

STRUCTURED SUMMARY

CAUSES OF FARMER–HERDER CONFLICTS IN AFRICA

A systematic scoping review

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Motivation

Conflict between farmers and livestock herders in Africa has received much attention in recent years, with attendant concerns about increasing and intensifying levels of conflict. However, some academic studies question whether these concerns are founded, calling for critical analysis and primary research on the root causes and triggers of the increased violence observed in parts of Africa.

Purpose

A systematic review of the literature reveals insights into the causes of farmer–herder conflict and uncovers trends and potential gaps in understanding. To what degree does conflict connect to land and natural resources, is land tenure insecurity cited as a cause of conflict, and in what capacity are women and youth mentioned in the research?

Approach and methods

A systematic scoping review was conducted using transparent and reproducible methods to minimise selection bias. Using Web of Science, Science Direct and think tank libraries, a search of academic articles published in English and French identified 88 relevant research papers from a long list of 1,102 articles.

Findings

Though interest in farmer–herder conflicts is significant, primary research on the causes of conflicts is scarce. The case studies reviewed make a direct link between farmer–herder conflict and land or natural resources. Nearly all conclude that conflict is increasing or becoming increasingly violent, but few present primary evidence to support this claim. Governance, political and social factors are most commonly cited as causes of conflict. Few studies mention women in relation to conflict, and those that do describe them primarily as victims; youth are mentioned considerably more so and primarily as participants in conflict. Youth are not differentiated by sex, but everything suggests that male youth are being discussed.

Policy implications

More primary research on farmer–herder conflicts is required, with effort made to break down the ‘causes’ into influencing forces, triggers, sparks and root causes of different depths. The explicit role of tenure insecurity needs particular attention, as does the role of women and youth in these conflicts and the impact on them.

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