

‘Your Land or Your Life’! ECOWAS Free Movement Regime, Migration, and Resource Conflicts in West Africa

Ernest Tooche Aniche, PhD

Department of Political Science
Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
E-mail: anicheet@fuotuoche.edu.ng.

Ikenna Mike Alumona, PhD

Department of Political Science
Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu University (COOU),
Igbariam, Anambra State, Nigeria

Victor Chidubem Iwuoha, PhD

Department of Political Science
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

Chris Isike

Department of Political Sciences
University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Rebecca Ginikanwa Nnamani

Department of Political Science
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

Abstract

West African borderlands still depict free labour migration that weaves a complex grid of relations and inter-dependences over the ‘artificial’ borders inherited from colonialism. Migrants consider the sub-region as a single cultural and socioeconomic unit within which trade and services are intertwined across countries, and where border crossing is a main part of people’s lives and livelihoods. This study reflects on migration and violent resource conflicts in West Africa such as migrant herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria to interrogate the wider security implications of ECOWAS free movement protocols in the sub-region. It links the deepening resource scarcity in the sub-region to the increase in undocumented migration. The study concludes that due to poor enforcement of ECOWAS visa-free regime and competition for scarce resources, the migration-conflict nexus has intensified banditry and violent conflicts in West African borderlands, especially between herders and farmers in Nigeria.

Keywords: Banditry, Borderlands, Herders-Farmers Conflict, Insecurity, Migration, Nigeria, West Africa.

Introduction

Migration has dominated the global discourse in recent years. Global estimates indicate that about 3% of the world's population are international migrants (O'Neil et al., 2017; Clemens and Postel, 2018; Crush, 2019). The West African sub-region is no exception to this growing phenomenon. Out of the 191 million migrants scattered across the globe, nearly 7 million people are from the West African sub-region (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2017; Aniche, 2022). More recent estimates have shown that there are 214 million migrants in the world today out of which 19.3 million are in Africa and 8.4 million in West Africa alone,^{Footnote 1} making it the sub-region with the largest migrant population (UNESCO and MOST, 2017; ILO, 2018; UNCTAD, 2018; Aniche, 2021). Thus, West African citizens are among the world's most mobile populations. Studies have shown that between 4 and 5 million ECOWAS citizens ply the highways and frontiers of the Community's territory every month (Altai Consulting, 2015). All ECOWAS member states are both places of emigration and immigration (IOM, 2015). The post-colonial period saw the emergence of free labour migration for wage work, weaving a complex grid of relations and inter-dependences over the 'artificial' borders inherited from colonialism (Aniche et al., 2021).

Although more attention has often been placed on South-North migration, contemporary mobility patterns indicate that only a small share of West African migrants actually move to the Global North. Indeed, intra-regional migration alone is almost four times greater than extra-regional migration in West Africa. For instance, migratory movements that occur within the ECOWAS sub-region are the most significant, with about 84% of flows internal to the area, which is seven times higher than to any other destination (ECOWAS/SWAC/OECD, 2006; Awumbila et al., 2014; Altai Consulting, 2015; Iwuoha and Mbaegbu, 2021). Of note, these figures only cover documented migration excluding multitudes of undocumented migration (Aniche, 2022). Given the 'artificiality' and porosity of the colonial boundaries in West Africa, most people have continued to migrate undocumented and unhindered to visit their kinsmen and also for various other reasons such as herding and farming. Meanwhile, insecurity, banditry, terrorism, trans-border crimes, and other illicit activities have put undocumented migration in the mainstream of academic conversations triggering national and international debates.

However, very few of these recent studies on migration in West Africa have interrogated the nexus between resource-scarce-induced undocumented migration and cross-border criminal and violent activities given the poor enforcement of ECOWAS visa-free regime. For example, Adeola and Oluyemi (2012), Achumba et al (2013), Kuna and Ibrahim (2015), and WANEP (2020) noted that one major immediate factor which has enhanced insecurity in Nigeria is the porous frontiers of the country, where individual movements are largely untracked. For Hazen and Horner (2007), Maiangwa (2017), and Ajala (2020), other activities that have heightened insecurity in Nigeria also include human and drug trafficking, porous borders that allow infiltration of illegal aliens, and arms and ammunitions. These have all enabled terrorist network infiltration of the country (Isike and Isike, 2018). Relatedly, Maiangwa (2017) posited that scholarly analyses of herder-farmer conflicts have mostly revolved around issues of land ownership, grazing rights, climate change, settlement and movement, de-territorialisation, and resource competition (Bello, 2013; Nformi et al., 2014; Olaniyan and Aliyu, 2016; Idowu and Okunola, 2017; Imo, 2017; Uche and Iwuamadi, 2018; Suleiman, 2019; Chukwuma, 2020; Ojo, 2020). Similarly, McGregor (2014), Olaniyan and Okeke-Uzodike (2015), Higazi (2016), Akov (2017), Benjaminsen and Ba (2018), Eke (2019), Mbih (2020), and Onwuzuruigbo (2021) have identified different factors which include climate change occasioning the

migration further south, the growth of agro-pastoralism, the expansion of farming on pastures, the invasion of farmlands by cattle, and extensive sedentarisation as the root causes of violent conflicts in Nigeria and other West African countries.

The objective of this study, therefore, is to examine the nexus between resource-scarcity-induced undocumented (cross-border) migration and intensifying violent conflicts in West Africa, particularly banditry and herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria. What are the wider security implications of these movements which have also been facilitated by the poor enforcement of 1979 ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and 1998 ECOWAS Transhumance Protocol in this era of intense competition for scarce resources?

Theoretical Framework

This study is essentially predicated on resource-conflict theory particularly as captured by neo-Malthusian or resource-scarcity version of Homer-Dixon (1999), Gleditsch (2012), and Nillesen and Bulte (2014). This theory recognises natural resources as integral to the social production and reproduction or material means of sustenance. Therefore, natural resource conflict is simply the tussle for survival or struggle over means of sustenance between different groups. It is estimated that half of the global population remain directly tied to local natural resources such as agriculture and minerals. In most developing countries, strategic natural resources like oil and gas are under state control, whilst developed countries have developed industrial infrastructures that rely heavily on imports of natural resources in which natural resource-rich developing countries are set up to supply that demand (USIP, 2007; Aniche et al., 2021).

Thus, resource-related conflicts usually evolve from interplay of primary resources or main conflict drivers (like hydrocarbons, minerals, gemstones, land, water, among others) which often involve the following: (1) conflict over resource ownership; (2) conflict over resource access; (3) conflict over resource management decision-making or power imbalance; and (4) conflict over distribution of resource revenues, benefits, and burdens (Kahl, 2006; Haysom and Kane, 2009; McNeish, 2010; UNEP, 2015; Akov, 2017; Suleiman, 2019).

In other words, natural resources promote conflicts through three machineries: (1) natural resources can serve as a *leit motif* for conflict as a result of disputes over distribution of benefits (like revenues and infrastructures) or the costs (such as environmental degradation, ecological damages, and socio-economic impacts) of natural resource extraction; (2) natural resources provide incentives for violence by financing warfare; (3) natural resources can cause conflict by weakening political institutions, impairing the effectiveness of public bureaucracy, and by so doing, increase the incentives for corrupt behaviour or systematic corruption (Auty, 2001; Le Billon, 2001; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Ross, 2006; Maiangwa, 2017).

Also, resource disputes often involve uneven geographical patterns of resource distribution along ethno-religious or ethnic lines. The theory asserts that there is a relationship between natural resources and conflicts in terms of triggering, intensifying, or prolonging conflicts. Resource-related conflicts are therefore usually intractable and protracted. The resource-scarcity variant of resource-conflict nexus also considers the relation between environmental factors or climate change (such as drought and desertification) and conflict (Halle, 2009; Gleditsch, 2012; Nillesen and Bulte, 2014). For the purpose of this study, we relied more on resource scarcity to explain the migration-conflict nexus.

History of Migration and Migration-Induced Conflicts in West Africa

Migration is not new in West Africa in that it is historically a way of life of the people. West Africa has a history of population mobility and long-distance movements long before colonial borders (Zacheria and Conde, 1978; Adepoju, 2005; Iwuoha, 2020). Historically, trade has played an important role in shaping West African migration patterns, with traders from the north moving goods and products to the south and the coast (Marc et al., 2015). Thus, pre-colonial migration in West Africa was basically oriented towards trading, grazing, farming, labour, and religion (for proselytising, evangelising, and pilgrimages) without legal restraints and barriers, which made it possible for nomads, farm workers, seamen, traders, and preachers to migrate freely and frequently across international borders. Some local chiefs were even paying migrants to cultivate their land. During the season of drought, nomadic pastoralists were able to bring their cattle from the northern countries for grazing (Adedokun, 2013; Aniche et al., 2021). From the sixteenth century onwards, with the growing European mercantilist trade, slave and trade wars propelled massive population displacements and forced migrations, which continued right down to the nineteenth century. Thus, migration occurred largely in search of security (during the period of tribal warfare in the nineteenth century), new land safe for settlement, wet for grazing, and fertile for farming (Adepoju, 2005; Aniche, 2022).

Following the European scramble for control over the people and resources of Africa, the continent was partitioned without any regard for the social and cultural realities of the indigenous people and as a result, some ethnic groups like Bono and Nzema (Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana), Ewe (Ghana and Togo), Yoruba (Benin and Nigeria), Hausa (Niger, Mali and Nigeria), Kroos, Mende and Vais (Liberia and Sierra Leone), Soninké (Mali, Mauritania and Senegal), and Kanuri (Chad and Nigeria), among others, were divided and found themselves in different countries. The ethnic groups in the adjacent countries regarded movements across these 'artificial' boundaries as part of their internal movements. This is simply because they continued to keep their kinship ties across the 'artificially' created boundaries (Aniche et al., 2022). Their cultural and linguistic affinities facilitated these movements across these borders. Absence of requirement for travel documents during the early days of independence also helped to promote movement of persons within the sub-region region (Nwanolue and Iwuoha, 2012; Aniche, 2021).

Forced labour practices during the colonial period saw the wholesale transfer of people across the region. Individuals and families were pushed from Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and the Sahel to the cocoa and coffee plantations of Ghana and the forestry industries of Côte d'Ivoire, leaving generations to build their livelihoods as 'outsiders' far from home (Marc et al., 2015). Therefore, during the colonial era, Burkinabe, Malians, and Togolese were contracted or subjected to compulsory work in plantations, mines, and road construction in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria. These oil and gold economies historically attracted regional migrants while Benin, the Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, and Togo supplied labour (Fioramonti and Nshimbi, 2016). However, independence altered the traditionally borderless mobility configurations, with more than 15,000 km of internal borders now separating the 15 ECOWAS countries (OECD/SWAC, 2006). These borders nonetheless often cross large border-spanning ethnic communities that perceive their movements as being within one socio-cultural space rather than between two nations (Aniche, 2022). Additionally, the iklans (or slaves) in the Touareg society also still practice traditional circular migration between the Niger River in the Bankilaré zone and Abidjan (Sofie and Olsen, 2011; Aniche et al., 2021).

Despite recent Nigerian West African border closures, the consolidation of boundaries at independence minimally impacted negatively on cross-border migrations. Border regulations could be circumvented and extensive borders made effective policing against clandestine migration extremely difficult. In reality, most West African countries are agglomerations of peoples than states, and many citizens lack access to national passports to leverage on ECOWAS visa-free regime (Adepoju, 2005; Aniche et al., 2022).

In other words, the efforts put in place to consolidate the inherited colonial boundaries and enactment of rules and regulations to control immigration in the early years of post-colonial era did not hinder movement across borders significantly. Over two and half million West African nationals were residing in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Gambia, and Togo before the formation of ECOWAS and enactment of the Protocol on free movement of persons. However, this was short-lived as restrictions on movement across borders (such as elaborate visa, passport, customs, and work permit regulations) imposed to protect economic and political interests of each member country became important policy objectives leading to several expulsions of undocumented migrants (Agyei and Clotey, 2007; Aniche, 2022).

In the early 1970s, professionals from English-speaking countries such as Ghana flooded the Nigerian workplace. A significant amount of brain circulation takes place between Gambia, Ghana, and Nigeria; Cote d'Ivoire and Togo; and Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, and Senegal (van Hear, 1998). By 1983, 2.5 million West Africans were registered in Nigeria (OECD/SWAC, 2006). Traditional Burkina Faso-Côte d'Ivoire migration increased from the mid-1970s to the 1990s; in 1975, 74% of Burkinabè migrants went to Côte d'Ivoire, while 12% went to Ghana. In 1985, this amount had risen to 83.9% and 2.2%, respectively (Sofie & Olsen, 2011). Population pressures, poverty, and post-independence conflicts have further spurred migration (Fioramonti and Nshimbi, 2016). For example, between 1988 and 1992, more than 6.4 million migratory movements were recorded between the seven countries of the network. Among these migrations, 2.3 million were international with 1.30 million inside the network. The most important flows were recorded between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. The exchange between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso (508,000 movements) represents about 40% of total migrations in the network. Far behind this performance are the flows between Côte d'Ivoire and Mali (with 283,000) and between Côte d'Ivoire and Niger (114,000) (IOM/UNHCR, 2011).

The data from the Ghana Immigration Service show that at least one-third of all arrivals in Ghana between 1999 and 2002 is from ECOWAS member states. Besides, more than half of 740,191 non-Ghanaian population in the year 2000 were nationals of sister West African countries. Similarly, over 50% of 740,610 Ghanaians born outside indicated that they were born in ECOWAS country (Agyei and Clotey, 2007).

Thus, migration in West Africa is predominantly intra-regional such that intra-regional migrants constitute about 7.5 million people or 3% of the total population (IOM, 2014; Marc et al., 2015). In 2006, intra-regional migrations represented 90% of all West African migratory movements, amounting to an estimated 7.5 million migrants. Earlier in 2010, ECOWAS countries also hosted close to 160,000 refugees and asylum seekers, including almost 120,000 originating from West Africa (IOM/UNHCR, 2011). In this same year, Côte d'Ivoire hosted 2.4 million migrants, followed by Ghana (1.9 million), Nigeria (1.1 million or 0.7% of the population), and Burkina Faso (1 million). In relative terms, however, with 16.6% of the

population being migrants, Gambia is the country with the greatest immigration, followed by Côte d'Ivoire (11.2%), Ghana (7.6%), and Burkina Faso (6.4%) (Adepoju, 2016).

But historically these intra-regional migrations had induced conflicts in West Africa. As such, grievances that sit at the intersection of migration and land tenure fuel many conflicts in West Africa. Conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mauritania, and Nigeria are in some way connected to migrants and access to land. Historically, village chiefs relied on migrants to cultivate their lands and populate their villages as a way to shore up their political and economic power (Cotula et al., 2004). In return for access to land through tenancies or tutorship, migrants were required to comply with local traditions and customs, abstain from political affairs, and offer respects to the landlord's family through regular gifts (Zongo, 2010). Despite farming the land for generations, migrants could never assume full rights. They therefore depended on their patrons (Marc et al., 2015).

This traditional relationship between landholders and migrants has come under pressure from conflicting tenure systems, divergent interpretations over monetary transactions, socio-generational change, and land scarcity. The descendants of migrants question the nature of transactions made by their ancestors, and the descendants of indigenous communities question the arrangements agreed to by their elders, calling on migrants to pay higher rates and make cash payments to avoid eviction. This tension has been observed across the region, on cocoa and plantation crop areas of southern Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, irrigated plots in northern Nigeria and Senegal, areas of large in-migration in southwest Burkina Faso, and high-density and peri-urban zones in southern Benin and southeast Nigeria (Marc et al., 2015).

ECOWAS Visa-Free Regime, Undocumented Migration, and Violent Conflicts in West Africa

ECOWAS has two main regulatory frameworks used to manage migration within the region which include the 1979 Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment and the 1998 ECOWAS Transhumance Protocol. The 1979 Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment stipulates the right of Community citizens with travelling documents (i.e. passport, health certification, etc.) to enter, reside, and establish businesses in member states. The ECOWAS visa-free regime eliminated the need for visas for maximum stays of 90 days in ECOWAS member states by Community citizens. Article 59 of the 1993 revised ECOWAS Treaty states that 'citizens of the community shall have the right of entry, residence and establishment and member states undertake to recognize these rights of Community citizens in their territories in accordance with the provisions of the Protocols relating hereto' thereby establishing entry, residency, and establishment as core components of free movement (Aniche, 2021).

Another regulatory framework for migration in West Africa is the 1998 ECOWAS Transhumance Protocol. The 1998 ECOWAS Transhumance Protocol provides that all transhumance livestock shall be allowed free passage across the borders of all member states (not at night) both at the points of exit and entry provided that they have the ECOWAS International Transhumance Certificate. The certificate is to enable authorities to monitor the herds before they leave the country of origin; protect the health of local herds; and make it possible to inform the host communities of the arrival of transhumance animals. It contains details on the composition of the herd, the vaccinations given, the itinerary of the herds, the border posts to be crossed, and the final destination. This means that transhumance herds shall follow the routes defined by the appropriate authorities of member states. Generally, the

protocols require Community citizen to travel with necessary documents and to pass through official border posts for proper documentation. This makes it a visa-free regime which is different from border-free or borderless regime, which if it had been implemented, would not require border checks and documentation from Community citizen (Aniche, 2022).

The number of undocumented West African migrants in Nigeria and other ECOWAS states is rapidly increasing due to competition for scarce resources (like farming and grazing land, water, and pasture) occasioned by climate change. Therefore, a greater percentage of the migration in the sub-region was undocumented. Undocumented migration is further facilitated by porous borders due to the poor enforcement of ECOWAS free movement protocols as the region's borders are not sufficiently policed. For example, in the Ghana/Togo and Nigeria/Benin borders, frontier workers commuted daily between their homes and places of employment, and nomadic pastoralists also moved freely in search of grazing land for their herds across international frontiers in Sahelian West Africa (Adepoju, 2005).

This is because West African migrants have always thought of the region as an economic unit within which people can move without restriction (Adepoju, 1999). Migrants also consider the West African sub-region as a single cultural and socio-economic unit within which trade and services are intertwined across countries, and where border crossing is a main part of people's lives and livelihoods (Sofie and Olsen, 2011).

The enforcement of ECOWAS visa-free regime concentrated on documentation of intra-regional migration at official border posts of ECOWAS internal borders through demanding travel documents like passports, vaccine certification, and transhumance certificate. There is no ECOWAS joint border patrol of ECOWAS external borders to prevent proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and infiltrations by extra-regional criminal elements like terrorists, bandits, traffickers, smugglers, launders, etc. In the absence of external border regional security architecture, the sub-region is massively proliferated by SALW and infiltrated by extra-regional militant herders, bandits, insurgents, terrorists, and trans-border criminals from Central, East, and North Africa like Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Libya, and Mauritania (Iwuoha, 2019; Aniche et al., 2021).

The point being made is that the ECOWAS free movement protocols have not been effectively implemented or enforced. The resultant effect is that the protocols have not been able to curb undocumented migration in the internal and external borders of the ECOWAS region. Given that many people in the sub-region do not possess any valid travelling documents, ECOWAS requirements for cross-border migration have encouraged irregular migration through the porous borders despite the freedom of movement established within West Africa. Irregular migration has in turn resulted in proliferation of smuggling, internet fraud, money laundering, illicit trade, drug trafficking, illicit trafficking of SALW, and human/child trafficking by transnational syndicates (Altai Consulting, 2015). The protocols of free movement in West Africa therefore predispose the region to free movement of light weapons and criminality within the region where trans-border crimes are freely exported. Criminals take advantage of the protocols to expand their scope of influence and this makes it increasingly difficult to track perpetrators of crimes (Idehen and Ikuru, 2019). This is coupled with the fact that ECOWAS and West African states have not instituted adequate mechanisms for controlling irregular migration and illicit trade in the sub-region (Agyei and Clotney, 2007).

In West Africa alone, there are a total of 35 international boundaries characterised by high levels of porosity (Lamprey, 2013). These porous borders have continued to engender

undocumented migration, cross-border crime, and instability in the sub-region, owing to the ineffective enforcement of visa-free regime and lack of an appropriate mechanism for monitoring movements and illegal activities across the borders (Addo, 2006; Omilusi, 2015). As a result of illicit trade in weapons across the borders of Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo, vast quantities of arms have flooded the region despite their rampant misuse by state and non-state actors alike (Asoba and Glokpor, 2014; Omilusi, 2015). Some of these illicit SALW are used in armed violence such as ethnic-religious conflicts, communal clashes, sectarian violence, cultism, political violence, electoral violence, vigilante, militancy, and criminality. The consequence being that there were over 30 communal clashes, sectarian violence, and ethno-religious conflicts with each claiming hundreds of lives and properties as well as internal displacement of women and children between 1999 and 2003 in Nigeria alone (John, Mohammed, Pinto and Nkanta, 2007). The proliferation and use of SALW in ethno-religious clashes and armed robbery have killed more than 10,000 Nigerians, an average of 1000 people per year within the same period. The majority of casualties, for example, about 66% in Kano riot of 2004 were SALW victims sustaining permanent disabilities. Injuries due to SALW have increased as much as tenfold in urban Nigeria because most homicides are committed using SALW (Nte, 2011).

The weapons are recycled between Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone and among belligerents in other conflict zones such as Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and Senegal. Most of these firearms illegally trafficked across the sub-region are eventually used by rebel combatants and criminal gangs for either fighting civil wars, as in the case of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d’Ivoire, among others, or used for armed robbery including vehicle theft and trafficking, and for committing highway robberies of passengers moving from one ECOWAS state to the other. Even the intensification of traditional cattle rustling practices has been attributed to the influx of SALW (Stohl and Tuttle, 2009; Aning and Atta-Asamoah, 2011; Marc et al., 2015). For further information on number of cattle rustled and fatalities in Nigeria between 2010 and 2019, see Table 1.

Table 1 Estimated cattle rustling and fatalities in Nigeria, 2010–2019

Year	Cattle rustled	Pastoralist fatalities
2010	32,316	412
2011	45,922	329
2012	47,312	194
2013	53,801	281
2014	60,000	357
2015	64,830	741
2016	59,322	1041
2017	67,400	1139
2018	68,322	1459
2019	-	1058

Sources: Compiled from (1) Institute of Governance and Social Research (IGSR) and Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) West Africa cited in Ajala, O. (2020). New drivers of conflict in Nigeria: An analysis of the clashes between farmers and pastoralists. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(12), 2048–2066. (2) West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (2020). *Addressing Armed Bandit in the North-West Region of Nigeria: Exploring the Potentials of a Multi-dimensional Conflict Management Approach*. Accra: WANEP West Africa Early Warning and Early Response Network (WARN) Policy Brief

What then are the wider security implications of the unchecked irregular migration in Nigeria and West African borderlands given the increasing resource-scarcity? How does competition for scarce resources impact on migration-conflict nexus?

Resource-Scarcity, Undocumented Migration, and Herders-Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria and ECOWAS Region

Some of the criminal elements among herdsmen have also been reported to be involved in transporting SALW to Nigeria through the cross-border undocumented movement of their cattle. Most of the SALW reached bandits, insurgents, and terrorists (and other dangerous groups and individuals) through Libyan and Malian rebels on the backs of camels and donkeys desperate to exchange arms for money. This has been made possible to a great extent by a combination of both internal and external factors such as Nigeria's porous borders, corruption of immigration officers, inadequate record of immigration and emigration, and the problem of identifying who is a Nigerian (Omitola, 2014; Aniche et al., 2021). To be sure, weapons come from various sources, some local, others from black markets across West and Central Africa, including from Libya's looted stockpiles (International Crisis Group, 2017). One of the gunrunners from Niger arrested in Zamfara confessed to have sold 450 rifles to bandits and militant herdsmen in Nigeria (Channels Television, 2021).

The current escalation and recurrent violent attacks on various farming communities in the North central Nigeria are linked to the infiltration of the herdsmen by migrants from neighbouring countries including Niger, Chad, and Mali. These infiltrators who have been radicalised or exposed to terrorist ideas and operations also operated as mercenaries demobilised from various conflicts in the Sahel. They are now pushing the front of banditry and terrorism in the North central states of Nigeria (Omitola, 2014; Obi and Iwuoha, 2023).

In addition, some of the high-placed Nigerian officials have attributed increasing violent conflicts in the Northern Nigeria to undocumented migrants from other West African states. For instance, even President Buhari had blamed the rise in violent conflicts in the Northern Nigeria on armed immigrants from failed states like Libya. Similarly, Nigerian Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed, blamed rising insecurity in Nigeria on the ECOWAS protocol on the free movement of persons for the infiltration of Nigeria by 'foreigners' who now operate as bandits and criminal herdsmen (The Sun, 2021). This was re-echoed by Mohammed Adamu, the Inspector General of Police (IGP), when he alluded to the fact that the escalating violent conflicts in the Northern region of Nigeria have an international dimension. The IGP claimed that an investigation revealed that most of the bandits in the country are foreigners, mostly members of the Islamic State of West Africa (ISWA). He announced that most of the arrested bandits confessed to have come from Sudan, Niger, and Mali, among other countries (Olafusi, 2020). In the same vein, the Governor of Niger State, Abubakar Sani Bello, had stated that foreigners, especially from Mali and Sudan, are being recruited as bandits in the Northern Nigeria through social media because some of the arrested bandits are foreigners from as far as Sudan and Mali (Ripples Nigeria, 2021).

Generally, undocumented economic migrants have come into conflict with indigenous populations in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Nigeria over ownership of assets, in particular land, as well as competition for jobs. Pastoralists constitute another category of migrants that have frequently been caught up in conflict such that pastoral communities in West Africa, including the Fulani, Tuareg, and the Moors, are in a persistent state of crisis (Audu, 2013; De Haan et al., 2014; Marcet al., 2015). The conflicts commonly stemmed from

competition over access to or use of the natural resources (land and water) necessary to sustain their livelihood. Many West African states have become arenas or theatres of farmers-herders conflicts. For example, in Nigeria, between 2001 and 2004, over 2000 deaths were recorded in the face-off between herders and farmers (Idehen and Ikuru, 2019).

Thus, tensions surrounding migratory flows through West Africa, coupled with discriminatory notions of citizenship and foreigner/alien, indigene/settler dichotomy, political and social marginalisation, and competition over land, resources, and employment, have contributed to violence and conflict across the sub-region. Therefore, banditry and challenges to state authority in large swathes of territory within ECOWAS are notable, especially in the northern Niger and Casamance in Senegal. Disputes over land, water, and chieftaincy have claimed hundreds of lives in low-intensity conflicts in northern Ghana, Mali, and western Côte d'Ivoire. The conflicts have created major human and regional security threats through spill-over effects and the export of bad practices that have blighted the region's development perspectives. Thus, the Casamance conflict has embroiled neighbouring Guinea-Bissau and Gambia just as the export of worst practice from the Liberian conflict has informed the acute insecurity in western Côte d'Ivoire. In the same way, the insurgency in northern Niger has influenced the resurgence of separatism and banditry in northern Mali among the local Tuareg (Pham, 2007; Musah, 2009).

Conflicts between herders and farmers are the most common form of land-based conflicts in West Africa. This is because the rapid population growth and climate change have resulted in resource scarcity such that livelihoods of some 15 million pastoralists in northern Nigeria are threatened by decreasing access to water and pasture (Olaniyan and Okeke-Uzodike, 2015; Maiangwa, 2017). The rising violent conflicts and numerous criminal activities in Nigeria and West African borderlands have thus been attributed to resource scarcity. The competition for scarce resources occasioned by population pressure, climate change, and other environmental challenges has triggered mass migration, criminality, insecurity, banditry, and bloody conflicts in West Africa (Eke, 2019; Suleiman, 2019; Ajala, 2020; Mbih, 2020; Onwuzuruigbo, 2021).

The increasing population density and pressures in the North-central and southern Nigeria have resulted in shrinking of grazing land and utilisation of cattle corridor for farming, building, housing, and other purposes. This has led to grazing in farms by herders damaging crops which in turn resulted in blocking of the remaining cattle corridor or track by farmers. In some cases, farmers retaliate by rustling herders' cattle. This establishes strong links between resource scarcity and cattle rustling in northern Nigeria (Onwuzuruigbo, 2021). This is often the cause of herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria (Benjaminsen and Ba, 2018). The herders-farmers conflicts can therefore be associated with herders' attempt to restore the lost equilibrium of resource access (Eke, 2019).

The increasing desertification exacerbated by climate change pushes the pastoralists further south in search of grazing. This serves to further increase tensions between southern farmers who view pastoralists as foreign invaders. In other words, low-intensity conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, as well as among different pastoralist groups, have a long history that is becoming more intense in countries such as Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal. For example, in Mali, Tuareg perceptions of economic exclusion and marginalisation by a state that favoured sedentary populations over nomadic ones fed into grievances and helped trigger rebellions and conflict. In most of West Africa and the Sahel, these tensions between herders and farmers have degenerated into recurrent episodes of deadly violence. Some of these tensions had in some instances escalated into large-scale conflicts such

as the war between Mauritania and Senegal (World Bank, 2013; Cilliers, 2014; De Haan et al., 2014; Marc et al., 2015; Yabi, 2016; Tariff, 2022).

Therefore, conflicts and violent clashes between farmers and nomadic/migrant cattle herders have been a common feature of economic livelihood in West Africa (Tonah, 2002; Tonah, 2006; Audu, 2014; Olayoku, 2014; Ahmed-Gamgum, 2016). There have been incessant and recurrent bloody clashes between the nomadic Fulani herdsmen and host communities (sedentary farmers) for several years. The clashes are occasioned by the destruction of agricultural farms of the farmers by the cattle of the nomadic herdsmen. The upsurge and incessant resource conflicts unleashed as a result of boundary dispute in the tropics have resulted in loss of lives and properties. These clashes have claimed thousands of lives within a period of 20 years. In 2013, about 115 casualties were reported and this spate of violence has become a recurring decimal. In 2014, over 1200 lives were lost. Several communities have therefore become hostile to the pastoralists particularly the Fulani herdsmen. The sedentary agrarian communities have thus resorted to self-defence through local vigilante groups. This has further aggravated violence, with destruction of lives and properties (Fasona and Omojola, 2005; Abbass, 2012; Mcgregor, 2014; Idowu and Okunola, 2017; Imo, 2017).

In Nigeria, for example, casualty figures rose 300% between 2010 and 2016, with reports suggesting approximately 2500 deaths in 2016, while only 80 deaths were reported between 2010 and 2013 (Eke, 2019). It has also been reported that a total of 6319 deaths including women and children between June 2011 and May 2019 in the State. Additionally, an estimated 4983 women were widowed, 25,050 children orphaned, and 190,340 others internally displaced between June 2011 and May 2019 in Zamfara State. In Katsina State, over 2000 people have been killed, 500 communities destroyed, and over 33,000 people displaced (Wodu, 2021; WANEP, 2020).

Further reports also revealed that over 10,000 cattle were lost, while 2688 hectares of farmlands and 10,000 houses were destroyed within 2011 and mid-2018 in Zamfara State. Also, the State recorded the loss of 147,800 vehicles and motorcycles between June 2011 and May 2019. In November 2019, an estimated 4000 people were also internally displaced in Shiroro LGA of Niger State. December 2019 recorded an increase in fatalities with 38 deaths in Niger, Kebbi, and Katsina States. According to a 2019 report issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Nigerian Government, over 200,000 persons were internally displaced in several communities of Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto States between January and August 2019. Reports obtained from the Zamfara State Government revealed that banditry has resulted in an estimated 22,000 widows and 44,000 orphans in Zamfara State since 2011 (WANEP, 2020).

Conflicts resulting from cattle grazing actually accounted for 35% of all reported crises between 1991 and 2005 in Nigeria (Adekunle and Adisa, 2010; Imo, 2017). The attacks by militant herdsmen have in recent years taken different dimensions with the use of new and sophisticated types of weapons and communication devices such as AK-47 rifles. Militant herdsmen have reportedly killed hundreds in different states of the federation including Adamawa, Benue, Enugu, Kogi, Nassarawa, Niger, Plateau, and Taraba, among others. For example, in April 2016, there was another attack in Southern Enugu State which claimed about 40 lives and destroyed properties worth millions of naira leaving thousands fleeing their homes and rendering children orphaned. Earlier in February 2016, there was an attack on farmers in Benue State which according to reports killed some 300 people. The herdsmen attacked Uzaar in Tombo, Anyii in Logo, and Vase in Ukum local government areas of Benue State killing 8

and 12 persons, respectively. This incident led to the displacement of over 1000 people from these localities rendering them homeless. Even in Oke Ako in Ikole Local government area of Ekiti State, some suspected herdsmen attacked the town and killed one of the residents (Adekunle and Adisa, 2010; Idowu and Okunola, 2017; Imo, 2017). For detailed information on herdsmen and farmers clashes in Nigeria from February 2016 to December 2020, see Table 2.

Table 2 demonstrates that the clashes have escalated such that in just two years, between June 2016 and June 2018, 682 villages and towns were displaced, 3000 people killed, 2706 farms destroyed, and 13,838 cattle and 11,088 sheep and goats were rustled (Aniche et al., 2021). At least 1813 people have been killed between January and June 2018. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), militant herdsmen killed 2500 Nigerians in 2016 (*Vanguard*, July 3, 2018).

Babandede (2019) and Adewale (2021) reported that the recent escalation of the menace of the rampaging and marauding armed herdsmen who migrated from Guinea, Senegal, and Gambia undocumented is another dimension of violent conflicts occasioned by undocumented migration in the sub-region. From 1996 to 2006, about 121 people lost their lives in Bauchi and Gombe states as a result of conflicts between pastoralists and farmers. Conflicts in some regions in Northern Ghana arise due to cattle destroying the crops of farmers (Abbass, 2012). Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso experience cross-border raids and attacks based on pastoral disputes between cattle herders and settler farmers (de Andrés, 2008). Some of these herders are involved in criminal activities as they were reported to have invaded some places in Lagelu Local Government of Oyo State and made away with goods and cash worth N500,000 (Idowu and Okunola, 2017). Not surprisingly, the 2015 Global Terrorism Index ranked militant herders as the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world with a record killing of about 1229 people in 2014 (Imo, 2017).

From the foregoing, there are three major ways through which undocumented migration is implicated in the intensification of herders-farmers conflicts in West Africa within the context of resource-scarcity occasioned by climate change. Firstly, as cross-border militant herders migrating undocumented from and to mainly different West African countries like Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, etc. Secondly, as foreign mercenaries or militant groups from other African countries like Sudan, Niger, Chad, Mali, and Libya often recruited by local herders to fight sedentary farmers. Thirdly, as trans-border gunrunners smuggling SALW (sometimes hidden in cattle herds) across various West African countries. For example, it has been pointed out that as disputes over grazing resources have increased, some herders who initially acquired arms to drive away cattle rustlers have organised or engaged fighters to avenge real or perceived wrongs by farmers or to gain access to fresh pasture (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Table 2 Some of the incidences of herdsmen and farmers clashes in Nigeria from February 2016 to December 2020

Month/year	State	Fatalities	Casualties	Displaced	Abducted
February 2016	Benue	Over 320 people were killed	Not fewer than 100 were seriously injured	About 2000 were displaced	-
March 2016	Benue	About 500 people were killed	-	-	-
April 2016	Taraba	15 people were killed	-	-	-
	Enugu	About 40 persons were killed	-	-	-
June 2016	Benue	About 59 persons were killed	-	-	-
August 2016	Enugu	-	Several persons were injured	-	-
October 2016	Imo	-	Several people were wounded	-	-
January 2017	Benue	Not fewer than five people died	Several people were injured Nine people were killed	-	-
	Niger	-	-	At least 6000 persons were displaced	-
March 31, 2018	Zamfara	Over 30 people were killed	-	-	-
March 1, 2019	Zamfara	About 21 people were killed	-	-	40 people were abducted
June 9, 2019	Sokoto	25 people were killed	-	-	-
July 4, 2019	Katsina	11 people were killed	-	-	-
August 19, 2019	Katsina	4 villagers were killed	-	-	-
January 17, 2020	Zamfara	31 persons killed	-	-	-
March 2, 2020	Kaduna	50 people were killed	Several people were injured	-	-
April 20, 2020	Katsina	A total of 47 villagers were killed	-	-	-
April 24, 2020	Kaduna	7 persons were killed	-	-	1 person was kidnapped
May 6, 2020	Katsina	6 persons were killed	-	-	1 person was kidnapped
May 20, 2020	Zamfara	12 people were killed	-	-	-
June 5, 2020	Zamfara	21 persons were killed	-	-	-
June 25, 2020	Niger	4 persons were killed	-	-	-
July 21, 2020	Niger	-	-	-	16 persons were kidnapped
July 26, 2020	Kaduna	10 villagers were killed	-	-	-
August 9, 2020	Katsina	10 persons died	-	-	-
September 4, 2020	Niger	22 people were killed	-	-	-
September 13, 2020	Kaduna	-	-	-	16 people were abducted
September 18, 2020	Sokoto	2 persons died	-	-	2 women abducted
October 12, 2020	Katsina and Niger	14 persons were killed	3 persons were injured	-	1 person was kidnapped
November 17, 2020	Kaduna	2 persons were killed	-	-	8 students were kidnapped
November 20, 2020	Niger	1 policeman was killed	-	-	14 people were kidnapped
November 23, 2020	Zamfara	-	-	-	18 persons were kidnapped
December 1, 2020	Katsina	Eight persons were killed	-	-	30 persons were abducted
December 5, 2020	Kaduna	1 person was killed	-	-	-
December 10, 2020	Abuja	-	-	-	3 persons were abducted
December 12, 2020	Benue	4 persons were killed	7 persons were injured	-	-
	Katsina	-	-	-	About 333 students missing
December 13, 2020	Niger	1 person was killed	-	-	20 persons were kidnapped

Sources: Compiled from (1) Imo, C.K. (2017). The demographic implications of nomadic herdsmen and farmers clashes in Nigeria. *International Journal of Development and Management Review (INJODEMAR)*, 12(1), 45–58. (2) Rosenje, M.O. and Adeniyi, O.P. (2021). The Impact of Banditry on Nigeria’s Security in the Fourth Republic: An Evaluation of Nigeria’s Northwest. *Zamfara Journal of Politics and Development*, 2(1), 1–26

Conclusion

West Africa has a long history of population mobility, both intra- and extra-regionally. The sub-region has always been a place of significant mobility and mixing of populations with the majority of migration intra-regional. But most of these movements are not documented in accordance with ECOWAS Protocol, thus posing serious security challenges in the West Africa

sub-region. Indeed, the increasing irregular migration induced by poor enforcement of ECOWAS free movement protocols and intensifying competition for scarce resources has resulted in increasing smuggling, internet fraud, money laundering, illicit trade, drug trafficking, illicit trafficking of SALW, and human/child trafficking by transnational syndicates. Given the rising resource scarcity occasioned by climate change and population pressures, the sub-region is confronted with enormous security challenges in the form of trans-border criminal and violent activities like terrorism, militancy, insurgency, armed robbery, and kidnapping.

We relied more on resource-scarcity variant of resource-conflict theory to explain the migration-conflict nexus in Nigeria. It is this scarcity of resources like water and grasses occasioned by climate change that is one of the drivers of migration of herders. Despite the ECOWAS free movement protocols, these herders move undocumented and trespass over farmlands destroying farms in the process. This leads to escalation of herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria and other forms of violent conflicts in West Africa such as cattle rustling and banditry.

We conclude that given the poor enforcement of ECOWAS visa-free regime, undocumented migration induced by resource scarcity has escalated violent conflicts such as banditry and herders-farmers clashes in Nigeria and West African borderlands. Hence, it is important to curb irregular cross-border migration so as to lessen violent conflicts in West Africa. To achieve this, ECOWAS must transcend the current poorly implemented visa-free regime to initiate border-free and possibly borderless West Africa; and tighten ECOWAS external borders against proliferation of SALW and infiltration of extra-regional criminal elements like terrorists, bandits, traffickers, smugglers, launders, etc. Relatedly, there is need to tackle the root causes of violent conflicts such as climate change, abject poverty, youth unemployment, and extreme inequality; and replace the traditional nomadic herding with modern ranching so as to prevent herders/farmers resource-access conflict.

Notes

1. Southern Africa has its fair share with South Africa alone accounting for over 5 million of the African migrants from not only the region, but also from West Africa (see Ngwanya 2010). Also, in alphabetic order, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Somalia, and Sudan are notable examples of countries outside SADC that have significant migrant stocks in South Africa (Isike and Isike, 2012: p. 94).

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