The Dynamics of Herder-Farmer Conflicts in Plateau State, Nigeria, and Central Darfur State, Sudan

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Abstract

Drawing on their own field studies, the authors examine how state and local actors involved in resource management and peacebuilding activities are implicated in the conflict between farmers and herders in Plateau State, Nigeria, and Central Darfur State, Sudan. The authors show that state officials, traditional chiefs, and security agents intensified the conflict by perpetuating the inequitable distribution of resources needed for the survival of farmers and herders, while promoting a peacebuilding process that empowered some groups and disempowered others. The divisive role state and local actors played accentuated the socio-political grievances underlying the conflict and enervated the peacebuilding process.

Résumé

S'appuyant sur leurs propres études de terrain, les auteurs examinent comment les acteurs étatiques et locaux engagés dans la gestion des ressources et les activités de consolidation de la paix sont impliqués dans le conflit entre agriculteurs et éleveurs dans l'État du Plateau, au Nigeria et dans l'État du Darfour central, au Soudan. Babatunde et Osman montrent que les représentants de l'État, les chefs traditionnels et les agents de sécurité ont intensifié le conflit en perpétuant la distribution inéquitable des ressources nécessaires à la survie des agriculteurs et des éleveurs, tout en promouvant un processus de consolidation de la paix qui a donné du pouvoir à certains groupes et en a privé d'autres. Le rôle de division joué par l'État et les acteurs locaux a accentué les griefs sociopolitiques sous-jacents au conflit et a affaiblit le processus de consolidation de la paix.

Resumo

Partindo do trabalho de campo realizado pelos próprios autores, este artigo analisa as formas através das quais o Estado e os atores locais envolvidos em atividades de gestão de recursos e de construção da paz estão também implicados no conflito entre agricultores e pastores no estado de Plateau, Nigéria, e no estado de Darfur Central, Sudão. Babatunde e Osman mostram que os responsáveis do Estado, os líderes tradicionais e os agentes de segurança intensificaram o conflito ao perpetuarem uma distribuição desequilibrada dos recursos necessários à subsistência de agricultores e pastores, ao mesmo tempo que promoveram um processo de paz que empoderou alguns grupos mas desempoderou outros. O papel divisivo desempenhado pelo Estado e pelos atores locais agravou os ressentimentos que subjazem ao conflito e prejudicou o processo de paz.

Introduction

The violent conflict between sedentary farmers and nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists in many African states has been a major subject of debate in the literature. The main conflict drivers have been attributed to resource scarcity arising from climate change and population growth, which intensified competition for dwindling land and water resources vital to livelihood (Brottem and McDonnell 2020; Benjaminsen and Ba 2021; Setrana 2022). According to Welzer (2012), the impacts of climate change can interact with political, economic, ethnic and other social-historical factors to reinforce and deepen resource competition and violent confrontations between groups. Conflict arises in situations in which social relations and group membership determine access to resources, and when rural development policies are implemented in ways that privilege or disadvantage one group over others (Brottem and McDonnell 2020).

This article examines how state and local actors exercising control over resource distribution and acting as primary agents in peacebuilding influence the complex and destructive nature of the conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria and Sudan. The actions of the state and local actors, such as government officials, security agents and traditional chiefs, have served to perpetuate the inequitable distribution of resources needed for the survival of the farmers and herders, while their peacebuilding activities have empowered some groups and disempowered others. The actions of state and local actors have also influenced the roles played by other internal and external actors, which has further contributed to the conflict dynamics. Using the case of Plateau State, Nigeria, and Central Darfur, Sudan, this article illustrates how state and local leaders in plural contexts can contribute to the intractable nature of resource conflicts and enervate the peacebuilding process. It shows that the politics of resource management and peacebuilding by state and local leaders has influenced the negative responses of the farmers and herders and other non-state actors to the conflict issues and the peacebuilding activities.

A comparative analysis of the farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria and Sudan is germane. In recent times, Nigeria and Sudan have been hotbeds of destructive

conflict between farmers and herders. Media reports and scholarly studies have provided varying estimates of the thousands of fatalities and the broad extent of human displacement arising from the conflict in Nigeria (Global Terrorism Index 2015; Ojo 2020; Kew 2021). Similarly, in Sudan, the conflict has degenerated into a full-blown crisis that has claimed thousands of lives and led to thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Degomme and Debarati 2010; Abdul-Jalil 2014; De Waal 2022). This comparative study can help us to distill how and why the politics of resource management and peacebuilding by state and local leaders in ethnically and religiously diverse Plateau State and ethnically divided and religiously homogeneous Central Darfur region, both of which are battling with pre-existing political crises, influence the nature and dynamics of resource-based conflicts in Africa. In Plateau State, the farmer-herder conflict is embedded in decades of ethno-religious violence and political crises, which have been the focus of extensive research (Best 2007; Human Rights Watch 2013; Madueke 2019; Oosterom et al. 2021). While the government has managed to contain the political crises through excessive military deployment (Obaj and Okeke-Uzodike 2013), the conflict over indigene rights and access to resources remains unaddressed (Krause, 2019). The government is perceived to favor the indigenous farmers, while marginalizing the non-indigenous herders. In Darfur, the conflict started in 2003 as an ethnic conflict between "Arabs" and "Africans." While African tribes are farmers, Arabs are generally herders. The government has been accused of unduly favoring the Arab tribes (Takana et al. 2012). The peacebuilding efforts in both countries to address the conflicts amplified rather than mitigated them.

This comparative analysis will show how identity diversity, politics of resource management and peacebuilding, and political crises have shaped the farmer-herder conflict in the two regions in Nigeria and Sudan. The farmers and herders' conflicts are intricately embedded in the waves of political crises in the two countries. At the same time, conflicts between farmers and herders in Africa transcend national boundaries (Cline 2020; Kwaja and Smith 2020), thereby necessitating a comparative approach to the analysis of the conflict contexts and peace processes. Yet, most of the literature on the farmers and herders' conflict has adopted a single-country case analysis, despite the fact that scholars and policy analysts have emphasized both the localized and transnational dimension of the conflict. Exploring the conflict through a comparative lens can offer critical perspectives on the intersecting socio-political issues and actors transcending national boundaries that shaped the conflict dynamics in the two regions in Nigeria and Sudan. This approach can allow policymakers and international organizations to dissect the conflict from a comparative lens, thereby broadening the scope for understanding both the localized and transnational dimension of the problem. This paper compares the nature of resource management and peace efforts by the state and local institutions and explains why they have resulted in a mix of successes and failures in the two conflict-affected contexts in Nigeria and Sudan.

Studies have established that resource scarcity may or may not necessarily lead to conflict between farmers and herders (Hagberg 2005; Moritz 2010; Akov 2017). Yet, scholarly investigation into why and how resource scarcity fuels

violent and intractable conflict between farmers and herders in polarized contexts remains relatively scanty. Whereas existing literature has explored how state and non-state actors can influence resource contestations between groups in some contexts (Sulieman 2015; Ryle and Amuom 2018; Benjaminsen and Ba 2021; Kew 2021), there is inadequate scholarly analysis of the impacts on the conflict dynamics and peacebuilding processes, particularly in ethnically, religiously, or politically polarized contexts. This is particularly instructive, given that the conflicts have continued to escalate and proliferate, in spite of the various peacebuilding efforts implemented to manage them. This raises critical questions about the viability of the peace efforts of state and local leaders.

Resource governance and peacebuilding are no doubt complex and controversial issues. Campese et al. (2016) asserted that resource governance as a complex entanglement of formal and informal institutions can be undermined by actors in asymmetric power relations. At the same time, the political nature of peacebuilding can create a situation in which state and local leaders are empowered, while perpetuating the oppression of marginal groups and legitimizing and normalizing the institutional practices that promote, sustain, and reproduce the oppression (Tieku et al. 2021). The farmers and herders in Nigeria and Sudan are in a position of asymmetric power relations due in part to the actions of state and local leaders involved in resource governance and peacebuilding activities. This can undermine the ability of the farmers and herders to deal with the structural issues underpinning the conflict, due to the institutional practices that promote the oppression of some groups and undermine their well-being in deeply divided societies like Nigeria and Sudan. Even though some studies have identified the politics of resource governance as a contributory factor to the violent conflict between farmers and herders (Ryle and Amuom, 2018; Oosterom et al. 2021; Onwuzuruigbo, 2023), there is inadequate intellectual reflection on how the actions of state and local leaders can influence the conflict dynamics and undermine the peacebuilding process in polarized contexts.

In fact, the intersection of resource scarcity and conflict has been explained from two perspectives—one in which state institutions lack resources but seek to govern inclusively (Brottem and McDonnell 2020), and another in which state actors privilege some groups and disadvantage other groups in the sharing of available resources. In Sudan, the government's diversion of land from communal rangeland into large-scale farms has served to dispossess the herders of grazing land and has instigated conflict between farmers and herders (Sulieman 2015). Similarly, the weak enforcement of land policies by the Nigerian government led to the annexation of lands allocated for grazing routes by farmers and placed them in violent confrontation with the herders (Ojo 2020). Yet, some scholars have noted that resource competition among smallholders in many parts of the Sudano-Sahel did not result in high levels of violence (Brottem and McDonnell 2020). Thus, the pertinent questions are: What is the nature of resource management and peacebuilding activities of state and local leaders and how have these influenced the complex and destructive nature of the conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria and Sudan? How have state and local leaders' policies and actions influenced the roles played by other internal and external actors and contributed to the conflict dynamics? In what

ways do they enervate the peacebuilding process intended to manage the conflicts?

Understanding the issues at the heart of the conflict in diverse contexts requires a nuanced analysis of why and how resource scarcity, access, and competition fuel violent conflict between farmers and herders in some contexts and not in others. This will help to gain deeper understanding, through a comparative lens, on the relevant but apparently under-studied dimension of the impacts of the politics of resource management and peacebuilding of those governing state and local institutions on the conflict dynamics in polarized contexts. This is aimed at addressing the knowledge and policy gaps on the intersecting localized and transnational dimensions of the conflicts, which are critical to effective local, national, and transnational conflict management efforts towards achieving durable peace.

The Contours of Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Africa

In Africa, the farmer-herder conflict has been traced to colonialism. Discussing the case of Rwanda, Mamdani (2001) explains how the colonial policy of restricting pastoralists' mobility confined them to designated locations for the purpose of tax collection and economic exploitation. The colonial-era policies, including the land tenure regimes that excluded pastoralists, were unfavorable to pastoralists' livelihoods (Azarya et al. 1999). In the postcolonial era, the marginalization of pastoral communities was heightened by various political and ecological crises experienced in the hinterland regions they inhabited (Brottem and McDonnell 2020). By the turn of the twenty-first century, several national governments and regional institutions established laws and policies to protect pastoral mobility and resource access (Brottem and McDonnell 2020). However, the resulting livestock passages were later displaced by population growth, farmland expansion, use of land for residential and industrial purposes, and loss of land mass to desertification (Amaza 2018).

In the postcolonial era, the negative effects of the IMF-imposed Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) on African economies accentuated the politicization of ethnic identities in Nigeria and other affected countries (Osaghae 1995; Babatunde 2019). In Nigeria's Middle-Belt/North-Central region, these identity divisions pitted the indigenous communities, populated by Christians and farmers, against Hausa-Fulani Muslim migrants, who are mainly semi-nomadic or nomadic pastoralists (Adebanwi 2009; de Vries 2018). In Plateau State, the indigenous groups, mostly the Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere, have struggled to take political control of their territories from the Hausa-Fulani (Angerbrandt 2018; Madueke 2019). The settlers have suffered disadvantages and excluded from accessing resources, including representation in government and politics, land rights, support for the creation of new LGAs and districts, and indigene certificates issued by the local government as a requirement to access benefits such as scholarships and employment in state government parastatals (Krause 2019).

In Sudan, the conflict has manifested along ethnic divisions among the pastoralist groups, sedentary farming groups, and pastoralists and farmers

from diverse ethnic groups (Hassan 2010; De Waal 2022). Abdul-Jalil (2014) noted that since the mid 1980s in the Darfur region of Sudan, the conflict between the sedentary farmers and nomadic herdsmen pitted the sedentary group—the Fur—against the nomadic group—Janjaweed. The farmer-herder conflict manifested along ethnic lines because of the preexisting conflict among the Arab government, Popular Defense Forces, Janjaweed[1] and oppositional ethnic groups (the Fur, Massalit, and Zaghawa) that have traditionally held a dominant position in Darfur (Olsson and Siba 2013; Krätli and Toulmin 2021). The armed conflicts between the government forces and the rebel armed groups—the Sudan Liberation Army—persist, particularly in the Jebel Marra (the northeastern part of Central Darfur). The farmer-herder conflict and the armed rebellion are strongly intertwined, in ways that make the conflict more internecine, complex, and highly militarized (Krätli and Toulmin 2021).

Scholars have shown that the age-long relationship between sedentary farmers and pastoralist herders has been characterized by both complementarity and conflict (Toulmin 1983; Breusers et al. 1998). Studies drawn from the African drylands found that resource scarcity may not necessarily lead to conflict between farmers and herders (Hagberg 2005; Moritz 2010; Akov 2017). In fact, in some parts of the Sahel region, there is more cooperation than conflict between the farmers and herders, which engenders exchange of resources, inter-trade, and cordial social relations (Bukari, Sow, and Scheffran 2018).

In their study of the Lakes region in South Sudan, Ryle and Amuom (2018) observed that the different local responses to the conflict between the farmers and herders in Eastern and Western Lakes States determine the divergent trajectories of conflict. While both states experienced similar sources of conflict relating to cattle theft, the constructive response of community leaders in Eastern Lakes state has engendered a greater level of peace than in neighboring Western Lakes state. The comparison of these two cases illustrates that the efficacy of local systems varies and depends on the behavior, attitudes, and capacity of local authorities. In Nigeria, traditional leaders and Fulani Ardos had effectively resolved conflicts between farmers and herders by negotiating fair compensation for damage to crops by herders' cattle (Kwaja and Smith 2020). Tribal leaders in Sudan, operating within the official Native Administration, played a crucial role in regulating access to resources between farmers and herders by monitoring the timing or scale of pastoral movements to ensure that herds' access to grazing land did not overwhelm local resources (Brottem and McDonnell 2020).

In Mali, Niger, and other countries, poor governance systems, state collapse, insurgencies, and ineffective law enforcement have weakened existing local dispute resolution mechanisms that mediate and resolve claims over resources (Pendle 2018; Brottem and McDonnell 2020). In the case of western Dinka in South Sudan, Pendle (2018) noted that traditional conflict resolution mechanisms may not be effective when the conflict involves political elites who cannot be held accountable.

The political ecology of resource governance and conflict is relevant in understanding the farmer-herder conflicts. Political ecologists view the farmer-herder conflicts as "responses to context," in which the key conflict drivers transcend resource contestation (Turner 2004) and intersect with power relations associated with the rent-seeking actions of state and nonstate actors that fuel marginalization and injustice (Benjaminsen and Ba 2009; Khanakwa 2022).

The central debate about the key source of the conflict relates to whether it is primarily linked to competition over resource access or to the power relations that shape it (Brottem and McDonnell 2020). While environmental changes are seen as an important contextual factor driving the conflict, there is a broad consensus in the literature that socioeconomic and political dynamics underpin resource conflicts in diverse contexts (Moritz 2010; Majekodunmi et al. 2014; Mkutu 2019). This can manifest in predatory behavior by political actors who abuse their position for financial or political gain in ways that fuel grievances and heighten resource competition (Brottem and McDonnell 2020). A political ecology framing situates the farmer-herder conflict within the materiality of natural resources governance and politics (Benjaminsen and Ba 2021). Citing the case of East Africa, Hesse and MacGregor (2006) opined that land scarcity should be construed as political and economic factors in which those with low political power are dispossessed of economic resources, such as land for pastoral grazing, by those in control of political power. In a case study of pastoral conflict in Eastern Ethiopia, for instance, Kenee (2022) described how identity politics and the predatory behavior of political elites have shaped the conflict.

In ethnically, religiously, or politically polarized countries, the potential for state and local leaders to be implicated in the conflict between farmers and herders is higher. Kew (2021) found that in Nigeria, polarization along ethnic, religious and political lines often fuel the perception that some state governments are contributors to the farmer-herder conflicts, thereby resulting in opposition to government policies. Politicians and religious leaders have been accused of politicizing identity, engaging in partisanship in land deals, and inciting attacks (Madueke 2019; Oosterom et al. 2021). In Mali, the government land policies and laws are perceived to favor farming at the expense of pastoralism, because they led to the transformation of pastoral landscape into farmland, blocked livestock corridors, and resulted in encroachment on key pastures (Benjaminsen and Ba 2021).

In many African countries, armed bandits, insurgents, criminal syndicates and ethnic militias have capitalized on the conflict to engage in cattle raids and trafficking of people, arms and drugs, often transnationally, for materials gains (Cline 2020). The porosity of borders across the continent allows for fluidity in the movement of people and arms in many countries (Mkutu 2019). In Chad, the challenges of small arms and light weapon proliferation led to the closure of the Chad-Sudan border to contain the spread of arms from Sudan, Central African Republic, and Libya (Kwaja and Smith 2020). The conflict in Libya and Mali contributed to the increasing circulation of small and large arms used by groups involved in the conflict in Nigeria (Ojo 2020). Similarly, in Sudan, the intensity of the farmer-herder conflict has been attributed to the influx of sophisticated arms and weapons linked to cross-border attacks from Chadian and Central

African Republic militias (Mohammed 2003, 479) and the flow of weapons from Libya.

Some of the Fulani nomadic herders and militias found in Nigeria are traced to neighboring Chad, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Benin Republic and Cameroon (Ademola-Adelehin et al. 2018; Ogundairo and Ijimakinwa 2020). Moreover, Brottem and McDonnell (2020) have noted that Nigerian transhumant pastoralists who migrated to Benin and Togo for safety from cattle rustlers were enmeshed in local conflicts and labeled as "foreign invaders." In the Central African Republic, foreign pastoralists from or connected to Arabic herding communities in Chad or Sudan have been implicated in violence (Kwaja and Smith 2020).

The complex interlinkage among armed insurgency, criminality, and pastoralism necessitated regional and bilateral agreements as a conflict management priority focusing on borderlands, such as the Liptako-Gourma region (Burkina-Niger-Mali), Lake Chad, and the disputed areas between Sudan and South Sudan (Cline 2020). The African Union's 2010 Policy Framework for Pastoralism, the Declaration of N'Djamena (2013) and Nouakchott (2013) were part of the measures to address pastoralist livelihood challenges (Brottem and McDonnell 2020).

The implementation of the continental agreements on pastoralist and cross-border movements varies among individual states. Nigeria, as a party to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) transhumance protocol, has a legal approach to pastoralism that is at variance with that of its Francophone neighbors. Moreover, Nigeria's 1999 constitution made provision for cross-border mobility, but there is no national law or framework for implementing the ECOWAS protocol (Leonhardt 2017). In Niger, the 2010 pastoral code protects pastoralist mobility and complements the Rural Code of 1993, which had supported pastoral tenure and resource rights and control in their home areas. In Sudan, the protection of livestock corridors and cross-border mobility is stipulated in the Darfur Peace Agreement (2006) and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005). Yet these agreements did not offer a practical framework for implementation (Brottem and McDonnell 2020).

In Sudano-Sahelian West Africa, laws have been ratified by each of the countries to provide some degree of recognition to pastoral mobility and resource rights (Brottem and McDonnell 2020). However, there is weak political commitment to implement these laws. In Mali, the local government set up measures to protect pastoral mobility through the establishment of transhumance corridors without any provision for local grazing reserves for these corridors (Brottem 2018). The establishment of pastoral areas in Burkina Faso has been undermined by the lack of adequate and continuous water supply for the grazing reserves (Sanou et al. 2018). However, the case of Sahel Sudan presents a success story of how the establishment, effective demarcation, and management of corridors by the local farming and herding communities led to the reduction of violent conflict in Sudan's North and South Kordofan (Brottem and McDonnell 2020).

Some states have contradictory national and local laws for pastoralist mobility. For instance, while Mali's 2001 pastoral charter adopted a rights-

based approach to pastoral mobility, there has been uneven implementation by the local governments due to reliance on customary land tenure. In Nigeria, the state and local governments determine land rights and control, as exemplified in the case of Ekiti, Edo, Benue, and Taraba states, where laws were enacted in 2016 and 2017 to restrict open grazing (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin 2018; Ojo 2020). The Nigerian Federal government set up a ten-year National Livestock Transformation Plan in 2019, aimed at modernization of pastoral production systems, but there is lack of political will to fully implement it (Adeniyi 2021). The previous federal government's Rural Grazing Area scheme, which aimed at providing settlements for the Fulani herders in all the thirty-six states, elicited widespread anti-Fulani sentiments from other ethnic groups, particularly in the North-Central and Southern parts of the country (Ojo 2020).

Moreover, state policies are seen to lack participatory and community engagement processes but rather focus more on co-opting community voices into predetermined agendas (LaTosky 2021). In Kenya, the pastoralists are often politically and economically marginalized by the state policy (Rodgers 2021). In Nigeria, Sudan, and Mali, the contradictory and exclusionary policies by the federal, state and local governments aggravate grievances and violent confrontations between the farmers and herders (Siddig et al. 2007; Dowd and Tranchant 2018). This can pose a major challenge to accountability processes for dealing with the perpetrators of violence in the farmer-herder conflicts (Oosterom et al. 2021). In South Sudan, Ghana, and Nigeria, the lack of accountability by state institutions in dealing with cases of cattle theft led to violent reprisals by individuals and groups over perceived injustices (Tonah 2006; Ryle and Amuom 2018).

In Nigeria, some of the states in the Middle Belt, including Plateau, Kaduna, and Adamawa, set up peace commissions between 2016 and 2018 to stem the tide of violence and promote peace. However, these commissions suffered from a lack of credible state and nonstate actors to spearhead the peace process, poor funding, undue interference from the state government, and lack of sustainability of the peace agencies by successive governments (Kew 2021). In Plateau, the ethnic and religious polarization across the state eroded trust in the government's peacebuilding process. Also, excessive use of security forces meant that funds that would have been used for peacebuilding initiatives have been diverted into security provisioning. In the Darfur region of Sudan, the peace process paved the way for two significant agreements which have so far not led to any resolution of the escalating conflict between the farmers and herders (Castro 2018; Ibnouf 2019). The shortcomings in the peace agreement relate to lack of engagement with the farmers and herders, weak peacebuilding institutions, poor governance, and lack of financial assistance (Netabay 2009; Takana et al. 2012).

Study Sites and Methods

Plateau State is located in Nigeria's North-Central region. The state is ethnically diverse with about forty ethnic groups, including the Bogwom, Gomei, Vergam, Ngas (Angas), Jawara (Jharr), Berom, Mangu, Fulani, and Hausa. The major ethnic

groups are the Berom, Ngas (Angas) and Tarokh (Majekodunmi et al. 2014). Plateau is subdivided into seventeen local government areas (LGAs), including Barkin Ladi and Bokkos, which constitute the research sites for this study. Four major communities where the farmer-herder conflicts have been volatile—Daffo, Bokkos, Dorowan Babuje, and Mararraban Kantoma—were selected for study. Figure 1 shows the map of Plateau State, highlighting the location of the LGAs.

In Plateau State, the study utilized a mix of qualitative and quantitative research techniques, including key informant interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and questionnaires. The fieldwork took place in 2019. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty key informants per community, with purposively selected respondents comprising traditional leaders, community elders, herders, farmers, leaders of Miyyeti Allah, religious leaders, vigilante groups, youth and women leaders, and staff of local NGOs. Twelve focus group discussions were conducted with youth and women, comprised of three FGDs per community and ten people per FGD. In addition, 200 questionnaires were administered, comprised of 50 per community. The field data were subsequently transcribed and coded according to themes that emerged.

Darfur occupies the far west of Sudan and shares international borders with Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan. The Darfur Regional Authority is divided into five federal States. Figure 2 shows a map of the Darfur region depicting the location of Central Darfur State and the study area of Zalingei.

The Zalingei area is populated by a diverse mix of ethnic groups, including the Fur, Burgo, Zagawa, and Tama, the largest agriculturist groups. The main sedentary cattle herder ethnic groups are the Bani-Hussien, Nawiaba, Misseriya, Khozam, Abala, Tarjam, Jalul, Mahriya, Bani-Halba, and the nomadic and semi-nomadic groups including the Beni-Helba, Beni-Jarrar, and Mahameed (Dawoud and Hassan 2015).

Primary data were derived from a sample of 231 respondents between the ages of sixteen and sixty-eight, selected purposefully based on criteria such as age, gender, occupation, leadership position and stakeholders in the conflict, to ensure the representation of critical constituencies, including farmers, herders, traditional leaders (sheikhs, omdas, shartays, and nazirs),[2] women, youths, religious leaders, government and nongovernmental actors. Respondents as young as sixteen years of age were included because there is a prevalence of child marriage in both farmers' and pastoralists' communities in the study areas, so that many sixteen-year-olds were already married and involved in farming and herding of cattle. Fifteen interviews and five focus group discussions, with four to eight participants each, were conducted in the Zalingei area, where the farmer-herder conflict has been frequent and violent. Structured questionnaires allowed for additional responses. This study ensured that the identity of respondents was protected and their informed consent sought and granted.

Dialectic of the Farmer-Herder Conflict in Plateau State, Nigeria

The farmer-herder conflict in Plateau State in the last two decades has been characterized by armed attacks and counterattacks in many communities. The
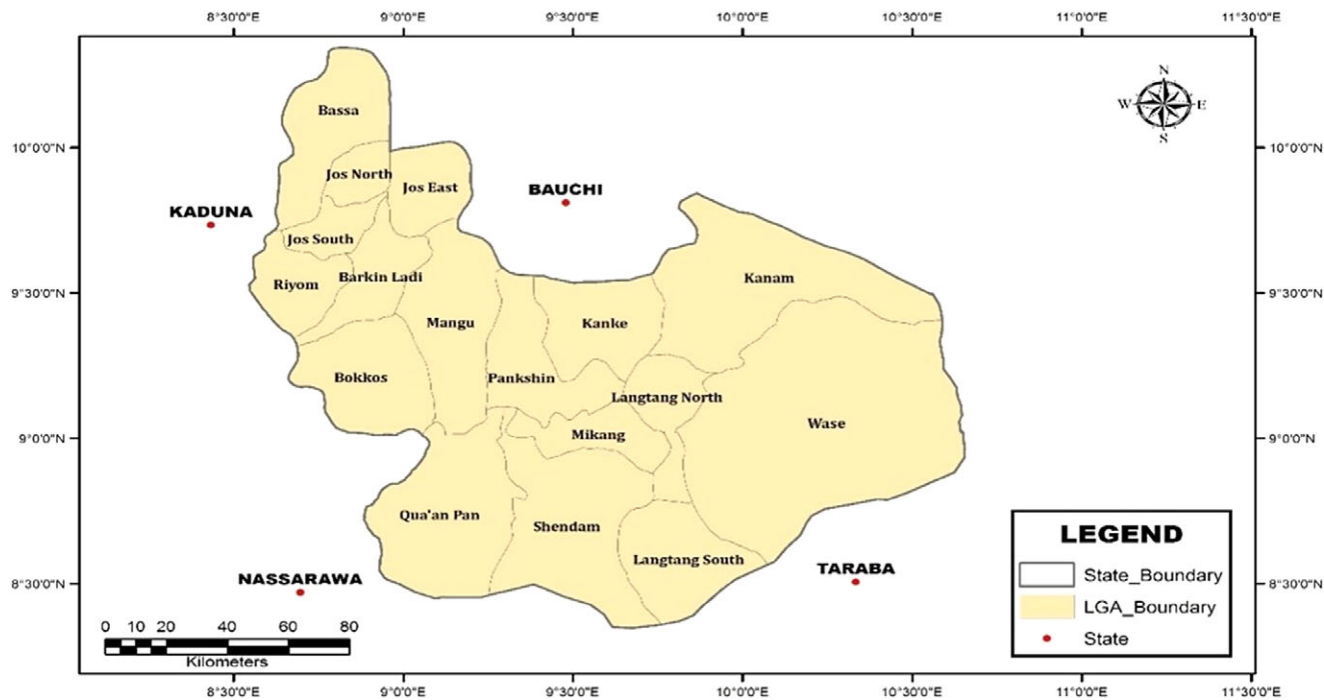
Figure 1. Map of Plateau State showing the local government areas (LGAs). Source: Geospatial Analysis Mapping and Environmental Research Solutions (GAMERS), 2018.

Figure 2. Map of Central Darfur State and the study area of Zalingei. Source: OCHA—Sudan: Central Darfur administrative map (June 2021).

intense identity politics instigated by political and local leaders resulted in a schism along ethnic and religious lines (Egwu 2016; Maiangwa 2021), and ultimately triggered a violent conflict between the sedentary farmers and semi-nomadic herders who had previously lived harmoniously with one another.

The Dorowan Babuje community is a mining settlement inhabited mostly by Muslim Hausa people and other migrants who are farmers and semi-nomadic herders. The traditional ruler of the community explained that the farmer-herder conflict rapidly transformed into a major conflict in 2000. This view was also articulated by the religious leader, an Imam, who asserted, "Since 2010, the conflict has become more frequent and characterized by destruction of lives and properties, burning of shops, houses, churches, mosques, vehicles, and farms."[3] The head of the vigilante group in Dorowan declared, "The conflict emerged as a spill-over conflict between the Berom and Fulani communities and spread to other communities, including Dorowan Babuje."[4] In Mararraban Kantoma, a Berom Christian and farming community, the community head, Damaje, observed that the conflict has been endemic in the community since 2010. The leader of Miyetti Allah, the association of cattle breeders in the Bokkos community, further disclosed that the conflict escalated to violence in 2013 and engulfed many communities in Bokkos LGA. In Bokkos, the people are predominantly Christians and farmers, although some of them rear cattle, while the Fulani who settled in the Bokkos communities are mainly herders. The escalating violence between the farmers and herders in Plateau State contrasts with the case of some parts of the Sudano-Sahel, where conflicts between farmers and herders did not result in intense violence (Brottem and McDonnell 2020). In Plateau State, identity division and the preexisting political crises intensified the violent confrontations between the farmers and herders. Figure 3 shows respondents' opinions about the frequency and magnitude of the conflict.

In an interview with the religious leader in Dorowan, he stated that "the division along religious lines supersedes that of ethnic division."[5] The respondents cited numerous cases of cattle rustling allegedly perpetrated by Berom Christians against the Berom Muslims. The religious cleavage is so deep-rooted that the local chief in Mararraban Kantoma disclosed that "the Fulani who once lived with them have relocated since the outbreak of the religious crisis in 2001."[6] The intense religious division that intertwined with the farmer-herder conflict in Plateau State contrasts with the finding by Ogbozor et al. (2018) that religious division is not a major contributory factor in the farmers and herders' conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt region.

The indigene/settler dichotomy that intersects with the conflict is amplified due to the conflicting claims of territorial expansionist agendas by both the farmers and herders. As inferred from the FGD respondents in Dorowan, "the attacks on their community by the Berom Christians are perceived as an agenda to reclaim the land that the Berom believed rightfully belong to their forefathers."[7] The perception of a territorial expansionist agenda fueled retaliation as the community under attack violently defended
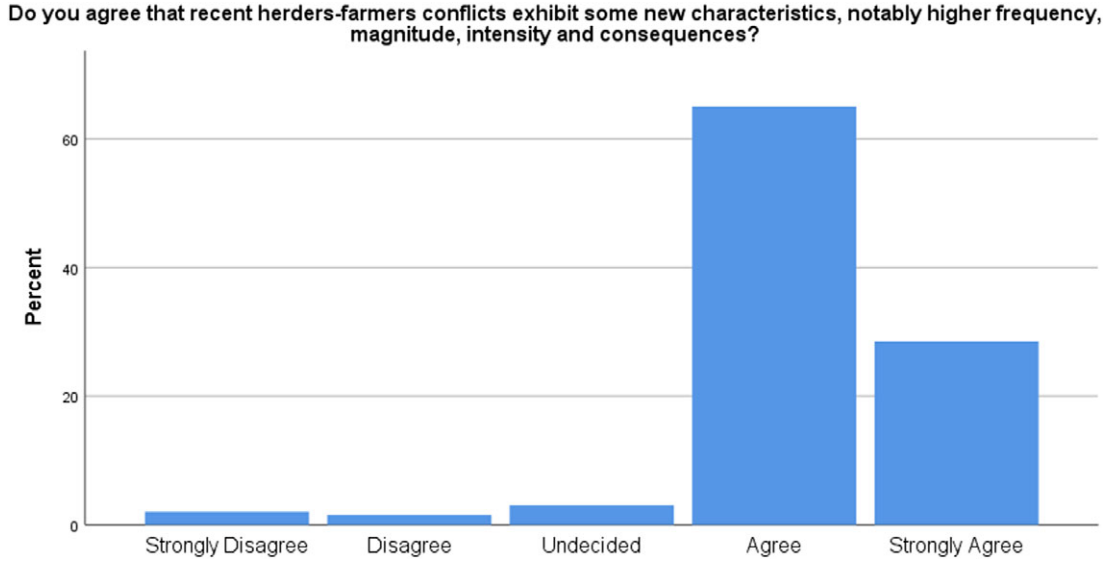
Figure 3. Frequency and magnitude of the farmers and herders conflict. Source: Babatunde, A.O. 2019.

their territory. For instance, in Mararraban Kantoma, the following statement was typical:

> The herders' invasion on our community is part of the agenda to sack us and lay claim to our territory, like they did in some communities including Jong, Majat, Lukfayi, Wong, Chipeng, Ziru, Ratis, and Kubung.[8]

The conflict manifests frequently during the planting and harvesting seasons, when the herders usually direct their cattle to graze on farms. This was captured in the views of the woman leader and FGD respondents in Dorowan that herders allowed their cattle to destroy crops such as maize and yam. The woman leader added:

> The woman who owned the farm that was invaded protested the damage to her crops and was stabbed in the stomach by the herder. The farmers, in retaliation for the attack on the woman, launched a reprisal attack on neighboring herding communities, leading to a cycle of counterattacks that spread to many communities.[9]

While the remote conflict issues relate to the lingering ethno-religious and indigene/settler conflict, the proximate issues relate to dwindling land spaces, the high rate of youth unemployment, access to small arms, a rise in the crime rate, and drug abuse. These issues are shaped by the actions of state and local leaders who perpetuate divisive politics, marginalizing one group and privileging the other group, while also manipulating the idle and unemployed youth to engage in violence.

In Bokkos, the indigenous people are the Ron, Mushere and Kulere, and their main occupation is farming. The scarcity of land for farming inevitably fuels competition among the farmers (indigene) and herders (settlers) in Bokkos. Most of the Fulani herders interviewed accused the farmers of farming on grazing routes. The political and local leaders' lopsided distribution of land, which is a vital resource for the livelihood of both groups, has intensified violent confrontations to access this resource. Although individuals and families own land in rural communities, the state and local governments determine land rights and control (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin 2018; Ojo 2020). Thus, the farmers who occupied a position of advantage as indigenes are favored, while the sedentary and semi-nomadic herders, regarded as migrants, are disadvantaged in terms of land rights. In fact, government use of land for mining, residential and industrial purposes; often meant increasing scarcity of land for farming and grazing. Thus, the farmers are incentivized to extend their farmland to grazing routes which were established through the Nigerian Grazing Reserve Act of 1964, on the claim that the land belongs to them. The action of the farmers is supported by politicians and local government officials who are also from the indigenous communities. In contrast to the partisan behavior of the political and local leaders in Plateau State, in the Eastern Lakes state in South Sudan, Ryle and Amuom (2018) observe that the constructive response of community leaders to issues over resource scarcity has promoted peaceful relations between the farmers and herders.

Contrary to the contention by some analysts that the Fulani are mostly the oppressors and the farmers are the victims (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin 2018), this research demonstrates that both groups have acted as oppressors. This is illustrated in the various accounts by the farmers and herders. One community leader asserted that farmers can be at the forefront of unprovoked attacks on the herders. The respondent described a major conflict in Daffo in 2018:

> A local farmer barricaded a route to prevent the Fulani herders from passing with their cattle. The barricade eventually killed about six cows as they attempted to find a passage. The Fulani reaction to the provocation led the farmer to hit him and he died in the process, while the farmer fled from the scene. The death of the Fulani herder sparked a community crisis.[10]

Another contentious issue that generates conflict is access to drinking water for cattle. The main source of drinking water for farming and herding is the rivers. The Miyetti Allah in Bokkos accused the farmers of poisoning the rivers, leading to the death of their cattle.[11] Some of the FGDs respondents confirmed the claim that three cows drank the poisoned water and died, and the farmer involved in the water poisoning was caught and arrested. In some contexts, farmers have even been incentivized to poison crops they know the cattle will feed on, without consideration for the destructive consequences for both the farmers and the herders alike (Morgen 2019; Ogundairo and Ijimakinwa 2020).

The community head in Mararraban Kantoma asserted: "Even though we allow Fulani herders to graze on our farms during fallow season, yet the Fulani cattle graze on our farms during rainy season when the farms are cultivated."[12] Direct observation showed that Fulani herders graze on nearby farmland. However, in more distant farmland, evidence showed that farmers set fires on the farms during the fallow season. One of the complaints of the herders is that farmers usually set farmland on fire during the dry season to prevent cattle from grazing. The farmers' act of burning the bush to prevent cattle from grazing is linked to herders' encroachment on farms during rainy and harvest seasons, which subjected the farmers to huge losses when crops were destroyed by Fulani cattle. In contrast, a related study on the Ashanti region of Ghana found that herders set dry bushes on fire to enable the growth of new grass and plants for their cattle, thereby destroying farmers' food crops in the fire (Setrana 2022).

The use of under-aged boys to rear cattle has been identified as another cause of cattle's encroachment on farmland. The farmers have accused the herders of using children as young as eight years old to herd cattle. The following respondent's statement was typical:

> The farmer and Fulani herdsmen conflict in Bokkos escalated when under-aged Fulani boys are saddled with the responsibility of rearing two-to-three hundred cattle at a time. These boys often consume narcotic drugs that can enhance their strength to adequately control and manage the large herd of cattle.[13]

Whenever the affected farmers resisted the invasion on their farmland, the young Fulani, presumably acting under the influence of drugs, reacted

aggressively, using lethal weapons like knives, machetes, and guns. The prevalence of drug consumption and substance abuse among young people and women in the herding and farming communities is due to the use of drugs as a form of enhancement to increase power needed for work and to cope with the stress and rigors of herding and farming activities (Owonikoko et al. 2021). The local people also accused the Fulani of sexual molestation of their women. As the woman leader in Bokkos explained: "Armed Fulani herders under the influence of drugs often attack unarmed women and girls, raping and sexually molesting them in their farms."[14] The Miyetti Allah and youth leader in Dorowan admitted that the use of eight-year-old children to herd cattle has stopped since early 2018 because of incessant attacks by cattle rustlers, which pose a risk to the safety of the children and cattle.[15]

Understanding the Farmer-Herder Conflict in Central Darfur State of Darfur Region, Sudan

The issues that intersect with the farmer-herder conflict in Zalingei, Central Darfur State, are congruent with other studies (Mohammed 2003, 479; Abdul-Jalil 2014) which found that intensified competition over diminishing resources pits nomads against nomads, nomads against farmers, migrants from Chad against local inhabitants, and Arabs against Fur. In contrast, related studies observed that in some parts of the Sahel region, the relations between the farmers and herders have been more cordial than antagonistic, thereby enhancing their livelihood practices and well-being (Bukari, Sow, and Scheffran 2018). In the case of Central Darfur, the intersection of the farmers and herders' conflicts with identity division and political crisis intensified violence. In the past, the farmer-herder conflicts were usually settled by the native administration. However, the traditional dispute resolution mechanism has been weakened since the time of President Nimeiry regime (1969–85), when he abolished the tribal-based native administration. Although the native administration was re-established after the Nimeiry regime, it has been disempowered and delegitimized (Tubiana et al. 2012).

The common causes of conflict as identified by the respondents are seasonal variations in water and pastureland, competition over land and pasture, poor management of resources by state and local leaders, and the failure to arrest and prosecute offenders. A majority of the respondents noted a rise in the intensity of conflict due to the availability of lethal weapons obtained during the political crises. The Sheikhs and omdas lamented:

> Hundreds were killed from both sides, and hundreds of villages and nomadic camps were burned, and hundreds were displaced. How many survived? We're just numbers to the government. Behind the numbers lie the blighted lives of people affected by this conflict. We don't know how long we will live.[16]

During interviews and group discussions, many of the religious leaders explained that "there are many political, local and external actors with vested interests in

sustaining the conflict, most especially those who make millions from selling arms and other lethal weapons."[17] A related study found that in Chad, small arms and light weapon proliferation led to the closure of the Chad–Sudan border as a measure to contain the flow of arms from Sudan, Central African Republic, and Libya (Kwaja and Smith 2020).

The 2013–19 Darfur Development, Recovery and Reconstruction Strategy report stated that "in Darfur in general, drought has pushed many families to expand the area of cultivated land." Often times, this expansion encroached on forests and on those lands that were traditionally used for grazing. Also, some herders' migration routes have been blocked by the extension of farming areas, resulting in limited grazing and livestock crossing routes. As one of the herders lamented, "We don't have enough land to graze our cattle,"[18] while one of the farmers exclaimed, "We live in constant fear of our crops being destroyed."[19] The two quotes capture the issue of resource scarcity or competition for dwindling land, while the access to these vital resources is inequitably distributed by state and local leaders. The respondents' statements indicate that, in most cases, the clashes between the two groups usually erupt at the start of the rainy season as a result of cattle damaging farmlands during their migration to the north and the farmers blocking passage tracks used by the herders.

Despite the agreement that specified a period from the end of the harvest season in February to the beginning of the plowing season in June during which herders can enter agricultural lands, the farmers accused the herders of not respecting this time limit. As a farmer in Zalingei declared, "Herdsmen often bring their cattle into our farmlands, in violation of the restrictions imposed by the government's livestock paths."[20] Since the government unduly favors the herders, their acts of violating government law are often not sanctioned. This account contrasts with the case of Kenya, where the pastoralists are perceived to be politically and economically marginalized by the state policy (Rodgers 2021). In Mali, government land policies and laws are perceived to favor farming at the expense of pastoralism and resulted in the transformation of pastoral landscape into farmland (Benjaminsen and Ba 2021). Hesse and MacGregor's (2006) study on East Africa found that pastoralists are marginalized in accessing pastoral grazing by the government.

FGD respondents observed that the main causes of the conflict remain unaddressed. The government has failed so far to take appropriate measures to make basic services and facilities available, adequate, and equitably accessible. The majority of youths in the FDG sessions noted that "most peace agreements focused on how the fighting can end, without addressing the conflict issues that can prevent renewed fighting."[21] Most of the youths who grew up in IDP camps declared, "We remain in the camps as the self-defense fighters for our people ... we have lost trust in the police and armed forces."[22] The Zalingei locality governor added:

> There is a strong tribal social network in Darfur, such that if herder–farmer conflicts happen in certain places, it will lead to another conflict in another area between herders and farmers belonging to the same tribes.[23]

In recent clashes, three herdsmen were killed due to renewed conflict over pastures and cultivation. The respondents also described another case of violent conflict:

> A farmer was killed on his farm in a village near Zalingei by a bullet fired by an armed camel herder, when he went to his farm to harvest crops and discovered a group of camels grazing inside the farm. This led to verbal altercations between him and the herdsmen that degenerated to firing of shots.[24]

Figure 4 shows some of the major consequences of the conflict, including physical injury and death, and the indirect costs of conflict (economic and social costs), such as poverty, loss of production capacity, negative impacts on women and children, food insecurity, and poor mental health.

In Central Darfur, women have been displaced, raped, and abused, but they are often reluctant to report cases of sexual abuse or violation to security officials, particularly due to fear of stigmatization, lack of state support and a gap in humanitarian agencies' response.[25]

Exploring Actors in the Farmer-Herder Conflicts

While the herders and farmers are considered the main actors in the conflicts in Nigeria and Sudan, our research suggests that the actions of the state and local leaders involved in resource governance and peacebuilding activities helped to shape the conflict dynamics and also influenced the roles played by other actors implicated in the conflict.

Youth are at the center of the violence that characterized the conflict. These youth who are not necessarily herders or farmers but share familial bonds and have ethnic and religious affinities with the main actors are the chief perpetrators of violence. This was captured in the statements of the respondents in Plateau State, that the reactions of the youth to instances of cattle rustling and encroachment on farmland usually sparked a cycle of reprisal attacks targeting people of other ethnic and religious groups. Some of the youth in Bokkos reported that politicians provide drugs and arms for the youth to engage in political violence on perceived opponents. This has incentivized the youth to engage in violent acts over disputes linked to the farmer-herder conflicts.

The political and local leaders, such as state and local government officials, security agents, and traditional chiefs, fuel enmity between the farmers and herders through unfair allocation of resources. A majority of the respondents in Central Darfur asserted that government expansion of land for mechanized farming displaced the traditional land space available for the farmers and herders. The remaining land spaces are also most often distributed to unduly favor the pastoralists due to their connection with the Janjaweed militias, supported by government. In retaliation, the farmers extended their farmland to the herders' migration routes, thereby obstructing the passage of livestock. This results in counter-retaliation whereby the herders' cattle encroach on farmlands to cause damage to crops. The herders disobey government-imposed restrictions on livestock paths, and the government law enforcement agencies hardly sanction the violators. The statements of a majority of the respondents in
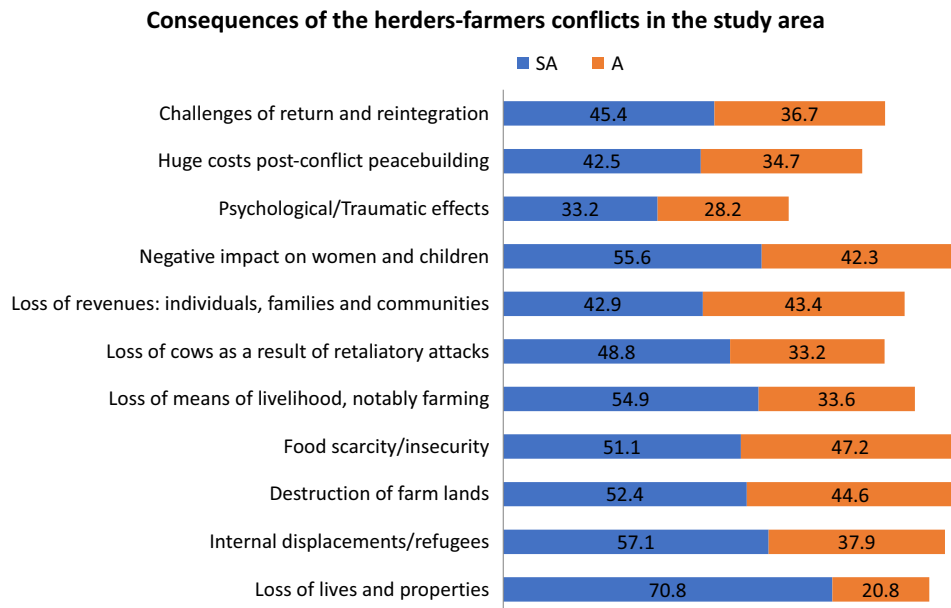
Consequences of the herders-farmers conflicts in the study area

Figure 4. Consequences of the herders and farmers' conflict in Central Darfur. Source: Ibnouf, F. O. 2019.

the herding communities in Plateau suggest that the state and local government allowed the farmers who are accorded indigene status to take over grazing land from the herders, categorized as migrants. Thus, the herders' cattle are unable to transverse grazing routes without encroaching on farmlands. Whereas state leaders favored the farmers in Plateau State, the herders are placed in a position of advantage by the government in Central Darfur. This results in a struggle for self-preservation that plays out in attacks and counterattacks over the slightest act of provocation.

In Plateau, while the sedentary farmers struggle to protect their lands as the original indigenes, the Fulani seek to protect their livelihood and rights to a land inhabited by their forefathers for centuries. This has led to the two groups' use of armed militias, insurgency, and armed banditry as a means for self-preservation and self-protection. It has also undermined the capacity of the security forces to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of violence. The head of vigilantes in Dorowan claims that the security agencies often fail to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of violence among the Berom and other indigenous ethnic groups who enjoy the support of their politicians. The youth leader added:

> While the security agents hardly arrest and prosecute the Berom youth involved in violent attack on the Fulanis, they often arrest innocent Hausa and Fulani youth. One of the Hausa youths from our community, who was falsely accused of attacking the Berom communities, was killed extrajudicially in police custody.[26]

In Central Darfur state, the respondents indicated that the major actors involved in the violence are the Janjaweed militias. Other implicated state actors are the government officials, traditional chiefs, police, and the armed forces. The integration of the Janjaweed militias into the transitional government after the December 2019 Revolution has made it difficult for the government to be a nonpartisan intervener in the farmer-herder conflict. This has led to the establishment of anti-government militias to defend the interests of the farmers. While the Janjaweed militia is regarded as pro-government, representing the pastoralists' interests, the Liberation Movement (SLM) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) are the militias defending the interests of the farmers. Smaller armed splinter groups have also emerged and are implicated in the conflicts. As one respondent added:

> There are numerous uncontrolled arms groups – multiple Janjaweed militias and other smaller splinter armed groups, who are benefiting from the ongoing conflict between the farmers and herders. These armed groups targeted civilians along tribal lines, looted livestock, destroyed villages, committed rape and sexual violence, and obstructed the pastoralists from their migration routes to access grazing areas.[27]

The FGD respondents indicate that the complicity of the government in the conflict makes it difficult for the security forces to arrest and prosecute the armed groups implicated in the violence. This inexorably worsens the conflict,

thereby making the violent confrontations between the farmers and herders more deadly.

The research suggests that the influx of strangers from neighboring countries has worsened the acrimony between the farmers and herders. In Plateau, cattle rustling affects both farmers (since some of them are also cattle breeders) and the Fulani herders. In fact, many of the farmers interviewed explained that the menace of cattle rustling forced them to stop rearing cattle. Many of the respondents explained that the cattle rustlers are outsiders (transhumant pastoralists and criminals) from other neighboring states such as Nasarawa and Kaduna, and neighboring countries, including Chad, Niger, Benin Republic, and Cameroon, who invade the community to rustle cattle for economic gain.[28] This is consistent with studies that showed that Fulani nomadic herders and militias from Chad, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Benin Republic, and Cameroon are found in Nigeria (Ademola-Adelehin et al. 2018; Ogundairo and Ijimakinwa 2020).

The actions of the outsiders have sparked attacks on the Fulani herders or farmers residing in the communities, who are perceived as the cattle raiders. The deep-rooted identity cleavage fueled by state and local leaders has deepened distrust and suspicion among the farmers and herders, leading to a situation in which they suspect and accuse one another of cattle rustling that might have been perpetrated by outsiders. This weakening of government and traditional institutions due to the actions of the leaders created an opportunity for these external actors to infiltrate the affected communities in Plateau and Central Darfur to perpetrate various crimes.

The traditional leaders are perceived by the respondents to play a major role in arresting the conflict in Central Darfur. Traditional mediation, reconciliation, and justice mechanisms, in particular Judiya and Rakoba, have been used by Darfurians in addressing conflict (Tubiana et al. 2012). However, the conflict has remained intractable due to the inability of the state and its local authorities to drive local peace initiatives in an impartial and accountable manner. The FGD respondents observe that although pastoralists had not been part of the Hakura system, it has been used by the traditional leaders in deciding the specific animal routes for accessing grazing areas. The contradiction between the Hakura system and Sudanese land law creates contestation between the farmers and herders, as both struggle to access land to preserve their livelihoods.

In the case of Plateau State, some respondents perceived that the traditional leaders have been enmeshed in fanning the embers of division that exacerbated the conflict. Many respondents in the herding communities state that the traditional leaders in Berom usually instigate their youth to attack the Fulanis. The community leader in Mararraban Kantoma alluded to the complicity of some of the Berom leaders in mobilizing their youth to perpetrate violence against the Fulani herders. In fact, some of the youth in the FGD sessions in Bokkos lamented that their community leaders had not demonstrated good leadership or a level of credibility that could empower them to mitigate the conflict effectively. Moreover, most of the respondents noted that the religious leaders were inciting their followers against people of other faiths, in ways that intensified the religious cleavage and the destructive conflict between the farmers and herders. Related studies have found that in Mali, Niger, South Sudan, and Cameroun, corrupt

political elites, local and district authorities, and local vigilante groups have been implicated in the conflicts between farmers and herders (Benjaminsen and Ba 2009; Pendle, 2018; Ojo 2020).

Research on farmer-herder conflicts has framed women as disproportionate victims of the cycle of violence that has characterized the conflict (Bukari et al. 2018; Maiangwa 2021), and they are also implicated in the conflict (Ademola-Adelehin et al. 2018; Krause 2019). In Central Darfur, women are perceived mainly as victims of the conflict. Yet, women's cultural role of appraising men's conduct in war by praising aggression and bravery and ridiculing timidity and cowardice indirectly supports the male aggressors. In Plateau State, the leader of Miyetti Allah in Daffos accused the local women of instigating their youth to attack those they blamed for destroying their sources of livelihood and raping or sexually molesting them. The women have also helped their youth to evade arrest by security agencies for indulging in acts of violence.

Implications for Peacebuilding

In Plateau and Central Darfur, the government, political, traditional and religious leaders are perceived to engage in politics of exclusion and identity politics. In Plateau, the herders reported that they are denied access to land, water, and other vital resources by the government from the indigenous farming communities, because they are perceived as migrants who have no right to these vital resources. The statements of most of the respondents from Dorowan suggest that the state and local government unfairly favor the Berom Christians communities in the quest to actualize the agenda to take over land, which the Berom perceived to rightfully belong to their forefathers. Since the conflict manifests along religious lines between the Muslim herders and the Christian farmers, the religious leaders who are expected to sue for religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence among the two groups have been accused by a majority of the respondents in the farming and herding communities of inciting their followers against people of other faiths. This worsens the crisis between the farmers and herders. In Central Darfur, in Central Darfur, the farmers perceived that the government favored the pastoralists in the allocation of land, while also allowing them to disobey government-imposed restrictions on livestock paths without being sanctioned for the infringement on the rights of the farmers. These actors are motivated by their quest to preserve their self-serving political and economic interests. The role of the government as the primary conflict management institution has been jettisoned, such that government is perceived as an actor rather than a mediator in the conflict.

In Plateau State, the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA), which could be considered part of the peace process to resolve the conflict, has achieved limited success due to the biased behaviors of state actors (Kew 2021). Many respondents from the herding communities lack confidence in the state-led PPBA, which they perceive as an instrument of perpetuating the marginalization of the herders from accessing socio-economic benefits. In fact, respondents in Doruwa noted that the PPBA did not consult with their leaders to identify their grievance, much

less tailor their peace interventions to address them. In Darfur, the conflict between the farmers and herders remains unresolved, despite peace initiatives spearheaded in Nigeria, Libya, Ethiopia, and Qatar (Srinivasan 2021). In 2007, the UNDP established the Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund (DCPSF), aimed at reducing the competition over scarce natural resources and a lack of livelihood opportunities. The Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) in October 2020 was geared towards addressing land rights and political representation in Darfur. Many respondents observed that armed groups, including the Janjaweed militias, contributed to the failure of these peace efforts, as they strove to maintain the conflict status quo in order to preserve their privileges and political power. The respondents also indicated that the government efforts to manage the conflicts have focused on engagement with the armed groups, including the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), while marginalizing the farmers and pastoralists. The case of Sahel Sudan presents a contrasting reality in which effective management of corridors by the local farming and herding communities paved the way for constructive management of farmer-herder conflict in Sudan's North and South Kordofan (Brottem and McDonnell 2020).

Most external and national peacebuilding efforts tend to be top-down, excluding the sub-national, the marginalized, the indigenous, the traditional, and the cultural context that is essential to achieving lasting peace (MacGinty 2008; Bereketeab 2021). Thus, resource governance and peacebuilding by biased state and local actors cannot address the root causes of resource conflicts. Furthermore, the unresolved political crises in the two regions have shaped the responses of the state and local leaders and continue to serve as a serious impediment to peace initiatives, exacerbating the violence, insecurity and human rights abuses.

The destructive nature of the conflicts has retarded development in the two countries at large. Local economic activities have been adversely affected, since the two groups are important players in the agricultural and pastoral sector. The conflict has disrupted the free movement of people, leading to internal displacement and the destruction of social facilities. In Plateau and Central Darfur, the accounts of the respondents illustrated how the constant threat of attacks has adversely impacted agriculture and livestock production. Related research has shown how the impact of the conflict has made the people vulnerable to food insecurity (Ademola-Adelehin et al. 2018; Brottem and McDonnell 2020).

These negative consequences have undermined the well-being of both groups and underscore the need for peaceful coexistence. As Bukari, Sow, and Scheffran 2018) posited, the adverse impacts of violence on personal and community security and development have made actors in the conflict realize the importance of peaceful coexistence. However, the partisan nature of state and local leaders' conflict-management approaches is an impediment to the ability of the two groups to constructively handle and manage disputes over dwindling resources. It also prevents them from developing the capacity to effectively negotiate complex adversarial identities (Paffenholz 2015; Kendhammer and Chandler 2021). This situation complicates the fundamental issues driving the conflict over resources and power.

Conclusions

This analysis of the farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria and Sudan has shown that there are interlocking socio-cultural, economic, and political issues that have shaped the conflict in these two countries (and by implication in the Sahel Region and the continent at large). The conflict is embedded in broader identity politics, political crises, and the politics of resource governance and peacebuilding. There is a constellation of internal and external actors who are implicated in the conflict. The participation of key state and local leaders in biased resource governance and peacebuilding activities has contributed to the destructive and complex nature of the conflict. It has also undermined peacebuilding efforts meant to resolve the conflict and achieve lasting peace. This creates a space for armed groups and criminal syndicates who operate nationally and transnationally to profit from the conflict situation and coopt the farmers and herders into their violent acts. Furthermore, it has fueled the cycle of violence and retribution that has characterized the conflict.

The political crises in Plateau and Central Darfur intertwine with the farmer-herder conflict because of the identity politics that have shaped political contestation and resource management. State and local leaders have exploited the identity divisions between the two groups in allocating resources needed for their livelihoods. This has undermined the capacity of the state and local leaders in the two regions to constructively manage the conflict. It has created a distrust of state institutions and heightened the enmity between the farmers and herders. In Central Darfur, the lack of accountability by the state government has undermined the capacity of the traditional leaders to manage the conflict. In Plateau State, most of the traditional leaders in the farming communities have been coopted by the government and political elites in ways that have eroded their authority in their communities. The traditional leaders, with the backing of the state and local government, incite their youth to attack the herders. In fact, most of the local youth in the farming communities accused their leaders of instigating them to attack the herders. This has undermined their capacity to coordinate the local peacebuilding process and serve as credible representatives of farming and herding communities. It has also influenced the actions of the farmers and herders and other non-state actors in negative ways. In Central Darfur, the bias of state leaders has led to the proliferation of armed groups who have taken advantage of the conflict to perpetrate violence, which they have linked to the farmer-herder conflict. In Plateau State, some of the farmers organized into ethnic militias in their struggle to protect their land, while the herders have joined armed bandits and insurgents as a means of protection. The situation has been exacerbated by the ineptitude and bias of the state security agencies in arresting and prosecuting perpetrators of violence in both Plateau and Central Darfur. The involvement of external armed groups, who were able to cross porous borders to engage in cattle rustling and trade in arms in Nigeria and Sudan, can also be attributed to the weak state and local institutions.

In Plateau State, while women are directly affected by the conflict, they have also been indirectly implicated in the conflict through instigating their youth to engage in violent acts of revenge and shielding them from prosecution. In

Central Darfur, women are perceived to indirectly contribute to the conflict by praising the males for their violent acts and belittling those who have sued for peace.

This analysis has revealed that the lack of credibility and accountability of state and local leaders in managing resources in pluralistic societies like those of Nigeria and Sudan and contending with political crises makes it difficult to develop effective conflict management and peacebuilding strategies.

Addressing the conflict between the farmers and herders in Plateau and Central Darfur would require concerted efforts and the commitment of credible state and local leaders to resolve the preexisting political conflicts and manage identity divisions, while also promoting fairness in resource management. It would also entail engagement with the marginalized groups, to identify their interests and needs and fashion creative ways of achieving sustainable livelihoods for them. At the same time, the effectiveness of any conflict management and peacebuilding processes would depend on regional, sub-regional, state, and local actors playing credible, complementary, and collaborative roles in resolving conflicts which transcend national boundaries.

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Notes

1. Janjaweed are mostly from Darfur's camel-herding tribes (*Abbala*), a heterogeneous range of groups conflating into a single entity and known as a pro-government militia.
2. Sheikhs, omdas, shartays, and nazirs are the traditional leaders of their tribes, entrusted with administrative, judicial, and police matters in their territorial domains.
3. Interview with traditional leader, January 10, 2019.
4. Interview with head of the vigilante group, January 11, 2019.
5. Interview with religious leader, January 12, 2019.
6. Interview with a local chief, February 11, 2019.
7. Interview with local youth, January 14, 2019.
8. Interview with farmers, February 12, 2019.
9. Interview with woman leader, January 15, 2019.
10. Interview with a community leader, February 20, 2019.
11. Interview with Miyetti Allah, March 24, 2019.

12. Interview with community head, February 14, 2019.
13. Interviews with farmers, March 18, 2019.
14. Interview with woman leader in Bokkos, March 20, 2019.
15. Interview with youth leader, Dorowan, January 18, 2019.
16. Interviews with Sheikhs and omdas in Zalingei, December 30, 2018.
17. Interviews with religious leaders in Zalingei, December 28, 2018.
18. Interviews with herder respondents in Zalingei, January 2, 2019.
19. Interviews with farmer respondents in Zalingei, January 3, 2019.
20. Interviews with farmer respondents in Zalingei, January 4, 2019.
21. Interviews with youth respondents in Zalingei, February 5, 2019.
22. Interviews with youth respondents in Zalingei, January 5, 2019.
23. Interview with the Zalingei locality governor, January 10, 2019.
24. Interviews with a number of local people in Zalingei, 7 January 7, 2019.
25. Interviews with women respondents in IDPs in Zalingei, January 12, 2019.
26. Interview with youth leader, Dorowan, January 18, 2019.
27. Interviews with youth respondents in Zalingei, January 6, 2019.
28. Interviews with diverse local respondents, January 2019.

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