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ASYMMETRIC THREATS ANALYSIS CENTER

Climate Security, Great Power Competition, and Adversarial Geopolitics in North and West Africa

Rapid Review 1: Farmer-Herder Conflict

START
NATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR THE
STUDY OF TERRORISM AND RESPONSES TO TERRORISM

APPLIED RESEARCH LABORATORY FOR
**INTELLIGENCE
AND SECURITY**

**UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND**

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Executive Summary

This case study is a part of the larger research initiative titled "Climate Security, Great Power Competition, and Adversarial Geopolitics in North and West Africa." This study explores the intersection of climate change, security, and governance through the lens of the escalating farmer-herder conflict in North and West Africa.[1] The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the causes, consequences, and potential responses to these disputes, situating them within broader geopolitical and environmental contexts. Key insights and findings are summarized below:

Contexts and Causes

- **Historical Dynamics:** Farmer-herder interactions traditionally relied on mutual dependency, with cooperation over shared resources. However, climate-induced disruptions, including altered rainfall patterns and prolonged droughts, have strained this balance.
- **Scarcity and Competition:** Reduced availability of water and grazing land has intensified disputes over land use and crop damage, particularly in regions with weak governance and limited conflict resolution mechanisms.
- **Exploitation by External Actors:** Non-state actors, including criminal networks and violent extremist organizations (VEOs), exploit these tensions, further destabilizing the region.

Consequences of the Conflict

- **Escalating Violence:** What were once localized disputes have evolved into widespread intercommunal violence, exacerbated by ethnic, religious, and economic tensions.
- **Organized Crime:** Criminal enterprises have capitalized on resource competition, with activities like cattle rustling and arms trafficking becoming entrenched.
- **Rise of Extremism:** VEOs leverage grievances and vulnerabilities among marginalized groups, deepening the conflict and fueling recruitment efforts.
- **Transnational Implications:** The spillover effects, including cross-border violence and migration pressures, threaten regional and international stability.

Government and International Responses

- **Regional and Domestic Efforts:** Programs by regional organizations such as the African Union and ECOWAS aim to address root causes like desertification and food insecurity. However, implementation gaps and inconsistent governance have hindered their effectiveness.
- **Militarized Interventions:** National policies often favor militarized solutions, which escalate tensions and alienate vulnerable communities, such as pastoralists.

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[1] For the purposes of this study, "North Africa" refers to Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, while West Africa includes Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

- **U.S. Engagement:** U.S. initiatives, including USAID programs, address the root causes through agricultural productivity, community resilience, and conflict mitigation strategies. However, a broader, integrated approach is required to achieve sustainable peace.

Recommendations

- **Governance and Inclusion:** Enhancing political representation for pastoralist communities is essential for inclusive policymaking and mitigating socio-economic vulnerabilities.
- **Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** Strengthening traditional and local governance structures can facilitate resource-sharing agreements and mediate disputes.
- **Climate Adaptation Strategies:** Adaptive policies, such as promoting sustainable land use and addressing climate change impacts, are critical to reducing resource scarcity.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Cross-border collaboration on transhumance regulation and shared resource management is key to mitigating transnational impacts.
- **Comprehensive Policy Approaches:** Efforts must integrate security, humanitarian aid, climate adaptation, and economic development to address the conflict's multidimensional nature effectively.

The farmer-herder conflict in North and West Africa exemplifies the complex interplay of climate change, governance deficiencies, and security threats. A failure to address these issues comprehensively risks exacerbating the conflict and destabilizing the region further. A nuanced and collaborative strategy that integrates local, national, and international efforts is vital for achieving sustainable peace and development.

Introduction

This case study is a part of the larger research initiative titled "Climate Security, Great Power Competition, and Adversarial Geopolitics in North and West Africa." This study explores the intersection of climate change, security, and governance through the lens of the escalating farmer-herder conflict in North and West Africa.[2] The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the causes, consequences, and potential responses to these disputes, situating them within broader geopolitical and environmental contexts. This report is structured as follows: it begins with an executive summary, providing a concise overview of the key issues and findings. The discussion then moves to contextualizing the farmer-herder conflict, exploring its origins and underlying drivers. Next, the report examines the broader consequences of the conflict, including its impact on internal criminal dynamics, the role of violent extremist organizations (VEOs), and the rise of rebels and armed groups. It also assesses government responses to the conflict, highlighting both challenges and opportunities. The report concludes with a synthesis of findings and a set of actionable recommendations.

Contextualizing the Farmer-Herder Conflict

Historically, African farmers and herders coexisted in a symbiotic relationship that emphasized mutual dependence, particularly before the profound disruptions caused by climate change. From the pre-colonial period, there is documented evidence of tensions stemming from inevitable interactions between these groups. However, such tensions rarely escalated into significant conflict. Instead, both communities recognized their interlinked survival, fostering cooperation.[3] Herders followed migratory patterns with their livestock to find pastures and water, while farmers cultivated crops in fixed settlements. Reciprocity was a cornerstone of their interactions; farmers often permitted herders to graze livestock on harvested fields, while herders provided other forms of assistance in return. For instance, in Cameroon's Adamawa Province, the Mbororo herders and Gbaya farmers engaged in mutually beneficial exchanges: Mbororo men allowed Gbaya men to lead their livestock on transhumance, while Gbaya men constructed seasonal huts on their land for Mbororo use. Such interactions solidified an interdependence that balanced the prosperity of both groups.

In recent decades, climate change has markedly altered this dynamic in North and West Africa. Agriculture and livestock, which constitute essential livelihood sources, are heavily reliant on consistent rainfall and predictable climate patterns. Disruptions in rainfall and prolonged droughts have undermined water and grazing availability, creating challenges for sedentary farmers and nomadic herders alike (see extended discussion in "Climate Security, Great Power Competition, and Adversarial Geopolitics in North and West Africa").

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[2] For the purposes of this study, "North Africa" refers to Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, while West Africa includes Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

[3] Gbadebo Njoku, C. (2021, May 2). *Farmer-Herder Relations in Nigeria: Historical antecedents and the way forward for social cohesion – Building Blocks for Peace Foundation*. https://bbforpeace.org/blog/2021/05/02/farmer-herder-relations-in-nigeria-historical-antecedents-and-the-way-forward-for-social-cohesion/

The resulting livelihood insecurity – shaped by diminished resource access and economic vulnerabilities – has intensified desperation within affected communities. Scarcity forces pastoralists to alter traditional mobility routes,[4] often encroaching on farming territories[5] in search of viable land and water. This encroachment, coupled with economic strain, fuels disputes over land, resource access, and livestock-induced crop damage. In regions heavily dependent on agriculture and plagued by weak governance, these disputes escalate into broader conflicts, often exploited by non-state actors to advance asymmetric threats.

Political instability, ineffective governance, and resource mismanagement exacerbate these challenges.[6] Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as mediation by village leaders, have historically mitigated disputes at the local level.[7] For example, Mossi farmers in Burkina Faso negotiated compensation for crop damage with herders through such systems.[8] However, as these mechanisms deteriorate, disputes become harder to resolve locally, increasing the risk of large-scale violence. The weakening of these foundational structures underscores the critical need for resilience and adaptive capacity within affected states to prevent conflict escalation.

Consequences Beyond the Conflict

The escalating farmer-herder conflict and its profound consequences are a pressing issue exacerbated by the interplay of escalating violence and the intensifying effects of climate change, particularly in North and West Africa. The accompanying graph illustrates the conflict's trajectory in this region over the decade spanning 2010 to 2020.[9]

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[4] Tinsley, J. H., & Gwiriri, L. C. (2022). Understanding the Representation of Pastoralism in Livestock-Related Climate Adaptation Policies in Ghana and Nigeria: a Review of Key Policy Documents. *Nomadic Peoples*, *26*(1), 83–105. https://doi.org/10.3197/np.2022.260105

[5] Brottem, L. V. (2020). Pastoral resource conflict in the context of Sudano–Sahelian Security Crises: A Critical Review of research. *African Security*, *13*(4), 380–402. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2020.1871291
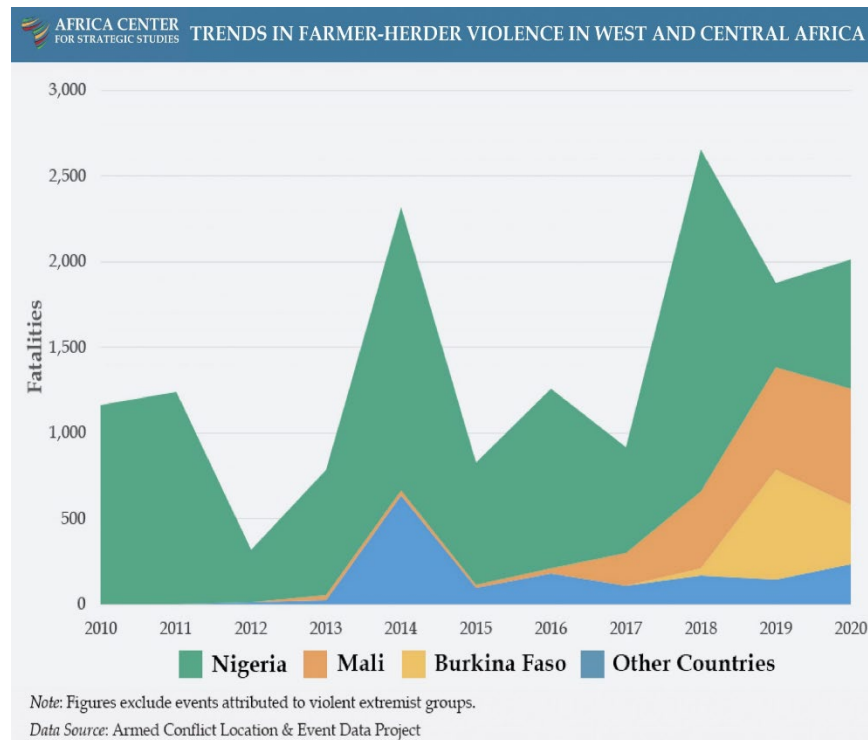
[6] Van Baalen, S., & Mobjörk, M. (2017). Climate change and violent conflict in East Africa: Integrating qualitative and quantitative research to probe the mechanisms. *International Studies Review*, *20*(4), 547–575. https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/vix043

[7] Moritz, M. (2010). Understanding Herder-Farmer Conflicts in West Africa: Outline of a processual approach. *Human Organization*, *69*(2), 138–148. https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.69.2.aq85k02453w83363

[8] Breusers, Mark, Suzanne Nederlof, and Teunis van Rheenen 1998 Conflict or Symbiosis? Disentangling Farmer-Herdsman Relations: The Mossi and the Fulbe of the Central Plateau, Burkina Faso. Journal of Modern African Studies 36(3):357-380.

[9] Brottem, Leif. (12 July 2021). "The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa." *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). https://africacenter.org/publication/growing-complexity-farmer-herder-conflict-west-central-africa/*

Figure 1. Trends in Fatalities from the Farmer-Herder Conflict in North & West Africa (2010–2020)[10]

TRENDS IN FARMER-HERDER VIOLENCE IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA
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Legend: Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Other Countries

Note: Figures exclude events attributed to violent extremist groups.
Data Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

While disputes between farming and herding communities are not a new occurrence, the transition of individual disagreements into broader, community-wide violence resulting in multiple fatalities[11] demands immediate policy attention. Current academic discourse often downplays the gravity of the issue, framing it as localized and of low intensity.[12] Such characterizations fail to capture the extensive and far-reaching implications of the conflict, which extend beyond immediate communities to influence regional and transnational stability. In response to the increasing prevalence of violence, there is growing momentum among scholars advocating for a reconceptualization of this conflict as a regional phenomenon, one that reflects its complexity and broader impact. The instability bred by these conflicts has increasingly become a fertile ground for exploitation by diverse actors seeking to further their agendas. These actors leverage the unrest to consolidate influence and recruit members, thereby exacerbating the conflict's intensity and scope.

Internal Criminal Dynamics

The emergence and increasing activities of criminal organizations in North and West Africa are inextricably linked to the region's growing instability, primarily fueled by the farmer-herder conflict. These groups exploit resource scarcity and the competition between farmers and herders, turning

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[10] Brottem, Leif. (12 July 2021). "The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa." *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). https://africacenter.org/publication/growing-complexity-farmer-herder-conflict-west-central-africa/*
[11] Moritz, M. (2010). Understanding Herder-Farmer Conflicts in West Africa: Outline of a processual approach. *Human Organization*, *69*(2), 138. https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.69.2.aq85k02453w83363
[12] "Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence | Crisis Group." 2018. July 26, 2018. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence.

the conflict into an advantage, especially in areas lacking effective governance.[13] Criminal enterprises such as cattle rustling, banditry, arms trafficking, and kidnappings for ransom are widespread, demonstrating how local disputes are transformed into opportunities for crime, thereby exacerbating regional insecurity.

Cattle rustling and banditry in North and West Africa have shifted from sporadic theft to highly organized and violent criminal operations, intensifying farmer-herder tensions. This trend is particularly pronounced in northern Nigeria, where agriculture and cattle rearing dominate, as seen in Zamfara State[14] and local government areas (LGAs) like Mangu, Bokkos, Barkin Ladi, Jos South, Riyom, Langtang North, and Langtang South.[15] As livelihood insecurity escalates, these activities have become more appealing as economic pursuits, with significant growth noted since 2010.[16] Cattle rustling – defined as stealing livestock – and banditry – marked by robbery, violence, and killings in poorly governed areas – are facilitated by the government's failure to manage growing tensions between these communities.[17] The economic pressures in the region, alongside increased demand for livestock, have intensified both phenomena, as rustlers target the economic value of livestock and bandits exploit the resulting financial turmoil, further complicating security challenges.

The escalating violence driven by cattle rustling and banditry prompted the Nigerian government to establish a Special Task Force to tackle the crisis.[18] Acts of violence by rustlers and bandits include killing herders, sexually assaulting women, stealing cattle for ransom, and even kidnapping girls and women.[19] These groups are no longer traditional farmers and herders; they are armed, organized, and sometimes outfitted in militaristic uniforms. Their sophisticated operations have transformed cattle raiding into a transnational, highly organized, and profit-driven problem.[20] These networks, equipped with advanced weaponry, have intensified violence, attacked communities, and clashed with security forces, deepening regional instability.

The evolution of cattle rustling into a more violent, organized form of crime is exemplified by the Fulani ethnic group, often portrayed as central to these activities – either as perpetrators or key players.[21] However, other ethnic groups, such as the Shuwa, Kanuri, Kaninbur, Arabs, and Touareg,

[13] Ibid.

[14] Bello, B., & Abdullahi, M. M. (2021). Farmers–Herdsmen Conflict, cattle rustling, and Banditry: The Dialectics of Insecurity in Anka and Maradun Local Government area of Zamfara State, Nigeria. *SAGE Open*, *11*(4), 215824402110401. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211040117

[15] Olaniyan, A., & Yahaya, A. (2016). Cows, Bandits, and Violent Conflicts: Understanding Cattle Rustling in Northern Nigeria. *Africa Spectrum*, *51*(3), 93–105. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44982211

[16] Blench, R. (2010). Conflict between pastoralists and cultivators in Nigeria. Kay Williamson Educational Foundation Cambridge.

[17] Bello, B., & Abdullahi, M. M. (2021). Farmers–Herdsmen Conflict, cattle rustling, and Banditry: The Dialectics of Insecurity in Anka and Maradun Local Government area of Zamfara State, Nigeria. *SAGE Open*, *11*(4), 215824402110401. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211040117

[18] Cows, bandits, and Violent Conflicts: Understanding cattle rustling in northern Nigeria on JSTOR. (n.d.). *www.jstor.org*. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44982211

[19] *Deadly persistence of cattle-rustling - Daily Trust*. (2015, May 16). Daily Trust. https://dailytrust.com/deadly-persistence-of-cattle-rustling/; *Why incoming FCT administration must act fast on cattle rustling - Daily Trust*. (2015, July 1). Daily Trust. https://dailytrust.com/why-incoming-fct-administration-must-act-fast-on-cattle-rustling/

[20] Cows, bandits, and Violent Conflicts: Understanding cattle rustling in northern Nigeria on JSTOR. (n.d.). *www.jstor.org*, 95. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44982211

[21] Cows, bandits, and Violent Conflicts: Understanding cattle rustling in northern Nigeria on JSTOR. (n.d.). *www.jstor.org*. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44982211

are also involved.[22] The Fulani's prominent role is tied to their extensive livestock ownership, which constitutes about 90 percent of the cattle, linking their herds to both economic gain and social status.[23] While historically engaged in localized cattle raiding to assert power and address resource needs, the practice has shifted into a militarized, organized endeavor. The underground economy created by cattle theft offers untaxed profits, often linked to financing terrorist groups.[24] Governor Shetima of Borno State has explicitly linked cattle rustling to Boko Haram, stating that stolen cattle sold in local markets provide financial resources for their violent activities.[25] As the underground market grows alongside escalating farmer-herder conflicts, the financial pipeline to VEOs will likely persist.

Scholars emphasize resource scarcity as a key factor driving increased violence, as threatened livelihoods push groups toward illegal activities.[26] Additionally, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in the region further exacerbates instability. Arms trafficking networks have flourished due to porous borders, corruption, and resource competition. For example, the Liptako-Gourma region—spanning Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger—has become a hub for criminal groups motivated by economic gains.[27] In Mali, stolen cattle have infiltrated the meat industry and are often traded for smuggled weapons, contributing to a burgeoning criminal economy that links local groups with rebel and terrorist organizations.

Compounding these challenges is the state's inability to respond effectively.[28] Violent non-state actors have adopted opportunistic tactics, adapting to environmental, social, and political factors. For instance, cattle rustlers frequently operate in dense forests, leveraging wet seasons to obscure their movements and erase evidence.[29] These forests, often under-policed due to limited state resources, have become "ungoverned spaces,"[30] where security forces struggle to maintain control. This lack of governance allows non-state actors to operate with impunity, using these areas as bases for civilian attacks and evasion from law enforcement.[31]

The transformation of cattle rustling from a localized, cultural practice into a widespread, violent criminal enterprise is intertwined with resource scarcity, the arms trade, and ineffective governance. This shift has deepened conflicts between farmers and herders while fostering conditions for violent non-state actors, including extremist groups, to thrive. As these conflicts persist, the resulting instability continues to create fertile ground for extremist ideologies and activities to expand.

[22] Blench, R., & Dendo, M. (2003). The Transformation of Conflict Between Pastoralists and Cultivators in Nigeria. *Africa*. In press.

[23] Dairy Development Programme in Nigeria Baseline Report. (2012). *International Fertilizer Development Center*.

[24] Kwaja, Chris (2014), Blood, Cattle, and Cash: Cattle Rustling and Nigeria's Bourgenoning Underground Economy, in: *West African Insight*, 4, 3, 1-6

[25] Ogbeche, D. (2016, March 5). Borno: Governor Shettima claims Boko Haram now sell stolen cattle to fund terror campaigns. *Daily Post Nigeria*. https://dailypost.ng/2016/03/05/borno-governor-shettima-claims-boko-haram-now-sell-stolen-cattle-to-fund-terror-campaigns/

[26] Markakis, John (1997) *Resource Conflict in the Horn of Africa*. London: SAGE.

[27] Firearms trafficking in Central and Western Africa. (2024). In *Interpol*. INTERPOL General Secretariat.

[28] Cows, bandits, and Violent Conflicts: Understanding cattle rustling in northern Nigeria on JSTOR. (n.d.). *www.jstor.org*. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44982211

[29] Raleigh, C., & Kniveton, D. (2012). Come rain or shine: An analysis of conflict and climate variability in East Africa. *Journal of Peace Research*, *49*(1), 51–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343311427754

[30] Whelan, T. (2006). Africa' s Ungoverned Space.

[31] Ladan, S. I. (2014). Forests and Forest Reserves as Security Threats in Northern Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal ESJ*, *10*(35). https://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/4867/4644

Violent Extremist Organizations

Recent years have seen a surge in violent conflicts over pastoral resources, claiming thousands of lives since 2015.[32] These clashes have exacerbated existing divisions, heightening ethnic and religious tensions, fueling cross-border violence, and escalating crime. Violent extremist organizations (VEOs) have astutely exploited these fractures, using them as platforms to disseminate their agendas, expand their influence, and magnify divisive narratives. Although herder-farmer disputes are widespread across the region, the ramifications are especially pronounced in states with fragile security infrastructures and weak governance, such as Nigeria, Mali, Ghana, Benin, and Burkina Faso.[33] The enduring contest for land and natural resources has evolved into a perilous ethno-religious and political conflict.[34] Climate-driven pasture degradation, overgrazing, and increasing insecurity have compelled herders to migrate in search of more fertile grazing grounds and safer conditions.[35] In Nigeria, these migrations have ignited violent clashes between northern herders and southern farmers, intensifying pre-existing ethnic and religious divisions over dwindling resources.[36]

Government policies have often exacerbated these tensions. Biased regulations perceived as favoring farmers have branded herders as security threats, entrenching negative stereotypes about groups like the Fulani nomads.[37] The 2015 Global Terrorism Index designation of "Fulani Militants"[38] as the fourth deadliest group globally cemented this narrative, painting Fulani herders as the "new face of terrorism"[39] while overshadowing the ecological and structural challenges that jeopardize their livelihoods. This perception has led to militarized responses that further alienate herders.[40] For instance, state authorities in Nigeria, such as those in Ekiti and Delta, have armed local farmers and security personnel, promoting self-defense measures against herders.[41] In Mali and Burkina Faso,

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[32] "Government Failures Fuel Deadly Conflict between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria." 2018. Amnesty International. December 17, 2018. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/nigeria-government-failures-fuel-escalating-conflict-between-farmers-and-herders-as-death-toll-nears-4000-2/ ; "Climate Change and Natural Resource Conflict in ECOWAS and ECCAS Regions: Implications for State Security Forces." n.d. *ACCORD* (blog). Accessed December 13, 2024. https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/climate-change-and-natural-resource-conflict-in-ecowas-and-eccas-regions-implications-for-state-security-forces/.

[33] Gaye, Serigne Bamba. n.d. "Conflicts between Farmers and Herders against a Backdrop of Asymmetric Threats in Mali and Burkina Faso."

[34] "Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence | Crisis Group." 2018. July 26, 2018. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence.

[35] "The Climate Factor in Nigeria's Farmer-Herder Violence." n.d. Accessed December 5, 2024. https://nigeriaclimate.crisisgroup.org/; Roux, Pauline Le. n.d. "Confronting Central Mali's Extremist Threat." *Africa Center* (blog). Accessed December 3, 2024. https://africacenter.org/spotlight/confronting-central-malis-extremist-threat/.

[36] Chukwuma, Kodili Henry. 2020. "Constructing the Herder–Farmer Conflict as (in)Security in Nigeria." *African Security* 13 (1): 54–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2020.1732703; Chukwuma, Al. 2014. "Nomads against Natives: A Political Ecology of Herder/Farmer Conflicts in Nasarawa State, Nigeria" 4 (2).

[37] Chukwuma, Kodili Henry. 2020. "Constructing the Herder–Farmer Conflict as (in)Security in Nigeria." *African Security* 13 (1): 54–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2020.1732703.

[38] GTI. Global Terrorism Index: measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism. (New York: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015).

[39] Idowu Adetayo Johnson and Okunola Biodun Taofik, 'Pastoralism as a new phase of terrorism in Nigeria.' Global Journal of Human Social Science. 17, 4 (2017): 51-54.

[40] Al Chukwuma Okoli and G.A. Atelhe, 'Nomads against natives: A political ecology of state, Nigeria.' American International Journal of Contemporary Research. 4, 2 (2015): 7688 ; "Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence | Crisis Group." 2018. July 26, 2018. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence.

[41] Johnson, IdowuAdetayo. 2017. "Pastoralism as a New Phase of Terrorism in Nigeria."

government forces and militias, ostensibly targeting jihadists, committed atrocities against Fulani communities in 2022, resulting in mass casualties and systematic targeting of Fulani men.[42]

These dynamics have created a fertile environment for extremist exploitation. Marginalized herder communities, like the Fulani, have turned to jihadist groups claiming to champion their cause against systemic injustices.[43] VEOs have capitalized on specific grievances to bolster their support and expand their reach. In Nigeria, ethnic and religious tensions between predominantly Muslim northern herders and Christian southern farmers have been inflamed, exacerbating mutual distrust and intensifying conflict.[44] In Mali, where Fulani herders and adjacent farmers often share an Islamic faith, groups like the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) have leveraged grievances such as cattle theft to escalate inter-communal tensions, particularly between the Tuareg and Fulani, garnering Fulani support.[45] Similarly, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), a coalition operating in Central Mali, aligned itself with the Fulani resistance,[46] working with factions like the Macina Liberation Front and backing figures such as cleric Amadou Koufa.[47] In Burkina Faso, VEOs have exploited farmer-herder conflicts as a foothold for expansion, embedding themselves by participating in retaliatory violence between herders and self-defense groups, thereby solidifying their influence.[48] This is demonstrated by JNIM, which has employed similar strategies in Burkina Faso as in Mali, particularly by aligning with and recruiting from Fulani communities. VEOs like JNIM exploit grievances within the Fulani population, especially related to tensions with local governments and rival ethnic groups, in order to gain support and recruit members.[49]

Although these conflicts are largely localized, they have significant transnational implications. In West and North Africa, designated transhumance corridors have been exploited by VEOs to move fighters, arms, and resources across borders. These corridors, originally intended to facilitate the movement of pastoralists, have become vulnerable to exploitation by armed groups seeking to expand their influence, recruit from marginalized communities, and evade security forces, thereby

[42] "To Protect Coastal West Africa, Protect the Peuhl." n.d. Policy Center. Accessed December 6, 2024. https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/protect-coastal-west-africa-protect-peuhl; "Ethnic Killings of Fulanis in West Africa Risks Regional Conflict." n.d. Accessed December 6, 2024. https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/07/mali-burkina-faso-fulani-ethnic-killings-by-west-african-armies-are-undermining-regional-security/.; "Ethnic Killings of Fulanis in West Africa Risks Regional Conflict." n.d. Accessed December 6, 2024.

[43] Brottem, Leif. n.d. "The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa," no. 39.

[44] Chukwuma, Kodili Henry. 2020. "Constructing the Herder–Farmer Conflict as (in)Security in Nigeria." *African Security* 13 (1): 54–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2020.1732703.

[45] Bisson, Loïc, Ine Cottyn, Kars de Bruijne, and Fransje Molenaar. 2021. "Between Hope and Despair. Pastoralist Adaptation in Burkina Faso." Netherland Institute of International Relations.

[46] Studies, the Africa Center for Strategic. n.d. "Mitigating Farmer-Herder Violence in Mali." *Africa Center for Strategic Studies* (blog). Accessed September 12, 2024. https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mitigating-farmer-herder-violence-in-mali/; Roux, Pauline Le. n.d. "Confronting Central Mali's Extremist Threat." *Africa Center* (blog). Accessed December 3, 2024. https://africacenter.org/spotlight/confronting-central-malis-extremist-threat/.

[47] Studies, the Africa Center for Strategic. n.d. "Mitigating Farmer-Herder Violence in Mali." *Africa Center for Strategic Studies* (blog). Accessed September 12, 2024. https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mitigating-farmer-herder-violence-in-mali/

[48] Bisson, Loïc, Ine Cottyn, Kars de Bruijne, and Fransje Molenaar. 2021. "Between Hope and Despair. Pastoralist Adaptation in Burkina Faso." Netherland Institute of International Relations.

[49] Heger, L., & Pezzarossi, P. (2019). *Islamist Insurgencies in the Sahel: The Role of Ethnic Militias and Jihadist Groups in Burkina Faso and Mali. African Security Review*.

intensifying regional instability and complicating efforts to maintain order.[50] The pastoral mobility along Mauritania's border with Mali raises fears of extremist infiltration,[51] while Niger's borders with Nigeria and Libya heighten concerns of cross-border spillover. In Benin, regions bordering Burkina Faso's Est area and Niger's Alibori department have reported increased VEO activity. These developments underscore the growing risk of regional instability driven by cross-border dynamics.[52]

The entanglement of VEOs in farmer-herder conflicts has deepened the security challenges in North and West Africa.[53] These organizations exploit herder networks for operational and trafficking purposes, using them to facilitate the smuggling of weapons, drugs, and other illicit goods – major revenue streams for terrorist groups.[54] This alignment with pastoralists amplifies organized crime, including cattle rustling and banditry, which have escalated as climate pressures intensify on pastoral livelihoods. For instance, Boko Haram has exploited economic desperation among herders to establish a thriving underground cattle economy.[55] These interconnected crises call for an urgent, comprehensive regional strategy to address the escalating conflicts and their wider implications.[56]

Emergence of Rebels and Armed Groups

In some regions of North and West Africa, the farmer-herder conflict has escalated into full-scale rebellion. This transformation stems from an intricate interplay of ethnic marginalization, resource competition, and weak governance structures. Pastoralist communities, particularly the Fulani, have emerged as pivotal actors in this dynamic.[57] These groups have historically faced systemic exclusion through state policies and targeted violence by militias, prompting the formation of ethnic militias and self-defense networks.[58] These entities actively resist both state forces and rival farmer groups, exacerbating the conflict.

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[50] In West Africa, the ECOWAS established corridors in 2004. "Regional Policies and Response to Manage Pastoral Movements within the ECOWAS Region." 2019, March. https://publications.iom.int/books/regional-policies-and-response-manage-pastoral-movements-within-ecowas-region.

[51] "Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel." 2018. UNOWAS. October 10, 2018. https://unowas.unmissions.org/pastoralism-and-security-west-africa-and-sahel.

[52] Bruijne, Kars de.June 2021. "Laws of Attraction: Northern Benin and Risk of Violent Extremist Spillover." CRU Report.

[53] Okoli, Al Chukwuma. 2019. "Cows, Cash and Terror: How Cattle Rustling Proceeds Fuel Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria." *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 44 (2): 53–76; "The Crime Paradox: Illicit Markets, Violence and Instability in Nigeria." n.d. *Global Initiative* (blog). Accessed December 3, 2024. https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/crime-illicit-markets-violence-instability-nigeria/.

[54] "Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel." 2018. UNOWAS. October 10, 2018. https://unowas.unmissions.org/pastoralism-and-security-west-africa-and-sahel.

[55] Okoli, Al Chukwuma. 2019. "Cows, Cash and Terror: How Cattle Rustling Proceeds Fuel Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria." Africa Development / Afrique et Développement 44 (2): 53–76.

[56] "Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel." 2018. UNOWAS. October 10, 2018. https://unowas.unmissions.org/pastoralism-and-security-west-africa-and-sahel.

[57] "Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence | Crisis Group." 2018. July 26, 2018. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence

[58] Ide, Tobias. "Why Do Conflicts over Scarce Renewable Resources Turn Violent? A Qualitative Comparative Analysis." *Global Environmental Change* 33 (2015): 61–70. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2015.04.008; "Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence | Crisis Group." 2018. July 26, 2018. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence; Ugwueze, Michael I, J. Tochukwu Omenma, and Felicia O Okwueze. "Land-Related Conflicts and the Nature of Government Responses in Africa: The Case of Farmer-Herder Crises in Nigeria." *Society (New Brunswick)* 59, no. 3 (2022): 240–53. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-022-00685-0.

The escalation of violence into rebellion is often linked to ethnic and cultural identity. In Nigeria, for instance, perceptions of ethnic bias attributed to President Muhammadu Buhari, himself of Fulani heritage, heightened tensions. Critics alleged implicit support for violent herders, intensifying ethnic divides. Consequently, pastoralist communities often faced collective punishment for the actions of a minority within their ranks.[59] This cycle of violence fostered further polarization, with pastoralist groups increasingly viewing their struggle as part of a broader existential fight. This perspective perpetuates retaliatory violence and deepens the conflict.[60]

In the Sahel, the erosion of the social contract has created a vacuum exploited by extremist factions. Marginalized youth, deprived of resources and stability, gravitate toward these groups, which frame violence against the state and rival communities as legitimate.[61] In Mali and Burkina Faso, extremist groups have supplanted traditional governance systems, seizing control of mechanisms such as *zakat* payments, previously directed toward conflict mediation and protection. This shift has introduced the concept of *sofal*, compelling pastoralists to pay for protection, thus blurring the lines between insurgents, criminals, and governance. This association erodes trust between farmers and pastoralists, with the former increasingly perceiving the latter as collaborators with violent actors, fueling further grievances.[62]

In response, self-defense militias have emerged among farming communities, often backed by local authorities, to protect land from encroachment by herders. However, the absence of effective state protection has driven herders to form their own armed groups. This has resulted in a retaliatory cycle of violence that local governance systems struggle to manage. Farmers, angered by the destruction of crops, retaliate by targeting cattle, actions that provoke violent reprisals from herders.[63] A Fulani pastoralist in Burkina Faso encapsulated this tension, stating:

> Host communities are unjustifiably jealous, tribalistic, and wicked. The farmers cultivate on cattle corridor yet, turn to blame pastoralists for allowing cattle to destroy crop fields. The farmers just do not want us on their land simply because they see us as strangers. They kill our cattle at the least provocation forgetting that the cattle are our source of livelihood. We will physically attack any farmer who tries to kill any of our cattle. It is this attitude of farmers that made us procure firearms in defense of our cattle. If the mantra of the farmers is to shoot any cattle on sight, we will not also hesitate to shoot back to protect our source wealth and survival.[64]

[59] Brottem, Leif V. "Pastoral Resource Conflict in the Context of Sudano-Sahelian Security Crises: A Critical Review of Research." *African Security* 13, no. 4 (2020): 380–402. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2020.1871291.

[60] Brottem, Leif V. "Pastoral Resource Conflict in the Context of Sudano-Sahelian Security Crises: A Critical Review of Research." *African Security* 13, no. 4 (2020): 380–402. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2020.1871291.

[61] de Bruijn, M. and J. Both (2017). "Youth between state and rebel (dis)orders: contesting legitimacy from below in sub–Sahara Africa." Small Wars & Insurgencies 28, no. 4–5: 779–98.

[62] Brottem, Leif V. "Pastoral Resource Conflict in the Context of Sudano-Sahelian Security Crises: A Critical Review of Research." *African Security* 13, no. 4 (2020): 380–402. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2020.1871291.

[63] International Crisis Group. (2018). *Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence* (Africa Report N°262). https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence

[64] Otu, B. O., & Impraim, K. (2021). Aberration of farmer – pastoralist conflicts in Ghana. *Peace Review*, *33*(3), 416. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2021.1953813

This perpetual violence is rooted in grievances over land, inadequate compensation, and collective punishment, driving herders to retaliate by destroying crops or using them to feed their livestock. This tit-for-tat dynamic has entrenched the conflict.[65]

Ultimately, these rebellions signify a broader political and ethnic struggle between pastoralists and farmers. Local grievances have escalated into extensive violence, challenging state authority, especially in areas of weak governance. These conflicts often intersect with larger non-state actors, including terrorist groups and organized criminal networks. The failure of governments to address underlying issues such as resource scarcity and ethnic tensions has allowed these rebellions to expand, posing profound challenges across North and West Africa.

Government Responses to the Farmer-Herder Conflict

Regional and Domestic Responses

Numerous regional institutions, such as the African Union (AU), the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), have formulated policies and initiated programs to address the root causes of farmer-herder conflicts. These programs tackle various issues, including desertification and deforestation through initiatives like the Great Green Wall, cross-border pastoralism with the ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance, food and livelihood security via the Food and Nutrition Insecurity Resilience Program in the Sahel, and community resilience to climate shocks through efforts like the Programme to rehabilitate and strengthen socio-ecological systems in the Lake Chad Basin (PRESIBALT).[66] However, the effectiveness of these initiatives heavily depends on the commitment and capacity of individual member states, leading to inconsistent implementation across the region. This inconsistency has significantly undermined the impact of these efforts. Many nations have prioritized national or sub-national policies over regional agreements, further constraining the ability of these initiatives to tackle the systemic drivers of farmer-herder conflicts and address their transnational implications.[67]

Domestic responses by African governments to farmer-herder disputes have often escalated tensions, leading to widespread violence. These responses have been exacerbated by the marginalization of herders, ineffective land policies, and failure to address climate and resource challenges. By failing to address the root causes of conflict, governments have inadvertently fueled rebellion and insurgency in North and West Africa. The absence of robust state presence in parts of North and West Africa has created a security vacuum, leaving communities vulnerable. In this void,

[65] International Crisis Group. (2018). *Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence* (Africa Report N°262). https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence
[66] "Great Green Wall Initiative." UNCCD. Accessed December 13, 2024. https://www.unccd.int/our-work/ggwi ; Bank, African Development. 2023. "Multinational - Project 2 of the Food and Nutrition Insecurity Resilience Program in The Sahel(P2-P2RS) – Project Appraisal Report." Text. African Development Bank Group. African Development Bank Group. January 23, 2023. https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/multinational-project-2-food-and-nutrition-insecurity-resilience-program-sahelp2-p2rs-project-appraisal-report; "Lake Chad Basin: Environmental Protection and Resilience." n.d. Alliance Sahel. Accessed December 13, 2024. https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/lake-chad-basin-environmental-protection-and-resilience/.
[67] Leonhardt, Manuela. 2017. "Regional Policies and Response to Manage Pastoral Movements within the ECOWAS Region." International Organization for Migration. Abuja, Nigeria.https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1411/files/documents/2023-09/regional-policies-and-response-to-manage-pastoral-movements-within-the-ecowas-region-2019.pdf

criminal groups, extremists, and rebels have capitalized on the lack of governance to advance their agendas.[68] As governments fail to adequately address violence, local communities have voiced grievances, claiming the state has abandoned its protective role. This has led communities to form self-defense groups, which governments sometimes support due to their own security shortcomings.[69] For example, in Mali, self-defense groups like the Bambara militia have received state backing to counter Islamist and armed groups. These groups, including the Dozo – traditional Bambara warriors – have militarized, acquiring advanced weaponry and training. Unfortunately, this has resulted in instances of extrajudicial actions against Fulani herders, accused of damaging farmlands.[70]

In Burkina Faso, a parallel trend has emerged with the Koglwego self-defense groups. Initially state-supported to counter cattle theft and banditry, these groups have grown militarized and increasingly autonomous, leading to human rights abuses. Their unchecked actions, such as arbitrary detentions and torture, have strained their legitimacy, prompting the government to distance itself.[71] However, state complicity in establishing or supporting such groups, including programs like Nigeria's Agro Rangers – militarized security forces trained to protect farmers – illustrates a pattern of reliance on paramilitary solutions.[72] Without proper oversight, these measures risk perpetuating abuses and escalating the farmer-herder conflict.

Government-backed self-defense and militant groups have not provided sustainable solutions to the escalating violence between herders and farmers. Both groups have expressed frustration over the federal government's inability to curb violence. Fulani herders, for instance, have condemned the lack of accountability for widespread killings and cattle theft. Their grievances include the ineffectiveness of investigative panels, such as one formed by the Adamawa state government, which lacked enforcement authority. This led to threats of retaliation, culminating in attacks by Fulani herders on Bachama villages, further fueling cycles of violence and encouraging militia activity.[73]

In addition, government policies aimed at mitigating farmer-herder conflicts, such as anti-grazing laws, have often been counterproductive. These laws, designed to regulate livestock grazing and protect farmland, have disrupted traditional nomadic practices, forcing herders to adopt sedentary lifestyles. While officials defend these laws as necessary to prevent resource disputes, herders, particularly the Fulani, argue they were excluded from policymaking and that the regulations ignore long-standing traditions. Moreover, poor enforcement has allowed bandits to exploit these laws for cattle theft, worsening tensions.[74] Economic hardships resulting from restricted grazing mobility

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[68] Cows, bandits, and Violent Conflicts: Understanding cattle rustling in northern Nigeria on JSTOR. (n.d.). *www.jstor.org*. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44982211

[69] Gaye, S. B. (2018). *Conflicts between farmers and herders against a backdrop of asymmetric threats in Mali and Burkina Faso*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Peace and Security, Centre of Competence Sub-Saharan Africa.

[70] Gaye, S. B. (2018). *Conflicts between farmers and herders against a backdrop of asymmetric threats in Mali and Burkina Faso*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Peace and Security, Centre of Competence Sub-Saharan Africa.

[71] Gaye, S. B. (2018). *Conflicts between farmers and herders against a backdrop of asymmetric threats in Mali and Burkina Faso*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Peace and Security, Centre of Competence Sub-Saharan Africa.

[72] *FG creates agro Rangers corps, set to deploy 3,000 to farms, ranches*. (n.d.). https://nscdc.gov.ng/fg-creates-agro-rangers-corps-set-to-deploy-3000-to-farms-ranches/

[73] *Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder violence*. (2018, July 26). International Crisis Group. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence

[74] *Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder violence*. (2018, July 26). International Crisis Group. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence

have further inflamed resistance among herding communities, undermining the intended goals of conflict resolution.

U.S. Response

The United States's proactive engagement in addressing the farmer-herder conflict in North and West Africa is vital for ensuring regional security, stability, and economic growth. By extending its support, the United States can alleviate the challenges of displacement, curb forced migration, and cultivate strategic alliances rooted in democratic values. This conflict exacerbates regional instability, creating fertile ground for violent non-state actors to expand their reach. Tackling the underlying causes of this conflict enables the United States to counter the recruitment efforts of VEOs, thus reducing extremism's proliferation across North and West Africa while promoting regional stability.

A key factor fueling the intensifying farmer-herder conflict is climate-induced migration and altered mobility patterns, which drive competition for shrinking resources like fertile land and water.[75] This competition, in turn, heightens tensions, leading to displacement and forced migration. Such developments increase migratory pressures not just within Africa but also toward North Africa, Europe, and even the United States, complicating global migration systems. For the United States, addressing this crisis is both a strategic and humanitarian priority.

The United States can strengthen regional stability and counter extremism by engaging in resolving the farmer-herder conflict while also asserting its influence in an area where global powers like Russia and China are vying for dominance.[76] These nations exploit unrest for their strategic objectives, including resource extraction and forming political alliances. In contrast, the United States' approach emphasizes sustainable peace, democratic governance, and resilient economies through strategic partnerships.

Through U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) initiatives, substantial progress has been made in tackling the root causes of this conflict. Programs such as the Feed the Future Initiative (EnGRAIS) address hunger and poverty by enhancing agricultural productivity and resource accessibility, reducing resource-based competition. The West Africa Regional Mission fosters sustainable land-use and equitable resource sharing while promoting community-level conflict resolution through dialogue and collaboration.[77]

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[75] "Climate Change and Violent Conflict in West Africa: Assessing the Evidence." 2022. SIPRI. https://www.sipri.org/publications/2022/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/climate-change-and-violent-conflict-west-africa-assessing-evidence.

[76] For more information on this topic, please see the topical case study published by START center titled: Climate Security, Great Power Competition, and Adversarial Geopolitics in North and West Africa: Russian Influence

[77] More information on these programs can be found on the USAID website. Information on country specific initiatives can be found by clicking on the country of interest on the interactive map. "West Africa Regional." 2024. U.S. Agency for International Development. December 10, 2024. https://www.usaid.gov/west-africa-regional; "Feed the Future | Agriculture and Food Security." 2023. U.S. Agency for International Development. July 25, 2023. https://www.usaid.gov/feed-the-future; Congressional Research Services. (July 25, 2016). *The Obama Administration's Feed the Future Initiative.* (CRS Report No. R44216); USAID, 2020: West Africa and the Sahel. Regional Development Cooperation Strategy; "Agriculture and Food Security | West Africa Regional." 2024. U.S. Agency for International Development. February 9, 2024. https://www.usaid.gov/west-africa-regional/agriculture-and-food-security.

Complementing resource-focused initiatives, USAID also runs dispute mediation, violence reduction, and community resilience programs, including the Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE) initiative.[78] This initiative targets vulnerabilities in Niger and Burkina Faso, building resilience against conflict drivers. Additionally, governance-improving local efforts and community-driven conflict resolution stabilize the region and limit violence's spread.[79]

Although these programs provide a holistic response to the crisis, the U.S. approach remains largely anchored in countering violent extremism. To achieve enduring peace, a broader strategy is necessary—one that integrates humanitarian aid, climate adaptation, and socio-economic development. Tailored efforts that account for local and regional dynamics, improved governance, and inclusive conflict resolution mechanisms are essential. Furthermore, strengthening partnerships with regional and local stakeholders will enhance stability in North and West Africa over the long term.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study underscores the pressing need to address the rising violence between farmers and herders in North and West Africa, as these conflicts have far-reaching destabilizing consequences for the region. These disputes are not static; rather, they evolve in tandem with broader shifts in the regional security environment. Persistent asymmetric threats, including terrorism and organized crime, combined with the militarization of local disputes, have exacerbated the situation. Disputes once confined to localized disagreements over land have been increasingly appropriated and amplified into expansive intercommunal conflicts, often underpinned by profound identity issues related to ethnicity, religion, and culture.

Fragile governance structures, pervasive corruption, and resource mismanagement, coupled with security vacuums in areas affected by conflict, have significantly exacerbated tensions between farming and herding communities. These conditions have intensified competition over vital resources such as land, water, and grazing areas, further inflaming tensions both within and between communities. In such a volatile setting, poorly conceived policies and interventions that fail to address the intricate dynamics of these conflicts risk deepening grievances, worsening the cycle of violence, and entrenching existing divisions.

Effective solutions to these challenges necessitate several critical strategies. Enhancing the political representation of pastoralist communities is vital, as their exclusion often leads to the implementation of ill-informed policies that exacerbate socio-economic vulnerabilities. Their active participation in decision-making processes is essential for fostering fair and inclusive policymaking. Security approaches must transition from reliance on militarized responses, which often escalate violence, toward stabilization and conflict mitigation efforts. Equally important is fostering regional collaboration to address transnational security challenges, including smuggling, violent extremist

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[78] "Conflict Prevention & Stabilization | West Africa Regional." 2022. U.S. Agency for International Development. July 27, 2022. https://www.usaid.gov/west-africa-regional/conflict-prevention-stabilization-office-transition-initiatives-oti.
[79] "Promoting Better Governance and Bolstering Community-Led Conflict Mediation with Benin's Mediator of the Republic | Our Stories | Stabilzation and Transitions." 2023. U.S. Agency for International Development. December 19, 2023. https://www.usaid.gov/stabilization-and-transitions/our-stories/dec-19-2023-promoting-better-governance-benin.

organizations, and broader instability. Initiatives to reduce the impacts of climate change and ensure safer transhumance practices can contribute significantly to stabilizing the region.

Strengthening local governance and mediation mechanisms is equally critical. Traditional institutions for conflict resolution should be empowered to mediate disputes, build trust, and negotiate equitable agreements for resource sharing. Structured frameworks must support herders in transitioning away from nomadic practices, particularly for younger generations, to facilitate sustainable livelihoods. Policies must be designed with sensitivity to local dynamics and free of stigma, engaging directly with affected communities to develop fair and practical solutions. Beyond these localized efforts, bolstering regional cooperation is crucial to tackling the transnational dimensions of the farmer-herder conflict. Strengthened cross-border collaboration can improve the management of shared resources like water and grazing corridors, reducing the risk of disputes escalating across national boundaries. Additionally, harmonized policies to regulate pastoralist migration and transhumance can ensure fairness and legal compliance, promoting stability while safeguarding the interests of both farmers and herders.

Finally, the promotion of sustainable natural resource management is imperative. This entails equitable land tenure and water-sharing systems, alongside adaptive measures to mitigate the effects of climate change. Addressing these interconnected challenges in a comprehensive manner can break the cycle of violence and create opportunities for enduring peace and stability in the region.

In essence, the farmer-herder conflict in North and West Africa exemplifies the complex interplay between climate change, governance deficiencies, and security threats. Tackling this issue requires a multi-layered approach that integrates local, national, and regional efforts. A failure to act decisively risks exacerbating the conflict, further destabilizing the region, and resulting in widespread, enduring repercussions. A nuanced, coordinated response is essential to disrupt the cycles of violence, address the root causes of conflict, and pave the way for sustainable peace and development in the region.

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