise could derail the project. COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges.

Why did it happen? Violence fuelled by environmental degradation and competition over land has aggravated long-running tensions in the country's northern and central regions. A surge in bloodshed in 2018 prompted Nigeria's federal government to formulate a far-reaching set of reforms for the livestock sector.

Why does it matter? The new Plan represents Nigeria's most comprehensive strategy yet to encourage pastoralists to switch to ranching and other sedentary livestock production systems. Modernising the livestock sector is key to resolving the herder-farmer conflict, which threatens Nigeria's political stability and food security.

What should be done? Federal and state authorities, working with donors and investors, should prioritise securing funds, training personnel and communicating the Plan's benefits to herders and farmers. Making progress on pilot ranches, donor commitments and staff training before the 2023 election, and ensuing change of administration, may help preserve the Plan's post-election viability.

Executive Summary

Nigeria's federal and state governments are struggling to implement a National Livestock Transformation Plan that seeks to curb the movement of cattle across the country and reduce deadly herder-farmer conflict. While the Plan has earned the endorsement of many state governments, it faces significant challenges. Deficient political leadership, popular misperceptions about its purpose, budgetary constraints aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a lack of personnel with the expertise to carry it out and widespread insecurity are all hindering progress. If the Plan fails – as previous initiatives to modernise livestock management did – herder-farmer violence could escalate. Federal and state governments should do more to publicise the Plan and win the support of both herders and farmers. These authorities should also work with donors and investors to fill funding gaps and to build capacity for implementation. Finally, Abuja should make sure the Plan's enactment takes into account the projected impact of climate change and also develop a strategy for dealing with non-Nigerian migratory herders.

Approved by the National Economic Council in January 2019, the Plan represents the most comprehensive effort to date to overhaul Nigeria's inefficient and grossly underperforming livestock system. At the core is a strategy to curtail migratory or open grazing and thus lower the risk of conflict between herders and farmers. It is animated by the hope that over a period of ten years, predominantly nomadic pastoralists will be persuaded to move their cattle into ranches and public grazing reserves, where breeding farms and other mechanised livestock management practices are to bolster the sector's productivity. By the end of 2028, authorities aim to have at least 119 ranches operating in all participating states, creating over two million jobs in the livestock production, processing and marketing chains.

President Muhammadu Buhari's administration came up with the Plan following a wave of violence between herders and farmers – and particularly a surge in related violence afflicting rural dwellers in 2018. The federal government, which has committed to fund 80 per cent of the transformation proposals submitted by participating states, has taken preliminary steps toward putting the Plan into practice, including by providing technical support to help states prepare for implementation, such as help with field surveys and site mapping. Several states have reactivated earlier-delineated grazing reserves, opened offices and set up steering committees to administer the Plan. Authorities have also held workshops and done other work to explain the benefits of livestock reform to a larger audience.

But two years into the ten-year Plan, the first new ranch has yet to be built, and the obstacles are many. Opposition, partly among herders predominantly from the Fulani ethnic group but also among farmers who resent the Plan's benefits to pastoralists, hinders reform efforts. Distrust is widespread in Nigeria's Middle Belt, which has been the scene of violent disputes over land between herders and farmers, notwithstanding peacemaking and military efforts that since 2018 have reduced the bloodshed. Federal and state budgets are pinched, partly due to the pandemic's economic fallout, and the country lacks sufficient technical expertise for managing ranches and grazing reserves. In many states, especially in the North West, the pro-

liferation of criminal gangs and other armed groups is cutting off access to grazing reserves and scaring away potential investors. Unless addressed, these and other problems could delay or even scuttle the Plan, leaving the country vulnerable to an escalation of herder-farmer conflict, which could degenerate into wider ethnic, regional and religious violence.

Tackling these challenges requires a concerted effort by federal and state authorities, with help from donors and investors. First, Abuja and supportive state governments should provide stronger political leadership and improve public communication to dispel misgivings and misperceptions about the Plan. These are especially prevalent among pastoralists, who will be asked to change a centuries-old nomadic lifestyle, and who legitimately doubt the Plan's promises about available pasture. But many farmers are fearful, too, worrying that they may lose land to livestock producers. Many in the Middle Belt and southern states remain deeply suspicious of the Plan's long-term goals, which they see as creating privileges for herders and more broadly the Fulani.

With Abuja's and other partners' support, state governments must build expertise and technical capacity, especially for managing ranches and grazing reserves, dairy production and meat processing. Federal and state governments should also up budgetary commitments, hasten the release of funds and provide financial transparency to ensure accountability, working with donors and investors as necessary. Addressing rural insecurity, curbing impunity and rehabilitating communities adversely affected by earlier violence in participating states are also vital. Plus, authorities will need to consider climate change's likely impact and reach a decision about how the transhumant herders who cross into Nigeria seasonally should or should not benefit from the Plan.

While some of these steps will take time, the Plan's proponents should focus on delivering concrete, visible results on a relatively short-term basis. Less than two years from now, the country will hold general elections. If the Plan is to survive the change of government that will follow, politicians may need to be able to produce clear proof of its benefits. (Having served two terms, President Buhari and many state governors are ineligible to compete, meaning that change is certain.) Ideally, by the time campaigning heats up in late 2022, the Plan's backers should be able to point to at least a handful of newly constructed ranches or rehabilitated reserves, strong donor and investor commitments, and the first of a cadre of newly trained livestock management professionals.

None of this will be easy, but the Plan is worth the effort. While far from perfect, it offers an important chance to reform Nigeria's livestock system with a strategy that addresses the needs of both herders and small-scale farmers. About 70 per cent of Nigeria's work force earns an income through agriculture. Modernising the livestock sector could boost the country's prosperity overall at the same time that it takes a big step toward resolving one of Nigeria's most dangerous conflicts. With the clock ticking down to the 2023 elections, federal and state authorities will need to move quickly to make a visible mark, lest the work they have done to create this moment of opportunity be lost.

Abuja/Dakar/Nairobi/Brussels, 4 May 2021

Ending Nigeria's Herder-Farmer Crisis: The Livestock Reform Plan

I. Introduction

Violence between herders and farmers in Nigeria has grown deadlier over the past decade. Climatic change, high population growth, environmental degradation, the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East and organised crime (including massive cattle rustling) in the North West, have forced large numbers of pastoralists in the north to migrate south in search of pasture and water. Their migration in turn has triggered disputes with sedentary crop farmers, especially in the North Central geopolitical zone, but also across the three zones in the south.¹

Since 2015, violent flare-ups in these parts of the country, particularly armed attacks on communities, have killed thousands of people, disrupted rural economies and threatened the country's stability.² In the Middle Belt, comprising the North Central zone as well as parts of the North East and North West, a combination of military operations and local peace agreements has proven effective in tempering the worst violence from late 2018 onward, but attacks involving herders and farmers continue.³ In the North West, what started as a contest over land between herders and farmers has evolved into wider violence involving an array of armed groups –

¹ Nigeria has 36 states, grouped into six geopolitical zones based on geographical proximity and ethnic similarities as well as shared political and administrative histories. The zones are North West, North Central, North East, South West, South East and South South. The North Central zone is sometimes loosely referred to as the Middle Belt, but in other usage, the Middle Belt also includes parts of the North East and North West where numerous ethnic minorities oppose the "hegemony" of the larger Hausa and Fulani groups. For background on the herder-farmer conflict, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°252, *Herders against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict*, 19 September 2017. See also "Harvest of Death: Three Years of Bloody Clashes between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria", Amnesty International, 2018; "Farmer-Herder Conflict in Northern Nigeria: Trends, Dynamics and Gender Perspectives", Centre for Democracy and Development, April 2021; and "Trends and Dynamics of Conflicts between Farmers and Pastoralists in Nigeria's Benue Valley", Zinariya Consults Limited, Open Society Initiative for West Africa and Global Rights, 2021.

² See Crisis Group Africa Report N°262, *Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence*, 26 July 2018; and "Harvest of Death: Three Years of Bloody Clashes between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria", *op. cit.*

³ Key military operations include Operation Safe Haven in Plateau state and Operation Whirlstroke in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states. There have also been many peace efforts and dialogues, some driven by state agencies such as the Kaduna Peace Commission and the Plateau Peace Agency, others by non-governmental organisations like the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and Search for Common Ground, and still others by the UN Development Programme under its "Integrated Approach to Building Peace in Nigeria's Farmer-Herder Crisis", a project that is part of its Peacebuilding Fund. The latter was executed jointly with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, UN Women, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and a range of Nigerian implementing partners (governmental and non-governmental) in Nasarawa, Taraba and Benue states from January 2019 to June 2020.

militias, vigilantes and criminal gangs – that risks paving the way for a new jihadist insurgency, on top of the decade-old Boko Haram conflict in the North East.⁴

In the country's three southern zones (South East, South West and South South), the increasingly frequent trespass on farms, deadly clashes between herders and local farmers, and criminal acts by armed gangs camped alongside – and often undistinguishable from – the predominantly forest-dwelling Fulani herders have fuelled widespread anti-herder and anti-Fulani sentiment.⁵ Recently, rising tension and the risks of wider inter-ethnic, inter-regional violence have revived the urgency of finding durable solutions to the herder-farmer conflict.

Following the wave of violence in the Middle Belt in 2018, the federal government, after consulting with various stakeholders (including state governors, leaders of herders' and farmers' associations, and international development partners), formulated a National Livestock Transformation Plan to modernise the livestock sector. Its objectives are to gradually end open grazing and thereby promote peaceful coexistence between herders and farmers. The Plan, which the National Economic Council adopted in January 2019, has been lauded by authorities in northern and some Middle Belt states.⁶ Several states have already taken steps toward commencing implementation. But these are only preliminary. The main work, which still lies ahead, will be challenging, requiring focused efforts by federal and state authorities, as well as donors and others, if it is to be successful.

Building on Crisis Group's 2017 and 2018 reports on herder-farmer violence in Nigeria and a May 2020 report on insecurity in the North West, this report examines the Plan and its limitations, while outlining recommendations for breaking through logjams that are holding up its implementation. It is based on interviews with a range of stakeholders, including federal and state agriculture ministry officials, leaders of herders' and farmers' associations, representatives of civil society organisations, local politicians, officials of food and agriculture companies, and officials of international agencies including the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the UN Development Programme. Interviews were conducted in the federal capital, Abuja, and

⁴ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°288, *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem*, 18 May 2020. For an earlier study that traces the evolution of herder-farmer conflict and the corresponding rise in crime in northern Nigeria, see Mohammed J. Kuna and Jibrin Ibrahim (eds.), *Rural Banditry and Conflicts in Northern Nigeria* (Abuja, 2015).

⁵ In Ondo state in the South West geopolitical zone, public dismay over the activities of criminals hiding in forests where cattle herds graze prompted the governor, Rotimi Akeredolu, to issue an order on 18 January 2021 requiring all herders to register with local governments or face eviction within seven days. In neighbouring Oyo state, an ethnic Yoruba rights activist, Sunday Igboho, ordered all Fulani to leave the state within seven days, and followed up by evicting several Fulani communities as the ultimatum expired. In Abia state, members of the government-outlawed secessionist group Indigenous People of Biafra attacked and burned down some herders' settlements. See "Herdsmen, communities clashes: Tension, anxiety in Oyo, Ogun, Edo, Abia", *Daily Sun*, 4 February 2021. The incidents drew strong condemnation from Fulani and several other northern groups, straining ethnic relations. A prominent northern group, the Arewa Consultative Forum, warned that civil war could ensue. See "Southwest/Fulani crisis: Another civil war looms, ACF warns", *Sunday Sun*, 24 January 2021.

⁶ The National Economic Council is a forum representing the federal government, the governments of all the country's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory.

in Adamawa, Nasarawa and Plateau states, three of the seven states initially designated as the Plan's pilot states, between December 2020 and April 2021.

II. The National Livestock Transformation Plan

The National Livestock Transformation Plan, one of a string of government initiatives to manage cattle production, is meant to foster greater prosperity through reforms that will make the livestock sector “more productive and sustainable” at the same time that it encourages peaceful coexistence between herders and farmers.⁷ Its chief aims are to curb the movement of cattle by encouraging predominantly nomadic herders to switch to sedentary, more mechanised livestock production and thereby to minimise conflict between them and crop farmers.

At the Plan's core is an initiative to establish various categories of ranches (large, medium and small) in public grazing reserves and improve services around them including by securing water to irrigate pasture and grow fodder, with support from the government, private investors and foreign donors. Although the Plan focuses on cattle herding, the government expects that it will benefit other livestock producers as well as small-scale farmers, whom it will encourage to grow more crops for use as fodder. The Plan assumes that establishing ranches will reduce competition over land and water, boost production of meat and other protein sources, raise incomes and prevent herder-farmer conflict in the future.

The Plan initially identified seven pilot states to develop ranches in public grazing reserves, namely Adamawa, Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba and Zamfara. The first guidelines for implementing the Plan projected that each of the then-seven pilot states would designate two pilot sites, with four ranches to be established at each location. In addition to the 56 facilities contemplated by this scheme, the initial pilot states were also expected to establish a total of seven breeder ranches and seven semen banks.⁸ Then, a meeting of the Northern States Governors Forum in Kaduna city in late 2019 resolved that all the nineteen northern states be considered as front-line states for the Plan's pilot implementation, a resolution later endorsed by the National Economic Council. The Council urged all other states to join in carrying out the Plan nationwide. By 2028, the Plan envisions that participating states will build a total of at least 119 ranches, creating over two million new jobs, especially along various value-adding chains.⁹

The Plan includes provisions for monitoring and broad priorities. To guide and evaluate progress, it outlines a “Results Framework” outlining specific targets throughout the ten-year timeline, as well as a set of indicators measuring performance. It also identifies five policy areas, or pillars, that require special attention: addressing conflicts; improving access to justice and peace; meeting the needs of those affected

⁷ “National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), 2019-2028: Implementation Plan Guidelines for FGN and States”, National Economic Council, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Federal Ministry of Interior, Abuja, n.d. This document guiding the Plan's implementation followed the first 56-page “National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), 2019-2028: Strategy Document”, January 2019. This report refers to these two documents together as the Plan.

⁸ “National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), 2019-2028: Implementation Plan Guidelines for FGN and States”, *op. cit.*

⁹ These jobs include positions for plant operators, veterinarians and farm managers, as well as unskilled workers such as farm and feedlot hands. Additional employment is expected in meat processing, factory packaging, transportation and warehouse managing; retail jobs such as in-house butchers at supermarkets and aisle-stocking teams are also envisaged.

by conflict; developing human capital; and attending to cross-cutting issues including gender, youth, research, information and strategic communication.¹⁰ It suggests that these pillars – which are more hortatory than operational – are key to creating “a conducive environment for the transformation of the livestock sector that will lead to peaceful coexistence, economic development and food security for the growing population”.¹¹

For purposes of implementation, the Plan has a tiered administrative structure. The federal government bears overall responsibility and provides most of the funding. At the apex of the federal structure is a National Livestock Transformation Plan Steering Committee, but direct supervision of the Plan falls under a Program Coordination Secretariat based in the Office of the Vice President.¹² The structure in the states mirrors the federal arrangement. Each participating state is to set up a State Livestock Transformation Office, to be supported by a State Livestock Project Management Office. A State Livestock Transformation Plan Steering Committee bears overall responsibility for meeting objectives at the state level.¹³ As agreed by the National Economic Council in 2019, the federal government is to fund 80 per cent of any livestock transformation plan submitted by any state government, while state governments and private investors are to provide the remaining 20 per cent.¹⁴ No state plans have yet been submitted.

As a condition of federal funding, each participating state must establish its State Livestock Transformation Office, provide details of its engagement with herders and farmers, and make a 5 per cent funding commitment to support the Secretariat's work.¹⁵ State governments are then responsible for demarcating land, assigning staff and developing projects.

The new Plan is not Nigeria's first effort to develop a strategy for defusing herder-farmer resource competition, but it has significant advantages over its predecessors, all of which either failed or were abandoned.¹⁶ First, unlike many previous efforts, it is the product of consultations among federal and state governments, herders' and

¹⁰ “National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), 2019-2028: Strategy Document”, op. cit.

¹¹ “National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), 2019-2028: Implementation Plan Guidelines for FGN and States”, op. cit.

¹² The Steering Committee is responsible for overall program oversight, policy guidance and strategic direction and review, as well as approval of annual workplans and budgets. The Secretariat is responsible for overall program coordination, assisting states with technical support in developing their implementation plans and budgets, monitoring and evaluation, contract management and quality control, and carrying out project-related studies, as well as communication and information. The membership comprises the ministers of agriculture and interior, as well as the governors of ten states – Adamawa, Benue, Ebonyi, Edo, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Oyo, Plateau, Taraba and Zamfara. It is chaired by the Ebonyi state governor, David Umahi.

¹³ The former office is to devise a detailed implementation program for the state, which will include funding sources and flows, along with other technical matters. The latter is to be responsible for key decision-making, including policy, strategic orientation and oversight.

¹⁴ The National Economic Council adopted this funding arrangement in September 2019.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, senior official, ministry of agriculture and rural development, Abuja, 19 January 2021.

¹⁶ For a summary of Nigerian federal and state government efforts that failed or were abandoned since the country's return to democratic rule in 1999, see Crisis Group Report, *Herders against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict*, op. cit., Appendix A.

farmers' groups, and development partners, and therefore stands a better chance of enlisting support. Secondly, its emphasis on the economic benefits of reform could make it more appealing to herders and farmers. Its five supporting pillars also represent a comprehensive understanding of the enabling environment required for the core reforms to be implemented. Thirdly, it includes a range of livestock production options that offer alternative entry points for various categories of producers and investors in the livestock sector, potentially boosting the sector's productivity.

That said, for all its breadth, the Plan fails to adequately address two factors that will be key to the sustainability of any livestock management reform. First, it does not take into account the many foreign transhumant migrants who move their herds in and out of Nigeria, as seasons change, and may have little interest in settling on ranches and grazing reserves. About 30 per cent of live animals slaughtered in Nigeria are imported from neighbouring countries.¹⁷ Neither does the Plan explain how authorities are to induce members of this cohort, who move in and out of the country, to stay on ranches and grazing reserves, or whether the government even aims to do so.

Amid widespread concerns about their involvement in herder-farmer conflict and crime in many states, views diverge as to whether the government should keep allowing these pastoralists into Nigeria and, if so, how it should apply the Plan to them.¹⁸ On one end of the opinion spectrum, Kano state's governor, Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, has advised the federal government to ban foreign herders from coming into Nigeria in order to stem rising insecurity.¹⁹ Others have argued that foreigners, if they do enter, should not derive benefits from the Plan, given that it is a Nigerian government-funded program.²⁰ Bauchi state governor Bala Mohammed (himself a Fulani) has asserted that the Plan will accommodate every Fulani herder in Nigeria, including those who come in from other countries.²¹

Whether or not the transhumant pastoralists are included under the Plan, the Nigerian government will need to arrive at some rules of the road that help ensure they do not undermine its implementation. If foreign pastoralists keep moving their herds about without restrictions, it may be difficult to persuade Nigerian herders to stay on ranches and grazing reserves.²² Moreover, continued roaming of foreign-owned cattle could create more friction with farmers, defeating a key purpose of the Plan.

Secondly, while the Plan acknowledges climate change as contributing to the challenges Nigeria faces, its treatment of this topic reflects serious gaps, which if un-

¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, UN Food and Agriculture Organization official, Abuja, 5 April 2021.

¹⁸ In 2017, the governors of Nigeria's northern states, under their umbrella body, the Northern Governors Forum, stated they had observed that most of the herders involved in incidents of insecurity in the country were foreigners, mostly from Senegal and Mali. "Northern governors: herdsmen attacking Nigerians are foreigners", *The Cable*, 25 January 2017.

¹⁹ "Ganduje to FG: Ban foreign herders now", *Daily Trust*, 12 February 2021.

²⁰ Crisis Group interviews, federal ministry of agriculture and rural development official, Abuja, 12 December 2020; civil society leader based in Nasarawa state, 4 February 2021.

²¹ "Bauchi gov: NLTP will accommodate Fulani herdsmen from neighbouring countries", *This Day*, 17 September 2019.

²² Crisis Group interview, cattle breeders' association official, Abuja, 2 February 2021.

addressed could make it less effective as a means of improving livestock management and reducing herder-farmer tension.

By way of background, Nigeria has been feeling the effects of climate change for a half-century, particularly in the form of extreme heat and drought in the far north. Leading forecasts predict that these trends will intensify over the Plan's ten-year timeline, and beyond, with a 1.56°C increase in average temperature in Nigeria by 2040, relative to 1995.²³ Average annual temperatures rose 0.7°C from 1970 to 2014, while annual precipitation fell 8mm from its peak in 1960 to 2014. Nigeria's climate varies across regions, with annual total precipitation in 2014 ranging from 2,000mm in the tropical south to 700mm in the arid northern regions, which have borne the brunt of climate change so far. These climatic changes have already put immense pressure on the agricultural sector by reducing the total amount of cropland as well as grassland. After expanding until 2013, the total area of mixed-use land (used for both farming and herding) has shrunk by about 2 per cent between 2013 and 2018.²⁴

On top of the effects of heat and drought, the increasing seasonal variability of rainfall and land productivity is another potentially growing driver of resource competition between herders and farmers. Such variability is especially pronounced in the Middle Belt and northern states, where crops and pasture are highly dependent on rainfall.²⁵ According to climate forecasts, the seasonal variability of rainfall is likely to increase over the Plan's timeframe, potentially further disrupting traditional rhythms of farming and herding and destabilising livelihoods in these regions.²⁶ While farming and cattle herding can complement each other, with cattle fertilising plots between crop harvests, greater seasonal variability disrupts pastoral migration cycles, upsetting this delicate symbiosis.

As climate change has increased pressure on the resources used by farmers and herders, intercommunal violence in Nigeria has risen over the last decade, with more than 1,000 violent events – clashes, attacks and killings – involving farmers and herders between 2010 and 2019, compared to fewer than 100 between 2000 and 2009.²⁷ But while the Plan acknowledges climate change as an important contributor to herder-farmer violence, it falls short in recommending policies that take into account its proven effects.

First, in proposing the construction of new ranches and rehabilitation of grazing reserves, the initiative does not seem to take into account that these facilities' feasibility over the coming decades will largely depend on the availability of water, which

²³ Temperature forecasts are based on the World Climate Research Programme's CORDEX model mean, assuming an intermediate emission scenario (RCP 4.5).

²⁴ Crisis Group calculations using CCI-LC time series land use data collected by the European Space Agency.

²⁵ The average seasonal variability in rainfall (2014-2019) increases from around 1,200mm in Nigeria's south to 1,800mm in the north. Seasonal variability is based on the within-year standard deviation and measures the spread of weather extremes within a certain year.

²⁶ Based on 2030 forecasting data by the World Resources Institute's Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas.

²⁷ Crisis Group calculations using Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) conflict event data on battles, riots or violence against civilians. Events are further filtered by a list of keywords associated with farmer-herder disputes using ACLED "notes" variable. A search found that 1,077 violent events fulfil these criteria between 2010 and 2019, while only 83 violent events meet the same criteria between 2000 and 2016.

is becoming scarcer as rainfall diminishes. Climate scientists can predict rainfall patterns and water scarcity with increasing accuracy, but the Plan does not require that states take this modelling into account in their proposals.

Secondly, the Plan leans perhaps too heavily on the argument that free-roaming cattle herding is less productive than ranching, making it no longer appropriate in modern times. While it may be true that ranches are more productive, stationary ranching is also less resilient in the face of climate-induced land use changes and erratic weather patterns, given that pastoralists (unlike ranchers) can adjust their movements to make use of seasonally available resources. Estimates say Nigeria's population will grow from 200 million to about 400 million by 2050. It may be that the country cannot afford to leave these resources untapped, in which case policymakers may need to explore more flexible arrangements in addition to what is in the Plan.

III. Implementation and Challenges

Both the federal and state governments have taken several steps to implement the Plan, from setting up steering committees to providing technical assistance, but their efforts have been uneven and, faced with several challenges, progress has been at best modest. In order to make significant strides, authorities at both levels of government will need to address certain fundamental issues.

A. *Implementation to Date*

At the federal level, activities kick-starting the Plan began as soon as the National Economic Council gave its imprimatur in January 2019. Shortly afterward, the Council announced that the government would allocate 100 billion nairas (approximately \$262 million) for executing the Plan. The Program Coordination Secretariat in the Vice President's Office, with support from development partners, then developed comprehensive guidelines for federal and state governments. On 10 September 2019, Vice President Yemi Osinbajo launched the first phase of state-level implementation in Adamawa, one of the initial pilot states, in north-eastern Nigeria.²⁸ Since then, the Secretariat has been providing technical support to several states to prepare the ground, including assistance with field surveys and project site mapping. It has also organised stakeholder sensitisation forums in these states.

The federal government has sought international expertise to kick-start fulfilment of the Plan in the states. Following a Memorandum of Understanding signed during President Buhari's visit to the Netherlands in July 2018, the government, in 2019, engaged the Dutch company Cownexxion, first to help in formulating the Plan, and subsequently to work on rolling it out in some states.²⁹ Cownexxion has developed a Project Appraisal Document that provides specific details of turnkey start-ups in four states – Adamawa, Gombe, Nasarawa and Plateau – including budgets for projects, a manpower training course and the development of a masterplan that will be used in scaling up implementation beyond these four states.³⁰ The start-ups, to be implemented from February 2021 to August 2023, involve the establishment of one pilot farm in each state, which is to serve as a training centre for farmers and extension agents focusing on feed production, management and other skills. (Extension agents are persons employed by federal and state ministries of agriculture who dispense practical and scientific advice on crop farming and animal husbandry.)

²⁸ "Osinbajo inaugurates National Livestock Transformation Plan", *The Punch*, 10 September 2019. Adamawa may have been chosen as curtain raiser because it has 69 of Nigeria's 415 grazing reserves, the highest number of any state.

²⁹ "Buhari rounds off visit to Netherlands, expects more foreign investments", *The Punch*, 18 July 2018; "Nigeria, Netherlands pledge stronger partnerships on Trade, Investments, Security", Press Release, State House, The Presidency, Abuja, 26 November 2019.

³⁰ Cownexxion is one of several companies making up an "Impact Cluster" to support implementation of the Plan. The Cluster, which is supported by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency, includes the Aeres Group, the Agriterro Dairy Delta Academy, Scherjon Dairy Equipment, Barenbrug South Africa, the Dutch Sustainable Energy Group and the Queens Company. Klaas Struiksma, "Project Appraisal Document: Dutch-Nigeria Bilateral Partnership for NLTP Start-up", Cownexxion, n.d.

The federal government has taken other steps to support progress on livestock reform as provided for by the Plan. Notably, on 15 March 2021, the federal ministry of agriculture and rural development launched the National Livestock Breed Improvement Programme to boost the development and transformation of the livestock value chain. This program is expected to improve the genetic makeup of certain indigenous breed animals, especially dairy cattle, in order to achieve increased milk and meat yields from the nation's herds. The government also expects that the program will, in the words of one senior official, "improve the livelihoods of pastoral communities and other livestock farmers" and help in "addressing other challenges in the livestock value chain, particularly the herders-crop farmers conflict".³¹

Support for the Plan among state governments is relatively strong. As of mid-April 2021, 22 of the country's 36 states had written to the federal government indicating interest in implementing the Plan. President Buhari's special assistant on agriculture, Andrew Kwasari, said: "Out of these 22 states, many have gone into training and the opening of offices. Some have even located over fifteen grazing reserves, which have been surveyed by certain governors totalling over 200,000 hectares of land".³²

While the states that have already begun Plan-related work are all in the far north or Middle Belt – the main cattle-producing regions – some southern state governments (including Ebonyi, Ondo and Ekiti) have also written to the federal government, formally expressing interest. States' support for the Plan may be due to several reasons. State governors were very much involved in the National Economic Council's consultations that gave birth to the Plan. Some state governments recognise that it could be a way to curb violence in their jurisdictions. There is also the extra attraction that the Plan will be largely funded by the federal government.

Most of the seven states that were initially designated as the Plan's pilots have opened their State Livestock Transformation Offices, one of the conditions for federal government support, and have also set up committees to oversee the Plan's rollout. Members of these committees include state officials, as well as representatives of pastoralists' and farmers' groups, notably the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria and the All Farmers Association of Nigeria. These groups do not represent all herders and farmers across the country, but they do provide platforms from which information about the Plan can be communicated to many herders and farmers in rural areas.³³

Some state governments have held awareness and sensitisation programs for herders and farmers, explaining details about the Plan and its potential benefits to both occupational groups. Some have organised workshops for government officials, especially in agriculture ministries, and have done other outreach as well. In Adamawa state, for example, the government has funded campaigns on state radio and tel-

³¹ "FG flags off National Livestock Breed Improvement Programme", *Nigerian Tribune*, 15 March 2021.

³² Crisis Group interview, Andrew Kwasari, senior special assistant to the president on agriculture, Abuja, 18 April 2021.

³³ Crisis Group interviews, agriculture ministry officials in Adamawa, Nasarawa and Plateau states, December 2020-January 2021.

evision; officials say they have also met with herders, farmers, civil society organisations, traditional rulers and community leaders to discuss the Plan.³⁴

Following the completion of field surveys (including soil and water tests), some state governments have demarcated the sites they intend to use as grazing reserves. In Adamawa state, the government has designated the Gongoshi, Guyaku, Nassarawo-Jada, Dauchi and Saurata reserves as sites for projects under the Plan.³⁵ In Plateau state, the government has designated the Wase and Garga grazing reserves as areas where herders and their livestock can settle.³⁶ In Nasarawa, where the government was already preparing to demarcate or reactivate its grazing reserves before the Plan's launch, it is now making them available for use under the Plan.³⁷ In Niger state, the government has tagged the Bobi Grazing Reserve, which covers 31,000 hectares, as the centre of its ranching sites. In Gombe state, the focus is on the vast Wawa Zange Grazing Reserve (141,000 hectares), which the government believes can accommodate over two million cattle.³⁸

Several state governments are partnering with private investors – strengthening existing partnerships or forging new ones – to support the Plan. In November 2019, Niger state signed a memorandum of understanding with the Dutch dairy company FrieslandCampina WAMCO Nigeria, allocating 10,000 hectares of land at the Bobi Grazing Reserve for milk production.³⁹ In February 2020, the Plateau state government signed a similar deal enabling two private companies – Sahel Consulting Agriculture and Nutrition and Integrated Dairies – to use grazing reserves.⁴⁰ Some states are also contemplating incentives that they hope would attract prospec-

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, permanent secretary, agriculture ministry, Adamawa state, Yola, 15 December 2020.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, agriculture ministry official, Jos, Plateau state, 12 December 2020.

³⁷ Sites designated for the Plan are spread across seven local government areas, namely Awe, Keana, Doma, Mankwar, Konva, Gitata, Kurudu and Loko.

³⁸ The reserve cuts across four local government areas, namely Dulku, Funakaye, Nafada and Kwami.

³⁹ The memorandum was signed in Abuja by the governor of Niger State, Abubakar Bello, and the president of FrieslandCampina Consumer Dairy, Roel van Neerbos, on 19 November 2019. A company statement said the partnership would boost dairy production at the reserve and offer training for Nigerian dairy cooperatives in the state. It said the company had already established key infrastructure in the reserve, including “a milk collection centre with a high-capacity cooling tank and high-quality milk testing equipment”. “Milk production: Niger, FrieslandCampina sign MoU”, *The Punch*, 27 November 2019. “Nigeria, Netherlands pledge stronger partnerships on Trade, Investments, Security”, press release, The Presidency, 26 November 2019. Five private companies – national and international – are engaged at the Bobi Grazing Reserve. Crisis Group interview, Niger state agriculture ministry official, Abuja, 29 January 2021.

⁴⁰ “Plateau commences implementation of livestock transformation programme”, *Daily Trust*, 21 February 2020. Full details of the agreements are not public, but these companies are expected to invest in equipment to boost development of the livestock value chain, particularly dairy, meat and foliage production. Integrated Dairies is a Nigerian dairy farm that has produced milk since 2003, under the brand Farmfresh, from its exotic Friesian breed of cattle. Located in the Vom highlands in Jos, Plateau state, its farmlands span over 550 hectares. A team from the Dutch dairy consultancy Cownexxion, led by Klaus Struilesma, had already indicated interest in ranching in Plateau state before the Plan's adoption. See “Cownexxion to build cattle ranches in Nigeria”, *National Insight*, 17 July 2018.

tive investors to build ranches, including tax waivers and provision of security escorts for their staff and to guard project sites.⁴¹

While most participating state governments say they have already complied with the conditions for obtaining federal government funding, these claims are disputed.⁴² In some of the states visited by Crisis Group, observers said the state governments are merely trying to shore up their budgets by doing what they need to qualify for the funding committed by the National Economic Council, but showing little commitment to carrying out the Plan. Notwithstanding the positive examples noted above, they pointed to a lack of information being shared with investors and the paucity of training programs and capacity building for ranch and grazing reserves management.⁴³

B. *Implementation Challenges*

Politics put off action on many aspects of the Plan following its formal adoption in January 2019. Given that Nigeria held general elections in the following month, commencement of most implementation activities, especially at the state level, was delayed through the peak of the election campaigns, voting, the post-election inauguration of new governments and the constitution of federal and state cabinets.⁴⁴ Thus, it was only in the fourth quarter of 2019 that state-level activities began. Moreover, even as it overcame those initial delays, the Plan has been confronted with several other challenges.

1. An enthusiasm and communications gap

Notwithstanding the support of some state governments, the Plan lacks broad political buy-in. Ethnic groups in the southern and Middle Belt states remain wary of the initiative, which they view as favouring Fulani herders over other ethnic and occupational groups. These groups oppose establishing ranches or even public grazing reserves for herders, arguing that pastoralists would get favourable treatment in the form of free use of state resources while others have had to buy or lease land in order to start a business.⁴⁵ This argument often overlooks the fact that farmers and other occupational groups have also benefited disproportionately from credit schemes (such as the Central Bank of Nigeria's Anchor Borrowers' Programme) as well as COVID-19 relief packages, which did not include or benefit herders.⁴⁶ It also fails to recog-

⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, agriculture ministry official, Jos, Plateau state, 10 December 2020.

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, civil society leaders, Yola (Adamawa state), Lafia (Nasarawa state) and Jos (Plateau state), 1-20 December 2020. Crisis Group telephone interview, Kor Aondona David, president, Benue Agro Youth Initiative, 10 April 2021.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, civil society leaders from Plateau and Kogi, Abuja, 2 December 2020.

⁴⁴ President Buhari swore in and gave portfolios to his 43 new ministers on 21 August 2019. See "Buhari swears in ministers", *Premium Times*, 21 August 2019. Some state governors did not appoint commissioners, including for agriculture, until much later in the year.

⁴⁵ "NLTP is RUGA in disguise – SMBLF", *The Punch*, 27 September 2019.

⁴⁶ The Anchor Borrowers' Programme was launched by the Central Bank of Nigeria in November 2015. According to the Bank, its thrust is "provision of farm inputs in kind and cash (for farm labour) to small holder farmers to boost production of commodities, stabilize inputs supply to agro-processors and address the country's negative balance of payments on food". "Anchor Borrowers' Programme Guidelines", Central Bank of Nigeria, December 2016.

nise that the Plan also opens up investment and business opportunities, not only for the predominantly Fulani pastoralists but to a wide range of private investors.

One line of criticism dismisses the Plan as a mere rebranding of previous agricultural policies, including a January 2018 proposal to establish “cattle colonies” and a May 2019 plan to set aside land for herders in settlements, known as Rural Grazing Areas (RUGA), across the country. These policies were not preceded by necessary multi-stakeholder consultations. The RUGA scheme was popular among some herders’ groups in the north and eleven northern states donated 55,000 hectares of land for its implementation. But it was vehemently opposed by groups in the south and Middle Belt, who viewed it as a “land grab” for herders. Vice President Yemi Osinbajo distanced himself from the scheme, saying it was neither provided for nor aligned with the livestock transformation plan, and President Buhari eventually suspended it.⁴⁷

Criticism of, and opposition to, the Plan reflect suspicions that many southern and Middle Belt Nigerians harbour about President Buhari himself. They are born of a widely held belief among Nigerians from these parts that Buhari, a Fulani, favours herder interests over those of other citizens. These misgivings have tended to cloud recognition of the Plan’s potential to benefit many non-Fulani communities, including by creating new markets for fodder to feed livestock on ranches and also grazing reserves during the dry season.

Pastoralists also raise understandable concerns. Leaders of some herders’ groups believe that the Plan focuses too narrowly on economic measures and benefits, neglecting the impact of comprehensive livestock reform on centuries-old pastoralist culture.⁴⁸ They argue that a ten-year timeframe to move from open grazing to ranching is too short for the far-reaching cultural and social changes the reforms will require of herders.⁴⁹ Some say an end to open grazing is acceptable in principle but impracticable until the government designates alternative locations – ranches and grazing reserves – where they can concentrate their herds.⁵⁰ Other herders have misgivings about the idea of concentrating cattle in ranches and reserves, fearing a possible shortage of pasture, which is a legitimate worry, particularly given changing weather patterns.⁵¹ Furthermore, some herders worry that gathering in such concen-

⁴⁷ On the proposal to establish cattle colonies and the controversies that followed, see Crisis Group Report, *Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence*, op. cit., pp. 23-25. In 2019, the ministry of agriculture proposed to establish RUGA settlements across the country. Several state governments in the south and Middle Belt openly criticised the RUGA project, especially because their governors had not approved it. President Buhari eventually suspended the project. “Osinbajo distances self from Ruga settlement”, *The Guardian*, 29 June 2019; “Buhari suspends Ruga programme – official”, *Premium Times*, 3 July 2019.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, local herders’ group leader, Abuja, 21 January 2021.

⁴⁹ At the Plan’s formative stages in 2018, the national secretary of the Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore herders’ group, Saleh Alhassan, said: “If we want to completely transform from open grazing to highly mechanised form of livestock production, which is ranching, we need a period of not less than 25 years”. *Saturday Punch*, 7 July 2018.

⁵⁰ “Govt can’t ban open grazing, says Miyetti Allah”, *The Punch*, 7 March 2021.

⁵¹ Experience fuels their concerns: in the 1970s, governments in the former Gongola state (now Adamawa and Taraba) as well as in Kaduna and Plateau states tried to concentrate herders in reserves. The strategy collapsed when the herders could not find enough fodder for their cattle in degraded reserves. Tolulope Ogboru and Oluwatoyin Adejonwo-Osho, “Towards an Effective Cattle Grazing

trations, if the sites are not well guarded, could make them targets for cattle rustlers.⁵² For now, authorities say movement to the reserves and ranches will be voluntary and not compulsory. Moreover, while many state governments have declared they have banned or are banning open grazing, they lack capacity to enforce the bans.⁵³

At least some of the herders' misgivings might be allayed through a greater appreciation of what the Plan has to offer. As noted, the Program Coordination Secretariat and some state governments have taken some steps to publicise the Plan, but awareness of its benefits remains low. Although the Secretariat and several state governments have conducted workshops to explain the reforms to some herder and farmer leaders and the general public, many traditional and other community leaders in Adamawa, Nasarawa and Plateau states told Crisis Group that they had little or no information about the Plan. Some said they had heard of it but had no idea how state governments planned to involve them in rallying support; some said they were neither notified of, nor involved in, the above-referenced forums that were convened to raise awareness about the Plan.⁵⁴ Others said they were hearing of the Plan only on national television, and not at the state or local level, adding that their state governments had not organised workshops for stakeholders or consulted with locals to build support, perhaps for resource or capacity reasons.⁵⁵

2. Wavering political leadership and bureaucratic inertia

The Plan has also been weighed down by a lack of political drive, an erosion of public confidence and bureaucratic challenges. President Buhari himself has hardly spoken out to rally support for the Plan. Officials of his government and his party – the All Progressives Congress – have likewise not promoted it; instead, they have sometimes suggested alternatives. For instance, in February 2021, the federal justice minister, Abubakar Malami, advocated the establishment of a “commission for pastoralism regulated by law” that “might provide recipes for resolving protracted farmer-herder conflicts”.⁵⁶ On 13 March, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the national leader of Buhari's party, recommended that the federal government convene all those affected by herder-farmer conflict “to hammer out a set of working principles to resolve the crisis”, but made no mention of the Plan, which was designed to achieve precisely that goal.⁵⁷

and Rearing Legal Framework: An Imperative for Environmental Protection”, *Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2018). Authorities will have to convince herders that the reserves earmarked for ranching contain enough grazing land.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, CORET pastoralists' organisation official, Abuja, 18 April 2021.

⁵³ See “South-West governors ban open grazing after meeting with Miyetti Allah”, *Daily Post*, 25 January 2021; “South-East governors ban open grazing, want criminals flushed out of forests”, *Vanguard*, 2 February 2021; and “Insecurity: Northern governors seek end to open grazing”, *Vanguard*, 9 February 2021.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interviews, traditional rulers, civil society leaders and other stakeholders in Adamawa, Nasarawa and Plateau states, December 2020.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interviews, stakeholders in Adamawa, Nasarawa and Plateau states, December 2020. Some officials suggested that the lack of resources and capacity at state agriculture ministries could be hamstringing outreach efforts. Crisis Group interview, federal ministry of agriculture and rural development official, Abuja, 16 March 2021.

⁵⁶ “Malami advocates pastoral commission to end herders' crisis”, *This Day*, 17 February 2021.

⁵⁷ “How to resolve farmer-herder crisis, by Tinubu”, *The Nation*, 13 March 2021.

While declaring support for the Plan, some state governors advance their own reform ideas that are not aligned with it. These diversions suggest a dearth of political commitment to the Plan.

Support for the Plan was particularly buffeted by the May 2019 plan to create RUGA settlements for herders. Though suspended following strong opposition from the Middle Belt and the southern states, that initiative and the controversy it generated subsequently jeopardised confidence in the Plan. Though the Plan was adopted in January 2019, five months before that RUGA controversy, many, including journalists from both mainstream media houses and independent blogs, continually disparage it as a repackaged RUGA program.⁵⁸

Inertia in the ministry of agriculture is also apparently a problem. The minister has constituted a committee to coordinate implementation activities with state governments and the National Economic Council, but there seems to be little or no enthusiasm for the Plan within the ministry. The Plan was not originally “a child of the ministry”, said one official by way of explanation. This source also noted that the officials who introduced the RUGA initiative are still unhappy that the president shot it down.⁵⁹ Whatever the case, as of yet there is no sense of urgency among the ministry’s staff for progress on the Plan.

3. COVID-19 and funding

The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the Plan’s rollout in some states and forced budget cuts at both the federal and state levels of government. Countrywide movement restrictions, social distancing measures and stay-at-home orders for junior and middle-level civil servants, along with other measures to curb the outbreak, have slowed or stalled several Plan-related projects.

At the same time, funding shortfalls are potentially significant. As noted, in 2019, the National Economic Council announced it had proposed that 100 billion nairas (about \$262 million) would be required to carry out the Plan.⁶⁰ Amid concerns that this amount falls short of what authorities would need for such an ambitious Plan, the Project Steering Committee in Abuja has clarified that the government’s funding will focus largely on boosting primary production of livestock while private sector investors and development partners are expected to provide funds for value chain development. Even so, as of mid-April 2021, no federal funds had been approved or released to states, to implement projects to improve production.⁶¹

Plan documents cited by Crisis Group show that, for projects scheduled for implementation in 2021, the Plan requires about €1.6 million and 8.4 billion naira in federal investment. But the twin impact of COVID-19 and falling oil prices, which plunged the economy into recession in 2020, have already taken a toll on the federal govern-

⁵⁸ See, for example, “National livestock plan is RUGA in disguise, Nigerians warn”, *The Guardian*, 16 September 2019; and “National Livestock Transformation is RUGA repackaged, says Biafra Nations Youth League, vows never to accept it”, *The Awareness*, 9 July 2019.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, agriculture and rural development ministry official, Abuja, 18 April 2021.

⁶⁰ “Nigeria to spend N100 billion on new plan for cattle, other animals”, *Premium Times*, 19 September 2019.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, senior official of the Project Steering Committee, Abuja, 18 April 2021.

ment's revenues.⁶² As of mid-April 2021, the federal government had not released any funds to states to commence projects. For instance, in Nasarawa state, for which the Dutch Investment Agency had approved a €400,000 grant to cover 50 per cent of the cost for a pilot project scheduled to start in February 2021, non-release of the federal government's matching 50 per cent has delayed commencement of activities.⁶³

State governments are also financially challenged. The pandemic has shrunk allocations from the federation account, cut funds internally generated from taxes by 40 per cent in 2020, drained already limited resources, and thus constrained their ability to build ranches, resuscitate grazing reserves or commence urgently needed capacity building.⁶⁴ It is not clear how much the states have allocated to the Plan in their 2021 budgets, but several state officials told Crisis Group that they lack the money to carry out major projects in 2021.⁶⁵ It is also not clear how the state governments intend to overcome the funding challenge: some officials say they may have to rely largely on federal funds, to the extent they are available. There is clearly a need for significant donor support.

4. Land acquisition

Another challenge relates to the acquisition of land for project sites, which has, in some locations, run into opposition, mainly from farmers, who fear being displaced by herders and their cattle. In some areas, parts of long-designated grazing reserves have, over the years, been occupied by crop farmers, who are now reluctant to leave such lands to livestock producers. For instance, in December 2020, members of the Garga Emirate Council in Plateau state said they opposed using the Garga reserve for livestock projects because it includes their farmland.⁶⁶ In other areas, farmers object to letting herders settle permanently on the reserves, arguing that such settlements could aggravate pre-existing local tension between them and Fulani herders. This objection runs contrary to one of the core objectives of the Plan – which is to sedentarise livestock production in order to reduce the friction associated with roaming and also boost productivity – and needs to be actively engaged by Plan proponents.

If farmers are dispossessed, especially without proper compensation, they could become hostile to the entire project and the well-meaning reforms could inadvertently stoke – rather than dispel – animosity between the two groups. Governments, in consultation with local leaders, need to accommodate the interests of both herders and farmers, including by enabling farmers to shift to producing fodder that would

⁶² "FG admits revenues crashing, Nigeria faces hard times", *The Punch*, 20 April 2021.

⁶³ Crisis Group interview, agriculture and rural development ministry official, Abuja, 18 April 2021.

⁶⁴ "COVID-19: States' tax revenue fell by 40 percent in 2020 – govts", *New Telegraph*, 20 April 2021.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interviews, senior agriculture ministry officials, Plateau and Adamawa states, Abuja, December 2020. In Nigeria, the federation account refers to the pool of all federally collected revenue, which is shared monthly between the federal government (48.5 per cent), all 36 state governments (24 per cent), the 774 local governments (20 per cent) and special funds (7.5 per cent). For recent reports of financial distress in states, see "States face cash crunch, salaries swallow revenues, Federal Govt seeks more funds", *The Punch*, 15 April 2021; and "Tough hurdles for states seeking pension fund loans", *The Guardian*, 3 January 2021.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interviews, 17 December 2020. According to them, the late emir (Muslim traditional ruler) had told state government officials to relocate the livestock project from Garga grazing reserve to parts of the Pia River Game Reserve, which was largely free of human activity.

be needed in the ranches, and even in the grazing reserves during the dry season, in order to promote peaceful coexistence between the two groups and avert more violence.

5. Insufficient technical expertise

A dearth of technical skills is yet another obstacle. Both the federal and state governments' agriculture ministries lack the manpower and expertise to execute the Plan. Few states have staff capable of managing ranches and grazing reserves, or other professionals like veterinarians, who can look after large cattle herds. The country's pool of agricultural extension agents had diminished over the years mainly due to buck passing between federal and state governments in terms of responsibility for training programs, diminished funding, agricultural policy changes and lack of interest by young people in taking up such careers in the public sector.⁶⁷ Countrywide, there is only one extension agent for every 10,000 farmers, far below the minimum ratio of 1:1,000 recommended by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.⁶⁸ The ratio is even lower in the livestock sector.

In many states that have adopted the Plan, governments have yet to organise workshops for agriculture ministry staff to familiarise them with the Plan or to sponsor staff training at agricultural institutions.⁶⁹ There is as yet no indication of expanding programs and increasing intakes at the country's three universities of agriculture, agriculture faculties at other universities or associated livestock training and research institutes. Without such expertise, managing ranches and grazing reserves, and more broadly reforming livestock production, will be impossible.

6. Growing insecurity

Insecurity may further delay the Plan's implementation. Nigeria's North East, especially Borno state, but also parts of Adamawa and Yobe states, are continually under siege by two jihadist factions, the Islamic State in West Africa Province and Jamaat Ahl al-Sunna li-Dawa wal-Jihad, collectively referred to as Boko Haram.⁷⁰ In many other states across the North West and North Central zones, the presence of armed groups, whom authorities and the media loosely refer to as "bandits", has left residents and travellers vulnerable to robbery and kidnapping for ransom, especially on roads, on farms and, more recently, in schools.⁷¹ Elsewhere, intra and inter-communal conflicts pose security risks. Across most of the north, insecurity has cur-

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, senior official at Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Abuja, 2 April 2021.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, senior official at Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Abuja, 25 January 2021. See also "Dearth of extension agents hampering diversification", *The Guardian*, 17 January 2021.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, civil servants and civil society organisations, Nasarawa state, December 2020.

⁷⁰ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°273, *Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province*, 16 May 2019.

⁷¹ See Crisis Group Report, *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem*, op. cit.; and Nmadi Obasi, "Halting Repeated School Kidnappings in Nigeria", Crisis Group Commentary, 5 March 2021.

tailed access to lands and grazing reserves, hampering the movements of state agriculture ministry staff charged with carrying out the Plan.⁷²

Several designated project sites face specific threats. On 6 January 2021, the Niger state governor, Abubakar Sani Bello, said: “Most of the bandits have started focusing their attention on the Bobi Grazing Reserve”, the Plan’s focal point in the state.⁷³ In Nasarawa state, the governor has repeatedly drawn attention to the presence of armed gangs in parts of the grazing reserves earmarked for ranches and other projects under the Plan; the road to one proposed ranch, located in Toto local government area, is considered particularly unsafe “due to the high rate of kidnapping”.⁷⁴ The presence and activities of armed criminal gangs are scaring away private investors and may hinder development of public infrastructure in areas where ranches are supposed to be built or where grazing reserves are being rehabilitated.⁷⁵ Until security improves, livestock producers and herders are likely to avoid these areas.⁷⁶

7. Concerns about sustainability

Beyond the immediate challenges of implementation, there are also longer-term concerns about the Plan’s sustainability after the elections and changes in government, particularly the presidency, coming up in 2023. In Nigeria, new governments often terminate projects that their predecessors initiated, especially where such projects lack legal footing or have no impressive results to show. Even where projects are not terminated, they are sometimes deprioritised, under-funded and eventually consigned to dormancy. Given that President Buhari and many state governments will be ineligible to run for re-election – meaning that change is certain – there are concerns that unless the Plan is given a proper legal basis and delivers credible results, it could be abandoned or starved of support by the next administration.

⁷² Crisis Group interview, senior official at the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Abuja, 30 January 2021.

⁷³ “Governor: bandits in North recruited from Mali, Sudan”, *The Nation*, 7 January 2021.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, conflict researcher from Nasarawa state, Abuja, 19 January 2021.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, dairy production company manager, Abuja, 31 January 2021.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interviews, communal and civil society leaders, Lafia, Nasarawa state, December 2020.

IV. Stepping Up the Plan

Governments at the federal and state levels, working with donors and investors, need to act with some urgency to shore up support and funding for the Plan and ensure that states can carry it through over the next eight years. Priorities should include improving public communication and awareness, ensuring proper funding and accountability, building technical expertise, and improving security in and around the reserves where ranches are to be built. The Plan's proponents should focus their efforts toward showing visible results between now and the commencement of campaigns for the 2023 elections. At the least, by then they should be able to point to some newly constructed ranches or rehabilitated reserves, strong donor and investor commitments, and the first batch of newly trained livestock management professionals and extension agents.

A. *Provide Stronger Political Leadership*

Federal and state authorities should demonstrate stronger political commitment and better leadership in rallying support for the Plan and driving its implementation. President Buhari and his ministers should seize every opportunity to speak out, particularly drawing attention to the Plan's potential benefits to herders, farmers and the overall national economy. The president might need to convene a cabinet-level retreat, at which he and his aides would properly brief all ministers and other relevant senior officials about the Plan and the strategies for meeting its goals. These officials should subsequently stay focused on promoting the Plan and stop suggesting alternatives that tend to dilute support.

Leaders of various ethnic, regional, religious and other pressure groups sometimes enjoy considerable legitimacy among their supporters. In seeking to boost support for the Plan, therefore, federal and state governments should seek to bring leaders of the most prominent groups on board, prevail on them to eschew hostile rhetoric and enlist their voices in support. Concerted messaging on the Plan, by both government officials and leaders of these diverse groups, would go a long way toward broadening and strengthening citizen support for accelerating and sustaining implementation.

B. *Improve Public Communication*

The federal and state governments need to improve public communication and increase buy-in from stakeholders. A Plan based on making far-reaching changes to livestock management practices – some of which are deeply entrenched in pastoralist culture – needs to be supported by a persuasive campaign explaining how the new livestock production system is designed to work. This campaign should lay particular emphasis on how the Plan's potential benefits would outweigh losses to particular groups and individuals and how these losses may be compensated. In particular, authorities should marshal clear, convincing evidence of the benefits to pastoralists who will be asked to limit their movements to grazing reserves; livestock owners who must now buy fodder to feed their cattle; and farmers who may have to stop cultivating areas earmarked as grazing reserves or shift to producing fodder and other feeds for cattle.

At the federal level, the Program Coordination Secretariat in the Office of the Vice President and the ministerial implementation committee in the federal ministry of agriculture should distribute the Plan more widely, including to major civil society organisations, influential newspaper columnists and popular radio/television talk show personalities, all of whom can boost public awareness. They should also exploit online platforms and social media tools in disseminating information about the Plan's provisions as well as progress on its implementation. The government should task the National Orientation Agency, the federal body mandated with raising public awareness about government policies, to mount a nationwide campaign aimed at boosting public knowledge about the Plan and softening opposition.⁷⁷

State governments also need to better publicise the Plan, as well as its opportunities for investors and updates on its progress.⁷⁸ They should engage with mass media and civil society organisations to explain the Plan, generate debate about its potential benefits and solicit support. They should also organise more sensitisation programs for both herders and farmers, taking such programs from state capitals to rural areas. Given the present widescale ignorance about the Plan's potential benefits, such programs should include demonstration events for innovations that it seeks to promote, showcasing new animal husbandry methods to pastoralists and new fodder production systems to farmers in order to persuade the two groups to adopt them.

C. *Ensure Funding and Accountability*

Federal and state governments must also make deliberate efforts to address funding shortfalls. They should seek loans or grants from donors such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the International Development Agency. As the federal government has already indicated that its funding would be focused on boosting primary production, state governments should step up engagement with foreign investors and international development partners to scale up the expansion of value chains in such areas as dairy production, meat processing and logistics.

Foreign donors and international development agencies should offer greater financial and technical support to help Nigeria implement the Plan. There are already various indications of support. A five-member Dutch consortium, the Holland Dairy House Group, is already engaged in start-up projects in four states. The Brazil-Nigeria Green Imperative, a four-member Brazilian consortium, is offering Nigeria an investment package of over \$1 billion, mainly for construction of power plants, training structures and agro-processing factories, that would help scale up agricultural reforms

⁷⁷ The National Orientation Agency is a federal government agency, established by Decree 100 of 1993, with a mandate to "consistently raise awareness, positively change attitudes, values and behaviors; accurately and adequately inform, and sufficiently mobilize citizens to act in ways that promote peace and harmony". It has offices in all 774 local government areas across the country, with over 5,000 staff, but is severely under-funded and lacks operational equipment. See "Grounded vehicles, dilapidated buildings dot offices of 'voiceless' NOA", *Daily Trust*, 7 February 2021.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, Very Rev. Fr Alfred Azige, cathedral administrator, Catholic diocese of Lafia, December 2020.

over a ten-year period.⁷⁹ The UN Food and Agriculture Organization, which supported the Plan's formulation, is also providing guidance on implementation to the federal government and several state governments. Donors and development agencies should sustain these engagements, supporting not only governments but also other actors, especially local and international civil society groups that are involved in strengthening the "supporting pillars" of the Plan.

An important condition for attracting donor funding is the guarantee of accountability. Over the years, fraud has crippled too many well-meaning agricultural projects, some of which had already received substantial donor support.⁸⁰ To guard against the Plan suffering the same fate, the Program Coordinating Secretariat should prioritise and promote measures that can help ensure that participating states spend donor funds accountably. Independently, state government should establish tight financial controls to prevent misuse of funds. Donors should insist that states show arrangements for ensuring prudence and accountability, as a condition for access to funds pledged for projects under the Plan. One way of doing this might be through arrangements whereby the donor funds would be held in accounts to which donors are joint signatories with state authorities and both parties also agree on arrangements for joint monitoring and evaluation of the funded projects.

D. *Build Technical Capacity*

The federal and state governments should also step up efforts to build capacity for executing the Plan. A key priority should be to redefine the roles and responsibilities of both levels of government in agricultural extension services and to revitalise these services in all states. The National Assembly has an Agricultural Extension Services Bill under consideration; lawmakers should expedite its approval in order to ensure a stronger legal and funding framework for expansion of training countrywide.

Governments should also commence staff training to deliver better extension services in the livestock sector. The federal government is taking some steps: in January 2021, the minister of agriculture and rural development, Mohammad Sabo Nanono, said the government was already designing protocols for training between 75,000 and 110,000 extension agents; in March, the ministry started training 1,110 agriculture extension agents across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory.⁸¹ These steps are welcome but, given the scale and urgency of the needs, such training programs need to be scaled up and accelerated.

⁷⁹ The consortium comprises Getúlio Vargas Foundation (Brazil), the Brazilian Machinery Manufacturers Association, Deutsche Bank and the Brazilian National Bank for Economic and Social Development.

⁸⁰ On 27 February 2021, the Benue state governor, Samuel Ortom, called on the federal government to probe the contracts that were quickly awarded for establishment of Rural Grazing Areas in some states, after the RUGA scheme was announced – and then suspended – in 2019. He said the government should recover the funds paid out for execution of those contracts and use them for the National Livestock Transformation Plan. "Ortom demands probe into failed RUGA contracts", *The Nation*, 27 February 2021.

⁸¹ "Dearth of extension agents hampering diversification", op. cit.; "FG begins training of 1,110 agric extension workers", *The Punch*, 9 March 2021.

State governments should seek staff training opportunities with countries that have well-developed ranching and livestock management programs, such as the Netherlands, Australia and Brazil, through their diplomatic missions in Abuja. They could also partner with private companies that already run successful cattle ranches in Nigeria, such as Shonga Farms Holding Nigeria in Kwara state, Sebore Farms in Adamawa state, Nagari Integrated Dairy Farm in Nasarawa state, Maizube Farms in Niger state and Zaidi Farms in Kaduna state.

As the Plan progresses, the federal government should also devote greater attention to equipping pastoralists' children for jobs in the livestock value chain – including production, processing and marketing. The federal government should expand the mandate of the National Commission for Nomadic Education and correspondingly provide more funding to ensure that it delivers on its mandate of providing educational services for herders' children.⁸²

E. *Improve Security*

The federal government must make a more vigorous effort to stem the deepening insecurity in many states. Military and police operations against armed groups should remain a key priority, including measures to reduce the movement of the large number of illicit firearms in circulation and use across the country.⁸³ Security agencies should forge closer partnerships with community leaders, organising joint patrols on roads that connect settlements in the grazing reserves. They should also work more closely with traditional rulers, village and district heads, and pastoralists' leaders, as well as women and youth groups, to generate and share intelligence about security-related developments around the ranches and grazing reserves.⁸⁴

The Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, under the interior ministry, should also expand training and deployment of its Agro-Rangers Squads around the grazing reserves and proposed ranches. In September 2019, the Corps inaugurated a special Agro-Rangers Squad in Adamawa state, whose members had learned weapons-handling skills necessary to protect grazing reserves.⁸⁵ It should replicate this endeavour in all the states that are carrying out livestock transformation projects.

As previous Crisis Group reports have detailed, and as the Plan itself recognises, security operations will not be enough to protect communities and provide an enabling environment for implementing livestock sector reform projects.⁸⁶ Such opera-

⁸² The National Commission for Nomadic Education is a federal agency established in 1989. Its mandate is to provide functional and relevant education to members of nomadic groups (including pastoralists and artisanal migrant fishermen) that would facilitate their integration into the nation's largely sedentary, mainstream economy, and also improve their livelihood skills, levels of income and productivity, ultimately equipping them to compete favourably in the nation's socio-economic and political affairs.

⁸³ Estimates of the number of illegal arms in Nigeria vary from six million to 30 million. See "Report on Small Arms, Mass Atrocities and Migration in Nigeria", SBM Intel, April 2020; and "30 million arms/weapons in wrong hands in Nigeria – ex-Army chief", *Vanguard*, 3 January 2021.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interviews, communal and civil society leaders in Adamawa, Nasarawa and Plateau states, December 2020-January 2021.

⁸⁵ "Civil Defence inaugurates squad to curb herders/farmers clashes", *The Nation*, 13 September 2019.

⁸⁶ For Crisis Group's major reports on conflicts and insecurity in northern Nigeria since 2014, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°216, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency*,

tions must be accompanied by action on the supporting pillars of the Plan, including establishing effective mechanisms for inclusive and sustained dialogue, especially between herders and farmers; improving the administration of justice to sanction perpetrators of violence, compensate victims and curb impunity; supporting the voluntary and safe return of persons and communities displaced by violence; and providing displaced persons with early recovery and livelihood support as they return to their home settlements. These tasks and responsibilities require engagement by various agencies of the federal and state governments, firmly coordinated by relevant agencies under the presidency.

F. *Establish Structures for Sustainability*

Beyond addressing existing challenges, a further priority must be to insulate the Plan from the vagaries of changing administrations and sustain implementation throughout its projected ten-year timeframe. The Plan must have a firm legal and institutional basis. The Senate is deliberating on a bill that seeks to establish a national livestock bureau, but this measure is inadequate, as the proposed bureau's mandate is limited to registering cattle, so as to be able to trace them, as well as preventing rustling and controlling livestock disease.⁸⁷ What is needed is legislation establishing an agency for comprehensive livestock sector transformation along the lines laid out in the Plan. The presidency or the leaders of the National Assembly (federal parliament) should act with urgency to sponsor a bill for this purpose, which should include a mandatory funding formula. Once this process is initiated, the National Assembly leaders should expedite deliberations to ensure the bill is passed for Buhari to sign into law before the legislators disperse to their constituencies to campaign for the 2023 elections.

State-level implementation arrangements also need to be secured by clear legal frameworks. In Plateau state, the governor has sent a bill to the state parliament seeking to establish a Plateau State Livestock Transformation Program, thereby giving the Plan legal backing in the state.⁸⁸ Other state governments should do the same.

G. *Address Transhumant Pastoralism and Climate Change*

As noted earlier, the Plan does not address two issues crucial to successful livestock sector reform: transhumance between Nigeria and its neighbours and the impact of climate change.

The federal government needs to start reviewing existing legislation and other regulations for the management of international transhumant herders, as northern leaders including Sokoto state Governor Aminu Tambuwal have urged.⁸⁹ Particularly important is the 1998 Protocol on Transhumance promulgated by the Economic

3 April 2014; Crisis Group Report, *Herders against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict*, op. cit.; Crisis Group Report, *Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence*, op. cit.; and Crisis Group Report, *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem*, op. cit.

⁸⁷ "Senate moves to create database for livestock", *Premium Times*, 21 April 2021.

⁸⁸ "Lalong sends livestock transformation bill to Plateau assembly", *The Punch*, 3 March 2021.

⁸⁹ See, for instance, "Tambuwal: ECOWAS protocol must be reviewed to check influx of foreign herders into Nigeria", *The Cable*, 7 March 2021.

Community of West African States (ECOWAS), to which Nigeria is a signatory, and which provides for international movements of pastoralists within the region. To that end, Abuja, which is the largest contributor to the West African sub-regional organisation, should engage with the ECOWAS commission, as well as the governments of Cameroon and Chad, to reach new agreements on how to better monitor and regulate international transhumant pastoralism.

In the short term, all countries concerned should work out agreements requiring that transhumant pastoralists be properly documented on entry into countries and that they proceed, through recognised stock routes, to specific reserves that have sufficient grazing resources to accommodate them, possibly within a limited distance from the international boundary. Such new arrangements should be incorporated into the Plan. In the longer term, the Nigerian government and its ECOWAS counterparts should review the existing Transhumance Protocol in light of the fact that the conditions under which it was drafted have changed considerably, especially given the growth of transnational security threats.⁹⁰

Secondly, the government should ensure that all states participating in the Plan integrate measures to mitigate climate change's impact, both in better understanding where and how climate factors have exacerbated resource competition and in tailoring policy responses to address future climate projections. Federal authorities should provide states with forecasts of future rainfall and water availability, requiring them to take this modelling into account in selecting ranch locations. In turn, state authorities should develop policy options beyond stationary ranching that more flexibly allow for pastoralists to make use of seasonably available resources while reducing the potential for land disputes.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, Adamu Lawal Toro, acting national publicity secretary, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, 11 April 2021.

V. Conclusion

The National Livestock Transformation Plan is no magic wand; it cannot wave herder-farmer conflict away. Nevertheless, its proper implementation could afford many benefits. The comprehensive livestock reform it envisages could modernise Nigeria's agriculture and improve its efficiency, reduce herder-farmer violence and improve security countrywide. By contrast, its stalled implementation would leave the country exposed to renewed violence between herders and farmers, which would sharpen ethnic, regional and religious divides and put even more pressure on already overstretched security forces. If the federal and state governments fail to deliver results before the 2023 general elections, a new administration could feel justified in shelving the Plan altogether, abandoning it to the fate of previous livestock management reforms. In contrast, progress on the Plan, with visible achievements over the next two years, will help build public support, improving the prospects that it will be sustained to achieve its goals.

Abuja/Dakar/Nairobi/Brussels, 4 May 2021

Appendix A: Map of Nigeria



Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

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After President & CEO Robert Malley stood down in January 2021 to become the U.S. Iran envoy, two long-serving Crisis Group staff members assumed interim leadership until the recruitment of his replacement. Richard Atwood, Crisis Group's Chief of Policy, is serving as interim President and Comfort Ero, Africa Program Director, as interim Vice President.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kiev, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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