

**INSECURITY, NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT: INTERROGATING THE LEGAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2021 ASABA DECLARATION\***

**Abstract**

*Governments all over the world have a number of responsibilities, prominent among which is the security and welfare of the people. These responsibilities are not only important, but statutory as can be seen in Section 14(2b) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). As unjustifiable as that responsibility is, the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari made the issue of security a cardinal point of his administration via his campaign manifesto – in addition to the economy and anti-corruption. Events of the past few years have witnessed a worrisome deterioration of security in every nook and cranny of the Nigerian federation. The dimension to the insecurity challenge in recent time – especially in the last five years beginning from 2016, appears to be threatening the corporate existence of the Nigerian state, leading to the setting up of regional security outfits in various parts of the country. Governors of the 17 states in the Southern part of the country on May 11, 2021, met in Asaba, the Delta state capital and came up with a 12-point communique, where various resolutions were made on topical issues that border on security and national integration. In view of the reactions that have continued to trail the communique, this paper examines the legal and social implications of the 2021 Asaba declaration, bearing in mind the tripartite variables of security, national integration and development. Findings from the study revealed that the security challenges facing the nation have negative implications for national cohesion and development. The paper therefore recommends, among others, that aspects of the Asaba declaration that needs statutory underpinnings should be incorporated into the constitutional amendment exercise being undertaken by the Nigerian Senate.*

**Keywords:** Insecurity, National Integration, Development and Constitution

**1. Introduction**

The security of lives and properties of citizens within a nation is the primary responsibility of every government. When the security of a nation is assured, the unity and development of the nation is almost imperative. Where the reverse is the case the nation grapples with incessant disunity and instability. Nigeria as a nation has been met with a whole lot of issues that threaten and endanger the fabrics of the country's cohesion, security and development. The situation is further complicated by the complex makeup of the Nigerian federation, which, in the views of Osaghae<sup>1</sup> is one of the most complex countries on planet earth. The complexity of the Nigerian federation has made the tasks of providing adequate security, enhancing national integration and promoting inclusive development not only difficult but complicated. While there are laws in place to help achieve the security and other social objectives of government, the application of these regulations appears to be met with ethnic, religious and other primordial sentimental attachments that are deeply seated in the hearts and minds of the Nigerian people, which sometimes constitute a clog in the wheel of the progress of the nation. That notwithstanding, the Constitution of a country especially in a democratic system of government remains the supreme law, that is, the grund norm from which no derogation ought to be permitted. The provisions of the constitution have binding force on all authorities, institutions and persons. This was the position of the court in the case of *FRN v Ifeagwu*.<sup>2</sup> It is ideally supposed to afford the citizens a solace, a place of refuge, a safe haven, to which they run to anytime there is an infringement of their rights. As a candidate in the 2015 general elections, Muhammadu Buhari, the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress made the issue of Security a cardinal point of his campaign manifesto – in addition to the economy and anti-corruption. However, events of the past few years have witnessed a worrisome deterioration of security in every nook and cranny of the Nigerian federation. The dimension to the insecurity challenge in recent time – especially in the last five years beginning in 2016, appears to be threatening the corporate existence of the Nigerian state, leading to the setting up of regional security outfits in various parts of the country. While the security agencies appear to be doing their best within the limitations of time, resources and intelligence available to them, their efforts were being interpreted – rightly or wrongly - in many quarters as being tilted in favour or against particular sections of

\*By **Obinna MBANUGO, LLB, LLM, PhD, BL**, Lecturer, Department of International Law and Jurisprudence, Faculty of Law, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State, Email: o.mbanugo@unizik.edu.ng Phone: 08037749145, 07069016828; and

\***Emeka Francis OBI**, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State Email: femeka2019@gmail.com Phone: 07030305905.

<sup>1</sup> E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence*. (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Limited). p.3

<sup>2</sup> (2003) Nigeria Weekly Law Report pt. 798.

the country, forcing the government of various component units in the Nigerian federation to promulgate laws establishing regional security outfits to complement the efforts of the federal government in their onerous task of securing lives and properties

Ethnoreligious colorations have tainted many aspects of the security challenges - kidnapping, farmers-herders' clashes, banditry, terrorism, among others - confronting the country with far reaching implications for national cohesion, national integration and national development. Several studies have linked the issue of rising food shortage in Nigeria to the problem of insecurity. For instance, Suleiman<sup>3</sup> is of the view that the issue of open cattle grazing – which is the major cause of farmers-herders' clashes – often lead to damage to crops, low agricultural yield, loss of revenue to farmers and increase in food prices. In retaliation, farmers-herders' clashes result in loss of lives, destruction of properties, cattle rustling, among others. All these have economic and social implications. While the economic implication borders largely on its negative impact on economic growth and development, the social implication is that it exposes the fault lines that have continued to threaten the peace and unity of the various ethnic nationalities in the corporate entity called Nigeria.

It is therefore not surprising the mixed reaction that trailed the 12-point communiqué of the governors of the 17 states in the Southern part of the country, who on May 11, 2021, met in Asaba, the Delta state capital to discuss the state of the nation as it affects their region. The interpretation of the different aspects of the resolutions of the southern governors - now known as the Asaba Declaration - can be said to largely depend on the points of view and backgrounds of the individual in question, thus, leading to an avalanche of consenting and dissenting opinions. In view of the cacophony of voices on this critical national issue, this paper explores the legal and social implications of the Asaba Declaration from the tripod of insecurity, national integration and development.

## **2. Conceptual Clarifications**

In order to ensure a better understanding of the present research, certain key terminologies shall be explained under this sub-head:

### **Insecurity**

In its simplest form, insecurity connotes the absence of security. Therefore, to better interrogate the issue of insecurity, it will be appropriate to better appreciate first, the concept of security. What then do we mean when we talk about security? The term security means different things to different people. In general terms, it connotes the absence of danger or threats. Security could be physical, financial / economic or social, but for the purpose of this paper, we will be restricted to physical security. Physical security has to do with the protection from and denial of unauthorized access to someone, or his personal effects. It involves protection from physical or bodily harm, assault, battery, death, physical freedom etc. Physical security is so essential because where available, it enhances freedom of movement; expression; thought, conscience and religion; and freedom of choice especially during elections in a democratic society like Nigeria. Government all over the world invest heavily in the security of the lives and properties of their citizens as a baseline approach towards the attainment of a stable, peaceful and prosperous society.

In the 2018 budget, for instance, data from the Budget of the Federation as obtained by BudGIT<sup>4</sup> indicates that security gulped N1.323tn out of a total budget figure of over N9.1tn. This represents an increase of almost a hundred billion naira as the figure for 2017 was N1.142tn out of a total budget figure of about N7.3tn, representing 14.5 percent and 15.6 percent respectively. Going further memory lane, the security sector, in 2016, 2015 and 2014, got N1.063tn, N969bn and N932bn respectively. The latitude and coverage of government expenditure on security in this sense, include all financial allocation directed at the protection of Nigeria's borders against foreign threats, and also, all expenses incurred in relation to security-related activities within Nigeria. The heavy financial expenditure of government – all over the world – on security, shows how important it is for a society to be rid of all forms of insecurities. Insecurity exist where all the aspect of physical security highlighted above are absent. In the views of Ndubuisi-Okolo, and Anigbuogu,<sup>5</sup> insecurity connotes the state of palpable anxiety, fear and uncertainty that envelops the citizens as a result of several factors, which could be failure of state security apparatus, proliferation of small arms

---

<sup>3</sup>H. Sulaiman, 'Policy Issues in Pastoral Development in Nigeria.' Paper Presented at a Conference on Pastoralism in Nigeria. Zaria, 26th–29th June 2015

<sup>4</sup><https://yourbudgit.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/SECURITY-PROPOSED-2018-BUDGET.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup>P. Ndubuisi-Okolo and T. Anigbuogu, 'Insecurity in Nigeria: The Implication for Industrialization and Sustainable Development', *International Journal of Research in Business Studies and Management*, (2019) vol.6, issue 5, p. 10

and light weapons in the hands of unauthorized persons, increase in crime and criminality, terrorism, banditry, among others.

The views expressed by Achumba, Ighomeroho and Akpor<sup>6</sup> on insecurity were anchored on two broad perspectives. Firstly, insecurity can be seen as a state of people being open or subject to potential danger or threat of danger. Danger, in this case, is the condition of being vulnerable to injury or harm. The second viewpoint identifies insecurity as a state of being exposed to risk or anxiety. Anxiety here has to do with an unclear but unpleasant emotion that is experienced in the expectation of some possible misfortune. Insecurity therefore depicts a feeling of uncertainty and realization of being exposed to harmful situations. The consequences of lack or absence of security in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Nigeria is far-reaching, some of which borders on national integration and development. The twin variables of national integration and development will be discussed subsequently.

### **National Integration**

For a country like Nigeria, national integration is as important as any other economic or social objectives of a nation or state. In its simplest form, national integration connotes national unity born of a feeling of harmony, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence among the different components of the Nigerian society; or any multi-cultural, multi-ethnic or multi-religious society for that matter. As a social objective, national integration cannot be enforced. Rather, it grows silently in the hearts of the people and manifest in their actions through patriotic dispositions, a sense of nationalism, unity of purpose and national direction, as well as the selfless ability to place parochial and sectarian proclivities far below national unity.

The idea of national integration is that despite the differences in tribe and tongues, religious inclinations or ethnic backgrounds, political views or orientation, there is a latent and manifest awareness of a mutual and shared identity among the nationals and citizens of a country. According to Onyeakazi and Okoroafor<sup>7</sup>, national integration is basically the process of bringing peoples of diverse ethnic, cultural, social and other backgrounds together in a specified social setting or polity for the collective good and interests of all. The quest for national integration in Nigeria becomes all the more important in view of the centrifugal and centripetal forces that always interplay with the politics, policy making and governance actions. There is always the challenge of mutual suspicion among the various ethnic nationalities and the manifestations of these suspicions by the elites have in no small measure contributed to the near disintegration of the corporate existence of the Nigerian nation. The events that led to the 30-month civil war and the recent calls for the disintegration of the country by separatist groups in various parts of the country are signs that the fabrics that hold the different aspects of the Nigerian nation together are becoming weaker. The activities of these secessionist agitators have, in recent times, take on a violent turn and provides ample evidence to our belief in this paper that the attainment of national integration will positively rub off on our development efforts as a developing nation. The notion of development therefore constitutes the focus of our next discussion.

### **Development**

Development is an economic and a social concept which means different things to different people, depending on the perspective one is viewing the concept from. As an economic concept, development can be interpreted to mean a positive and sustained increase in economic activities that have the potentials of translating to better economic conditions for the majority of the people. In other words, development from an economic point of view connotes a sustained economic growth process that translate to better welfare, more income and wealth for the people and an increased economic ability to access life's basic and essential amenities in the forms of good food, healthcare, better clothing and conducive shelter for the majority of the people.

In its simplest term therefore, development is the gradual and sustained growth aimed at advancement and progression from a less desirable state to a more desirable state.<sup>8</sup> Citing Rodney, Ikpeze<sup>9</sup> presents the many-sided processes of development: at the level of individual – as implying increased skilled capacity, greater

---

<sup>6</sup>O.S Achumba, M Ighomereho, and O.M Akporobaro. 'Security Challenges in Nigeria and the Implications for Business Activities and Sustainable Development' *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*. (2013) 4(2), p. 82

<sup>7</sup>J Onyeakazi and EC Okoroafor, (2018). 'National integration in Nigeria: A Philosophical Insight' *International Journal of Novel Researches in Humanities, Social Sciences and Management*.(2018) 1 (1) p. 54

<sup>8</sup>O, Ikpeze, 'Non-Justiciability of Chapter II of the Nigerian Constitution as an Impediment to Economic Rights and Development', Internet material obtained from [www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net) accessed 7 June 2021.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

freedom...and material well-being. These are the social aspects of development that centers on the individual or a social group. Further he stated that a society develops economically as its members increase their capacity for dealing with their environment which entails...exploiting the resources of nature and profiting from same. Development can also be said to be a process that creates growth, progress, positive change and/or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components. The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. Development is visible and useful, not necessarily immediately, and includes an aspect of quality change and the creation of conditions for a continuation of that change.<sup>10</sup>Development is the ultimate economic and social objective of many countries of the world, especially those classified as developing nations. Development efforts cannot effectively thrive in a society battling with security challenges and the crises of national integration. Some development efforts require the force of law; others need the political and collective will of the leadership and the followership to achieve. The formulation and implementation of development policies and programmes are usually followed by the allocation, disbursement and utilization of public funds as prescribed by the constitution of the country.

### **Constitution**

The Nigeria Supreme Court had in *Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) v Osahon*<sup>11</sup>posited that the constitution of any country is the embodiment of what a people desire to be their guiding light in governance, their supreme law, fountain of all their laws. As such it is expected that a constitution cannot for any reason whatsoever contain ambiguities in any of the provisions contained therein. All its provisions must be such that can be given a literal interpretation, the imperfections and clumsiness of the draftsman notwithstanding. Common sense must be applied to give meaning to all its sections and articles. Every provision of the constitution must be enforceable and thus it be an aberration and a gross abnormality if any of the provisions of the constitution becomes/is made unenforceable or non-justiciable. The term “constitution” is further defined as “a body of fundamental principles or established precedents according to which a state or other organization is acknowledged to be governed”.<sup>12</sup>It is the basic principles and laws of a nation, state, or social group that determine the powers and duties of the government and guarantees certain rights to the people in it. It is usually a written instrument embodying the rules of a political or social organization.<sup>13</sup>

### **3. Asaba Declaration 2021: Interrogating the Legality or otherwise of the Southern Governors Forum Resolution**

The Governors of the 17 Southern States of Nigeria met on Tuesday the 11<sup>th</sup> day of May 2021, in Asaba, Delta State to discuss the state of the nation, especially the issue of security, which is of common interest to them.<sup>14</sup> In that meeting, they raised key issues about the future of the Nigerian nation in general and the Southern region. Apparently, the outing in Asaba was not the first time that the governors from the southern region would be meeting. However, this particular meeting attracted special interest for a number of reasons. First is the symbolism of the meeting. There are various subgroups under the Nigerian Governors’ Forum. While the Northern Governor’s forum appears to be more organized and united, their counterparts in the south usually prefer to meet under the aegis of the Southeast, South-west or South-south Governor’s forum. Therefore, the meeting in Asaba symbolizes a change in approach and a pointer to the much talked about southern unity in some quarters.

Another remarkable reason that attracted special interest to the Asaba meeting of governors from the southern parts of Nigeria is the timing and the weightiness of the outcome of the meeting. The timing of the meeting was also apt in view of the security situation in the country at the time and for the first time in a long while; governors from the southern parts of Nigeria spoke with one accord and came up with a joint resolution. The 12-point declaration in Asaba can be divided into the non-controversial and the controversial. In the former category, the declarations therein are mere expressions of commitment to the unity of Nigeria on the basis of justice, fairness and equity, with emphasis on the co-operation among the Southern states. Some of the element contained in these uncontroversial declarations included, strategies needed to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to address the security challenges in the country, the need for the

---

<sup>10</sup>What is Development? – Sid Israel – Society for International Development’, Internet material obtained from www.sid-ireal.org accessed 11<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>11</sup> (2006) 10 NWLR (PT 647) p. 264.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Definition of Constitution’, Internet material obtained from www.dictionary.com accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2021.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> R Abati, ‘The Asaba Declaration by Southern Governors’, *This Day*, May 18, 2021.

activation and establishment of ports in other states of the federation to create new jobs and promote socio-economic activities; with Nigeria's unemployment standing at 33.3% according to the National Bureau of Statistics. These declarations are indeed uncontroversial and faultless.<sup>15</sup> The problem however, is with the controversial observations and resolutions of the Southern Governors Forum, beginning with their declaration of a ban on open grazing of cattle in every part of Southern Nigeria, their call for the convocation of a national dialogue, their demand for restructuring (state police, review of revenue allocation formula in favour of the sub-national units and practice of true federalism) and their resolve that appointments in Federal Government Agencies must be reviewed in line with Federal Character.<sup>16</sup> This has thrown up ethnic and geographical sentiments – a veritable indication of the fault lines in Nigeria and the inherited culture of the mistrust that has been the bane of the country's developmental process.

Assessing the legal connotations of the declarations, the holistic and sacrosanct nature of Section 14 (2) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) lend a complete credence to the appropriateness of the declarations by the Southern governors. By way of emphasis, the provisions of the said section are as follows:

14(2) it is hereby accordingly declared that – sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through this Constitution derives all its powers and authority; The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government; and the participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.

The subsection is notable and affords the very foundation and essence of modern democracy. This implies the active participation of the people in their own government, either directly or through their representatives. In this case, the Southern Nigeria Governors' forum can be said to have acted on the demands of the people of Southern Nigeria in view of the fact that the said section of the constitution confers sovereignty on the people. However, it is seen that the totality of Chapter 2 of the Constitution which encapsulates section 14 thereof is made non-justiciable by virtue of the provisions of section 6(6)(c). The implication of this is that although the sovereignty of the people is expressly provided for in the constitution, it can by no means be enforced. At best, the people may raise their voice to the government and hope that they are heard. Experience has shown how rarely they are ever heard. An examination of the implications of such non-justiciability will show that citizens cannot obtain redress from the courts if denied their socioeconomic, developmental and other rights provided for in this chapter of the constitution.<sup>17</sup> It is therefore a formidable impediment to the socioeconomic development of the nation.

It is imperative to reproduce the provisions of Section 6 sub-section 6 of the Constitution hereunder: Section 6 (6) provides that:

- 6 (6) the judicial powers vested in accordance with the foregoing provisions of this section;
- a) Shall extend, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this constitution, to all inherent powers and sanctions of a court of law;
  - b) Shall extend to all matters between persons, or between government or authority and any person in Nigeria, and to all actions and proceedings relating thereto, for the determination of any question as to the civil rights and obligations of that person;
  - c) Shall not, except as otherwise provided by this Constitution, extend to any issue or question as to whether any law or any judicial decision is in conformity with the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy set out in Chapter II of this Constitution.

A comprehensive reading of this section will show that the provisions of paragraph (c), has taken away what the provisions of paragraphs (a) and (b) had given and thus is an aberration which in a constitutional provision rocks the root of its constitutionality and runs afoul of the proceeding provisions of section 6(a) and (b) and indeed against public policy whereby a fundamental policy that cuts across economic rights purports to be created. In addition to this, it also inhibits the courts of law in Nigeria from the exercise of their inherent powers to adjudicate on any matter and give sanctions where necessary on all matters between persons and government, or authority and persons in Nigeria for the determination of any question as to civil

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> O, Ikpeze, *op.cit.*

rights and obligations of that person. The point being made here is that section 6 (6) (c) has taken away what section 6 (6) (a) and (b) had given. Looking at the provisions of section 6(6) (a), the word notwithstanding as used in the section implies that nothing in the constitution can derogate from the powers of the court. This interpretation is akin to that given by the Court of Appeal in *Attorney General of the Federation (AG Fed) v Abubakar*<sup>18</sup> where the court expounded the term “notwithstanding” to mean without being affected by and in *Messin v Nwachukwu*<sup>19</sup> where the court held that it means in spite of. The Supreme Court also held in *NDIC v Okem Enterprises Ltd*<sup>20</sup> that the word “notwithstanding” is meant to exclude imaginary or impeding effect of any other provision of the statute. And so, as Ikpeze rightly opined, the word “notwithstanding” used in section 6(6)(a) of the Constitution excludes any impeding ouster of the inherent powers and sanctions of a court of law. Matters between persons or between government or authority and any persons, section 6 (6) (c) purporting to oust the inherent powers and sanctions of a court in Nigeria on Chapter II is therefore unconstitutional as well as an aberration.<sup>21</sup>

Howbeit, the said provisions which in the instant case, the Southern governors are presumed to be relying on to make their declarations are still non-justiciable and thus one can only but ponder on the efficacy of the declarations made by the Southern governors. This position is exacerbated by the fact that judicial authorities have not also been helpful in resolving this dilemma. Thus, the court in *Attorney General of Ondo State v Attorney General of the Federation*<sup>22</sup> merely re-emphasized the already contradictory provisions of section 6 of the constitution when it stated that it is well established as per s. 6(6)(c) that the rights under the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy are not justiciable except as otherwise provided in the constitution.<sup>23</sup>

#### **4. Asaba Declaration 2021: Implications for National Security, National Integration and Development**

Having dwelt on the legality of the issues emanating from the 12-point declaration of the governors from the southern parts of Nigeria, it must be noted at this point that the most controversial of the 12-point demands and one that has elicited the most reaction is the ban on open grazing in all parts of southern Nigeria. In agricultural science or practice, livestock grazing is a form of animal husbandry whereby domestic animals - especially cattle - are allowed to roam around and eat from the wild grasses, vegetation of the earth and in some cases arable crops planted by farmers<sup>24</sup>. The practice of grazing of cattle is as old as civilization and the Fulani ethnic group is one of the ethnic nationalities that have sustained this tradition over time. However, in recent times, there have been clashes between herders and farmers. The complexity of these clashes in different parts of the country, notably Benue, Plateau, Oyo, Ebonyi among other states of the Nigerian federation has contributed in no small measures to whipping up ethnic sentiments and raising the bars of ethnic suspicion among various ethnic groups in Nigeria. details of some of the incidents of farmers-herders' clashes have been copiously reported in the broadcast, print and online media spaces in Nigeria and need not to be repeated in this discussion.

It is our collective view in this article however; that what has not been given full attention is the security and social consequences of the open grazing challenge and its implication for national integration and national cohesion. Not too long ago, the governor of Ondo state in Southwest Nigeria, Rotimi Akeredolu (SAN), in January of 2021 issued a quit notice to Fulani herdsmen in Ondo state, asking them to vacate the state's forest reserves. The governor, who was reported in several electronic and print media outlets, said that the activities of the herders in the forests constitute potent threats to the security of the state. According to a Premium Times report by Adejumo,<sup>25</sup> information obtained from the debriefings of kidnap victims in the state suggests that the forest reserves in the state has been converted to hideouts for keeping kidnapped victims by herdsmen who are mostly of the Fulani extraction.

---

<sup>18</sup>(2007) 8 NWLR 9Pt 1035) 117.

<sup>19</sup> (1999) 6 NWLR (Pt 605) 154.

<sup>20</sup> (2004) 10 NWLR (Pt 80) 107.

<sup>21</sup> O, Ikpeze, *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> (2002) 9 NWLR (PT 772).

<sup>23</sup> See also *Okogie v A.G Lagos State* (1981) NCLR 2187.

<sup>24</sup>E. Chukwuemeka, A. Aduma and M. Eneh, 'The logic of open grazing in Nigeria: Interrogating the effect on sustainable development,' *International Journal of Family Business and Management Studies*. 2 (1): 1 – 17. 2018.

<sup>25</sup>KAdejumo, 'Akeredolu orders herdsmen to vacate Ondo forests within seven days'. *Premium Times* Monday January 18, 2021 available online at <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/south-west/437165-akeredolu-orders-herdsmen-to-vacate-ondo-forests-within-seven-days.html>.

A retrospective analysis of the events that happened in 2015 will also be necessary to recall when Chief Olu Falae, an elder statesman, former Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) and former presidential candidate of the defunct Alliance for Democracy was kidnapped in his farm. Investigations by the Nigerian police revealed that the incident was perpetrated by Fulani herdsmen some of who were captured, tried and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2017.<sup>26</sup> In Delta state of Nigeria, there have been protests over the purported atrocities of the Fulani herdsmen as reported in several news media outlets. Women in Edjekota-Ogor community in Ugbelli North Local Government Area of Delta state protested in November 2018 against the activities of armed Fulani herdsmen.<sup>27</sup> In the month of March 2021, hundreds of women in Abraka, Ethiope East Local Government Area also protested the alleged killing of a man and two of his sons by suspected herdsmen.<sup>28</sup> The Punch Newspapers reported in 2016 that protesters from across the 25 Local Government Areas in Delta state barricaded the ever busy Benin-Asaba expressway to protest alleged killings in the state by suspected Fulani herdsmen.<sup>29</sup>

In the Southeastern part of Nigeria, the Ebonyi state governor, Eng. David Umahi lamented that despite the fact that his people accommodated and protected Fulani herdsmen in his state, they still killed his people. The lamentation, was reported by a prominent online news platform – Sahara reporters – the reported killing of 25 persons in Egedegede community in Ishielu Local Government Area of the state. There exist a litany of issues and complaints about the activities of these herdsmen of Fulani extraction in Plateau, Benue, Kaduna (especially the southern part of the state) among other states in the north and southern parts of Nigeria.

There are those who argue that the issue of tagging all herdsmen of Fulani extraction as kidnapers and murderers will be a negative form of ethnic profiling. Others subscribe to a conspiracy theory of a supposed Fulani expansionist programme through ethnic cleansing and forceful occupation of the ancestral lands of the various indigenous ethnic groups in Nigeria. The focus of this paper will neither be to amplify, falsify or justify the possibilities of these notions, nor to dismiss the thought processes of those who hold these views. After all, the Constitution of Nigeria in Sections 38 (1) and 39 (1) guarantees for all, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion as well as freedom of speech and expression. However, it is our informed opinion that the issue at present is threatening the security and corporate existence of Nigeria as a nation. Those who have held on to some of these views have amplified them to the point of truism and latched on to them to advance their parochial objectives to the detriment of our collective unity as a nation. Therefore, while the reactions to the Asaba declaration have been sharply divided along these parochial sentiments, it is hoped that the security angle to the problems being faced and its potential effect on the unity of the country will not be lost on every patriotic Nigerian.

The last leg of our tripartite variable is on the dimension of development. On this note, it is our informed opinion that development is dynamic, evolving, progressive and contemporary. While we struggle to remain neutral on the security angle to the issues at state in this paper, we must not fail to stress that holding on to the age long practice of open grazing is not only archaic, but antithetical to modernity and development. The researchers have observed that majority of the herdsmen do not own their herds of cattle but are employed by others – who are probably well-to-do individuals – to tend to them. The herdsmen are denied the basic comfort of good food, clothing and shelter, as they trek from the North Pole to the South Pole looking for grasses and water for their cattle. On the other hand, their employers enjoy these life's basic necessities. If our development efforts as a nation will focus on the people, then, these categories of individuals – herdsmen and their families – also deserve life's basic necessities and not living in the bushes, cut off from civilization and lacking access to those things that makes life worth living.

A number of experts have argued in favour of ranching. The advantage of this method of animal husbandry, according to them, is that ranched cattle is healthier and better fattened than the ones that have been made to trek for hundreds of kilometers. To this end, they have better economic values and produce more milk. The

---

<sup>26</sup>J Dayo, 'Court sentences seven Fulani herdsmen who kidnapped Chief Olu Falae to life imprisonment', *Vanguard Newspapers* Monday April 10, 2017 available online at [https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/04/court-sentence-seven-fulani-herdsmen-kidnapped-chief-olu-falae-life-imprisonment/amp/](https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/04/court-sentence-seven-fulani-herdsmen-kidnapped-chief-olu-falae-life-imprisonment/).

<sup>27</sup>P Brisibe, 'We're under siege by herdsmen, Delta women protest'. *Vanguard Newspapers*, Wednesday November 28, 2018 available online at [https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/11/were-under-siege-by-herdsmen-delta-women-protest/amp/](https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/11/were-under-siege-by-herdsmen-delta-women-protest/).

<sup>28</sup>Oladapo, M. (2021). 'Delta women protest herdsmen's killing of father, sons', *Daily Independent*, Friday March 26, 2021 available online at <http://independent.ng/delta-women-protest-herdsmens-kiling-of-father-sons/>.

<sup>29</sup>N Akenzua, and E Opara, 'Protest in Delta over alleged killings by Fulani herdsmen' *Punch Newspapers*, Wednesday April 20, 2016 available online at <https://www.punchng.com/protest-in-delta-over-alleged-killings-by-fulani-herdsmen/?amp>.

experience in Brazil is a good example. As a country with the second largest herd of cattle in the world, Brazil, according to Mustafa, Hansen, Hjort, and Valdes,<sup>30</sup> has 22.2 percent of the entire cattle herds in the world, 15.4 percent of the global production of beef and was the third largest producer of milk with about 35.1 billion liters as at 2018.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Southern governors' meeting in Asaba might have come and gone but its reverberating effects on the polity are still potent. For one, it brought to the fore, the deeply bifurcated nature of the Nigerian state, which, for the sake of political correctness on the part of the political elites, has not been on the front burner of political discussions for a long time. However, we conclude this treatise by asserting that the ethnic dimension to the security challenges facing the nation has negative implications for national cohesion and development. We believe that an honest effort at addressing these issues will achieve the desired result if we bear in mind the following recommendations.

1. First, the present researchers recommend that aspects of the Asaba declaration that need statutory/constitutional recognition should be incorporated into the constitutional amendment exercise being undertaken by the Nigerian Senate, especially the issues of state police.
2. We support the call by the Southern Nigerian governors for the convocation of a national dialogue to address issues of secessionist agitations, ethnic questions and other national questions that bothers on the corporate existence of the Nigerian state.
3. Finally, since the major issue of contention is the issue of open grazing, we recommend the establishment of ranching to address the constant clashes between herders and farmers. Our recommendation here is in view of the fact that these challenges impact negatively on food security which is an important indicator of development.

---

<sup>30</sup>Mustafa, Z., Hansen, J., Hjort, K. and Valdes, C. (2019). Brazil once again becomes the world's largest beef exporter. Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2019/july/brazil-once-again-becomes-the-world-s-largest-beef-exporter/>