



Conflict Theory and its Implications to Farmers–Herders Relations in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of conflict theory on the intricate relationships between farmers and herders in Nigeria, a situation characterized by escalating violence and socio-economic unrest. It begins with an overview of conflict theory, highlighting its significance in analysing social and political disputes. By applying this theoretical approach to the dynamics between farmers and herders, the research uncovers critical issues contributing to these tensions, such as competition for land and resources, ethnic divisions, and climate change. The study explores how these conflicts affect local communities and society as a whole, pointing out the impact on security, livelihoods, and social unity. It emphasises the importance of understanding these relationships through the lens of conflict theory, focusing on power imbalances and resource distribution as key elements driving conflict. Additionally, the study suggests possible strategies for conflict resolution and peace-building, advocating for collaborative methods that encourage dialogue and fair resource management. Acknowledging the wider societal effects, the research provides policy recommendations aimed at promoting sustainable coexistence between farmers and herders. Lastly, it concludes by highlighting areas for future research and discussion, urging interdisciplinary approaches to tackle the complex nature of farmer-herder relations in Nigeria.

Key words: Conflict theory; Socio-economic unrest; Farmers-Herders relations; Power Imbalances

1.0 Introduction

The relationship between farmers and herders in Nigeria has been a complex and persistent issue that has drawn considerable attention due to its extensive social, economic and political effects. This dynamic mainly centers on the rivalry for land and natural resources between settled agricultural communities and mobile herding groups, resulting in frequent conflicts, violence and displacement. Contributing factors such as population growth, climate change, resource scarcity and ineffective governance intensify this challenge, which is deeply rooted in historical, cultural and economic factors. Understanding the intricacies of farmer-herder relations in Nigeria is essential for tackling the root causes and creating sustainable solutions that foster peace, coexistence and fair access to resources for all communities involved. Therefore, it is vital to apply conflict theory to comprehend the underlying dynamics of the persistent tensions in farmer-herder interactions. This theory highlights the power struggles, economic inequalities and conflicting interests between the two groups. The unequal allocation of resources like land and water significantly fuels the conflict, alongside the region's historical and sociopolitical context.

In Nigeria, the conflict between farmers and herders has led to severe outcomes, including lives lost, community displacement and economic turmoil. By applying conflict theory, stakeholders and policymakers can pursue effective solutions that tackle the underlying issues of this conflict and encourage peaceful cohabitation. This viewpoint emphasises the importance of examining the complexities of farmer-herder dynamics in Nigeria through the framework of conflict theory, with the goal of achieving a deeper understanding and long-term resolution.

Consequently, the paper's objective is to explore the detailed aspects of conflict theory and its relevance to farmer-herder interactions in Nigeria. It aims to create a forum for scholars, policymakers and stakeholders to assess the intricate factors behind the ongoing disputes between farmers and herders through the conflict theory perspective. The paper will cover the historical, economic and sociopolitical elements that contribute to the farmer-herder conflict. By investigating power dynamics, resource competition and structural inequalities within this complex relationship, the paper intends to enhance understanding of the root causes of the conflict. Additionally, it will highlight the importance of recognising the viewpoints and narratives of both farmers and herders, taking into account the varied socio-cultural contexts in which these interactions occur.

2.0 Conflict Theory

Conflict theory, articulated by Karl Marx, highlights the importance of power dynamics, inequality and social structures in sustaining conflicts within societies (Marx, 1867). It argues that conflicts stem from competition over limited resources

and the uneven distribution of power and wealth (Dahrendorf, 1959). Collins (1975) also notes that this theory emphasised the role of social institutions in either exacerbating or alleviating social tensions. Central to conflict theory is the idea of social stratification, where individuals and groups are hierarchically arranged according to factors like class, race and gender (Lenski, 1966). It stresses the function of coercion and control in upholding existing social orders, as discussed by Max Weber (1922) in his analysis of authority and domination.

As mentioned above, conflict theory primarily stems from the theories of Karl Marx, who posited that society is stratified into classes vying for resources and authority. Marx suggested that the dominant class (the bourgeoisie) takes advantage of the working class (the proletariat), resulting in unavoidable conflict (Marx, 1867/1990). Contemporary interpretations build upon this idea by incorporating various identity factors, including race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality, alongside class. Hurst (2019) indicated that modern conflict theorists investigate how systemic inequalities trigger conflicts that are expressed through political activism and social movements, highlighting that these conflicts often stem from profound societal injustices.

In examining power relations, the emphasis of conflict theory on power relations is particularly insightful for scrutinizing political conflicts. Power is perceived not only as a resource but also as a relational construct that develops through challenges and opposition. Foss & Waters (2020) contend that political conflict frequently mirrors deeper social struggles, where oppressed groups confront the existing order in pursuit of fairness. This viewpoint enables a more detailed comprehension of political disputes by uncovering the motivations behind political movements, such as those advocating for racial justice or LGBTQ+ rights. In expression of social discontent, the relevance of conflict theory also lies in its capacity to clarify social dissatisfaction and unrest. Tilly (2004) asserts that social movements and collective actions often arise from perceived injustices, inequality and exclusion, with individuals uniting to challenge societal norms and policies. Utilizing conflict theory allows researchers to pinpoint the core grievances that spark these movements. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement illustrates how systemic racism and police violence have incited widespread social unrest, highlighting a deep discontent with societal systems (Smith, 2020).

The influence of ideology and culture is another crucial facet of conflict theory, because of its focus on the role of ideology and culture in shaping social and political conflicts. Ideologies frequently act as instruments for endorsing power dynamics and social structures, affecting how conflicts are presented and understood within public discussions (Mouffe, 2005). For instance, the ideological

struggle surrounding climate change showcases divergent interests and the contest for resource control. As demonstrated by Haughton & Preez (2021), conflict theory permits a more thorough examination of how ideological conflicts can heighten political tension and inspire collective activism.

Therefore, consequences for policy and governance in grasping conflict theory also have tangible implications for governance and policy creation. It underscores the necessity for policymakers to tackle the fundamental causes of conflict instead of simply reacting to the symptoms of unrest (Lindner, 2022). Approaches to policy-making that are sensitive to conflict can promote social unity by acknowledging and addressing the structural inequalities that lead to dissatisfaction.

In essence, conflict theory acts as an influential framework for dissecting social and political disputes, demonstrating how power dynamics, cultural ideologies and systemic inequalities fuel contention within society. Its focus on conflict as an essential component of social existence enriches understanding of political participation and social movements. By recognising the importance of conflict theory, academics, policymakers and practitioners can more effectively navigate the complexities of societal interactions, paving the way for fairer and just solutions to widespread social problems.

Thus, conflict theory brings attention to the idea of alienation, initially explored by Marx, which illustrates how individuals can feel disconnected from the outcomes of their work and powerless within societal frameworks. These concepts help explain the ways in which conflicts arise and persist in society, offering a theoretical approach to understand the tensions between farmers and herders in Nigeria and similar societal disputes. Thus, conflict theory provides insight into the intricate nature of social conflicts, illuminating the power imbalances, struggles over resources and structural inequalities that contribute to such tensions in Nigeria.

3.0 Relevance of Conflict Theory to Social and Political Conflicts

The significance of Conflict Theory in understanding social and political conflicts is evident, especially regarding farmer-herder dynamics in Nigeria. This theory serves as a valuable framework for examining the fundamental power struggles, competition for resources and systemic inequalities that lead to these conflicts. As Dahrendorf (1959) notes, social conflicts emerge from unequal resource distribution and power competition in society. This situation is clearly illustrated in Nigeria, where disputes over farmland, water sources and grazing territories have resulted in ongoing conflicts (Mustapha, 2016). Conflict theory also has

political implications, revealing how social disputes can affect governance, policymaking and political power distribution (Collins, 1975). Collins highlights how social structures and institutions either sustain or alleviate these conflicts, providing further understanding of the political aspects of farmer-herder tensions in Nigeria. Thus, the importance of conflict theory in social and political issues lies in its focus on social stratification and the dynamics of power. Lenski (1966) illustrates how hierarchies based on class, ethnicity and other social distinctions can intensify conflicts, reflecting the complexities found in farmer-herder relationships in Nigeria. Consequently, Conflict Theory offers critical insights into the social and political aspects of conflicts, helping analyses the tensions and relationships between farmers and herders in Nigeria and similar situations.

4.0 Application of Conflict Theory to Farmer-Herder Relations in Nigeria

Applying conflict theory to the relationship between farmers and herders in Nigeria offers valuable insights into the underlying dynamics and complexities of their ongoing tensions. Conflict theory, which focuses on power struggles and inequalities in societal conflicts, aligns well with the power imbalances and resource competition fueling the conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria. Karl Marx's concept of social stratification is particularly relevant when considering the uneven distribution of critical resources like land and water that impact farmer-herder relations. This unequal access to essential resources perpetuates the conflict seen in their interactions in Nigeria. Understanding the structural factors contributing to conflict is crucial, as emphasised by Randall Collins. In the context of farmer-herder relations in Nigeria, historical, economic and sociopolitical dimensions all play significant roles in shaping the conflict's dynamics. Max Weber's insights into authority and domination provide a lens for analyzing power dynamics and control mechanisms within farmer-herder interactions, shedding light on coercive aspects perpetuating the conflict. The application of conflict theory, as advocated by influential theorists, offers a compelling framework for comprehending farmer-herder relations in Nigeria, highlighting the power differentials, resource struggles and structural inequalities at the core of this societal conflict.

5.0 Farmer-Herder Relations in Nigeria

Weber, M. (1922) in his work "Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology" delves into the historical background and evolution of farmer-herder relations in Nigeria, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of this enduring relationship. Over time, farmers and herders in Nigeria have been intertwined in a complex interplay influenced by various sociocultural, economic and environmental factors. The historical coexistence between farming communities and nomadic herding groups was initially harmonious, each group contributing

to the agricultural landscape. Nevertheless, changes in land use, population growth and environmental shifts have altered the nature of these relations. The colonial period ushered in significant transformations in land management and ownership, leading to territorial delineations and land tenure systems that impacted both farmers and herders (Mahmood, 2002). These shifts set the stage for subsequent conflicts over land rights and grazing territories, intensifying tensions in farmer-herder relationships. The post-colonial era saw rapid demographic changes, urbanization and agricultural expansion, further disrupting traditional patterns of interaction between these groups. Competition for land, water and grazing areas sparked conflicts and violence between farmers and herders (Akinwumi, 2010). Factors such as the proliferation of weapons, political instability and governance issues have exacerbated these conflicts, deepening the historical roots of their relationship (Ukeje, 2006). The evolving historical narrative of farmer-herder interactions in Nigeria reveals the intricate blend of historical legacies, socioeconomic shifts and environmental pressures that continue to shape their coexistence and conflicts. Understanding this history is crucial for developing interventions and sustainable solutions to ease tensions and promote peace in Nigeria.

6.0 Factors Contributing to Conflicts between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria

The tensions between farmers and herders stem from multiple factors, as indicated by scholarly investigations. A major cause is the competition for limited resources, chiefly land and water. Farmers need land for farming, while herders rely on pasture for their animals, resulting in conflicts over territorial rights and usage (Adams, 1984). Scholars like Akin L. Mabogunje (1970) have pointed out that demographic pressures worsen the disputes between farmers and herders. The rapid growth in population has heightened the demand for resources, further stressing the availability of land and water, fueling the conflict. In addition, the absence of well-defined land ownership systems and property rights has been identified as a significant factor in the disputes (Rustad, Binningsbø, and Buhaug, 2017). Unclear boundaries and ownership arrangements have led to disagreements and violence between farming and herding communities. Furthermore, political and governance issues, including ineffective land management policies and inadequate conflict resolution mechanisms, have been recognized as contributing factors to the ongoing conflicts (Yaro and Osha, 2017). The lack of inclusive policies and mechanisms for resolving disputes sustains the tensions between farmers and herders. Therefore, various factors, such as resource competition, demographic pressures, land ownership challenges and governance deficiencies, significantly contribute to the conflicts between farmers and herders in different regions of Nigeria and other African nations.

7.0 Impact of Farmer-Herder Relations on Communities and Broader Society

The relationship between farmers and herders has been thoroughly examined by numerous researchers, revealing significant insights into the social, economic and environmental effects of these interactions on communities and society as a whole.

One major effect of these relations is the potential for conflict. Véron et al. (2019) contend that competition for scarce resources like land and water can result in tensions between the two groups, which may lead to disputes that disrupt community cohesion and hinder social stability. In addition to that, the struggles for resources have had economic ramifications for communities. Mapiye et al. (2018) discovered that conflicts stemming from farmers-herders interactions can interfere with agricultural operations, causing a decrease in productivity and income for farmers. This ultimately impacts the broader economic health of the community and could intensify existing socio-economic disparities.

The environmental implications of the relationship between farmers and herders are also significant. Adesina et al. (2020) point out that excessive grazing by herders may result in land degradation and soil erosion, thus diminishing the land's fertility over time. Such outcomes can adversely influence agriculture, potentially jeopardising food security and the livelihoods of both farmers and herders alike. On a positive note, researchers also acknowledge the benefits that can arise from effective collaboration between these groups. For example, Deh (2017) suggests that working together can foster sustainable land management practices and bolster environmental conservation efforts. This cooperation can lead to better resource management and heightened resilience against climate change. Thus, the dynamics of farmers-herders relations have complex repercussions on communities and the wider society. Resource conflicts can jeopardise social unity and economic viability, while overgrazing poses serious environmental threats. However, through collaboration, farmers and herders can also engage in practices that promote sustainability and conservation.

8.0 Implication of Conflict Theory to Farmer-Herder Relations in Nigeria

Conflict theory provides a valuable framework for understanding and addressing the complex dynamics between farmers and ranchers. This theoretical perspective emphasizes the role of power, inequality and competition in shaping social relations and outcomes. By applying conflict theory, researchers and practitioners can better understand the root causes of agricultural-pastoral conflicts and develop strategies to address them. According to Coser (1967), conflict theory sees

social order as the result of ongoing power struggles between different groups in society. In the context of farmers and pastoralists, power differences related to access to land, distribution of resources and political influence can lead to conflict. For example, farmers may have greater political and economic power, leading to the marginalisation and displacement of pastoralists. This imbalance of power can intensify tensions and create a cycle of violence and hostility.

Furthermore, Marx (1867) argues that conflicts arise from the contradictions inherent in the capitalist system, where economic interests drive competition for resources. Farmers and ranchers often compete for limited resources such as land and water, which can fuel conflicts rooted in economic inequality. These conflicts can be exacerbated by external factors, such as climate change, population growth and government policies, intensifying the struggle for resources and intensifying social divisions. Applying conflict theory to the farmer-pastoralist context can help guide interventions that address the causes of conflict and promote social justice and equity. Strategies such as inclusive governance structures and participatory decision-making processes can help mitigate power inequalities and ensure equitable distribution of resources (Meth, 2018). Efforts to promote dialogue and negotiation between farmers and pastoralists, assisted by neutral mediators, can foster understanding, reduce tensions and seek mutually beneficial solutions (Nnabuo and Iorshase, 2019). In addition, addressing economic disparities between farmers and pastoralists, for example through fair trade initiatives and income diversification programmes, can help create a more inclusive and sustainable agricultural system (Kiti et al., 2018). In the same vein, comprehensive land use planning that takes into account the needs of farmers and ranchers can help reduce competition and conflict over resources (Taylor et al., 2020).

Therefore, conflict theory provides valuable insights into the dynamics between farmers and pastoralists, highlighting the role of power, competition and inequality in conflicts. Understanding these underlying causes can guide interventions to address power imbalances, promote dialogue and support the equitable distribution of resources. By adopting a perspective informed by conflict theory, stakeholders can work towards more inclusive and sustainable solutions to farmer-pastoralist relations in Nigeria.

9.0 Potential Strategies for Conflict Resolution and Peace Building

Efforts to promote conflict resolution and peace building among farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria have received considerable attention because of the ongoing conflicts and their negative impact on the community. Researchers and practitioners have proposed several possible strategies to address this problem

and promote peaceful coexistence among these groups. One possible strategy is to create community-based conflict resolution mechanisms. Adisa and Oladimeji (2020) emphasize the importance of traditional methods of conflict resolution, such as dialogue and community mediation, in resolving disputes between farmers and herdsmen. These mechanisms can foster mutual understanding, provide a platform for grievances to be heard and facilitate the negotiation of mutually beneficial agreements. Based on the community approach, Chama et al. (2020) proposes the integration of local peace building initiatives. This includes the involvement of community leaders, elders and religious leaders in peace building processes. Using their authority and influence, local actors can facilitate dialogue, mediate conflicts and promote reconciliation between farmers and pastoralists. Another strategy is to implement inclusive governance structures. (Adesina et al., 2020). This may include the creation of joint committees or platforms where both groups are equally represented and participate in decision-making processes. In addition, agricultural and environmental policies that support sustainable land use and resource management practices can contribute to conflict resolution. Ogunbodede et al. (2020) suggest the implementation of policies that favor the creation of pasture or farm reserves and the distribution of adequate resources for their development. This can help minimize competition for land and resources and reduce the potential for conflict and provide economic opportunities for farmers and herders.

In addition, improving economic opportunities and diversification for farmers and herders can contribute to the resolution of the conflict. Adegeye et al. (2019) proposes the promotion of income-generating activities in accordance with the agricultural practices of the two groups. This can reduce their dependence on limited resources, minimize competition and foster economic interdependence, which has the potential to create common interests and mitigate conflict. Thus, there are many possible strategies to resolve conflicts and consolidate peace among farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria. These strategies include community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, integration of local peace-building initiatives, inclusive governance structures, implementation of sustainable land use policies and promotion of economic opportunities. By combining these strategies, stakeholders can work to promote peaceful coexistence, resolve grievances and promote sustainable agricultural practices in Nigeria.

10.0 Broader Societal Implication of Farmer-Herder Relations in Nigeria and Policy Recommendations

The problem of farmer-pastoral relations in Nigeria goes beyond the immediate conflicts between these groups and extends to wider social implications affecting various aspects of the country. Researchers have explored these implications and

proposed policy recommendations to address the challenges and promote sustainable coexistence. One of the most important social implications is the impact on food security. Conflicts between farmers and pastoralists can disrupt agricultural activities, leading to reduced productivity and food shortages (Mapiye et al., 2018). Policies and interventions must be designed to ensure the continuity of agricultural production and access to food for all communities, including support for alternative subjects for pastoralists during periods when pastures may be inaccessible. Another important element to consider is the effect on social cohesion and intergroup relations. Farmers and pastoralists often belong to different ethnic groups, which can lead to ethno-religious tensions and identity conflicts (Owoeye et al., 2019). Policy recommendations should include initiatives that encourage dialogue, reconciliation and promote understanding and tolerance between different communities.

Furthermore, the environmental implications of farmer-pastoralist relations are crucial. Overgrazing, deforestation and land degradation by pastoralists can have long-term environmental consequences, such as soil erosion and loss of biodiversity (Adesina et al., 2020). Fresh policy interventions should prioritise sustainable land use practices, land restoration programmes and the implementation of environmental regulations to mitigate these impacts. In addition, economic implications play an important role in farmer-pastoralist relations. Conflict can lead to a reduction in agricultural productivity, loss of life and increased levels of poverty (Ogundipe and Ogunkola, 2018). Policy recommendations should focus on economic diversification, skills development and access to credit and markets for farmers and herders, thereby promoting inclusive economic growth and reducing resource dependence limited. In terms of policy recommendations, Adegeye et al. (2019) emphasize the need for comprehensive and integrated policies that address the root causes of agricultural-pastoral conflicts, such as land insecurity and resource scarcity. These policies must be developed through the participation of many actors, including farmers, herders, community leaders and government officials.

Furthermore, Mapiye et al. (2018) emphasizes the importance of conflict-sensitive approaches to policy formulation and implementation, taking into account the potential impacts on different groups and ensuring an equitable distribution of resources. This requires proactive interventions such as conflict early warning systems, effective law enforcement and grievance mechanisms. Investments in infrastructure development, especially in rural areas, can improve access to markets, provide alternative livelihoods and promote social and economic integration in communities (Ogundipe and Ogunkola, 2018). The wider social implications of farmer-pastoral relations in Nigeria are significant and

multifaceted, affecting food security, social cohesion, environmental sustainability and economic development. The policy recommendations should prioritise comprehensive approaches, address the root causes of conflict and promote sustainable resource management. By integrating various actors and incorporating conflict-sensitive strategies, policy interventions can contribute to resolving agro-pastoral tensions and promote peace and long-term development in Nigeria.

11.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, conflict theory provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of farmer-pastoralist relations in Nigeria. Competition for resources, especially land and water, has led to tension and violence between these two groups. The unequal distribution of power and resources further exacerbated these conflicts and government policies often favoured one group over another, leading to increased marginalisation. Key findings and observations from the application of conflict theory to agrarian-pastoral relations in Nigeria include the role of economic inequality, historical grievances and the need for inclusive and equitable policies to address the causes of the conflict. In addition, the involvement of external actors, such as political elites and multinational companies, has also contributed to the perpetuation of these conflicts. Overall, understanding the underlying power dynamics and structural inequalities is critical to resolving farmer-pastoralist conflicts in Nigeria. Efforts to promote peace and reconciliation must include the redistribution of resources, the empowerment of marginalised communities, and the promotion of inclusive governance. This will require a concerted effort by all stakeholders, including government, civil society organisations and the international community, to address the root causes of conflict and create a more just and peaceful society for farmers and the herders.

The application of conflict theory to farmer-pastoralist relations in Nigeria has several implications for further research and practical applications. First, more research should focus on understanding the specific mechanisms by which power imbalances and structural inequalities contribute to the persistence of these conflicts. This included the study of the impact of government policies, resource allocation and historical grievances on the relationship between farmers and herders. Research should also be carried out on the role of external actors, such as political elites and multinational corporations, in exacerbating these conflicts. Understanding how these actors exploit and exacerbate existing tensions between farmers and pastoralists can inform more effective conflict resolution and peace building strategies. In particular, lessons learned from conflict theory can inform policies and intervention strategies aimed at resolving conflicts between farmers

and pastoralists. This may include the implementation of land and resource management policies that promote equity and inclusion, as well as initiatives to empower marginalised communities and foster dialogue between farmers and herders. Practical applications may also include support for conflict resolution mechanisms, such as community mediation, to ease tensions and promote peaceful coexistence.

In addition, there is a need to implement practical applications that address economic disparities and promote sustainable livelihoods for farmers and herders. This could include initiatives to improve access to education, health care and economic opportunities in rural areas, as well as investments in agricultural and livestock practices that are environmentally friendly and equitable for both groups. Overall, further research and practical applications should aim to address the root causes of agrarian-herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria, promote equity, inclusion and sustainable peace building initiatives. This requires multidisciplinary approaches involving a range of stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, non-governmental organisations and international partners, to design and implement effective strategies for conflict resolution and peace building.

Opportunities for Further Discussion and Studies

Many avenues of reflection are available on this subject. First, more research is needed to understand the specific ways in which power dynamics and inequality play out in farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria. This may include a deeper analysis of the historical, economic and political factors that have shaped these relationships. In addition, there is a need for more discussions and initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of farmer-pastoral conflicts. This may include the implementation of policies that promote the equitable distribution of resources, as well as the promotion of dialogue and reconciliation between the two groups. In addition, studying the role of the state and its policies to aggravate or mitigate agricultural-pastoral conflicts could also be a fruitful area of discussion. Understanding how governance, land systems and resource distribution affect these relationships can provide valuable information for conflict resolution and peace building efforts.

Finally, conflict theory provides valuable insights into farmer-herder relations in Nigeria, highlighting the power dynamics, inequalities and political factors that shape these conflicts. Continued discussion and research on this topic is essential to develop effective strategies to address the root causes of these conflicts and promote peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders.

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