

FARMERS AND HERDERS CONFLICT IN CENTRAL BENIN: PRACTICES AND PROSPECTS FOR PEACEFUL COHABITATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates farmer-herder conflicts in detail, and compares historical and current peace brokerage committee conflict management settled in Agouna city in Benin with IA4RD approach system as innovative strategy. Literature, Focus Groups Discussion (FGD) including five persons, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was used to analyze the content of the data. Diachronic and comparative analysis methods have been made for evaluation of the technical, economic, social, institutional and cultural changes that occurred in the community. The results revealed three types of farmers-herders conflicts that drive from stakeholder's behavior facing scarcity of grazing space for livestock, expansion of farmland due to soil poverty. The peace brokerage committee was efficient than former conflict regulation mechanism by contributing to conflict reducing, used two mode for conflict management. The approach led to peaceful cohabitation of farmers and herders and improving sustainable livelihood in the community. Findings suggest to politics and decision makers the strengthening of appease cohabitation of farmers and Fulani which improve agricultural development and local economy.

Keywords: Conflict, Innovation strategy, Farmer, Fulani, Local economy

1. INTRODUCTION

The legacy of colonial policies generally accorded greater authority to the village-based authority which is dominated by farming interests and disregarded pastoralists claims to commonly-held grazing land and water points (Bris and al. 1982; Schmitz, 1993; Niamir-Fuller, 1999). That is

one of the major sources of conflict between farmers and the Fulani community. Livestock management practice in Sub Sahara Africa is fodder-based and cattle movement is dictated by the availability of fodder and water. This factor constantly brings crop farmers and nomads on conflict path in most times (Okunlola, 2012). Few studies have been carried out on conflict due to climate or environment change. They claim that a causal connection between environmental change and armed conflict fail to mention farmer–herder clashes in the Sahel. The most frequent types of conflict situation encountered in the world are conflicts between Senegal and Mauritania in 1989, the Darfur conflict, and recent clashes between ethnic groups in northern Nigeria. Those conflicts are generally caused by land-uses and they are violent. Other circumstances that lead to conflict include the juxtaposition of communities with different lifestyles and economic activities (Benjaminsen and al., 2012). This last conflict situation dealing with economic activities is the starting point of society’s modernization through change of agrarian system. This is observed by creation of stalling park and reduction of transhumant. These cases of conflicts connected to economic activities, are nevertheless the ones which infer the modernization of the society thanks to the changes which they entail in the agrarian system. Crops, livestock, water and other plant resources play key roles in the development, maintenance and projection of the socio-economic strength of a society (Schama, S., 1996). In other words, most conflicts are over scarce resources. As the supply of natural resources declines of the demand for them increases through population growth, competition over these resources increases people may move to new areas; social tension increases; and the prospect for the eruption of violent conflict increases. Conflicts often result from land use, river use and juxtaposition of farmers and Fulani ethnic groups. Both Fulani and farmers need land for their activities. The Fulani’s perform their activities between the arid and semi-arid zones where they are largely concentrated. They invade grazing space to feed cattle. Nowadays the size of cattle increases but the Fulani don’t invest in pasture to prevent vegetal biomass from depleting due to climate or environmental change. Farmers use land for crops production. The increasing of population is the main reason of agricultural land expansion. Farmers move to new land in order to increase crop yield as they do not invest to restore its soil fertility. The Fulani take their cattle to rivers to drink after feeding them whereas farmers use river banks for market gardening (Boumo, 2017). Conflicts resulting from the coexistence between Fulani herders and farmers lead to the marginalization of the Fulani (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2009; Bonfiglioli & Watson, 1992; Hagberg, 2005). In some cases, the farmer–herder conflicts, imagined or real, have inspired community rules governing land use (APA, 2012) and in others stimulated the setting-up of enclosure around farmlands to make it private properties of agricultural lands with their subsequent privatization (Thompson, 1991; van den Brink, Bromley, & Chavas, 1995). Resource-related conflicts are social violent or nonviolent conflicts characterized by struggles to gain access to natural resources (Vahyala, 2021). They lead undermine peace and increase insecurity in areas where they occur. As a consequence,

stakeholders' activities are hampered and the local economy witnesses a downturn (Lamidi, 2017). However, such views are criticized for being oversimplified and highly materialistic accounts of social conflicts which are in fact socially produced, mediated, and felt (Breusers et al., 1998; Peluso and Watts, 2001; Turner, 2004). Conflicts shed light on the divergent interests, powers, and vulnerabilities of different social groups. Climate change and its resulting effects, the scarcity of rainfall and degradation of grazing space, are the main reasons why herders migrate in order to meet the needs of their livestock (Okpeh and all, 2021). For decades, Central and Southern Benin regions in particular, have been subject to strong immigration of transhumant herders that come from the North of the country and neighboring countries (Boko, 2009). This situation has evolved and some herders no longer content simply to pass the territories, but also settled down permanently. Therefore, farmers and herders are bound to live together. This cohabitation associated with the allocation of new land for agricultural activities has become a source of conflict since the 1980s (Boko, 2009). And as to complicate the situation, the breeding in rambling is spread in Benin so in rural areas as urban (Gnangle, 2018). These are sometimes source of violent conflicts between farmers and herders, and attracted both of public and private sector attention. Since 1987, national and regional laws, decrees and decisions have been passed, to help people cope with the phenomenon of transhumance and its consequences. Unfortunately, all regulatory mechanisms failed to resolve these conflicts. In Agouna city, Benin center, during the last decade, at least one farm is destroyed partially or completely per day. Historically in Agouna, conflict management is reserved to traditional rulers, leaders of farmers and herders, and the national public security forces, like other places in the country. According to Boko (2009), until 2009 in the lower valley of the Ouinhi-Za-kpota-Djidja in southern Benin, farmers and herders seem understand one another via traditional leaders and or national public security forces. The most frequent sources of conflict include crop damage by flock, collective attacks of farmers by herders in retaliation against violence and physical attacks on livestock by farmers. Conflicts were frequent, at least one conflict per day and their intensities range from verbal abuse to physical violence, both on animals and human beings. Thus, between 2000 and 2006, more than thirty animals were killed. Also, during the same period, more than ten cases of injuries due to conflict were recorded among farmers and herders. This situation naturally affects the social peace in the region. Conflicts lead to the loss of crops and other properties. Serious conflicts usually lead to loss of human lives (Kehinde, 2014). For this reason, an IAR4D-based intervention using IPs was designed to reduce conflict as a priority before addressing other crop and livestock husbandry and marketing issues. This manuscript reports results and lessons from the IP on conflict resolution in Benin.

2. FRAMEWORK AND METHODS

2.1. Data collection and Data Handling

Literature and retrospectives survey have been used to analyze the management of conflicts between farmers and herders. Iterative discussions were conducted with community resource persons to absorb the evolvement of conflict management practices; representatives of research and extension services, to understand conflict management procedures; political and administrative authorities of the sub-district of *Agouna*, the public security services, and microfinance structures to absorb the role of each actor in conflict management. Farmers and herders were also surveyed to collect their practices, challenges and suggested solutions. Semi-structured interviews with Focus Groups Discussion including five persons at least with appropriate interview guides were conducted with farmers, herders and other categories of actors involved in the conflict management. Individual interviews were also conducted to validate some information collected from the focus group discussions. In addition to the interviews, observation was also used during the investigation, to verify information provided by the different actors. One special research team was responsible for studying new practices developed by farmers and herders five years after the establishment of peace brokerage committee. The team includes all stakeholders of the IP and non-members. Through multiple afore mentioned methods and tools, various practices are revealed. The synthetic schemes and diachronic and comparative analysis have been made for evaluation of the technical, economic, social, Institutional and cultural changes that occurred with each individual, each category of actors and in the whole community.

2.2 Peace brokerage committee

The main source of farmers and Fulani conflict is the destruction of crops and killing of cattle because that affects livelihood of the farmers and Fulani. Any meaningful effort at mitigating the crisis must seek to address its roots causes and critical drivers, including regulating farmer-herder relations in such a manner that mutually guarantees their competitive livelihoods and heritage (Anthony, 2021). Farmer-herder relations lead to establish a mutual inter-group committee; that is in charge of periodically examining the differences between the warring groups, advising them, monitor formal resolutions reached between them and ensuring that new mandates are strictly adhered to. In *Agouna* city during the conflict resolution, local traditional actors, sometimes public security agents are bribed. They swindle farmers and herders. The Fulani are not satisfied with the amount or strategy of compensation for animal killing. To answer their full participation in the management committee of the conflicts, Fulani had to install their chief. So in order to establish and enhance the peaceful atmosphere, a peace brokerage committee including farmers, Fulani and their chief is established in the area. Table 1 shows the different categories of actors and their role in the committee.

Table 1: Category of actors involved in conflict management

Categories of actors	Role
Local authorities	Represented by the chief of <i>Agouna</i> 's city, and chiefs of villages. They are responsible for supervising activities related to conflict management
Farmers	Direct actors in conflict situation, they are involved in conflict management and represented by their peers within the peace brokerage committee.
Interpreters	They are sometimes the intermediate between farmers and <i>Fulani</i> herders who provide interpretation services and facilitate communication
Herders	Direct actors in conflict situation, they are involved in conflict management and represented by their peer within the peace brokerage committee
Veterinary services	Favors peaceful cohabitation for farmers and herders and offer vet treatments
Public security services	Represented by police office and national public security forces, they ensure security of persons and goods in <i>Agouna</i> 's borough. They are involved in conflict management when actors prefer the formal resolution method
Research and extension services	Favors peaceful cohabitation between farmers and herders and ensure the monetary evaluation of damage on crops.
Traders	Ensure and maintain the link between, farmers and consumers and are aware of good products price in the locality
Processors	Ensure the improvement of product value and add value to crops and livestock products
Microfinance institutions	Provide financial and technical support to farmers and herders, traders, processors, etc.

Source: Field Survey, 2014

3. RESULTS

3.1. Types of Conflicts

The most common conflicts are related to damage caused by Fulani cattle herders and their flock. Three situations arise in crop destruction: first, accidental destruction; second, deliberate destruction of crop and third, damage in the fields installed in transhumance corridors or around water points.

Accidental destruction of farm: Herders often have serious difficulties guiding animals to grazing areas. This situation is linked to the low experiences, and large size of the livestock which is beyond the control capacities of one or two shepherds. For less mistake, policemen arrest cattlemen and animals move around the farm without their shepherd and cause lot of damage to crops.

Deliberate destruction of farm: This form of destruction occurs sometimes sheperds leave animals to destroy crops, while farmers react, herders individually or in groups deny. The situation leads to animals injuring and killing.

Destruction of the farm in transhumance corridors or around water points: Fields settled in transhumance corridors or around the water points are regularly destroyed during pasture. The mere passage of animals in fields, especially during the fruiting crops period, causes significant crop losses. Cattlemen consider these fields as traps; i.e fields that owners expect them to be destroyed by cattle. The table 2 shows the type of conflict and actors responsible

Table 2: Type of conflict and actor responsible

Type of conflicts	Actor responsables	
	Farmers	Herders (Fulani)
Accidental destruction of farm	-	-
Deliberate destruction of farm	-	x
Destruction of the farm in transhumance corridors or around water points	x	x

3.2. Drivers of Conflicts

Various factors were identified and were reals causes of conflicts in Agouna city. Fulani and farmers were lacking of wisdom and behaved on ignorance, negligence, corruption and bad faith.

Ignorance: It is lack of knowledge of herders. They conduct animals on field without well identified farms limits. Animals reach garden and provoke many damage before sheperds intervention.

Negligence: Fulani sometime neglect animals and do not care because they tired. Farmers also do not well clean their field which appeared like abandonned farm that attract Fulani and cattle.

Corruption: it is the act of corrupting or of impairing integrity. Face damage situation, herders prefer to refer to structures or people that they can easily corrupt. All actors involved in the management of conflicts are likely to be corrupted by herders. Thus, based on their antecedents on conflict management, they prefer to deal with an actor who may favor them. This may be local authorities or mediators because they contribute to the reduction of the amount of compensation that they are supposed to pay to farmers. Those actors favor herders, because they had granted by loan of money or animal as gift from former conflicts resolution situation. The public security officers were not also honest in their judgemen and in appreciation of conflicts

situation; they were usually corrupted by farmers and herders. Overall, public security agents and research and extension officers took full advantage of the conflict management, that promote the persistence of conflicts. Mediators or translators were also involved in corruption case by bad interpretation and that achieve to swindle herders or farmers in the end conflicts management; but according the society those actors may be partial in their service and rented as 10% of the amount of compensation. In fact, the party in conflict that promises high commission seems enjoy the favors of the mediator.

Bad faith: Farmers sometimes set up on fields, "trap farms" and expect them to be destroyed by animals and referred to security forces for complain. They hope to get money from herders but this behavior is denounced and discouraged by the security forces. Local authorities generally took party in conflict management, through imposition decision without well understood conflict situation. They usually favors farmers to guarantee their popularity them following election.

All those factors yielded less confidence so generally parties in conflict choose to refer to peace brokerage committee. So since November 2014, conflicting parties sit around table and discuss for a peaceful settlement; and nowadays, conflicts are less frequent. Cases of murder of numerous animals, farmers, herdsman had not been recorded.

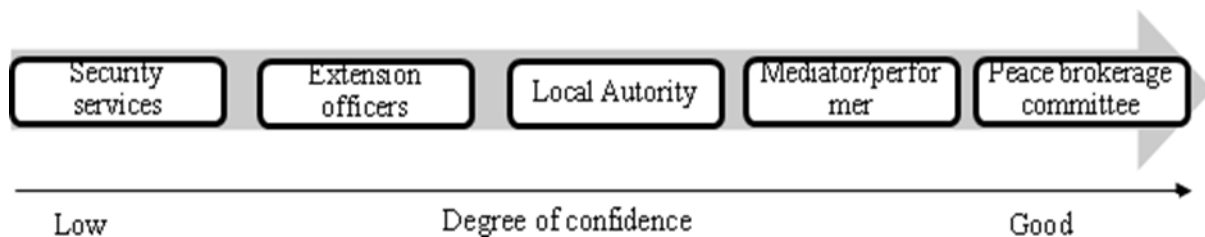


Figure 1: Degree of Confidence of Farmer and Fulani

Source: Field Survey, 2021

3.3. Conflict management mode

The management of conflicts ends on two ways. Different actors were involved regarding the mode of resolution. Parties in conflicts aim to refer to informal decision and further to high level of justice.

Informal resolution mode: this is the first mode, and seems a negotiation. Farmers and herders negotiate and discuss without third party intervention usually when they speak the same language and agree on the amount of compensation. In these conditions, the farmer assesses the damage value and proposed compensation that both parties finally agree on an amount that

herder immediately paid to the farmer. Another way, parties in conflicts were both agreeing to refer to mediator or translator service for resolution when there is language barrier. The value of damage was esteemed that Fulani pays to farmer. Sometimes divergence come from damage value estimation and parties in conflict refer to peace brokerage committee. The influence of peace committee is that all members were agreeing on marketable value of destroyed crops that Fulani pays because this value bases on speculation destroyed; vegetative stage of crops i.e. number of days after sowing; grassing stage of the land i.e. estimated costs of labor; inputs i.e. fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides applied to crops and their quantities. But there are some cases that make farmers difficult to identify the flock that caused damage because there are many in the area in the same time or it was rain just after damage and farmers can't follow the prints of animal hoofs. Some herders prefer this mode of conflict resolution, rather than bring the case to the security forces, especially when the devastated surface is important i.e. more than a hectare.

Formal resolution mode: Public security and research and extension services are involved in conflict resolution through formal mechanisms. The courts are normally the only ones to make decision when there is a conflict in community. However, common usage is to avoid as much as possible the court regulation because of the lengthy procedures. In this management mode, the peace brokerage committee faces the situation. In order to well assess the marketable value of damaged crops, research and extension agents estimate the compensation taking into account of, speculation destroyed (x), corn, cotton, cowpea, cassava; devastated surface (S), that were estimated by Global Position System; crops yield (R); price (P) of speculation in the locality. Thus, the amount (M) to be paid by Fulanito farmers is: $M = S \times R_x \times P$. M in USD, S in ha, R_x in kg/ha and P in USD/kg. This form of estimation of amount supposes that, speculation is conducted to harvest, in optimal conditions. Officially, research and extension agent got 10 % the mount for their service. Herders chosen the resolution mode they wanted. In summary, the steps taken by farmers and herders in resolving conflicts are presented in Figure 2.

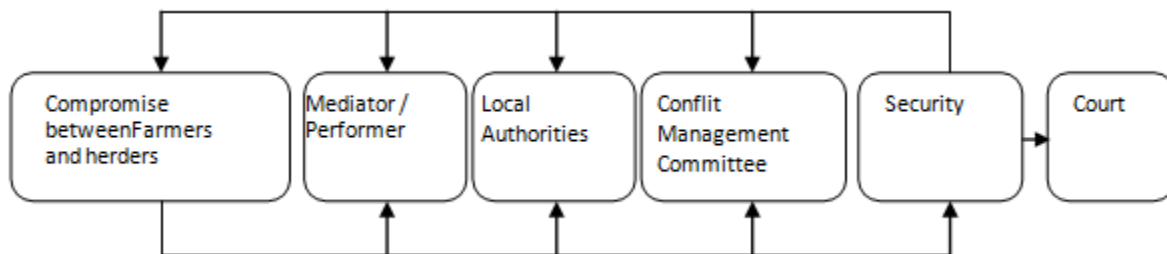


Figure 2: Steps followed by farmers and herders in conflict resolution

Source: Field Survey, 2021

3.4 New orientation of local economy

Population of Fulani which was less than 1% in Agouna city in 2002 increases in the areas nowadays. That seems like Fulani population through the time, agrees with conflicts management mode by peace brokerage committee and are more faithful. The immediate consequences of this are the increasing of agricultural product price about 50%, house rent about 100%, and land cost doubled in the areas, development of infrastructure and the reinforcement of local trade through shopping center developed along the main road of the city. The proximity of herders and farmers facilitates accessibility and availability of animal protein as cheese, milk and meat to farmers and promotes intercommunity mixing. The presence of Fulani community in the area induced easy indirect use of organic manure derived from cattle dropping to improve soil fertility. In other way, cattle were used after harvesting to eat crop residues and cleaned farm. Overall in the area, the size of cattle, goats and sheep were increased as indicated in figure 3. The Herders enjoy proximity of farmers and easily purchase crops and also benefit from frequent services of public and private veterinarians. The appease cohabitation increase animal size. Fulani sold more easily meat through butchers network present in the area.

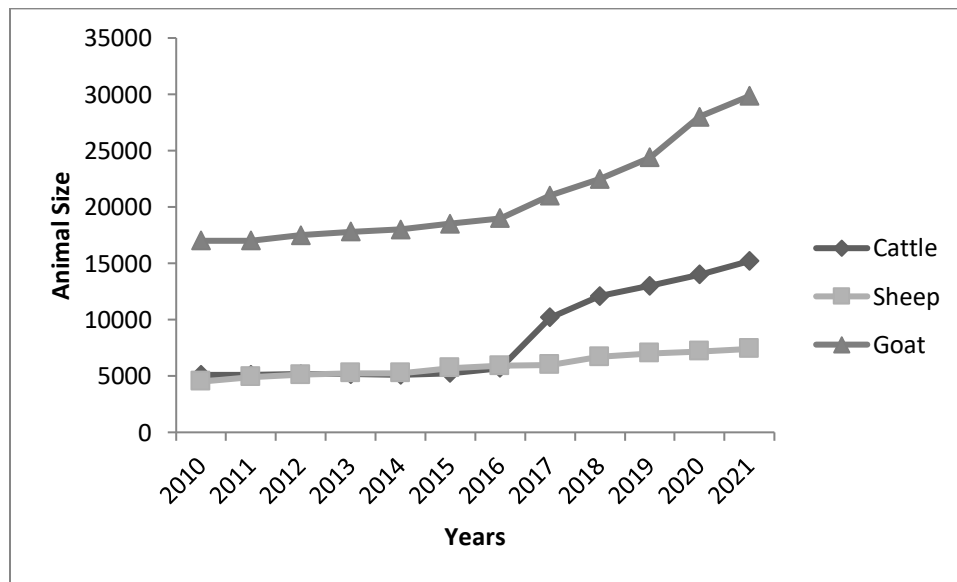


Figure 3: Evolution of cattle, sheep and goats in the city

Source: Country STAT

4. DISCUSSION

Farmers and breeders’ cohabitation has brought about many socio-economic changes. In *Agouna*, the cohabitation has effectively contributed to the development of economic and social

activities. In Tchad, farmers hire flock to transport their harvest from the field to the town, home or markets. It is also common that some farmers entrust their flock to nomadic herders (*Duteurtre et al., 2002*). Also, even though nearly 50% of farmers and herders have witnessed this change due to coexistence between farmers and herders. This would promote more peaceful cohabitation between farmers and herders, that is why Vahyala (2021) in study for dissecting management strategies of farmers and herders conflict in selected vulnerable states in north central Nigeria recommended the need for greater participation and cooperation the locals for building trust, confidence, resilience and trust among the contending parties. Herders would spend less money to compensate farmers and confidence between actors would be strengthened. The ability of rural communities to prevent and manage conflict is largely based on the strength of networks of communication between herding and farming interests, respected community leaders, and leaders in neighboring communities (Turner, 2004). The peace brokerage committee set up has helped to identify new corridors for the passage of animals; water points and animal's parks were created. Its responsibilities include sensitization of farmers and herders and conflicts management. Conflicts have become less frequent; it goes from at least one conflict per day to less than three per week; moreover, less violent. The committee has solved, from 2014 to 2018, more than 70 cases of conflict. The sensitization of farmers and herders on conflict prevention and management mechanisms should continue. Okounlola (2016) got the same result and underlined that on conflict prevention, provision of grazing reserves for nomads was seen as a solution. Indeed, less than 50% of direct actors are not conscious that, living together is the pre requisite of socio-economic development of the city.

5. CONCLUSION

The study on farmers and herders conflicts has enabled to, identify conflict types and drivers, analyze mode of conflict management, and appease cohabitation and their implication in local economy. Competitive and scarcity of natural resources and crops destruction are sources of violent conflict between farmers and herders. Since decades ago, transhumant herders from Sahel region crossed Central and Southern Benin in search of water points and pasture for livestock. The findings have brought about many factors and stakeholder's behavior leads to conflict persisting that drew both the public and private sector attention. Unfortunately, regulatory mechanisms might not help resolve the conflicts that arose from farmers and herders. To understand and manage farmer-herder conflict, peace brokerage committee was settled in the area. Findings have also shown that both communities of farmers and herders were faithful to committee which involved in conflict prevention and management while facilitated farmers and herders cohabitation and improvement of local economy, agricultural and breeding activities.

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