

STRUCTURED SUMMARY

WOMEN IN FARMER–HERDER CONFLICTS

Case studies from Sudan and Nigeria

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Motivation

Although recent literature on women and conflict has begun to consider voice and agency, this is less evident within farmer–herder conflict. Women are seldom mentioned in studies on such conflicts, and when they are mentioned, they are predominantly portrayed as victims of conflict rather than actors exercising their own agency.

Purpose

This report addresses this gap. It aims to understand women’s experience of – and role in – conflict, and highlights the challenges they face, the coping strategies they use, and the impacts of conflict on their access to food and livelihoods. Sudan in eastern Africa and Nigeria in western Africa were selected for contrast.

Approach and methods

Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted in two case study locations, in two countries: Azaza Sogora village in Gadarif State, Sudan and Jangargari village in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Transcripts were analysed through content analysis, and key insights were distilled.

Findings

Farming and pastoral food production systems are intimately connected to farmer–herder conflict. As key actors in these systems, women play prominent roles in such conflicts, both as affected parties and as strategic actors. In Sudan, they seek reparations through formal and informal channels when their crops or livestock are affected. In Nigeria, where conflicts are violent, they evacuate families and care for the injured. In both contexts women sometimes fuel or calm tensions. Despite their active roles, women are neither represented in conflict resolution bodies nor in post-conflict processes.

In both contexts, women depend mainly on local food production systems for livelihoods and food security. Both are substantially affected by farmer–herder conflict. While men may seek opportunities elsewhere, social and cultural constraints limit women’s mobility, worsening economic hardships from lost harvests and livestock. The impacts are more acute in Nigeria. Despite the challenges, women show resilience by tapping into various coping strategies, though these are limited and demanding. Access to finance and to specific support enhances women’s ability to cope and to manoeuvre, as demonstrated among women farmers in Sudan.

Conflict also deeply affects women physically and psychosocially, particularly where it is more violent, as in Nigeria. This leads to trauma, fear and isolation. At the same time, it increases women's economic and caregiving burdens in both contexts. Opportunities for social exchange and connection are reduced, if not removed altogether, as seen in Nigeria. Addressing these impacts can strengthen women's ability to cope and contribute to rebuilding family and community cohesion.

Policy implications

Given differences in the intensity of conflicts and in political, social and economic dynamics, support to women in farmer–herder conflict needs to be mindful of context. It should respond to the specific patterns and recurrent themes of each setting. Moreover, support should be informed by the lived experiences of the women affected.

Areas of priority in conflict contexts include:

- integrating women's perspectives into inclusive land use policies to address farmer–herder conflict
- strengthening women's roles and leadership in governance as well as land access
- strengthening women's economic resilience by investing in skill-building and access to inputs and resources (financial and otherwise)
- integrating women in conflict resolution and peace-building, and emphasising social and psychosocial support and humanitarian assistance for women, particularly in violent contexts such as in Nigeria, where such support is currently lacking
- further exploration in future research into women's roles in resolving and fuelling conflict, as understanding these roles can inform strategies to break cycles of violence and support community stability.

Funded by



This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.