

Conflict between Farmers and Herders in Africa: an Analysis

Present understanding of the importance of, and the factors affecting, conflict between farmers and livestock keepers or herders in semi-arid Africa was reviewed and analysed. An extensive review of the literature was made and a survey was conducted amongst international researchers – the research focused primarily on violent conflict.

Background

There is a long historical record of fluctuating conflict, competition and co-operation between settled farmers and pastoral or transhumant herders. This includes periods of violent herder domination over settled farming production systems and the conversion of former pastoral lands to cultivation. The current levels of conflict that occur in some locations are clearly intolerable for farmers, herders and also for the environment. The need for local communities to resort to such violence is indicative of a lack of policies, or that existing policies are not working to the benefit of these communities as a whole.

Research highlights

Evidence was presented of conflict between farmers and herders in the pre-colonial period. There is also a considerable body of evidence for an increase of conflict within living memory and especially during the post-independence period. This evidence includes farmer and herder testimonies. A significant number of researchers do not sense a dramatic

increase in the incidence or gravity of farmer/herder conflicts. There was, however, a dearth of empirical data and it was difficult either to confirm or deny the hypothesis of increasing violent conflict. Those who argue that conflicts are not increasing, nevertheless feel that the causes of conflicts are changing and acknowledge that the visibility and perhaps intensity of such conflict is increasing.

herders are often given temporary settlement rights, but overstay their welcome and subsequently demand equal rights of tenure and exploitation.

Where the Government has encouraged nomadic herders to become sedentary, this has led to protests by the host agricultural populations and to heightened potential for conflict.

Examples of long-term trends and proximate causes of farmer/herder conflicts

Long-term trends	Proximate events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gradual process, over 50 years, of Fulani herds moving from northern to southern areas in the Sahel, with many herders becoming sedentary (Ivory Coast; northern Nigeria) Increased availability of modern weapons since the mid-1980s (Afar in Ethiopia; Turkana & Somali in Kenya; Kuria in Tanzania) Increased population pressure (Afar in Ethiopia; Fulani & Hausa in Niger) Farmer encroachment on traditional pastoral lands (Mouride cultivators expanding into Fulani pastoralist areas in Senegal; Fulani & Hausa in Niger) Overall economic crisis, macro-economic factors (north Cameroon) Climate change (north Cameroon, Niger) Privatisation of land (Morocco, Tunisia) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influx of refugees from Sudanese civil war; movement of Turkana pastoralists into southern Ethiopia resulting in changes in land use Pastoralist herds trespassing on farmers' fields resulting in crop damage (Cameroon) Exclusion of nomadic herders from traditional rangelands (Cameroon) Convergence of herding groups round wells (Cameroon) Food insecurity and drought (Niger, Morocco, Tunisia) Permanent settlement of 'strangers' on land given to pastoralists by local 'host' agriculturalist populations (Senegal, Maghreb) Introduction of new technologies resulting in changed land use and influx of new settlers (small- and large-scale irrigation on the Tana River, Kenya, resulting in conflict with herders)

An important aspect of the changed nature of conflict has been the increasing availability of modern weapons, particularly in eastern Africa. Here, powerful interests supply certain groups (usually herders) with weapons in order to advance their own causes through sponsored violence. In both sub-Saharan and north Africa, the abuse of traditional host/stranger relationships has led to heightened conflict. This refers to the way in which

A number of policy-level implications were highlighted by the research:

- Promote new herder institutions for the management of rangelands and the assertion of herders' rights at local and national levels to control access to resources.
- Incorporate both farmers and herders in groups responsible for local management of natural resources. For this to occur, governments have to accept that power to manage local resources is

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devolved to local institutions. However, there remains the question of who provides a 'safety net' when resource management fails.

- Negotiate arrangements for multiple land use amongst all groups using the same land.
- Encourage communities to build their own institutions for management of local resource conflicts by giving them the legal power and responsibility to do so.
- Ensure that development schemes do not have a negative impact on existing pastoralist and transhumant grazing patterns.
- Provide training to farmer and herder groups in conflict management and resolution techniques.

Uptake

Project findings clearly demonstrate the need to view conflict among groups within the broader context of farmer/herder interactions or relations in general. A variety of ongoing research themes on crop/livestock interactions are also likely to touch on farmer/herder relations and will be important in assessing these conflicts from a broader perspective – as will research into changing land tenure systems, and the new opportunities and changing land use arising after tsetse fly eradication.

Linkages

Given (a) the insufficient evidence for increasing levels of violent conflict, (b) the continued existence of customary forms of conflict resolution, (c) the many examples of the legal system being used by both farmers and herders to clarify their respective rights with regard to access and control of natural resources, and (d) the failure of many natural resource management initiatives to end farmer/herder conflicts, the project highlighted the

main question that needed to be asked: "is there anything that needs to be done?". Indeed, it was also noted that conflict could at times be positive, leading to necessary adaptation and change.

Furthermore, when conflict is violent it is normal for the State to intervene with action to pacify internal violence that may have a destabilising influence. Violent conflict poses a problem of internal security that may be considered to be primarily an issue of state maintenance of the peace.

Listening to 'experts' and their various recommendations regarding pastoralism is becoming part of the problem itself, as new interventions are recommended, tried and fail, ultimately threatening the welfare of herders and at times the survival of their production systems. Obligatory or forced sedentarisation was cited as a case in point.

Relevance to sustainable livelihoods

Relations between farmers and herders in semi-arid regions of Africa have been characterised by close reciprocal ties – so close that they have been referred to as 'symbiotic'. It has been argued that such relations are now disappearing due to the breakdown of traditional social ties. However, it was emphasised that it is sometimes necessary for farmers and herders to compete for survival – a situation that can lead to conflict becoming a dominant feature of the relationship.

Where a resource is ecologically suitable to both farmers and herders,

the relative political power of these groups determines the pattern of resource use. With an increasing trend towards land scarcity linked to increasing populations, political power has generally been influenced in favour of cultivators and an increase in cultivated land, normally at the expense of the best dry-season grazing land. Changes to communal land tenure regimes have also led to tensions and legal conflicts between farmers and herders, especially in the post-harvest period, over damage caused to late-maturing crops.

Whilst there are factors inherent in the settled farming and nomadic livestock production systems that tend to produce competition, it can by no means be assumed that this necessarily produces increased conflict. Competition can result in the adaptation of livelihoods, particularly in specialisation, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict. The challenge, therefore, is to produce land use policies and facilitate changes to production systems that enhance the positive aspects of the competition between farmers and herders, whilst at the same time minimising any potential negative effects.

Selected project publications

- Hussein, K. (1998) *Conflict between Sedentary Farmers and Herders in the Semi-Arid Sahel and East Africa: A Review*. IIED Pastoral Land Tenure Series 10. International Institute for Environment and Development, London, UK.

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