



Local Learning: Ideas for reducing farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria

Policy Brief

NOVEMBER 2020



Centre for Democracy & Development

Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

Experience Sharing and Learning Conference on Farmer and Herder Conflicts in Nigeria

In Nigeria today, the farmer-herder conflict is one of the most pressing conflicts disrupting lives and livelihoods. It was reported that the violent conflict claimed an estimated 8,000 lives from 2011 to 2019, based on a 2019 joint assessment by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons⁽¹⁾. The humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict is also alarming, with an estimated 620,000 people that have been displaced in states such as Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau where the conflicts have been prevalent⁽²⁾. In Benue, over 180,000 people were internally displaced, living in at least eight Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps.

The conflict has been previously linked to challenges that bothers on climate change and land resource struggles between the farmers and the herders. While these factors remain relevant to understanding the key causal factors for the conflict, present-day triggers show that the dynamic and unique nature of the conflict in different locations. The benefits of strategies such as Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlement and anti-grazing laws deployed by the federal and state governments to mitigate the conflict have not been fully evident or utilised. More so that, they have generated mixed reactions from people, depending on which side of the conflict divide they stood. For example, the passage of the anti-grazing law in Benue State caused thousands of herders to migrate to neighbouring state, Nasarawa that doesn't have such laws. The migration, an influx of almost 2 million cattle⁽³⁾ and ethnic tensions heightened the conflict amongst the warring parties in Nasarawa state.

The federal government unveiled embarked on a collaborative project in September 2019 between the state government, farmers, pastoralists and private investors called the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP). The project has begun in seven (7) pilot states; Adamawa, Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, Taraba and Zamfara state. The NLTP sets out transform the Nigerian livestock industry by addressing the challenges in livestock and dairy production, availability of land, overgrazing and the farmer-herder conflict.

The multi-dimensional nature of the conflict points out the need for more practical multifaceted sustainable solutions. To this effect, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in partnership with United States Institute for Peace (USIP), with support of the Secretariat of the National Livestock Transformation Plan organised an experience sharing and learning conference that sought to understand the current trends and dynamics of the farmer-herder conflict as well as strengthen existing linkages between national, state, community-based organizations, and local peacebuilders including religious and traditional leaders, who are working towards addressing, or are involved in the conflicts.

In addition, CDD recently completed a rapid field research on the conflict and presented its findings at the conference. The conference set to achieve the following key objectives:

- a critically review the results from the field research to bring stakeholders up to speed on new trends surrounding the farmer-herder conflict.
- effectively deliberate on government responses in adapting to the changing dynamics of the conflict; particularly the NLTP
- discuss and generate recommendations on practical strategies by state and non-state actors towards mitigating the conflict.

Trends and Dynamics of the Farmer and Herder Conflict

The rapid assessment of the conflict was carried out in four focal states where the conflict has been recurrent – Benue, Kaduna, Katsina and Nasarawa States.

The farmer-herder conflict has mutated and is now manifesting and transforming into other forms of conflicts. In Kaduna and Katsina state, the conflict has mutated into armed banditry involving cattle rustling, destruction or theft of farm crops, kidnapping and armed robbery. For example, a traditional leader in Batsari, Katsina categorically stated that *“they were no longer herders in the LGA, most herders have now become bandits and cattle rustlers”*. The gravity of the situation is such that the bandits operate freely and openly without checks. In Kaduna State, the farmer-herder conflict heightened between 2012 and 2013 but de-escalated between 2013 and 2019 and re-emerged with intensity of attacks and heavy casualties in 2020. The conflict in the state also assumed ethno-religious dimension as there is a thin line between ethnicity and religion on the one hand and ecological niches on the other.

In Benue State, the farmer-herder conflict was a frequent occurrence and there was a spike in the conflict incidences between 2014 and 2019 with the crescendo of escalation in 2018 after the state enacted the Anti-Open Grazing Law which made a large number of the herders to emigrate from the state into neighbouring Nasarawa State. The maxim *wa gaa or wa usu* (ranch or ruin your cattle) in Tiv language is the new norm in Benue State as attested to by Tiv farmers during a focus group discussion

The conflict in Nasarawa between the farmers and herders can be attributed to the spillover effect of the conflict in the neighbouring Benue State. Since Nasarawa is contiguous with Benue State, many the herders that were forced to leave Benue moved into Nasarawa State. The migration of herders from Benue to border communities in Nassarawa exerted pressures on existing resources in these communities. It also heightened the conflict between farmers and herders in these communities. Ethnicity is also identified as one of the key conflict dynamics in the state. This is because the Jukun and the Alago groups from Keana have been mentioned consistently by majority of the respondents as actors flaming the amber of the conflict so that they could have access to more farmlands.

Other key trends and dynamics of the farmer-herder conflict include:

Encroachment into Farmlands by Under-aged Herders

A common denominator reported by many of the farmers from the field communities covered, was the issue of encroachments into farms by the herders. Farmers often lament the fact that their crops and farms suffer destruction in the hands of herders. The farmers in Kaduna and Nasarawa accused the herders of using under-aged children to herd cattle. The inability of the under-aged herders of about five to eight years to coordinate the cattle often leads to encroachment and destruction of farmland.

The Use of Drugs and small arms and light weapons

The use of drugs by herders is also identified as a cause of their aggressive behavior. Access to and availability of arms has shaped the violent nature of the conflict. The herders are perceived to act violently under the influence of drugs and with access to small arms and light weapons.

Activities of Transhumance

The activities of transhumance were particularly singled out as major causes of the farmer-herder conflict in Katsina and Kaduna States. During dry season, transhumance pastoralists migrate from the Sahel to the southern part of Nigeria to graze their flocks. This period usually coincides with harvest period in northern Nigeria and most times the flocks often stray unintentionally into farms causing damages and triggering conflict with the farmers. The same experience is encountered during the beginning of wet season when pastoralists migrate up north sometimes causing damages during planting season. The activities of transhumance were linked to the porous nature of Nigerian borders.

Transhumance move from all parts of the Sahel to southern Nigeria in search of greener pasture for their flock. Their movement down south has resulted into several clashes with farmers, and this is because the movement coincides with either the season of planting or harvesting.

One of the respondents in Katsina State stated that *“What has continued to trigger the crises is the porous nature of our border which allows the foreign herdsmen to pass with large herds of cows and direct them to feed on farms. They come with weapons and beat or even kill you if you resist their invasion of your farm.”* The issue of transhumance is a very delicate one and this is because most of the nomads migrating into Nigerian borders were ignorant of the fact that the old cattle routes have been displaced because of crop farming expansion and urbanization.

The Role of Security Agents

The pastoralists believed the activities of security agents, forest and livestock guards have contributed to the rise in the conflict between the herders and farmers. They alleged that the security agents usually collaborate with farmers to arrest their cattle. The Fulani herders alleged that they were made to pay a huge amount of money to reclaim their cattle and in most cases the number of arrested cattle could not be accounted for by the security agents and livestock guards. Another form of provocation as disclosed by the pastoralists in Nasarawa is linked to the actions of the livestock guards in Benue who cross to Nasarawa State to make arrests of their cattle. This has forced many of the pastoralists to sell some cows to secure the release of their seized cattle. During a focus group discussion with the pastoralists, they claimed that 30 cows out of the 100 cattle seized by the livestock guards could not be accounted for.

Table 1: Actors and their roles in the conflict

Conflict Actors	Roles
Farmers	Act in defense of their crops and farmlands
Herders	Act in defense of their cattle
Traditional rulers	Some corrupt traditional leaders cede grazing tracks and cattle routes to farmers; heavy fines levied on herders
Transhumance	Encroachment into farmlands and destruction of crops
Bandits	Cattle rustling and theft
Ethnic militia/mercenaries	Hired to attack communities
Livestock and forest guards	Extortion of the herders and apprehension of cattle
Interested ethnic groups	Stoking the conflict to have access to more farmland
Security agents	Extortion, bias and injustice in carrying out their duties

Implementation of the National Transformation Plan (NLTP): The Journey So far

For the federal government, the NLTP represents a holistic approach to livestock transformation that will confer socio-economic prosperity to farmers and herders and reduce conflicts. The plan was developed to modernise Nigeria's livestock industry to ensure that the country can feed its growing population, boost fledging yields and productivity and remove accelerants for communal crisis. Specifically, on the farmer-herder conflicts, it is conceptualised to address nomadic model causing avoidable clashes across the country.

Using classic value chain building tools, the NLTP is designed to bring the livestock transformation to Nigeria that many countries have witnessed. It aims to do this and solve challenges in the sector through the following:

- Build a symbiotic farmer-rancher partnership that can absorb the lessons of Zambia, southern Africa, Brazil, and Argentina.
- Create a conducive environment for both nomadic herders and private enterprises, by focusing on access to land and water, clustering of farmers and access to finance, market.
- Create a suitable business environment for SMEs, with an emphasis on modern ranching, abattoirs, and processing

There is no compulsion in the adoption or implementation of the NLTP for any state. Although most of the states in the federation have expressed commitment to the plan, no state has rejected the plan because of its flexibility to adapt to each state's peculiarities. The following 20 states have submitted their commitments to implementing the NLTP: Kaduna, Taraba, Adamawa, Plateau, Nasarawa, Kano, Ondo, Katsina, Bauchi, Yobe, Borno, Gombe, Benue, Niger, Sokoto, Ekiti, Kogi, Ebonyi, Kwara, Zamfara and the FCT.

All nineteen (19) Northern States have been considered as frontline states and have been selected as pilots, with varying degrees of implementation. States such as Adamawa, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Gombe have concluded mapping and enumeration of residents, infrastructure, and victims of conflict. Furthermore, Awe grazing reserve in Nasarawa State has been selected as a kick-off site, with grant funding, financing 50% of the establishment of a turnkey NLTP model. In Adamawa, Plateau, Taraba, Benue and Nasarawa States, collection of soil samples for examination and hydrological tests have been carried out.

It is important to recognize the role of the State as a catalyst for investment; while it is a measure of upfront public investing, we expect that in the medium to long term, it will be repaid via higher jobs, income taxes and improved social stability, reducing the need for security spending.

To address the farmer-herder challenges, a summary of the key recommendations made by participants include:

1. State and non-state actors should effectively collaborate and build synergy towards addressing the farmer-herder conflict. Lessons should be drawn from existing engagement at the community levels for improved collaboration.
2. A bottom-up approach to addressing the problem, which leverages on, and support existing community structures for mitigating conflict, should be strengthened. This community-based approach would, in a way, capacitate traditional institutions and its leadership for local responses with potentials of building strong relations amongst the group.
3. For both government, development partners and civil society, there is a need for the adoption of a decentralised approach to empowering stakeholders through direct capacity building and awareness creation programs, with the goal of building coherence in responses.
4. In line with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, women should play a central role in conflict mitigation and management at all levels of society. Programmatic interventions should be framed in line with the National, State and Local action plans towards achieving this goal.
5. Conflict-sensitive training for the media and other stakeholders working on reporting farmer-herder crisis should be prioritised to change negative narratives that heightens and sustains the conflict.
6. The disconnect between research and policy response remain a challenge that should be addressed. In this light, there should be continued engagement between researchers and policy makers for the exchange of ideas. Such interface should be done at the state level done to the concentration of efforts at the national level.

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