

# Towards a Peaceful Coexistence between Herders and Farmers in Nigeria

Conclusions drawn from the field



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Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Abuja

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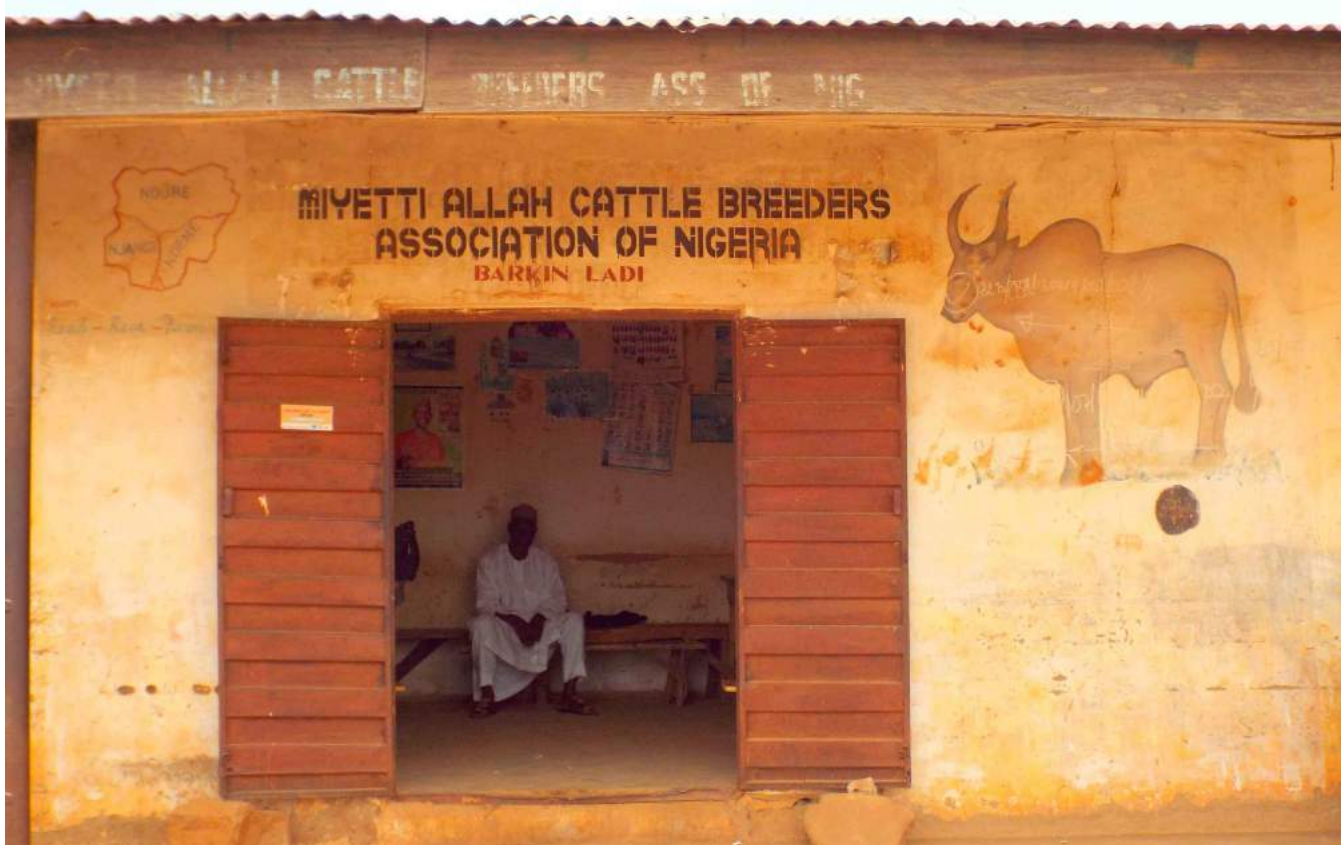
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# Background

For several decades MISEREOR has supported various Nigerian partner organisations, among others, in the field of agriculture and rural development. During 2014, MISEREOR received numerous reports of herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria, particularly from the JDPs in Middle Belt dioceses, leading to a request from partner organisations for support in tackling this urgent issue. In order to work systematically with its partner organisations, MISEREOR commissioned Roger Blench and Umaru Hassan to undertake five missions in 2016 and 2017 to travel to various states and dioceses, work with JDP staffers, and to meet with a wide variety of stakeholders, including farmers, herders and their leaders, NGOs, as well as government officials, to shed light on the conflicts and to develop adaptive mechanisms to prevent and effectively manage conflicts in the future.

The table below gives a summary of the missions undertaken, the interviews held and the number of

people involved in the interaction, linking these to the five missions and corresponding reports.

This booklet presents the major results from direct contact and in-depth discussion with the affected parties as well as conclusions drawn, with a view to working towards a peaceful coexistence of herders and farmers in Nigeria. It makes a number of proposals for transforming the situation, including the revitalisation of the system of grazing reserves, improving control of access to prescription drugs and modern weapons, reducing the use of underage herders through improvements to nomadic schools.

Above all, it suggests that without documentation and analysis of the conflicts and the political will to try out innovative solutions, Nigeria will be locked into a violent cycle of killings for the foreseeable future. NGOs, with their connections to communities at the level of grassroots, can and should play a crucial role in changing attitudes.

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<sup>1</sup> These can be found on the internet at [www.misereor.org/herders-farmers-nigeria](http://www.misereor.org/herders-farmers-nigeria)

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## MISEREOR Herder/Farmer Conflict Missions, 2016-2017

NUMBERS OF VILLAGE AND OTHER MEETINGS AND THOSE PRESENT

Report	Year	State	Meetings	Total Present
<b>I</b>	2016	Benue	11	103
	2016	Kaduna	5	38
	2016	Plateau	11	99
	2016	FCT	3	3
<b>II</b>	2016	Oyo	21	168
	2016	Ekiti	17	155
<b>III</b>	2017	Nasarawa	10	100
	2017	Benue	14	55
	2017	Plateau	2	3
<b>IV</b>	2017	Katsina	6	35
	2017	Sokoto	6	83
	2017	Kaduna	7	59
	2017	Kogi	9	69
	2017	Plateau	4	23
<b>V</b>	2017	Oyo	3	60
	2017	Ogun	7	70
	2017	Osun	8	57
	2017	Ondo	8	77
	2017	Ekiti	1	8
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>153</b>	<b>1265</b>



## Analysis of the conflicts

Civil conflict in Nigeria has had a high profile in recent years and farmer-herder conflict, which has been taking place across much of the Central Area of Nigeria, has been disastrous in terms of loss of life and property and its negative impact on rural livelihoods. Because it is scattered across the country and takes place outside the view of media outlets it has been under-reported, but the issue is now being raised at the highest levels of government. The interviews found that the types of conflict in rural areas are typically concerned with;

- \* Herder-farmer conflict, where cattle enter the fields of farmers either by accident or intentionally, or farmers cultivate areas where cattle have traditionally grazed

- \* Invasion by farmers of grazing reserves and stockroutes intended for herders
- \* Conflict between farmers over ownership and access to land
- \* Conflict between ethnic groups over traditional grievances
- \* (more recently) conflict over access to the drugs trade
- \* The growth of banditry, kidnapping and stock-theft and resentment against herders

This booklet focuses on the findings of the mission concerning herder-farmer conflict.



## The current situation in Nigeria

Nigeria was an agrarian country where most people depended on rainfed farming for subsistence and the production of small-scale cash crops for the world market until the commercialisation of oil in the 1960s. Livestock were mostly kept by herders such as the Fulani and the Shuwa and were confined to the dry areas of the North. Low population densities meant that there was plenty of land for both farmers and pastoralists. Many Fulani migrated southwards in the dry season to major rivers such as the Niger and Benue. Traditional exchanges, such as milk for cereals, and manure for crop residues, meant that both groups collaborated for their mutual benefit. However, the human population of Nigeria has increased very rapidly in the twentieth century, mainly due to better healthcare, and farmers and herders are now competing for the same land. This has forced the herders to push ever further south every year, into unfamiliar areas. For example, farmers in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, told us they had only encountered migrant herders since 2013. The result of this has been a significant rise in conflict between the two groups.

The situation has been made worse by a number of other factors, including the fall in the value of the Naira, which has reduced food imports and increased the incentive for farmers to grow more food, the continuing terrorist actions of Boko Haram in the Northeast, which have caused many herds of cattle to flee the area leading to greater pressure on the Middle Belt. However, equally worrying are factors such as the use of prescription and other drugs, access to modern, sophisticated weapons, and the increasing role of social media in encouraging hate speech. Typical responses, such as bringing together community leaders, have not worked, largely because their influence over the individuals at the root of the problem is now limited. Government response has been to treat farmer-herder conflicts as a security issue, which can work in the short term, but which does not address the root causes of the conflict. In the meantime, populist politicians in some states have been passing anti-herder legislation, which has thrown the issue into sharp relief.

## Long term causes of Herder/Farmer Conflict

The focus of this booklet is on herder/farmer issues. Low-level conflict between the two groups has a long history, but in the years since 2000, various factors have acted together to make the level of violence more extreme and increase the incidence of clashes. These can be summarised as follows;

### Why do Pastoralists migrate?

Nigerians are often puzzled by the migrations of herders. They are aware that cattle are raised on fenced farms in the developed world. These cattle producers depend on purchased feeds, temperate climate and often government subsidies.

In Nigeria, the seasonal movement of cattle is often suggested as the 'nature' of the Fulani people, 'like birds'. **This is emphatically not the case.** Cattle depend on nutritious grass and because of the uneven distribution of rainfall in West Africa, pasture is similarly variable. In the dry season, there are few grasses in the north of Nigeria, so herders are forced to move south. As the pasture has declined, herders are moving greater distances. **Seasonal migration of herds is a rational response to uneven rainfall** and not some obsolete cultural pattern.

## Causes of Accelerating Rural Violence between Herders and Farmers

- Population growth reducing available grazing resources, forcing herders south in the quest for pasture
- Growth of dry-season horticulture reducing livestock access to rivers
- Weak regulatory environment at both the level of the states and Federal Government
- Ineffective and politicised civil society organisations, particularly of pastoralists
- Construction of bridges making easy access to higher rainfall environments
- Erosion of system of stockroutes and grazing reserves
- Sliding value of Naira, and more expensive food imports, stimulating internal agricultural production and competition for land
- Lack of formalised land tenure
- Limited use of fences for localised control of livestock access
- Access to sophisticated modern weapons
- Use of narcotics and prescription drugs
- Breakdown of traditional family mechanisms of social control due to urban migration
- Use of social media to spread rumours and atrocity stories
- Politicians passing anti-herder legislation without wider consultation
- Use of under-age herders
- Breakdown of traditional relationships of herders with farmers



**Population growth.** The Nigeria human population has risen from around 5 million in 1900 to ca. 180 million in 2018. People must be fed, and farmers are responding by bringing more and more land under cultivation, without major intensification of rain-fed agriculture in the drylands where staples are produced. As a result, less and less land is open for free grazing, which herders have depended on in the past.

**Farming along rivers.** Since the 1980s, the use of small portable water-pumps has allowed farmers to cultivate river-banks in the dry season. This increases the supply of vegetables but not rainfed staple crops. This prevents access to the riverine pastures where herders traditionally enjoyed user rights to graze in the dry season, and which they regarded as 'theirs', although without legal ownership.

**Niger-Benue bridges.** Since the 1960s, a series of bridges have been constructed across the Niger-Benue river system, including at Jebba, Lokoja, Ajaokuta, Yola and Numan. These were intended to improve road access, but had the consequence of allowing large herds to cross the river and reach the richer pastures south of the river more easily.

**Stockroutes.** These were established to provide safe routes between farmland for pastoral herds to migrate between areas of unfarmed land in order to graze, and thereby avoid crop damage. This system has been largely allowed to collapse, largely due to lobbying from local political interests.

**Grazing reserves.** These were established to provide refuge areas for herders where there would be no cultivation and to provide a focus for pastoral development (milk collection etc.) However, no resources have been available for some years to

develop reserves and gazette livestock routes, and farmer encroachment is now common.

**Naira devaluation.** The dramatic fall in the value of the Naira following the collapse in the prices of oil has made food imports more expensive. Hence the Nigerian government has followed a policy to substitute imports by stimulating local agricultural production, thereby increasing the competition for land.



**Lack of formalised land tenure.** Most land in Nigeria is held through traditional tenure arrangements, which was practical with low population densities, but is now not fit for purpose. Moreover, even where farmers and herders take action to obtain Certificates of Occupancy, these are frequently over-ridden by powerful commercial interests. As a result, farms are created even where herders have used due process to register land ownership, for example to protect river grazing.

**Lack of effective land use planning and management.** For decades, farmers have been able to expand their arable land at the expense of forests and pastures, without taking into account the natural suitability of the land. The designation of land according to its suitability and future requirements in the context of an overarching land use plan has not been implemented in rural areas.

**Fencing.** Fencing is used in most intensive farming systems for localised control of livestock access. Although common on the Jos Plateau, it is rarely used elsewhere in Nigeria, and so cattle can easily enter fields by accident or design. It seems likely that the use of fencing will increase in coming decades.

**Modern weapons.** In the era when both parties were armed with cutlasses, conflicts remained at a low level. But a major growth in access to sophisticated modern weapons, and a willingness to use these by both sides, has seen heavy increases in mortality. In addition, a feud mentality can lead to a cycle of revenge attacks, growing in intensity, which communities seem powerless to halt.

**Narcotics and prescription drugs.** The misuse of both narcotics such as marijuana and prescription drugs such as Tramadol increases levels of aggression. Young men among both farmer and herder communities make use of these drugs, heightening the incidence of violence. Community leaders in Barakin Ladi, Plateau State, narrated their unsuccessful efforts to close down the local suppliers of such drugs.

**Family fragmentation.** The behaviour of both herders and farmers was strongly controlled by the traditional authority of the family head. New possibilities for keeping in touch, such as the mobile

phone, have led to the dispersal of households, weakening this authority. For example, young men charged with herding the cattle now often hire unskilled children and young adults in markets to manage herds while they stay in towns, leading to increased crop damage, as witnessed in Ogbomoso during the missions. The team visited herder communities in Sokoto where the owners of the herds causing disruption in the southwest are based. Our interviews showed clearly that elders are simply unaware of trouble caused by youth behaviour in distant places.

**Under-age herders.** More and more herder households now split up, with the women and older people staying at a fixed base in the North and young men and children sent with the herds further south. On the road in Nasarawa State, the mission observed a herd of more than a hundred cattle, managed by two young girls, apparently under the age of 10 years. Such lack of herding experience leads to increased crop invasions.

**Breakdown of crop-livestock integration.** Antagonism between herders and farmers has meant that many traditional mechanisms of crop-livestock integration have broken down. When herders stayed in the North, they co-operated with farmers who were also Muslims and exchanged milk and manure for cereals and crop residues. As the herds have moved south, they have to deal with rural communities who are not familiar with such mutual relationships between herders and farmers. For example, farmers may burn their cereal stalks to prevent cattle eating them as part of their revenge for crop damage. In Oyo state, the team was told that farmers are resorting to placing poisoned cassava tubers where cattle pass, to deter herders.

## What has made conflicts worse in recent times

**Social media.** Facebook and other social media are used to spread rumours and atrocity stories, as well as incitements to violence. These 'news' items are rarely based on hard facts and evidence.

**Anti-herder legislation.** Since 2016, several states have been passed anti-grazing laws without consultation of all stakeholders involved and these have caused antagonism with herders, rather than any positive result.

**Framing as a religious conflict.** The herder-farmer conflict is often framed as religious, with Fulani herders as agents of an imagined crusade to overwhelm and convert Christian farmers. This is effectively false, as conflict in areas where farmers are Muslim has been equally violent.

**Spillover from the Northeast.** The attempts to suppress the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast have allowed large numbers of modern weapons to become more freely available. However, the scale and sophistication of attacks lead to the suspicion that individuals linked to terror organisations in the region are providing funds and expertise to destabilise Nigeria.

**Lack of communications.** The missions showed clearly that most farmers' leaders are not in touch with pastoralist leaders or their organisational representation, such as Miyetti Allah. Indeed they believe that it is difficult to communicate due to language problems. The missions were able to bring together such leaders, but keeping lines of communication open requires constant follow-up.



**Land sales.** Herders also complain about undocumented huge land sales to foreign agricultural producers which block off traditional grazing lands. Increasingly, bush land tends to be exploited by charcoal producers for external sales, contributing to the herders' loss of suitable pastures.

**Poor documentation.** There is no effective system of documentation of causes, consequences and impacts of herder-farmer conflicts, nor any record of their resolution. This makes it possible to brandish quite untrue statistics to help further increase antagonism and virtually ensure no lessons are learnt from previous experience.

The graphic on page 10 summarises the major causes of conflict, categorised by general area of significance.

## Perspectives on effective responses

The worsening herder-farmer conflict has not passed unnoticed. A great variety of agencies, secular and religious, international and local, have put forward peace-building initiatives to resolve the situation. However, far greater efforts need to be made to visit and make contact with pastoralist leaders to assess the potential for creative partnerships.

A promising example of a preventive alliance is the Shendam area of Plateau State where the local government was able to build up a network of influential leaders and authorities in order to serve as important mediators once smaller conflicts tend to escalate. Better communication would therefore create links between potentially moderating individuals, leading to reduction in conflict.

Building a next generation of leaders is another high priority. Investing in appropriate programs of pastoralists' education for children as well as for adults is therefore a must.

While it was enforced, the system of stockroutes and grazing reserves was highly effective in reducing conflict, and it remains government policy.

Since herds coming from the North crossing a defined number of bridges, at Jebba, Lokoja, Numan and Yola suggests great potential to monitor and regulate young men bringing cattle south, which would reduce the incidence of trouble in southern areas.

Given that parents of many of the young men behind the conflicts in southern areas are often unaware of the problems caused by their children, a campaign to improve awareness in states such as Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara would ensure greater responsibility for their behaviour.

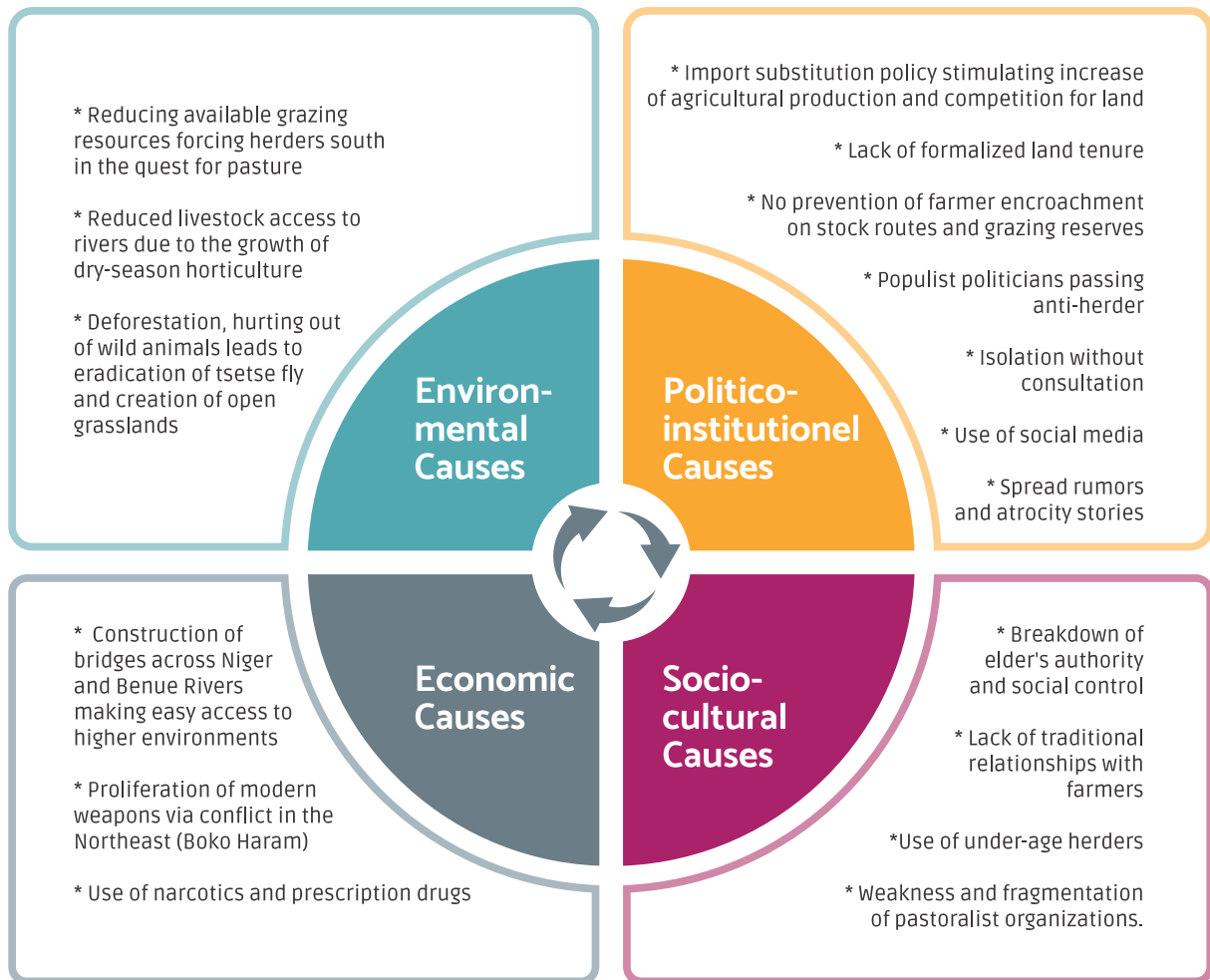
Above all, it should be clear that farmer-herder conflicts do not have a security solution and cannot be resolved by peacebuilding alone. Unless the underlying drivers, which include pressure on farmland, environmental degradation and the changing economic background are addressed, there will be no resolution.

Additionally, action should be taken to;

- ★ Develop effective documentation of farmer-herder clashes, both to create 'early warning' systems and to support policy advice
- ★ Explore more effective land use planning and management based on modern technology, and campaign against illegal land grabs
- ★ Create awareness around abuse of prescription drugs
- ★ Create awareness around weapons stockpiling



Map of Nigeria, showing principal bridges and current limit of southern herder migrations



Causes of Accelerating Rural Violence between Herders and Farmers

# PROJECT



**KADUNA STATE COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE  
DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (World Bank Assisted)**

**KADUNA STATE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT  
LADDUGA GRAZING RESERVE, KACHIA LGA**

**BENEFICIARY: Commercial Agriculture Development  
Association (CADA)**

**SUBPROJECT: Milk Collection Centre**



## Is Ranching the Solution?

- It has been widely proposed, both in the media and at the level of state government policy, that 'ranching' is the solution to the problem of pastoral migration. But ranching has not been successful in the past.
- Ranches were first established in Nigeria in the 1920s, mainly with the objective of fattening cattle for the market
- Ranches continued to be established into the 1960s, often with external aid
- **They have all fallen into disuse**, for lack of effective management
- Ranches require undisputed land tenure, reliable infrastructure and utilities, and predictable input costs, none of which are present in Nigeria
- **Ranches would compete in a market where traditional suppliers of livestock products** from within Nigeria and from neighbouring countries (Niger, Chad) have access to free pasture, **making economic operation very difficult.**





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