



RESOURCE COMPETITION AND POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF FARMER-HERDER CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

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Farmer–herder conflict in Nigeria has emerged as a critical challenge to national security, food systems, and sustainable development, underscoring the importance of understanding its underlying drivers and long-term implications. While existing studies often examine isolated causes of the conflict, there is a notable research gap in integrative analyses that link resource competition, environmental change, and governance failures within a unified political ecology framework. This study addresses this gap by analysing the dynamics of farmer–herder conflict through the lens of resource competition and political ecology. The study aims to examine the root causes of the conflict, assess its socio-economic and environmental consequences, and explore sustainable pathways for peacebuilding. A qualitative research design is adopted, relying on secondary data, historical analysis, and policy review, supported by conflict theory and political ecology as analytical frameworks. The findings reveal that the conflict is driven by interrelated factors, including competition over land and water resources, climate change, population growth, migration patterns, and weak institutional and governance structures. These conflicts have resulted in widespread violence, loss of lives and property, displacement, food insecurity, and weakened social cohesion. The study further finds that existing conflict resolution mechanisms remain inadequate due to poor implementation and limited coordination. The study concludes that achieving sustainable peace requires a holistic approach that integrates institutional reform, effective land governance, environmental management, and community-based conflict resolution strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria and the wider West African region have long experienced recurrent conflicts, many of which are rooted in resource competition and socio-ecological pressures¹. These conflicts span political, religious, ethnic, and environmental dimensions, but are increasingly driven by competition over scarce natural resources. In recent years, farmer–herder conflicts have become a prominent manifestation of these dynamics, contributing significantly to the escalation of violence and instability in Nigeria². Agricultural producers and pastoralist communities have historically been central actors in rural livelihoods, maintaining a mutually beneficial and interdependent relationship over time. Their cooperation in the use of land, water, and other resources fostered coexistence, facilitated communication, and supported relatively balanced socio-economic development³. Although tensions occasionally arose between pastoralists and agricultural producers, these were traditionally managed through local conflict-resolution mechanisms, reflecting a long-standing history of economic interdependence between the two groups.

For many years, herders and sedentary farmers in Nigeria maintained a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship grounded in shared resource use and economic interdependence⁴. When disputes arose during these periods, they were largely resolved through customary community-based peacebuilding mechanisms and traditional institutions⁵. However, in recent years, farmer–herder disputes in Nigeria have escalated into violent and protracted conflicts, emerging as a major constraint to sustainable

¹ R Blench, 'Conflict Between Pastoralists and Cultivators in Nigeria' (Kay Williamson Educational Foundation 2010) 1.

² AU Ofuoku, 'The Role of Community Development Committees in Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Central Agricultural Zone of Delta State, Nigeria' (2009) 1(3) *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 921.

³ AG Shetima and UA Tar, 'Farmer-Pastoralist Conflict in West Africa: Exploring the Causes and Consequences' (2008) 1(2) *Information, Society and Justice* 163.

⁴ AN Aniche and UL Ngwu, 'Herdsman and Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria: The Implications for Social Work Practice' (2019) <https://www.google.com> accessed 25 July 2022.

⁵ KO Lamidi and OI Olaleye, 'Critical analysis of the contemporary role of traditional institutions on intra-communal conflict resolution in Southwest Nigeria' (2023) *African Identities* <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2023.2227353>.

development and national stability. Adisa⁶ correctly pointed out that the major cause of resource-use conflict in Nigeria continues to be the conflict between farmers and herders. Beyond environmental pressures, these conflicts are also shaped by intertwined economic, social, and political factors. In particular, rising herd sizes and changing production conditions have compelled cattle herders to migrate beyond traditional grazing areas in search of new pastures, intensifying competition over land and resources⁷. Climate change, population growth, and related pressures have intensified stress on land resources, increasing competition between farmers and herders and turning arable land into an increasingly scarce and contested⁸. According to Blench⁹, Unauthorized encroachment onto farmlands and the destruction of crops by grazing cattle—particularly during planting periods and immediately after harvest—are among the most frequently reported triggers of conflict between farmers and herders. However, Abbass¹⁰ identified the main causes of disputes between farmers and Fulani herders, or herdsmen. This study demonstrated that the causes, effects, and methods of resolution—particularly on grazing fields—are what lead to the majority of disputes.

Shettima and Tar¹¹ stated that a common pastoral practice involves moving livestock onto lands cultivated by crop farmers for grazing. At the same time, these farming communities depend on pastoralists for essential resources, including dairy products for nutrition and animal manure to enrich soil fertility. Adeleke¹² also pointed out that interactions with sedentary farmers shape the pastoralist group's ability to survive. Both

⁶ RS Adisa, 'Land Use Conflict between Farmers and Herdsmen – Implications for Agricultural and Rural Development' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Ilorin 2012).

⁷ I Abbass, 'No Retreat No Surrender Conflict for Survival between the Fulani Pastoralist and Farmers in Northern Nigeria' (2012) 8(1) *European Scientific Journal* 25.

⁸ SS Abdulbaqi and O Ariemu, 'Newspapers framing of herdsmen-farmers' conflicts in Nigeria and its implication on peace-oriented journalism' (2017) 11(2) *Creative Artist: A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies* 77.

⁹ Blench (n 1) 7.

¹⁰ Abbass (n 7).

¹¹ Shettima and Tar (n 3) 171; KO Lamidi, LB Jutta and BA Taleat, 'Farmers-Herders' Crisis in Nigeria: An Empirical Review' (2024) 5(10) *International Journal of Religion* 1515.

¹² M Adeleke, 'The Increasing Spate of Killings in Nigeria: Cases, Causes and the Needful' (2018) 2(2) *African Development* 32-45.

groups depend on shared resources—such as water, land, and pasture—to sustain their livelihoods, underscoring a long-standing interdependence. However, recurring disputes across various regions have escalated into widespread violence, loss of life, and internal displacement, disrupting a relationship that had endured for generations¹³. Land use for grazing remains a significant source of tension, as farmers cultivating the same areas often resist the use of these lands by herders for cattle grazing across extensive tracts¹⁴. These dynamics often lead to crop destruction, intensified competition over land and resources, and a range of adverse consequences. Persistent violent clashes between farmers and herders have, in many cases, eroded stability across Nigeria's senatorial zones, making sustained peace increasingly difficult to achieve¹⁵. The narrative has shifted from once peaceful communities to environments marked by persistent insecurity, where frequent attacks have fostered a climate of fear among residents¹⁶. Existing literature indicates that multiple stakeholders—including government institutions, non-governmental organizations, community leaders, traditional authorities, and local groups—have all played important roles in efforts to promote peace between farmers and herders in Nigeria.

Recent historical scholarship challenges the common assumption that farmer–herder conflict in Nigeria is an age-old phenomenon characterized by persistent violence. Rather, historians and political ecologists argue that relations between farming and pastoral communities in the pre-colonial period were largely governed by systems of cooperation, negotiation, and mutual dependence. Pastoral groups, particularly the Fulani, practiced seasonal transhumance across ecological zones in search of pasture and water, while farming communities benefited from access to livestock

¹³ T Doyin, 'An Empirical Investigation to Incessant Killings in Nigeria' (2017) 5(67) *Journal of Philosophy* 82.

¹⁴ R Akinkuolie, 'Herdsman / farmers clashes: Problems and solutions' *The Guardian* (2018) <https://guardian.ng/opinion/herdsmen-farmers-clashes-problems-and-solutions>.

¹⁵ JP Okoro, 'Herdsman / Farmers Conflict and Its Effects on Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria' (2018) 4(1) *Journal of Peace, Security, and Development* 143.

¹⁶ OP Akorede, 'Implications of Farmers-Herdsman Conflicts on Nigeria's Cohesion' (2018) 7(3) *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 22.

products and manure that enhanced agricultural productivity¹⁷. Access to land and grazing routes was regulated through customary institutions, traditional authorities, and local agreements that helped manage disputes and maintain social stability.

Historical studies indicate that pre-colonial societies maintained flexible land tenure systems and locally embedded conflict-resolution mechanisms that facilitated coexistence between farmers and herders despite periodic competition over resources¹⁸. Although disputes occasionally occurred, they were generally localized and resolved through customary institutions rather than escalating into widespread violence. The colonial period introduced profound changes that altered these relationships. British colonial policies transformed land administration, mobility patterns, and political authority in ways that gradually increased tensions between farmers and herders¹⁹. Through indirect rule, colonial authorities restructured local governance systems, strengthening some traditional institutions while weakening others and reshaping access to natural resources. Colonial administrators also sought to regulate pastoral mobility through grazing reserves, stock routes, veterinary regulations, and taxation policies. While these measures were intended to improve livestock production and administrative control, they frequently disrupted existing arrangements governing land use and resource access²⁰.

Recent scholarship argues that colonial land and resource management policies contributed to the gradual territorialization of land use, reducing the flexibility that had historically characterized farmer–herder interactions²¹. As agricultural expansion increased and pastoral routes

¹⁷ AU Ofuoku and BI Isife, 'Causes, effects and resolution of farmers–nomadic cattle herders conflict in Delta State, Nigeria' (2009) 1(2) *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 47–54.

¹⁸TA Benjaminsen and B Ba, 'Farmer–herder conflicts, pastoral marginalisation and corruption: A case study from the inland Niger Delta of Mali' (2009) 175(1) *Geographical Journal* 71–81.

¹⁹ MD Turner, 'Political ecology and the moral dimensions of "resource conflicts": The case of farmer–herder conflicts in the Sahel' (2004) 23(7) *Political Geography* 863.

²⁰ Blench (n 1).

²¹ Benjaminsen and Ba (n 18).

became constrained, competition over land intensified. Furthermore, the creation of administrative boundaries imposed new restrictions on the mobility of pastoral groups, undermining traditional mechanisms for resource sharing and conflict management. Contemporary historians and political ecologists therefore contend that the current farmer–herder conflict should not be interpreted as a continuation of ancient ethnic or religious antagonisms. Rather, it is the outcome of long-term political, economic, and environmental transformations that have reshaped access to land and natural resources²². Colonial interventions laid the foundations for many of these tensions, while post-colonial population growth, environmental degradation, climate change, and governance failures have further intensified competition and insecurity²³. Overall, the historical evidence suggests that relations between farmers and herders in pre-colonial Nigeria were characterized more by coexistence, interdependence, and negotiated resource access than by persistent violent conflict (Blench, 2010; Bassett, 1988). The escalation of violence observed in recent decades is therefore better understood as a consequence of changing political, environmental, and institutional conditions than as an inevitable feature of farmer–herder relations.

Alhassan²⁴ identifies several underlying drivers of farmer–herder conflict, including the southward migration of pastoralists, competition over scarce resources, the erosion of long-standing farmer–herder relations, and broader structural conditions. Increasing levels of violence have further intensified tensions, prompting farmers to defend their property while herders adopt more aggressive measures to safeguard their livestock during grazing²⁵. In response to recurring attacks by cattle rustlers during grazing, some pastoralists have armed themselves—often with small

²² Ibid.

²³ AC Okoli and GA Atelhe, 'Nomads against natives: A political ecology of herder/farmer conflicts in Nasarawa State, Nigeria' (2014) 4(2) *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 76–88.

²⁴ UB Alhassan, 'Herdsman and Farmers Conflicts in North-Eastern Nigeria: Causes, Repercussions and Resolutions' (2013) 2(5) *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 17.

²⁵ JB Oppong, 'An Analysis of Herder-Farmer Conflicts in the Asante-Akim North District of Ghana' (Unpublished thesis, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology 2015).

firearms and illicit weapons—in efforts to protect their herds, a development that has nonetheless led to fatalities among Fulani herders and the loss of their livestock²⁶. The situation continues to deteriorate as both groups persist in causing destruction within communities, thereby endangering the lives and safety of residents²⁷. The Nigerian government has often been perceived as struggling to effectively curb the violence and to establish lasting peace in communities that have suffered extensive loss of lives and property as a result of the conflict²⁸. To curb the ongoing conflict and reduce further loss of life, there is a need for a comprehensive examination of the structural and institutional factors driving these disputes, alongside their consequences and the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for resolution.

This paper is divided into seven sections. After this first section, the theoretical framework is the second section. The third section presents the affected states, regions and migration routes of the farmers/herders' conflict in Nigeria. The fourth section describes the methodology. The fifth section historicizes the herdsman and farmers' conflict vis-à-vis its causes in Nigeria. The sixth section examines the magnitudes of farmers and herders conflicts in Nigeria. The seventh section, which is the penultimate section, analyses the sustainable mechanisms of resolving herders and farmers' conflict. The eighth section presents the concluding remarks.

²⁶ SO Abugu and CO Onuba, 'Climate change and pastoral conflicts in the Middle Belt and South-East Nigeria: Implication on human resource of the regions' (2015) 3(5) *Global Journal of Human Resource Management* 44.

²⁷ DS Ortserga, 'Towards a model explaining change in agricultural land use patterns in Ute Districts of Vandeikya Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria' (2012) 2(4) *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 13.

²⁸ MB Tukur, 'Conflicts between Transhumant Pastoralist and Farmers in Nigeria: The Way Out' (11 November 2014) <https://pastoralist2.wordpress.com>.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conflict Theory

According to Schrich²⁹, a conflict is a significant dispute, quarrel, struggle, or major confrontation of wants or viewpoints. According to Vanderlin³⁰, the threat aims to prevent or restrict one party's access to a certain resource or objective. Land disputes in the grasslands between crop farmers and grazers might be an example of this. This is frequently the case in situations when they graze and cultivate in the same areas³¹. The conflict theory identifies coercion, division, animosity, dissent conflict, mal-integration, and change as traits of a society. According to Klein & Ritti³², conflict arises from a variety of factors, such as disparities in tasks, values, attitudes, and priorities as groups compete for control over limited resources. Conflict can occur when group leaders have different viewpoints or when one group prefers to take advantage of the others³³. Personality conflicts can cause arguments in groups and split the society into various factions. According to Tonah³⁴, conflict theory sees ongoing hostility over limited resources as the main reason why economic actors fight. Conflict theorists such as Vanderlin³⁵, Abbass³⁶, and Kwagha³⁷ contend that the following characteristics are shared by economic agents: (1) there is some form of

²⁹L. Schirch, *Women in Peacebuilding Resource and Training Manual* (Eastern Mennonite University 2004).

³⁰ JP Vanderlin, 'Conflicts and Cooperation Over the Commons: A Conceptual and Methodological Framework for Assessing the Role of Local Institutions' (2005) <http://www.ilri.cgiar.org>.

³¹ SI Odoh and CF Chigozie, 'Climate Change and Conflict in Nigeria: A Theoretical and Empirical Examination of the Worsening Incidence of Conflict between Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers in Northern Nigeria' (2012) 2(1) *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 110–124

³² SM Klein and RR Ritti, *Understanding Organizational Behaviour: The Conflict Process* (Kent Publishing Company 1980) 50–65

³³ E Elfversson, 'The political conditions for local peacemaking: A comparative study of communal conflict resolution in Kenya' (2019) 52(13–14) *Comparative Political Studies* 2061–2096.

³⁴ S Tonah, 'State policies, local prejudices, and cattle rustling along the Ghana-Burkina Faso border' (2006) 704 *Africa* 551–567.

³⁵ Vanderlin (n 30).

³⁶ I Abbass, 'Conflicts between Pastoralist and Farmers in Nigeria' (2014).

³⁷ Kwagha (2018).

contact between the parties; (2) the parties perceive opposing viewpoints; and (3) one of the parties always seeks to resolve contradictions that already exist.

There is a border separating any farming system, like the herding of cattle on the move, from the wider system that is the environment³⁸. The bounds of the bigger system are represented by the border. Nomadic herders and farmers are facing increased competition for access to fresh water, cropland, pastures, and rangeland usage in general³⁹. Many forms of conflict in ties between farmers and nomadic herders are clearly distinguished from one another. Similarly, Blench⁴⁰ has distinguished between several kinds of conflicts in farmer-nomadic relationships. He distinguishes between conflicts of interest, violent conflicts, and disagreements between people and groups. According to Tonah⁴¹, a dispute can be understood as a disagreement or argument between two or more individuals or groups. When such a disagreement escalates into violence, it may result in chaos, including the loss of human and animal lives as well as widespread destruction. In contrast, a conflict of interest arises when different parties hold opposing views, priorities, or concerns. In most cases, this type of conflict is nonviolent and is expressed as a struggle for access to and control over resources within a particular geographical area⁴². Differences between farmers and herders are perceived as an ethnic conflict between the two groups as well as a conflict for resources.

Conflicts between herder and farmer groups are sometimes classified as ethnic conflict since they have highly diverse values, customs, physical qualities, and cultural traits⁴³. Group membership is often characterized

³⁸ D Mwamfupe, 'Persistence of Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Tanzania' (2015) 5(2) *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications* 1–8.

³⁹ Adisa (n 6).

⁴⁰ Blench (n 1).

⁴¹ Tonah (n 34).

⁴² AC Okoli, 'The political ecology of the Niger delta crisis: The Nigeria state, oil industry and the Niger Delta conflict' (Conference Proceeding, Niger Delta University 2008) 730-736

⁴³ I Muhammed, AB Ismaila and UM Bibi, 'An Assessment of farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria using GIS' (2015) 4(7) *International Journal of Engineering Science Invention* 23-33.

by a strong sense of belonging that is rooted in shared economic interests, as well as a collective commitment to defending the group's values, culture, and authority structures. Similarly, although Fulani nomadic cattle herders constitute a minority in many of the communities where they settle temporarily, they maintain a distinct cultural identity and a strong sense of solidarity among themselves⁴⁴. They are often socially and economically isolated from the surrounding farming communities, a separation that tends to frame interactions in ethnic terms. Consequently, tensions between nomadic herders and host farming populations are frequently perceived as ethnically driven, an assumption reflected in both the theoretical framework and contextual focus of this study. In Nigeria—especially in Benue State—such clashes between crop farmers and nomadic cattle herders have repeatedly led to substantial losses in agricultural output, property, and human lives⁴⁵. Achieving the goals of agricultural development initiatives requires a clear understanding of both the drivers and impacts of conflict between nomadic herders and farming communities in host areas. Accordingly, this study contributes to strengthening professional engagement in this field, which continues to attract critical attention from researchers and extension practitioners.

At the same time, conflict can play a functional role within loosely organized groups by exposing and addressing underlying grievances, thereby fostering greater stability and cohesion. It also provides a channel through which competing interests are articulated and their relative influence negotiated through direct interaction. According to Atagher⁴⁶, conflict brings areas of disagreement into focus and can generate pathways toward compromise and equilibrium. In the Tiv agrarian communities of Benue State, Nigeria, there appears to be an existing rural arrangement that links crop farmers and livestock grazers. Within this framework, grazing

⁴⁴ E Francis, YB Bawa and MS Haruna, 'Impact of Farmers and Fulani Herdsmen Conflict on Socio-Economic Activities in Agatu LGA of Benue State, Nigeria' (2019) 4(2) *International Journal of Scientific Research in Social Sciences and Management Studies* 12-24

⁴⁵ E Nwakanma and SE Boroh, 'Demography of Conflict and the Herders-Farmers Crisis in Nigeria' (2019) 17(2) *The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 28-40.

⁴⁶ I Atagher, 'Tiv Economic relationship with their neighbours in the 19th century' in D Akinwunmi, OO Okpe Jr and JD Gwamna (eds), *Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria during the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Aboki Publishers 2006) 248-261.

lands are typically considered state-owned, allowing the government to reallocate them for alternative development purposes whenever such actions are deemed to serve the broader public interest⁴⁷. Historically, the Fulbe were predominantly pastoralists who migrated with their cattle in a nomadic pattern, settling only temporarily in locations with abundant pasture. However, increasing population pressure has contributed to a gradual shift toward more sedentary lifestyles and transhumant practices, a transition that has, in turn, reduced the availability of grazing land⁴⁸. As grazers transition toward more settled livelihoods, they encounter multiple challenges. Internally, many struggle to relinquish long-established patterns of extensive grazing and mobility. Externally, they often face resistance from neighboring communities that claim customary land rights and assert a sense of precedence based on their status as original settlers.

The Political Ecology Approach

According to Abugu and Onuoba⁴⁹, political ecology situates ecological issues within a broad political economy framework. Rather than separating environmental concerns from social and political contexts, it demonstrates that environmental knowledge and scientific understanding are themselves shaped by social relations and political processes. As previously stated by Vanderlin⁵⁰, the integration of political economy and ecological perspectives is justified by highlighting the interdependence of social and political factors that shape the causes, lived experiences, and management of environmental challenges. Although there are many different ways to study political ecology, Schirch⁵¹ summarizes political ecology into four key areas of concern. The first is degradation and

⁴⁷ A Abdullahi, 'Rural Banditry, Regional Security and Integration in West Africa' (2019) 2(3) *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* 644-654.

⁴⁸ S Goke, 'The Genesis of Farmers-Herdsman Clashes in Nigeria' (2018) 4(2) *Journal of Social Sciences* 34; KO Lamidi, 'Farmers-Herders' Conflict in Nigeria: Causes, Consequences and Resolution Mechanisms' (2025) 10(2) *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change* 56-65.

⁴⁹ Abugu and Onuba (n 26).

⁵⁰ Vanderlin (n 30).

⁵¹ Schirch (n 29).

marginalization, which situates environmental change within broader political and economic contexts. The second is environmental conflict, which interprets struggles over environmental resources as part of wider contests shaped by factors such as class, gender, race, and identity. The third is conservation and control, which examines challenges within conservation practices, including the political and economic exclusion often embedded in environmental management. The fourth is environmental identity and social movements, which explores how environmental issues shape collective identities and mobilization for social and political action.

Ofuoku and Isife⁵², who assert that political ecology includes the components and systems of culture, power, political economy discourse, and history, likewise hold this opinion. Therefore, capitalizing on this reasoning, Schirch⁵³ shows that political ecology as a whole. It outlines empirical, research-based investigations that take explicit consideration of power relations into account in order to explain connections in the state and evolution of social and environmental systems. Political ecology examines the underlying causes of social and environmental problems by emphasizing that environmental systems are inherently shaped by political processes. It also draws attention to how economic and political structures influence environmental conditions and resource distribution. From this perspective, policy failures and weak socio-ecological resilience frameworks are seen as key drivers of farmer–herder conflicts. The approach further explains how rapid population growth, climate change, and global warming intensify resource scarcity, compelling herders to migrate from the far northern regions toward the Middle Belt in search of water and pasture. This movement increases contact with farming communities, often resulting in farmland encroachment and crop damage, particularly where effective social and institutional mechanisms—both

⁵² Ofuoku and Isife (n 17).

⁵³ Schirch (n 29).

traditional and modern—are lacking to manage resource competition and mediate conflict⁵⁴.

State involvement in land-related issues operates at three critical levels, largely reflecting its limited success in establishing a framework for socio-ecological resilience capable of mitigating the impacts of climate change. First, there is an absence of coherent policies promoting intensive agricultural land use as an alternative to the extensive practices prevalent in conflict-prone areas, despite increasing population pressures. Second, persistent and unresolved disputes over access to water points and grazing arrangements—particularly the debate between ranching and grazing reserves—remain central to the economic survival of both farming communities and pastoralists. Third, Nigeria's land tenure system continues to shape, and often constrain, the ability of lower-income groups and peasant farmers to access and secure land⁵⁵.

Since land is fundamental to both farmers' and herdsmen's socioeconomic existence, disputes over land are common. The notion of indigeneship in Nigeria is another important land-related concern⁵⁶. Individuals are granted the right to possess land by virtue of their indigenous status. According to Okoli⁵⁷, in many Nigerian societies, including Tiv communities in the Benue Valley, land is regarded as sacred, imbued with deep symbolic meaning and strong historical and ancestral significance. As a result, disputes over land tend to be highly volatile and often escalate into violence, leading to considerable loss of lives and property. Efforts that undermine or disregard the rights and identities of those with ancestral claims to the land frequently provoke intense and widespread

⁵⁴ EB Inyang, EN Effiong and EO Ekwutosi, 'Fulani herdsmen/farmers conflict and the challenges of food security in the middle belt region of Nigeria' (2021) 4(3) *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation* 134-139

⁵⁵ A Nwozor, JS Olarenwaju, S Oshewolo, AM Oladoyin, S Adedire and O Okidu, 'Herder-Farmer Conflicts: The Politicization of Violence and Evolving Security Measures in Nigeria' (2020) 14(1) *African Security* 55-79

⁵⁶ D Adetula, 'Understanding the Fulani herdsmen crisis in Nigeria: Here is everything you need to know' (2019) <http://venturesafrica.com/understanding-the-fulani-herdsmen-crisis-in-nigeria-what-you-need-to-know> accessed 28 January 2019.

⁵⁷ Okoli (n 42).

conflict. Similarly, CDD⁵⁸ contends that the provisions of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution dealing with the indigene–settler dichotomy remain insufficient. From an inclusive standpoint, the argument emphasizes the need for constitutional reforms that would guarantee migrants and non-indigenes the same rights, protections, and opportunities as those considered native to a given locality.

In essence, disputes are what lead to Nigeria's ambiguous land tenure system⁵⁹. This situation has significantly diminished the availability of arable land, intensifying competition and conflict over the remaining resources. In Tiv areas in particular, rapid population growth has placed increasing pressure on land boundaries, resulting in a steady decline in per capita landholdings⁶⁰. This is particularly evident in policy areas such as land use, trade (import and export) regulations, the allocation of resource rights between indigenes and migrants, issues of indigeneity, and state security. Each of these domains can either mitigate or exacerbate conflict, depending on how appropriate or inappropriate the policies are in addressing underlying social and economic realities.

According to Blench⁶¹, underlying many conflicts are political power imbalances that concentrate authority within one group—whether traditional or modern—often at the expense of others, creating tensions that can easily escalate even with minimal provocation. Within the framework of political ecology, such conflicts are frequently reflected in the shortcomings and inequalities embedded in land access and allocation policies. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, government officials continue to grapple with unresolved and often contradictory positions on land ownership and control, further complicating efforts to achieve equitable resource governance⁶². Governments, in turn, enact laws that define land ownership and delegate authority over land distribution across different tiers of government, while also formally recognizing the

⁵⁸ CDD, *Farmer-Herder Conflict in Northern Nigeria: Trends, Dynamics and Gender Perspectives* (CDD Publication 2021).

⁵⁹ Lamidi and Olaleye (n 5).

⁶⁰ Tukur (n 28).

⁶¹ Blench (n 1).

⁶² Abbass (n 7).

rights of indigenous communities to own and manage their ancestral lands. A political ecology perspective is useful for examining the environmental and ecological foundations of the socio-economic and existential processes that shape farmer–herder conflicts within the study area. Consequently, political ecology offers a valuable analytical framework for interpreting environmental narratives and discourses, particularly in relation to conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria and broader issues of environmental security⁶³.

3. AFFECTED STATES/REGIONS AND MIGRATION ROUTES IN FARMER–HERDER CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

Farmer–herder conflicts in Nigeria are most prevalent in the country's Middle Belt region, where agricultural and pastoral activities overlap. The conflict is largely driven by competition over land, water resources, grazing routes, and the effects of climate change, desertification, and population growth. Benue State, popularly known as the "Food Basket of the Nation," has experienced some of the most severe farmer–herder conflicts in Nigeria. The state's fertile land attracts both crop farmers and pastoralists, leading to frequent disputes over grazing activities, crop destruction, and land ownership. The enactment of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law in 2017 further intensified tensions between some farming communities and pastoral groups. Plateau State has long been a hotspot for communal and farmer–herder conflicts⁶⁴. The state's favorable climate and fertile agricultural land attract migrant pastoralists from northern Nigeria and neighboring countries. Competition over land use, ethnic tensions, and disputes over grazing rights have contributed to recurrent violent clashes, particularly in areas such as Barkin Ladi, Riyom, and Bassa Local Government Areas. Taraba State is another major conflict zone due to its extensive grazing lands and

⁶³ AS Aliyu, 'Causes and Resolution of Conflict Between Cattle Herders and Crop Farmers in Katsina State' (MA thesis, Ahmadu Bello University 2015).

⁶⁴ A Higazi, *Farmer–Pastoralist Conflicts on the Jos Plateau, Central Nigeria: Security Responses of Local Vigilantes and the Nigerian State* (Centre for Democracy and Development 2016).

agricultural activities. The state serves as an important destination for pastoral migration from northern Nigeria. Frequent clashes occur when cattle encroach on farmlands, resulting in crop destruction and retaliatory attacks by farming communities⁶⁵. Kaduna State experiences farmer–herder conflicts mainly in its southern region, particularly in areas such as Kaura, Kachia, Zangon Kataf, and Jema'a. The conflicts are often compounded by ethnic and religious differences, making dispute resolution more complex. Competition over natural resources and migration of herders from northern areas contribute significantly to the violence⁶⁶. Other states significantly affected by farmer–herder conflicts include Nasarawa, Adamawa, Gombe, Bauchi, Niger, Kogi, Zamfara, Katsina, and parts of Oyo and Ondo States. These areas experience varying degrees of conflict depending on seasonal migration patterns, resource availability, and local socio-political conditions⁶⁷.

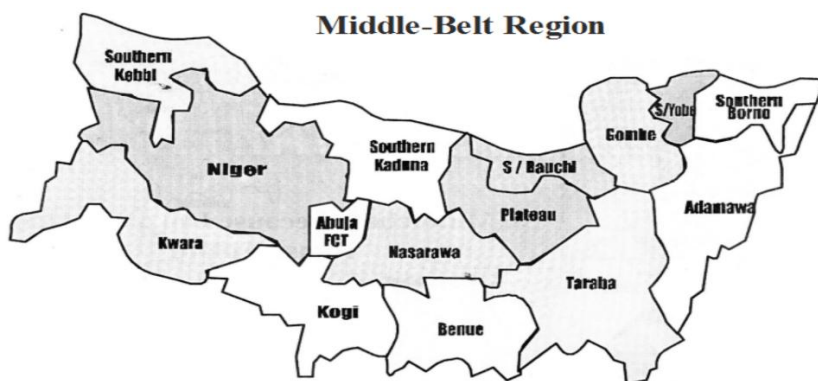


Figure 1: Middle-Belt Region

Source: <https://share.google/D60OPiSrR4k1DNckm>

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ International Crisis Group, *Herders Against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict* (International Crisis Group 2017).

⁶⁷ Turner (n 19).

Traditionally, pastoralists in Nigeria practice seasonal transhumance, moving their cattle along established migration routes in search of pasture and water resources. These movements generally originate from the semi-arid northern states, including Sokoto, Katsina, Zamfara, Kano, Jigawa, Yobe, Borno, and Adamawa, where environmental conditions often limit the availability of grazing land, particularly during the dry season. The major southward migration corridors include routes from Katsina through Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, and into Benue State; from Sokoto and Zamfara through Niger and Kogi to Benue; from Kano and Jigawa through Bauchi and Plateau to Taraba; and from Borno and Yobe through Gombe and Adamawa into Taraba State. These routes have historically facilitated the movement of pastoralists and their livestock across ecological zones. However, increasing population growth, expansion of farmlands, climate change, desertification, and the encroachment on traditional grazing paths have disrupted these migration patterns, often resulting in competition over land and water resources and contributing to recurring conflicts between farmers and herders. Many pastoralists continue further south into states such as Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti, Ogun, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Cross River during the dry season when pasture becomes scarce in northern Nigeria. Climate change, desertification, shrinking grazing reserves, population growth, and the encroachment of farmlands on traditional stock routes have disrupted these migration patterns⁶⁸. Consequently, herders increasingly move through cultivated areas, resulting in heightened competition for land and resources and contributing to the persistence of farmer–herder conflicts across Nigeria.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study relies exclusively on secondary data sources, including scholarly literature, historical records, policy documents, and published reports. While secondary analysis provides valuable insights into the dynamics, causes, and consequences of farmer–herder conflict in Nigeria, it does not incorporate primary data obtained through interviews, surveys, focus group discussions, or field observations. Consequently, the findings are based on existing evidence and interpretations available in the literature

⁶⁸ Higazi (n 64).

and should be understood within that context. The study therefore does not claim to provide direct empirical verification of stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, or motivations. Future research incorporating primary data collection is recommended to validate and enrich the findings and to capture local perspectives on conflict drivers, impacts, and peacebuilding initiatives.

5. THE HISTORY OF HERDSMEN AND FARMERS CONFLICTS AND ITS CAUSES IN NIGERIA

In the West Africa Sub region, herders and farmers have harmoniously co-existed throughout history⁶⁹. Despite the current crisis affecting their relationship, farmers and herders previously shared a peaceful, cooperative, and mutually beneficial coexistence. Their interaction was largely complementary, as farmers' crop residues and vegetation supported herders by providing essential feed for livestock, while herders supplied farmers with meat, milk, and organic manure that enhanced agricultural productivity. Over time, access to land, water, fodder, and other natural resources was governed by a reciprocal arrangement that reflected an interdependent and mutually advantageous relationship⁷⁰.

According to Ofuoku⁷¹, historical accounts suggest that during the 12th and 13th centuries, although competition between farmers and herders existed, it did not translate into recorded cases of violence or loss of life. Instead, both groups maintained a shared interest in each other's survival and prosperity, which helped sustain a mutually beneficial and largely cooperative relationship over time⁷². Prior to the advent of British colonial rule, Fulani elites reportedly developed a communal governance arrangement known as RUGA, intended to help regulate relations and maintain peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders. This system

⁶⁹ M Davidheiser, 'Culture and conflict: Socio-cultural dimensions of disputing and peacemaking' (Lecture notes 2009).

⁷⁰ Shettima and Tar (n 3).

⁷¹ Ofuoku (n 2); KO Lamidi, V Ojakorotu and BW Shiyabade, 'Community members' perspectives on the farmer-herder crisis: A case study of Ibarapa north local government area of Oyo State, Nigeria' (2023) 36(2) *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology* 50.

⁷² Davidheiser (n 69).

was designed to structure settlement patterns and manages interactions in ways that could reduce tensions and support mutual accommodation between the two groups⁷³. The RUGA system was established to organize grazing areas and define migratory routes for pastoral movements, as well as to oversee grazing activities in a structured manner. Within this arrangement, a designated RUGA officer was responsible for supervising compliance and serving as a mediator in disputes between crop farmers and herders, thereby helping to maintain order and reduce potential conflicts⁷⁴. The existing frameworks of cooperation between herders and farmers in Northern Nigeria were weakened by colonial interventions that altered and restructured both the social and physical systems that had previously governed their interactions. These changes disrupted established patterns of resource sharing and contributed to the erosion of longstanding mechanisms for peaceful coexistence.

The once cooperative relationship between farmers and herders was disrupted by changes in prevailing socio-political thought. As a result, traditional and informal systems of land tenure and resource-sharing arrangements were weakened and gradually undermined. For example, during the colonial period, new forms of dispute resolution were introduced that were unfamiliar to indigenous communities and, in many cases, proved ineffective in addressing local conflicts and realities⁷⁵. From a strategic perspective, colonial administrations introduced decrees regulating property ownership that effectively reallocated substantial portions of land through privatization processes. In many cases, this resulted in significant transfers of land rights to European interests and allied actors, reshaping existing indigenous land tenure systems and altering patterns of access and control over natural resources⁷⁶. By reducing the influence and access to land of the local populace and herders,

⁷³ KO Lamidi, 'Local Institutions and Peacemaking in Southwest Nigeria' (2021) 11(1) *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 55.

⁷⁴R Sundberg, 'Violent Values: Exploring the Relationship between Human Values and Violent Attitudes' (2014) 20(1) *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 68–83

⁷⁵ Odoh and Chigozie (n 31).

⁷⁶ Okoro (n 15)

this privatization regime contributed to the scarcity of resources and the worsening of ecological degradation.

During the colonial period, veterinary and livestock healthcare institutions were established to support cattle production and control animal diseases. The introduction of these cattle treatment facilities significantly reduced livestock mortality and disease outbreaks, thereby improving herd survival rates. As a consequence, herders were increasingly encouraged to expand their migratory routes toward the southern regions of Nigeria in search of grazing opportunities⁷⁷. The deterioration of the RUGA system, combined with rising population pressures and the increasing demands of socioeconomic development, has contributed to the intensification of farmer–herder conflicts. In addition to these structural factors, environmental pressures such as climate change also play a significant role, acting as a natural driver that exacerbates resource scarcity and heightens competition over land and water resources. For example, as mentioned by Alhassan⁷⁸ and Davidheiser⁷⁹, changes in the land tenure structure and regional agricultural production practices have been connected to the significant decline in normal rainfall that has occurred in Africa's dry and semi-arid zone since the 1970s.

There is a lot of violent confrontation between farmers and herders surrounding the existing arrangement. One notable early instance of conflict that was documented by Ikelegbe⁸⁰ occurred in Muri, Taraba State, in the early 1990s. Local communities expressed dissatisfaction with the allocation of land for large-scale ranching projects within their vicinity, viewing such distributions as a threat to their existing land use systems and livelihoods. In 1989, several parts of the country reportedly experienced violent confrontations between farmers and herders, reflecting escalating

⁷⁷ Blench (n 1)

⁷⁸ Alhassan (n 24)

⁷⁹ Davidheiser (n 69)

⁸⁰ AO Ikelegbe, 'Checks on the abuse of political power' in AAA Ayoade and AB Agbaje (eds), *African Traditional Political Thought and Institution* (Centre for Black African Arts and Civilization 1998).

tensions over access to and control of scarce land resources⁸¹. According to Abdullahi⁸², There have been claims that farmer–herder conflicts carry ethnic and religious dimensions, sometimes linked—whether directly or indirectly—to historical ethno-religious tensions predating colonial rule. However, the relative absence of widespread, sustained conflicts of this nature in Nigeria’s pre-independence period suggests that contemporary structural and governance-related factors play a more decisive role in driving current violence. In light of ongoing reports of repeated attacks and killings associated with herder-related violence, the situation warrants serious national concern and urgent attention to prevent further escalation. According to Baderinwa⁸³, conflicts between herders and farmers claimed the lives of an estimated 121 individuals in the states of Bauchi and Gombe between 1996 and 2006.

Around 1,700 individuals were reportedly killed by herders between January and September of 2018, according to CDD⁸⁴. For instance, between 2010 and 2015, approximately 850 conflict incidents were recorded in Benue State and other parts of North Central Nigeria, leading to the displacement of about 62,000 people. Since 2011, recurring clashes between herders and farmers have reportedly resulted in at least 10,000 deaths. In addition to the loss of lives, many affected individuals and households have been rendered homeless, further worsening humanitarian and socioeconomic conditions in the region⁸⁵. The persistent conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria continue to pose serious threats to national security and contribute to broader political instability. It is also argued that the federal government has, at times, demonstrated insufficient

⁸¹ O Adebayo and A Olaniyi, 'Factors Associated with Pastoral and Crop Farmers Conflict in Derived Savannah Zone of Oyo State Nigeria' (2008) 40(1) *Journal of Human Ecology* 1-40.

⁸² Abdullahi (n 47)

⁸³ R. Baderinwa, *Farmers-Herders Conflict in Nigeria: A Review of Relevant Literature*. Final Paper for the Proseminar in Graduate Research Methods and Scholarly Writing in the Social Sciences: Government and History SSCI S-100b Section 2, Harvard Extension School 8th August 2019

⁸⁴ CDD (n 58)

⁸⁵ MA Popoola, AN Braimah and SN Olawale, 'Effect of Farmers and Herders Conflict on Entrepreneurial Practice in Southwestern Nigeria' (2020) *International Journal on Economics, Finance and Sustainable Development* 73-83.

political commitment to effectively address and reverse the worsening conditions associated with these conflicts, thereby complicating efforts toward sustainable resolution and peacebuilding⁸⁶. The worsening conditions associated with farmer–herder conflicts have had adverse effects on national development, slowing economic progress and undermining social stability. If this trend continues unchecked, it risks further weakening law and order and potentially destabilizing governance structures. In many cases, herders have been accused of allowing livestock to damage cultivated farmlands, while perceptions persist among affected farming communities that accountability mechanisms and compensation systems are either weak or inconsistently enforced, thereby deepening grievances and tensions⁸⁷.

Recent evidence suggests that farmer–herder conflict remains one of Nigeria's most persistent security challenges despite variations in the frequency of violent incidents. According to Nextier's *Annual Violent Conflict Report 2025*⁸⁸, farmer–herder violence resulted in approximately 619 deaths in 2022, 592 deaths in 2023, and 467 deaths in 2024. Although the number of recorded incidents declined from 102 in 2022 to 61 in 2024, the North-Central region continued to bear the highest burden of violence, accounting for over 70 percent of total casualties⁸⁹. Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) indicate that insecurity remained widespread across Nigeria between 2024 and 2025, with more than 21,500 conflict-related fatalities recorded nationwide. While these figures encompass multiple forms of violence, farmer–herder clashes continued to be a major source of insecurity in states such as Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Kaduna⁹⁰.

⁸⁶ KO Lamidi, 'Conflict Analysis in Peacebuilding: A review' (2022) 31(4) *African Security Review* 399-414.

⁸⁷ Doyin (n 13); Goke (n 48); Gursoy (2019).

⁸⁸ Nextier, *Mutations of terror and conflicts: Annual violent conflict report 2025* (Nextier 2025).

⁸⁹ Nextier (n 88)

⁹⁰ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), *Country guidance: Nigeria security situation* (EUAA 2025).

Similarly, an analysis by ACAPS drawing on ACLED data shows that North-Central Nigeria recorded more than 2,200 violent incidents and nearly 5,500 fatalities between January 2023 and October 2025. The report identifies disputes over grazing routes, anti-open grazing legislation, and competition for land and water resources as key drivers of recurring violence. It further notes that some state-level grazing restrictions have inadvertently intensified tensions between farming and pastoral communities⁹¹. Evidence from the 2026 Peace and Human Security Outlook published by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP-Nigeria) indicates a resurgence of farmer–herder violence in 2025. The report estimates that the conflict caused approximately 1,197 deaths in 2025, making it one of the deadliest forms of communal violence in Nigeria. This represented a substantial increase from the 181 deaths recorded in 2024, highlighting the persistence and evolving nature of the crisis⁹².

The humanitarian consequences of the conflict remain severe. In May 2025, coordinated attacks on farming communities in Benue State reportedly resulted in the deaths of at least 42 people and the displacement of numerous households. The attacks disrupted agricultural activities, destroyed property, and further weakened rural livelihoods. Analysts attributed these incidents to ongoing competition over land resources, climate-induced migration, demographic pressures, and weak enforcement of grazing regulations⁹³. The conflict has also had significant implications for food security. Continued attacks on farming communities have forced many farmers to abandon their fields, reducing agricultural output and contributing to rising food prices across the country. This trend has been particularly evident in northern Nigeria, where insecurity has disrupted the cultivation of staple crops such as maize, rice, and yam⁹⁴.

⁹¹ ACAPS, *Conflict dynamics and humanitarian implications in North East, North West and North Central Nigeria* (Assessment Capacities Project 2025).

⁹² West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP-Nigeria). *Nigeria peace and human security outlook 2026*. Accra: WANEP; 2026.

⁹³ *The Guardian*, 'Nigeria attacks in Benue State leave dozens dead' (Guardian News & Media 2025).

⁹⁴ Reuters, 'Nigerian farmers abandon farms after attacks, sending food prices higher' (Reuters 2024).

From a political ecology perspective, these developments demonstrate that farmer–herder conflict extends beyond localized disputes over land. Rather, it reflects the interaction of environmental pressures, climate variability, demographic expansion, migration patterns, and governance failures. The persistence of violence suggests that sustainable peace will require comprehensive reforms in land administration, natural resource management, rural security, and community-based conflict resolution mechanisms.

6. MAGNITUDES OF FARMERS AND HERDERS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

Conflicts between farmers and Fulani herders have wide-ranging consequences. The most immediate and visible outcomes are the loss of lives and destruction of property when violence erupts. Such incidents also often expose weaknesses in Nigeria’s law enforcement capacity, particularly in terms of preparedness and effectiveness in preventing, managing, and responding to violent clashes involving herder-related disputes⁹⁵. There have been numerous reports of violent incidents in different parts of the country linked to conflicts involving herders and farming communities, with resulting loss of lives, destruction of property, and disruption of local livelihoods. These developments have raised growing public concern about insecurity and the capacity of institutions to manage rural violence effectively. In some accounts, certain attacks are attributed to armed groups operating under the guise of pastoral migration, further complicating efforts to clearly identify perpetrators and underlying motives. While access to grazing land remains a key driver of mobility, recent patterns of movement have often been perceived by host communities as disruptive and insufficiently coordinated with local land-use arrangements, thereby heightening tensions⁹⁶.

⁹⁵ Muhammed, Ismaila and Bibi (n 43)

⁹⁶J Gasu, 'Identity Crisis and Inter-ethnic Conflicts in Northern and Upper East Regions of Ghana' (2020) 17(1) *Ghana Journal of Development Studies* 48– 67.

The extent of the devastation caused by the hostilities is one of its evident after effects⁹⁷. There have been many fatalities as a result of these unresolvable conflicts between the herders and their hosts, the farmers. According to Elfversson⁹⁸, a significant number of both farmers and herders have lost their lives in the course of these conflicts, with substantial losses also recorded in livestock populations. In addition, many herders have experienced reduced herd productivity and output, further worsening livelihoods and deepening economic vulnerability within affected rural communities. This was corroborated by Ezenwoko & Osagie⁹⁹, who noted that in Imo State, for example, confrontations between farmers and herders and the violence that frequently followed them resulted in 19 fatalities and 42 injuries between 1996 and 2005. Peace and the stability of the country are threatened by the conflicts¹⁰⁰. These conflicts also strain relations among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, thereby undermining broader patterns of intergroup coexistence in a multi-ethnic society. Episodes of large-scale violence and destruction of lives and property in different parts of the country have left lasting social and psychological impacts on affected communities, reinforcing fears and mistrust. Such incidents highlight the urgent need for more effective conflict prevention, land governance, and peacebuilding mechanisms to address underlying drivers of rural insecurity¹⁰¹. In earlier years, particularly tragic episodes have been recorded in places such as Dogo Nahawa in Plateau State and Agatu in Benue State, both located in Nigeria's North Central geopolitical zone. These incidents involved large-scale violence associated with farmer–herder tensions, resulting in the deaths of many people, including women, children, and the elderly. Such events have significantly deepened insecurity and reinforced the urgency of addressing the structural drivers of rural conflict in the region¹⁰².

⁹⁷ Inyang, Effiong and Ekwutosi (n 54)

⁹⁸ Elfversson (n 33)

⁹⁹ FA Ezenwoko and JI Osagie, 'Conflict and conflict resolution in pre-colonial Igbo society of Nigeria' (2014) 19(1) *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences* 135–158.

¹⁰⁰ Emmanuel and Ndimbwa (2019)

¹⁰¹ Okoro (n 15)

¹⁰² Nwakanma and Boroh (n 45)

It is important to recognize that these conflicts have direct and profound effects on the lives and livelihoods of the people involved. Beyond the immediate human toll, they also disrupt and threaten the sustainability of both agricultural and pastoral production systems, thereby undermining food security and rural economic stability in affected regions¹⁰³. These conflicts erode social stability and food security, while also reinforcing cycles of poverty and vulnerability in affected communities. The impacts are particularly severe for women and children, who often bear the greatest burden of insecurity and displacement. In addition, disruptions to livelihoods negatively affect children's access to education, contributing to long-term developmental challenges and increased patterns of migration as households seek safer and more stable environments¹⁰⁴. As a result, the previously strong relationships and interdependencies between farmers and pastoralists become increasingly weakened. This situation is further aggravated when individuals are categorized or identified along lines of location, ethnicity, or religion, as such identity-based divisions tend to intensify mistrust and deepen existing tensions between the groups. Abbass¹⁰⁵ observed that tensions between sedentary agricultural lifestyles and pastoral mobility are closely linked to increasing trends toward sedentarization. He further noted that the expansion and intensification of pastoral activities have contributed to ongoing conflicts with farming communities, as both systems increasingly compete over land and other essential natural resources. In a similar trend, Okoli¹⁰⁶ emphasizes that the adverse effects of conflict on Nigeria's national security are profound and cannot be overstated. The consequences of violence extend across economic, social, and humanitarian dimensions, producing complex and instructive challenges for the state and affected populations. The resulting crises in livelihoods and personal security significantly undermine the capacity of impacted communities to sustain themselves and maintain collective resilience.

Other negative externalities include the depletion of household capital and declining agricultural productivity, both of which undermine the long-

¹⁰³ Blench (n 1)

¹⁰⁴ Oppong (n 25)

¹⁰⁵ Abbass (n 7)

¹⁰⁶ Okoli and Atelhe (n 23)

term viability of affected communities and the broader national economy. The prevailing insecurity has not only intensified as a result of these conflicts but has also demonstrated a strong capacity to further aggravate Nigeria's food security situation. In addition, the losses of human lives, livestock, harvests, and other productive assets have wider ripple effects that may extend beyond national boundaries, affecting neighbouring countries through disrupted trade and regional stability¹⁰⁷. In a similar vein, Oghuvbu & Oghuvbu¹⁰⁸ highlight the serious consequences associated with confrontations between farmers and herders. These impacts include the destruction of homes and farmlands, physical harm to individuals or family members, loss of income, resources, and agricultural output, as well as significant emotional and psychological stress. Brottem¹⁰⁹ argues that repeated escalations of violent conflict have generated significant socio-economic and political tensions with far-reaching implications for national stability. These developments have raised critical questions regarding the cohesion and continued effectiveness of the Nigerian state. In particular, concerns have been expressed about the state's limited capacity to manage and resolve such disputes effectively, which in turn has led to debates about the suitability and relevance of the country's federal structure within Nigeria's contemporary socio-political context.

According to Popoola, Braimah, and Olawale¹¹⁰, soil erosion in the region is largely driven by environmental exposure, with heavy rainfall intensifying the degradation process. In some hilly areas, the natural topography further accelerates erosion, leading to substantial loss of soil nutrients and making agricultural production increasingly difficult. The literature also documents severe violence associated with farmer–herder conflicts, including fatalities among nomadic herders and host community members, as well as retaliatory attacks that occur during periods of dispute. In such incidents, livestock are sometimes killed, and victims—including both young and elderly individuals—may suffer serious injuries

¹⁰⁷ Sundberg (n 74)

¹⁰⁸ Oghuvbu and Oghuvbu (2020)

¹⁰⁹ L. Brottem, 'The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa' (Africa Security Brief No. 39, Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2019)

¹¹⁰ Popoola, Braimah and Olawale (n 85)

or long-term disabilities. These violent encounters have also contributed to social disruption, including cases where women become widowed as a result of fatalities within farming households. Consequently, the agricultural labour force in affected areas has been significantly reduced. Furthermore, there are reported instances of the circulation of small arms and ammunition within these conflict settings, which further escalates insecurity. Such developments are often linked to growing mistrust and perceptions of hostility between herders and farming communities. Ultimately, these tensions undermine efforts toward peaceful coexistence and broader national integration among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups.

7. SUSTAINABLE MECHANISMS OF RESOLVING HERDERS AND FARMERS' CONFLICT

Nigeria employs a range of approaches to promote peace and manage conflict, including initiatives aimed at rapprochement and dispute resolution. These strategies typically involve mediating disagreements between conflicting parties and encouraging dialogue to strengthen cooperation and mutual understanding. In addition to formal mechanisms such as truth and reconciliation processes, peacebuilding efforts may also rely on traditional and religious leaders who play important roles in resolving disputes at the community level¹¹¹. Community-based initiatives also form an important component of peacebuilding strategies. These interventions are designed to strengthen trust and cooperation among different groups through locally driven activities. They often include collaborative community development projects, conflict resolution workshops, and training programmes that equip local people with skills for managing disputes and supporting peaceful coexistence across communities¹¹². Government-led initiatives constitute another key strategy for promoting peace in Nigeria, as peacebuilding is a central responsibility of the state. This role is carried out through formal legal and judicial systems, as well as through the operations of security institutions tasked with maintaining law and order. In addition, the government can initiate or support broader socio-economic programmes—such as

¹¹¹ Adetula (n 56)

¹¹² Abdulbaqi and Ariemu (n 8)

employment creation and educational initiatives—that contribute to reducing tensions and fostering reconciliation among conflicting groups¹¹³.

Several scholars have proposed a range of approaches to dispute resolution aimed at addressing conflict in resource-dependent communities. However, despite these theoretical and policy frameworks, significant challenges remain in effectively managing disputes between farmers and herders, particularly in contexts marked by resource scarcity, environmental stress, and weak governance structures¹¹⁴. This explains the recurrence of disputes between farmers and herders across the nation, particularly in recent years. According to Gasu¹¹⁵, the conventional approach to dispute resolution that existed in Africa before to colonization was superior than the tactics used now. As stated by Brottem¹¹⁶, the goal of traditional dispute resolution systems was to eliminate the root causes of conflict and restore social harmony by reintegrating disputing parties into a balanced community structure. In many cases, elders drawn from different clans would convene in a communal forum, often referred to as a “village square,” where conflicts were openly discussed and adjudicated. Through dialogue, mediation, and collective deliberation, these assemblies sought to reach peaceful resolutions and reconcile the parties involved, thereby reinforcing social cohesion and stability within the community¹¹⁷. It is best to handle conflicts while they are still simmering. This supports the well-worn adage that prevention is preferable to treatment. This is in line with Mwamfupe's recommendation¹¹⁸ to end the war as soon as possible. This reflects the importance of early conflict detection and prevention, particularly the ability to identify emerging tensions at their initial stages. It involves understanding the nature and root causes of disputes, as well as recognizing early warning signs before they develop into open violence. Such an approach also emphasizes the need for timely and decisive

¹¹³ Gursoy (2019)

¹¹⁴ Baderinwa (n 83)

¹¹⁵ Gasu (n 96)

¹¹⁶ Brottem (n 109)

¹¹⁷ Nwakanma and Boroh (n 45)

¹¹⁸ Mwamfupe (n 38)

intervention to de-escalate tensions and prevent conflicts from intensifying into broader social unrest. Three crucial aspects of conflict management were identified by Abugu & Onuba¹¹⁹: conflict analysis, confrontation and containment, and conflict resolution.

Table 1: Summary of Resolution Mechanisms with Description and Expected Outcome

Resolution Mechanism	Description	Expected Outcome
Mediation and Dialogue	Facilitating discussions between farmers and herders to address grievances, build trust, and encourage cooperation.	Peaceful settlement of disputes and improved relationships between parties.
Truth Reconciliation Processes	Formal mechanisms aimed at addressing past grievances, promoting forgiveness, and rebuilding social cohesion.	Long-term reconciliation and reduced hostility.
Traditional Conflict Resolution Systems	Use of elders, clan leaders, traditional rulers, and community forums (village squares) to mediate disputes through dialogue and consensus-building.	Restoration of social harmony and reintegration of disputants into the community.
Religious Leaders' Intervention	Religious leaders mediate conflicts and promote peace through moral guidance and interfaith dialogue.	Strengthened peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding.
Community-Based Peacebuilding Initiatives	Local development projects, conflict resolution workshops, and peace education programmes involving community members.	Increased trust, cooperation, and local capacity for conflict management.

¹¹⁹ Abugu and Onuba (n 26)

Resolution Mechanism	Description	Expected Outcome
Government and Legal Judicial Mechanisms	Utilization of courts, legal frameworks, and law enforcement agencies to resolve disputes and enforce justice.	Rule of law, accountability, and conflict containment.
Security and Law Enforcement Measures	Deployment of security agencies to prevent violence, maintain order, and protect lives and property.	Reduction in violent confrontations and improved security.
Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Systems	Identification of early signs of conflict, conflict analysis, and timely intervention before violence escalates.	Prevention of conflict escalation and reduction in casualties.
Conflict Analysis, Confrontation and Containment	Assessment of conflict causes, management of emerging tensions, and implementation of containment strategies.	Effective management and de-escalation of disputes.
Protection of Herders' Land Rights	Government policies that clearly define and protect pastoralists' access to land and grazing resources.	Reduced disputes over land use and enhanced coexistence.
Review and Restructuring of Grazing Policies	Reform of the Grazing Reserve of Law and expansion of grazing reserves to meet current pastoral needs.	Reduced competition for land and fewer farmer–herder clashes.
Establishment of Grazing Reserves and Routes	Creation and enforcement of designated grazing reserves and stock routes for pastoralists.	Minimized crop destruction and improved resource management.
Agricultural and Livestock Development Policies	Policies aimed at improving livestock production, pastoral welfare, and agricultural productivity.	Enhanced economic opportunities and reduced resource-based conflicts.
Education and Sensitisation Programmes	Awareness campaigns on environmental conservation, resource management, and	Improved understanding and cooperation among stakeholders.

Resolution Mechanism	Description	Expected Outcome
	peaceful coexistence for farmers and herders.	
Implementation of Inquiry Panel Recommendations	Adoption and enforcement of recommendations from commissions investigating farmer–herder conflicts.	Addressing root causes and preventing future conflicts.
Strengthening Intelligence Gathering	Improving the capacity of security agencies to detect and respond to emerging threats.	Timely intervention and prevention of violence.
Control of Illegal Arms Proliferation	Measures to curb the circulation and use of illicit weapons among conflict actors.	Reduced intensity and duration of violent confrontations.
Socio-Economic Development Programmes	Employment generation, education, and social welfare initiatives targeting vulnerable populations.	Reduced poverty-related tensions and sustainable peacebuilding.

Several recommendations were made by Oghuvbu & Oghuvbu¹²⁰ to help reduce confrontations between farmers and herders. It has been argued that government-led initiatives aimed at improving the welfare of Fulani herders are essential for reducing recurring conflicts. In this regard, it is important for the state to ensure that herders' rights to access and utilize land are clearly defined and protected, as this can help minimize instability and the frequency of disputes. Such measures are expected to promote peaceful coexistence between host farming communities and Fulani pastoralists. Furthermore, secure and regulated access to grazing resources can enhance the safety of livestock while reducing the likelihood of crop destruction, thereby contributing to more sustainable and mutually beneficial land-use practices. Additionally, Oghuvbu and Oghuvbu¹²¹ recommended that the Grazing Reserve Law be reviewed and restructured to better address contemporary pastoral challenges. It is important to note that the Nigerian Grazing Reserve Act of 1964 was originally established

¹²⁰ Oghuvbu and Oghuvbu (n 108)

¹²¹ *Ibid*

to provide pastoralists with designated grazing areas and to reduce conflicts over land use. In this context, the policy also encouraged sedentarisation while promoting dispute resolution strategies aimed at improving access to social amenities and enhancing productivity within pastoral communities¹²². In a broader sense, the policy was expected to address challenges such as disease control and structural inefficiencies within the cattle market. However, despite the enactment of the law, its implementation remained largely ineffective. This has contributed to reduced cattle productivity and the persistence of conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. As a result, Nigeria reportedly imports a significant proportion of its cattle—estimated at over 23%—from neighbouring Sahelian countries. In response to these challenges, the government introduced the 1988 National Agricultural Policy in an effort to strengthen the agricultural sector and improve livestock production systems¹²³.

The law requires grazing reserves to occupy at least 10% of the country's total area, or 9.8 million acres. But out of 313 reserves, just 2.82 percent were obtained¹²⁴. The current administration is recommending the creation of grazing reserves in light of this. The goal of this is to lessen the ongoing disputes that occur nationwide between herders and farmers. Lamidi¹²⁵ argues that sustainable peace requires a deliberate strategy aimed at educating and sensitising both farmers and herders to better understand the ecosystem and the sustainable use of local resources. Such an approach would also encourage cooperation among relevant stakeholders and institutions, enabling more efficient and equitable utilisation of available resources for mutual benefit. He further emphasises the importance of enforcing designated grazing routes for herders, while also ensuring that farmers, with the support of local, state, and federal authorities, refrain from encroaching on these pathways through cultivation. In addition, it is crucial to take seriously the recommendations of various panels and commissions of inquiry established to investigate the root causes of farmer–herder conflicts at both local and broader levels. Effective

¹²² Vanderlin (n 30)

¹²³ CDD (n 58)

¹²⁴ Abbass (n 36)

¹²⁵ Lamidi (n 86)

implementation of these recommendations is necessary to prevent the recurrence and escalation of similar conflicts in the future¹²⁶. The intelligence-gathering capacity of law enforcement agencies needs to be strengthened in order to enable timely and effective responses to emerging threats, particularly in situations where tensions between farmers and herders risk escalating into breakdowns of law and order. Enhanced early warning and rapid response mechanisms are essential for preventing the escalation of localized disputes into widespread violence. In addition, deliberate efforts must be made to curb the proliferation of illegal weapons, which are often used to intensify and prolong violent confrontations during such conflicts.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study focuses on the recurring conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria. In earlier periods, such disputes were relatively infrequent and were often resolved through traditional peacebuilding mechanisms that promoted dialogue and communal reconciliation. However, in recent times, these conflicts have escalated to more dangerous levels, frequently resulting in violence and significant disruptions to social order. A combination of factors contributes to this escalation, including competition over scarce resources, land use pressures, population growth, climate variability, and other socio-economic and environmental challenges¹²⁷. Peace and social cohesion in Nigeria have been significantly undermined by the escalating conflicts between farmers and herders. Historically, the relationship between these groups was largely symbiotic, but it has increasingly come under strain due to changing land-use patterns, intensifying competition over scarce resources, population growth, and the impacts of climate change. These disputes have led to loss of lives, destruction of property, and the displacement of communities. The complexity of these conflicts is evident in the multiple and often divergent explanations offered for their causes, including resource scarcity, demographic pressures, and environmental degradation. However, no single explanation sufficiently accounts for the full scope of

¹²⁶ Okoro (n 15)

¹²⁷ Okoli (n 42); Abbass (n 36); Mwamfupe (n 38); Oghuvbu and Oghuvbu (n 108)

the problem. The situation has been further aggravated by the use of violent tactics, the proliferation of firearms, and deepening mistrust between the affected parties, all of which have contributed to the escalation and persistence of the conflict.

The widespread loss of lives and property arising from farmer–herder conflicts has had severe consequences for both pastoral and agricultural productivity. This disruption in food production contributes directly to food insecurity, resulting in increased hunger and deepening poverty among affected populations. Beyond the agricultural sector, the conflict also poses significant challenges to Nigeria’s national security. Its impacts are multidimensional, extending across social, economic, and humanitarian spheres. Communities experience breakdowns in livelihoods, displacement, and weakened social cohesion, while the broader economy suffers from reduced productivity and instability. Collectively, these effects threaten the peace and stability of the country, underscoring the urgency of addressing the underlying drivers of the conflict¹²⁸. The government is therefore expected to implement measures that strengthen and support Fulani herders as part of broader efforts to reduce violence and promote lasting peace. This includes ensuring secure and clearly defined rights to land use, which may help reduce instability and foster peaceful coexistence between host farming communities and pastoral groups. In addition, government attention should be directed toward environmental restoration strategies such as revegetation and reforestation, alongside addressing the impacts of climate change, which significantly contribute to resource scarcity and conflict dynamics. A comprehensive and multifaceted approach that considers both structural factors (such as land tenure systems and resource distribution) and processual factors (such as governance, mediation, and dialogue mechanisms) is essential. A coordinated and inclusive conflict resolution strategy can help rebuild trust, promote sustainable coexistence, and open opportunities for socio-economic development in affected communities. In conclusion, achieving durable peace between farmers and herders in Nigeria requires an integrated approach that addresses the social, economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions of the conflict. By

¹²⁸ Abdullahi (n 47); Nwakanma and Boroh (n 45)

fostering cooperation and tackling the root causes of tensions, Nigeria can create the foundation for more stable and peaceful relations between these key livelihood groups.