



“NO TRIBE IN CRIME”¹

An in-depth look at dynamics within and between pastoralist groups and farmers in Nigeria

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Research and Policy Brief

Farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria has attracted increased media attention both locally and internationally, though its main actors, causes, and consequences are often the source of speculation and rumors. This lack of understanding of conflict dynamics is largely driven by limited evidence on pastoralist groups and practices, particularly as gathered directly from pastoralists themselves. As part of the USAID-funded Engaging Communities for Peace in Nigeria program, Mercy Corps conducted a study to develop a deeper understanding of the changing dynamics among pastoralist groups, relationships between farmers and different pastoralist groups, and the ways in which these complex dynamics and relationships affect and are affected by conflict. We spoke with pastoralists across the spectrum of movement, farmers, government

¹ Excerpt from ethnographic study data from a pastoralist who stated "...there is no tribe in crime", demonstrating that in his view, pastoralists are not participating in organized crime or violence.

officials, and civil society representatives, with the aim of informing policymakers, practitioners, and donors on best ways to address conflict.

This qualitative study is based on interviews with 70 people from Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states, of whom 44 were pastoralists and 21 were farmers. Forty percent of respondents were women. We define a pastoralist as someone whose economic system or way of life is based on the raising and herding of livestock. While other ethnic groups pursue pastoralism in other parts of Nigeria, all pastoralists present in research locations were Fulbe, while farmers came from a variety of ethnic groups.

Key Findings

Central to all of the study’s findings are that pastoralists face increasing challenges and threats to their way of life and security, and they struggle to adapt to these challenges. Pastoralists cited the expansion of farming areas into grazing routes and reserves and insufficient pasture as their primary challenge, in addition to changing weather patterns, causing them to move their cattle to new places with more fertile ground, which exposes herds to new diseases. They also spoke of decreased social cohesion with farmers and increasing fears of violence.

To cope with and adapt to these challenges, pastoralists reported changing grazing patterns, shifting to settlements, and seeking new feed for their cattle. These strategies are both caused by and contribute to increased tensions among pastoralist groups and with farmers, as highlighted in these key findings.

Influx of pastoralists from West African region may not be a driver of the conflict among pastoralists and between pastoralists and farmers in Nigeria

The notion of “sudden influx” of herders from other parts of West Africa are implausible and may not be the drivers of conflict in Nigeria. Pastoralist migrations are slow and predictable to avoid sickening of animals. Pastoralists have a particular zone of migration as cattle adapt to the ecology of the areas in which they live. If pastoralists move to a new area suddenly, it is likely that many of their cattle will sicken and die due to diseases present in the area and different types of pasture both of which they have not had the time to adapt to. Movement to a new area altogether is done slowly from location to location over the years so cows can slowly adapt to changing ecology. It can take 10 to 15 years to permanently migrate to a completely new location.



> *“I lost almost everything. I lost family members, friends, cattle and other property as we tried to escape from the Anti-Grazing Law enforcers in Benue in January 2018,” says Mubaba, a displaced Pastoralist now living in Nasarawa state.*

Photograph by Ezra Millistein for Mercy Corps

Coping mechanisms in response to decreased available land, autonomous nature of pastoralist families and increased fears of violence exacerbate harmful masculinities within pastoralist groups, making conflict more likely.

Within the Rindobe clan of the pastoralists who are found to migrate often, they are comprised of highly autonomous families, where each family uses a specific type of specialized communication to process a family specific decision, creating inter-group tensions, suspicions and sometimes conflicts. This devolved decision structure with no central coordination system, has limited collective consensus, slows creation of collective meaning and disrupts continuation of communication, especially around issues that cause and drive violent conflicts. This makes them much less likely to move together than previously because of fear of violence. This change causes strain on families and increases the burdens on both men and women, as they each manage their food and housing responsibilities separately. Partially to protect themselves through strength in numbers, and partially to share tasks such as cooking and setting up camp, young migrating men are traveling in larger groups.² Stresses related to expectations around masculinity, the pressure to protect the wealth of their families, and the lack of family support in a time of declining pasture, water and increasing violence combine to intensify conflict dynamics and make violence more likely. Isolated from parents, wives, and other family members, these young men no longer have access to the advice of elders, female and male, who used to caution against violence. Respondents linked increasing numbers of fights, encroachment onto farmland, and involvement in criminality with this change.

Diverse nature of the pastoralists and increasing tensions between the migratory pastoralists, or the Rindobe (in Fulfulde), and the settled pastoralists, or Jodibe, contribute to a widespread lack of trust and social cohesion, affecting farmer-pastoralist conflict.

Even though considered one community by many people, (including policy makers), pastoralists are highly diverse. Pluralism within this community manifests itself through the existence of multiple roles, identities, norms, values and beliefs, which come along with disparate survival demands making the internal cohesion of pastoralist communities a challenge. For example, a given way of dressing and prayer may be highly legitimate and meaningful to Rindobe and deeply illegitimate and even irreligious to Jodibe.

While some respondents from both groups had positive things to say about the other, the Jodibe, who are more sedentary, expressed feeling superior to the more nomadic Rindobe due to their self-perception of being better educated and more religious. The Jodibe disparaged the Rindobes' cultural customs and certain gender norms, criticizing the fact that women provided for the family against norms of "breadwinner masculinity" in Islam and dressed in ways they said were not allowed by Islam. The Rindobe, on the other hand, reported feeling stigmatized and discriminated against, and stressed their higher level of knowledge and exposure from living in different places.

Whereas Rindobe and Jodibe used to cooperate to meet various physical and social needs, as did both groups with farmers, their relations are now frayed. For example, Migratory groups of pastoralists previously interact with the Ardo, or nomadic chieftains, of locations through which they are passing to inform them of

² This finding was also indicated in CDD West Africa (2018) - Rural Banditry in Northern Nigeria, C. 2, p.89. <http://cddwestafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ruralbanditryinnorthernigeria1.pdf>.

their presence, to request permission to stay in the location for some time and to ask for advice. It was found that this communication had ceased over time and that is where problems have arisen, especially if they are passing through quickly in transit.

Rindobe identify 'territories of aggression' where they believe they are likely to be cheated or their property stolen. They also reported passing through communities silently, minimizing contact with both Jodibe and farmers and seeing Jodibe as closer to the farmers.³ These tensions between distinct settled or migratory pastoralist groups and farmers contribute to broader conflict between farmers and all types of pastoralists. Non-pastoralist respondents varied in whether they distinguished between different pastoralist groups. They showed less ability to differentiate in areas of greatest tensions and conflict and were more likely to express that 'Fulani are Fulani' and all the same. Whether this tendency to generalize is a cause or effect of conflict, it is clearly part of the cycle of mistrust between farmers and pastoralists and perpetuates a lack of understanding between conflict actors.

Conflict encounters often occur between women farmers and young male pastoralists and spread to the broader community and to other locations.

While violence is popularly understood as taking place between (young) men, the crisis point for many conflicts occurs between young male pastoralists and women farmers, as young men are often leading the herds, as mentioned previously, and women are often tending to their farms. Women farmers across locations spoke of harassment and rape, or of being ignored as they protested against herds moving through farmland. After initial verbal or physical encounters between pastoralist men and farmer women, these conflicts escalate as male farmers desire to avenge attacks and threats against women in their communities, exacerbated further by the heightened masculinities among pastoralist groups noted above.



Respondents identified water as a major driver of conflict. Long early morning walks to the streams leaves women susceptible to attacks.

A number of additional drivers exacerbate the conflict. Almost all respondents agreed that social cohesion between pastoralists and farmers has deteriorated, and many blamed politicians, community leaders, and the media for exacerbating conflict. Further, recent policies have made conflict worse in key cases, underscoring the need for solutions to tackle the conflict drivers comprehensively and in partnership with a variety of stakeholders.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, governments, donors and practitioners should:

1. **Facilitate Intergenerational Dialogue to Support Young Male Pastoralists** as a number of constraints, from increasing difficulties in finding food and water for family and livestock, limited or lack of parental guidance to prolonged periods of separation from families result in compounded risk and stress faced by young male pastoralists. The government and development partners should facilitate families and communities to find ways to support young male pastoralists and improve relations through building

³ This is reinforced in Chapter 2 of CDD West Africa (2018).

genuine intergenerational dialogue, which are sensitive to hierarchies of gender, age and power, and be institutionalized as part of long-term processes, which enables the voices of young women and men to be heard on a regular basis.

2. **Foster Intercultural Tolerance** where stakeholders and development partners can address the challenge of cultural tolerance and prejudice, especially between Rindobe and Jodibe pastoralists and pastoralist and farmer communities. Interventions should aim to enhance understanding, tolerance and respect for cultural and religious diversity among targeted groups. Efforts are needed that will create spaces for constructive contact with those who consider themselves different from the “other” based on cultural differences and **build intercultural and interreligious competences** as integral life skills for dealing with fears that spur stereotypes of “us” versus “them”, prejudice and/or xenophobia.
3. **In Close Collaboration with Key Stakeholders, Conduct Joint Mapping of Existing Peacebuilding and Governance Structures to Verify Effective Mechanisms for Dialogue, Consultation, and Influence.** The study demonstrates that both pastoralist and farmer communities have some form of conflict resolution mechanisms in place. However, given the level and ferocity of the violence of late, these mechanisms seem uncoordinated and ineffective, lack federal and state government support and lack adequate resources. We recommend mapping governance structures responsible for peacebuilding and development at the community, LGA and state levels and strengthening to make them more responsive, effective and better coordinated.
4. **Build The Capacity of Pastoralist and Farmer Influencers to Promote Intercultural Understanding** by establishing, or where available strengthening a network of influential pastoral and farmer community leaders and organizations (like Pastoral Resolve) to identify and mobilize existing social cohesion resources on the ground and work collaboratively with each other and the government. Support should focus on key stakeholders, including religious leaders, CSOs, women and youth groups among others, for the organizational and individual strength required to extend themselves effectively to larger coalitions. This will facilitate increase in knowledge and skills to conduct successful joint advocacy time-bound campaigns to enhance dialogue and social inclusion that target vulnerable pastoralists and disadvantaged farmers, including other ethnic minorities, the disabled, women and girls.
5. **Promote the Involvement of Civil Society Organizations in Intercultural Dialogue, Cultural Diversity and Non-Discrimination** where local CSOs and other traditional structures are considered for capacity building for advancing advocacy issues through CSO networks. This will prepare them for building and sustaining coalitions to deal with pastoralist farmer issues (whether for one-off activities or on long-term interventions) and bolster civil society actors and organizations at LGA and state levels. CSOs should learn various techniques that serve the dual purposes of educating pastoralists on relevant public policy reform efforts related to cultural diversity and livelihoods, and spurring participants to action around reform efforts and challenge harmful government policies.
6. **Encourage Farmers and Pastoralists to Rediscover Complementary Livelihood Modalities**, drawing on past practice for example grazing on farmland after harvest to increase soil fertility. Additional resources should be dedicated to opening up lines of communication where migratory pastoralists inform local leaders of their presence and movements from the sedentary pastoralist.

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Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.

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