



Climate Change and Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts in Nigeria

Naila Salihu

Elsie A. Tachie-Menson

occasional paper 53

Climate Change and Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts in Nigeria

Naila Salihu & Elsie A. Tachie-Menson

KAIPTC Occasional Paper 53

Climate Change and Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts in Nigeria

Naila Salihu & Elsie A. Tachie-Menson

Copyright © 2023 KAIPTC

This publication was supported by the Government of Norway to undertake action research to identify the interlinkages among climate change, migration, demographical change and insecurity in West Africa.

Cover Photo: APRI - Africa Policy Research Institute.

Design and Typesetting: KAIPTC Design and Production Unit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Introduction	1
Exploring the Links between Climate Change Induced Migration and Insecurity in Nigeria	2
<i>Historical Antecedents of Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts</i>	4
<i>Dynamics of Pastoralist Conflicts</i>	5
Mechanisms to Address Climate Change and Pastoralist Conflicts	7
Conclusion	10
Recommendations	10

Abstract

This paper explores the complex dynamics of conflicts, including pastoralist-farmer disputes, and their far-reaching implications on Nigeria's security landscape. It argues that various socio-cultural, ethnic, regional, and political factors underlie farmer-herder conflicts; yet the effects of climate change exacerbate insecurity in Nigeria. Particularly, the already difficult relationship between herders and farmers has degenerated into violent conflicts due to environmental factors such as land degradation, shrinking grazing spaces, ineffective governance and regulatory mechanisms, and violent extremism. Migration intensifies resource competition, igniting disputes and violence. Pastoralist conflicts have morphed into criminal activities involving organised networks engaged in abductions, livestock theft, and indiscriminate violence, posing a significant threat to human security and regional stability. This paper also scrutinises Nigeria's response mechanisms and underscores the urgency of implementing comprehensive strategies that directly address underlying issues. Thus, this paper recommends fortifying legislative frameworks, advocating for sustainable agricultural practices, strengthening early warning systems, and devising climate adaptation strategies.

Keywords: Climate-induced conflict, Nigeria, Climate change, migration, pastoralist.

Introduction

Nigeria is located within the lowland humid tropics and is generally characterised by high temperatures most of the year. It has a relatively wet coastland and highly arid northern zones. There are two main relief regions: the high plateau ranging between 300 metres (m) to 900m above sea level and the lowlands which are generally less than 300m.¹ The country is faced with a myriad of developmental and security challenges emanating from political violence,

Boko Haram insurgency, farmer-herder conflicts, and banditry. Some have argued that violence in Nigeria has gone full circle in recent years, due to the nationwide emergence and domination of various non-state armed groups. With differing rationales, objectives and modus operandi, these actors include violent extremists, criminal gangs, separatist groups, communal militias, and kidnappers.² A significant number of Nigeria's population still live in poverty and without adequate access to basic services. The lack of socio-economic opportunities contributes to high poverty levels, regional inequality, and social and political unrest in the country.³ High levels of poverty and underdevelopment and dependence on rain-fed agriculture also limit the capacity of poor households and communities to manage climate risk; thereby, increasing their vulnerability to climate-related shocks. Nigeria is ranked 160 out of 181 countries in 2020 on the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Index.⁴

The country is confronted with a wide range of environmental challenges, some of which are exacerbated by climate change and negatively affect every sector; particularly, agriculture, water resources, and infrastructure. Other environmental threats emanate from deforestation and de-vegetation; causing biodiversity loss and land degradation, floods, erosion, drought, and desertification especially in the semi-arid areas of the country.⁵ Massive flooding is being experienced in about 34 of the country's 36 states, which is causing displacement of people and loss of lives and properties.⁶ For instance, in 2022, a flooding disaster displaced more than 1.4 million people, killed over 600, and damaged or destroyed about 440,000 hectares of farmland.⁷ The disaster was linked to the release of excess water from the Lagdo Dam in Northern Cameroon, heavy rainfall, overflow of local rivers, and the impact of climate change.⁸ Figure 1 shows the pattern of Nigeria's climate vulnerability.

¹World Bank (2021). *Climate Risk Country Profile: Nigeria*. Retrieved from https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/15918-WB_Nigeria%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf

²Ojewale, O. (2023). In Nigeria, Ideology, Insecurity and Access to Natural Resources Fomented Violence against Christians, February 23, *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*. Retrieved from <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/in-nigeria-ideology-insecurity-and-access-to-natural-resources-fomented-violence-against-christians-120650>

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

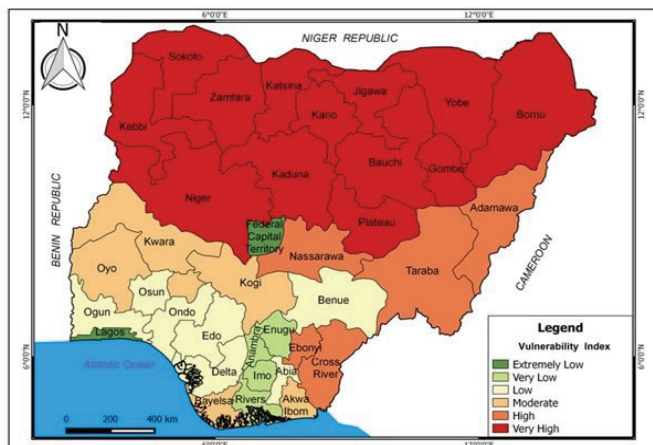
⁵Ibid.

⁶Ukomadu, A. (2022). Nigeria floods test government's disaster plans, Reuters, October 20. Please confirm title as this was what was found: Ukomadu, A. (2022). Nigeria's Flooding Spreads to the Delta, Upending Lives and Livelihoods, October 20, Reuters. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/nigerias-flooding-spreads-delta-upending-lives-livelihoods-2022-10-19/>

⁷Ojewale, O. (2022). Climate Change, Flooding and Nigeria's Tide of Corruption, November 10, *ISS Today*,. Retrieved from <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/climate-change-flooding-and-nigerias-tide-of-corruption>

⁸Ibid.

Figure 1: Patterns of Climate Vulnerability in Nigeria



Source: Madu.⁹

West Africa has the highest rate of intra-regional migration in Africa.¹⁰ Porous borders are a major factor behind increased irregular migration in West Africa, leading to insecurity in countries like Nigeria. This is because the movement of people is largely untracked.¹¹ The realities of migration in Nigeria are both internally and across borders. Internal population movement is an important component of mobility considering the country's geographical size, vast population, and ecological and resource diversity. Various types of internal migration—rural—rural, rural—urban, urban—urban, and urban—rural—persist in the country. Several factors, including environmental, economic, social, and political, propel people to migrate both internally and across borders. Rapid population growth, pressure on arable land, land tenure system, declining productivity resulting in rural poverty, widespread underemployment, and lack of access to social amenities, land and capital can stimulate rural-urban migration.¹² While major internal migration takes place from rural to urban areas and within urban areas, there are rural—rural migration by farmers, seasonal labourers, and pastoralists from resource-poor to resource-rich rural areas; especially, from the savannah zones to the fertile coastal areas. Seasonal migration from the dry savannah zones in the north to coastal areas during periods of low agricultural activity has been and remains a major

form of rural-rural migration within Nigeria.¹³

Climate change-induced internal migration has been on the ascendency in Nigeria. Some parts of the country have been characterised as archetypical ungoverned spaces confronted by complex security paradoxes such as the Boko Haram insurgency, Fulani militancy, and banditry that continuously breed terrorist organisations, and criminal networks that pose an enormous risk to human security.¹⁴ Some have argued that conflict between farmers and herders is often overlooked; yet, it poses severe security challenges and has claimed far more lives than the Boko Haram insurgency.¹⁵ This paper analyses climate change, migration, and insecurity in Nigeria. It argues that various socio-cultural, ethnic, regional and political factors underlie farmer-herder conflicts; however, the effects of climate change exacerbate insecurity in Nigeria. Particularly, the already difficult relationship between herders and farmers has degenerated into violent conflicts due to environmental factors such as land degradation, shrinking grazing spaces, ineffective governance and regulatory mechanisms and violent extremism. The paper proceeds in four sections. In the first section, it examines how climate change-induced migration in Nigeria fuels insecurity; especially, pastoralist conflicts in some parts of the country. In the second section, it explores the mechanisms and the challenges in dealing with climate-induced pastoralists' conflicts. In the third section, it provides some final thoughts in the conclusion and in the fourth and final section, it offers some recommendations. The paper employs a triangulation of secondary and primary data collected in October, 2022 in Nigeria.

Exploring the Links between Climate Change Induced Migration and Insecurity in Nigeria

Nigeria is located in the Sudano-Sahelo region and climate change is accelerating transnational migration and displacement in the Sahel region generally. Furthermore, it has contributed to the spread of organised violence in the region. Climate

⁹Madu, A.I. (2016). Rurality and Climate Change Vulnerability in Nigeria: Assessment towards Evidence Based Even Rural Development Policy (Being a Paper presented at the 2016 Berlin Conference on Global Environmental Change held from 23-24 May 2016 at Freie Universität Berlin). Retrieved from <https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/fub188/18130/RuralityandclimatchangexvulnerabilityxinxNigeriafinalxconferecexdraft.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

¹⁰Aning, K., & Pokoo, J. (2017). Between Conflict and Integration: Border Governance in Africa in Times of Migration. *International Reports*, (1), 54-65.

¹¹Achumba, I. C., Ighomereho, O.S. & Akpor-Robaro, M.O.M. (2013). Security Challenges in Nigeria and the Implications for Business Activities and Sustainable Development. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 4(2), 79-99.

¹²Federal Republic of Nigeria (2015). National Migration Policy 2015. Abuja: International Organization for Migration. Retrieved from https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/national_migration_policy_2015.pdf

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ojo, J.S. (2020). Governing "Ungoverned Spaces" in the Foliage of Conspiracy: Toward (Re)ordering Terrorism, from Boko Haram Insurgency, Fulani Militancy to Banditry in Northern Nigeria, *African Security*, 13(1), 77-110.

¹⁵Daniel, O.B. (2021). Climate Change and Farmers-Herders Conflict in Nigeria. November 15. New Security Beat. Retrieved from <https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2021/11/climate-change-farmers-herders-conflict-nigeria/>

vulnerability in this region is compounded by the region's high dependence on rain-fed agriculture and natural resources, weak governance, rapid population growth, and chronic humanitarian crises due to recurrent drought, flooding, crop failures, epidemics, and violent conflict. Additionally, prolonged water scarcity, longer dry seasons, and sustained higher temperatures conflagrate to increase social tensions and conflict, and trigger forced migration.¹⁶ For, in Nigeria, climate change poses threats to the security situation through conflict over resources. This has been exacerbated by increasing water and food scarcity. Desert encroachment and steadily depleting vegetation and grazing resources in the North Sahelian zone have prompted massive emigration and resettlement of people to areas less threatened by desertification.¹⁷ While climate change was not a precursor to the migration of herders to the southern part of Nigeria, it has increased their migration to the southern forest zone in search of better resources for their livestock.¹⁸

Pastoral livestock production systems are mostly found in Africa's vast arid and semiarid areas.¹⁹ Transhumance pastoralism is one of the main economies of the West African sub-region. Transhumance is a form of livestock-rearing practice marked by the movement of herds of livestock from one grazing ground to another.²⁰ As an adaptation measure, it entails the strategic movement of pastoralists across agro-ecological zones at various seasons in search of pasture for their livestock. Their movement is not confined to state boundaries but require cross-border movement. Transhumance has a long history as an important source of livelihood in the Sahel and the Sudanese regions of Africa and

the leading livestock-producing countries in West Africa include Nigeria-41.8 per cent,²¹ Niger-14.2 per cent, Mali-12.7 per cent, and Burkina Faso-11.9 per cent. Nigeria, thus, hosts a significant proportion of livestock in West Africa. As an economic powerhouse in the sub-region, it is also West Africa's largest market for meat and dairy products.²² About 85 per cent of Nigeria's cattle is raised by pastoralists.²³

Pastoralist communities generally live in isolated, remote, and underdeveloped areas. These areas are often conflict-prone, food insecure, and associated with high levels of vulnerability. Service provision in pastoral areas is usually less well-developed than in other areas.²⁴ These communities are affected by a range of cross-border conflict issues with substantial variance. These include the following: armed insurgencies; cattle rustling; conflicts between herders and farmers; state violence; violent crime; and gender-based violence. These issues occur both within and across borders.²⁵ Violent conflicts involving farmers and herders have become a major source of instability in the Western Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, as resource-related grievances intersect with political, social, and economic interests.²⁶ Protracted conflicts have significantly impacted pastoralism by displacing populations, changing herder routes, and increasing the risks of herder militarisation.²⁷ The depletion of arable land for farming and rapid urbanisation has caused the amount of land available for crop production and grazing to shrink.²⁸

The Fulbe or Fulani is an ethno-linguistic group spread across fifteen countries in West and Central Africa.²⁹ They are a large and internally diverse population with their largest concentration in Nigeria.

¹⁶Schmidt, P. & Muggah, R. (2021). *Assessing The Relationships Between Climate Change and Security in West Africa*, Ingarape Institute.

¹⁷Environmental Security Analyst in Abuja, personal communication, October 25, 2022.

¹⁸Ibid,

¹⁹Davis, M. (2022). Pastoralism, Farming, and a Changing Climate in the Sahel Region. *Stockholm Environment Institute*. January 18. Retrieved from <https://www.sei.org/features/pastoralism-farming-climate-in-sahel/#:~:text=It%20is%20a%20hard%20life,has%20often%20led%20to%20marginalization>.

²⁰Pokoo, J., & Nelson, S. (2022). Security in Cote d'Ivoire – Transhumance, Maritime Domain, and Elections. *Occasional Paper 46*. Accra: KAIPTC.

²¹Ibid.

²²Leonhardt, M. (2019). *Regional Policies and Response to Manage Pastoral Movements within the ECOWAS Region*. (Study on behalf of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), within the framework of the Support to Free Movement of Persons and Migration in West Africa (FMM West Africa) Project). Abuja: International Organization for Migration.

²³Ibid.

²⁴African Union (2013). *Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa: Securing, Protecting and Improving the Lives, Livelihoods and Rights of Pastoralist Communities*. Addis Ababa: African Union Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture. Retrieved from https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/30240-doc-policy_framework_for_pastoralism.pdf

²⁵Herbert, S., & Birch, I. (2022). Cross-Border Pastoral Mobility and Cross-border Conflict in Africa – Patterns and Policy Responses. XCEPT Evidence Synthesis. Birmingham: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷United Nations (2020). Preventing, Mitigating & Resolving Transhumance-Related Conflicts in UN Peacekeeping Settings: A Survey of Practice. Retrieved from https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/transhumance_and_un_pkos_final_web.pdf

²⁸Adzande, P. (2019). Migration of Pastoralists in Africa: Reflections on Practical and Policy Implications. *African Human Mobility Review*, 5(2):1650-1673.

²⁹There are a number of alternate labels for the ethnolinguistic identity of this group including 'Fula,' 'Fulbe,' 'Peuhl,' 'Lenyi,' and 'Pulaa.'

They can be divided into other sub-categories as follows: those who farm (*Fulbe Remaibe*); those who rear cattle (*Fulbe Duroobe*); and those who live in towns and do not rear cattle (*Fulbe Wuro*).³⁰ These different categories have deep-seated tensions. Trust, social cohesion, and strength of relationships between Rimndooobe (migratory pastoralists) and Joodiibe (settled pastoralists) is decreasing as a result of increased farmer-pastoralist violence, intolerance to different gender norms, and other factors.³¹ For instance, migratory pastoralists often claim that settled elites/pastoralists associated with the political class in northern Nigeria do not serve their interests.³² This occurrence also cuts across the entire region.

Historical Antecedents of Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts

Historical accounts suggest that the relationship between farmers and herders has been a mix of conflict and cooperation. Many pastoral and farming settlements developed symbiotic relationships through reciprocity, economic exchanges, and support.³³ Although farmers and herders have enjoyed mutually beneficial coexistence, it has not been without low-scale skirmishes, which were usually caused by the destruction of crops or the killing of cattle.³⁴ The nature of the relationship has seen shifts from the pre-colonial era to present times. In the precolonial era, the subsistence and small-surplus peasant modes of production of Fulbe herders and West African farmers were often intertwined in a mutually beneficial fashion.³⁵ Changes in land tenure laws during the colonial period increased commodity production and the environmental degradation that often resulted from it.³⁶ In the post-colonial era, the adoption of new irrigation techniques and the sedentarisation schemes for transhumant pastoralists that came with the introduction of capitalist modes of production to West Africa, disrupted the production symbiosis of Fulbe and farmers. These developments increased the likelihood of conflict

between them.³⁷

As West Africa adopted new agricultural practises and capitalist modes of production after colonisation, Fulbe pastoralists and settled farmers' relationship changed significantly. This age of technical progress and capitalism added various factors to the region's socio-economic equation, disrupting the long-time productive symbiosis between these two groups. Together with these agricultural improvements, sedentarisation efforts to settle transhumant pastoralists exacerbated the issue. The goal was to boost agricultural output and economic stability, following capitalism.³⁸ However, this production system paradigm shift undermined transhumance, when pastoralists moved their herds over vast grazing regions in response to changing seasons and resource availability. Pastoralists were se; limiting their freedom to migrate. This escalated resource rivalry and tensions with sedentary farming groups; transforming pastoralist-farmer interactions. In the post-colonial era, these communities' complex connections are fraught with tensions, resource conflicts, and violent conflicts as they seek economic expansion and modernisation. These changes upset pastoralist-farmer connections and have far-reaching effects.

Related conflicts have increased due to several historical, social, and environmental factors.³⁹ Due to the demographic and climatic changes in the past decades, pastoralists have been expanding their grazing areas southwards; particularly into the sub-humid middle belt regions and the high-altitude grasslands of Bauchi and the Jos Plateau.⁴⁰ On the one hand, desert encroachment and loss of grazing areas in the north have driven herders further south of Nigeria.⁴¹ On the other hand, Nigerian farmers have been moving into the densely populated semi-arid zone around the major Hausa towns of Sokoto, Kano, and Kaduna in the north. Land pressure has

³⁰Nagarajan, C. (2019). No Tribe in *Crime: Changing Pastoralism and Conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt*. Retrieved from <https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Report-Changing-Pastoralism-Conflict-Nigerias-Middle-Belt.pdf>

³¹Ibid.

³²Higazi, A. (2020). Herders and Farmers in Nigeria: Coexistence, Conflict, and Insurgency. March 19. *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*. Retrieved from <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/herders-and-farmers-nigeria-coexistence-conflict-and-insurgency-25447>

³³Daniel (2021). Op. cit.

³⁴Herbert & Birch (2022). Op. cit.

³⁵Davidheiser, M., & Luna, A.M. (2008). From complementarity to conflict: a historical analysis of farmer-Fulbe relations in West Africa. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 8, 77-103.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸de Bruijn, M. E., & van Dijk, H. J. W. M. (1999). Insecurity and Pastoral Development in the Sahel. *Development and Change*, 30, 115-139.

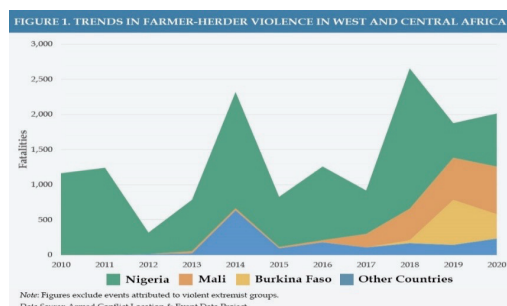
³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Leonhardt (2019). Op. cit.

⁴¹Interview with Security Analyst in Abuja, October 28, 2022.

led to increasing tensions between farmers and pastoralists.⁴² Such confrontations have become more violent; resulting in a huge number of casualties and destruction of settlements, infrastructure, and properties including large-scale forceful displacement of people. The conflict threatens Nigeria's security and increases ethnic, regional, and religious polarisation.⁴³ It also involves the use of sophisticated weapons like machine guns and Avtomat Kalashnikova (AK) 47 rifles.⁴⁴ Violent events between pastoralist and farming communities have been concentrated in the north-western, middle belt, and recently, southern states. In states such as Adamawa, Sokoto, Bauchi, Benue, Kwara, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Taraba, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, the Federal Capital Territory—Abuja, as well as the southern parts of Borno, Gombe, Kebbi, Kaduna, and Yobe have experienced an escalation of conflict between herders and farmers.⁴⁵ For instance, an estimated 800 civilian fatalities, many among farmer communities, were reported as a result of Fulani militia attacks in 2021.⁴⁶ In December 2021, Fulani militias launched a multi-day attack against Tiv farmers in Nasarawa state; reportedly in reprisal for the death of their kinsman in the Obi Local Government Area (LGA). The attack resulted in at least twenty fatalities and the displacement of thousands.⁴⁷

Figure 2: Incidence of Pastoralist Conflict in Nigeria and Beyond, 2010-2020



⁴²Leonhardt (2019). Op. cit.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Adzande (2019). Op. cit.

⁴⁵SB Morgen (2018). Growing Impact of the Pastoral Conflict. Retrieved from <https://www.sbmintel.com/2018/07/growing-impact-of-the-pastoral-conflict/>

⁴⁶Kazemi, E. & Raleigh, C. (2022). 10 Conflicts to Worry About in 2022: Nigeria: Multiple Security Threats Persist around the Country. February, ACLED. Retrieved from <https://acleddata.com/10-conflicts-to-worry-about-in-2022/nigeria/>

⁴⁷Sunday, C. (2021). 20 Farmers Killed, 5,000 Displaced as Herders Attack Nasarawa Communities. December 20. Punch. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/20-farmers-killed-5000-displaced-as-herders-attack-nasarawa-communities/>

⁴⁸Brottem, L. (2021). The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa. July. African Security Brief No. 39.

⁴⁹Adzande (2019). Op. cit.

⁵⁰Higazi, (2020). Op. cit.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Adomako, M. (2019). Addressing the Causes and Consequences of the Farmer-Herder Conflict in Ghana. September. Policy Brief 6. Accra: KAIPTC.

⁵³DCAF/ ISSAT (nd). Cattle Rustling and Insecurity in Africa: A Comparative Perspective. Retrieved from <https://www.dcaf.ch/issat>

⁵⁴Leonhardt (2019). Op. cit

Dynamics of Pastoralist Conflicts

Pastoralists conflicts have metamorphosed into criminality. This new dimension of the conflicts has raised questions about the origins of the 'new breed' of itinerant herders on the one hand and the support-base or criminal networks of the 'indigenous' herders on the other.⁴⁹ This is evident in the proliferation of armed gangs who kidnap for ransom, rustle cattle, and kill indiscriminately.

Many of these gangs that operate in central/northern Nigeria are believed to be Fulani. Yet, other Fulani pastoralists are among the main victims, as well as the wider Nigerian public. These gangs of bandits are criminal networks with rural-urban links.⁵⁰ Fulani communities in parts of Plateau, Taraba, and Adamawa states have responded by setting up state-registered vigilante groups to fight the banditry. Zamfara state is a key epicentre from which these criminal groups have spread.⁵¹ These farmer herder conflicts in Nigeria have implications for the sub-region, ⁵²including e grave consequences for regional stability, human security. food security l.

Cattle rustling is on the rise in various African countries. The practice has become a large-scale criminal activity, with the associated number of deaths amongst cattle rustlers, security forces, and affected populations; reaching problematic proportions.⁵³ In Nigeria, cattle rustling has also evolved into a militarised economic crime orchestrated by well-organised networks; often with the backing of some high-ranking officials.⁵⁴ It has been fuelled by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and the availability of hideouts in the country's forests. In northern Nigeria, wealthy individuals stage and finance large-scale cattle rustling operations by well-armed groups of unemployed young pastoralists; usually involving several thousand

animals and complex logistic operations.⁵⁵ Cattle rustling is often misunderstood and equated with the violent farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria's middle belt. Pastoralists in the north are particularly affected by cattle rustling. As such, cattle rustling has fed into longstanding conflicts between farmers and herders; inciting violence and deepening polarisation. It has also become a significant source of financing for armed groups, including regional insurgent groups operating in north-eastern Nigeria and northern and central Mali.⁵⁶

In most West African countries, farmer-herder conflicts are embedded in socio-political systems governing access to resources.⁵⁷ Competition over the distribution, access, use and control of natural resources is frequently politicised along the lines of identity and enmeshed in local struggles for power.⁵⁸ Some have attributed the rising pastoralists conflict to ethnic-regional and religious reasons; notably, the attempts at Islamisation and 'Fulanisation' of southern parts of Nigeria. The proponents of the Islamisation agenda narrative contend that the Fulani wants to continue the Jihad of Othman Danfodio, which turned the Hausaland into an Islamic Caliphate in the early 19th century before the advent of colonial rule stalled it.⁵⁹ Arguably, herders have been ascribed a terrorist identity and are often intertextually linked with the 2015 Global Terrorism Index that classified herdsmen militants as the fourth deadliest terror group of 2014. It is reported that Fulani militants killed 1,229 people in 2014. Again, the 2020 Global Terrorism Index reported that Fulani extremists were responsible for 26 per cent of terror-related deaths in Nigeria at 325 fatalities.⁶⁰ Indeed, there is evidence of linkages between Fulani herders and some terror groups operating in Nigeria.⁶¹ Militant Islamist groups in parts of Nigeria have exploited intercommunal tensions to foster recruitment. This has had the

effect of conflating farmer-herder conflict with violent extremism; significantly complicating the security landscape.⁶² Similarly, Biafran separatists in south-eastern Nigeria have utilised grievances against herders to mobilise for their independence efforts in some parts of the country.⁶³

Although various social, ethnic, regional, and political factors underlie farmer-herder conflicts, this paper situates pastoralists conflicts within environmental challenges posed by climate change. Farmer-herder conflicts and conflicts between pastoralists have been exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Changing climate coupled with high population growth and cattle, has led to greater competition for limited resources. The increasing depletion of arable land for farming and rapid urbanisation have caused the amount of land available for crop production and grazing to shrink. Grazing routes and reserves are areas officially designated for pastoralists' use. Notably, in 1965, the Nigerian Government passed a law on the establishment of grazing zones for pastoralists. The law allowed for a minimum of 10 per cent of the country's land area to be legally acquired and constituted into grazing reserves for lease allocation to pastoralists.⁶⁴ These areas have been gradually encroached upon by farmers, other private ranches, and mining interests due to failure by different levels of government and community leadership structures in enforcement and to the weakening of existing structures and mechanisms for the preservation of areas for grazing.⁶⁵ Many of the existing grazing reserves are in bad shape and lack the social and pastoral infrastructure to support a large pastoral population. Some of them are used by cattle rustlers as retreats; taking advantage of their protected status and inaccessibility. These cattle rustlers also threaten the pastoralist population living on the reserves.⁶⁶

⁵⁵Leonhardt (2019). Op. cit

⁵⁶Madueke, K.L. (2023). Driving Destruction: Cattle Rustling and Instability in Nigeria. Geneva: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. Retrieved from <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Kingsley-L-Madueke-Driving-destruction-Cattle-rustling-and-instability-in-Nigeria-GI-TOC-January-2022.pdf>

⁵⁷Penu, D. A. K., & Paolo, S. A. (2021). Institutions and Pastoralist Conflicts in Africa: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 16(2), 224–241.

⁵⁸Paolo, S.A. (2021). The Politics of Addressing Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Ghana. *Peacebuilding*, 9(1), 79-99.

⁵⁹Nwankwo, C. F. (2021). Discursive Construction of the Farmer-Pastoralist Conflict in Nigeria. *Open Political Science*, 4(1), 136-146.

⁶⁰Institute for Economics & Peace (2020). *Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*. Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace. Retrieved from: <http://visionofhumanity.org/reports>.

⁶¹Nwankwo (2021). Op. cit.

⁶²Brottem (2021). Op. cit.

⁶³Wilson Center (2022). *Herder-Farmer Conflicts and Food Security in Southeast Nigeria: Plugging the Gaps in the Peacebuilding Policy Framework*. August 17. Retrieved from <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/svnp-herder-farmer-food-security>.

⁶⁴Leonhardt (2019). Op. cit

⁶⁵Nagarajan (2019). Op. cit.

⁶⁶Leonhardt (2019). Op. cit.

Furthermore, there has been increased migration of pastoralists from countries in Central and West Africa into Nigeria.⁶⁷ Such movements are supported by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Transhumance Protocol of 1998;⁶⁸ still, there have been conflicts and tensions along grazing routes in the country. It is noteworthy that Nigeria's elite often regard transhumant pastoralism as an outdated practice since they associate it with low productivity and incessant conflicts. Most of them have resorted to ranching for large-scale livestock breeding. Many elites, including the Nigerian army, have established cattle ranches aimed at production of milk and meat for the domestic market.⁶⁹ The establishment of ranches often involves large-scale land acquisitions of fertile and well-watered land near the country's main transportation routes, which, also reduces the pastoral space available to traditional pastoralists.⁷⁰

Pastoralists face increasing challenges and threats to their way of life and security as they struggle to adapt to these challenges. Expansion of farming areas into grazing routes and reserves and insufficient pasture present challenges to pastoralists. This expansion, in addition to changing weather patterns, causes them to move cattle to new places with more fertile ground, which exposes herds to new diseases.⁷¹ Due to scarcity of pasture and water for cattle, herds are getting weaker, reproducing less, and producing less milk for domestic and commercial consumption. Incidence of cattle disease has increased due to hunger—as cows are scavenging and eating whatever they can find—and to the collapse of veterinary services in some parts of the country.⁷² These challenges partly account for the price volatility of cattle on the local and regional markets.⁷³

Moreover, extreme changes in weather conditions create new opportunities for cultivation and incite agricultural encroachment onto pastoral land.⁷⁴ Many

factors result in the expansion of farming, including the impact of rainfall changes and variability, heat or other climatic factors on soil fertility and livelihood viability.⁷⁵ Reduced access to natural resources such as fertile land, water, and pasture is undermining the livelihoods of vulnerable people and communities in the Lake Chad region, which has triggered recurrent conflicts.⁷⁶ Many herders move because the lack of rain affects the availability of pasture. As herders divert their cattle to new areas they often struggle to find pasture in these new areas. In some cases, cattle encroach on farmland and destroy crops; often resulting in confrontations with farmers.⁷⁷ Farmers, which includes women, are threatened with violence and rape by pastoralists.⁷⁸ Climate change and its related conflicts have increased vulnerabilities of women who rely mostly on natural resources and climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture for their livelihoods. The desire of both herders and farmers to protect the wealth of their families coupled with intense stresses on the part young pastoralists, drug abuse, and the lack of family support in a time of declining pasture, water, and increasing violence contribute to the intensification of conflict dynamics and to the high likelihood of violence.⁷⁹ In other cases, herders moving in small groups are attacked by farmers and the chances of reprisal attacks are high.⁸⁰ Some pastoralists in Nigeria argue that banditry activities of Boko Haram terrorists have forced them to move into southern Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and other West Africa countries. This has increased the number of cattle in these countries that were already grappling with competition for resources and, thus, exacerbated confrontation and contestation among farmers.⁸¹

Mechanisms to Address Climate Change and Pastoralist Conflicts

Several normative frameworks exist in Nigeria to deal with the effects of climate change generally.

⁶⁷Adzande, (2019). Op. cit.

⁶⁸ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance (1998). ECOWAS (1998). Twenty-First Conference of Heads of State: ECOWAS (1998). Decision A/DEC.5/10/98 Relating to the Regulations on Transhumance between ECOWAS Member States. October. *Official Journal of the Economic Community of West African States Vol. 35*.

⁶⁹Leonhardt (2019).

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Nagarajan (2019). Op. cit.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Environmental Security Expert in Abuja, personal communication, October 25, 2022.

⁷⁴Benjaminsen, T.A., Alinon, K., Buhaug, H., & Buseeth, J.T. (2012). Does Climate Change Drive Land-Use Conflicts in the Sahel?. *Journal of Peace Research*, 49(1), 97-111.

⁷⁵Civil Society Official in Abuja, personal communication, October 24, 2022.

⁷⁶Ehiane, S., & Moyo, P. (2022). Climate Change, Human Insecurity and Conflict Dynamics in the Lake Chad Region. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 57(8), 1677–1689.

⁷⁷Civil Society official in Abuja. Op. cit.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Nigaranja (2019). op. cit.

⁸⁰Higazi (2020). Op. cit.

⁸¹Bukari, K. N. (2021). ECOWAS and the Question of How to Resolve Farmer-Herder Conflict in West Africa. March 25. Africa Portal. Retrieved from <https://www.africaportal.org/features/ecowas-and-question-how-resolve-farmer-herder-conflict-west-africa/>

The country passed the Climate Change Act on November 18, 2021, which provides a framework for Nigeria to achieve low greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through inclusive green growth and sustainable economic development, as well as, the implementation of Nigeria's commitment to net zero emissions as declared at the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties 26 (COP 26) in 2021. According to the Notre Dame – Global Adaptation Initiative, Nigeria is the 53rd most vulnerable and the sixth least prepared country in terms of responding to climate change.⁸² Since 2020, measures such as the Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan (NESP), the National Policy on Climate Change, the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), and in 2021 the National Strategy on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Strategy (REDD+).⁸³ It is intended to facilitate the integration of many systems for setting baselines, monitoring and reporting performance, and validating sector-wide emission reductions. The REDD+ Strategy was developed to address the existing impacts of deforestation and other ecological issues in the country. Nonetheless, some authors posit that Nigeria's REDD+ Strategy for engagement and readiness was arguably too ambitious;⁸⁴ hence, leading to the unintended outputs. Nevertheless, the REDD+ Approach as well as a 2050 Long-Term Vision Policy, have been adopted as part of this Strategy.⁸⁵

With the passage of the Climate Change Act of 2021,

Nigeria has become a prominent stakeholder in environmental issues; particularly, climate change. In this regard, a National Council on Climate Change was established to coincide with the Act's implementation.⁸⁶ Still, there have not been sufficient procedures to handle the effects of floods and droughts that have afflicted Bayelsa, Borno, and other states.⁸⁷ However, internally displaced persons (IDP) are put up in ad-hoc and temporary camps to provide them with provisional shelter and safety. Experts refer to this intervention as a "reaction action"⁸⁸ that could have been avoided if the Federal or State Government had been vigilant and responsive to addressing issues of climate change. For instance, the flooding in early October, 2022 in Bayelsa State, was predicted by the National Meteorological Agency (NIMET). Despite this, update measures were not put in place to dampen the impact of the floods. To experts, it is disturbing that the Government exhibits no sense of urgency regarding environmental concerns, including climate change. They argue that "the Ecological Fund has been fraudulently appropriated with disregard for its original intent."⁸⁹ As analysts relate the violence in the south of Nigeria to the population explosion, especially of the youth, the lack of clarity and, in turn, the ineffectiveness and inapplicability of governance frameworks to address socio-economic challenges related to climate change, are matters of grave concern.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Nigeria has legislation on pastoralism and land use as enumerated in Table 1.

⁸²Notre-Dame Global Adaptation initiative. Retrieved from <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/rankings/> on September 20, 2023.

⁸³Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, October 2021. Nigeria launches REDD+ strategy to curb deforestation and forest emissions. Retrieved from <https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/news-story/nigeria-launches-redd-strategy-curb-deforestation-and-forest-emissions>

⁸⁴Olaniyan, U.O., Dargusch, P., Wadley, D. (2021). Requirements and Realities of REDD+ Implementation in Nigeria. *Journal of Environmental Science and Public Health*, 5(1), 99-113.

⁸⁵New Climate Institute. Climate Policy Database [Nigeria]. Retrieved from https://www.climatepolicydatabase.org/policies?decision_date=&high_impact=All&keywords=NIGERIA%20&page=1&order=field_policy_date_of_decision&sort=asc (Accessed on December 28, 2022).

⁸⁶Adesina, F. (Press Release). (2022). Buhari Inaugurates Nigeria's Climate Change Council. September 28. *Premium Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/556545-buhari-inaugurates-nigerias-climate-change-council.html>

⁸⁷Interview with a Security Analyst in Abuja, October 24, 2022.

⁸⁸Environmental Security Expert in Abuja, 2022, Op. cit.

⁸⁹Environment Security Analyst in Abuja, personal communication, October 24, 2022.

⁹⁰Ibid.

Table 1: Nigeria’s Legal Provisions for Pastoralism and Land Use

Federal Legislation on Pastoralism in Nigeria	State Legislation on Pastoralism
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hides and Skin Act, Law No. 14 of 1942• Grazing Reserve Law N.N (Northern Nigeria), Law No. 4 of 1965• Land Use Act, Law No. 6 of 1978• Animal Diseases (Control) Decree, No. 10 of 1988• National Commission for Nomadic Education Act, Law No. 41 of 1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Laws establishing grazing reserves in several northern states (Kaduna, Katsina, and Plateau states, 1960s)• Taraba State, Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017• Benue State, Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017• Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, The Agriculture Promotion Policy (2016-2020): Building on the Successes of the [Agricultural Transformation Agenda]
	ATA, Closing Key Gaps, Policy and Strategy Document, 2016.

Source: Leonhardt.⁹¹

The country has an uneven history of legislative engagement with pastoralism as some of the laws and policies point to a long-standing effort to sedentarise transhumant pastoralists and transform their production systems. Most of the laws have encountered challenges and rendered ineffective. There have been efforts to modernise livestock production through ranching. A number of urban elites—of Fulani and non-Fulani origin—have also benefitted from the Land Use Act of 1978, which allows the individual acquisition of up to 5,000 hectares of land for grazing purposes to set up private ranches.

There is a shift in public policy and discourse toward ranching. There have also been state laws to ban open grazing. For example, in 2017, Benue and Taraba states enacted legislation banning open grazing on their territories, to reduce the escalating violence between farmers and transhumant pastoralists. Taraba State also prescribes ranches as the only legal form of animal production. Pastoralist groups, however, protested the new bills in both states. Some state governors in the south have introduced a ban on open grazing; this has heightened tensions.⁹² Some have argued the current promotion of ranching may lead to the dispossession of thousands of small-holder farmers and pastoralists and exacerbate land scarcity in certain areas. Dispossessed farmers and pastoralists may have to resort to competing for the few paid jobs on ranches. Ranching may, therefore, lead to further conflict instead of reducing it.⁹³

Further, the Federal Government of Nigeria in July, 2018, announced plans to implement the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlement programme as panacea to the incessant crop farmers-herdsmen conflicts.⁹⁴ Still, RUGA incited outrage in Nigeria as affected parties rejected proposed policies including cattle colonies, cattle routes, grazing reserves, and RUGA settlements.⁹⁵ The policy is seen by a majority of Nigerians as the crudest assault on inclusivity in a multi-ethnic country. Thus, more than 70 per cent of the population rejected the policy in view of its existential threats to crop farmers, secularism, and national security. According to Ademola, the grounds for Nigerian stakeholders’ rejections and counter-reactions to policies stem from their fear of ethnic dominance and distrust.⁹⁶ Some communities in the middle belt especially, due to a lack of communities’ inclusivity, substantially contributed to the local revolt against the RUGA settlement policy. People fears of the possibility of losing their ancestral lands, the experience of the host communities, ethnic and political factors, and poor policy awareness were the⁹⁷ primary factors that reinforced the communities’ resistance. In response to the widespread condemnation of the policy, the Nigerian Government suspended its implementation.⁹⁸

⁹¹Leonhardt (2019). Op. cit.
⁹²Environment Security Analyst, 2022. Op. cit.
⁹³Ibid.
⁹⁴Apikins, M.W. (2020). The Federal Government of Nigeria’s Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) Policy: The Demystification of the Elite’s Theory? *International Journal of Advanced Studies in Economics and Public Sector Management*, 8(1), 229-243.
⁹⁵Ademola, E. O. (2020). Herder-Farmer Conflicts and RUGA Policy: Why Nigerian Stakeholders are at Loggerheads over Rural Grazing Settlements. *Ethnic Studies Review*, 43(3), pp. 103-121.
⁹⁶Ibid.
⁹⁷Ojo, J. S. (2023). Climate-Related Armed Conflict and Communities’ Resistance to Rural Grazing Area Settlement Policy in Nigeria’s Middlebelt. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 1– 21.
⁹⁸Apikins (2020). Op. cit.

The ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance of 1998 and supporting Regulation C/REG.3/01/03 Relating to the implementation of the regulations on Transhumance between the ECOWAS Member States of 2003, provide regional regulatory frameworks for cross-border transhumance in West Africa. This is in line with the ECOWAS principle of free movement of persons, services, and goods. However, processes aimed at domesticating and implementing the ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance in Member States, including Nigeria, are fraught with challenges. Nigeria has no national law domesticating the Protocol. There is also no institutional framework for implementing the law. For example, provisions of the Protocol, like the possession of the International Transhumance Certificate as a mandatory entry requirement, have not been integrated into law in Nigeria.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Weak governance and ineffective law enforcement have contributed to the escalation of pastoral conflicts in Nigeria. The lack of enforcement of existing laws and regulations has enabled perpetrators to act with impunity; exacerbating the situation. Disputes over land use and ownership have been a major source of conflict between pastoralists and farmers in Nigeria. Factors, including the proliferation of small arms and the involvement of criminal networks, have contributed to the escalation of pastoral conflicts. Addressing climate change-induced pastoral conflicts in Nigeria, as it is in other states and regions, requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the root causes of these conflicts. This includes implementing policies that promote sustainable land use, improving governance and law enforcement, promoting stakeholder engagement, increasing education and awareness, and addressing external influences. Without concerted efforts to address

these challenges, the conflicts will continue to escalate with devastating consequences for Nigeria and its people.

Recommendations

In view of the various stakeholders involved and mentioned in this study, this section provides recommendations to address climate change-induced pastoralist conflicts in Nigeria.

- The Federal and State governments of Nigeria in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, such as traditional leaders and community representatives, should strengthen legal frameworks by revising existing laws or enacting new ones to address pastoralist conflicts, with a focus on land use and grazing rights.
- The Federal and State governments of Nigeria should promote sustainable agriculture and incentivise farmers and pastoralists to implement climate-smart agricultural methods that reduce natural resource consumption and conflict.
- Nigeria’s Federal and State meteorological and environmental agencies must bolster early warning systems and climate adaptation measures in order to provide pastoralist and agricultural communities with opportune information on weather patterns, droughts, and other climate-related hazards.
- The development of climate adaptation strategies that consider the needs, perspectives, traditional knowledge, and coping mechanisms of pastoralists while investing in climate-resilient infrastructure such as water storage facilities, irrigation systems, and drought-tolerant crop varieties must be prioritised by states, civil societies and agencies.

⁹⁹Adzande (2019). Op. cit.

About the Authors

Dr. Naila Salihu is Research Fellow and Deputy Programme Head at the Faculty of Academic Affairs and Research (FAAR) at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC). She is also a faculty member and lecturer for post-graduate programmes at KAIPTC. She specializes in research on peacebuilding, democratic processes, defence and security sector governance in Africa.

Elsie A. Tachie-Menson researches into emerging security studies, specifically cybersecurity and maritime security at the Faculty of Academic Affairs and Research (FAAR) of the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC). She is the Editorial Assistant of the Journal of African Peace and Security (JAPS).

About the Project

This study was conducted with support from the Government of Norway to undertake action research to identify the interlinkages among climate change, migration, demographical change and insecurity in West Africa.

How to cite this Publication

Salihu N., Tachie-Menson E.A., (2023). Climate Change and Pastoralist-Farmer Conflicts in Nigeria. *Occasional Paper 53*, Accra: KAIPTC.

About the Centre

Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) is an ECOWAS Centre of Excellence that provides globally recognized capacity for international actors on African peace and security through training, education and research to foster peace and stability in Africa.



KAIPTC
...where peace begins



Norwegian Embassy
Accra

KOFI ANNAN INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING TRAINING CENTRE
PMB CT 210, CANTONMENTS, ACCRA-GHANA | T: 233(0)302718200 | F: 233 (0)302718201

 www.kaiptc.org

   @kaiptc



KAIPTC
...where peace begins

[f](#) [t](#) [▶](#) [kaiptcgh](#) [◉](#) [kaiptc](#)
[www.kaiptc.org](#)