

Pastoralist-farmer conflict in Nassarawa and Benue States, 2017

FINAL VERSION FOR CIRCULATION

Field investigations on pastoralist-farmers crises areas and enhancement of MISEREOR's partners interventions in Nigeria, Phase 3

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ACRONYMS

CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
NLPD	National Livestock Projects Department
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSO	Community Support Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ❖ The two main goals of the mission were to provide more in-depth information on the farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nasarawa and Benue States of south-central Nigeria and to organise a workshop in Benue to bring together experiences from the different dioceses and plan further collaborative action
- ❖ Extensive interviews were conducted with both pastoralists' and farmers' leaders in Nasarawa and Benue states, as well as government officials and relevant NGOs concerned with this issue.
- ❖ Four of the five bishops in the dioceses covered were consulted and ideas for action were discussed
- ❖ A workshop was held in Makurdi, April 18-19th, 2017, to discuss ideas for progressing proposals
- ❖ A preliminary version of this report was submitted to MISEREOR on 6th May 2017. It was discussed in Aachen on 15th May and a revised version was submitted on 25th May. This report repeats the background and conclusions of previous reports only in summary form. Most content results from the current mission

- ❖ The situation in Benue State first reported in May 2016 remains very serious with loss of life and property and a climate of fear persisting in many areas.
- ❖ Conflict in rural areas has resulted in high mortality of humans and livestock as well as destruction of property
- ❖ Banditry and intra-ethnic conflict in relation the trade in illicit drugs is also contributing to civil insecurity
- ❖ Benue State Government has drafted a bill to effectively exclude all pastoralists from the State, in contravention to Nigerian Federal law. It is currently undergoing a third reading in the State House of Assembly. This is likely to further exacerbate conflict
- ❖ Churches in Benue State openly tolerate racist propaganda against pastoralists. This is unlikely to result in equitable and co-operative solutions.
- ❖ In Nasarawa State, conflict is principally between indigenous farming groups, the Eggon and the Alago, and the herders are only involved in a peripheral fashion. In 2012-2013 there were serious clashes in communities such as Asaikio, where previously the Alago and the Eggon have lived peacefully side-by-side.
- ❖ A consequence is that in both Benue and Nasarawa States there are large numbers of 'hidden IDPS', those whose homes were destroyed in the conflicts and are currently living with relatives in towns, or in spaces such as primary schools.
- ❖ Security aspects of the situation can only be dealt with by the Nigerian government although lobbying may achieve changes in policy
- ❖ Nonetheless, there are many areas where NGOs and CBOs can act to improve matters by defusing tension. These include;
 - The creation of more effective information sharing systems. The mission found that little was known about events and policy in areas outside the immediate concern of individual projects. However a broader vision is essential in dealing with pastoralists, where remote events frequently affect local interactions
 - The more effective use of vernacular media to communicate analysis and information to all sides in conflict situations
 - The development of an internet presence, both to promote the goals of the organisation and to respond effectively to public enquiry as well as improving advocacy
 - A more systematic assessment of the role of traditional leaders in both reconciliation and exacerbation of conflict and dissemination of lessons learnt
 - In Nasarawa State, with its lower population density, a more effective use of stock routes and grazing reserves to reduce conflict between herders and farmers, would be politically acceptable

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- In the current state of opinion in Benue State, no immediate solution is possible.
- An extended effort to contact pastoralist leaders who have been excluded from the process of community dialogue

The current plans are to undertake two further missions in 2017, along the same lines as the present one;

- ✚ Visits to communities in Kogi, Kaduna, Plateau and possibly other states where MISEREOR has potential partners to develop a Central Nigeria coalition, most likely co-ordinated by DREP, Jos.
- ✚ Further visits to bishops in relevant dioceses to obtain institutional backing for these plans
- ✚ Workshop along the same lines as the one in Makurdi to develop a Central States coalition.
- ✚ Visits to pastoral camps in the far north of Nigeria, the base of many of the troublesome herds managed by single males which are the source of considerable trouble to assess a possible peace strategy
- ✚ Visits to communities in the Southwest of Nigeria, to follow up on Oyo and Ekiti visits in 2016 to develop a Southwest coalition
- ✚ Workshop following up on Makurdi and Jos to try and develop a coalition.

Additional goals;

- ✚ Develop a more comprehensive network of connections with diocesan offices and the problems they are experiencing
- ✚ Expand training in analytic report writing to a wide range of partner individuals as well as developing schedules of reporting
- ✚ Develop a regional database of trusted interlocutors, especially among pastoralists and train offices in the use of this

1. Introduction: background to the mission

Since 2001, the Jos crisis, Nigeria has seen a continuing expansion of conflict between farmers and the pastoralist FulBe, the traditional cattle-herders who have grazed their herds in the semi-arid regions for centuries. With the changing ecology and security environment following the creation of colonial Nigeria, the herders were able to move south and exploit the rich grazing of the higher rainfall zones. This was made possible by a reduced fear of attacks on herds and veterinary advances, protecting the cattle against the trypanosomoses, which had previously kept them out.

On the whole, this large-scale migration southwards was peaceable, and the government of Nigeria, both under the British and in the post-Independence era, made efforts to facilitate the process by demarcating cattle routes and establishing grazing reserves. Since Nigeria has a very large urban sector which requires both meat and dairy products, this was largely seen as beneficial to the overall economy.

However, this migration took place in an era when the human population was still relatively small and land was freely available. However, Nigeria has undergone rapid demographic change (see §8.1) and there is now significant competition for land throughout the Central Zone. The northern, semi-arid and Sahelian zones have always had a higher population and the rapid increase, together with climate change, has now pushed the herders further south. Inevitably, the pastoralist concept of free access to grazing and rivers upon which their lifestyle depends, is in conflict with the farmers, who have more stable concepts of land ownership. Hence the dramatic acceleration in resource conflicts which have become more numerous, widespread and violent.

The narrative of resource conflict is conveniently simple, and has been emerging from both sides. Typically, it is associated with a religious characterisation, Christianity versus Islam. The characteristic response has been a corresponding growth in reconciliation and peace meetings, where available figures on both sides of the divide agree to resolve their differences. These processes have been manifestly unsuccessful, and violent incidents continue unabated. The explanation may lie in the fact that quite different conflicts are being played out within the context of the farmer/pastoralist conflicts. The potential wealth of Nigeria is such that both politicians and gangsters are willing to undertake extremely ruthless strategies against their opponents. These can be very effectively disguised by appealing to conventional stereotypes. There is strong evidence that both bandits and the dispossessed of diverse ethnic groups have been manipulated by politicians to serve narrow local interests. This in turn has played into the hands of both professional insurgent groups such as Boko Haram and regional criminal groups, including those involved in the drugs trade, thereby exacerbating the violence. All sides are served by characterising these conflicts as either over resources or religion or both.

The series of missions, of which this is third, arise from a series of reports of violent incidents reported by diocesan communities across the Central Zone of Nigeria. The Justice, Peace and Development Committees (the exact form of the name varies from state to state and the system is here abbreviated to JDPs) have made this known to MISEREOR and there have been scattered projects for peace and reconciliation. Rather larger-scale initiatives, such as DREP in Jos, have been funded from a variety of archdiocesan sources.

The current report follows those of May and December 2016, arising from feedback in various communities in the dioceses of the Middle Belt and Southwestern states. MISEREOR requested the consultant to investigate the situation in two states, Benue and Nasarawa, with a view to developing a more in-depth analysis of the roots of the conflicts, to evaluate existing initiatives and to make proposals for policy options to improve the situation. A visit to Nigeria was made from the 24th of March to 22nd April 2017¹. The end of the process was a workshop held in Makurdi 18-19th April,

¹ Roger Blench was accompanied throughout by Mal. Umaru Hassan, a Fulfulde-speaker who has worked on pastoral issues for many years. In Benue State, Valentine Kwaghchimim (JDPC) acted as facilitator and in

Pastoralist-farmer conflict in Nasarawa and Benue States Roger Blench Draft submission version 2017, where representatives of the dioceses of Katsina Ala, Gboko, Makurdi Otukpo and Lafia were present. The objective was to put together the basis of a fundable proposal for further action on reducing conflict. The Terms of Reference are given in Appendix 1. An itinerary of field visits undertaken is given in Appendix II. Appendix III presents the schedule of the workshop, together with a summary of the discussions.

In view of the previous reports, much of the general background to the conflict is only repeated here in summary form. The format is much the same as the previous reports, but has been updated throughout. Importantly, more detailed interviews have altered the interpretation of events in Benue State.

2. The States

2.1 Benue

2.1.1 State background

Benue State shares boundaries with five other states, Nasarawa State to the north, Taraba State to the east, Cross-River State to the south, Enugu State to the south-west and Kogi State to the west. It also borders the Republic of Cameroun. Table 1 shows the basic demography of Benue State as of the mid-2000s.

Table 1. Demography of Benue State

Item	Data
Total Area	34,059 km ²
Population (2006)	4,253,641
Density	125/km ²

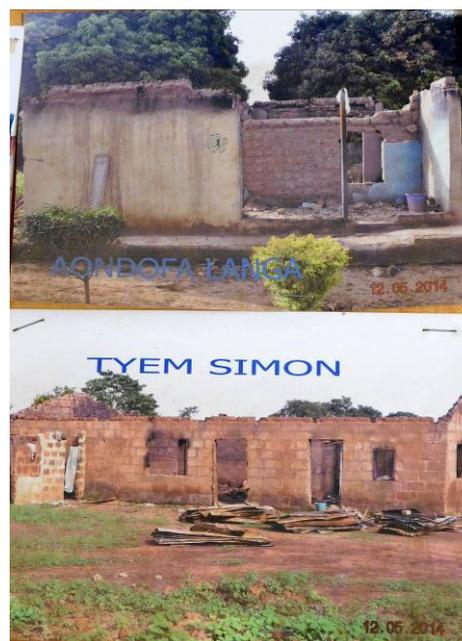
The main farming communities in the Benue State area are the Tiv and Idoma peoples, but the Igede, Etulo and other minorities are also resident. Benue State can be characterised as strongly Christian, with extremely large churches of all denominations in both towns and villages throughout the state. Apart from the pastoralists, small Muslim quarters representing the Hausa trading community are found in most towns.

Until the 1960s, these populations depended on rainfed cultivation, growing yams, cassava, maize and oil-palms. Cash crop production was very limited and small numbers of taurine cattle were kept. Fisheries are also important to riverine groups with valuable dry season ponds. However, since the 1960s, there has been a transformation in the production system, with the development of dry-season farming along the Benue and its tributaries. Much of the area along the banks is now given over to high density horticulture, which is problematic for the pastoralists who traditionally grazed the pasture beside the rivers.

2.1.2 Conflict issues

Oral history suggests that the first pastoralists began to cross the Benue around the time of the First World War, i.e. a century ago. Minor clashes have occurred, but the Tiv and the pastoralists have

Photo 1. Churches destroyed in 2014, Katsina Ala diocese



Source: Katsina Ala JDP Office

Nasarawa, Fr. Matthew Ofoku. The Makurdi workshop was organized at the logistical level by JDPC Makurdi, and our thanks to Blessing Adzaagee, the Programme Manager. Cosmas Olaniyan from DPS, Abuja was in attendance. My thanks to all of them. This report consists of my own analyses and they should not be taken as supporting all statements made here.

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usually managed to live together amicably, even exchanging daughters in marriage. However, in the 2000s, incidents began to accelerate. Nonetheless, the major bout of destruction which happened ‘unexpectedly’ in 2014, left many dead on both sides. Villages were burnt and many churches destroyed (Photo 1). Many of the villages deserted at this time remain empty, their inhabitants too fearful to return. Equally the pastoralists who fled the area have never come back. Another major episode occurred in February 2016, when Agatu villages were attacked by heavily armed groups. Despite the intervention of the Nigerian Army, many villages were under siege for weeks. Into 2017, further minor episodes of killing have occurred. The mission witnessed an attack on a group of herders outside Gboko. Photo 2 shows thousands of animals running towards the Benue River, with villagers in pursuit. The outcome of this episode is unknown.

Photo 2. Cattle fleeing an attack in Gboko, April 2017



Source: Own photo

As in Nasarawa State, various groups have been formed by farmers to defend themselves. Some of the more formal organisations are described in §5. However, there are also youth organisations which are largely uncontrolled, and which have access to modern weapons in some areas. Among the Tiv, these are known as Alayo and among the Idoma, Progressive Youth.

These attacks are problematic to interpret. According to the farmers, the FulBe herders, having lived peaceably beside them for a century, suddenly decided to attack their neighbours in 2014, ‘for no reason’. The leaders of the pastoral community say almost the same, except that the reverse is recounted, the Tiv decided to attack them. Neither of these versions can be wholly true. The destruction of buildings on quite a large scale argues that these attacks were organised and took place over time, which hardly seems characteristic of mobile herders. Similarly, the herders have never returned, suggesting they are as fearful as the farmers. This strongly suggests outside forces (‘shadow actors’) were at work and were supplying weaponry and taking care to frame the conflict as pastoralist/farmer. Since this took place in the runup to the election in 2015, it is locally suggested that politicians may have been hiring mercenaries to attack their rivals. This is even more certain in the case of Agatu, where long-term disputes between sections of the community seem to have been played out in this way. Needless to say this interpretation is unlikely to find favour with government.

2.2 Nasarawa

2.2.1 State background

Nasarawa State is bounded in the north by Kaduna State, in the west by the Abuja Federal Capital Territory, in the south by Kogi and Benue States and in the east by Taraba and Plateau States. Table 2 shows the basic demographic and geographical data on Nasarawa State as of 2005.

Table 2. Demography of Nasarawa State

Item	Data
Total Area	27,117 km ²
Population (2005)	2,040,112
Density	75/km ²

Nasarawa State is highly multi-ethnic, with more than twenty different languages spoken. Because of its proximity to the Federal Capital Territory, there has been significant economic development west of Keffi, servicing Abuja. The capital, Lafia, once a small road town, has now grown in keeping with its status as a capital.

Nasarawa State captions itself as ‘The home of solid minerals’ but this is more an optimistic projection than an economic reality. Most of the population remains dependent on farming and fishing, and the low population density has permitted the expansion of herding, especially as regions further north become unsafe. In terms of religion, the state is split almost equally between Muslims and Christians.

2.2.2 Conflict issues

The situation in Nasarawa State is fundamentally different from Benue State. A much higher percentage of the population is Muslim and Hausa is widely spoken, hence a greater potential to communicate directly with FulBe leaders. Moreover, the population is highly ethnically diverse, so the sort of coalition which has been formed against pastoralists in Benue has never developed there. The human population is also much lower, which creates greater opportunities for the two populations to avoid one another. In addition, the system of Grazing Reserves and cattle tracks still survives in residual form.

The main conflict has been between the two dominant ethnic groups, the Alago and the Eggon. The Eggon² formerly lived in the hills north of Nassarawa Eggon, and only began to descend to the plains in the 1940s and 1950s (Akika 2015). Ironically, they met the FulBe already pasturing their cattle on the plains, so the suggestion that the FulBe are ‘not indigenous’ is somewhat ironic in this context. The Eggon settled on land claimed by the Alago, and agreed to make nominal annual payments for its use. However, this came to seem more burdensome over time as did the political authority of the Alago. In 2012, the tensions burst into open conflict, especially in mixed settlements, such as Asaikyo (northeast of Lafia). The exact mortality is hard to determine, but it is fairly certain that hundreds were killed on both sides and whole quarters of the town were reduced to rubble (Photo 3). This was the worst of a series of attacks in rural areas, and these have continued sporadically into the near present. Eggon ‘Refugees’ or IDPs are currently still billeted with relatives in Nasarawa Eggon town or in unpublicised camps nearby. The most alarming aspect of this is the growth of the Ombatse or ethnic militia, described in §2.2.3.

² Known as ‘Hill Mada’ in older sources.

Photo 3. Destruction of houses in Asaikyo



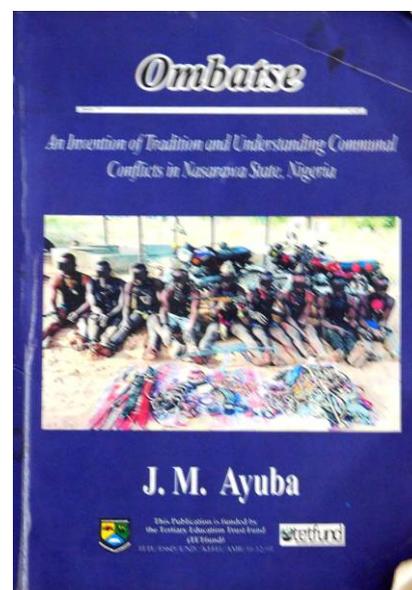
Source: Own photo

Broadly speaking, relations between herders and farmers in this region have been cordial, and since this is a cereal-growing area, it has been possible to develop exchange relations with farmers. However, the growth of banditry and in particular the role of cattleless FulBe has acted to turn some communities against the herders. Some were reported killed in the outbreak of violence in 2012, although on a minimal scale compared with the casualties among the farmers.

2.2.3 Ombatse and the ethnic militias

A troubling development in Nasarawa state is the rise of what are locally known as ‘ethnic militias’. These are associations of (mostly) young men pledged to use violence to defend what they perceive to be the rights of their ethnic group. The strongest of these is the *Ombatse* movement among the Eggon, which draws heavily on traditional beliefs as well as modern organisational techniques. Ayuba (2014) has described their practices as well as transcribing excerpts from the Commission of Enquiry (Photo 4). Its use of ‘branding’ suggests the membership has learned from watching American television dramas. Nonetheless, the violence they have perpetrated is very real. Government has virtually no power to act against such unstructured bodies, but without recognition of their importance, the Alago/Eggon conflict will never be eliminated.

Photo 4. Cover of publication on Ombatse



Source: Own photo

2.2 The FulBe pastoral system

2.2.1 Historical background

The FulBe [Fulbe] or Fulani are the main pastoral people in Nigeria, along with the Shuwa Arabs and the Koyam in the northeast. They probably entered what is now Nigeria in the fifteenth century and travelled along the Sahel Belt as far as Lake Chad. During the eighteenth century some groups settled in the towns and effectively became urban residents, perhaps owning cattle but not herding them. They were converted to a more zealous form of Islam, and in 1804, Usman dan Fodio initiated a jihad, which eventually created a series of Islamic Emirates across North-Central Nigeria and adjacent Cameroun. This was driven by extensive slave-raiding for sale in the markets of North Africa, and much of the Middle Belt became a wasteland at this period. The pastoral FulBe were not directly involved in the trade, but

there is no doubt that the raiding opened up a vast new zone of pasture in the subhumid areas. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century FulBe settlement expanded considerably. Many of these areas were non-Muslim, so much of the understanding between the FulBe and the Hausa farmers based on common religion was absent.

This period of expansion is at the root of many of the contentious issues in the Middle Belt today. The FulBe herd mainly cattle, with small numbers of sheep and sometimes goats. The majority are seasonal transhumants, usually moving south towards the river systems of Central Nigeria in the dry season (roughly December-April) and then north when the rains bring fresh grass. Many FulBe keep part of their family further north and the majority of families do some small cropping of cereals. The traditional household economy of the FulBe was based on the sale of surplus milk and milk products, which are exchanged for cereals. However, milk is no longer the prestigious product it was, and its value is now low. In addition, poor nutrition for the cattle causes a decline in milk yields, so increasingly the herders' economy is based on the sale of surplus bullocks for meat. In addition, farmers valued the manure of cattle as fertiliser, so often would invite the FulBe to camp on their farm after harvest. The cattle ate the cereal stalks and fertilised the fields. All these factors induced herders to increase herd size and to move into previously unfamiliar areas of the Middle Belt. But the problems were;

- Farmers were increasingly not Muslims and had no understanding of FulBe culture. Farmers grew yams and other crops which did not produce edible residues and did not need manuring
- Farmers did not drink, indeed could not digest, dairy products, so were not interested in the main items the herders had to sell

This meant the basis for co-operation was lacking, which tended to decrease trust.

An important reason why conflicts persist is the differing concepts of land ownership and access in farming and pastoral societies. Broadly speaking, when a pastoralist grazes an area every year, and his rights are accepted by other pastoralists he considers he 'owns' the portion of land. However, for farmers, who practise both shifting cultivation on rainfed lands and dry-season horticulture, only clearing and farming the land constitutes ownership. As the need for arable land increases, farmers are clearing grazing land ever more frequently. Inevitably when a pastoralist returns to his traditional grazing land and finds it under crops, he is aggrieved, and the cattle often enter the farm either by accident or indeed intentionally. Needless to say, states are controlled by politicians who represent the interests of farmers and thus inevitably support the farmers in this type of incident.

2.2.2 Grazing Reserves and stockroutes

The colonial and early Independence era saw the establishment of system of grazing reserves and stock routes, intended to create spaces for pastoralists and thereby minimise conflict. These systems have been maintained for a long time, and broadly speaking have been respected. Unfortunately, however, legal responsibility for maintaining the stock routes was given to the states. In many cases the states have rejected even the concept, claiming they have no mandate to support what are essentially Federal regulations. A functioning system of stockroutes is an essential tool in reducing conflict between herders and farmers and with the rise in human population has become more important, not less. If such a network was fully functional it would be a valuable tool in reducing conflict, but unfortunately, these routes exist only in theory in many places. Since the states are controlled by politicians elected by farmers, they have little interest in maintaining the system and in some cases have openly declared they do not accept it.

Nasarawa State has several grazing reserves, some developed, others existing in name only. The most important of these is Keana, southeast of Lafia, which at one time benefited from World Bank investment. Often the reserves were sited in places where there were few or no farmers. But if there was also no water development and they were also far from markets, then few herders would use them on more than a seasonal basis. In Benue State, there are no functioning reserves and the state government has rejected the concept that they should be established. It is therefore not practical to

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recommend this issue be considered at the policy level, unless the Federal Government intervenes, which is unlikely.

2.2.3 Recent changes in pastoral migration in Nasarawa

The relatively tolerant climate in Nasarawa State has proven attractive to pastoralists fleeing conflict in other regions. Many interviews underlined the appearance of 'new' pastoralists since 2011, when the Boko Haram insurgency began to hit the Borno communities. Similarly, some of the FulBe fleeing the conflict in Benue in 2014 have set up camp in Nasarawa. In addition, the long-distance migrants from Northern Nigeria have been appearing in greater numbers, as in the Southwest. All of this puts much greater pressure on resources and makes further disputes over land and grazing more likely.

3. Security issues

3.1 The arenas of civil insecurity

Nigeria has significant issues with security in four major arenas, Boko Haram, inter-ethnic conflict in the Central Zone, banditry and competition for territory in the market for drugs and other illegal but profitable resources. The Boko Haram insurgency has received far more attention both within Nigeria and externally than the others, but there is a strong argument that these less-well publicised issues negatively impact on ordinary citizens' lives to a far greater extent.

Security issues in other parts of Nigeria can and do affect the situation in regions very remote from the problems. Pastoralists are by definition mobile and their herds are vulnerable, so they inevitably flee conflict areas. Although the Boko Haram insurgency is the major problem for the Nigerian government, trouble on the Jos Plateau has also affected pastoralists. A typical response to attacks on the herds and camps is to move the family unit to a place of safety and to send the herds with young men or hired herders. As a consequence, this reduces control over the herds, and they are more vulnerable to rustling. Alternatively, herders resident in Benue and Nasarawa have been concentrating in a few areas for greater safety. In Benue, for example, they have been clustering around the larger towns, typically Makurdi and Otukpo, where the security services are located and they can come to the aid of one of their number who is attacked.

The forces that underlie the growth of conflict between herders and farmers in the Nigerian Central Zone have been allowed to develop unchecked due to a weak policy environment. NGOs and CBOs can use advocacy to try and change the situation, but where security issues are involved they have little influence. Nonetheless, they can engage in several key arenas, most notably in-depth regional conflict analysis, forward policy thinking and advocacy for pastoralist-friendly policies. Probably the most difficult conceptual problem is convincing the established farmer blocs that resolving these issues is in their own interest, especially in the new Nigeria that is developing. Non-formal institutions have the freedom to try new technological solutions which government will never implement.

3.2 Cattle-rustling and banditry

A more general breakdown of law and order has followed the insurgency in the Northeast and this has been manifested by the rise in banditry, cattle-rustling and kidnapping. Especially since 2010, there has been a major expansion of cattle rustling and associated kidnapping, reflecting a combination of youth unemployment, pastoralists who have lost their herds and a lax security environment. Given the lack of herding skills among farmers, it is credible that the rustlers consist of gangs which include FulBe who have lost their cattle in association with thieves, and connect to networks which can transport the stolen livestock to the large markets in the south, where they rapidly disappear. Government response has so far been ineffectual, as the rustlers live in remote areas and are hard to catch by conventional means. Nonetheless, the stolen cattle must be fed into the marketing system and transported past checkpoints. If such cattle can move freely, this does not provide confidence that action is being taken. The unchecked growth of this practice, the suspicion that the powerful people behind it are being protected, all adds to the climate of distrust.

A further rather remarkable development is the alliance of bandits with unemployed youths within the farming community. For example, Tiv youths will enter a market and pretend to warn the stallholders the FulBe pastoralists are coming to kill them. The market traders flee and their goods and livestock is looted by this alliance of criminals. After the event, the exact responsibility is hard to determine, and very often this is taken as further evidence of the maleficent intentions of the herders.

3.3 Drug use

In interviews in both Benue and Nasarawa States, the use of drugs, both legal and illegal, was often mentioned as a factor in exacerbating conflict. Hard drugs, heroin and cocaine, are rare except in big cities, but marijuana is common, cheap and is locally grown. The hill areas of Southern Taraba State and southeastern Benue State adjacent to Cameroun are major growing areas and Katsina Ala is a transit town for the drugs reaching many parts of Nigeria. As a result, there are frequent 'turf wars' between local gangs. The NDLEA (Nigerian Drugs Law Enforcement Agency) has checkpoints in Katsina Ala, but without intelligence-led policing, this is of limited value.

Similarly, legal prescription drugs such as Tramadol, are in common use. Nigeria has no prescription system and once a drugseller has a licence, he or she may sell almost any commercial drug to customers quite legally. Both pastoralists and traditional leaders consider this is an important factor in further exacerbating aggrieved youth. Drug use clearly plays a role in tipping potential conflict situations into actual violence. Although occasional rather weary posters are seen warning against drug use, there is no evidence these have any effect.

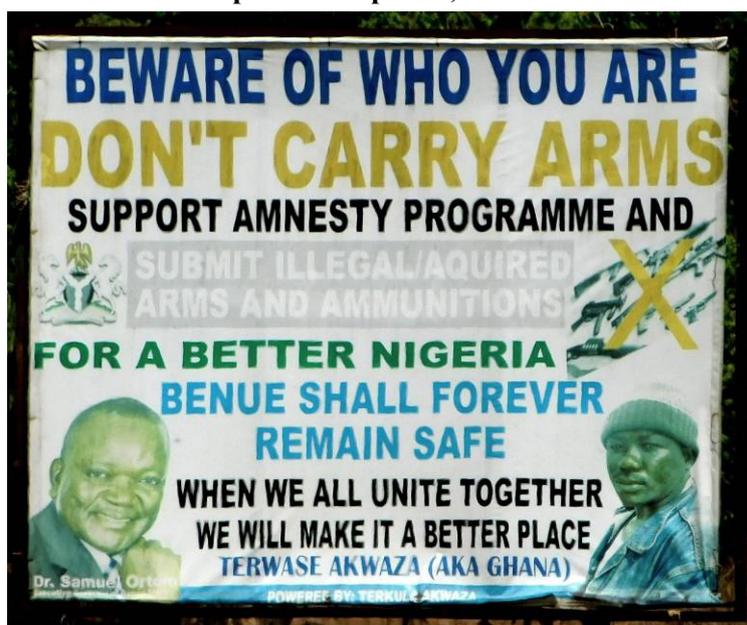
3.4 Increasing access to sophisticated weapons

All of those interviewed agreed that weapons are becoming increasingly common on all sides, and that they are more and more sophisticated. Unlicensed guns are theoretically illegal but are smuggled with impunity from a variety of directions. They are imported into the creeks of the Niger Delta for local use but also sold on to create an income stream. Similarly, they can be bought and sold by insurgents in the Northeast, taking advantage of the vacuum in authority created by Boko Haram.

The important question is how these purchases are financed, since a semi-automatic weapon would normally be beyond the income of a farmer or herder. For the farmers, there may sometimes be community contributions for local defence, but most of the weapons are apparently supplied by politicians during elections in support of their faction. For example, in the run-up to the election of 2015, youths were supplied with guns as part of a strategy to intimidate opposition voters. Win or lose, the guns remain in the community, and usually in the hands of the same unemployed rootless young men who are around at polling time.

There have been a number of efforts to induce communities to hand in weapons. Government amnesties have been declared (Photo 5) but these are generally ineffective. Unless greater security can be developed, it is unlikely people will divest themselves of the means of defence. The situation is all too reminiscent of the United States, where almost every mass shooting leads to an increase in

Photo 5. Anti-weaponisation poster, Katsina Ala



Source: Author photo

Pastoralist-farmer conflict in Nasarawa and Benue States Roger Blench Draft submission version
gun buying as people fear for their protection.

3.5 Things are not what they seem; political manipulation

The characterisation of conflict in Benue State depends on the interest of those expounding the narrative. From the point of view of the elites, it is important to characterise this as a struggle for resources, and secondarily as a Christian/Islam divide. But the evidence suggests that the situation is quite different from this surface appearance. As suggested above, there is little doubt that the attacks are partly funded by political and sectional interests who cloak them in quite different conflicts. Just as politicians in the North fund Islamic extremists in the quest for power, so further south, the narrative is the defence of Christianity against proselytisation and conversion, the supposed goal of the herders. Until a more nuanced account of the events in Benue State is accepted, all types of work for reconciliation are likely to founder.

3.6 Social outcomes of insecurity

The high population density of Benue State and the shortage of land has the consequence that civil disturbances are common, even apart from the pastoral conflicts discussed in this report. Conflicts over land, drugs and politically motivated attacks are described above. Following the major outbreak of violence in 2014, many villagers moved to towns to stay with relatives. These can be considered 'hidden IDPs'. Their numbers are hard to gauge, since the state government will not allow the establishment of official IDP camps. However, studies conducted for UNHCR in some LGAs suggest the total figure could be as high as half a million. For comparison, the permitted camps outside Maiduguri are thought to shelter some 1.5 million IDPs. Needless to say, the social outcomes are hardly positive. Food shortages and malnutrition are widespread and very often the IDPs depend on family, the churches and informal CSOs rather than the state. At the same time, social breakdown has the consequence of increasing prostitution, and alarmingly, child slavery. Children may be sold to suspect employers with the knowledge of the parents, who believe, or pretend to believe, their unrealistic promises. In other cases, children are simply lured away. Girls become house servants and child brides and boys are put to work on remote farms, with no access to mobile phones.

4. Responses on security issues

4.1 Police

Given that these episodes involve loss of life and property, it might be thought that the Nigerian government would have a role in keeping order and the prevention of further episodes. By and large, the police play little or no role in security incidents, and the army is called in directly. This can be a risky strategy, as the army are not trained to deal with civilian incidents and their current concerns are events in the northeast.

4.2 Army

The Nigerian army has been much occupied in the northeast in recent years although it keeps a small presence throughout the country. In recent times, however, they have been called both to conflicts in the Middle Belt, and to oversee post-conflict meetings. There was a general consensus in interviews that the situation has much improved, at least in terms of response time, since the government of Present Buhari took over. However, interviewees also noted that the skills of local commanders were extremely variable, some being much more adept than others at peacebuilding.

4.3 Vigilantes

One of the responses to the increased insecurity has been the formation of vigilante groups. These are informal groups, often including hunters, armed with a variety of mostly antiquated weapons. Members are mostly voluntary and paid only by community contributions, although in some places Local Government contributes to their costs. Increasingly, they are formalising their status with offices and uniforms. In areas where armed robbers and criminal operate, for example, along the Lafia-Shendam road, vigilante checkpoints are extremely common. In the long run they are dangerous to peace, since they tend to be armed and consist of younger men.

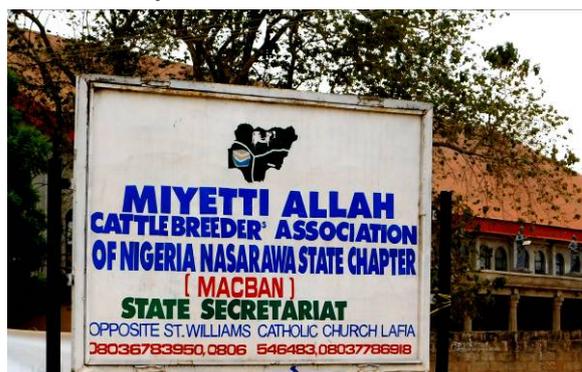
4.4 Informal sector

Nigeria has a relatively poorly developed civil society sector, and the various churches thus play an important role. Much of the social justice and economic development is effectively the responsibility of external funders. For the Catholic church this is CARITAS and the JDP system, for the Protestants, Bread for the World and similar bodies. Since the government system for assistance to IDPs is extremely weak, the churches have played an important role in providing food and health-care. Individual projects have focused on mediation skills and workshops for reconciliation. However, they are based on assumptions which are not necessarily founded on a in-depth analysis.

4.5 Pastoralist organisations: Miyetti Allah

Unlike other regions, pastoralists in the Benue-Nasarawa area are almost entirely represented by Miyetti Allah (the name means 'I thank God' in Fulfulde). It is the oldest and most well-established pastoral organisation in Nigeria and the only one to have branches in every state. It exists to lobby government on issues related to pastoralists, particularly the FulBe. Its effectiveness has been limited by internal disputes and these are very much an issue in Benue, where different individuals claim to represent the body. Even so, communication between CSOs within the Christian community and Miyetti Allah are rather limited. Photo 6 shows the sign for the office of Miyetti Allah in Lafia, opposite the cathedral where the

Photo 6. Miyetti Allah Office in Lafia



Source: Own Photo

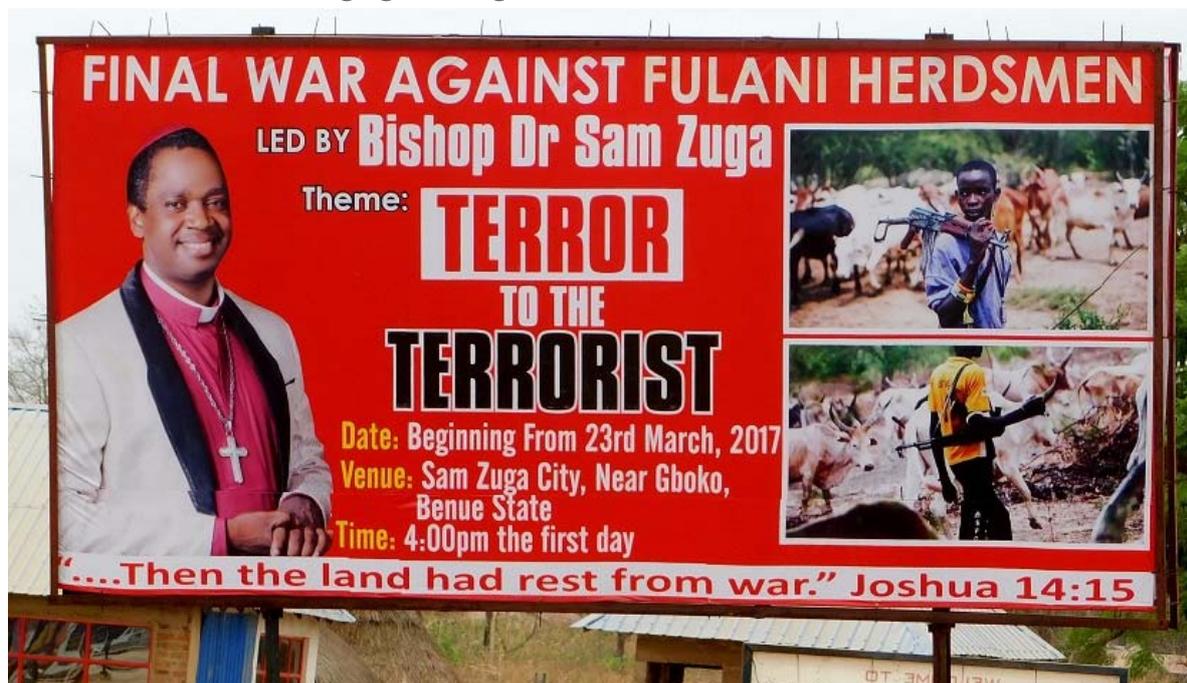
JDP office is located. At the time of the mission, it had remained unvisited by the JDP.

5. The role of the church

The role of the church should presumably be to encourage peace and reconciliation and to diffuse a tolerant view of different belief systems in the interests of their congregations. This is not necessarily how the issue is seen in Nigeria. Indeed some churches take a strong view that their role is the reverse, it is rather to defeat the 'enemy', who are characterised as terrorists. The poster in Photo 7 adorning a church in Gboko, and illustrated with photographs adopted from the internet and certainly not in Nigeria suggests attitudes which are all too common. Worryingly, even bodies which do not propagate these views are not necessarily willing to condemn them.

The church, whether Catholic or Protestant, is an influential voice in Benue State. If it is not seen to condemn this type of hate-speech, no resolution is possible. The Nigerian church is typically very hierarchical and the bishops and archbishops are at the top of the tree of authority as in medieval Europe. Lower-level bodies and individuals are very unwilling to challenge authority. It is therefore essential to ensure that the hierarchy of the church be in broad agreement with the strategies proposed.

Photo 7. Church Poster urging ‘war’ against Fulani terrorists



Source: Own photo

6. Policy and advocacy

6.1 Regional solutions

As this report emphasises, the mobility of pastoralists is such that this is a regional issue. FulBe herders typically move between grazing areas, regardless of administrative boundaries, and the rise of instability has further accelerated this trend. FulBe also split their herds and families, so that part of the herd may be in one state, while the young men are with the larger group of animals somewhere else. In recent times, the mobile phone has become an indispensable tool in co-ordinating these dispersed activities. Any effective solution to the issues outlined in this report will therefore depend on the development of a more regional perspective, not confined to the boundaries of diocese, province or state.

6.2 The widespread belief in ‘ranches’

Politicians are not livestock producers, but this does not prevent them from pronouncing on strategies for animal management. Ranches have a long and entirely unsuccessful history in Nigeria and there is no reason to consider this will change. However, suddenly, perhaps as a result of glimpses of intensive farms in Europe or ranches in Uruguay, this has become the preferred solution. A separate paper, submitted together with this document, discusses the social, economic and infrastructural requirement for any type of ranching to succeed, and concludes these conditions are not met in Nigeria. This suggests a rather costly failure is the likely outcome. The argument will not be repeated here, but a discussion of the legislative situation is appropriate.

Individual states, playing to public opinion, have been discussing restrictive solutions to what they perceive as the ‘herder problem’. These consist mainly of prohibiting open grazing and authorising vigilantes and other barely-controlled groups to shoot or ‘arrest’ cattle they perceive to be roaming. During fieldwork in Ekiti State in November 2016, such a bill was passed in the State House of Assembly. This led to some immediate shootings, and predictably violent responses from affected herders.

A draft bill has been presented to Benue State Assembly and was in circulation during fieldwork. This also provides for the prohibition of open grazing, and fines of up to a million Naira for contraventions.

More intriguingly, the Benue State government will apparently buy up land and create a grazing space for cattle herders, which will be leased to them. Among the other provisions are one which allows the governor to withdraw access to grazing, giving no reason and with no compensation due to the herder.

The mission was able to discuss these proposals with pastoralist leaders in Benue State. Their reaction was uniformly negative, as can be imagined. Unfortunately, at least so far they have been unable to form a coalition to present a consolidated response. It is still unclear if and when the bill will be passed, and how it will be enforced. If a violent attempt by the security forces is undertaken the response may be equally violent. National pastoral organisations had taken up the issue with the Federal Government in Abuja following the mission, but the outcome is currently unknown. If the bill goes through, it is likely that FulBe herders will leave Benue completely, bringing to an end a century of co-existence.

6.3 Human rights

FulBe herders are Nigerian citizens and have rights under Federal Law, which provides for free movement. Their human rights appear to be in danger of being contravened. This is often justified informally by the assertion (which is backed by mythic anecdotal evidence such as Chadian ID papers found on corpses) that ‘they are not Nigerian anyway’. According to this version of reality they have all come from other West African states and should therefore ‘go home’. This has alarming echoes of both the ‘fake news’ controversies in the United States and the rhetoric of rightwing populists in Europe. The JDP system is intended to have a human rights component; perhaps it should apply its energies more intensively to this travesty of justice.

7. The importance of information

7.1 How should we disseminate information?

Both farmers and pastoralists entertain wrong information about one another and tend to propose highly impractical solutions to current problems. Most typical are plaintive comments that we should return to the former period of collaboration, co-operation and peace. Such days will never return and only realism is a practical response for fixing the problems.

In addition, rumours and false accusations have a tendency to circulate rapidly, exacerbating distrust between the two communities. There seems little doubt that insurgents and bandits play on this by using what must be quite exaggerated versions of FulBe dress to give the impression the herders are the attackers. Government plays no role in correcting this unchecked propaganda. It is therefore of considerable importance to use whatever media is most effective in countering some of the more exaggerated claims.

Nigeria is a quite connected society, where the internet and smartphones play a role in social interaction among urban populations. However, this technology is almost useless in rural areas, where the problems recur. Radio is the only way to reach such populations, and that broadcasts must be in the vernacular, and in a style that convinces hearers of the sympathy of the speaker. Peacebuilding organisations have so far made little use of this cheap and effective method of countering false assertions.

7.2 The potential of radio

One solution that has been so far little explored is the use of vernacular radio. Nigeria has a lively broadcasting scene, and recent trends have been to include more and more languages, both on Federal and private stations. In Ekiti State, the JDP has already begun broadcasting in Yoruba, although so far on non-controversial topics. Reaching rural populations is most effectively achieved through radio and television and the internet are still rare in many areas. The proposal to make radio programmes in different state languages is widely acceptable.

7.3 The role of the mobile phone

Mobile phones began to be widespread in Nigeria from 2005 onwards, and they remain relatively cheap and practical, with good national coverage. Smartphones are common in urban areas, and Nigerians are enthusiastic adherents of social media. However, in rural areas, perhaps surprisingly, a lack of literacy among both herders and farmers has meant that the importance of mobile phones is restricted to voice calls. Even so, access to a phone now plays an important role in herders' lives. The primary use of the phone is for information concerning grazing and water, something individuals previously would travel long distances to find out. Market prices are an important secondary use, since FulBe economy depends on the sale of small stock for meat. The potential of the smartphone for circulating security information as well as correcting exaggerated claims in the media, as well as linking together pastoral leaders in widely dispersed places has yet to be realised.

7.4 Internet presence

Despite the importance of the internet in spreading ideas in Nigeria, the JDP system has no internet presence. This is indicative of the passive approach taken to the goals of the organisation. It is recommended that each JDP has a website and training sufficient to update it with current activities. Ideally, each body would also have a Facebook page and would be able to promote actions and policies as well as responding to the queries of the public and outside organisations. At present the paradox is that organisations with a mission for advocacy and social change have precisely no tools to achieve these goals.

7.5 Analytic versus narrative reporting

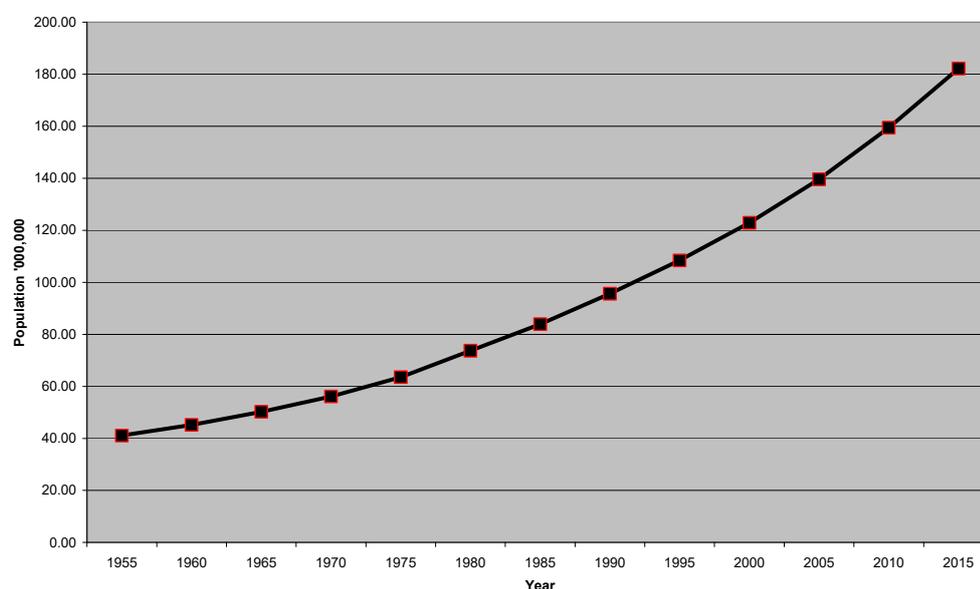
Long-term solutions require effective analysis and this is often sorely lacking in Nigeria. There is a general assumption that conflict resolution and peace-building are desirable and they have accumulated considerable resources. But the continuing violence argues that they are only temporary solutions. Reporting in Nigeria is usually narrative; suitable for agriculture but of limited value in a humanitarian situation. Unless reports dig down to the drivers of conflict, proposed solutions are of no proven value. It is better to try and prevent future conflict than simply to keep on trying to patch up the situation after the event.

8. Current issues

8.1 The major issue: human population density

The single most important driver of conflict in the Nigerian Central Zone is rising human population. In the past, human population densities were low and farmers and graziers each had enough space to operate. From the colonial era onwards, this situation has changed, largely due to improved healthcare. The human population of Nigeria was probably around 5 million in 1900 and is ca. 180 million today. Figure 1 shows estimated Nigerian population growth (1955-2015) and there is no

Figure 1. Nigerian population growth (1955-2015)

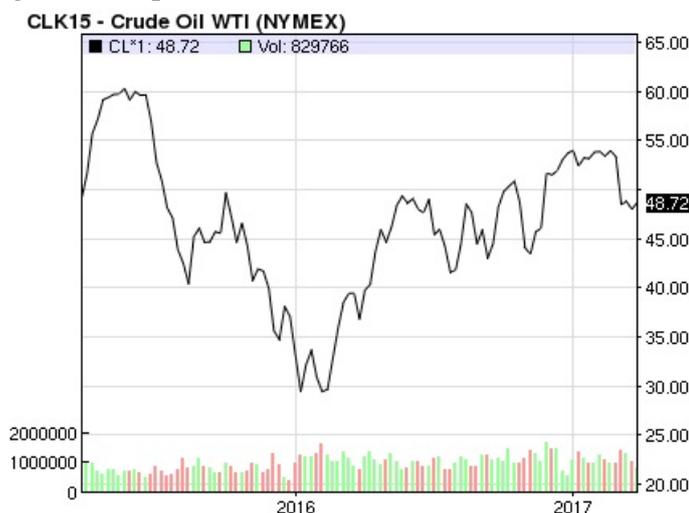


Large families are still regarded positively in Nigeria and although attitudes are slowly changing in urban areas, in rural communities, numbers of children are still maximised.

8.2 Collapse in the price of oil

Nigeria has historically had a highly skewed economy, based heavily on oil exports. The price of oil has been high for a long time, allowing the import of both food and manufactured goods on a large scale. By some estimates, as much as 50% of food in Nigeria was imported until recently, including most milk and meat. As a result, both agriculture and small factories have been allowed to fail³, and the government has no policy support for these industries, since many individuals have grown rich on import licences. However, since 2015, the price of oil has fallen some 70% and few analysts think it is unlikely to approach former levels (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Oil price trends since 2015



Source: NASDAQ

As a consequence, lack of confidence in the capacity of Nigeria to find alternative sources of revenue has led to a fall in the value of the Naira. Since the end of 2014, the Naira has nearly halved in value (Figure 3). There is no reason to consider it will not fall further still, as oil prices are likely to remain low. The consequence is that both imported food and manufactured goods will become correspondingly more expensive. This might ultimately be good for local farmers, but in the short term will create problems, as to increase food production they will need government support.

Figure 3. Naira/Euro exchange rate since 2015



Source: xe.com

However, their likely response is to bring still more land under cultivation, which will further exclude herders from grazing, especially along the banks of rivers, where dry season farms are now established. The obvious policy response should be to consolidate water access and stock routes while it is still possible, as pressure to turn these over to agriculture is only likely to increase. Civil insecurity in rural areas will act a major deterrent to farmers seeking to invest in improved agricultural productivity.

³ An excellent summary of this problem is at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35785426>

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