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STRUCTURED SUMMARY

DEEP-ROOTED CAUSES OF FARMER–HERDER CONFLICTS AND IMPACT ON LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Cases from Sudan, Nigeria and Mali

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Motivation

Farmer–herder conflicts in Africa have received heightened attention in recent years in the media, academic circles and policy-making. Increasing and intensifying levels of conflict within and between groups has become a particular concern. Despite this attention, however, a systematic literature review of farmer–herder conflicts found only a few in-depth studies. Women and youth were under-represented in these studies.

Purpose

We sought to understand the root causes and impacts of farmer–herder conflicts and the linkages between these conflicts and food systems, while recognising the politicised nature of these conflicts.

Approach and methods

We chose three locations to study, based their known history of farmer–herder conflicts: in Sudan, Azaza Sogora Village, Gadarif State; in Nigeria, Jangargari Ward, Awe Local Government Area, Nasarawa State; and in Mali, Sio Commune, Mopti Region.

Between 2023 and 2025, we undertook focus group discussions (FGDs) using participatory appraisal tools to initiate and frame the discussions. These included stakeholder relationship mapping, timelines and conflict trees. Key informant interviews (KIIs) of stakeholders were also carried out.

Findings

Farmer-herder conflicts are deeply rooted in a complex interplay of tenure insecurity, political marginalisation and weakening governance institutions contributing to diminishing pastoral mobility, contested land and water access, agricultural expansion, and exacerbated by climate change. Food systems are directly impacted by conflict increasing local and national food insecurity.

Women and youth are frequently marginalised in conflict resolution. Often presented as victims, their potential as peacemakers and sometimes active participants in conflict resolution is largely unacknowledged. Younger generations grow up amidst cycles of distrust and hostility that hinder peace-building.

Policy implications

Enabling policy and legislation for gender-sensitive land allocation systems that consider the needs of both farmers and pastoralists and allow for the centrality of women, youth and men in decision-making are needed.

Multi-stakeholder platforms can prove effective in increasingly complex and volatile landscapes, improving communication and trust between actors.

Bottom-up interventions that encourage resource sharing and cooperation can build trust and community cohesion, of which peacemaking dialogue should be a part.

Diversification of livelihoods can reduce vulnerability to conflict. Including youth in formal and informal conflict resolution and peacebuilding platforms and processes is vital. Digital technologies can enhance effective peacebuilding communications.