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**Socioeconomic Impacts Assessment of Farmers-Herders Conflicts and Pathways for Sustainable Solutions**

By Israel Dunmade

**Abstract**

Nomadic herding of goats, sheep and cattle are common in some parts of Africa. It involves moving a herd of cattle from one place to another. The herd is moved from place to place where pastures are available for cattle to feed on from morning till evening when they are brought back to “roost”. When the herd owner(s) observe(s) that the available pasture in the area is no longer sufficient to feed the cattle, he/she moves the cattle, the entire family and his/her possessions to another area where he/she finds lush pasture to feed the herd. After staying there for some weeks or months, the cycle of movement and settling begins again. The goal of this research was to evaluate the trend in conflicts between the community of the nomadic Fulani pastoralists that keep their herds of livestock all year round on a system of free-range grazing and their host farming rural communities in West Africa. Other objectives of the research is to determine the trend in frequency and severity of conflicts, the social and economic impacts, and to suggest sustainable solutions to the perennial conflicts. The study is based on intensive literature survey and historical knowledge/observation of nomadic herding in some specific parts of Africa. Preliminary results showed a remarkable change in nomadic herding operations, from peaceful co-existence of nomadic communities with their host communities to hostile relationship involving massive loss of lives, crops, cattle and properties. The results of this study is expected to contribute to the ongoing discussions on possible pathways to addressing the deadly clashes of the herdsman with villagers in some parts of Africa. It is also expected to provide insight on how science and technology can contribute to finding sustainable solutions to the lingering problem.

**Key words:** Cattle rearing, Nomadic herding, Socio-economic impacts, Sustainable farming, Sub-saharan Africa

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### **Introduction**

Human civilizations which started with man as food gatherers have advanced significantly to the stage where the world is today. Despite the advancement in technology and civilization, there are still communities/societies that have been consistent in maintaining their cultural way of life. One of such communities is pastoral nomadic communities. A nomadic society is a community of people who live in different locations, moving from one place to another daily or seasonally in search of grasslands for their animals (Annamoradnejad and Lotfi, 2010). Pastoralism, nomadic pastoralism, pastoral nomadism and transhumance are other terms that are interchangeably used to mean almost the same thing.

Nori et al (2008) stated that “the land where most herding peoples and livestock make a living are characterized as open grazing lands, including savannahs; grassland; prairies; steppe and shrublands. They also mentioned that “extensive pastoral production occurs in 25% of the global land area from the dry lands of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, to the highlands of Asia and Latin America and the Arctic parts of Fennoscandia and Russia”. Warg (2013) estimated the grazing land coverage to be 77% of Australia, 61% of Africa, 49% of Asia and 18% of Europe. Furthermore, New Internationalist (1995) stated that there were an estimated 30–40 million nomads in the world. And that most nomads live in marginal areas like deserts, steppes and tundra, where mobility becomes a logical and efficient strategy for harvesting scarce resources spread unevenly across wide territories. Pastoral nomads move with their households in search of pasture for their animals.

Analyzing the culture and occupation of nomadic pastoralists, New Internationalist (1995) went further to say that “livestock is central to their livelihood and the basis of their culture”. It was also stated that this community of people raise herds, driving them, or moving with them, in patterns that normally avoid depleting pastures beyond their ability to recover. And that their movement is seasonal, linked to rainfall and the availability of good forage for their animals. Expatriating on the global locations of nomadic herders, Kradin (2002), said that Nomadic pastoral societies are found in Africa (Figure 1), the Near East, Iranian Plateau, Central Eurasia, and southwest Asia. And that “only the special cult relation to the livestock, main source of subsistence of nomads, distinguishes them from all other societies”.

Describing the link between the kind of herds chosen, their climate adaptation, herders’ movement and reasons for their choice of herds, New International (1995) stated that goats are the choice herds among the pastoralists in the Peruvian Andes where their animals graze on richer grasses at lower altitudes during the wet season, then move to higher altitudes during the dry season. Reindeer is the choice of the 6,000 Sami nomadic group in Scandinavia. They migrate with their reindeer up to 300 kilometres from sheltered forests in the winter to coastal grasslands in the summer. The purpose of their choice of the kind of herds range from the provision of milk, meat and blood for food; hides, hair, wool, horn and bone for clothing, shelter and tools; and dung for fuel and fertilizer. Nomads also use animals for transport, freight carriage

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and traction (milling, threshing and ploughing) (Kradin, 2002; Latipova and Hazelwood, 2016; New International, 1995; Nori et al, 2008; Warg, 2013).



Figure 1 Locations of major pastoralist communities in Africa

(Extracted from [https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/subsistence/images/map\\_of\\_pastoralists.gif](https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/subsistence/images/map_of_pastoralists.gif) )

According to Anter (2011), “the Fulani (also called Fula in some places) form the largest pastoral nomadic group in the world. The Bororo’ en are noted for the size of their cattle herds.” Anter (2011) reported that there are about 18 million Fulani people stretch across the countries of West Africa. And that they remain to be the largest group of nomadic people in the world. Anter also said that “the Fulani are the only major migrating people of West Africa, though most Fula now live in towns or villages. They are traditionally pastoralists herding cattle, goats and sheep across the vast dry hinterlands of their domain, keeping somewhat separate from the local agricultural populations.” It was further said that most Fulani in the countryside spend long times alone on foot, moving their herds; and that they are the only major migrating people of West Africa. Anter (2011) also explained that Fulani movement in West Africa tended to follow a set pattern (Figure 2). Their first movement into an area tends to be peaceful. Local officials give them land grants. Their dairy products, including fertilizer, are highly prized. They try to convert their host communities to Islam over time. Once they have “foothold” in the communal life of their host community, Fulani becomes resentful at being ruled by pagans, or imperfect Muslims. Consequently conflicts do ensue (Obydenkova, and Pearce, 2016; Pattanayak and Pfaff, 2009; Van Cotthem, 2015).

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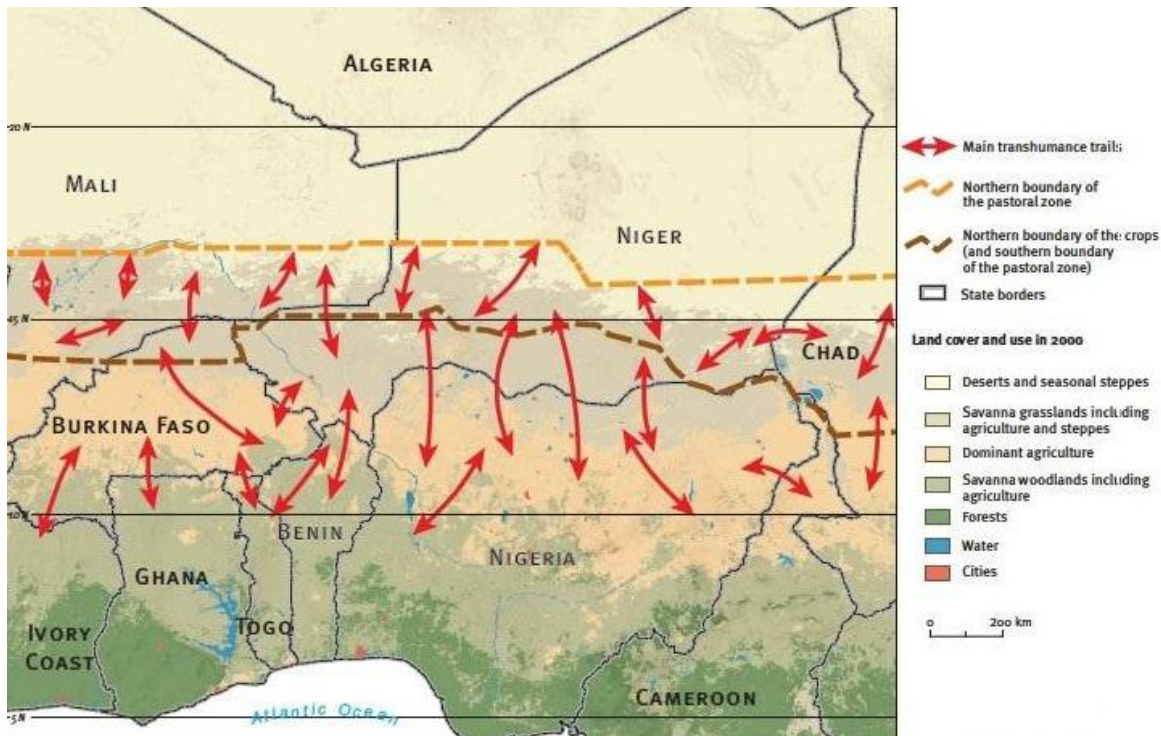


Figure 2 Main Transhumance trails in West Africa

Source:

[https://www.cairn-int.info/loading.php?FILE=E\\_EG/E\\_EG\\_424/E\\_EG\\_424\\_0306/E\\_EG\\_424\\_0306\\_img001.jpg](https://www.cairn-int.info/loading.php?FILE=E_EG/E_EG_424/E_EG_424_0306/E_EG_424_0306_img001.jpg)

The goal of this research was to evaluate the trend in conflicts between the community of the nomadic Fulani pastoralists that keep their herds of livestock all year round on a system of free-range grazing and their host farming rural communities in West Africa. Other objectives of the research are to determine the trend in frequency and severity of conflicts, the social and economic impacts, and to suggest sustainable solutions to the perennial conflicts.

### **The Trend in West African Herders-Farmers Conflicts, the Frequency and Severity**

The history of amorous relationship between farming communities and their settler nomadic pastoralists turning sour after a period of settlement is very long. It is more than a century. According to Moritz (2010), “West African herders and farmers have long coexisted in symbiotic relationships that endure both peace and contentious engagements, reports of violent clashes between these two groups are becoming more frequent”. Sandner (2018) said “whether in Mali, Niger or Nigeria, the nomadic Fulani herders often find themselves in conflict with farmers over scarce resources (Figure 3).



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Figure 3 Fulani Herdsmen and their Cattle

Source: <http://www.dw.com/en/west-africa-fulani-conflict-getting-worse/a-43679371>

But there is more to the conflict than the fight for natural resources: Often it becomes a struggle for political supremacy.” Onubogu (2017) substantiated this by stating that “tensions between nomadic cattle herders and more settled farming communities have a long history in Nigeria’s north and along the country’s Middle Belt, the rough dividing line between the largely Muslim north and the Christian south. Over the past year, what were once recurrent, low-level clashes mostly confined to these areas have spiraled into a deadly crisis that is inflaming religious as well as ethnic hostilities locally and nationally.” While the spate of killing and arson are predominantly in West Africa, other African countries are not spared. For example, Ngoolo (2017) and Nzengu (2018) reported killing of farmers, destruction of farms and burning of houses in parts of Kenya by Somali Camel herders.

### **Causes and Socio-economic impacts of herders-farmers conflicts**

There are so many stories of killing and arson resulting from herders-farmers conflicts all over Africa that would make someone wonder what the causes of conflicts are and what are the steps taken to address the conflicts.

### **Causes of Conflicts**

Many reasons have been attributed to the increasing herders-farmers conflicts in Africa, especially in West Africa. Olayokun (2014) and Sandner (2018). Olayokun (2014, cited by Eje et al, 2017) disclosed that climate changes, the migration further south, the growth of agropastoralism, the expansion of farming on pastures, the invasion of farmlands by cattle, assault on non-Fulani women by herders, blockage of stock routes and water points, freshwater scarcity, burning of rangelands, cattle theft, inadequate animal health care and disease control, overgrazing on fallow lands, defecation on streams and roads by cattle, extensive sedentarization, ineffective coping strategies, ethnic stereotyping, and the breakdown of conflict

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intervention mechanisms are some of the causes of conflicts. To buttress the point that decrease in grazing areas due to population growth was one of the reasons for the conflicts, Osai Ojigho in Muller-Jung and Oneko (2018) stated that “populations have expanded around the areas where the nomadic communities have often moved their cattle across the country. And this goes beyond Nigeria, across the entire Sahel and West African region.”

Regarding destruction of farmlands by herds of Cattle, Nzengu (2018) reported that herders drove their camels into a farm in Wikitoo area of Kaningo, Kenya and attacked the farmers when farmers attempted to repulse them. This was buttressed by This Day Editorial (2015), by writing that “most often, the arguments that trigger the violence result over the grazing of farmlands by livestock”. This was reiterated by Muller-Jung and Oneko (2018) by saying that “nomadic cattle breeders need water and grass for their livestock so they send them to graze on local farmland. But that angers farmers who are using the land, and the scarce resources at their disposal, to grow crops. In recent months, a growing number of herdsmen and farmers have taken up arms and formed militias and the conflict has spread.” According to Mohammed in ECOWAS (2018) “Most livestock-related conflicts in the region stem from increased competition between herders and farmers for access to water and pasture.” Therefore the main causes of the conflicts are land and natural resources.

However, in recent years, other reasons crept in. Nana in Muller-Jung and Oneko (2018) said "This conflict was initially a conflict over natural resources between farmers and herders, so people were competing over land. But gradually it was politicized and there are also religious manipulations that have been brought into the conflict. There are also criminal elements that have been involved. So there are hired killers for example," She further said that "When you kill a three-day-old child, that child is neither a farmer nor a herder. You're killing the child because of their ethnic or religious background. That is genocide". Nana further said that "If nobody is being arrested, if nobody is being persecuted, then what people think is: I have to defend myself," So, one can adduce land, ethnicity, religion and politics as other causes of the conflicts (Adisa, 2012; Ayantunde et al, 2010; Eje et al, 2017; Muller-Jung and Oneko, 2018; Pattanayak and Pfaff, 2009; UNCCD, 2015).

### **Socio-economic Impacts**

In last few years, there has been an increasing incidences of fatal clashes and wanton destruction of lives and property involving nomadic herders and farmers in the African region, especially in West Africa. The effects herders-farmers conflicts ranged from physical, economic, to socio-psychological (Adisa, 2012). According to Mohammed in ECOWAS (2018) “Conflicts between herders and farmers have an impact on national and regional human security, hamper economic development and tear communities apart.”

For example, Sadner, P. (2018) reported that 400 people were killed in Mali just in April 2018 alone. In the same vein Muller-Jung and Oneko (2018) also reported that the same number was killed in Nigeria in the first four months of 2018, 2500 died in 2016 while 175000 were displaced. According to Ojewale, O. and Appiah-Nyamekye, J (2018), “Violent conflicts between nomadic herders and farmers over the use of land and water, destruction of farms, and theft of livestock in since 2016 have killed an estimated 2,000-3,000 people and costed Nigeria

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at least \$14 billion in potential revenues annually due to the loss of crops and livestock in the country's rich agricultural zone, especially Benue and Plateau states in North Central Nigeria that have been worst hit by these herder-farmer clashes.”

The spate of killings, looting, rape and arson is making residents to live in fear and causing many to flee their residential and business locations due to social insecurity. Many are abandoning their farming and other businesses seeking shelter elsewhere. As a result, there are lots of farm losses, reduced productivity, school closure, reduced income, loss of tax revenue, and increased burden on government. Consequently the setbacks caused by the situation is exacerbating poverty, hunger, and child and women abuse. The economic cost of housing, feeding, and rehabilitating displaced persons as well as lost revenue across Africa in the last eight years is estimated to be about \$200 billion (Sulaiman and Ja`afar-Furo, 2010).

### **Pathways for sustainable solutions to farmers-herders' conflicts**

Governments across Africa and International organizations have proposed and taken steps to douse the tension and resolve the conflicts involving herders and farming communities in West Africa. While some of them worked for some time, a number of them have not produced any visible results (Alternativeafrika, 2018; ECOWAS, 2018; Sandner, 2018). Among the suggested solutions to the perennial herders-farmers conflicts are: Development of cooperation between feuding communities; registration and monitoring the movement of herds of cattle within and across borders, and taxation of herdsmen and assurance of cattle protection against robbery or killing. Other proffered solutions are modernization of animal production systems, and full implementation and enforcement of relevant regional protocols. Two emphasized protocols are the 1979 ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons, goods, capital and services and 1998 protocol relating to transhumance. It is believed that implementation of these protocols will enable relevant security agencies to track herders/cattle movement and to enforce their compliance with laws and orders. Our research showed that while no one single approach can solve the problem, modernization of animal production involving changing from the current transhumance method to ranching method as commonly practiced in many western countries will go a long way in solving the perennial problem. Sustainable and enduring solutions would also require involvement of all the stakeholders, working together to achieve the desired peace. Taking such approach will foster trust, provide necessary environment for peace and security of lives and property, foster economic growth and engender environmental protection.

### **Conclusion**

The escalating farmers-herders' conflicts in Africa is wrecking havoc on the social and economic lives of the people. The lingering problem is threatening national security and regional security. Unless drastic measures are put in place, the conflict may not allow the affected countries to reach the sustainable goals on poverty elimination, ending hunger, attainment of good health and wellbeing, and provision of quality education. Furthermore, achievement of the sustainable goals such as gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, and others will be impossible without solving the

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problem. Enduring and sustainable solution to the problem require multi-stakeholders collaboration and willingness to make necessary changes by all that are concerned.

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