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TECHNICAL REPORT

YOUTH IN FARMER- HERDER CONFLICTS

Case studies from Sudan and Nigeria

Magda Nassef, Hussein M. Sulieman, Saleh Momale, Adam Higazi and Pilar Domingo



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About SPARC

Climate change, armed conflict, environmental fragility and weak governance, and the impact these have on natural resource-based livelihoods, are among the key drivers of both crisis and poverty for communities in some of the world's most vulnerable and conflict-affected countries.

Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC) aims to generate evidence and address knowledge gaps to build the resilience of millions of pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and farmers in these communities in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

We strive to create impact by using research and evidence to develop knowledge that improves how the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), donors, non-governmental organisations, local and national governments, and civil society can empower these communities in the context of climate change.

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ACRONYMS

FGD	focus group discussion
KII	key informant interviews
NGO	non-governmental organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a significant gap in primary research on farmer–herder conflict in Africa. Specifically, youth – a demographic that constitutes the majority of the continent’s population – are notably under-represented in the literature. Through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs), SPARC has examined the experiences and roles of male and female youth in Sudan and Nigeria and how they are affected by farmer–herder conflict.

In Sudan, the case study focuses on conflicts between farmers of mixed ethnic groups and Fallata pastoralists in Azaza Sogora village in Gadarif State. In Nigeria, the case study focuses on Tiv, Hausa and Fulani farming and pastoralist communities in Jangargari village in Awe Local Government, Nasarawa State.

The fieldwork reveals that youth are key contributors to their communities and to local economies, and that they are highly affected by farmer–herder conflict. However, they are not very visible in research studies, which means the central role and potential of youth is insufficiently acknowledged and their specific vulnerabilities insufficiently addressed.

Sheep market, Jigawa State, Nigeria. © Adam Nigazi



Key findings

Livelihood impacts

Youth livelihoods in farming and herding are significantly disrupted by repeated cycles of farmer–herder conflict. This leads to reduced productivity, loss of access to productive assets like land and livestock, and loss of financial and food security. Youth (particularly women) face constrained economic mobility because they have limited opportunities beyond agriculture, and inadequate skills and education. This is especially pronounced in Nigeria.

Magnified inequalities

Existing inequalities are exacerbated during conflicts, particularly around youth property rights, resource access, participation in decision-making and economic vulnerability. Poverty, exclusion from education and employment, and alienation are especially pronounced in state border areas in Nigeria.

Food insecurity

Young men and women, and women of all age groups, are vulnerable to food insecurity and undernourishment due to their weak purchasing power and limited access to financial resources.

Targeted vulnerabilities

Young women and girls often face direct attacks and gender-based violence in insecure environments. Young men and boys experience violence during daily activities, heavy-handed interventions by armed forces, and exploitation or forced recruitment by armed non-state actors and criminal gangs.

Weak visibility and voice

The contributions, vulnerabilities and grievances of youth go unseen because few formal avenues exist for local participation. However, social media and mobile phones are providing effective platforms for youth communication and expression.

Polarisation and generational animosity

Prolonged conflict entrenches negative perceptions of opposing groups, with cycles of hostility transferring to younger generations. However, many young men and women work to ease tensions and break this cycle. Further research is needed to understand why some, and not others, choose hostility, and to understand the nuanced role of young women in conflict.

Not just victims or perpetrators

Youth are often portrayed as victims or perpetrators. Our research shows youth are active, informed and vocal, and they can drive positive change. Some bodies recognise youth representation and inclusion as critical to peace-building, but their integration into decision-making and governance structures remains slow.

Recommendations

- Research should give greater attention to the role of young people in farmer–herder conflict to identify entry points for appropriate support.
- National/local governments and community stakeholders should include youth from different land user groups in processes to address the root causes of farmer–herder conflict. Examples include inclusive land allocation and planning.
- Government and community stakeholders should establish and strengthen formal and informal platforms to actively include youth in conflict resolution and decision-making processes.
- Governments, donors and development partners should invest in and support youth-led peace-building initiatives, particularly those that work across ethnic divides.
- Governments, donors and development partners should invest in gender-responsive skill-building and youth access to inputs and opportunities beyond subsistence agriculture and menial labour, in order to strengthen livelihood opportunities. Investments in education, healthcare and social services more broadly are also critically needed to enhance overall well-being and expand young people’s options for participation in society.
- Banks, donors, development partners and community associations should extend access to credit to women of all ages in contexts where this has shown promise. Schemes should build on the success of financial programmes led by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Sudan for farmer women, scaling initiatives across areas affected by conflict.
- Researchers should conduct targeted studies to identify grievances and incentives that drive some youth (particularly young men) to violence and criminality. The evidence generated can inform programmes to address the driving factors before such behaviours become entrenched.
- Governments, development partners, and civil society and youth organisations should leverage digital platforms to enable youth to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes and influence peace-building through non-traditional channels.



Young herder in wet season nomadic camp, Gombe State, Nigeria. © Adam Higazi

1 INTRODUCTION

Farmer–herder conflict across Africa has been written about extensively, but primary research on the subject is scarce (Nassef et al., 2023). Of 1,100 publications on farmer–herder conflict captured in the cited systematic review, only 88 include primary research. Youth are mentioned in only 38 of these 88 studies and, where mentioned, they are described mainly as participants in conflict (81%), victims of conflict (50%) or peacemakers (18%). Almost none of the studies specify whether these youth are male or female, but the content implies they are male. Despite the fact that youth constitute the majority population in Africa, this demographic does not feature prominently in the literature (ibid.).

This paper contributes to the limited body of knowledge on youth in farmer–herder conflict. It draws on case studies from Sudan¹ and Nigeria and a literature review to highlight the experience and role of male and female youth in conflict and the impacts of conflict on them. The paper is intended for practitioners and researchers working on youth, with recommendations for a policy audience also.

Readers wishing to engage in greater detail on conflict dynamics and the causes and drivers of farmer–herder conflict in Sudan and Nigeria are encouraged to access the respective country reports (Sulieman, 2024; Momale and Higazi, 2024).

¹ N.B.: The case study location in Sudan was in an area deemed accessible and safe enough to allow research in the context of the ongoing war in Sudan. The farmer–herder conflict in question is non-violent and is between individuals/families rather than between communities. This conflict typology cannot be generalised to other places in Sudan where farmer–herder conflicts can be, and are, violent, and take on an inter-communal dimension. Levels and intensities of violence and insecurity also vary in Nigeria. While our case studies do not provide a generalisable typology of farmer–herder conflict for either country (they are not meant to), the research allowed focus on a specific area, its people, and its farmer–herder conflict dynamics in more detail, with illuminating insights on youth emerging.

2 METHOD

Qualitative research methods (including FGDs and KIIs) were used in study locations in Sudan and Nigeria where both traditional farming and pastoral food production systems remain dominant, and where farmers and herders could be accessed who had knowledge of recent local farmer–herder conflicts. These farmers and herders include both male and female youth. The locations were considered not too politically sensitive for the study to take place, and safe and accessible for researchers and participants.

In Sudan, Azaza Sogora village in Gadarif State was selected as the case study location. The study concentrates on farmer–herder conflicts between farmers and Fallata pastoralists, given that the latter constitute the largest of several pastoralist ethnic groups passing through the area.² Ten FGDs were conducted (six with farmers and four with pastoralists). Discussions with farmers comprised: men and women (mixed ages), men (mixed ages), women (mixed ages), male and female youth (mixed ages), male youth, and female youth. Discussions with pastoralists shared similar profiles but they did not include mixed-gender groups as these are socially inappropriate in this community. Five FGDs focused on youth (three in the farming community, two in the pastoralist community). Overall, 162 people participated in discussions (84 farmers – 41 men and 43 women; and 78 pastoralists – 37 men and 41 women). Among farmers, 19 young men and 23 young women participated in youth-only discussions. Among pastoralists, 13 young men and 15 young women participated in youth-only discussions. Overall, 52% of all respondents were women and at least 43% were youth. Eight KIIs were conducted (four with farmers – two men, two women; and four with pastoralists – two men, two women). Fieldwork took place in November and December 2023. Participants were identified through community leaders, and women facilitators encouraged women to actively participate.

In Nigeria, Jangargari village in Awe Local Government, Nasarawa State, was selected as the case study location. This is close to the border with Benue State. Four out of 15 community clusters in Jangargari were chosen for FGDs (two farmer clusters – one Hausa and one Tiv; and two herder clusters – both Fulani). Overall, 24 FGDs were held, six in each cluster. These FGDs comprised: male elderly, female elderly, male youth, female youth, male (mixed ages), and female (mixed ages). In total, 296 people participated in the FGDs (161 farmers – 81 women and 80 men; and 135 pastoralists – 81 women and 54 men). Among pastoralists, 21 young men and 30 young women participated. Among farmers, 29 young men and 27 young women participated. Overall, 54% of respondents were women, and 36% were youth. Participants were identified through community leaders, and women facilitators encouraged women to actively participate. Twenty KIIs were conducted to further explore themes emerging from the FGDs, with interviewees purposively sampled and identified during the FGDs. Participants included local government officials and community and opinion leaders, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, title holders, elderly persons and leaders of the different ethnographic socio-cultural groups. Fieldwork took place in March 2024.

² In Sudan, Fallata is another name used for Fulbe or Fulani. The Fallata are pastoralists with origins in West Africa, having migrated eastwards over many years.

Youth in this study constitute individuals aged between 15 and 24 years, as per the United Nations definition of youth (UNDESA, n.d.). The large discrepancy between the number of participants in Sudan and Nigeria is because the research team in Nigeria was bigger, thus allowing for larger sampling. The team was small in Sudan owing to the ongoing country-wide conflict, which meant very few researchers were available in-country.

Women in rainy season camp, Gombe State, Nigeria. © Adam Higazi



3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Youth in farmer–herder conflict

Youth constitute around 60% of the population of Africa (UNDP, 2023). They contribute substantially to food production systems and the informal economy, and they are active and vocal members of their communities. Where mentioned in farmer–herder conflict studies, the literature indicates that they are the main actors in farming and pastoral food production systems alongside the older demographic, but that economic hardship and constrained opportunities magnified by conflict (both local farmer–herder conflict and wider conflict) contribute to limited and sometimes negative coping strategies (e.g. joining armed groups) and drive out-migration, particularly among male youth. They have different aspirations to those of older generations, and they actively make themselves ‘seen and heard’ within their communities in positive and negative ways. These ways range from organising themselves and focusing on specific tasks (e.g. activism, peace-building, community service provision, political change), to piecemeal participation in protests and active participation in conflict, usually in contexts where structural barriers typically limit youth engagement and participation.

Economically driven out-migration is a trend among male youth. In a Niger study, most of the sample population engaged in farming and livestock rearing, but many young men found it necessary to migrate in search of income (Turner et al., 2011). In southwest Burkina Faso, 50% of farming households were concerned about labour shortages in crop production due to the migration of male youth to urban centres (Brockhaus et al., 2003). Similar findings are reported among pastoralists, with many young Maasai men in Tanzania searching for economic opportunities in urban centres due to local shortages in land and pasture (Mbonile, 2005).

Among those young people who stay, limited and narrowing options can drive disillusionment and frustration, and fuel resentment. This makes youth (particularly young men) more susceptible to polarisation and more likely to turn to sources of income or prestige linked to militarisation and criminality (Tonah, 2003; Young et al., 2009; Bond, 2014; CDD, 2018; Ammour, 2020; Arowosegbe, 2020). For example, in Darfur, Sudan, enlistment in the military has been seen by young pastoralist men and their families as a dependable source of income and a route to development, education, recognition and respect, with little thought given to the long-term effects of militarisation, including the perception among male youth that goals are achieved through military means (Young et al., 2009).

Aspirations among youth are changing. Some desire autonomy and individualisation in traditionally collective societies, leading to younger generations (specifically young men) moving out of the family compound. At the same time, farming is becoming fragmented due to increased demand for land (Brockhaus et al., 2003; Beeler, 2006). The pursuit of autonomy and improved incomes can also drive youth migration against their families’ wishes, who may want them to stay home and support the household (Beeler, 2006). Those who stay find ways of supplementing incomes without their families’ knowledge. For example, young male farmers are making deals directly with herders when livestock trespass, and they pocket cash or sell livestock belonging to the household without the knowledge of their fathers (ibid.). Joining armed groups is another strategy for young men seeking emancipation and autonomous

livelihoods (Brottem, 2021). Studies show that elders' influence over youth is decreasing in some contexts (Krätli and Toulmin, 2020).

In many places, young men and women are pushing to be seen and heard in societies that still defer to male elders and leadership structures dominated by men with power. These are structures from which youth are typically excluded, and in which their interests and grievances are not priorities (Campbell et al., 2000; Brottem, 2021; UNDP, 2023). They engage through peaceful and violent means.

Aside from local and organic protests against perceived injustices (Apeh et al., 2021), many youth have organised themselves into activist and political groups to advocate for their issues. In Ghana, farmer youth groups have petitioned the government to evict pastoralists from their area, which the court complied with (Otu and Impraim, 2021). In Nigeria, established and politically engaged youth groups from both farming and herding communities are loudly vocal about their issues and they also support (in places) the establishment of armed community defence groups and ethnic militias. This is driven by their disaffection with government and leadership's ability or willingness to protect the interests of their community or respond to their grievances (International Crisis Group, 2018). In Kenya, young men are becoming politically active and securing spaces in land committees from which they have been traditionally excluded. Through these platforms they can influence decisions over land and prefer individual landholdings within collective lands to secure their autonomy (Campbell et al., 2000).

3.2 Youth experience of, and role in, farmer–herder conflict

A small proportion of the literature indicates that farmer and herder youth help their communities and elders avoid conflict or protect conflict escalation. They do this by patrolling farmlands and herds to find quick and peaceful resolutions to any tensions before conflict begins (Tonah, 2003; Beeler, 2006; Brottem, 2016).

Other literature indicates youth involvement in peace-building. They operate local youth-driven peace-building NGOs in Nigeria (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018), participate in effective and inclusive grassroots dispute resolution committees (Kabara committees) (Brottem, 2021), and engage in specific project-based peace-building initiatives that have shown promising results (Banzhaf, et al., 2000; Krätli and Toulmin, 2020). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023) highlights the proactive, creative and innovative participation of youth in peace-building within their communities. For example, youth provide early warning through online platforms and lead reconciliation campaigns and peace dialogues through civil society organisations and targeted networks.

However, most literature focuses on youth as belligerents or catalysts in farmer–herder conflict. This role is attributed to their difficult economic circumstances and lack of alternative options, as a way of pushing back against exclusion and 'losing out', and as an option to express themselves and be visible and counted, when there are no perceived outlets to air their grievances.

Limited economic options and poor prospects make youth easy targets for polarisation, radicalisation, criminality and conflict (Tonah, 2003; Bond, 2014; Arowosegbe, 2020; UNDP, 2023), especially in areas where youth unemployment is high (UNDP, 2023). This is



Nomadic Fulani camp, Plateau State, Nigeria. © Adam Higazi

exacerbated when livelihoods and property are lost due to conflict and available alternatives are poor or non-existent (CDD, 2018). In Ghana, for example, young farmers who are already disaffected by poor prospects and low returns in farming have jumped on the bandwagon of calling the pastoralist presence an ‘invasion’ alongside politicians and others, and youth groups have attempted to forcibly expel pastoralists together with the local administration (Tonah, 2003).

In addition, physical and armed conflict, protests, court actions and violent demonstrations are a means of expression among youth. They are attempts at forcing decision-makers to act or a means to address grievances and pursue justice directly when local administration or local leadership are unresponsive, biased or centred on their own interests. This is particularly the case around issues related to land tenure and land allocation or when conflict resolution mechanisms fail to deliver justice or compensation in the event of lost lives and livelihoods (Tonah, 2003; Turner et al., 2011; CDD, 2018; Mbih, 2020; Ahmed and Kuusaana, 2021; Brottem, 2021; Otu and Impraim, 2021). Female youth are also implicated in conflict, with some having been arrested in connection with civil unrest (Mbih, 2020).

Inadequate state protection encourages the formation of armed community defence groups and ethnic militias – mainly comprising male youth – whose roles are not always limited to protection (Krätli and Toulmin, 2020). Meanwhile, unaddressed grievances, an absence of space for voice and participation, and inadequate state protection in insecure places open opportunities for state and non-state armed groups to recruit local youth. These groups play to youth grievances and provide them with the chance to defend their communities and interests and to take justice into their own hands (Benjaminsen et al., 2009; Young et al., 2009; International Crisis Group, 2018; Diarra Boi, 2019; Ammour, 2020; Mbih, 2020; Brottem, 2021; Benjaminsen and Ba, 2021).

In Central Mali, for example, young Fulani men organised themselves and voiced feelings of marginalisation to state and international organisations. These were not addressed in any tangible way, which led to more violent means of expression, as young men became part of militant Islamist groups who promise to fight for their cause. These young men are seen as threats, while their opinions and reasoning are ignored or not understood (Benjaminsen and Ba, 2021). As Krätli and Toulmin (2020: 53) aptly put it, one must pay attention to the meaning of conflict and violence since it is a form of communication. The meaning of violence can shed light on appropriate courses of action that can keep conflict 'within bandwidths of acceptability'.

Joining militant Islamic groups in Mali is also seen as a means by which young men push back against human rights violations, heavy-handedness by the army, and predatory behaviour of traditional leaders and state representatives (Benjaminsen and Ba, 2021). In Nigeria, many youth have lost respect for the army, given brutality towards them: 'They were treating our people like animals' (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018: 17).

3.3 Impact of conflict on youth

Youth are disproportionately affected by conflict, given that they constitute the majority of the African population (UNDP, 2023). A large segment of youth in farmer–herder contexts engage in subsistence agriculture and herding activities, meaning that their livelihoods, income and food security are affected when there is conflict. In repeated cycles of conflict, many people's livelihoods in farming and herding (including youth) are affected by reduced productivity and poor access to productive assets such as land and livestock, as well as lost access to markets. And this occurs in contexts where there are already limited opportunities for youth beyond the agricultural sector and where youth skills and education are often restricted.

Young women and girls are directly targeted in conflict through attacks and gender-based violence in insecure environments (International Crisis Group, 2018; Janoch, 2024); and young men are targeted through direct attacks while conducting day-to-day activities. Brutality by armed forces tasked to 'restore peace', plus violent exploitation and forced recruitment by armed non-state actors in some countries are additional experiences among young men, particularly in West Africa (Ammour, 2020; Krätli and Toulmin, 2020; Brottem, 2021).

Polarisation of youth is an additional impact of conflict. When young people grow up within conflict, negative perceptions of 'the other' are reinforced. Families transfer animosity and negative perceptions to children, embedding ill will in upcoming generations (Adelehin et al., 2018; CDD, 2018).

Finally, existing inequalities experienced by young men and women – and women more broadly – are magnified during conflicts, which affects coping options in times of stress. These individuals are generally on the losing side of property rights, they are in weaker positions to access and manage resources (particularly when these resources are commercialised beyond a certain scale) (Krätli and Toulmin, 2020), they are generally excluded from local and higher-level decision-making, and they have limited access to economic and financial resources (UNDP, 2023). In borderland areas with neighbouring states, where many farmer–herder conflicts take place, young men's and women's alienation is particularly pronounced. Many here experience poverty and exclusion from education, employment and local decision-making (ibid.). Young men and women and women more

broadly are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity and undernourishment, given they have weaker purchasing power due to limited access to economic and financial resources (ibid.).

3.4 Summary

To sum up, youth are an active, informed and vocal demographic in farmer–herder contexts, they are disproportionately affected by conflict, and they act positively and negatively in conflict. The literature on farmer–herder conflict mainly emphasises their role as victims or as perpetrators and, to a lesser extent, it highlights their active efforts towards conflict avoidance, peace and positive change. This constitutes a missed opportunity because youth experience in conflict is nuanced, extending beyond the perpetrator–victim dichotomy (UNDP, 2023). At the level of the African Union, youth are recognised as potential drivers of positive change, and their role within political and governance structures is slowly gaining traction. Some headway has also been made on the inclusion and representation of youth in decision-making, which is seen as critical to redefining the role of youth in peace-building. However, progress in this regard is slow (ibid.).

The literature beyond farmer–herder conflict finds that most young people do not engage in violence or participate in armed conflicts – yet research exploring this dimension is limited. This gap contributes to the false impression that youth, particularly male youth, opt for violence as a means of expression (Hilker and Fraser, 2009; Ismail and Olonisakin, 2021). This is coloured by the fact that much evidence on youth in conflict speaks to male youth and violence in Africa (mainly in the West African context), and little is explored around non-violent responses to socioeconomic vulnerabilities and political exclusion, particularly in contexts not already wracked by violence. Few studies focus on the experience of female youth (Ismail and Olonisakin, 2021). And there is a tendency in the literature to focus on what is wrong and where things have gone wrong, rather than exploring what works (ibid.).

Pastoralist woman collecting firewood, Gombe State, Nigeria. © Adam Higazi



4 FINDINGS FROM AZAZA SOGORA VILLAGE, SUDAN

4.1 Context

Local livelihoods in Azaza Sogora mainly depend on small-scale rain-fed crop farming and traditional livestock production.³ The area is dominated by large-scale agriculture, with a policy environment that favours this. Waves of displacement from other conflict-affected areas across Sudan have increased the population of farmers and herders in the study area, alongside natural population growth. Consequently, pastoralists and small-scale farmers are squeezed into limited spaces, fuelling conflict when the two groups compete over land and resources (Sulieman, 2024).

This situation is exacerbated by an overall and general policy bias towards farming, with pastoralists losing grazing land and migratory routes to small-scale farm expansion. This trend has gone largely unchecked, and has resulted in soured relationships between farmers and pastoralists (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023). Farmer–herder conflict in Azaza Sogora mainly occurs between individuals and individual households rather than between communities, and it links to cases of crop destruction and livestock confiscation. The conflict rarely involves armed violence or loss of life.

Access to finance among farmers has changed their relationship to land. While most cropland in the village is considered unregistered and informal private land, the last 15 years have seen an increase in formal registration of agricultural land to enable access to loans (ibid.).

Few women are title holders of registered plots, with most land registered to men.⁴ However, banks have accommodated direct agreements with women, offering creative solutions for women's collateral, given they prefer to give loans to women who have more dependable repayment rates (Sulieman, 2024). This access to finance has improved women's visibility, power and voice, and it has increased their interest in and control over land (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023). There is now buying and selling of land, which did not occur in the past when there were only omdas (traditional community leaders) and sheikhs (tribal leaders) who could allocate land.⁵

The relationship to land is also shifting among pastoralists, who have begun to use privatisation as a strategy to secure access to land (Sulieman, 2015). In the study area, pastoralists still rely on a combination of open-access communal rangelands (e.g. in the Butana rangelands in the north), government-owned land (e.g. local forests) and privately owned land, for which they purchase access rights from farmers to access crop residues

3 The ethnic groups in Azaza Sogora who identify as farmers include Fur, Zaghawa, Bulala, Salamat, Kajaska, Masalit, Burgo, Tama, Tunjur and Misseriya (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023).

4 KIL_FW_N

5 KIL_FM_E

and water. However, pastoralists have also started to rent farmland and, in some cases, buy land to accommodate shifting livelihoods towards farming over the last 30 years. Respondents did not indicate whether men or women buy and rent land, but we can assume it is mostly men because men own and control most livestock wealth and therefore are in a financial position to engage in such transactions. Unlike their farming counterparts, pastoralists do not deal with loan institutions (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023).

Gender roles in Azaza Sogora village reflect typical patriarchal values in Sudan, where men are leaders and decision-makers and women mainly tend to home life and care for the household (FAO, 2021; Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023). Though formal land laws do not discriminate against women, in practice, local patriarchal socio-cultural factors determine – and often curtail – women’s land rights (FAO, 2021; IGAD, 2021):

[G]ender roles and gender relations are socially constructed around the supremacy of masculinity and the domination of men over women. This has contributed to women’s internalisation of their position as inferior and has compromised women’s rights, including the rights to land. (IGAD, 2021: 11)

While food production systems remain dominant sources for livelihoods, income and food in Azaza Sogora, staggering nationwide inflation has made it difficult for youth to sustain a principal livelihood in farming or herding. Increasingly, youth participate in agricultural wage labour and other menial economic activities, and there is significant out-migration among young men. This is due to difficulties meeting basic needs within the respective food production systems and a growing commercial orientation among young men. (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023; Sulieman, 2024)

4.2 Role of youth in food production systems

Young men in the farming community

Crop farming is generally a family undertaking. The head of the family – usually the husband or a mature son – secures land for the household and is generally responsible for it. They provide inputs of seeds and fuel, cash for labour if needs go beyond household capacity, and oversight and decision-making around the entire production process, including guarding crops against infringement. Young men play a supporting role in family farming and participate in all steps of the farming process. They also provide support by guarding crops, which is often time, labour and energy intensive.⁶

Young men also hold their own farm plots, which they cultivate after fulfilling their obligations on the family farm, and around 50% of young men have their own farms. The preferred crop is sesame, as it has a short growing season and can be sold quickly (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023). Crops grown on household plots are mainly for household consumption, with surplus sold to cover household expenses. Sorghum and millet are the main crops prioritised on these plots, followed by sesame and groundnut, which are cash crops (Sulieman, 2024).

Young men’s interests are shifting away from farming, however. Many have migrated in search of better economic opportunities, because there are diminishing returns from farming.

6 KILFW_A; KILFM_E; KILFW_N

Destinations include urban centres in Sudan and, until conflict broke out there in early 2023, the national capital Khartoum. Out-migrants work mainly as wage labourers – around 20% return seasonally to participate in local farming during the rainy season.⁷ A few have migrated out of the country, and some have left to work as artisanal gold miners in areas further away in Gadarif State and beyond. Local wage labour is also a trend among young men (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023).

Young women in the farming community

Young women play a supporting role in family farming and participate in all steps of the farming process. Like young men, young women hold their own farm plots, which they cultivate after fulfilling their obligations on the family farm. They mainly grow groundnuts as these are not costly to cultivate.⁸ In the past, young women's plots (and women's plots in general) were smaller than men's or household plots, but this is changing for some women who can access finance. They also tend to livestock, collect milk, and make yoghurt and ghee.⁹

While women, including young women, fulfil typical traditional roles within the farming community, their visibility, power and voice has improved over the last 14 years in Azaza Sogora. For example, they have more interest in and control over land due to access to financial institutions. NGOs working on women's economic empowerment have connected women to banking and lending institutions, which provide loans to individuals and groups registered as cooperatives. All locally registered cooperatives are women's cooperatives, comprising a mixed profile of young, old, married and unmarried women. Most loans are in the form of agricultural inputs and cash (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023).

Hundreds of local women currently receive loans from banks in Gadarif City. Banks prefer to give loans to women rather than men, because women are more committed to paying loans back (ibid.). This has allowed women to increase their involvement in crop production, with 75% of women in the village now having their own plots. Women have expanded their activities from food crops to cash crops for income, mainly growing sesame and groundnuts, and they have increased the number of livestock they own (ibid.). Loans have also enabled women to access agricultural machinery, which allows them to farm larger plots.¹⁰

Concurrently, women have been affected by general economic hardship. Over the last decade, women, including young women, have increasingly turned to wage labour on agricultural schemes to help meet their basic needs.¹¹ They have also become involved in petty trading, setting up small stands in front of their homes to sell crops and other items, while others sell food and tea in local markets.¹²

Some youth in Azaza Sogora are landless due to population growth and increased demand for land, meaning they have to borrow or rent land for farming (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023). In addition, the out-migration of male youth has caused local agricultural labour shortages.

⁷ Growing crops with a short growing season that can quickly be sold allows young men to return to other economic activities elsewhere, outside of local farming.

⁸ KIL_FW_A; KIL_FM_E; KIL_FM_E

⁹ KIL_FW_A; KIL_FM_M; KIL_FW_N; KIL_FM_E

¹⁰ KIL_FW_A

¹¹ KIL_FW_A; KIL_FM_E; KIL_FM_E

¹² KIL_FW_N; KIL_FW_A

The absence of young men in many families has resulted in women shouldering much of the agricultural workload.¹³

Young men in the pastoralist community

Men are responsible for livestock herds, including the sale of animals. They play the main role in mobile herding, with youth aged 25–30 years moving with cows while younger youth (under 20 years) move with sheep and goats. Boys aged 13–15 years move with the young calves. Older men generally do not accompany the herds during transhumance, instead providing guidance and advice to the younger men based on their experience. For example, older men will make decisions on where livestock should move during transhumance.¹⁴

Young pastoralist men are showing a preference for rearing sheep over cattle, the latter traditionally preferred among the Fallata. Sheep are easy to sell, fetch good prices and mature quicker than cattle. Some young pastoralists also engage in livestock trading, collecting livestock from owners and selling on their behalf in the markets (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023).

Young women in the pastoralist community

Women, including young women, are responsible for household duties as well as livestock in and around the homestead, where they milk the animals, take care of sick livestock kept near the home, and look after newborn and young animals (ibid.). Generally, young women fetch water (which can be up to 5 km from their homestead) and collect firewood, in addition to doing household chores.¹⁵ They also make and sell yoghurt and ghee in local markets. Income is used to buy supplies for the home, including clothing and food.¹⁶ Women bring livestock with them into a marriage, as a contribution from their families. Custom dictates that a husband cannot sell this livestock without his wife's agreement, since it was gifted to her by her family and does not belong to him, even if he manages those animals within his own herds (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023).

Young pastoralist women may be either mobile or settled, with an increasing trend towards settlement. When moving with the herd and the family, they lead the bulls that carry household supplies. Some women settle due to the lack of pasture, while others no longer accompany men to the Butana in the north due to insecurity.¹⁷ Some settled pastoralist women practise crop farming alongside livestock rearing,¹⁸ and others work as wage labourers on agricultural farms, mainly weeding and harvesting. Wage labour is relatively new for pastoralist women, starting about 15 years ago. Similar to their farming counterparts, pastoral women have turned to wage labour due to general economic hardship, but also to avoid losing their livestock or paying high fines in the event that their livestock trespasses on farmers' fields.

13 KIL_FW_N

14 KIL_PM_A; KIL_PW_A

15 KIL_PM_A; KIL_PW_F

16 PW_M; KIL_PM_A; KIL_PW_A; PF_Y; PM_Y; PM_I

17 KIL_PM_A; FGD_PF_Y

18 FGD_PF_Y

4.3 Impact of conflict on youth

Across KIIs and FGDs, participants reported that farmer–herder conflict has a collective impact on the whole household, including men, women and youth, with variations in how different genders and age groups experience those impacts. Most impacts are felt with regard to food production systems and livelihoods, the ability to meet basic needs, social fabric and family cohesion, roles in the family and community, and physical and psychosocial well-being.

Young men in the farming community

Men, including young men, have been pushed by general economic hardship into agricultural wage labour and out-migration in search of economic opportunities in urban centres. Young men in particular have sought opportunities in gold mining. Farmer–herder conflict has fuelled these trends by inflicting financial losses on farmers through loss of harvests from crop damage, early sale of crops before harvest (a practice known as *waqif*),¹⁹ and loss of land as farmland located in conflict hotspots is more likely to be sold or rented out.²⁰ Longer hours spent guarding crops against livestock trespassing and the stress associated with this may also have contributed to these changes, with the role of crop guarding mainly ascribed to male youths.²¹ Out-migration among male youths has become more pronounced in the last decade.²² Delayed marriage has also had an impact on youth in general²³ – marriage is generally seen as a positive milestone in life and the lack of financial means to enable marriage is a constraint.

Young women in the farming community

Young women increasingly engage in agricultural wage labour due to general economic hardship. Like young men, they are pressed to turn to wage labour when they or their families lose harvests due to crop damage, to compensate for losses and to provide for the family. Young women are mainly contracted daily on large-scale mechanised schemes and return home at the end of the day.²⁴ When not at home, women leave their eldest daughter responsible for the household. Sometimes, women cannot go to work because they must mind children.²⁵

The absence of men due to out-migration has exacerbated these trends. It has increased the burden on women, affected family cohesion and magnified economic hardship. In the absence of men, women play the role of father and mother at home and, at the same time, they may seek work opportunities outside the home. When family cohesion and economic circumstances are stressed in this way, children may drop out of school.²⁶ Also, when men are absent, it is harder for women to seek reparations when their farming land is affected due

19 The literal translation is 'standing'. This is when crops are sold before harvest at reduced prices, to avoid crop damage during harvest time and to secure at least some income from the crop.

20 FGD_FF_Y; FGD_FW_M; KII_FW_A; KII_FM_E; KII_FW_N

21 FGD_FM_Y

22 KII_FW_N

23 FGD_FM_Y

24 FGD_FW_M

25 FGD_FMF_Y

26 KII_FW_A

to crop damage.²⁷ The same applies when women are the head of a household,²⁸ as women often rely on the support of male family members to help with this process. This stretches women's already excessive workload, which the Food and Agriculture Organization reports already extends to 80 hours per week on unpaid activities under 'normal' circumstances; the equivalent of two full-time jobs (FAO, 2021).

The encroachment on the crop affects us. The majority of students pay tuition fees from crops and thus, infringement affects education through the inability to pay tuition fees. Also, there is an inability to pay for [medical] treatment. We have no other source of income. (Young female farmer, FGD participant)²⁹

The impacts of farmer–herder conflicts on female youth also manifest as delayed marriage and their participation in agricultural wage labour on large-scale farms, petty trade and work in local markets.³⁰

Young men in the pastoralist community

As a consequence of farmer–herder conflict, young pastoral men are separated from their family for long periods (sometimes months at a time) in search of pastures far from conflict-affected areas or in search of livelihood opportunities elsewhere.³¹ Agricultural wage labour is another coping strategy³² used among male youth who face significant financial losses due to fines from livestock trespassing. Delayed marriage occurs when youth are not able to save enough money from herding, and also when they incur hefty trespassing fines.³³

Young men bear the brunt of conflict as they move with the herds and are often the ones detained when trespassing occurs.³⁴ They attempt to avoid conflict by guarding livestock sometimes day and night, and by moving with herds at night, but this also causes stress and exhaustion.³⁵

Young women in the pastoralist community

Farmer–herder conflict is making it increasingly difficult for pastoralist women to remain in livestock production. To cope with losses due to heavy fines for livestock trespassing,³⁶ women (particularly young women) have turned to wage labour in agricultural fields. Wage labour is also a coping strategy when the men are away.³⁷

27 FGD_FF_Y

28 FGD_FM_M

29 FGD_FW_M

30 FGD_FF_Y; FW_M; KIL_FW_A

31 KIL_PW_A; FGD_PF_Y

32 FGD_PW_M; FGD_PF_Y

33 FGD_PF_Y

34 KIL_PM_A; FGD_PM_Y; KIL_PW_F; KIL_PM_I

35 FGD_PW_M; KIL_PW_A; FGD_PM_Y

36 FGD_PW_M

37 FGD_PM_Y

I came to this site and I had a number of cows, sheep and goats. I lost all these livestock because of the conflict. Now I work for farmers as a daily wage labourer. We have become wage workers. (Young female pastoralist, FGD participant)³⁸

The impacts of conflict are felt acutely by pastoralist women, particularly when their husbands are away. Their men can be in jail for their animals trespassing into crop fields, or they can be frequently away searching for pastures in remote areas where it is easier to avoid conflict. Some might be absent for months and return home only for short breaks. This is a great source of stress for women.³⁹ Women, like men, are also burdened and stressed due to guarding animals against crop trespassing.

One day I had to tie a donkey at my feet during the night so that he would not stray into a field. We are afraid of farmers with large agricultural projects because they have police guarding their farms. (Female pastoralist, FGD participant)⁴⁰

Like in the farming community, the absence of men means that all family responsibilities fall on the shoulders of pastoralist women.⁴¹ One positive impact shared by young women respondents, however, is that currently no man has more than one wife due to limited time and finances. Men are too busy trying to avoid animal trespassing and their incomes are reduced as a result of heavy fines.⁴²

Farmer–herder conflict strains relationships between communities too.

Young people are beaten and fined. This in itself is a justification for increasing the conflict, as it generates hatred and calls for revenge as a result of these actions. This is the cost of conflict on society. (Young female pastoralist, FGD participant)⁴³

4.4 Youth experience of and role in conflict

Young men in the farming community

Like other community members, young men are parties to farmer–herder conflict when their land is encroached upon by livestock.⁴⁴ When this happens, young men catch and detain trespassing livestock. They then seek compensation for crop damages through the same informal and formal conflict resolution channels as the rest of the community, and they can handle the case themselves from start to finish. Their role is considered no different from that of older men. They are also proactive at documenting and reporting crop damage using their smartphones and use video footage and photos to prove their cases.⁴⁵

38 FGD_PF_Y

39 FGD_PF_Y

40 FGD_PW_M

41 FGD_PW_M; KII_PM_A; FGD_PF_Y; KII_PW_F

42 FGD_PF_Y

43 FGD_PF_Y

44 KII_PM_A; KII_FW_A; KII_FM_E; KII_FW_N; FGD_FMF_Y; FGD_FF_Y; FGD_FM_Y; FGD_FW_M

45 FGD_FM_M; KII_FW_N

While young men interact with conflict resolution institutions, they are not represented in them.⁴⁶ The lack of young men's participation in these bodies is considered normal by some, because they respect their elders and accept their decisions;⁴⁷ other mainly young men believe they must be given a chance and should be represented in these bodies.⁴⁸

Young women in the farming community

Like young men, young women are parties to farmer–herder conflict when their land is encroached upon by livestock.⁴⁹ Their role in conflict resolution differs to that of young men, however. Women may pursue the case themselves through the same channels or defer to male family members to handle the case for them, depending on the disposition of their families.⁵⁰ Conservative households who see conflict resolution as the preserve of men will discourage women from pursuing cases themselves, while more liberal households give women more freedom to participate. Young women described their experiences handling crop trespassing:⁵¹

In 2017, my crop was damaged by sheep and goats owned by pastoralists. I went and brought the police to the site of the damage and the shepherd was arrested by the police. There is no difference between men and women. The woman can work on the procedures for opening the report and litigation. My husband was there but I did all the steps on my own. I moved on with the crop damage assessment committee. After that, the Damage Assessment Committee came and set the compensation at fifteen sacks. (Young female farmer, FGD participant)⁵²

In 2018, my mother did the procedures alone, as the camels entered her crop, so she took the camels who attacked the crop alone and went to the police station. The problem was resolved amicably and then became an amicable relationship between us and the shepherds. After that, they started storing their equipment with us at home when they went away. Sometimes a peaceful social relationship is established between the shepherds and the farmers after the infringement. (Young female farmer, FGD participant)⁵³

Similarly to their male counterparts, young women are proactive at documenting and reporting crop damage using their smartphones and using video footage and photos to prove their cases.⁵⁴

Resolution of crop damage cases is generally a matter of internal family discussion. Young women have the right to accept or refuse conciliation or compensation, and resolution of the issue is only concluded when the woman or her family, or both, are satisfied with the

46 FGD_FMF_Y; FGD_FM_Y; FGD_FW_M; KII_FW_A; KII_FW_N

47 FGD_FM_M

48 FGD_FM_Y

49 KII_PM_A; KII_FW_A; KII_FM_E; KII_FW_N; FGD_FMF_Y; FGD_FF_Y; FGD_FM_Y; FGD_FW_M

50 FGD_FMF_Y; FGD_FMF_M; FGD_FM_M; FGD_FM_Y

51 FGD_FMF_Y

52 FGD_FMF_M

53 FGD_FMF_Y

54 FGD_FM_M; KII_FW_N

outcome (Sulieman and Abdal-Karem, 2023). While young women may interact with conflict resolution institutions, they are not represented in them.⁵⁵

Beyond seeking resolution to cases of trespassing, study participants mentioned little of other roles for young men and women in conflict. Only one male participant from the farming community mentioned that women (both farmers and herders) may fuel conflict, as they are protective of their families and may be vocal when their sons are affected by or implicated in conflict. This can exacerbate tensions when women push for action behind the scenes.⁵⁶

Young men in the pastoralist community

Young pastoralist men are directly involved in conflict as they move with the herds and are on the frontline dealing with the consequences when their livestock trespass onto farms and damage crops. Most conflict occurs between young men and farmers or agricultural scheme owners. They bear the brunt of the conflict, including detention or arrest.⁵⁷ Older men lead the conflict resolution process and are represented in conflict resolution committees.⁵⁸ Young men are not involved, obeying their elders and omdas.⁵⁹

Concurrently, youth may calm tensions and solve problems.⁶⁰ One male study participant remarked that pastoralist youth today, under the age of 30, are more open-minded and informed than in the past. Some are educated, which makes them more understanding during conflict, while older people are stuck in their ways and beliefs.⁶¹

Young women in the pastoralist community

Pastoralist women are parties to farmer–herder conflict when their land is encroached upon or when their livestock damage others' crops.⁶² Like young men, pastoralist women are not involved in the conflict resolution process, which is conducted solely by men.

Pastoralist women do not sit idly by, however. Some have become physically involved in altercations:

If there is a quarrel, we carry sticks to defend our brothers and sons. (Female pastoralist, KII participant)⁶³

We, the young girls, if we are exposed to friction with the farmers, we may meet on it and make a blow. Such friction occurred a lot and the farmer fled as a result of beatings by young women. (Young female pastoralist, KII participant)⁶⁴

⁵⁵ FGD_FMF_Y; FGD_FM_Y; FGD_FW_M; KII_FW_A; KII_FW_N

⁵⁶ KII_PM_A

⁵⁷ KII_PW_F; KII_PW_A; KII_PM_I; KII_PM_A; FGD_PM_Y

⁵⁸ FGD_PM_Y; KII_PW_F

⁵⁹ FGD_PM_Y; KII_PW_F; FGD_PW_M

⁶⁰ KII_PM_I

⁶¹ KII_PM_A

⁶² KII_PM_A; KII_PM_I

⁶³ KII_PW_F

⁶⁴ KII_PW_A

Fallata (Fulbe) young women taking a break during their work as wage labourers on a large-scale mechanised scheme in southern Gadarif, Sudan. © Hussein M. Suleiman



Young women support the young men, so they have a role in the conflict. (Young female pastoralist, KII participant)⁶⁵

4.5 Youth perspectives on solutions to farmer–herder conflict

Both young men and women echo their community in believing that land availability and access are key to resolving farmer–herder conflict. They also advocate for land allocation and planning that takes place in such a way that both small-scale farmers and pastoralists can participate in their respective food production systems with dignity and without conflict.

65 KII_PW_A

5 FINDINGS FROM JANGARGARI VILLAGE, NIGERIA

5.1 Context

Youth and young children are the majority population in the Jangargari area and they have limited education and economic opportunities. Most livelihoods, including for youth, remain dependent on small-scale rain-fed crop farming and traditional livestock production, though both production systems have been highly affected by repeated cycles of violent farmer–herder conflict. The main ethnic groups are Hausa, Tiv and Fulani, with the former two groups dominating the crop production sector and the latter dominating livestock production.

Unlike in the Sudan study area, farmer–herder conflict in Jangargari has escalated to violence cyclically since the 1980s, causing loss of lives and property and displacement of people (1980, 1989–1990, 2000–2003, 2007–2009, 2013–2015 and 2017–2023). The conflicts are marked by substantial losses of crops and livestock, with devastating impact on people’s health, food security, livelihoods and incomes.

Land is central to farmer–herder conflict in Jangargari. Issues arise primarily over loss of land and land access, land conversion (for pastoralists), conflict (for all groups), and disputes over land ownership and boundaries (between Hausa and Tiv). Historical power relations between the three ethnic groups are central to these contestations. Tension over land is particularly acute and volatile between the Fulani and the Tiv, mainly over pastoral access to land and mobility, and between the Hausa and the Tiv over land ownership and boundaries. These local dynamics are influenced by politics in neighbouring Benue State, which has been openly hostile to pastoral mobility and grazing.

In addition, national policies and biases favouring crop production over pastoralism have allowed rapid and unchecked local farm expansion at the expense of grazing land and pastoral mobility. Pastoralists appear to be on the lowest rung of the local power ladder, given biases towards farming.

When we have disputes with either Hausa or Tiv farmers, the Awe and Jangargari traditional leaders [Hausa] always favour the farmers. With damages less than N5000, the farmers would demand N100,000 or even more, and the leaders would approve because we did not go to school and do not have skilled readers. We have no privilege and are considered outcasts. (Elderly male pastoralist, FGD participant)⁶⁶

Commercialisation compounds land issues in Jangargari. Land sales by local leaders from the farming communities to commercial crop producers from outside the area have resulted in

⁶⁶ FGD_GidanJemma_MaleElderlyHerdors_12.03.24

grievances with local groups. These groups see leaders becoming increasingly accountable to commercial interests rather than to farmer–herder welfare and peaceful relations among their constituencies. Repeated cycles of violence and conflict magnify land issues as violence limits people’s access to farms and grazing land, fuelling more intense competition over farmland and grazing in nearby safe spaces. Many farmers are expanding farm plots in these areas to make up for losses due to conflicts elsewhere.⁶⁷ This exacerbates tensions, increases poverty and reduces options for many.

As a majority population, youth are central in society, in food production systems and in conflict. While there are no restrictions on young men and women, or on women in general, owning and controlling production, the process of accessing land is stacked against youth and women. Their weaker purchasing power also limits their ability to pay for land or land access, which affects their ability to adapt and manoeuvre.

5.2 Role of youth in food production systems

Male and female youth in the farming communities

Men, including young men, take the lead in crop production and are mainly involved in preparing the land, planting, harvesting and transport.⁶⁸ Women, including young women, play pivotal roles in crop production, mainly in post-harvest activities such as crop storage, processing (threshing, grading and packaging), marketing and trade. Some women (mainly married women, and mainly among the Hausa) cultivate their own plots and own the land through inheritance, though mainly men own the farmland.⁶⁹

Young women, like their older counterparts, engage in crop production to cover household needs. They sell surplus in local markets for income (young unmarried women on family plots and young married women on their husband’s plots). The sale of home-reared animals is also an important source of income. Beyond crop production, women (mainly women in their 30s and particularly Hausa women) are also active in shopkeeping and market trade. Some own shops in Jangargari market and sell goods to meet local needs; others are involved in retailing crops in local markets and some further away.⁷⁰

Women’s and men’s roles in food production and trade have been severely challenged by protracted conflict (see **5.3 Impact of conflict on youth**).

Male and female youth in pastoralist communities

Pastoralists in Jangargari are mainly involved in livestock rearing, with most households owning between 20 and over 200 heads of cattle. However, an increasing number of households are diversifying to crop cultivation, due to livestock losses and the growing challenges they face in sustaining mobile livestock production.⁷¹

⁶⁷ FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleElderlyHerders_08.03.24

⁶⁸ KII at Jangargari, January 2024

⁶⁹ KII at Jangargari, January 2024

⁷⁰ KII at Jangargari, January 2024

⁷¹ FGD_GidanJemma_MaleYouthHerders_12.03.24

Young men between the ages of about 12 and 20 years are mainly involved in day-to-day herding and they move with their herds. Older youth in their late 20s to early 30s rarely accompany them, but they do guide the younger herders in terms of where to go, where to stay and which routes to take. They also supply the younger herders with food, clothing and shelter.

This represents a departure from the past when men up to the age of 40 years would accompany the herds during a migration,⁷² and household heads in their 50s, 60s and 70s took responsibility for guiding and managing livestock migration. Today, men in their late 20s and older are mainly settled and do not move with the herds. This role change among men is thought to be because young and able-bodied men can quickly respond and fight, should they encounter conflict during a migration. Most cattle are owned by older men (household heads) who also decide on livestock sales. However, some young men also participate in this decision-making; for example, making young married men who themselves are household heads, those who own cows within the family herd, or young orphaned men whose herds are entrusted to older male relatives who consult them before sales.

Young Fulani women, like their older counterparts, mainly rely on milk and dairy products for food security and they sell these in local markets to cover household expenses. In the last decade, however, the milk supply has completely dried up, severely affecting household food security and women's incomes (see **5.3 Impact of conflict on youth**).

5.3 Impact of conflict on youth

Farmer–herder conflicts have had a collective impact on whole communities, but there are variations in how different genders and age groups experience these impacts. Conflicts mainly affect livelihoods and food production systems, the ability to meet basic needs, overall food security, the social fabric and family cohesion, and physical and psychosocial well-being.

Cycles of violent farmer–herder conflict in Jangargari have caused substantial loss of life, have destroyed homes, property, harvests and livestock, and have led to the theft of property and livestock. Conflict has also closed the local Jangargari market (since 2017), which is a lifeline for the community, as well as schools. Widespread fear has made farms and grazing areas inaccessible and conflict has displaced many people. Criminal gangs and criminality are now also a prominent local feature, with young men mainly involved. The impacts are far-reaching.

Young people's livelihoods in crop and livestock production and associated trade have been destroyed or severely curtailed by conflict. Prices have gone up, given the scarcity of many staple food items and the difficulties and distances associated with getting goods in and out of Jangargari from markets further away. Poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition are now daily realities for both young farmers and herders. Livelihoods and income options for both married and unmarried young men and women have severely contracted,⁷³ with those who remain in the area meeting their basic needs through various coping strategies. Some strategies have taken a darker turn, particularly among male youths, as a result of decades of violence. Strained and mistrustful relationships between ethnic groups have become locked in.

⁷² KII, Jangargari, 2024 in Momale and Higazi (unpublished)

⁷³ Young married women are cushioned somewhat from the effects of this, while unmarried young women are more affected. Young married men are also more affected as they shoulder the responsibility of the family.

Male youth in the farming community

Many young men have lost their livelihoods in crop production as a result of recurring violence that has severed access to farms and destroyed harvests. Many fear travelling to their farms due to the risk of attack.⁷⁴ Others have lost the financial means and the physical strength to maintain their farms.

The most important effect is the loss of our crops as farming is our main livelihood.
(Male Tiv farmer, FGD participant)⁷⁵

Before the conflict, I usually farmed by myself, but for now, I can't farm due to changes in our body system, no good food to eat, no strength and I have no money to farm.
(Young male Hausa farmer, FGD participant)⁷⁶

Poverty, trauma, hypertension and domestic violence are common,⁷⁷ the latter being a response by men who are hard-pressed to fulfil their roles as breadwinners.⁷⁸ This domestic violence is mainly directed at wives.

Reduced local livelihood options and fear of being targeted during conflicts have driven permanent and seasonal out-migration, particularly among young Hausa men. This means fewer young men remain in the area than in the past.

A high number of our male youths have left to the city in search of greener pastures and due to the rising conflicts, because they are usually the targets ... Two-thirds of our able youths have all fled out for fear of being killed. They are now all over the country doing other jobs. (Elderly female Hausa farmer, FGD participant)⁷⁹

About 80% of our community are women. The female youths make up about 50%, and the male youths make up about 15% of the male population. (Female Hausa farmer, FGD participant)⁸⁰

Poverty and lack of development have engulfed the community. Two-thirds of the people that have fled are yet to return to their homes. The impact is still being felt today. (Elderly female Hausa farmer, FGD participant)⁸¹

Most of us have moved to other places or other communities due to the conflict.
(Young male Tiv farmer, FGD participant)⁸²

⁷⁴ FGD_GidanUkoha_MaleMixedFarmers_18.03.24; KII_Jangargari_MaleElderlyHerdors_17.03.2024; FGD_Jangargari_MaleYouthFarmers_13.03.24

⁷⁵ FGD_GidanUkoha_MaleMixedFarmers_18.03.24

⁷⁶ FGD_Jangargari_MaleYouthFarmers_12.03.24

⁷⁷ FGD_Jangargari_MaleMixedFarmers_18.03.24

⁷⁸ FGD_Jangargari_FemaleYouthFarmers_15.03.24

⁷⁹ FGD_Jangargari_FemaleElderlyFarmers_10.03.24

⁸⁰ FGD_Jangargari_FemaleMixedFarmers_20.03.24

⁸¹ FGD_Jangargari_FemaleElderlyFarmers_10.03.24

⁸² FGD_GidanUkoha_MaleYouthFarmers_13.03.24

Coping strategies employed by young men who remain in the area include growing crops in smaller quantities and planting quick-maturing crops instead of yams, which were a staple food crop and which fetched higher prices in the market.⁸³ Young men also hunt, fish, sell firewood and make charcoal.⁸⁴ They undertake agricultural wage labour on the farms of others, provide motorcycle transport services, engage in construction work and travel to markets further away to trade. Wage labour on the farms of others is a recent development in response to conflict. Concurrently, many others are unemployed.

We no longer sleep in good houses, we cannot farm as we used to do before the conflict and we barely eat. Presently we are waiting for the rains to come so we can engage in hired labour for survival. (Young male Tiv farmer, FGD participant)⁸⁵

Darker coping strategies have also been adopted among young men. Drug abuse, the prevalence of weapons in the community and long-term exposure to violence have lured some young men into criminality, including armed robbery, cattle rustling and kidnapping people for ransom.⁸⁶ Some young men have lost respect for the authorities due to the inability of the government to enforce law and order.

Female youth in the farming community

Conflict has substantially reduced young women's engagement in crop production and trade, the latter particularly since the closure of the Jangargari market.⁸⁷ This has had a significant impact on livelihoods, income and food security. Young Tiv women have lost access to farms,⁸⁸ and young Hausa women can no longer access important land resources, such as certain local forests, for fear of attack.⁸⁹ Many have also been displaced, either permanently or temporarily.⁹⁰

There has been a significant impact on our income due to the conflict. Before the conflicts, we used to farm in large quantities and usually experienced bounty harvests. There was enough to eat and, most importantly, more than enough to sell. There was a steady inflow of cash, but since the conflict that has changed. Things are no longer the same. We barely have enough to eat, much less to sell. We don't even go to the market anymore because there's nothing to take to the market, and farming is our only source of livelihood. You can understand the financial impact on us. (Young female Tiv farmer, FGD participant)⁹¹

We now have little income and reduced productivity. Before, we could get about 10,000 yams during harvest season, but now, no yams to sell or eat. Now, one can barely get 100 yams. Millet is our main staple food, and its production has been reduced as well.

83 FGD_GidanUkoha_MaleYouthFarmers_13.03.24

84 FGD_GidanUkoha_MaleYouthFarmers_12.03.24

85 FGD_GidanUkoha_MaleYouthFarmers_18.03.24

86 FGD_Jangargari_FemaleYouthFarmers_15.03.24; FGD_Jangargari_MaleYouthFarmers_13.03.24

87 KII at Jangargari, January 2024 in Momale and Higazi (unpublished)

88 FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleYouthFarmers_15.03.24; FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleMixedFarmers_16.03.24

89 FGD_Jangargari_FemaleYouthFarmers_15.03.24

90 FGD_Jangargari_FemaleYouthFarmers_10.03.24; FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleMixedFarmers_20.03.24

91 FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleYouthFarmers_15.03.24

The effect of this was and still is hunger that is very much with us today. (Young female Tiv farmer, FGD participant)⁹²

I was harvesting more than 10 bags of maize, but since the conflict, I barely get enough to eat with my family. (Young female Hausa farmer, FGD participant)⁹³

Before the conflict, women had capital and engaged in micro and small businesses, but this is no longer the case. They now rely on the seasonal mangoes and their relatives elsewhere for support. (Young female Hausa farmer, FGD participant)⁹⁴

Trade and shopkeeping have disappeared with the closure of the Jangargari market. Other markets are far away and the costs associated with travel and the transport of goods to these far-away markets is prohibitive. Travel has also become physically risky for young women.

Young women employ various coping strategies to deal with the loss of livelihoods and income. This includes increasing their engagement in subsistence farming, switching to fast-maturing varieties of crops due to uncertainties linked to insecurity, and planting economic fruit trees on household land around the homestead, which require less care than crops.⁹⁵ Additionally, young women participate in fishing, selling firewood and charcoal,⁹⁶ keeping domestic livestock and poultry, selling food and drinks in local villages, and working as domestic helpers for a wage. Many now spend much of their time on immediate domestic responsibilities, with displacement having closed down the normal economic opportunities they would have once tapped into. Instead, many rely on family and friends for income.

Trauma linked to violence and loss is a common experience in the current context, while an increase in domestic violence has also been reported.

My mother was traumatised because her shops, three grinding machines, livestock, and houses were burnt down. This led to her being hypertensive, and she developed an eye problem and some mental issues. (Young female Hausa farmer, FGD participant)⁹⁷

During one conflict, a woman ran into Mai Goshi Forest where she was injured with a thorn in her eye. She was in the forest for three days before we found her. (Young female Hausa farmer, FGD participant)⁹⁸

After the conflict, some of our men are involved in domestic violence and some even divorced their wives because they cannot afford their normal life expenses because they have no job and their normal incomes are not forthcoming because of the conflicts. (Young female Hausa farmer, FGD participant)⁹⁹

⁹² FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleYouthFarmers_16.03.24

⁹³ FGD_Jangargari_FemaleYouthFarmers_13.03.24

⁹⁴ FGD_Jangargari_FemaleElderlyFarmers_10.03.24

⁹⁵ FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleMixedFarmers_19.03.24; FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleYouthFarmers_15.03.24

⁹⁶ FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleMixedFarmers_20.03.24; FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleYouthFarmers_14.03.24

⁹⁷ FGD_Jangargari_FemaleYouthFarmers_15.03.24

⁹⁸ FGD_Jangargari_FemaleYouthFarmers_15.03.24

⁹⁹ FGD_Jangargari_FemaleYouthFarmers_15.03.24

Relations and trust between the different ethnic groups have broken down further due to conflict. Given limited opportunities for inter-ethnic engagement in the current climate, there are few means to redress this.

The attacks from the herders on three different occasions makes it very hard for trust between us ... they who think good of you would not attack, displace or kill you. These are the reasons why we can't trust the Fulani herders anymore. (Young female Tiv farmer, FGD participant)¹⁰⁰

Before the conflicts, there was no way we would miss a single market day. There was a lot to take to the market for sale. The attacks from the herders have affected our livelihoods, and that has denied us access to the few opportunities we have for peaceful relations. The tension has increased in the last 10 years. Before the outbreak of the first conflict our relationship with the herders was very friendly, but we can't say the same now. (Elderly female Tiv farmer, FGD participant)¹⁰¹

Male youth in the pastoralist community

Young pastoralist men are targets in conflicts, with most Fulani settlements now dominated by women since so many men have been killed or have fled.¹⁰² The kidnapping of young Fulani men has also been reported, as have substantial herd losses.

During the time of [Governor] Ortom, they came to our place with 10 trucks and they kidnapped our young men and forced them into the vehicles. Up to today, we have not heard anything about them. One man had two wives and nothing now. This lack of men affects cattle rearing as well. (Female pastoralist, FGD participant)¹⁰³

I had 70 cattle, but now it has been reduced to 30; I used to have 100 cattle, but now I have 60; I had 80 cattle, now I have 40. (Young male pastoralists, FGD participants)¹⁰⁴

Young herders have adapted by changing migratory patterns to avoid conflict-affected areas – albeit with difficulty, given ever-increasing challenges to pastoralist mobility. They also go further away and for longer. Some older men (including older youths) have given up mobility altogether, leaving day-to-day herding to those who are sometimes much younger. These men are now involved in livestock trading as this is physically safer than moving with the herds. Other young men have taken up farming due to unviable herd sizes and their inability to access grazing areas due to conflict. The grazing ban in neighbouring Benue State has restricted access to southern grazing areas.¹⁰⁵

Concurrently, many young pastoralist men have lost interest in livestock activities and, like their farming counterparts, many are unemployed. The normalisation of weapons within the community and long-term exposure to violence has also lured some young Fulani men into criminality, including armed robbery and kidnapping.

¹⁰⁰ MF_FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleYouthFarmers_15.03.24

¹⁰¹ FGD_GidanUkoha_ElderlyFemaleFarmers_11.03.24

¹⁰² FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleYouthHerders_13.03.24; FGD_GidanJemma_MaleElderlyHerders_12.03.24

¹⁰³ FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleMixedHerders_15.03.24

¹⁰⁴ FGD_GidanPate_MaleYouthHerders_12.03.24

¹⁰⁵ FGD_GidanJemma_MaleYouthHerders_12.03.24

Female youth in the pastoralist community

Poverty, food insecurity, trauma and loneliness are common among pastoralist women due to protracted conflict. For the last decade, pastoralist women (including young women) have not been able to depend on milk and dairy products as sources of food security and income. Today, the family herd that provides milk is either insufficient or absent from the area for many months due to inadequate local grazing and insecurity. With many young women now settled (joining their families during mobility only in exceptional cases), their links to a milk supply have been severed.

Goats, sheep and poultry kept near the home represent a lifeline for Fulani women. However, their ability to rely on this small stock for milk and marginal income is tenuous, given the lack of natural grazing. Forests and hillsides have been converted to farming and they face the threat of the looting and killing of small livestock when conflict erupts. Given these extreme difficulties, Fulani women have begun cultivating vegetables around the home for household consumption and sale, but this is insufficient to cover household food needs or income. Indeed, most Fulani women are now entirely dependent on their menfolk, even for buying the most basic items such as food seasoning.¹⁰⁶

All the conflicts have brought about a loss in income because there are no cows within reach for us to milk and sell in the market. Most of us have not sold milk in the last 10 years. The standard of living has also been affected due to total dependence on the heads of households. (Young female pastoralist, FGD participant)¹⁰⁷

There is not enough food and no milk, and this has led to malnutrition among our children and poor health among us. We have no income and are totally dependent on our husbands because of poverty. (Female pastoralist, FGD participant)¹⁰⁸

Responses from men support the women's testimonies.

The women no longer engage in any economic activity while the men experience a reduction in their incomes as well because the quality and quantity of their livestock have declined. (Elderly male pastoralist, FGD participant)¹⁰⁹

The conflict affected our women's access to resources such as milk. Our women no longer go to the market to sell milk to support the household, and we don't have cattle in our settlement in Gidan Jemma. We leave our women for three months. Sometimes we don't know how they eat or go to the hospital. (Elderly male pastoralist, FGD participant)¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleElderlyHerders_08.03.24

¹⁰⁷ FGD_GidanPate_FemaleYouthHerders_15.03.24

¹⁰⁸ FGD_GidanPate_FemaleMixedHerders_20.03.24

¹⁰⁹ FGD_GidanPate_MaleElderlyHerder_08.03.24

¹¹⁰ FGD_GidanJemma_MaleElderlyHerder_12.03.24

To cope, increasing numbers of pastoralist families have begun to buy or rent land¹¹¹ to cultivate staples such as maize and sorghum.¹¹² However, even this strategy does not cover household needs.

Before, we milked our cows, mixed the milk with millet and fed our children, and also take from it and we are sufficient, but now, we ourselves are hungry, not to talk of our animals, so the milk is no longer available, it is not enough for us to feed nor talk of selling. For that our husbands have to complement with farming to feed us, and because we are not farmers, we cannot cultivate enough to last us throughout the season. It is usually one or two bags of grains, so it is not enough. (Elderly female pastoralist, FGD participant)¹¹³

Young women echo this.¹¹⁴

The psychosocial well-being of pastoralist women has also been severely affected by conflict, with men conceding that the hardships for women are greater.

What affects us also affects our women and children, but we feel the women are affected the most because it impacts their food security, constant fear, mental health, and managing losing their husbands and children. Sometimes, when a woman loses her son, we wait for a little time (before informing her) to manage her reaction and grief to such news. The women and children are left at home with inadequate resources. (Elderly male pastoralist, FGD participant)¹¹⁵

The separation of families and the loss of local cultural festivities, which provided important sources of social connection and support for women, have also taken their toll. Women commonly reported feelings of loneliness.

As a result of the fights with the Tiv farmers and subsequent bomb blasts, our Hirde celebration had to be stopped. The Hirde celebration is an occasion where we and our young men dress up to celebrate weddings. This is where we meet potential husbands, socialise and exchange information. We have not had one in the last three years. This is really hurting us that we cannot celebrate Hirde again. (Young female pastoralist, FGD participant)¹¹⁶

We are seriously missing the previous days when there was peace because we could follow our husbands wherever they went. Our husbands now leave us behind for months, spending only two or three days with us when they come back and then they go back to the animals in Benue State. The younger ones among us leave their matrimonial homes and move in back with their mothers because of the lack of companionship. (Young female pastoralist, FGD participant)¹¹⁷

111 It is mainly male heads of household who buy or rent land from Hausa farmers or Hausa village leaders.

112 FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleElderlyHerdors_07.03.24

113 FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleElderlyHerdors_08.03.24

114 FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleYouthHerdors_13.03.24

115 FGD_GidanJemma_MaleElderlyHerdors_12.03.24

116 FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleYouthHerdors_10.03.24

117 FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleMixedHerdors_14.03.24

The research team noted that young women in pastoralist communities seemed unassertive and quiet compared to older women and women in farming communities, possibly indicating the cumulative effects of hardship and isolation.

5.4 Youth experience of and role in conflict

Male youth across farming and herding communities

Male youth across local ethnic groups play both a positive and a negative role in conflicts. While they are seen by many as the main participants in armed violence and criminal gangs, many young men do not engage in violence or criminality.

With regard to violent confrontations, young Hausa, Fulani and Tiv men from all study locations are active and armed combatants, with the Tiv and Fulani being the main actors.

Young Tiv men said:

The main parties in the conflict are Tiv youths, Tiv elders, and Tiv traditional leaders; Fulani youth, Fulani elders (they have cattle to sell and support themselves with weapons and whatever they need) and the Hausa community also comprising the Hausa youth, elders, and women which are accused of alliance with the Fulanis; they consider themselves poor and can't afford sophisticated weapons. (Young male Tiv farmers, FGD participants)¹¹⁸

Young Hausa men said:

The Tiv [and] the Task Force¹¹⁹ were constituted for the fight against Fulani. They were provided with guns, vehicles, and food. Fulani also own some weapons for protection against the Tiv, but not as sophisticated. (Young male Hausa farmers, FGD participants)¹²⁰

And young Hausa women said:

The Tiv Youth Task Force was constituted for the fight against Fulani herders. They were provided with a war vehicle, cars, money, and food. Fulani youth use cutlasses against the Tiv youth. Hausa youth direct the women, children, and the weak ones among them to an escape route to safe places. The young men then return to protect their community before the conflicts become very intense. (Young female Hausa farmers, FGD participants)¹²¹

Criminal gangs from all groups take advantage of the violence to steal and kill livestock, attack or loot farmer settlements, kidnap people for ransom, and occasionally trigger violence to provide cover for these activities. Tiv gangs from across the Benue State border

118 FGD_GidanUkoha_MaleYouthFarmers_13.03.24

119 Generally refers to the Benue State livestock guards, a state security group deputised by the Benue government to enforce Benue's open grazing prohibition law.

120 FGD_Jangargari_MaleYouthFarmers_13.03.24

121 FGD_Jangargari_FemaleYouthFarmers_14.03.24

also reportedly enter Jangargari to steal and kill cattle. Tiv incursions from Benue trigger resistance from local Fulani youth, which often spirals into violent confrontations affecting Tiv communities in Jangargari. It is believed that unemployed and idle young men are at the forefront of these activities, sometimes triggering conflict to provide cover for looting and theft.

However, not all young men from these communities are involved in violence or criminal activities. Some help traditional leaders resolve disputes over crop damage, blocked migratory routes, blocked access to grazing areas and water points, and ownership of farmland. Inclusive agreements are usually reached, with compensation for crop damage negotiated and agreed upon amicably; farmers are persuaded to allow herders access and safe passage. Sometimes, young men participate in local politics, influencing local government and farmer–herder conflicts.¹²² During peace times, young men have also been mobilised into vigilante groups to prevent criminal activities and coordinate grazing boys in the fields. They sometimes cooperate across ethnic and socio-cultural divides, with local Hausa, Fulani and Tiv young men working together. Sometimes they extend their cooperation into the adjoining Benue State.¹²³ During or before violence, young men take people to safety and protect local people and assets, including harvested produce, crops and livestock. They also flee conflict.

Despite evidence that young men engage in conflict resolution activities to maintain and restore peace, however, male and female youth have limited involvement in conflict management and decision-making. The exclusion of youth from conflict resolution was noted in almost all FGDs.

Elderly persons are most involved in meeting to resolve conflicts. Women and youths are not much involved in peace resolutions. Ardos [pastoralist local leaders], as representatives of the Fulani communities, are entrusted with representation and the herders are always satisfied. (Elderly male pastoralist, FGD participant)¹²⁴

Female youth across farming and herding communities

Women (including young women) do not participate in violence or conflict and they are also not involved in existing conflict resolution mechanisms. The main actions they take during violence are to flee towards safer areas and to help evacuate people and property. Hausa and Fulani women flee towards Awe Town and other settlements in Nasarawa State, and most Tiv women and children towards safer settlements in Benue State. Older women (and men) counsel young men against conflict and violence.¹²⁵ Some women¹²⁶ organise themselves into joint movements to push community leaders to work with young men to end conflict.¹²⁷

Most feedback by women and about women describes a benign, even positive role in conflict. But some responses indicate that women play a more confrontational role, with skirmishes between young women and verbal abuse by young children reported. This indicates underlying animosities.

¹²² KII with farmers and herder community leaders, Jangargari, January 2024

¹²³ KIIs with farmers and herder communities at Jangargari, January 2024

¹²⁴ FGD_GidanPate_MaleElderlyHerders_17.02.24

¹²⁵ FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleElderlyHerders_08.03.24

¹²⁶ Usually older women who live in towns, who have some level of education.

¹²⁷ KII at Jangargari, January 2024 in Momale and Higazi (unpublished)

When attacks happen we run. Everyone, both men and women, help to evacuate. (Elderly female Tiv farmer, FGD participant)¹²⁸

We women herders help move the children to a safer location and the cattle and goats to another location, normally on the hills which are higher ground, to safeguard the animals. (Elderly female pastoralist, FGD participant)¹²⁹

The women help the evacuation process, especially in evacuating the children, the reason being that the women are not always the target of attacks, and for that reason, they help in the moving process since we [the men] are the prime targets of attacks, and have fled before the women. (Elderly male Tiv farmer, FGD participant)¹³⁰

Unlike us settled farmers, the herders are migrants and always on the move, making it easy for them to attack. We are settled and that makes us vulnerable to such attacks. Besides this, they also possess sophisticated weapons which gives them an upper hand in conflict, so the only chance we stand to survive is to flee. (Young female Tiv farmer, FGD participant)¹³¹

When the event happened, we got really confused. We saw our men and the Tivs running. The Tivs were fighting us and preventing our cattle from coming back home. That was how we started running, without shoes on our feet. Some of us fainted. We got to the Dakala River, but it was raining heavily, and the river was so high that we could not cross. We had to call the canoe men to come and get us across the river. (Young female pastoralist, FGD participant)¹³²

Some Hausa respondents said that in the early years of the conflict in the 1980s and 90s, Tiv women would instigate conflict in Jangargari, beating war drums and boosting their men's morale. Sometimes they would help the men loot properties in Jangargari and cut meat from killed cattle to take back to their communities. Since that time, the violence has increased in scale and has evolved from the use of basic weapons to the use of sophisticated arms, mainly carried by men. So while women are less involved in the physical arena of violence today, this historical perspective suggests that women may still instigate and fuel violence, through from behind the scenes.

A young Hausa woman's statement suggests young women are not too shy to push for the use of force if their grievances are unheard.

Near the boundary at Asuku Forest, land was taken over by the Tiv farmers. Our leaders were informed that action should be taken and if not, then we will decide to take it by force. (Young female Hausa farmer, FGD participant)¹³³

128 FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleElderlyFarmers_20.03.24

129 FGD_GidanJemma_ElderlyFemaleHerders_08.03.24

130 FGD_GidanUkoha_MaleElderlyFarmers_08.03.24

131 FGD_GidanUkoha_FemaleYouthFarmers_15.03.24

132 FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleYouthHerders_10.03.24

133 FGD_Jangargari_FemaleYouthFarmers_14.03.24

Local skirmishes between young Fulani and Tiv women indicate an overall tense relationship between the two groups. And yet a transactional and dependent relationship between the groups remains.

Even yesterday we fought with the Tivs at Dakala River, towards Wurbany. We went to fetch water from the stream, and they tried to stop us, saying that the land does not belong to us and we should go back to our ancestral land. We resisted and fighting broke out. Although we got beaten up badly, we were able to fetch the water. At the same time, this will not stop us from doing business with them. We sell hens to them, and we buy yams from them too. This will not stop us from fighting tomorrow. The Tiv women always want to instigate the fight, but we always try to avoid it until we are pushed to the wall. (Young female pastoralist, FGD participant)¹³⁴

We want to live together with them and don't want them to leave. We are both living in the forest, and we need each other. Their presence is a sure safety for us because we know their brothers elsewhere will not come and attack us. We flee anytime we see them fleeing and take refuge together. (Young female pastoralist, FGD participant)¹³⁵

Antagonistic remarks by young children provide further evidence of an overall tense relationship between the two groups.

Three days ago, I went to look for my goats at Urbanya. Young children about 6 to 12 years were calling out to me and insulting me. They always do that using vulgar language. This pains me. I tried running after the kids one time out of anger, but on closing in at the kids' home I realised that if they saw me, they would beat me, so I turned back home. (Female pastoralist, FGD participant)¹³⁶

5.5 Male and female youth perspectives on solutions to farmer–herder conflict

Youth from both pastoralist and farming communities recognise that one of the main causes of farmer–herder conflict lies within pastoralist grievances around lost grazing land and denied access to land, water and grazing routes. Study participants emphasised the importance of providing grazing areas and access routes for pastoralists, as well as an increased military presence to monitor and manage violence.¹³⁷

Shrinking pastoral lands through conversion of land use from pasture lands and cattle routes to farmlands by the farmers drastically reduces the available grazing land, resulting in overgrazing. This leads to cattle grazing in farmlands and destroying crops. This brews anger and tension and causes conflicts between parties. (Elderly female Hausa farmer, FGD participant)¹³⁸

¹³⁴ FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleYouthHerders_10.03.24

¹³⁵ FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleYouthHerders_10.03.24

¹³⁶ FGD_GidanJemma_FemaleMixedHerders_14.03.24

¹³⁷ FGD_Jangargari_FemaleMixedFarmers_20.03.24; FGD_GidanPate_FemaleYouthHerders_14.03.24; FGD_Jangargari_MaleYouthFarmers_13.03.24

¹³⁸ FGD_Jangargari_FemaleElderlyFarmers_10.03.24

6 DISCUSSION

Young men and women are a dominant demographic group in both Sudan and Nigeria, and they contribute significantly to sustaining rural farming and herding communities. They produce food, engage in local economies and provide critical physical and social support to families and communities. Conflict has a substantial impact on youth and weakens their central roles. It increases poverty and hardship due to lost livelihoods and income, and it compromises their means of food production, thereby affecting food security. Physical and psychosocial stress is common, while inter-communal relationships are strained because the root causes of conflict are not addressed.

Consistent with broader literature, the two SPARC studies in Sudan and Nigeria show that conflict exacerbates existing inequalities experienced by young men and women. This is because youth are generally on the losing side of property rights, they are in weaker positions to access and manage resources, they have limited access to economic and financial resources and have limited purchasing power, and they are generally excluded from local and higher-level decision-making (Krätli and Toulmin, 2020; UNDP, 2023). These factors limit the options available to youth to manoeuvre, adapt and participate in shaping their circumstances.

In both case study locations, young people have few opportunities to compensate for losses, and their ability to move beyond subsistence farming, livestock rearing and menial labour is constrained. Many young men have migrated out of both areas (an upward trend), leaving behind predominantly female populations and the elderly who must shoulder greater responsibilities. Young women's coping options are especially limited, and their mobility is much more constrained than that of young men, primarily due to social and cultural norms. Young married women, in particular, have less flexibility to leave because of family obligations.

An interesting aspect in Sudan that requires further consideration is the potential contribution of access to finance among women farmers. Finance can buffer the impacts of conflict, as demonstrated by the enhanced power, voice, visibility and control over land enjoyed by women in Azaza Sogora who accessed finance over the last 14 years. The fact that many young women still turn to wage labour likely means that access to finance benefits only some individuals, however.

The effects of conflict are more severe and magnified in the Nigeria study site than in Sudan, as farmer–herder conflict has spiralled there into widespread violence. In the Sudan case study, farmer–herder conflict constitutes mainly altercations between individuals or households. What is considered food stress among certain families in the Sudan study can be considered widespread hunger and malnutrition in the Nigerian context. Poverty is magnified in Nigeria, given lost access to critical infrastructure such as local markets and roads, while physical and psychosocial stress amounts to outright trauma, given the death, destruction and displacement caused by violence. Furthermore, ill will between groups in Nigeria has played into ethnic politics, where animosity becomes entrenched.

Given the violent nature of the conflict in Nigeria, young men across local ethnic groups are armed and active combatants. Some also engage in criminality, which itself triggers and perpetuates violence. However, many young men do not engage in violence or criminality and,

like others, instead pursue coping strategies to minimise the effects on livelihoods and income and engage in neutral or positive actions before and during violent conflicts. Many flee, and others help evacuate people to safety and protect crops and livestock within their communities.

During peaceful periods, young men are mobilised into vigilante groups that help maintain peace and prevent criminality, sometimes cooperating across ethnic groups. Some young men participate in local politics and influence local government regarding conflict. Capable young men help traditional leaders resolve disputes amicably in non-violent disputes over crop damage, blocked access to grazing and water, and ownership of farmlands. However, despite such efforts to maintain or restore peace, young men are generally excluded from formal and informal conflict management and decision-making, as this space is traditionally dominated by older men.

Women in Nigeria generally do not participate in violence. They flee during conflict and help evacuate people and assets. This is especially true when men are the first to leave because they are the primary targets. Some responses by women and about women suggest a benign or even positive role for women in conflict, but some indicate a more aggressive and confrontational role. For example, women may instigate and fuel violence from behind the scenes and use confrontation as a means of expression. Like young men, young women are also excluded from conflict management and decision-making.

In Sudan, it is mostly male youth who are involved in farmer–herder conflict, though some young women participate in skirmishes. Otherwise, young men and women across farming and herding groups try to avoid conflict by putting in extra labour to avoid triggers (e.g. crop trespassing). They report encroachments or seek redress through existing conflict resolution mechanisms. While young men and women interact with such platforms to seek a resolution to disputes (particularly in the farming community), they are not represented within these mechanisms, either formally or informally.

Across the Sudan and Nigeria case study sites, young men and women acknowledged land availability, allocation and access as root causes of farmer–herder conflict, emphasising that these issues need to be addressed to secure a long-term solution to conflict and violence. In Sudan, young men and women underscored the need for balanced and inclusive land allocation and planning that benefits both small-scale farmers and pastoralists. In Nigeria, youth emphasised the importance of providing grazing areas and access routes for pastoralists, along with an increased government military presence to monitor and manage violence.

7 CONCLUSION

This study shows that young men and women are an active, informed and vocal demographic in two contrasting farmer–herder conflict contexts. They act positively and negatively, and their involvement in conflict extends beyond the perpetrator and victim roles described in much of the literature. This nuance must be explored further to allow greater and more appropriate engagement with youth in conflict contexts. For example, further study could identify entry points to support youth-led initiatives working across ethnic divides in Nigeria to maintain and restore peace.

The study looks at a specific context of farmer–herder conflict without inter-communal violence (in Sudan) and another deeply violent context (in Nigeria). It indicates that many young men are not involved in violence, and instead actively seek ways to avoid violence or mitigate it, in spite of the poverty and exclusion that they experience. This runs counter to the picture that can be painted by the popular media that young men are somehow naturally inclined towards violence. The conditions and incentives that draw young men to non-violent means of response and expression therefore must be explored.

The findings that young people play non-violent and non-aggressive roles emerge particularly when the research extends to also include the involvement of young women in farmer–herder conflict. However, some women do participate in aggression and can encourage violence, again countering the notion that all women are benign and positive actors. This, too, deserves further research.

For youth who participate in violence and criminality, it is essential to understand the grievances and incentives that lead to this behaviour, in order to identify pathways to break cycles of violence. It is important to do this before armed and hostile action becomes entrenched and normalised.

Youth have much to contribute given that their perspectives, experiences and abilities differ from those of older community members. They also carry out most of the labour in farming and herding and they are the most mobile. Yet they tend to be excluded from formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms and decision-making linked to prevalent social norms. As the majority population in many rural contexts, young men and women should be actively included in efforts around conflict resolution and peace-building. Today, youth have different means at their disposal to make their voices heard, through digital platforms and other ‘non-traditional’ means. This provides many youth with significant influence. It is critical that genuine space is carved out for youth participation and voice within established formal and informal peace processes. Not doing so is a missed opportunity and excluded youth could use their influence to undermine peace deals concluded behind closed doors (Shamil Idriss, Search for Common Ground, personal communication, 13 June 2024).

Emphasising youth in farmer–herder conflict research, including their roles in society and food production systems, permits a deeper understanding of what is important to youth and of their grievances. The findings of such research can then inform action rooted in what young men and women actually do, aspire to do and are forced to do in circumstances of conflict.

Lost livelihoods and food insecurity are critical issues among entire communities affected by farmer–herder conflict. Young people’s basic needs are going unfulfilled, particularly so for women, who are usually left behind in conflict-affected communities with fewer options and means to manoeuvre. In Sudan, the contribution that access to finance has made to women farmers’ resilience, voice and power deserves attention: it has allowed more women to farm their own plots, to diversify from food to cash crops and to purchase livestock to supplement crop production. Furthermore, it has increased their visibility among formal institutions in positive ways. This progress should be learnt from and built upon.

Young man herding donkeys in Adamawa State, Nigeria. © Adam Higazi



8 RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Recommendations

Increase the focus on youth in research

Researchers should pursue and promote evidence-based understanding of the role of youth in farmer–herder conflict across different contexts, given the central roles of young people in farming and pastoralist societies and the significant impact that conflict has on them. This would help identify entry points for appropriate support to youth in such contexts.

Include youth to address the root causes of farmer–herder conflict

National and local governments and community stakeholders should design and implement inclusive land allocation and planning systems that consider the needs of farmers and pastoralists, male and female. This includes the provision of grazing areas and access routes. Young men and women from across farming and herding communities must be included when such processes are established, to ensure their perspectives are heard and their needs reflected.

Promote youth inclusion in conflict resolution and peace-building mechanisms

National and local governments and community stakeholders should establish and strengthen formal and informal platforms that actively include youth in conflict resolution and decision-making. Mechanisms should leverage young men and women's unique perspectives, experiences and roles in community dynamics.

Support youth-led peace-building initiatives

Governments, donors and development partners should encourage and adequately resource youth-led initiatives, particularly those that work across ethnic divides to foster peace and mitigate conflict.

Strengthen livelihood opportunities for youth

Governments, donors and development partners should invest in gender-responsive skill-building, access to inputs, and the creation of livelihood opportunities within and beyond subsistence agriculture in conflict-affected settings. This would improve young people's ability to respond and manoeuvre in such contexts, beyond having to turn to menial labour and petty trade.

Skills, inputs and opportunities should fit the context and they should be explored and defined together with youth, since they are best placed to identify entry points and needs. Aside from positive contributions to resilience, this may also reduce youth susceptibility to participating in violence and criminality.

Investments in education (e.g. investing in schools and teachers, and including practical skills and trades alongside academic subjects), healthcare and social services more broadly are also critically needed to enhance overall well-being and expand young people's options for participation in society.

Expand access to finance for women in general and for young men and women in contexts where this has shown promise

Banks, donors, development partners and community associations should build on the success of NGO-led financial programmes in Sudan. They should scale initiatives across conflict-affected areas to provide access to credit to enhance economic stability and community influence. Note, however, that access to credit has benefited women farmers in Sudan, but this may not be an appropriate option for pastoralists there or farmers and pastoralists in other settings.

Understand and mitigate drivers of youth violence

Researchers should conduct targeted studies to identify grievances and incentives that drive some young people to violence and criminality. Governments, development partners and practitioners should use the knowledge gained to develop programmes that address these issues before such behaviours become common and entrenched.

Leverage digital platforms for youth engagement

Governments, development partners, and civil society and youth organisations should use digital technologies (with gender sensitivity) to amplify youth voices. These platforms offer the potential for young people to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes and to influence peace-building efforts through non-traditional channels.

Possible areas for further research

Youth's non-violent responses to socioeconomic and political exclusion

The strategies youth use to address socioeconomic vulnerabilities and political marginalisation without resorting to violence. Such research is relevant in both violent and non-violent farmer–herder conflict settings.

Gendered dimensions of youth experiences in conflict

The experiences of female youth in conflict settings, including their roles, perspectives and coping strategies, to address the current male-centric focus in the literature.

Positive youth contributions to conflict avoidance and peace-building

Cases where youth actively work to prevent conflicts or engage in peace-building efforts, including grassroots initiatives, to identify scalable and replicable strategies.

Intergenerational dynamics and shifting roles in traditional societies

Evolving youth aspirations for autonomy and individualisation and how these affect traditional collective systems and intergenerational relationships, including their implications for conflict dynamics.

Youth representation in decision-making

The inclusion of youth in governance and decision-making structures to positively impact conflict resolution, peace-building and community development outcomes.

Youth perceptions of justice and state response

Youth interpretation of justice and fairness in the context of state and local conflict resolution mechanisms, and how these perceptions influence their choices to engage in activism, migration or violence.

Long-term impacts of conflict on youth

Long-term socioeconomic, psychological and intergenerational effects of farmer–herder conflicts on youth, particularly in terms of livelihood sustainability and community cohesion.

Comparative studies across contexts

Cross-regional analyses of youth roles in conflict and peace-building to identify context-specific factors and broader trends in youth engagement and conflict dynamics.

Youth-led innovations in peace-building

Creative and innovative approaches led by youth, such as the use of technology and social media for early warning systems, advocacy and reconciliation campaigns.

Role of state and non-state actors in youth engagement

How state and non-state actors, including international organisations, can effectively support youth as drivers of positive change in conflict-prone areas.

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Cover: Young pastoralist herding sheep
along migratory route in southern Gadarif.
Credit: Hussein M. Sulieman

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