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**AN EXAMINATION OF THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF FARMERS AND HERDERS
 CONFLICT IN SOUTHERN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study investigates the causes and consequences of farmers-herders conflict in Southern Nasarawa State, Nigeria, where escalating competition over land and water resources has intensified tensions, often resulting in violent confrontations. A mixed-methods approach was utilized, collecting primary data through surveys and interviews with 150 participants, including farmers, herders, and community leaders, alongside secondary data from existing literature. The aim was to identify the primary drivers of conflict and assess their socio-economic and environmental impacts on the region, contributing to a deeper understanding of this complex issue. The findings reveal that crop destruction by cattle emerges as the most significant cause of conflict, with a mean score of (4.12), highlighting the substantial economic losses farmers face due to damage to crops such as maize, yam, rice, and millet. This issue is compounded by the straying of cattle into farmlands (mean score 3.71) and overgrazing (mean score 3.69), which further exacerbate tensions between the two groups. Additional factors contributing to the conflict include cattle theft, bush burning, and water contamination, albeit with comparatively lower severity. These results underscore the urgent need for interventions aimed at managing cattle movements and protecting agricultural lands. The socio-economic consequences of the conflict are significant, with economic impacts identified as the most pronounced, accounting for (36.67%) of the effects. These conflicts disrupt agricultural productivity, reduce livelihoods, and increase poverty levels, threatening food security and destabilizing local economies dependent on farming and livestock. Social disruption follows closely at (23.33%), reflecting how conflict erodes community cohesion, leads to displacements, and perpetuates cycles of violence due to historical grievances and ethnic tensions. Furthermore, environmental degradation (18%) threatens biodiversity and exacerbates vulnerabilities to climate change impacts, while health and well-being (10%) are negatively affected, resulting in physical health risks and psychological stress in conflict-affected areas. To address the challenges posed by the farmers-herders conflict, the study recommends implementing designated grazing areas, promoting sustainable grazing practices such as rotational grazing, and enhancing conflict resolution mechanisms. Additionally, improving fencing to protect crops and strengthening security measures to reduce cattle theft are critical strategies for mitigating the conflict. These interventions, supported by government policies and community engagement, could foster better communication and cooperation between farmers and herders, ultimately promoting sustainable coexistence. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to address the root causes of the conflict and enhance sustainable development in the region.

Keywords: Conflict, Farmers, Herders, Sustainable, Straying of Cattle, Water Contamination

1. Introduction

Conflicts between herders and farmers globally are not a new challenge, yet its intensity and dimension in some States in Nigeria lately has attracted the attention of the global community and researchers in particular. Violent confrontations between farmers and herders are prevalent and pervasive in Central and West Africa. From Mali to South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo to Nigeria, climate variability, environmental degradation, and socio-political upheaval have shifted pastoralist migratory patterns and increased tensions between farmers and herders (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018). The authors further observed that conflicts between farmers and herders exist on a large scale, both within Nigeria and the greater Lake Chad Basin and Sudan-Sahel region. This conflict often stems from competition over arable land and water resources, exacerbated by climate change and historical grievances. The effects of this conflict include economic disruption, social fragmentation, and political instability (Oseni, 2023).

However, states within Nigeria's north central have witnessed an increase in casualties as a consequence of the fractured relationship. In Nigeria, the North-Central states of Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau have witnessed series of incessant conflicts between herders and farmers. Similarly, states like Kaduna, Taraba and Zamfara states among others have also witnessed protracted conflicts between herders and farmers. This therefore implies that there has been no region in the country that has not been affected by the challenge of conflicts between herders and farmers.

Adetula (2016) rightly asserted that previously the herdsmen were known to wreak havoc in certain communities in Nigeria, but now the rate at which they are committing these crimes has increased exponentially. Ofuoku and Isife (2009) conducted a research in Delta State and found that a cow once strayed and destroyed farm products and as a result, the offended party slaughtered it. This resulted in conflicts between the host farming communities and the nomads. They further observed that the contamination of streams

that the host communities rely on and the rape of community girls by the nomads also cause and aggravated the conflict.

The history of herders and farmers conflicts in Southern Nasarawa State is not a new phenomenon because these conflicts have remained a recurring challenge even with the advent of democratic rule. Adogi (2013) pointed out that the conflicts between the farmers and herders in Nasarawa State have been on the rise since the 1990s because; Nigeria in general, and Nasarawa state in particular has experienced resource-related communal clashes often misrepresented or misinterpreted as ethnic, political and religious clashes since the beginning of the 1990s. The farmers fear that Fulani herders will destroy their farmlands. Nchi (2013) opined that the herder/farmer conflicts in Nasarawa State have copious economic undertones. The author argued that to explain this conflict simply in terms of clash of economic interests" is reductionist. According to the scholar, the issue of economic interests should be treated as secondary symptom rather than cause in trying to come to terms with the real essence and substance of the conflict.

Ugwu and Enna (2015) observed that bloody clashes erupted between Igbira and Bassa in Toto Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. This was followed by another violent conflict between the Tiv and other ethnic groups in Awe, Keana, and Obi LGAs. The conflict led to the gruesome beheading of the SarkinAzara, Musa Ibrahim (who was a Muslim) on the 12 June 2001. This led to reprisal attacks on the basis of religion. The authors further asserted that in 2013, there was another violent clash that claimed many lives and properties and the Judicial Commission of Inquiry puts the number of people killed at 667 while properties worth over ₦2.3bn, were destroyed.

Okoli and Atelhe (2014) linked the herders and farmers violent conflicts in Nasarawa State to environmental degradation, desertification, loss of wetlands and droughts. These factors according to the scholars have fueled violent clashes in Akpanaja, Ondori and Rukubi in Doma LGA of Nasarawa State in November

2011. The conflicts between herders and farmers in Awe and Obi that led to the displacement of majorly the farming communities of Tiv who were left with no option than to take refuge in places like Bukan Kwato, Marraban Akunza and Lafia town in 2017 and 2018 may have affected the economy of the State as well.

It is no longer news that globally, conflict itself is an essential feature of human existence. Adogi (2013) pointed out that the conflicts between the farmers and herders in Nasarawa State have been on the rise since the 1990s and Nigeria in general. The farmers fear that Fulani herders will destroy their farmlands. Nchi (2013) opined that to explain the herders and farmers conflicts in Nasarawa state simply in terms of “clash of economic interests” is reductionist.

Nasarawa State for instance shares these attributes as the state has a large population of herders and farmers and while majority of the herders are Muslims, majority of the farmers also are Christians. Because of this stratification of the occupational distribution of herders and farmers in the area along religious divides, minor dispute between two or few farmers in their local communities often times lead to full blown violence conflicts coined as herders and farmers conflicts by their perpetrators to gain cheap popularity.

Bello (2013) stated that among many others that crop damage by cattle is among the causes of herder-farmer conflict. The failure of the state, for example to resolve the settler/ indigene identity and the inherent struggles over resources can be adduced to have brought dangerous dimensions of economic and political elements in the Fulani cattle herders and farmers conflicts (Abbas, 2009). Yahaya (2008) observed that the cattle herders often left a large number of cattle in the care of children who do not care about the consequences in the event of destruction of farm produce. The conflicts, through provocative claims over access rights to farmland and cattle routes, have become ubiquitous and seem to have defied solutions (Abbas, 2009).

In many places, herders have clashed with farmers and their host communities over cattle destruction of crops;

farmers” encroachment on grazing reserves and indiscriminate bush burning by nomads which normally leads to loss of crops (Adeoye, 2017). The lack of political will is a contributing factor responsible for the incessant conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria, (Ndubuisi, 2018) stated that despite the continuous attacks of local farmers by the herders in different parts of Nigeria, no serious arrest has been made and the Fulani come back at intervals to attack farmers and villagers on their farms.

Thus, the inability of government in most cases to respond quickly to distress calls and early warning signs is an issue that promotes conflict. Mwamfupe (2015) stated that it has become apparent that the use of excessive force by police and military personnel tasked to solve the conflict rather deepens the hatred and struggles between the two actors. Ofem and Inyang (2014) opined that other causes of these perennial conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria, including Nasarawa State are indiscriminate bush burning, sexual harassment of women by nomads, harassment of nomads by youths of the host communities, theft of cattle and indiscriminate defecation by cattle along the road.

Garba (2016) conducted a study on socio-economic assessment of resource use conflict between crop farmers and cattle herders in Misau Local Government Area, Bauchi State. The study revealed that crop damage, blockage of watering points, and lawlessness were the major sources of conflict. The findings identified the effects of such conflicts to include loss of expected yield, lost cattle, displacement of people and loss of human lives and recommended that the religious, traditional and nomad leaders should give more efforts in preaching the implications of the conflict on their people and the community in general.

Similarly, Adeoye (2017) carried out a study on land use conflict between farmers and herdsman in parts of Kano, Yobe and Borno States of Nigeria: Nomads” viewpoints found that intrusion on the grazing reserves and encroachment on waterholes for cattle were farmers” actions that caused skirmishes while deliberate

grazing of cattle on crops and herder's indiscriminate bush burning often infuriated the farmers. However, some of those free areas were the grazing routes for the nomadic farmers from the north. Therefore, the conflicts begin when two parties encounter on the same land and try to protect their own benefits (Genyi, 2017). Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, Benue and Taraba states in the central Nigeria have the highest numbers of casualties because of violent clashes between farmers and herders in these transitional regions between the north and the south of Nigeria (International Crisis Group, 2017).

In Southern Nasarawa State, the conflict manifests in various forms, including disputes over grazing lands, crop destruction by wandering cattle, and retaliatory attacks by aggrieved parties (Ayih, 2022). The lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms and the proliferation of small arms further exacerbate the situation, leading to cycles of violence and counter-violence (Suleiman and Abdullahi, 2023). Furthermore, the socio-cultural dynamics in the region play a significant role in perpetuating the conflict. Historical grievances, perceptions of marginalization, and identity politics often exacerbate tensions between farming communities and pastoralists (Ibrahim, 2023). Additionally, the absence of comprehensive land tenure systems and inadequate government intervention contribute to the persistence of the conflict in Southern Nasarawa State (Audu, 2021).

Furthermore, the inadequacy of government intervention and institutional support aggravates the

farmers-herders conflict in Southern Nasarawa State. Despite the recurrent nature of the conflict and its devastating consequences, there is a lack of proactive measures from both state and federal authorities to address its root causes and promote sustainable peace building initiatives. The absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms, coupled with weak law enforcement and governance structures, undermines efforts to prevent and mitigate violence between farmers and herders. Additionally, the failure to provide alternative livelihood options for pastoralists and implement sustainable land management practices further exacerbates the conflict, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and insecurity in the region. Therefore, the problem is compounded by the inadequate response of government institutions to address the complex socio-economic and environmental factors driving the farmers-herders conflict in Southern Nasarawa State.

Unfortunately, while these conflicts persist over the years, the paucity of studies on the effect of these conflicts on economic activities in the State have attracted the attention of researchers, yet, their divergent views and findings calls for further studies. Olayoku, (2014) asserted that from a methodological point of view, conflict between farmers and herders is not well reported and there is need for further studies. This research aims to explore the complexities of this issue by examining the causes and consequences of Farmers-Herder Conflict in the study area.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Study area

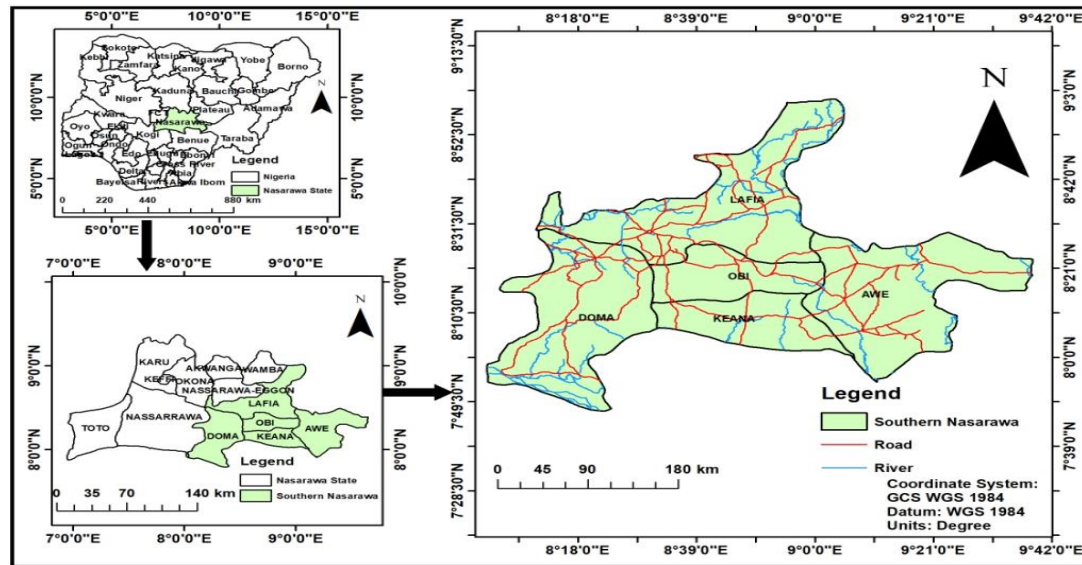


Figure 1: Location of Southern Nasarawa, Nasarawa State

Source: Department of Geography NSUK, 2024

The study area for the research on the effects of farmers-herders conflicts in Southern Nasarawa State, Nigeria, is located in Southern Nasarawa State. It lies between latitude $8^{\circ}00'01''$ and $9^{\circ}05'64''$ North and longitude $8^{\circ}09'07''$ and $9^{\circ}38'45''$ East, figure 1.. The precise location within Southern Nasarawa State depends on the extent and intensity of the conflicts and the availability of data and access to research sites.

2.2 Data Collection

The study data collection approach involved both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through surveys, structured interviews, with affected individuals such as farmers, herders, and community leaders. The method aimed at capturing firsthand insights into the causes and effects of the farmers-herders conflict.

Additionally, secondary data were collected from existing research, reports, and historical records to provide context and background information on the conflict. This combination of primary and secondary sources allows for a comprehensive understanding of

the situation, ensuring the research is well-informed and grounded in both current and past experiences

2.3 Sample Size

The study adopted a random sampling technique to select a representative sample from the population, with a total sample size of 150, the target was for specific groups of farmers and herders who have experienced conflict, ensuring that the data collected directly aligns with the research objectives. Within these identified groups, random sampling was applied to provide a balanced and unbiased sample for analysis.

The sample size of 150 was determined using statistical methods based on the population size, ensuring that it is both large enough to provide reliable and valid results, while also remaining manageable for data collection and analysis. This approach aims to capture a comprehensive set of responses that accurately reflects the views and experiences of the affected population, enabling an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the patterns and dynamics of farmer-herder conflicts.

The study adopted a combination of random sampling technique to select a representative sample from the population. Sampling targets specific groups, such as farmers and herders who have experienced conflict, ensuring that the data collected directly relates to the research objective. Random sampling is used within the identified groups to provide a balanced and unbiased sample for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study involved examining the causes of the farmers-herders conflict in Southern Nasarawa State, utilizing a combination of descriptive statistics and weighted mean calculations to rank the severity of each identified cause. Responses from community members were categorized into five levels: Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, and Very High, allowing for a nuanced assessment of each cause's impact on the conflict. The data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to 150 respondents, providing a representative sample of the affected population.

Formula:

$$\text{Mean (x)} = \frac{\sum(f_i \times w_i)}{N}$$

f_i = frequency of responses for each severity level (Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, Very High)

w_i = weight assigned to each severity level (1 for Very Low, 2 for Low, 3 for Moderate, 4 for High, 5 for Very High)

N = total number of responses for that particular cause

3. Results and Discussion

Causes of Farmers and Herder Conflict in the Southern Nasarawa State

Table 1 shows the mean scores for various causes of Farmers and Herders conflict with crop destruction emerges as the most severe cause of conflict (4.12), indicating that crop destruction by cattle is a frequent and significant problem, leading to substantial economic losses for farmers and driving tensions. In communities like Doka, Gwanki, Agab, Buna,

Maisamari, and Sarkin Noma the destruction of crops, such as maize, yam, rice and millet, leads to significant economic losses for farmers, heightening tensions and often resulting in violent confrontations. Farmers not only lose their crops but also their income, which severely affects their food security. This destruction often occurs when herders graze their cattle on farmlands, either unintentionally or due to a lack of designated grazing areas, leading to significant damage as crops are trampled or consumed. For farmers, this results in substantial economic losses, affecting both food security and income, and often sparking violent confrontations between the two groups. The data highlights the urgent need for interventions that protect crops from cattle incursions, such as improved fencing, compensation mechanisms, and the establishment of designated grazing areas to minimize crop damage. Similar findings have been reported in studies from Nigeria and Ghana, where crop damage by livestock has been identified as a major cause of conflict between farmers and herders (Turner, 2004; Benjaminsen., 2012).

Following crop destruction, the straying of cattle into farmlands is identified as another major cause of conflict, with a mean score of (3.71), example of is a situation where herders are moving their cattle through rural areas in search of pasture, but due to the absence of clear grazing routes or designated areas, the cattle unintentionally stray into farmers' cultivated lands. This issue, closely related to crop destruction, underscores the challenges in managing cattle movements to prevent them from entering agricultural lands. Overgrazing is a significant concern with a mean score of (3.69). Overgrazing depletes pasture resources, exacerbating competition for land and leading to conflicts. Addressing these issues requires sustainable grazing practices, such as rotational grazing and clearly defined grazing rights, to ensure that both herders and farmers can coexist without depleting the available resources. Research in Kenya and Sudan has also highlighted overgrazing and straying of cattle as critical factors in farmer and herder conflicts (Galaty, 2013).

Other notable causes include cattle theft (mean score 3.47) and the killing of cattle (mean score 3.31),

perceived as less severe than crop destruction and overgrazing. Bush burning (mean score 3.27) and contamination of water (mean score 3.00) are moderate concerns, indicating that while they contribute to the conflict, they are not the primary drivers. Effective conflict resolution strategies should prioritize the most severe causes identified. Implementing better fencing, designated grazing areas, and rotational grazing systems, alongside improved herding practices, can mitigate crop destruction, straying, and overgrazing.

Table 1: Causes of Farmers and Herders Conflict in the study area

S/n	Causes	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high	Mean (x)	Rank
1	Crop Destruction	2	7	28	47	66	4.12	1
2	Straying of Cattle	14	18	21	41	56	3.71	2
3	Overgrazing	16	19	19	38	58	3.69	3
4	Cattle Theft	17	24	29	31	49	3.47	4
5	Killing of Cattle	39	8	18	37	48	3.31	5
6	Bush Burning	27	20	29	33	41	3.27	6
7	Contamination of Water	20	48	17	42	23	3	7

Sources: Author Field Survey (2024)

Consequences of farmers-herders conflict in the Southern Nasarawa State

The result in figure 2 shows farmers-herders conflict in many regions has profound implications that resonate across societal and environmental dimensions. In the study area, these conflicts typically stem from competition over limited resources such as land and water, exacerbated by factors, environmental degradation, population growth, and the impacts of climate change. As farmers and herders contend for access to these vital resources, tensions escalate, often resulting in frequent conflicts and instances of violence. Literature indicates that such conflicts primarily manifest in several key dimensions, each with significant repercussions. Economic impact (36.67%) emerges as the most substantial, underscoring the profound economic consequences of farmers-herders conflicts. Studies highlight losses in livelihoods, reduced agricultural productivity, and heightened poverty levels as direct outcomes (Toulmin and Guèye, 2013). These disruptions not only threaten food security

Additionally, enhancing security measures to prevent cattle theft and fostering better communication and cooperation between farmers and herders will help reduce the overall conflict and promote sustainable coexistence in the study area. Studies from Mali and Burkina Faso support the effectiveness of such measures in reducing conflicts and promoting peace between farming and herding communities (Cotula, Toulmin, and Hesse, 2004; Moritz, 2006).

but also destabilize local economies reliant on agriculture and livestock (Rustad, 2017). Social Disruption (23.33%) ranks as the second most critical dimension, emphasizing how these conflicts disrupt community cohesion, trigger mass displacements, and erode social structures (Kotsopoulos, 2019). Such social fragmentation exacerbates historical grievances and ethnic tensions, perpetuating cycles of violence and hindering efforts towards reconciliation and peace-building (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008). Environmental Degradation (18.00%) constitutes another significant impact, with studies documenting increased land degradation, deforestation, and intensified competition over dwindling natural resources (Nkedianye, 2011). This environmental strain not only threatens biodiversity but also amplifies vulnerabilities to climate change impacts like desertification and water scarcity (Barnett et al., 2016). Health and Well-being (10.00%) are also affected, albeit to a lesser extent percentage-wise, with reports highlighting physical health risks due to inadequate living conditions and psychological distress stemming

from the trauma and stress of conflict (Wodon, 2018). These health impacts further strain already fragile health systems in conflict-affected regions. Security and Governance (12.00%) represent additional challenges, reflecting the complexities in maintaining security, enforcing governance, and implementing effective conflict resolution strategies (Collier, 2003). Heightened violence and militarization often accompany these conflicts, posing obstacles to political

stability and development efforts (Stewart, 2008). Farmers-herders conflicts necessitates multifaceted approaches that integrate resource management, conflict resolution mechanisms, and sustainable development initiatives. Without concerted efforts to mitigate these impacts, the repercussions can perpetuate poverty, exacerbate humanitarian crises, and impede broader regional development goals (Schneider, 2015).

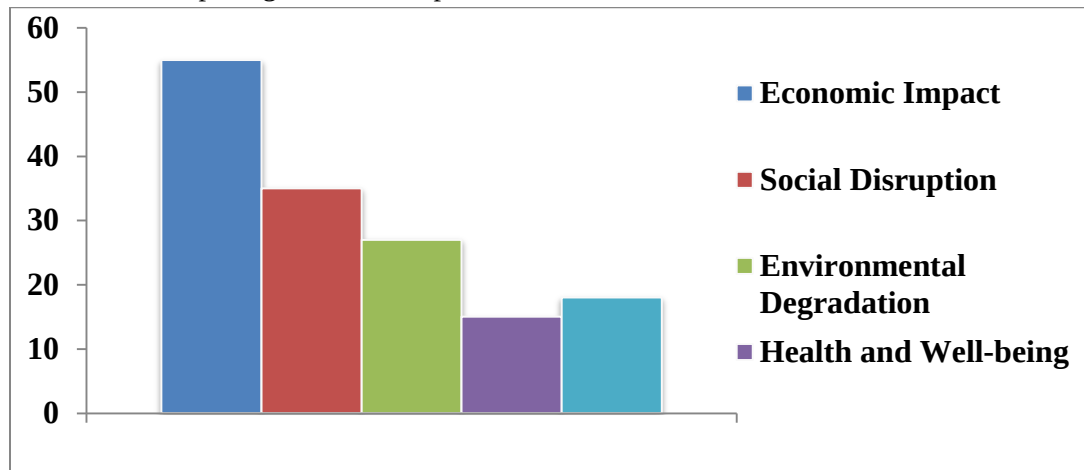


Figure 2: Perceived consequences of farmers-herders conflict in Southern Nasarawa State
Source: Author, 2024

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the multifaceted nature of the farmers-herders conflict in Southern Nasarawa State, with crop destruction by cattle identified as the most significant cause of tension. The data indicate that economic losses from agricultural damage severely affect farmers' livelihoods and food security. Additionally, issues such as straying cattle and overgrazing contribute to escalating conflicts, highlighting the need for comprehensive interventions. The socio-economic consequences of the conflict are profound, leading to increased poverty, social disruption, and environmental degradation. Without effective strategies to address these challenges, the cycle of violence and economic instability is likely to continue, adversely impacting both communities.

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to mitigate the impacts of the farmers-herders conflict:

- i. **Establish Designated Grazing Areas:** Create specific zones for grazing to reduce conflicts over farmland and ensure that herders have adequate access to pasture without encroaching on agricultural lands.
- ii. **Implement Sustainable Grazing Practices:** Promote rotational grazing and clearly defined grazing rights to manage cattle movements effectively and prevent overgrazing.
- iii. **Enhance Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** Develop community-based conflict resolution strategies that engage local leaders, farmers, and herders in dialogue to address grievances amicably.
- iv. **Strengthen Security Measures:** Increase security presence and measures to prevent cattle theft and protect communities from retaliatory attacks.

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