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POLICY BRIEF 6 | September 2019

Addressing the Causes and Consequences of the Farmer-Herder Conflict in Ghana

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SUMMARY

For several years, tensions have existed between local farmers and Fulani herdsman in Ghana. However, various factors have recently, contributed to the tensions taking on a violent nature and becoming one of Ghana's foremost security threats. Based on an extensive fieldwork conducted in 2016/2017, this policy brief discusses the causes of the Farmer-herder conflict and its consequences on the security, social and economic structures of the country. It looks at the shortfalls of *Operation Cowleg*, the major intervention that has been implemented by the state and concludes with a few policy relevant recommendations which includes a nationwide registration of herdsman to support the government in the implementation of an effective taxation system.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning from the late 1990s, the farmer-herder conflict has become a recurring annual challenge for the Government of Ghana. This conflict usually occurs between local farmers and herdsman, mostly of the Fulani origin, over grazing lands and water sources in certain parts of Ghana. The conflict has been prevalent in Agogo, in the Ashanti region, and Afram Plains in the Eastern region, although there have also been recorded incidences in some parts of the Northern and Brong Ahafo regions¹. Over the years, various governments have struggled to find a sustainable solution to the problem and have implemented expulsion policies that are largely seen as reactive.

Based on a field work carried out in December 2016 and January 2017, this policy brief seeks to examine the causes of the farmer-herder conflict in Ghana. It discusses the consequences associated with the conflict and also addresses the shortfalls of Operation Cow Leg, a major government intervention to address the conflict. It concludes by proposing some recommendations which could help in providing sustainable solutions to the conflict.

UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

One of the undisputed causes of the farmer-herder conflict in Ghana is the destruction of farms by herdsman mostly through

night grazing. The Asante Akyem North district of Ghana has recorded various cases of this nature as a result of its lush vegetation. The district has a wet semi-equatorial climate with annual total rainfall between 125cm and 175cm making it a favorite spot for crop farming² and animal grazing especially in the dry season.³ Usually, during the dry season, herders from towns such as Donkorkrom and Ekyiaman from pass through Agogo on their way to Kumawu and Nyantakurom in search of pasture during the dry season. These herders are sometimes unaware or indifferent to the locations of farms on their route considering that any damage wrecked cannot be traced back to them. As a result, they do not hesitate to cut down ripe plantains or slice already harvested watermelons into smaller sizes for the cattle to feed before moving on to the next town.⁴ Unfortunately, the police most often find it difficult to arrest the perpetrators of such reported cases due to a lack of evidence.⁵ This has created a situation where affected farmers randomly target Fulani herdsman and their cattle who might not even be the perpetrators in reprisal attacks. Additionally, these farmers have also not been hesitant to occasionally shoot at the cattle, triggering a chain of violent reactions leading to the loss of human lives and

2 See 2010 Population and Housing Census, District analytical report of Asante Akim north district. Available at: www.statsghana.gov.gh

3 See 2010 Population and housing Census, District analytical report of Asante Akim north district. Available at: www.statsghana.gov.gh

4 Interview with affected farmers in Agogo, January 2017

5 Interview with Policemen in Agogo, January 2017

1 Areas include Kintampo, Atebubu, Ejura, Donkorkrom, Yeji, Prang and Karaga.

the destruction of properties belonging to the two conflicting parties. It should be noted however that the nomadic herders are not the only ones cited for destruction of farms. Settled herders (i.e. cattle owners who have settled permanently in towns like Ekyiamanfrom and Agogo) who do not keep their animals in kraals also destroy farms on their way to graze.⁶

Another contributing factor to the conflict is the negative stereotyping and media reportage of Fulani herders as rapists and armed robbers. For instance the news site GhanaWeb carried headlines in 2018 which read 'Police clash with Fulani Highway robbers' and 'Suspected Fulani robbers arrested'. According to Bukari and Schareika (2015) "Ghanaian media discourses deliberately identify Fulani armed robbers by their ethnic groups and simply referred to the others as Ghanaian armed robbers."⁷ This is not taking into consideration that most Fulani herders are second and third generation Ghanaians. Media reports are often rife with violent acts committed by herders contributing to an erroneous perception that Fulani herdsmen are not law abiding. Even though it was confirmed in Ejura by the Municipal Police Command that statistically, the Fulani commit a greater percentage of crimes than the locals,⁸ it was not the case in the other towns visited such as Kintampo and Atebubu. Yet, the Fulani community in the affected localities were often the target of biased and mostly negative reportage in the media. With this turn of events it is not surprising that some locals also take advantage of the situation by dressing up as Fulani herders to commit crimes adding to already existing tensions in the communities.⁹ Effectively, this adds to the biased labelling of Fulani herdsmen as criminals who have no respect for human lives in these localities.

The lack of adequate sources of drinking water for the cattle is yet another cause of the farmer herder conflict. In Agogo where lands were given in 2006 to 4 cattle herders, one of the conditions stipulated in the agreement was that the herdsmen were to dig boreholes to serve as a source of drinking water for their animals.¹⁰ However, according to the Agogo Traditional Council, this condition was not fulfilled by the herders, leading to the subsequent annulment of the agreement by the Kumasi High Court in 2012.¹¹ Just like Agogo, in all the communities such as Atebubu, Kintampo and the Afram Plains, there were no boreholes or dams built by the herdsmen for the animals. The herdsmen take their animals to water sources used by the locals. The pollution

caused by the cattle ends up creating tensions between the herdsmen and the locals who often threaten to shoot the animals. In 2015 for instance, the people of Pataban, a village in the Asante Akyem North district killed about 26 cattle by poisoning the water source used by some herders for their animals.¹² In order to prevent future occurrences of such incidents, it is essential that measures such as the creation of dams are implemented by the district and municipal assemblies with support from the Government of Ghana and the Herders association to ensure that there is adequate sources of water for both the community and the cattle.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONFLICT

The farmer herder conflict in Ghana has metamorphosed into a national issue with implications for not only the country but the sub-region. Like most armed conflicts, it has led to loss of lives, damage of the social fabric as well as destruction of physical infrastructure. This section thus examines the security, economic and social consequences associated with the farmer-herder conflict in Ghana.

Security

The violent confrontation between local farmers and Fulani herdsmen is one of the emerging security threats in the country and has led to the loss of lives and the destruction of properties worth millions of cedis. From its inception, the conflict in Agogo has led to the deaths of over 50 people on both sides with several others sustaining various degrees of injuries.¹³ In 2018 the deaths of 3 soldiers and a police officer led to widespread condemnation regarding the conflict as most people realized that the conflict has persisted for too long. Calls were made to the government to find sustainable solutions to the conflict and as usual, several reactive measures were implemented to appease the populace. Furthermore, fueling the already existing tensions in the conflict areas is the perception of both parties that the police is biased against them. The locals believe that the police officers accept cattle from the herders to not pursue cases through the criminal justice system whilst the herdsmen on the other hand believe that the policemen feel a kinship towards the locals and consequently, ensure that reported cases are not accorded the needed attention.¹⁴ Unfortunately, notwithstanding the fact that most of these people do not have an accurate understanding of how the justice system functions, they cling unto these beliefs and are often not receptive to opposing ideas. This explains the

6 A kraal is an enclosure for sheep or cattle

7 Bukari, Schareika N. 2015. *Stereotypes, prejudices and exclusion of Fulani pastoralists in Ghana*. Research, Policy and Practice

8 Interview with the Ejura Police Command, January 2017

9 Interview with Fulani Community in Ejura, January 2017

10 Interview with the Agogo Traditional council held on January 2017

11 Interview with Agogo Traditional Council, January 2017

12 Interview with Fulani herders in Asante Akim North district, December 2016

13 Interview with an Assembly man at Agogo, January 2017

14 Interview with herdsmen and farmers in Agogo, December 2016

level of mistrust and suspicion that exists on both sides. There is also the issue of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. According to the herders, they carry these weapons to protect themselves and their animals against attacks in the bush. However the locals feel threatened by the ease with which the herders are able to procure sophisticated weapons adding to the general sense of insecurity that exists in these communities.¹⁵

Economic

In the early 2000's a joint military and police operation code named *Operation Cow leg* was initiated to curb the farmer herder conflict in the country. Over the course of 15 years, the operation has been activated in various parts of the country where clashes between farmers and herders have occurred. The Asante Akyem North District Assembly which has seen a lot of violence in recent times spends on average 300,000 to 400,000 Ghana cedis each year when Operation Cow Leg is activated.¹⁶ This money is taken from the District Assembly Common Fund (which was set up to ensure development across all district assemblies) and is used to provide food, accommodation, and logistics, and also to perform post mortem on people killed as a result of the conflict. Unfortunately the district assemblies do not receive any special support from the Central government.¹⁷ Thus using money from the Common fund for *Operation Cow leg* means that the development activities of the affected Assemblies would be stagnant leading to hostilities from the citizenry towards the government. In the Kwahu Afram Plains North District, the figure was less staggering. The Assembly spends an average of 40,000 cedis per annum in dealing with the conflict, money that could be directed towards other sustainable projects. Nevertheless, some of the assemblies are able to generate money internally by taxing the herdsman. For instance, in Ekyiamanfrom, it was discovered that the herders pay 300 cedis per annum to the district assembly whilst in Kintampo they are taxed 8 cedis per cow per annum to the assembly.¹⁸

When rightly regulated and made into a national policy, this taxation system could be implemented on a larger scale with the sums generated, used in undertaking needed social interventions and services. For instance, with an estimated cattle population of 100,000 in the Afram Plains district¹⁹,

15 Interview with farmers, assembly members and herdsman in Agogo and Kintampo, January 2017

16 Aning, K., Aubyn, F. and Adomako, M (2017) Herder-Farmer Conflict in West Africa: A Challenge for Regional Security. Ghana case study, ECOWAS Report (forthcoming)

17 Interview with staff of the Kwahu Afram Plains North District Assembly, Donkorkrom, January 2017

18 Interview with Fulani herdsman in Kintampo and Ekyiamanfrom, January 2017

19 Figure sourced from the Afram Plains District Assembly.

if each herder is to pay 8 cedis per cattle, that will bring the estimated annual revenue to 800,000 cedis for only one locality. These monies could be used in the drilling of boreholes for the communities where Fulani herdsman are located to prevent situations whereby there is a struggle between them and farmers for scarce water resources. Equally, the sums could also be used in the creation of fodder banks for use during the dry season as well as substitute the cost involved in building kraals for herdsman to avoid animals grazing on farmlands. But in creating such a taxation system, there should be sufficient accountability mechanisms for the resources mobilized to ensure transparency and avoid mismanagement of resources.

Another economic consequence of the conflict is food shortage. As the clashes intensify and security deteriorates, some farmers especially the women are unable to go to their farms for fear of getting harassed by Fulani herdsman. This slows down the production of foodstuffs like plantain and maize leading to price hikes as demand exceeds supply.

Social

In towns such as Atebubu and Kintampo, it was observed that aside the indigenous population, the Fulani mainly have issues with the Konkomba ethnic group. In Atebubu, for instance, it was found out that the Konkombas (who are predominantly yam farmers) do not like animals on or near their farms because it is perceived as a bad omen. This has generated a lot of animosity between the two ethnic groups leading to violent confrontations whenever there is a slight dispute.

Socially, there is also a culture of exclusion of the Fulani in most of the communities visited. The Fulani herders generally stay together in the Zongo or in the outskirts of town. Even though most of them were born in Ghana and have been staying in these communities for years they are still perceived as foreigners leading them to be excluded from community social activities. Similarly, they also mostly do not have any representative in the affairs of the community. In Ekyiamanfrom, the Fulani herders have been registered by the district assembly as "Alien" herdsman – a term that is derogatory and discriminatory. Yet per Section 4 of the Citizenship Act, 2000²⁰ 'a person born on or after 6th March 1957 is a citizen of Ghana by birth if (a) he was born in or outside Ghana and either of his parents, and also one of at least of his grandparents or great-grandparents, was born in Ghana'. Per this, older generation Fulani herdsman cannot claim Ghanaian citizenship because although they were born in Ghana their parents had different nationalities. On the other hand, the younger ones who were

20 Citizenship Act, 2000 (Act 51)

born in Ghana can claim citizenship if either parent was also born in Ghana. However, because people are mostly unaware of this provision, all Fulanis are tagged as aliens and foreigners, affecting negatively, the quality of their life

EXISTING INTERVENTIONS BY GOVERNMENT AND ITS SHORTFALLS

Since the mid-1970s, successive governments have not been highly receptive of the presence of Fulani pastoralists in Ghana and have tried to drive out the Fulani herdsmen instead of finding ways of ensuring peaceful cohabitation with the locals. One of the key measures put in place by the government to deal with the menace has been the deployment of a joint military-police taskforce code named *Operation Cow leg* and the policy of expulsion. However, both interventions have failed to yield any good results except to cement further the fears and frustrations of the populace. The activation of *Operation Cow leg* over the years has led to the indiscriminate shooting of cattle and cattle rustling. Some of the animals are butchered by some farmers and sold at local markets in broad daylight.²¹ The locals often see the activation of *Operation Cow leg* as an avenue to make up for losses incurred as a result of the conflict. Unfortunately, little or no action is taken by the police to ensure that the farmers pay for the damages caused.

The main objective of the expulsion policy which was to return Fulani herdsmen to their countries of origin has remained largely unachieved. This is due to the fact that there are 1st generation and 2nd generation Fulani herdsmen who have spent all their lives in Ghana and have nowhere else to return to. Consequently they move to the next town and return when the tensions abate. Additionally, the policy is also contrary to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Free Movement of Goods and People, of which Ghana is a signatory. The inability of the government of Ghana to see to the effective implementation of various '*Operation Cow leg*' has led to distrust and frustrations on the part of the locals. A general belief held by the local populations is that there is lack of political will as a result of the vested interest of certain individuals in high political offices. In Agogo, the General Assembly of the district believe that the military operations are a waste of the District Assembly's resources as the problem recurs every year.²²

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the years, Fulani herdsmen in the country have been marginalized and alienated as non-citizens. Whilst government policies have failed to address their concerns it has also created enmity, mistrust, tension and conflict between them and local people across many villages and towns in the country. The situation is particularly worrying in the Asante Akim North District and Afram Plains in the Kwahu District. This has had serious implications on local and national security, as well as socio-economic consequences. It has thus become imperative to devise means to mitigate the situation. In order to effectively end the herder-farmer conflict in Ghana and fully harness the benefits the state stands to derive from the herdsmen, it would be imperative that all stakeholders work together to find lasting solutions to the problem. Based on the analysis from the preceding sections, this policy brief makes the following recommendations:

- There should be a clear demarcation of grazing and farming lands by government together with traditional authorities to avoid cattle straying into people's farms. Strict measures should be put in place to punish anyone who fails to comply.
- There is the need for the construction of dams and boreholes to be used purposely for animal rearing. The district assemblies could use funds generated from taxing the herdsmen to finance this project
- A nationwide registration of herders should be embarked on to enable the government to impose taxes on the herders. Also a fund could be set up from the taxes collected and used by the district assemblies to pay compensation to both farmers and/or herders for any damage caused to their properties.
- Fodder banks should be created for the herders to use during the dry season to prevent the seasonal migration of herdsmen in search of pasture. This could be financed and operated by the government of Ghana with support from international organizations such as the African Development Bank
- The district assemblies should embark on peace education to sensitize the people on the use of non-violent means to resolve conflict. This could be funded through the District Assembly Common Fund.
- The security agencies, especially the police need to be fair and firm and deal decisively with perpetrators of violence.

²¹ Interview with Fulani herders and Assembly members in Agogo, December 2016.

²² Interview with various Assembly members in Agogo, December 2016

About the Author

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How to Cite this Publication

Adomako, Margaret. September 2019. *Addressing the Causes and Consequences of the Farmer-Herder Conflict in Ghana*. Policy Brief 6, Accra: KAIPTC.



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