TWO DAY NATIONAL DIALOGUE
ON MANAGING
FARMER - HERDER
RELATIONS
IN NIGERIA

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary 1

Keynote Address: Alhaji Samaila Muhammed Mera, HRH, Emir of Argungu 2

Context setting, key issues, and current trends in farmer-herder relations 3

Policy recommendations 5

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violent conflicts between nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmer communities in Nigeria have led to thousands of deaths and significant economic losses in recent years. The conflict has worsened the already protracted food crisis in the country. Land-use disputes, historically resolved through traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, have become more difficult to contain, with the increased availability of small arms and light weapons a factor. Climate change and population growth have also increased pressure on available resources, while farmer-herder relations have become increasingly politicized as ethnic and religious identities have hardened. While farmer-herder conflict now exists in every region of Nigeria, it has evolved into banditry and terrorism in parts of the northwest and north-central zones.

To find lasting solutions to these conflicts, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) organised a national multi-stakeholder conference on farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria on June 7-8, 2022 with support from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and United States Institute of Peace. Participants included the Emir of Argungu, the Commissioner of Internal Security in Kaduna State, members of civil society organisations, academics and the media.

Among the key topics discussed during the conference were:

The root causes of farmer-herder conflict, including mismanagement of land-use disputes, climate change and urbanization, the hardening of ethnic identities, corruption, a lack of opportunities for youths, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

The local variations in farmer-herder relations across Nigeria, including the factors behind certain communities’ successful sustenance of historically peaceful relations.

The role of traditional institutions in managing farmer-herder relations.

The successes and shortcomings of government efforts to address insecurity and land-use disputes, such as the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP).

Recommendations for improving relations at the federal, state and local levels.

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS: ALHAJI SAMAILA MUHAMMED MERA, HRH, EMIN OF ARGUNGU

Following a welcome address from CDD Grant and Partnership Manager Damien Ihekoronye, His Royal Highness, the Emir of Argungu in Kebbi state, delivered a keynote address to kick off the conference on day one.

The Emir thanked the Centre for hosting the national dialogue and noted his appreciation that the important role of traditional leadership in the conflict resolution process was being recognized. He noted that traditional and religious institutions are not just the closest to the people but also the oldest, most easily recognized and most accessible institutions.

The Emir took time to describe the traditional leadership structure in his Emirate, noting that these structures have been the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms since pre-colonial times. He documented how, in the past, traditional authorities ensured that forest reserves for grazing and herders’ settlement were demarcated and protected from encroachment by appointed rangers. However, the authority to administer grazing and forest reserves is now shared between states and their local governments with no mention of any authority or role for traditional leaders, the custodians of these ancestral lands.

The Emir then elaborated on the root causes of farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria, identifying over a dozen key drivers of conflict:

1. Population growth and the demand for farmlands to grow more food, which have led to encroachment on grazing reserves and forest reserves
2. The loss of cattle routes through which herds access grazing lands and watering points
3. Lack of adequate funding to provide necessary services and support in grazing reserves
4. The loss of grazing lands due to climate change, resulting in migration
5. Weak law enforcement giving rise to impunity and corruption in the judicial system
6. Public’s loss of trust in, and alienation from, the justice system
7. Weak traditional leadership
8. Conflict entrepreneurs preventing peaceful and swift conflict resolution
Over the course of the two-day conference, the participants discussed some of the core tenets underpinning the historically peaceful coexistence of farmers and herders; outlined the factors that have undermined these relations in recent years; and highlighted some of the current challenges and opportunities in farmer-herder relations. Throughout these discussions, conference participants stressed that while certain themes, opportunities and challenges define farmer-herder relations on the national level, it is imperative to recognize local nuances and dynamics as these are what frequently determine whether any given farming and herding communities live in peace or in conflict. Indeed, participants agreed that farmers and herders cooperate in numerous ways beyond the popular narrative of conflict and that in many parts of the country, communities maintain peaceful relations. As one of the conference organizers, Dr. Chris Kwaja, noted in his opening remarks, on the highway just outside Abuja one can see herders selling their products in farmers’ markets on any given day.

Nevertheless, participants agreed that relations between farmers and herders had deteriorated dramatically in many communities across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones over the past decade, causing significant insecurity. In addition to the explanations proffered by the Emir of Argungu, the participants discussed other drivers of conflict such as poorly managed urbanization, corruption among elites, poor public education, and the hardening of ethnic identities. In addition to examining core drivers of the crisis, the participants discussed emergent trends in farmer-herder conflict and urgent priorities to be addressed by stakeholders to stem the growing tension between these communities in various parts of the country.

For example, Barr. Yusuf Anka and James Barnett, previewing research findings from an upcoming edited volume to be published by CDD, explained how farmer-herder conflict...
in the northwest had deteriorated to such an extent by the mid-2010s that the insecurity enabled the rise of banditry-terrorism in which criminal militants are overpowering the state and establishing themselves as warlords of local communities. Participants discussed in detail the perceived nexus between banditry, farmer-herder conflict and jihadist terrorism in an attempt to assess the degree to which groups such as Boko Haram have penetrated northwest and north-central Nigeria. Although there were diverging viewpoints, the participants agreed that the longer that tensions between farmers and herders go unaddressed, the more opportunity there will be for extremist elements such as Boko Haram, the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) and Ansaru to exploit the situation.

On the second day of the conference, discussion turned to policy challenges and practical solutions. Participants discussed the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) at length following comments made by the representative of the Senior Special Advisor to the President on Agriculture. One of the major challenges plaguing ambitious plans like the NLTP is that years of pervasive corruption have derailed previous attempts to properly develop and gazette ranches and, just as crucially, undermined the legitimacy of federal, state and local authorities in the eyes of both farming and herding communities. Consequently, the NLTP and related plans tend to suffer from a lack of critical stakeholder awareness and buy-in.

Dr. Aishatu Arimya’u also noted the crucial role of trauma healing networks in building resilience and peaceful coexistence within communities afflicted by farmer-herder conflict. Unfortunately, as many participants noted, such networks are woefully lacking in Nigeria.

Samuel Aruwan, Commissioner of Internal Security and Home Affairs in Kaduna state, argued that ethnic profiling and selective condemnation from politicians is central to driving farmer-herder tensions, which prompted a lively discussion among participants regarding the role to which policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders should discuss the role of ethnicity in farmer-herder conflict. In the end, a consensus was reached that while ethnic profiling by security forces is both morally wrong and counterproductive, stakeholders must accept that, for better or worse, farmer-herder conflict and related issues of banditry-terrorism are seen through an ethnic lens by the majority of the Nigerian population, including most conflict actors.

After splitting into groups to develop policy recommendations during the break-out session, participants reconvened for a final session to discuss how to formulate an action plan, to be published separately, that combines the insights and recommendations developed during the conference. While acknowledging the importance of pushing for the concrete national- and state-level policy changes as outlined in the recommendations below, it was also noted that each participant has a responsibility to foster dialogue and tolerance on the level of their own community. Farmer-herder relations are a matter of national importance, but these relations must first and foremost be cultivated and maintained at the level of each individual household, village, town, and region.
central purpose of the two-day dialogue was to foster collaboration among participants with the objective of developing recommendations for stakeholders at the federal, state and local levels to implement in order to address conflict and foster coexistence. By the end of the conference, the participants had developed a list of recommendations, beginning with those first proffered by HRH, the Emir of Argungu, at the conclusion of his keynote speech on day one. The Emir’s recommendations included:

- Both the federal and state governments should provide, demarcate, and protect grazing reserves in all states. States should have no authority over federal reserves but should create their separate reserves to complement the federal government’s efforts.

- The federal government should provide infrastructure and social amenities like hospitals, schools, abattoirs, clinics, and security in such reserves to encourage pastoralists to remain in one place.

- The federal government should establish cattle routes across states to enable pastoralist movement to greener pastures safely throughout the country.

- Federal and state authorities, in partnership with service providers, should offer alternative professional skills acquisition programs for pastoralists.

- The federal and state governments should restore some of the lost power of traditional rulers in terms of grazing and forest reserve administration, including the protection of demarcated grazing areas.

- Authorities should set up a mechanism to address the growing demands for additional farmlands.

In addition to endorsing the aforementioned recommendations of the Emir, the participants drafted up initial action plans and targeted these at four main levels: recommendations for the federal government, the state governments, local governments, and traditional institutions.
Federal

- The Federal Government (FG) should direct security votes to local governments
- FG should undertake immediate and comprehensive efforts to improve border security
- The Great Green Wall policy should be revised and seek the buy-in of farming communities
- It is imperative to revise and subsequently improve legislation on afforestation and revive forest guards
- The FG should establish a special tribunal to deal with farmer-herder issues
- Those guilty of brazen politicization and profiling of the farmer herder-conflict should be held accountable under existing laws prohibiting incitement and hate speech
- Nigeria’s Human Rights Commission should be empowered to better document and report on issues of forced displacement
- In order to reduce the opacity of local government funding, the FG should conduct a nationwide audit of local government finance; this should aim to determine the extent to which local governments are effectively using the funds they receive from the federal and state governments as well as whether they are effectively raising their own revenues

State

- Conduct campaigns to create public awareness around issues of ranching and its beneficial economic impacts
- Create a dedicated standing consultative committee tasked with resolving farmer-herder crises at local government levels and monitoring for early warning and pre-emptive response
- Police and security sector reform: Establish a dedicated security ministry within each state government; this can be achieved when there is a change in the legal framework, organizational setup, and operational control of the Nigeria Police Force
- Establish committees to checkmate the proliferation of small arms of light weapons as well as the illicit drug trade based on intelligence gathered by security agents, civil society groups, and community members
- 20% of states’ security votes should be dedicated/allocated to peacebuilding
Local

- Build the capacity of local governments to manage information and communications technology to clamp down on fake news
- Build the capacity of local governments, in partnership with civil society organisations, to provide psychosocial support and substance abuse support to youths
- Create coordination mechanisms to increase security coordination between villages, districts, and local governments
- Create community trust funds on a pilot basis into which communities will invest in order to generate revenue to support local security and social services

Traditional institutions

- Review the Land Use Act to ensure that it adequately reflects the role of traditional institutions
- Empower, expand and integrate the role of traditional institutions to cover early warning responsibilities
- Review each state’s gazettes of traditional institutions
- Build the capacity of traditional institutions to lead alternative dispute resolution efforts
- State assemblies should review state gazettes to ensure the inclusion of traditional institutions in state security council meetings
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