

The Fulani Herder–Farmer Conflict and National Development in Nigeria: A Qualitative Analysis

OJUAWO OLAKUNLE OLANIYI

Department of Peace and Security Studies, Faculty of Multidisciplinary Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

Abstract- *This study examines the persistent Fulani herder–farmer conflict in Nigeria and its implications for national development. Recurring clashes between pastoralists and farming communities have intensified insecurity, disrupted agricultural production, and generated significant socio-economic, political, and humanitarian challenges across the country. Guided by Social Conflict Theory, the study investigates the drivers of the conflict, assesses its implications for national development, and evaluates existing government responses and peacebuilding initiatives. A qualitative research design was adopted, drawing on secondary data from peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, policy documents, and other relevant documentary sources. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the interplay of competition over land and water resources, climate change, environmental degradation, weak governance, ineffective land administration, the proliferation of illicit arms, and inadequate conflict management mechanisms drives the conflict. The study further reveals that the conflict has undermined agricultural productivity, worsened food insecurity, displaced rural populations, weakened social cohesion, discouraged investment, and constrained sustainable national development. It also finds that existing government interventions, including security operations, anti-open grazing policies, ranching initiatives, and peacebuilding programmes, have achieved only limited success due to weak implementation and institutional deficiencies. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing an integrated qualitative analysis that links the conflict's drivers, developmental implications, and peacebuilding responses within a unified analytical framework. It recommends strengthening land administration, promoting sustainable ranching, improving climate adaptation, enhancing security and justice institutions, institutionalising community-based peacebuilding and peace education, and adopting inclusive, evidence-based policies that address the structural causes of the conflict.*

Keywords: *Fulani Herder–Farmer Conflict, National Development, Social Conflict Theory, Thematic Analysis, Peacebuilding, Food Security, Nigeria.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Violent conflict remains a major impediment to sustainable national development, particularly in developing countries where agriculture is a primary source of livelihoods and economic activity. Beyond the immediate loss of life and destruction of property, violent conflicts undermine economic growth, weaken state institutions, disrupt agricultural production, exacerbate poverty, threaten food security, and erode social cohesion (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022; World Bank, 2023). In Nigeria, recurrent insecurity, including insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, and the Fulani herder–farmer conflict, has become a significant obstacle to national development. Of these, the Fulani herder–farmer conflict has emerged as one of the country's most persistent internal security challenges because of its widespread humanitarian, economic, and developmental consequences (Inimiesi, 2025; Peter, 2020; Nwankwo, 2020).

Historically, pastoralism has been an integral part of West Africa's socio-economic system, with Fulani pastoralists practising seasonal transhumance in search of pasture and water. Relations between pastoralists and farming communities were traditionally regulated by customary institutions, established grazing routes, and local conflict-resolution mechanisms, which generally promoted peaceful coexistence. However, climate change, environmental degradation, rapid population growth, shrinking grazing reserves, and expanding agricultural activities have intensified competition for

land and water resources, transforming once-localised disputes into recurrent violent conflicts across many parts of Nigeria (Nkwede et al., 2018; Inimiesi, 2025). Over time, the conflict has evolved beyond competition for natural resources to encompass governance failures, insecurity, demographic pressures, and socio-political tensions, resulting in widespread loss of life, displacement, property destruction, disruption of agricultural production, and weakened social cohesion (Peter, 2020; Nwankwo, 2020).

Contemporary scholarship shows that the persistence of the conflict is driven by the interplay of environmental, institutional, and socio-economic factors rather than by resource competition alone. Environmental degradation, desertification, and climate change have altered pastoral migration patterns and intensified pressure on grazing and farmland, while weak land administration, inadequate security responses, unresolved property rights, and the proliferation of small arms have enabled local disputes to escalate into protracted violence (Nkwede et al., 2018; Nwankwo, 2020; Inimiesi, 2025). Adzande (2021) further argues that many peacebuilding initiatives have achieved limited success because they fail to address the conflict's evolving and multidimensional nature, thereby allowing cycles of violence and retaliation to persist. The developmental consequences of the Fulani herder–farmer conflict extend well beyond security concerns. Persistent violence has disrupted agricultural production, destroyed crops and livestock, displaced rural populations, undermined livelihoods, and heightened food insecurity (Peter, 2020; Fajonyomi et al.). The conflict has also weakened rural economies, disrupted access to education and healthcare, reduced investor confidence, and increased government expenditure on security and humanitarian assistance (Nwankwo, 2020; World Bank, 2023). These cumulative effects demonstrate that the conflict is not merely a security or agricultural problem but a broader development challenge with significant implications for economic growth, social stability, and sustainable national development.

Although previous studies have substantially advanced understanding of the Fulani herder–farmer conflict, they have largely examined its causes, socio-economic impacts, governance challenges, or peacebuilding initiatives as separate issues (Nkwede et al., 2018; Peter, 2020; Nwankwo, 2020; Adzande, 2021; Inimiesi, 2025). Consequently, limited attention has been devoted to an integrated analysis of how the evolving drivers of the conflict collectively influence national development. This study addresses that gap by examining, through a qualitative analysis of the existing literature, the nature and evolution of the conflict, its underlying drivers, its socio-economic and developmental consequences, and the effectiveness of existing government and peacebuilding responses. Anchored in Social Conflict Theory, the study contributes to the growing scholarship on conflict, security, and development by demonstrating how unresolved competition over scarce resources, institutional weaknesses, and governance failures continue to undermine sustainable national development in Nigeria. The findings also provide policy insights for strengthening conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and inclusive governance.

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Social Conflict Theory

This study is grounded in Social Conflict Theory, which explains conflict as an inevitable outcome of competition over scarce resources and unequal access to economic, political, and social opportunities. The theory is chiefly associated with Karl Marx (1867/1976), who argued that society is characterised by continuous struggles between competing groups for control of limited resources. According to Marx, conflicts arise because resources are unevenly distributed, creating inequalities that generate tension and confrontation. Max Weber (1978) broadened this perspective, arguing that conflict is not limited to economic resources but also involves struggles over power, authority, prestige, and political influence. Similarly, Lewis Coser (1956) maintained that conflict is a normal feature of society and may stimulate institutional reforms when properly managed, while Ralf Dahrendorf (1959) argued that unequal authority relationships within social

institutions are major sources of persistent social conflict.

The central proposition of Social Conflict Theory is that competition over scarce resources inevitably generates conflict when institutional mechanisms fail to regulate competing interests effectively. The theory assumes that resources such as land, water, wealth, political power, and economic opportunities are scarce, thereby compelling individuals and groups to compete for access to and control over them. Where governance structures are weak or unable to manage competing interests fairly, disputes often escalate into violent conflicts (Dahrendorf, 1959; Coser, 1956).

The theory's assumptions offer an appropriate explanation for the Fulani herder–farmer conflict in Nigeria. The growing scarcity of grazing land and water resources, driven by climate change, desertification, population growth, and environmental degradation, has intensified competition between pastoralists and sedentary farming communities (Nkwede et al., 2018; Inimies, 2025). The situation has been further exacerbated by weak governance, ineffective land administration, unresolved property rights, inadequate security responses, and the proliferation of small arms, thereby transforming local disputes into widespread violent conflicts (Nwankwo, 2020). These structural conditions align with the central propositions of Social Conflict Theory, which attributes persistent conflicts to competition over scarce resources and institutional weaknesses.

Recent empirical studies further reinforce the theory's relevance to the Nigerian context. Peter (2020) observes that recurring confrontations between Fulani herders and farmers have led to widespread loss of life, damage to property, reduced agricultural output, and the erosion of rural livelihoods, thereby undermining national development. Similarly, Fajonyomi et al. (2016) argue that the conflict has significantly affected socio-economic development by reducing agricultural productivity, lowering household incomes, and increasing food insecurity. Inimies (2025) further identifies climate change, cattle rustling, population pressure, weak governance,

and the proliferation of illicit weapons as interconnected factors that sustain the conflict. Likewise, Nkwede et al. (2018) explain the conflict in terms of push-and-pull factors arising from environmental pressures and competition for natural resources.

Beyond explaining the causes of the conflict, the theory also helps explain why previous interventions have achieved only limited success. Adzande (2021) argues that many peacebuilding initiatives have failed because they do not adequately address the structural and evolving drivers of the conflict. Similarly, Muhammed et al. (2023) contend that effective peacebuilding requires comprehensive state responses, including improved security, control of illicit weapons, protection of affected communities, and the promotion of ranching systems. Okoh et al. (2025) further emphasise the importance of traditional institutions and community mediation in restoring trust and promoting peaceful coexistence, while Terlumun and Manasseh (2025) advocate peace education and community dialogue as complementary mechanisms for conflict prevention and sustainable peace.

The conflict's implications for national development further underscore the relevance of Social Conflict Theory. According to Mamman (2021), persistent violence threatens sustainable national development by undermining peaceful coexistence, human security, and socio-economic progress. Njoku et al. (2026) similarly argue that climate-induced migration has intensified violent clashes, resulting in food insecurity, displacement, and declining agricultural productivity. Bakari and Abdullahi (2025) conclude that the conflict has become a major obstacle to socio-economic development and advocate structured grazing reserves, improved land-use planning, and stronger governance institutions as sustainable solutions.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative documentary research design to examine the Fulani herder–farmer conflict and its implications for national development

in Nigeria. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena through the interpretation and synthesis of existing literature, rather than numerical analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Sources of Data

The study relied exclusively on secondary data from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government publications, policy documents, reports from international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, conference papers, and other credible scholarly publications relevant to the Fulani herder–farmer conflict, peacebuilding, food security, and national development in Nigeria. Priority was given to studies published between 2018 and 2026, while seminal theoretical literature on Social Conflict Theory was included to provide the study's conceptual foundation.

Data Collection

Relevant literature was identified through systematic searches of major academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, Semantic Scholar, ResearchGate, and institutional repositories. Search terms included Fulani herder–farmer conflict, farmer–herder conflict in Nigeria, national development, food security, climate change, peacebuilding, Social Conflict Theory, rural insecurity, and grazing conflict. Only publications directly relevant to the study's objectives were selected, while duplicate studies, opinion-based publications, and sources lacking scholarly or empirical support were excluded.

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to examine and synthesise the selected literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Relevant information was reviewed, coded, and organised into recurring themes aligned with the study objectives. The analysis focused on four broad themes: (i) the nature and evolution of the Fulani herder–farmer conflict, (ii) the drivers of the conflict, (iii) its implications for national development, and (iv) government responses and peacebuilding initiatives. This approach integrated

diverse scholarly perspectives and provided a comprehensive understanding of the conflict and its developmental implications.

Ethical Considerations

As the study relied solely on publicly available secondary sources, no human participants were involved. Consequently, issues relating to informed consent and confidentiality did not arise. Nevertheless, the study adhered to established academic ethical standards by accurately citing and referencing all sources in accordance with APA 7th edition guidelines.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nature and Evolution of the Fulani Herder–Farmer Conflict

Historical Background

Analysis

The thematic analysis of the reviewed literature indicates that the historical origins of the Fulani herder–farmer conflict are closely linked to the Fulani's traditional pastoral lifestyle and seasonal migration across West Africa. Historically, relations between pastoralists and farming communities were largely characterised by peaceful coexistence and mutual economic interdependence. However, increasing pressure on land and other natural resources gradually altered these relationships, laying the foundation for recurrent disputes between the two groups.

Discussion

The Fulani are predominantly pastoralists whose livelihood depends on cattle rearing and seasonal transhumance in search of pasture and water. Historically, Fulani pastoralists migrated from the Sahel region through northern Nigeria and gradually expanded into the Middle Belt and southern parts of the country in response to ecological changes and the search for grazing resources. During this period, interactions between herders and farming communities were generally regulated through customary institutions, traditional grazing routes, and informal conflict-resolution mechanisms, allowing both groups to coexist with relatively few violent confrontations (Nkwede et al., 2018).

Peter (2020) observes that earlier disputes between farmers and herders were predominantly localised and seasonal, often arising from accidental destruction of crops by grazing cattle or disagreements over access to water sources. Such disputes were commonly resolved through traditional rulers, community leaders, and compensation arrangements, thereby preventing widespread violence. Similarly, Nwankwo (2020) argues that although competition over land has existed for decades, institutional weaknesses, demographic changes, and increasing pressure on natural resources have significantly altered the character of the conflict.

Recent scholarship demonstrates that the historical patterns of coexistence have gradually deteriorated due to climate change, desertification, population growth, and expanding agricultural activities, which have reduced the availability of grazing land and intensified competition over scarce resources. Inimiesi (2025) notes that these environmental and socio-economic changes have transformed traditional pastoral migration into a source of persistent insecurity, with disputes becoming increasingly violent and extending beyond rural communities into broader national security concerns.

Interpretation

The reviewed literature suggests that the historical evolution of the Fulani herder–farmer conflict cannot be understood solely as a consequence of pastoral migration. Rather, the conflict reflects the interplay among changing environmental conditions, increasing demographic pressure, and weakening institutional mechanisms that once regulated relationships between herders and farmers. This finding supports the assumptions of Social Conflict Theory, which explains that competition over scarce resources becomes increasingly conflictual when effective institutional arrangements fail to manage competing interests. Consequently, the historical transformation of the conflict provides an important context for understanding its contemporary implications for national development in Nigeria.

V. EVOLUTION INTO A SECURITY CRISIS

Analysis

The thematic analysis of the reviewed literature reveals that the Fulani herder–farmer conflict has undergone a significant transformation over the past few decades. What initially existed as seasonal disputes over grazing routes and access to farmland has evolved into one of Nigeria's most persistent internal security challenges. The literature indicates that a combination of environmental pressures, weak governance, demographic changes, the proliferation of illicit weapons, and the increasing involvement of criminal elements has driven the escalation of the conflict. Consequently, the conflict has extended beyond local communities, becoming a national concern with far-reaching security, economic, and developmental implications.

Discussion

Historically, disputes between Fulani herders and farming communities were largely localised and centred on disagreements over grazing routes, crop destruction, and access to water resources. Such disputes were generally resolved through traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms involving community leaders, traditional rulers, and compensation arrangements. However, the reviewed literature suggests that these mechanisms have gradually weakened, allowing local disputes to escalate into violent confrontations with devastating consequences (Peter, 2020).

Nkwede et al. (2018) argue that environmental degradation, increasing population pressure, and expanding agricultural activities have intensified competition over scarce land resources, thereby increasing the frequency and intensity of confrontations between herders and farmers. As traditional grazing reserves and cattle routes became increasingly encroached upon, seasonal migration patterns changed, exposing pastoralists to greater competition with sedentary farming communities. These developments created conditions that transformed occasional disputes into recurring violent conflicts across several regions of Nigeria.

The literature further demonstrates that the conflict has become increasingly militarised. Inimiesi (2025) attributes this transformation to the proliferation of small arms, cattle rustling, organised criminal networks, and weak law enforcement institutions. Rather than remaining isolated disputes between herders and farmers, many incidents now involve heavily armed groups capable of carrying out coordinated attacks on rural communities, leading to significant loss of lives, destruction of property, and widespread displacement. Similarly, Nwankwo (2020) contends that inadequate protection of property rights, ineffective security responses, and weaknesses in land administration have enabled the conflict to evolve into a broader national security challenge with serious implications for governance and development.

Evidence from the reviewed studies also suggests that the changing nature of the conflict has blurred the distinction between resource-based disputes and broader forms of rural insecurity. Increasingly, incidents associated with farmer–herder conflict have been linked to kidnapping, banditry, organised crime, and communal violence, thereby complicating government responses and reducing public confidence in state security institutions (Inimiesi, 2025). This evolution has expanded the conflict's geographical spread from the northern states to the Middle Belt and parts of southern Nigeria, making it a national rather than a purely regional security issue.

Interpretation

The reviewed literature demonstrates that the Fulani herder–farmer conflict has evolved from a traditional livelihood dispute into a complex and multidimensional security crisis. This transformation reflects the interaction of environmental pressures, demographic change, institutional weaknesses, and the increasing availability of illicit weapons, all of which have intensified the scale and complexity of the violence. These findings strongly support the assumptions of Social Conflict Theory, which maintains that unresolved competition over scarce resources, combined with ineffective institutional regulation, creates conditions for prolonged and increasingly violent conflict. The evolution of the conflict, therefore, highlights the need for

comprehensive policy responses that address both its structural drivers and its broader implications for Nigeria's national security and sustainable development.

Changing Dynamics

Analysis

The thematic analysis of the reviewed literature indicates that the Fulani herder–farmer conflict has undergone significant changes in its nature, causes, and manifestations. While the conflict was historically characterised by seasonal disputes over grazing routes and farmland, contemporary evidence shows it has become increasingly complex, encompassing environmental challenges, criminal activity, ethnic tensions, political interests, and governance failures. The literature further suggests that these changing dynamics have complicated conflict management efforts and increased the severity of its implications for national security and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Discussion

The reviewed literature demonstrates that the dynamics of the Fulani herder–farmer conflict have shifted considerably from traditional livelihood disputes to a multidimensional security challenge. Historically, conflicts were largely driven by disagreements over crop destruction, grazing routes, and access to water resources, with disputes often resolved through customary institutions and local mediation. However, increasing environmental degradation, population growth, and agricultural expansion have altered traditional patterns of interaction between herders and farming communities, making peaceful coexistence increasingly difficult (Nkwede et al., 2018).

Recent studies indicate that climate change has significantly reshaped pastoral migration patterns and intensified competition for scarce natural resources. Inimiesi (2025) argues that desertification, prolonged drought, and declining pasture availability in northern Nigeria have compelled many pastoralists to migrate farther south, where rising agricultural activity has reduced grazing land. Similarly, Njoku et al. (2026) contend that climate-induced migration has not only increased the frequency of farmer–herder encounters

but has also contributed to declining agricultural productivity, food insecurity, and rural displacement. These findings suggest that environmental pressures continue to alter both the geographical distribution and intensity of the conflict.

The literature also reveals that the conflict has become increasingly intertwined with broader forms of organised violence and criminality. Inimiesi (2025) observes that the proliferation of illicit small arms, cattle rustling, kidnapping, banditry, and organised criminal networks has significantly changed the character of the conflict. Rather than involving isolated confrontations between herders and farmers, many incidents now involve heavily armed groups capable of carrying out coordinated attacks on rural communities. This development has complicated security responses and blurred the distinction between communal conflict and organised crime.

Another emerging dimension identified in the literature is the growing influence of political, ethnic, and governance-related factors. Nwankwo (2020) argues that weak land administration, unresolved property rights, and inconsistent government responses have contributed to public distrust and intensified tensions among affected communities. Adzande (2021) further notes that many peacebuilding initiatives have failed because they were designed around earlier patterns of resource conflict and did not adequately reflect the evolving realities of the crisis. As a result, interventions based solely on dialogue and mediation have often proved insufficient in addressing deeper structural and institutional drivers.

Furthermore, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises the importance of inclusive and community-based approaches to peacebuilding. Okoh et al. (2025) emphasise that traditional institutions continue to play a vital role in rebuilding trust and facilitating local conflict resolution, while Ojo et al. (2026) argue that sustainable peace requires greater recognition of pastoralists' perspectives and stronger community participation in peacebuilding initiatives. These studies suggest that the changing dynamics of the conflict demand equally dynamic and inclusive

policy responses that combine security measures with social, economic, and institutional reforms.

Interpretation

The reviewed literature demonstrates that the Fulani herder–farmer conflict has become increasingly dynamic and multidimensional, extending beyond competition for land and water to encompass climate change, organised criminality, governance failures, and socio-political tensions. These evolving dynamics explain why conventional conflict management strategies have achieved only limited success. From the perspective of Social Conflict Theory, the transformation of conflict reflects the interaction among structural inequalities, institutional weaknesses, and intensified competition for scarce resources. Consequently, sustainable conflict management requires integrated approaches that address environmental sustainability, institutional reform, inclusive governance, and community-based peacebuilding rather than relying solely on security-based interventions.

VI. GOVERNMENT RESPONSES AND PEACEBUILDING

Introductory Analysis

The thematic analysis of the reviewed literature reveals that successive Nigerian governments have implemented a range of policy measures and peacebuilding initiatives to address the persistent Fulani herder–farmer conflict. These interventions include legislative reforms, anti-open-grazing policies, security operations, ranching initiatives, community dialogue, traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, and peace education programmes. Despite these efforts, the conflict continues to threaten national security and sustainable development, suggesting that many existing interventions have not adequately addressed the structural, environmental, institutional, and socio-economic factors that sustain the crisis. Consequently, the literature suggests that effective conflict management requires an integrated approach that combines security, governance, environmental sustainability, and community participation.

Government Policies

Analysis

The thematic analysis indicates that government responses have largely centred on legislative reforms, security operations, and institutional policies aimed at reducing violent confrontations between herders and farmers.

Discussion

Successive Nigerian governments have introduced various policy measures to manage the Fulani herder–farmer conflict. These include anti-open grazing laws enacted by several state governments, military and police operations in conflict-prone areas, the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), and various dialogue initiatives involving stakeholders in the livestock and agricultural sectors. According to Muhammed et al. (2023), government interventions such as increased security presence, restrictions on illicit weapons, arrests of perpetrators, humanitarian assistance, and support for ranching have contributed to improved peacebuilding outcomes in some rural communities.

Similarly, Mamman (2021) argues that government policies that promote sustainable livestock management and peaceful coexistence are essential to achieving national development and the Sustainable Development Goals. However, Adejumo and Mohammed (2026) contend that although anti-open grazing laws and local security initiatives represent important policy innovations, their implementation has often been undermined by weak coordination, corruption, political interference, and institutional limitations. Nwankwo (2020) further maintains that weaknesses in land administration and inconsistent policy implementation have reduced the effectiveness of government interventions.

Interpretation

The reviewed literature suggests that government policies demonstrate a commitment to addressing the conflict but have produced mixed outcomes due to implementation challenges. Sustainable policy success, therefore, depends not only on legislation but also on effective governance, institutional capacity, and consistent enforcement.

6.5.1 Ranching

Analysis

The thematic analysis identifies ranching as one of the most widely recommended long-term strategies for reducing violent competition over grazing land and promoting sustainable livestock production.

Discussion

Unlike open grazing, ranching provides controlled grazing systems that minimise crop destruction and reduce farmer–herder interactions. Muhammed et al. (2023) argue that government-supported ranches can significantly improve peacebuilding outcomes by reducing resource-based conflicts while increasing livestock productivity. Similarly, Mamman (2021) identifies ranching as a practical strategy that can promote peaceful coexistence and support sustainable national development.

Bakari and Abdullahi (2025) further argue that ranching should be complemented by well-developed grazing infrastructure, veterinary services, water facilities, and supportive government policies to ensure long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, the literature also recognises that financial constraints, resistance from some pastoral communities, inadequate infrastructure, and inconsistent government commitment remain significant barriers to successful implementation.

Interpretation

The reviewed evidence suggests that ranching offers significant potential to reduce conflict by addressing one of its primary structural causes—competition over land resources. However, successful implementation requires substantial investment, stakeholder participation, and long-term government commitment.

6.5.2 Traditional Institutions

Analysis

The analysis reveals that traditional institutions remain important mechanisms for local conflict prevention, mediation, and reconciliation.

Discussion

Traditional rulers, community elders, religious leaders, and local associations continue to play

significant roles in resolving disputes between farmers and pastoralists. Okoh et al. (2025) argue that indigenous mediation mechanisms strengthen trust, encourage dialogue, and promote social cohesion within affected communities. Similarly, Muhammed et al. (2023) observe that community participation and local leadership improve peacebuilding outcomes because local actors possess better knowledge of community dynamics and enjoy greater legitimacy than external institutions.

Traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms also facilitate negotiation, compensation, and reconciliation, thereby reducing the likelihood of retaliatory violence. Their continued relevance demonstrates that sustainable peacebuilding should integrate customary institutions alongside formal government structures.

Interpretation

The reviewed literature demonstrates that traditional institutions complement formal governance by providing culturally legitimate and community-based approaches to conflict resolution. Their inclusion is therefore essential for building lasting peace in rural communities.

Peace Education

Analysis

The thematic analysis further identifies peace education as an important non-violent strategy for addressing the behavioural and attitudinal dimensions of the conflict.

Discussion

Peace education promotes tolerance, dialogue, mutual understanding, and non-violent conflict resolution among competing groups. Terlumun and Manasseh (2025) argue that peace education can significantly reduce hostility by developing conflict-resolution skills, encouraging intergroup dialogue, and promoting respect for cultural diversity. Similarly, Adzande (2021) contends that many peacebuilding initiatives fail because they inadequately address mistrust, exclusion, and poor conflict analysis. Consequently, educational programmes that encourage dialogue and reconciliation should complement security-based interventions.

Peace education also provides opportunities for community sensitisation, youth engagement, and intergroup cooperation, thereby reducing stereotypes and strengthening peaceful coexistence.

Interpretation

The reviewed evidence suggests that sustainable peace requires changing attitudes and relationships in addition to resolving immediate disputes. Peace education, therefore, represents an important long-term investment in conflict prevention and social cohesion.

Policy Gaps

Analysis

Despite numerous interventions, the thematic analysis indicates that significant policy and institutional gaps continue to undermine peacebuilding efforts.

Discussion

Adzande (2021) argues that many peacebuilding initiatives fail because they are based on inadequate conflict analysis and insufficient stakeholder participation. Similarly, Adejumo and Mohammed (2026) identify weak institutional coordination, corruption, inconsistent implementation, and limited community involvement as major obstacles to effective conflict management. Muhammed et al. (2023) further emphasise that fragmented government responses often fail to integrate humanitarian assistance, security reforms, climate adaptation, and rural development into a comprehensive policy framework.

Ojo et al. (2026) also observe that sustainable peacebuilding requires greater recognition of pastoralists' experiences, improved dialogue, and stronger community ownership of peace initiatives. Collectively, these findings suggest that many existing interventions address the symptoms rather than the underlying structural causes of the conflict.

Interpretation

The reviewed literature demonstrates that policy effectiveness depends less on the number of interventions than on their quality, coordination, inclusiveness, and implementation. Addressing

governance failures, institutional weaknesses, and environmental pressures remains essential for achieving sustainable peace.

Overall Interpretation

The thematic analysis demonstrates that government responses to the Fulani herder–farmer conflict have become increasingly diverse, encompassing legislative reforms, ranching initiatives, security operations, traditional mediation, and peace education programmes. However, the persistence of violent conflict suggests that these interventions have achieved only partial success, as they often fail to address the conflict's structural drivers comprehensively. From the perspective of Social Conflict Theory, sustainable peace cannot be achieved solely through coercive security measures or isolated policy initiatives. Rather, effective conflict management requires reducing competition over scarce resources, strengthening governance institutions, improving land administration, promoting climate adaptation, encouraging inclusive dialogue, and enhancing community participation. Accordingly, an integrated peacebuilding framework that combines security, development, institutional reform, and environmental sustainability offers the most viable pathway toward lasting peace and sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance sustainable peace, strengthen national security, and promote national development in Nigeria:

1. Strengthen land administration and property rights

The Federal and State Governments should strengthen land administration systems by clearly defining and enforcing land ownership rights, grazing routes where appropriate, and land-use regulations. Transparent land governance would reduce disputes arising from competing land claims and minimise violent confrontations between herders and farmers.

2. Promote sustainable ranching systems

The government should accelerate the implementation of sustainable ranching programmes through adequate funding, provision of veterinary

services, water infrastructure, grazing facilities, and access to credit for pastoralists. Transitioning from open grazing to modern livestock production would significantly reduce competition over land resources and improve livestock productivity.

3. Invest in climate change adaptation and environmental management

Given the role of climate change and environmental degradation in driving pastoral migration, the government should invest in climate adaptation programmes, afforestation, irrigation, water conservation, and restoration of degraded grazing lands, particularly in northern Nigeria. Such interventions would reduce environmental pressures that contribute to farmer–herder conflicts.

4. Strengthen security institutions and intelligence gathering

Security agencies should improve intelligence gathering, early warning systems, rapid response mechanisms, and coordinated law enforcement in conflict-prone communities. Greater control of illicit arms and impartial enforcement of the law would help prevent the escalation of local disputes into widespread violence.

5. Enhance community-based peacebuilding through traditional institutions

Traditional rulers, religious leaders, farmers' associations, pastoralist groups, and community-based organisations should be formally integrated into conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives. Their local legitimacy and knowledge of community dynamics make them valuable partners in mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation.

6. Institutionalise peace education and conflict resolution programmes

Peace education should be integrated into schools, community development programmes, and extension services to promote tolerance, dialogue, non-violent conflict resolution, and mutual understanding between pastoralists and farming communities. Public awareness campaigns should also encourage peaceful coexistence and reduce ethnic stereotypes.

7. Improve policy coordination and implementation

The government should establish an integrated national framework that coordinates the activities of relevant ministries, security agencies, local governments, and development partners. Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should accompany policy implementation to ensure accountability and improve programme effectiveness.

8. Promote inclusive stakeholder participation

Conflict management policies should be developed through broad consultation with farmers, pastoralists, traditional institutions, civil society organisations, women's groups, youth representatives, and local communities. Inclusive participation would enhance policy legitimacy, strengthen trust, and improve compliance with peacebuilding initiatives.

9. Support rural livelihoods and agricultural development

The government should provide financial support, agricultural inputs, extension services, rural infrastructure, and livelihood diversification programmes for conflict-affected communities. Strengthening rural economies would reduce poverty, improve food security, and lessen competition over scarce resources.

10. Encourage continuous research and evidence-based policymaking

Universities, research institutions, and government agencies should collaborate to generate reliable data on the changing dynamics of the Fulani herder–farmer conflict. Regular monitoring and evidence-based policy evaluation would enable governments to design more responsive and sustainable conflict management strategies.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study examined the Fulani herder–farmer conflict and its implications for national development in Nigeria through a qualitative analysis of existing literature. The study was undertaken against the backdrop of the persistent escalation of violent confrontations between pastoralists and farming communities, which have increasingly undermined Nigeria's security, agricultural productivity, and

socio-economic development. Using Social Conflict Theory as its analytical framework, the study analysed the underlying drivers of the conflict, its implications for national development, and the effectiveness of existing government responses and peacebuilding initiatives.

The findings demonstrate that the Fulani herder–farmer conflict has evolved from relatively localised disputes over grazing land and water resources into a complex national security and development challenge. Although competition over scarce natural resources remains the immediate trigger of many confrontations, the persistence and increasing intensity of the conflict are sustained by broader structural factors, including climate change, environmental degradation, rapid population growth, weak governance, ineffective land administration, proliferation of illicit arms, and inadequate conflict management mechanisms. These interconnected factors have transformed the conflict into a multidimensional crisis that extends beyond agriculture, affecting virtually every aspect of national development.

The study further established that the consequences of the conflict are profound and far-reaching. Persistent violence has disrupted agricultural production, undermined food security, displaced rural populations, weakened livelihoods, destroyed public and private infrastructure, discouraged investment, and imposed high economic and humanitarian costs on the Nigerian state. Beyond its immediate socio-economic consequences, the conflict has eroded social cohesion, weakened public confidence in state institutions, and complicated efforts to achieve sustainable development. These findings reinforce the view that the Fulani herder–farmer conflict is not merely a rural resource dispute but a broader governance and development challenge requiring comprehensive policy attention.

The study also found that while successive governments and other stakeholders have introduced several interventions—including anti-open grazing policies, security operations, ranching initiatives, traditional mediation mechanisms, and peacebuilding programmes—the effectiveness of these responses

has remained limited due to weak implementation, inadequate institutional coordination, poor stakeholder participation, and insufficient attention to the structural drivers of the conflict. Sustainable peace, therefore, requires integrated interventions that combine improved governance, climate adaptation, effective land administration, community participation, peace education, and institutional reforms.

From the perspective of Social Conflict Theory, the findings confirm that violent conflict emerges when competing groups struggle over scarce resources within institutional environments that cannot regulate access fairly and effectively. Consequently, addressing only the immediate manifestations of violence without resolving the underlying structural inequalities and governance deficiencies is unlikely to produce lasting peace. Sustainable conflict management must therefore focus on reducing resource-based competition while strengthening institutions that promote equity, justice, and peaceful coexistence.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on the Fulani herder–farmer conflict by providing an integrated qualitative analysis that synthesises the conflict's causes, developmental implications, and peacebuilding responses within a single analytical framework. Unlike many previous studies that examined these dimensions separately, this study demonstrates how environmental pressures, governance failures, socio-economic conditions, and institutional weaknesses interact to shape both the persistence of the conflict and its implications for national development. It concludes that achieving sustainable peace and national development in Nigeria will depend on comprehensive, inclusive, and evidence-based policies that address both the immediate and structural causes of the conflict while promoting peaceful coexistence, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the Fulani herder–farmer conflict by providing an integrated qualitative synthesis of its

historical evolution, drivers, developmental implications, and peacebuilding responses within a single analytical framework. Unlike previous studies that have examined these dimensions separately, this study demonstrates how environmental pressures, governance failures, and institutional weaknesses interact to sustain the conflict and impede national development. The findings provide evidence-based insights that can inform policy formulation, peacebuilding practice, and future research on conflict management and sustainable development in Nigeria.

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