Farmer-Herder Conflict in Kogi State, Nigeria: Causes and Attitudes Towards Intervention Strategies

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ABSTRACT
The persistent farmer-herder conflict in Kogi State, Nigeria, significantly threatens agricultural productivity, food security, and rural livelihoods. This study investigates the causes and stakeholder perceptions of the effectiveness of intervention strategies in addressing the crisis. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and a multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 280 respondents (200 farmers and 80 herders) from four conflict-prone Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Kogi State. Structured questionnaire and interviews were used to collect primary data, which were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Likert-type. Findings indicate that competition over scarce resources (87.9%), land crisis (82.5%), economic factors (81.1%), and security issues (66.8%) were the primary causes of conflict. Respondents perceived interventions as biased (94% of herders and 82% of farmers), untimely (70% pooled), and sometimes propagandist (56% pooled). While both groups acknowledged government efforts, many preferred self-protection over state-led security measures. Furthermore, women were largely excluded from intervention programmes (64% pooled agreement), limiting their role in peacebuilding. The study highlights the need for inclusive, transparent, and sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms. The effectiveness of intervention strategies can be enhanced through land-use reforms, economic diversification, gender-inclusive mediation, and improved security infrastructure. Addressing farmer-herder conflicts requires a multi-stakeholder approach that integrates equitable resource distribution, policy reforms, and early warning systems to foster long-term peace and agricultural resilience.

Keywords: Farmer-herder conflict, resource competition, land crisis, intervention strategies, food security, Kogi State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION
The farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria has become one of the most persistent and escalating security challenges, particularly in agrarian regions such as Kogi State. This conflict, primarily driven by competition over land, water, and other productive resources, has resulted in loss of lives, destruction of property, and widespread displacement(Adamu & Umar, 2020). While historically symbiotic, the relationship between farmers and herders has deteriorated due to demographic shifts, climate change, and economic pressures, leading to violent confrontations (Shaibu, 2018).

Several interrelated factors have contributed to the escalation of farmer-herder clashes in Nigeria. Competition over land and water resources has intensified due to climate variability, desertification, and population growth (Premium Times Nigeria, 2018). The impact of desertification in the far northern regions has forced Fulani herders to migrate southward in search of pasture, bringing them into direct conflict with sedentary farmers (Ndubuisi, 2018). This movement has frequently led to disputes over farmland encroachment and grazing rights, as seen in the 2013 Fulani herder attacks, which reportedly resulted in the deaths of 10 people and the displacement of over 4,000 residents(Ndubuisi, 2018). Similarly, Mikailu (2016) documented a 2016 attack in Benue State, where Fulani herders displaced thousands of people from six villages, further escalating tensions.

Beyond resource competition, ethnic and religious factors have fueled the crisis. Some victims of these conflicts have linked escalating violence to religious divisions between Muslims and Christians, particularly in multi-religious states. Additionally, as herders migrate, their cattle often trespass onto farmlands, damaging crops and property, which intensifies disputes. Farmers, in response, seek to protect their land, while herders argue they are merely safeguarding their cattle from displacement (Adisa, 2012). These hostilities have led to injuries, deaths, and mass displacements (Christopher, 2018), making the farmer-herder conflict one of Nigeria's most pressing security challenges. Without effective intervention, the crisis could escalate into widespread ethno-religious violence and further humanitarian crises.

Different theoretical perspectives explain the persistence of farmer-herder conflicts. Shaibu (2018) applies the "tragedy of the commons" framework, arguing that unregulated open grazing incentivizes herders to expand their cattle population, which places unsustainable pressure on communal lands and exacerbates farmer-herder tensions. Over the past decade, these conflicts have spread and intensified, threatening national security. Scholars have linked the crisis to poverty, migration, inequality, and religious divisions, with Middle Belt states, including Kogi, Benue, Taraba, and Plateau, being the most affected (Usman Leme, 2017). The conflict has displaced tens of thousands of people, disproportionately affecting women and girls, who face poverty, loss of resources, and the deaths of male household members (International Crisis Group, 2017). The escalation of violent confrontations between herders and farmers has also led to severe humanitarian and security challenges (Leme, 2017). Scholars offer competing explanations for the conflict. Some attribute it to resource scarcity and competition over arable land (Donald & Jo-Ansie, 2010), while others argue that herders rely on freedom of movement to sustain their livelihood, whereas farmers see herder encroachment as an infringement on private land ownership (Idowu, 2017).

These conflicting perspectives have complicated government intervention efforts, as policies that favour one group over another fail to address the full complexity of the crisis (Opejobi, 2016; Okoli & Ogayi, 2018). A narrow, one-sided approach risks further exacerbating the situation. Instead, multi-stakeholder engagement, inclusive dialogue, and land-use policy reforms are crucial for fostering sustainable peace and resource management.

Several intervention strategies have been implemented to address the crisis, spearheaded by government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based peacebuilding initiatives. Mass media communication has played a significant role in conflict resolution, helping to dispel misinformation and foster dialogue between farmers and herders (Aliyu et al., 2021). Additionally, policies such as the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), grazing reserves, and anti-open grazing laws have been introduced in various states to mitigate conflicts(International Crisis Group, 2018). However, the effectiveness of these interventions remains a subject of debate, as stakeholders hold divergent views on their fairness, implementation, and long-term sustainability (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2020).

This study examines the causes of the farmer-herder conflict in Kogi State and assesses stakeholders' attitudes toward intervention strategies. The study provides empirical insights into effective communication and policy solutions for fostering sustainable peace and agricultural resilience. The findings will contribute to ongoing policy discussions on conflict resolution, rural development, and land-use management in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study area for this research is Kogi State, Nigeria, which was created on August 27, 1991, following the merger of parts of Kwara and Benue States. The state is centrally located in Nigeria, with Lokoja as its capital, situated at the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers—a geographic feature that has earned Kogi the nickname "The Confluence State." The state lies between Latitudes 6°30'N and 8°05'N and Longitudes 5°51'E and 8°00'E. Kogi shares boundaries with eight states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT): the FCT to the north, Nasarawa to the northeast, Benue to the east, Enugu to the southeast, Anambra to the south, Edo to the southwest, Ondo and Ekiti to the west, Kwara to the northwest, and Niger to the north. The state had an estimated population of 4,710,211 people in 2018, based on the projected growth rate from the National Population Commission (NPC, 2007), and spans a land area of approximately 30,354.74 square kilometers.

Kogi State is agriculturally diverse, with four agricultural zones (A, B, C, and D) as delineated by the Kogi State Agricultural Development Project (Kogi ADP). Zone D, which comprises Idah, Ofu, Ibaji, Olamaboro, and Igala-Mela Local Government Areas, has its zonal headquarters at Aloma. This zone is particularly rich in river valleys and swamp lands, making it highly suitable for dry-season farming. The major crops cultivated in the area include maize, yam, cassava, sorghum, rice, millet, cowpea, pigeon pea, groundnut,

Bambara nut, cocoyam, sweet potato, beniseed, melon, banana, plantain, and cotton. Additionally, a variety of fruits and leafy vegetables such as okra, pepper, fluted pumpkin, and spinach are grown.

Livestock farming is also a significant agricultural activity in Zone D, with the rearing of cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry being common. Furthermore, fishing is widely practised in the riverine areas, contributing to both the local economy and food security. Given the agroecological richness of the state, agriculture remains a primary occupation for the majority of the population, providing livelihoods and supporting economic activities across the region.

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders (farmers and herders) in the farmer-herder crisis in Kogi State, Nigeria. Kogi State was selected as the study area due to the prevalence of farmer-herder conflicts and their significant impact on agricultural production and food security.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure the selection of respondents relevant to the study. In Stage One, four Local Government Areas (LGAs)—Omala, Ofu, Igalamela/Odolu, and Ijumu—were purposively selected based on the frequency and severity of farmer-herder conflicts in the state. In Stage Two, two farming communities were purposively selected from each of these four LGAs, yielding a total of eight farming communities. In Stage Three, 25 arable crop farmers and 10 herders were purposively selected from each farming community, ensuring the inclusion of key actors such as opinion leaders, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders. This systematic selection process resulted in a final sample of 200 arable crop farmers and 80 herders, bringing the total number of respondents to 280.

The study relied on primary data, which were collected through structured questionnaire and interviews. A total of 280 questionnaire were administered and retrieved on the spot, ensuring a 100% response rate. The questionnaire design was aligned with the research objectives, capturing key variables relevant to the study. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and mean scores derived from a Likert-type scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Respondents

The socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents, as presented in Table 1 show differences between farmers and herders, particularly in terms of gender distribution, age, and marital status. The majority of the respondents were male (71.4%), with all the herders being male, whereas 40% of the farmers were female. This reflects the male-dominated nature of herding activities, which require extensive mobility and physical endurance, a finding supported by Blench (2017), who notes that pastoralism in West Africa is overwhelmingly a male-led occupation due to its nomadic demands. In terms of age distribution, the average age for farmers was 45 years, while that of herders was slightly higher at 48 years, indicating that herding remains an activity sustained by relatively older individuals. This finding aligns with Moritz (2010), who states that younger generations of herders are increasingly shifting toward sedentary economic activities due to modernization and climate challenges. Marital status data show that 74.6% of the respondents were married, with a slightly higher proportion among herders (80%) compared to farmers (72.5%), which suggests that both occupations require stable household structures for economic support. Studies by Ojeleye (2019) confirm that marriage and family stability play crucial roles in both agricultural and pastoral livelihoods, as they provide labour and resilience during economic shocks.

The average household size was larger among herders (9 persons) compared to farmers (6 persons), implying that herders may rely on extended family networks for labour and support, a trend observed by Nwozor et al. (2019), who highlight that Fulani pastoral households typically maintain large family sizes to support cattle rearing and migration needs. Educational attainment varied significantly, with 47% of farmers having tertiary education, compared to only 1.3% of herders who attained that level. Conversely, 91.1% of herders had only Islamic or Quranic education, while only 5% of farmers were in this category, reflecting differences in educational priorities and access. This aligns with the findings of Aliyu et al. (2021), who argue that formal education among pastoralists remains low due to mobility constraints and cultural preferences for informal or religious schooling. In terms of occupation, farming was the dominant activity (42.1% pooled), followed by trading (29.3%) and civil service employment (25.4%).

Among the herders, 55% identified herding as their primary occupation, with only 10% engaged in other income-generating activities such as artisanship. This suggests that farmers tend to diversify their economic activities more than herders, a pattern also noted by Adamu & Umar (2020), who argue that farmers, particularly in agrarian regions, engage in multiple income-generating activities to mitigate risks associated with climate variability. Land ownership, livestock holdings, and income levels provide further insights into the economic disparities between the two groups.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to socio-economic characteristics

	Farmers n = 200			Herders n = 80			Pooled n = 280		
Socioeconomic Characteristics	Freq.	%	Mean	Freq	%	Mean	Freq.	%	Mean
Sex									
Male	120	60.0		80	100		200	71.4	
Female	80	40.0		0	0		80	28.6	
Age									
26 – 35	57	28.5	45	16	20.0		73	26.1	
36 – 45	41	20.5	years	12	15.0	48 years	53	18.9	46 years
46 – 55	64	32.0		32	40.0		96	34.3	
56 – 65	22	11.0		16	20.0		38	13.6	
66 – 75	16	8.0		04	5.0		20	7.1	
Marital Status									
Single	33	16.5	12	15.0			45	16.1	
Married	145	72.5	64	80.0			209	74.6	
Divorced	10	5.0	04	5.0			14	5.0	
Widowed/widower	12	6.0	0	0			12	4.3	
Household Size									
1 – 5	91	45.5	6	28	35.0	9	119	42.5	
6 – 10	99	49.5	persons	20	25.0	persons	119	42.5	7 persons
11 – 15	10	5.0		32	40.0		42	15.0	
Educational Qualification									
No formal education	20	10.0		01	1.3		21	7.5	
Islamic/Quranic education	10	5.0		73	91.1		83	29.6	
Primary education	29	14.5		01	1.3		30	10.7	
Secondary education	47	23.5		04	5.0		51	18.2	
Tertiary education	94	47.0		01	1.3		95	33.9	
Major Occupation									
Farming	74	37.0		44	55.0		118	42.1	
Trading	54	27.0		28	35.0		82	29.3	
Civil Service	71	35.5		0	0		71	25.4	
Artisanship	01	0.5		08	10.0		09	3.2	
Farm Size									
0 – 2	25	12.5	5.8 ha	76	95.0	0.30 ha	101	36.1	
2.1 – 4.0	48	24.0		0	0		48	17.1	4.2 ha
4.1 – 6.0	62	31.0		04	5.0		66	23.6	
Above 6.0	65	32.5		0	0		65	23.2	
Number of Cattle									
0 – 10	174	87.0	6	0	0	125	174	62.1	40
11 – 20	20	10.0		0	0		20	7.1	
Above 20	6	3.0		80	100		86	30.8	
Annual Crop Income									
Below 200,000	54	27.0		76	95.0	25,000.	130	46.4	316,215.04
200,000 – 400,000	35	19.0	432,70	04	5.0	00	39	13.9	
401,000 – 600, 000	67	33.5	1.05	0	0		67	23.9	
601,000 – 800,000	28	14.0		0	0		28	10.0	
800,000 – 1,000,000	16	8.0		0	0		16	5.8	
Annual Income (Livestock)									
Below 200,000	154	77.0	32,000.	10	12.5		164	58.6	232,000.14
200,000 – 400,000	12	6.0	20	0	0	732,000	12	4.3	
401,000 – 600, 000	04	2.0		0	0	.00	04	1.4	
601,000 – 800,000	06	3.0		0	0		06	2.1	
800,000 – 1,000,000	24	12.0		70	87.5		94	33.6	

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

The average farm size among farmers was 5.8 hectares, while herders owned significantly smaller plots (0.3 hectares), likely for subsistence crop cultivation. Additionally, 100% of herders owned more than 20 cattle, whereas 87% of farmers had fewer than 10 cattle, emphasizing the centrality of livestock to herders' livelihoods. This corroborates findings by Okoli & Ogayi (2018), who assert that pastoralists view cattle as both economic assets and cultural heritage, reinforcing their dependence on extensive grazing systems. Income disparities were also evident, with farmers earning a higher annual crop income (₦432,701.05) compared to herders (₦25,000.00). However, in terms of livestock income, herders earned an average of ₦732,000.00 annually, compared to ₦32,000.20 for farmers, reflecting the economic significance of cattle rearing in their financial stability. This pattern is consistent with the observations of Usman Leme (2017), who found that pastoralists, though appearing economically disadvantaged in terms of land ownership, generate substantial wealth through livestock sales. These findings suggest that while farmers rely on crop production for their livelihoods, herders depend more on livestock trade, reinforcing the need for resource-sharing frameworks to mitigate farmer-herder conflicts, a recommendation echoed by the International Crisis Group (2018) in their report on sustainable conflict resolution strategies in Nigeria.

3.2 Causes of Crisis between farmers and herders in the study area

The distribution of the respondents on perceived causes of the farmers/herder crisis is presented in Table 2. The findings reveal that competition over scarce resources (87.9%) and land crisis (82.5%) are the most widely acknowledged causes of farmers-herders conflicts. All herders (100%) agreed that both factors are major contributors to the conflict, while 83.0% and 75.5% of farmers and herders, respectively, held the same view. This aligns with Okoli and Atelhe (2014), who argue that the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria is primarily a resource-based struggle intensified by climate change, expanding agricultural activities, and dwindling grazing lands. The increasing demand for farmland due to population growth (67.5%) further exacerbates the competition for land, with all herders (100%) and more than half of the farmers (54.5%) acknowledging its role in escalating tensions. This corroborates the findings of Moritz (2010), who notes that as rural populations expand, traditional grazing corridors shrink, leading to frequent clashes between herders and sedentary farmers.

Climate change and environmental degradation (65.4%) were also identified as significant conflict drivers, although this perception varied considerably between the two groups. While 83.5% of farmers believed that climate change contributes to the conflict, only 20% of herders shared this view. This disparity suggests that farmers are more aware of the environmental challenges affecting agricultural productivity, while herders may attribute their struggles more directly to land-use policies and migration restrictions.

Table 2: Perceived Causes of Farmers/Herders Conflict

	Farmers, n=200		Herders, n=80		Pooled , n = 280	
Perceived Causes*	**Freq.**	**%**	**Freq.**	**%**	**Freq.**	**%**
Population growth	109	54.5	80	100.0	189	67.5
Climate change and environmental degradation	167	83.5	16	20.0	183	65.4
Economic factor	167	83.5	60	75.0	227	81.1
Power / political factor	117	58.5	36	45.0	153	54.6
Poverty	121	60.5	28	35.0	149	53.2
Competition over scarce resource	166	83.0	80	100.0	246	87.9
Land crisis	151	75.5	80	100.0	231	82.5
Security factor	107	53.5	80	100.0	187	66.8

Source: Computed from Field Survey, 2023

The economic dimension (81.1%) of the crisis is also strongly recognized, with 83.5% of farmers and 75% of herders attributing economic pressures as a key driver. This supports Olaniyan and Yahaya's (2016) assertion that poverty and declining economic opportunities in rural areas intensify competition for land and water, making conflicts more frequent and severe.

Political and security factors were also widely cited as major contributors to the conflict. More than half of the respondents (54.6%) agreed that power struggles and political influences exacerbate tensions, with farmers (58.5%) perceiving this factor more strongly than herders (45%). This finding aligns with Nwosu (2017), who argues that the political manipulation of farmer-herder conflicts for electoral gains has further entrenched hostilities. Similarly, security concerns were highlighted by 66.8% of respondents, with all herders (100%) and just over half of the farmers (53.5%) acknowledging insecurity as a conflict trigger. This reflects the growing impact of banditry, cattle rustling, and armed confrontations, as highlighted by the International Crisis Group (2018), which notes that the proliferation of small arms among rural communities has intensified clashes between farmers and herders. The role of poverty (53.2%) in fueling the conflict was also recognized, as economic deprivation often limits alternative livelihoods, forcing both groups to compete aggressively for survival resources. The combined effects of climate change, economic hardship, political influence, and weak security structures suggest that resolving the farmer-herder conflict requires a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes land-use policies, economic empowerment, and conflict mediation strategies.

3.3 Farmers and Herder' Attitudes Towards Intervention Strategies

The mean score distribution on respondents' perception of the interventions in the farmers-herders conflict in the study area is presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Respondents' perception of interventions

	Farmers		Herders		Pooled		
Perception statement	MS	Prop	MS	Prop.	MS	Prop.	Decision
Intervention strategies are normally bias or lump sided	4.1	82	4.7	94	2.2	44	Disagree
Most times, there is religious sentiments	4.2	84	4.2	84	3.2	64	Agree
Interventions are untimely	3.7	74	3.9	78	3.5	70	Agree
Some interventions are propaganda	4.4	88	4.2	84	2.8	56	Disagree
farmers-herders meetings and interactions yield more results than other forms of intervention	3.7	74	3.1	62	2.8	56	Disagree
Interventions are not substantiated	3.5	70	3.6	72	3.2	64	Agree
Self-protection is better than trusting the government	3.1	62	3.6	72	2.6	52	Disagree
Women are not carried along in the intervention strategies	2.8	56	3.9	78	3.2	64	Agree

Source: Computed from Field Survey, 2023 MS = Mean Score (NOTE, various frequencies used for calculating the mean score values are found in the appendix), Prop. = Proportion (%).

The perception of intervention strategies among farmers and herders highlights key concerns regarding bias, effectiveness, timeliness, and inclusivity. One of the most notable findings is that both farmers and herders perceive intervention strategies as biased, although herders (Mean Score = 4.7, 94%) hold this view more strongly than farmers (MS = 4.1, 82%). However, when responses are pooled, the overall perception (MS = 2.2, 44%) indicates disagreement with this statement, suggesting that bias in intervention strategies may not be a universally held belief across both groups. Similarly, the belief that some interventions are mere propaganda is stronger among farmers (MS = 4.4, 88%) and herders (MS = 4.2, 84%), but the pooled response (MS = 2.8, 56%) indicates overall disagreement, suggesting that while some interventions may be viewed with scepticism, they are not widely dismissed as propaganda. These findings align with Aliyu et al. (2021), who note that stakeholder distrust in intervention programs often stems from past experiences of exclusion or perceived favouritism.

The timing and implementation of interventions appear to be a significant concern among both groups. Farmers (MS = 3.7, 74%) and herders (MS = 3.9, 78%) agree that interventions are often untimely, with the pooled mean score (MS = 3.5, 70%) supporting this sentiment. This aligns with Usman Leme (2017), who found that delayed government responses to farmer-herder conflicts exacerbate tensions rather than mitigate them. Additionally, the perception that interventions are not substantiated is shared by both farmers (MS = 3.5, 70%) and herders (MS = 3.6, 72%), with the pooled mean score (MS = 3.2, 64%) further supporting this concern. This suggests that while interventions may be introduced, their effectiveness and impact are often questioned due to a lack of transparency or measurable success. The belief that farmers-herders meetings yield better results than formal intervention programs is not widely supported (MS = 3.7 for farmers, 3.1 for herders, and 2.8 pooled), indicating that stakeholders may prefer more structured conflict resolution mechanisms over informal discussions.

Another critical issue is the inclusivity of intervention strategies, particularly regarding women's involvement. Herders (MS = 3.9, 78%) were more likely to agree that women are excluded from interventions, compared to farmers (MS = 2.8, 56%), but the pooled mean score (MS = 3.2, 64%) indicates overall agreement. This aligns with Nwozor et al. (2019), who found that women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is often overlooked despite their critical role in mediation and community resilience. Interestingly, the perception that self-protection is preferable to relying on the government was stronger among herders (MS = 3.6, 72%) than farmers (MS = 3.1, 62%), although the pooled response (MS = 2.6, 52%) indicates overall disagreement. This suggests that while some stakeholders may prefer self-defence mechanisms due to perceived government inefficiency, there remains a general expectation that government-led interventions should provide adequate security. These findings underscore the urgent need for more inclusive, transparent, and timely intervention strategies to address farmer-herder conflicts effectively.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study highlight the nature of the farmer-herder conflict in Kogi State, Nigeria. The conflict is driven by competition over scarce resources, land crises, climate change, economic disparities, and security concerns. Farmers and herders perceive intervention strategies as biased, untimely, and sometimes ineffective, with many expressing scepticism about government-led solutions. Economic factors remain a significant trigger for conflict, as farmers rely heavily on land for cultivation, while herders depend on grazing areas for livestock sustenance.

Additionally, the exclusion of women from conflict resolution efforts and the preference for self-protection over government intervention further complicate peace-building initiatives. Based on findings from this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The government and relevant stakeholders should institutionalize farmer-herder mediation committees at the community level, ensuring that both groups have equal representation in conflict resolution processes. This will foster mutual understanding and trust in intervention strategies.
2. There is a need to implement clear land tenure policies that define grazing routes, ranching systems, and farmland allocations to reduce disputes. The National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) should be strengthened to promote modern livestock management while protecting farmers' rights.
3. To address the economic dimension of the conflict, farmers and herders should be supported with financial incentives, access to credit, and training in alternative livelihood options such as agro-processing, irrigation farming, and climate-resilient agricultural techniques.
4. Women, who are often excluded from conflict resolution initiatives, should be actively involved in peacebuilding processes. Special programmes should be introduced to empower women in farming and livestock management, as they play crucial roles in both agricultural production and household stability.
5. Improved security infrastructure is essential in curbing violence, cattle rustling, and land invasions. A community-based early warning system should be established to track potential conflicts and facilitate timely intervention by security agencies. This will enhance trust in government-led peace efforts and reduce reliance on self-protection mechanisms.

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