

Farmer/Herder Conflict and the State and Non- State Actors Responses in Plateau State

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Abstract- Farmer–herder conflict remains a persistent security, socioeconomic, and humanitarian challenge in Plateau State, Nigeria. This study examined the nature and dynamics of the conflict, the key state and non-state actors involved, and the strategies employed in managing it. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with structured questionnaires administered to 400 respondents across six purposively selected Local Government Areas Jos South, Mangu, Barkin Ladi, Bassa, Bokkos, and Riyom. A total of 396 valid questionnaires were returned, representing a 99% response rate, and the data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. Findings revealed that competition over land resources, crop damage by cattle, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, environmental pressures, ethnic and religious differences, cattle rustling, and historical grievances were major dimensions of the conflict, with significant consequences including loss of lives, livelihoods, and displacement. Traditional rulers and community leaders were perceived as the most prominent actors in conflict mediation, while federal security agencies, farmers' and herders' associations, government institutions, NGOs, and faith-based organisations also played important roles. Overall, conflict-management strategies recorded a moderate assessment, with cattle ranches or grazing reserves, military intervention, and peace-building initiatives receiving relatively favourable ratings, while weaknesses were identified in land-use law implementation, inter-actor coordination, community participation, and overall improvement in the conflict situation. The study concludes that sustainable management of farmer–herder conflict requires stronger coordination among state and non-state actors, improved land-use governance, greater community participation, effective early-warning mechanisms, and integrated approaches that address both the immediate security threats and underlying causes of the conflict.

Keywords: farmer–herder conflict, state actors, non-state actors, conflict management, Plateau State, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict from ancient times has been a regular feature of human social dynamics since it reflects a complicated combination of personal and group interests, beliefs, and perceptions. According to Ramsbotham et al. (2016), conflict results from actual or apparent antagonism of wants, interests, and values, thereby generating a condition of discord that may show up in many spheres including social, political, and economical ones. Historically, the African continent has been a scene of various and complicated conflicts starting from many linked elements including colonial legacy, ethnic tensions, resource competitiveness, and government issues. These wars have seriously impeded society's growth, brought about significant personal pain, financial crisis, and long-term social alienation. Notable examples include the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 took almost 800,000 lives and the protracted civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone demonstrate the terrible force of unresolved issues (Prunier, 2017; Gberie, 2015).

Particularly in the Middle Belt area of Nigeria where environmental, economic, and cultural elements interact, the herders-farmers conflict poses a particularly important modern problem. This conflict mostly consists of nomadic Fulani herders whose traditional means of existence have become progressively incompatible due of environmental changes, population increase, and resource limits, and of sedentary farming communities. By changing established migration tracks and limiting accessible pasture and agricultural areas, climate change has raised these conflicts and driven herders to search other paths and territories (Werrell & Femia, 2017). Based on Adamu and Rasheed's 2021 research, changed rainfall patterns and desertification had mostly caused 47% of the northern Nigerian

sustainable pastureland to disappear between 1975 and 2020. This environmental change has caused approximately 1.4 million pastoralists southward into agricultural land, therefore aggravating competition for little resources (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2020). Along with population growth from 45 million in 1960 to over 200 million in 2020, Nigeria's land pressure has been greatly raised and traditional resource-sharing practices have been changed (National Population Commission, 2020). With an estimated 350,000 illegal firearms floating in Nigeria's Middle Belt area, the spread of tiny weapons has militarized once under control conflicts. These linked pressures have turned small resource conflicts into sophisticated, multi-dimensional conflicts with major security and humanitarian consequences.

Plateau State herders-farmers struggle with a range of disputes with complex connections among natural, social, political, and financial elements. Progressive weakening of conventional conflict resolution systems has left a void open for state and non-state players to strive to suitably control. Complicating efforts at conflict resolution are public communication's collapse, spread of small weapons, and poor institutional responses. This circumstance calls for a full grasp of the responsibilities and efficiency of several participants in controlling and reducing these complicated tensions. Ibrahim and Kuden's 2019 empirical research found significant institutional fragmentation in conflict reaction systems whereby government agencies, security forces, civil society organizations, and traditional authority lacked much coordination. Complete conflict management is compromised by repeated efforts, strategic conflicts, and required intervention gaps brought about by fragmentation. Research by Alemika and Omotoso (2021) also underlined the need of more integrated and cooperative approaches to handle the complex dynamics of herders-farmers conflicts in Plateau State since research by Alemika and Omotoso (2021) showed how competing institutional mandates and resource constraints had hampered the development of coherent, sustainable conflict resolving strategies.

Statement of the Problem

The continuous herders-farmers conflict in Plateau State poses a major humanitarian and security danger

given recorded losses between 2016 and 2020 exceeding 7,000 deaths (International Crisis Group, 2021). Even with various government agency, security force, and civil society group projects, the dispute becomes more severe suggesting underlying problems in current techniques of resolution. Over 300,000 people over the Middle Belt have been displaced; agricultural output worth at over ₦400 billion has been lost; this continuous fighting has seriously damaged local socioeconomic systems (Mohammed & Ibrahim, 2021; Adebayo et al., 2019). The continuous deterioration of security conditions raises fundamental questions about strategic coordination and intervention effectiveness even with major resources devoted to conflict avoidance.

Research on the conflict between herders-farmers highlight significant knowledge gaps on the comprehensive evaluation of intervention measures and their outcomes. Though many research on conflict origins and dynamics (Okeke & Chukwuma, 2021; Ibrahim & Abdu, 2018) pay less attention to completely assessing the success of the many actor interventions. Usually using a disconnected approach, past research focus on either governmental institutions or civil society projects without adequately assessing their complementary links and their synergies (Yakubu & Mohammed, 2020; Olatunji & Falola, 2018). This knowledge gap makes it difficult to create integrated conflict management methods employing the relative benefits of various stakeholders inside a coordinated resolution architecture.

Lack of evidence-based assessment of intervention possibilities greatly affects the development and implementation of policies. Without comprehensive study of current approaches, policymakers and practitioners overlook necessary insights needed for strategic adaptation and reform of conflict management systems. As demographic pressures challenge accepted land-use practices and climate change raises resource competitiveness, effective conflict resolution solutions become increasingly important (Werrell & Femia, 2017). This study closes in these crucial knowledge gaps and so offers required insights for developing more sophisticated, integrated, and contextually appropriate conflict transformation strategies addressing the complex interaction of

environmental, economic, and sociopolitical factors driving the herders-farmers conflict in Plateau State by means of a comprehensive evaluation of the roles and efficacy of state and non-state actors.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess the roles and effectiveness of state and non-state actors in addressing the herders-farmers conflict in Plateau State, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- i. Examine the nature and dynamics of the herders-farmers conflict in Plateau State
- ii. Identify key state and non-state actors involved in addressing the conflict
- iii. Analyze strategies and interventions employed by these actors in managing the conflict

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What is the nature and dynamics of the herders-farmers conflict in Plateau State?
- ii. Who are the key state and non-state actors involved in addressing the conflict?
- iii. What strategies and interventions have these actors employed in managing the conflict?

II. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Conflict

Etymologically, the term "conflict" comes from the Latin word "confligere," which means to strike together or clash, therefore implying a basic interaction of opposing forces or ideas. Beyond simple confrontational knowledge, conflict is a multifaceted phenomenon in scholarly argument reflecting a complex social process comprising many interests, values, and interactions among persons, groups, or institutions.

Farmers

Farmers are individuals or groups whose primary livelihood is derived from the cultivation of land for the production of crops, including food crops, cash crops, and sometimes fodder for livestock. This agricultural practice is typically sedentary, involving settled communities with established land tenure systems, whether customary or formal. Farming

encompasses a range of activities from land preparation, planting, weeding, and pest control to harvesting, storage, and marketing of agricultural produce.

Herders

Herders, also commonly referred to as pastoralists or livestock keepers, are individuals or groups whose primary livelihood revolves around the rearing and management of livestock, typically cattle, but also including sheep, goats, and other animals. A defining characteristic of many herding groups, particularly in regions like West Africa, is mobility, which can range from transhumance (seasonal movement between fixed pastures) to full nomadism (continuous movement without permanent settlement) in search of pasture and water for their animals (Blench, 2004).

Farmers-Herdsman Conflict

The word "farmers-herdsmen conflict" was originally used in reference to the interaction that took place in the past between communities of sedentary farmers and pastoral tribes of nomadic people. The relationship in question is a complex socio-ecological problem that has its origins firmly planted in the patterns of land utilization, the access to resources, and the cultural configurations that are already in place.

State Actors

State actors, in the context of governance and conflict, refer to individuals, institutions, and agencies that are formally part of the governmental structure and exercise legitimate authority and power on behalf of the state. These include elected officials (such as presidents, governors, legislators), appointed government functionaries (ministers, civil servants), security agencies (police, military, intelligence services), and judicial bodies (courts, judges).

Non-State Actors

Non-state actors (NSAs) constitute a broad category of individuals, groups, and organizations that operate outside of direct governmental control but can exert significant influence on societal dynamics, including conflict and peace processes. This diverse group includes civil society organizations (CSOs) such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based

organizations (FBOs), traditional and customary institutions (e.g., traditional rulers, elders' councils), ethnic associations, and armed non-state actors like militias or insurgent groups.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Protracted Social Conflict Theory

The Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) theory was pioneered by Edward Azar in 1983, emerging as a critical theoretical framework for understanding prolonged and complex social conflicts. Azar developed this theory to explain persistent conflicts that transcend immediate political or economic disputes, focusing on deeper societal tensions rooted in fundamental human needs and structural inequalities. Originally conceptualized in the context of international relations and ethnic conflicts, the theory has been extensively utilized across various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, peace studies, and conflict resolution.

Human Needs Theory

The Human Needs Theory was predominantly developed by John Burton in the 1960s and 1970s, emerging as a critical approach in conflict resolution and peace studies. Burton proposed that conflicts fundamentally arise from unmet human needs that extend beyond material resources, encompassing psychological and existential requirements such as identity, security, recognition, and personal development. Originally conceptualized in the field of international relations, the theory has been extensively applied across disciplines including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and conflict resolution studies.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to comprehensively investigate the roles and effectiveness of state and non-state actors in addressing the herders-farmers conflict in Plateau State, Nigeria, between 2016 and 2024

Population and Sample Size

the target population comprised all key stakeholders who were directly involved in or affected by the herders-farmers conflict in Plateau State during the period 2016 to 2024. This population included, but was not limited to, members of farming communities, pastoral communities, traditional rulers, community leaders, religious leaders, local government officials, state government functionaries, representatives of security agencies, members of non-governmental organizations working on peacebuilding, representatives of farmers' associations, representatives of herders' associations, and ordinary residents of conflict-affected areas across the 17 Local Government Areas of Plateau State. Given the widespread nature of the conflict and the multiplicity of actors involved, the total population was heterogeneous, geographically dispersed, and impractically large for exhaustive study within the constraints of time, resources, and accessibility, particularly in areas experiencing active security threats.

The sample size for this study was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for calculating sample size from a finite population, which is widely accepted in social science research for its simplicity and reliability. Yamane's formula is expressed as: $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$, where 'n' represents the required sample size, 'N' represents the total population size, and 'e' represents the acceptable margin of error or level of precision. For this study, the researcher set the confidence level at 95% and the margin of error at 0.05 (5%), which are standard parameters in social science research that balance statistical rigor with practical feasibility (Nardi, 2018). Given the large and undefined nature of the total stakeholder population across Plateau State's conflict zones, the researcher adopted a conservative approach by assuming a sufficiently large population to warrant the use of Yamane's formula at maximum variance. Applying the formula: $n = N / (1 + N(0.05)^2)$. For a very large population approaching infinity, this calculation yields a sample size of approximately 400 respondents.

Therefore, the study targeted 400 respondents across the six purposively selected Local Government Areas (Jos South, Mangu, Barkin Ladi, Bassa, Bokkos, and

Riyom) to ensure adequate representation of diverse perspectives and experiences regarding the conflict and interventions. This sample size was considered sufficient to achieve statistical significance, allow for meaningful subgroup analysis across different stakeholder categories and geographical locations, and provide findings that could be generalized to the broader population of conflict-affected communities in Plateau State with reasonable confidence (Fowler, 2014).

Following the administration of 400 questionnaires across the selected study sites, 396 questionnaires were duly completed and returned to the researcher, representing a response rate of 99%. This exceptionally high response rate was attributed to several factors including the direct administration method employed whereby trained research assistants personally delivered questionnaires to respondents and waited to collect them immediately or within a short agreed timeframe; the relevance of the research topic to the lived experiences of respondents who demonstrated keen interest in contributing to knowledge that could inform better conflict management strategies; the assurances of confidentiality and anonymity provided to respondents; and the involvement of local community leaders and trusted intermediaries who facilitated access to respondents and vouched for the legitimacy of the research (Groves et al., 2009).

Only four questionnaires out of the 400 administered were not returned or were returned with incomplete or unusable data, likely due to respondent attrition, challenges in accessing certain individuals for follow-up, or respondents' change of mind about participation. The 99% response rate was considered excellent by survey research standards, where response rates above 70% are generally deemed acceptable and rates above 85% are considered very good (Babbie, 2020). This high response rate minimized the risk of non-response bias, which occurs when individuals who choose not to participate differ systematically from those who do participate, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample and the validity of the study's findings.

Data Collection Methods

This study, the primary method of data collection involved the direct administration of structured questionnaires to respondents across the six selected Local Government Areas in Plateau State. The data collection process was carefully planned and executed over a period of six weeks between April and May 2025, following the approval of the research proposal and the granting of ethical clearance from the Taraba State University Research Ethics Committee. Prior to commencing data collection, the researcher recruited and trained a team of six research assistants, one assigned to each of the selected LGAs.

A three-day intensive training workshop was conducted for the research assistants, during which they were oriented to the objectives of the study, the content and structure of the questionnaire, proper techniques for administering questionnaires, ethical considerations including informed consent and confidentiality, strategies for handling difficult respondents or sensitive situations, and safety protocols given the potential security risks in some conflict-affected areas (Groves et al., 2009). Following the training, the research assistants conducted practice sessions among themselves and with volunteer respondents to build confidence and competence in questionnaire administration.

Prior to entering communities for data collection, formal permissions and letters of introduction were obtained from relevant authorities including the Plateau State Government, Local Government Chairmen, and traditional rulers in the study areas, which facilitated community access and enhanced the legitimacy and acceptance of the research team (Babbie, 2020). In each LGA, the research assistant worked closely with community leaders, local government officials, and representatives of relevant associations (farmers' groups, herders' groups, youth groups, women's groups) to identify potential respondents who met the sampling criteria and to schedule data collection sessions at convenient times and safe locations such as community halls, market squares, religious centers, or homes of respondents. The questionnaires were administered through face-to-face interactions in which the research assistant read out each question to respondents (particularly those

with limited literacy), explained the meaning where necessary, and recorded their responses directly on the questionnaire forms, a method that ensured high response rates, allowed for immediate clarification of misunderstandings, and enabled the research assistant to observe and address any difficulties respondents had with particular items (Fowler, 2014).

For literate respondents who preferred to complete the questionnaires themselves, the research assistants provided the questionnaires and remained available to answer questions and collect the completed forms. Ethical protocols were strictly observed throughout the data collection process, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, assuring them of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, explaining their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and ensuring that no monetary or material inducements were offered that

could constitute coercion (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.8 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected quantitative data were systematically analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, primarily simple percentages and frequency distributions. This method was defined as a way of summarizing and describing the basic features of the data in a study, providing simple summaries about the sample and the measures. The researcher utilized the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 for data entry, cleaning, and analysis. Each questionnaire item was transformed into percentage representations, allowing for a clear and concise interpretation of the respondents' perspectives on conflict actors and their interventions.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: What is the nature and dynamics of the herders-farmers conflict in Plateau State?

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	Competition over land resources is a primary cause of the conflict.	4.07	1.10	High agreement
2	Climate change and environmental degradation have significantly worsened the conflict.	3.86	1.11	High agreement
3	Crop damage by cattle is a major trigger for violent confrontations.	4.13	1.09	High agreement
4	Cattle rustling is a significant factor contributing to the conflict.	3.75	1.17	High agreement
5	Proliferation of small arms and light weapons has intensified the violence.	4.14	1.10	High agreement
6	Ethnic and religious differences have been exploited to fuel the conflict.	4.01	1.12	High agreement
7	The conflict has led to significant loss of lives and livelihoods for both herders and farmers.	4.35	0.89	Very high agreement
8	There has been an increase in violent clashes in Plateau State between 2016 and 2024.	4.08	1.10	High agreement
9	The conflict has resulted in widespread displacement of people in affected communities.	4.20	1.05	Very high agreement
10	Historical grievances between communities contribute to the ongoing conflict.	3.97	1.06	High agreement

The results show that respondents generally agreed with all ten statements, since every mean score is above the decision threshold of 3.00. The highest mean was recorded for loss of lives and livelihoods ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.89$), indicating that this was the most strongly perceived consequence of the conflict. This was followed by widespread displacement ($M = 4.20$,

$SD = 1.05$) and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.10$). Respondents also strongly agreed that crop damage by cattle ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.09$), increased violent clashes between 2016 and 2024 ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.10$), and competition over land resources ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.10$) contributed substantially to the conflict. Although cattle rustling

(M = 3.75, SD = 1.17) recorded the lowest mean, it still exceeded the acceptance threshold, suggesting that respondents considered it a significant factor. Overall, the findings suggest that farmer–herder conflict in Plateau State is multidimensional, involving competition over land, environmental pressures, livestock-related disputes, arms proliferation, socio-cultural tensions, and historical

grievances. The relatively high mean scores across the items indicate a strong consensus among respondents regarding the major causes and consequences of the conflict.

RQ2: Who are the key state and non-state actors involved in addressing the conflict?

Table 4.3: Key State and Non-State Actors Involved in Addressing the Conflict (N = 396)

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
11	The Plateau State Government has been a key actor in efforts to resolve the conflict.	3.97	1.10	High agreement
12	Federal government security agencies (Army, Police) have played a significant role.	4.02	1.12	High agreement
13	Local government authorities have been actively involved in peace-building.	3.56	1.20	High agreement
14	Traditional rulers and community leaders are important actors in mediating disputes.	4.23	0.97	Very high agreement
15	Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have made valuable contributions.	3.77	1.11	High agreement
16	Faith-based organizations have played a constructive role in dialogue and reconciliation.	3.83	1.11	High agreement
17	Community-based vigilante groups have been involved in security provisioning.	3.84	1.18	High agreement
18	Farmers' associations are key actors representing farming communities.	4.00	1.07	High agreement
19	Herders' associations (e.g., Miyetti Allah) are key actors representing herding communities.	3.91	1.12	High agreement
20	International organizations have shown sufficient interest and involvement.	2.91	1.27	Moderate disagreement
Overall	Overall assessment	3.80	1.11	High agreement

The results indicate that respondents generally perceived state and non-state actors as actively involved in addressing the farmer–herder conflict, with an overall mean of 3.80. Traditional rulers and community leaders recorded the highest mean (M = 4.23, SD = 0.97), suggesting that they were regarded as the most important actors in dispute mediation. Federal security agencies (M = 4.02, SD = 1.12) and farmers' associations (M = 4.00, SD = 1.07) also received strong levels of agreement. The Plateau State Government (M = 3.97, SD = 1.10), herders' associations (M = 3.91, SD = 1.12), community-based vigilante groups (M = 3.84, SD = 1.18), faith-based organizations (M = 3.83, SD = 1.11), and NGOs (M = 3.77, SD = 1.11) were similarly perceived as

contributing to conflict management. Local government authorities recorded the lowest mean among the actors receiving positive ratings (M = 3.56, SD = 1.20). In contrast, international organizations recorded a mean of 2.91 (SD = 1.27), indicating comparatively limited perceived involvement. Overall, the findings suggest that community-based and governmental actors are perceived as more prominent in conflict management than international organizations, with traditional institutions occupying a particularly important position in local mediation.

RQ3: What strategies and interventions have these actors employed in managing the conflict?

Table 1: Strategies and Interventions Employed in Managing the Conflict (N = 396)

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
21	Military intervention has been effective in reducing violence in the short term.	3.60	1.22	High agreement
22	Dialogue and mediation by state actors have led to sustainable peace agreements.	3.21	1.26	Moderate agreement
23	Peace-building initiatives by non-state actors have been effective in fostering inter-community trust.	3.58	1.17	High agreement
24	Establishment of cattle ranches or grazing reserves is a viable strategy.	3.71	1.22	High agreement
25	Existing legal frameworks for land use are adequately implemented.	2.70	1.28	Moderate agreement
26	Early warning and response mechanisms have been effective in preventing escalations.	3.07	1.27	Moderate agreement
27	Livelihood support programmes have helped reduce tensions.	3.45	1.22	High agreement
28	Interventions by various actors have been well-coordinated and complementary.	2.91	1.25	Moderate agreement
29	There is sufficient community participation in conflict management strategies.	3.13	1.27	Moderate agreement
30	Strategies have led to significant overall improvement in the conflict situation (2016–2024).	2.80	1.29	Moderate agreement
Overall	Overall assessment	3.22	1.25	Moderate agreement

The results reveal a moderate overall assessment of the strategies employed to manage the farmer–herder conflict ($M = 3.22$). The most positively assessed strategy was the establishment of cattle ranches or grazing reserves ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.22$), followed by military intervention in reducing short-term violence ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.22$) and peace-building initiatives by non-state actors ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.17$). Livelihood support programmes also received relatively strong support ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.22$). However, respondents expressed less confidence in the implementation of existing land-use laws ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.28$), overall improvement in the conflict situation ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.29$), and coordination among different actors ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.25$). This suggests that although several interventions have produced some positive outcomes, weak implementation, limited coordination, and insufficiently sustained results remain important challenges. The findings therefore indicate a need to move beyond short-term security responses toward more coordinated approaches combining dialogue, effective land-use governance, community participation, livelihood interventions, and sustained peace-building.

Summary of Findings and Interpretation

The findings on the strategies and interventions employed in managing the farmer–herder conflict in Plateau State indicate that respondents perceived the overall effectiveness of conflict-management measures as moderate (overall $M = 3.22$). This suggests that although several interventions have contributed to containing the conflict, they have not yet produced sufficiently sustainable improvements. The relatively high rating for military intervention in reducing violence in the short term ($M = 3.60$) indicates that security responses may be effective for immediate containment but may not adequately address the underlying causes of the conflict. This finding is consistent with the earlier result that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons was strongly identified as a factor intensifying violence ($M = 4.14$). Thus, military intervention appears necessary for immediate security, but its effectiveness is likely constrained when structural drivers of conflict remain unresolved.

The establishment of cattle ranches or grazing reserves recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.71$), indicating

strong support for land-use arrangements as a conflict-management strategy. This finding relates directly to the earlier finding that competition over land resources ($M = 4.07$) and crop damage by cattle ($M = 4.13$) were major contributors to the conflict. The relationship between these findings suggests that respondents view improved management of land and grazing resources as an important pathway to reducing farmer–herder disputes. Similarly, peace-building initiatives by non-state actors ($M = 3.58$) and livelihood support programmes ($M = 3.45$) received relatively favourable assessments, corresponding with the earlier finding that traditional rulers and community leaders were regarded as the most important actors in conflict management ($M = 4.23$). This reinforces the importance of locally grounded approaches, particularly mediation, dialogue, and community-based peace-building.

However, the findings reveal important weaknesses in institutional and policy implementation. Respondents gave relatively low ratings to the adequacy of existing land-use law implementation ($M = 2.70$), coordination among intervention actors ($M = 2.91$), community participation ($M = 3.13$), and the overall improvement in the conflict situation between 2016 and 2024 ($M = 2.80$). These findings are particularly significant when considered alongside the earlier observation that international organizations had limited perceived involvement ($M = 2.91$) and that local government authorities received a comparatively lower rating among the identified actors ($M = 3.56$). Taken together, the results suggest that the principal challenge is not necessarily the absence of actors or interventions, but rather weak coordination, inconsistent implementation, limited community ownership, and inadequate translation of interventions into sustainable peace outcomes.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that farmer–herder conflict in Plateau State requires a multidimensional conflict-management framework. The earlier findings established that the conflict is driven by land competition, crop damage, environmental pressures, arms proliferation, historical grievances, and socio-cultural tensions. The present findings show that interventions addressing these factors directly—particularly land-use management, livelihood support,

community mediation, and peace-building—are more promising than approaches focused exclusively on coercive security measures. Therefore, sustainable conflict resolution will require stronger land governance, effective enforcement of relevant laws, improved early-warning mechanisms, greater participation of farmers and herders, and better coordination among government, traditional institutions, civil society, and security agencies.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The study examined farmer–herder conflict and the responses of state and non-state actors in Plateau State, Nigeria, based on three specific objectives. The first objective examined the nature and dynamics of the conflict. The findings established that the conflict is multidimensional, with competition over land resources, crop damage by cattle, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, climate change and environmental degradation, cattle rustling, ethnic and religious differences, and historical grievances constituting important factors. The conflict has also resulted in substantial loss of lives and livelihoods, violent clashes, and displacement of affected communities. This demonstrates that the farmer–herder conflict in Plateau State extends beyond disputes over agricultural and grazing resources and is influenced by broader environmental, socioeconomic, security, and communal factors.

The second objective identified the key state and non-state actors involved in addressing the conflict. The findings revealed that the Plateau State Government, federal security agencies, local government authorities, traditional rulers and community leaders, NGOs, faith-based organizations, community-based vigilante groups, farmers' associations, and herders' associations are involved in conflict management. Traditional rulers and community leaders were particularly prominent, indicating the importance of indigenous and community-based institutions in mediating disputes. The findings therefore suggest that addressing farmer–herder conflict requires the collective involvement of governmental institutions and community-based actors rather than reliance on security agencies alone.

The third objective analyzed the strategies and interventions employed by these actors. The findings showed that the strategies have produced moderate outcomes overall. Military intervention was perceived as effective in reducing violence in the short term, while the establishment of cattle ranches or grazing reserves, peace-building initiatives by non-state actors, and livelihood-support programmes received relatively favourable assessments. However, weaknesses were identified in the implementation of land-use laws, coordination among actors, community participation, early-warning mechanisms, and the overall improvement in the conflict situation. The study therefore concludes that although state and non-state actors have made significant efforts, their responses have not yet achieved sufficiently sustainable peace. Effective management of the conflict requires better coordination, stronger institutional implementation, greater community participation, and interventions that address the underlying causes of the conflict.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made in line with the three objectives:

- i. The Plateau State Government should address the underlying causes of farmer-herder conflict, particularly competition over land, crop damage, cattle rustling, environmental pressures, and access to grazing and water resources. Land-use planning should be strengthened, while appropriate grazing routes and livestock-management arrangements should be clearly defined in consultation with affected farming and herding communities. Measures should also be introduced to reduce the proliferation of small arms and prevent their use in communal disputes.
- ii. There should be stronger collaboration among the identified state and non-state actors. In particular, traditional rulers and community leaders should be adequately incorporated into formal conflict-resolution structures because of their strong local legitimacy and mediation roles. Farmers' and herders' associations, NGOs, faith-based organizations, security agencies, and local government

authorities should also be involved in regular dialogue and joint peace-building activities. A coordinated framework should be established to ensure that the activities of different actors are complementary rather than fragmented.

- iii. Conflict-management strategies should move beyond short-term military responses toward more sustainable interventions. Government and relevant stakeholders should strengthen dialogue and mediation, early-warning and early-response mechanisms, livelihood-support programmes, and community participation. The implementation of land-use laws and other relevant policies should be improved, while ranching or other appropriate livestock-management systems should be developed through inclusive consultation. Regular monitoring and evaluation should also be undertaken to determine whether interventions are actually reducing violence and improving relations between farming and herding communities.

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