

The role of peace education in addressing herders-farmers' conflict in Nigeria

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Abstract

The herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria has been a longstanding issue with profound implications for national security, food security, and social cohesion. This paper explores the role of peace education in addressing this conflict, emphasizing the importance of fostering dialogue, tolerance, and conflict resolution skills among affected communities. Key policy recommendations include strengthening the legal framework for land use and grazing laws, promoting dialogue through regional mediation committees and national peacebuilding platforms, enhancing security operations, and implementing economic empowerment initiatives for both farmers and herders. Additionally, the paper advocates for better research, data collection, and regional cooperation. It concludes that peace education, when integrated with broader socio-economic and governance strategies, offers a sustainable approach to mitigating the herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria.

Keywords: Herders, Farmers, Conflict, Peace, Education

Introduction

Nigeria has experienced persistent conflicts between herders and farmers, particularly in the Middle Belt and northern regions, posing significant threats to national security, economic stability, and social cohesion (International Crisis Group, 2017; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). These conflicts are primarily driven by competition over land and water resources, exacerbated by climate change, population growth, and weak conflict resolution mechanisms (Blench, 2010; Olaniyan, Francis, & Okeke-Uzodike, 2015). The consequences include loss of lives, displacement of communities, destruction of livelihoods, and deepening ethnic and religious tensions (Abbass, 2012; Udo & Falola, 2020).

In response to this crisis, peace education has emerged as a viable strategy for fostering understanding, tolerance, and conflict resolution between herders and farmers. Peace education emphasizes dialogue, mutual respect, and non-violent dispute resolution by equipping individuals and communities with the knowledge and skills necessary for peaceful coexistence (UNESCO, 2017). By integrating peace education into school curricula, community engagement programmes, and policy frameworks, stakeholders can address the underlying causes of the conflict and promote sustainable peace (Salomon & Cairns, 2011; Adedoyin, 2022). This paper explores the role of peace education in mitigating herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria. It examines its effectiveness in promoting dialogue, reducing tensions, and fostering a culture of peace. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for collaboration among government agencies, traditional institutions, civil society organizations, and local communities to ensure the successful implementation of peace education initiatives.

The farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria is a long-standing and complex issue rooted in historical, environmental, economic, and socio-political factors (Ofuoku & Isife, 2009). It primarily involves clashes between sedentary farmers and nomadic or semi-nomadic cattle herders, most of whom belong to the Fulani ethnic group (Tonah, 2006). These conflicts have escalated in recent years, leading to significant loss of lives, destruction of property, and worsening ethnic and religious tensions (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2009). Traditionally, herders migrated peacefully in search of grazing lands and water, governed by local agreements. However, land use changes, climate variability, and population growth have heightened competition for scarce resources (Adisa, 2012; Tenuche & Ifatimehin, 2009). Key drivers of the conflict include desertification and climate change, which have diminished available pasturelands in the north, compelling herders to move southward (Blench, 2010). The encroachment of the Sahara Desert, irregular rainfall patterns, and land degradation have disrupted traditional grazing routes.

Nigeria's rapid population growth has further increased demand for land for agriculture, settlements, and infrastructure, leading to the conversion of traditional grazing paths into farms or urban areas (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). The commercialization of agriculture and livestock has intensified land competition, resulting in more frequent and violent clashes.

Weak enforcement of land tenure laws and ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms have compounded the problem (Abbass, 2012). The absence of clear grazing policies and low public trust in security institutions have contributed to violent

confrontations. In some instances, political actors have been accused of exploiting the conflict for political and economic gain (Olayoku, 2014). The proliferation of small arms, cattle rustling, and banditry has transformed the conflict into a multifaceted security challenge, with both sides arming themselves for protection (Ogunrotifa, 2020). Although the conflict is largely resource-based, it is increasingly framed in ethnic and religious terms. Fulani herders, who are mostly Muslim, are often in conflict with Christian farming communities in the Middle Belt and southern Nigeria (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). This framing reinforces regional and national divisions, complicating resolution efforts.

Policy responses such as the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), anti-open grazing laws, and ranching policies have yielded limited results due to poor implementation, resistance from stakeholders, and logistical constraints (Audu, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2017). Despite these efforts, the conflict persists, underscoring the need for sustainable peacebuilding strategies.

Peace education offers a long-term solution by promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, and dialogue. By addressing underlying drivers and empowering communities with conflict resolution skills, peace education can complement existing policy and security measures in reducing violence and fostering coexistence (Salomon & Cairns, 2011; UNESCO, 2017). Fratkin, (2018) states that farmer-herder conflicts have existed since early beginning of agriculture in Africa. But it's continued evolving violent nature against the backdrop of social differences, resource scarcity, increase in the population of resource users, lack of adequate grazing reserves and poor state of the existing ones, however there are various way put together to address this conflict. Finding a permanent solution for the conflict between rural dwellers and farmer herders is paramount vital for the sustainability of socio-economic growth and development in agricultural productivity in areas affected. The conflict, which often revolves around resource competition and land disputes, has far-reaching consequences that go beyond immediate violence and displacement.

Peace education refers to the process of equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to prevent violence, resolve disputes amicably, and foster a culture of peace and non-violence. It encompasses conflict resolution training, human rights education, and intercultural dialogue, making it a critical tool for addressing communal, ethnic, and political conflicts in diverse societies (Bajaj, 2019; UNESCO, 2017). Peace education aims to transform the mindset of learners by developing their capacity for empathy, critical thinking, dialogue, and constructive engagement with others across social divides (Harris, 2016; Reardon & Snauwaert, 2022).

According to UNESCO (2021), peace education promotes behavioral changes that enable children, youth, and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural, and to build relationships grounded in mutual respect and social justice. This process prepares learners to actively contribute to peace at interpersonal, community, national, and global

levels (UNESCO, 2021; Zembylas, 2021). Rather than simply avoiding conflict (negative peace), peace education supports the realization of positive peace, which involves addressing root causes of violence and injustice while promoting equity, inclusion, and participation (Gawerc, 2016; Reardon & Snauwaert, 2022). Early exposure to peace education is especially important in shaping the values and behaviors of young people and ensuring long-term societal transformation (Bajaj, 2019; Amutabi, 2020).

Rajaguni (2015) views peace education as being concerned with helping learners to develop an awareness of the processes and skills that are necessary for achieving understanding, tolerance and goodwill in the world today. Peace education brings together multiple traditions of pedagogy, theories of education and international initiatives for the advancement of human development through learning. As captured by Asanebi and Okafor (2019), Nigeria and her citizenry needs peace education, as it is no longer news that the nation is immensely face with conflicts in every geopolitical zone since the dawn of independent in the twenty-century arising from several issues as enumerated above. This paper shall attempt to discuss the role of peace education in conflict management in Nigeria. Within the context of this study some basic concepts are clarified to situate their meaning(s) and understanding. Some of these are: conflict, causes of conflict, type(s) of conflict, peace and peace education.

The Role of Peace Education in Addressing Herders' Farmers' Conflicts

- 1) **Promoting dialogue and understanding:** Peace education fosters communication between herders and farmers, helping them understand each other's challenges and perspectives. This reduces stereotypes and prejudices that fuel animosity.
- 2) **Conflict resolution and mediation skills:** Teaching conflict resolution techniques to community leaders, youth, and local authorities can help prevent violent confrontations and encourage peaceful negotiations.
- 3) **Encouraging cultural and religious tolerance:** Many conflicts are exacerbated by ethnic and religious differences. Peace education promotes coexistence by emphasizing shared values and respect for diversity.
- 4) **Enhancing community participation in conflict prevention:** Peace education empowers local communities to take proactive measures in conflict prevention by fostering early warning systems, mediation committees, and dialogue platforms.
- 5) **Addressing misinformation and hate speech:** Misinformation and inflammatory rhetoric often escalate tensions. Peace education can counteract this by promoting responsible communication, especially on social media and within traditional information-sharing systems.
- 6) **Integrating peace education into school curricula:** Educating children and young adults on peaceful coexistence, negotiation, and tolerance helps to instill a long-term culture of peace and reduce the likelihood of future conflicts.

The herder-farmer crisis in Nigeria has had profound economic repercussions, particularly on the agricultural sector, which contributes approximately 24% to 30% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2020; World Bank, 2022). The disruption of farming activities due to conflict has led to a marked decline in agricultural output, including staple crops such as maize, rice, and yam, which are largely produced in regions most affected by violence (FAO, 2021). This decline in production has not only affected national food security but also reduced export potential and agricultural contributions to GDP (International Crisis Group, 2018). Furthermore, the conflict has significantly disrupted supply chains, leading to food shortages and soaring food inflation, which undermines household purchasing power and worsens national inflation metrics (UNDP, 2022). The mass displacement of thousands of farmers and the destruction of their means of livelihood have resulted in increased rural unemployment and poverty, thereby reducing rural productivity and economic participation (Adisa, 2021; Iroegbu, 2021). In addition, the persistent insecurity in agricultural zones deters both local and foreign investment in agribusiness and agro-industrial ventures, further weakening the sector's capacity to contribute to GDP growth (Mustapha, Egwu, & Mohammed, 2021).

The crisis has also led to increased government expenditure on security and emergency relief, diverting resources away from growth-enhancing sectors such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare (Omilola, 2020). Moreover, the disruption of agro-industrial value chains including food processing, livestock feed production, and textile manufacturing has created knock-on effects across the economy, contributing to stagnation in industrial GDP contributions (Zenn & Pearson, 2022). Ultimately, the herder-farmer conflict has deepened poverty and inequality, especially in rural areas, weakening aggregate demand and slowing national economic development (UNICEF Nigeria, 2020). While exact figures vary, estimates suggest that Nigeria loses billions of dollars annually due to the herder-farmer crisis. For example, the International Crisis Group (2018) reported that conflicts between herders and farmers cost Nigeria about \$13 billion in economic losses annually. Some regions, like the North-Central and North-West, which are heavily affected by the crisis, have seen agricultural contributions to state GDP decline sharply.

Causes and Drivers of the Herders-Farmers' Conflict in Nigeria

The herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria is a complex and multi-dimensional crisis **driven by a combination of** environmental, economic, social, and political factors.

1) **Climate Change and Environmental Factors:** Desertification and drought in the Sahel region have intensified due to climate change, pushing pastoralists southward in search of grazing land and water (Climate Security Expert Network, 2021; UNDP, 2022). This migration increases contact and often conflict with sedentary farming communities. Changing rainfall patterns further exacerbate this by reducing the

availability of both pasture and arable land, leading to competition over shrinking natural resources (Amnesty International, 2018; Suleiman & Mohammed, 2020).

- 2) **Resource Competition and Land Use Conflicts:** Encroachment on traditional grazing routes, driven by urban expansion, agricultural intensification, and infrastructural development, has severely limited pastoral mobility (Abbass, 2017; ICG, 2017). Additionally, the scarcity of water and arable land due to increasing population and land degradation fuels competition between herders and farmers over access to essential resources (Adamu & Ben, 2017; Mustapha, Egwu, & Mohammed, 2021).
- 3) **Ethno-Religious and Socio-Cultural Tensions:** The conflict is framed along ethnic and religious lines, with Fulani pastoralists often seen as Muslim intruders, clashing with largely Christian farming groups such as the Tiv, Berom, and others in Nigeria's Middle Belt (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2018; Okoli & Okeniyi, 2018). Historical grievances and mutual distrust have developed into cyclical patterns of attack and reprisal (Zenn & Pearson, 2022; CDD, 2020), escalating what may have started as resource conflicts into identity-based violence.
- 4) **Economic and Demographic Pressures:** Rapid population growth has led to greater demand for farmland and settlement expansion, thereby reducing available grazing space (Suleiman & Mohammed, 2020). Both herders and farmers rely on the land for their livelihoods, and increasing economic hardship intensifies this dependency (Mercy Corps, 2017; Aloba & Ndifon, 2022).
- 5) **Weak Governance and Policy Gaps:** The crisis is exacerbated by weak land management systems and unclear grazing policies, which leave both parties vulnerable to disputes over land tenure and usage (Amnesty International, 2018; Adamu & Ben, 2017). Additionally, the failure of law enforcement and judicial systems to deter or punish violence has encouraged impunity and lawlessness in many affected areas (ICG, 2017; Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2018).
- 6) **Proliferation of Small Arms and Insecurity:** The influx of weapons from regional conflicts, especially Libya and Mali, has intensified the scale and lethality of clashes between herders and farmers (Okoli & Atelhe, 2023; Zenn & Pearson, 2022). Both groups have become militarized, with herders forming armed groups and farmers organizing vigilante units, further deteriorating local security conditions (Okoli & Okeniyi, 2018).
- 7) **Political Manipulation and Elite Interests:** Politicians and other actors have often manipulated the conflict for electoral and economic gains, framing it in ways that incite division and resentment (CDD, 2020; Iroegbu, 2021). Furthermore, the lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms at both the local and national levels has led to the persistence and escalation of the crisis (UNDP, 2022; Mustapha et al., 2021).
- 8) **The herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria is driven by a mix of environmental, socio-economic, political, and security-**

related factors. Addressing it requires a multi-faceted approach, including climate adaptation strategies, land use reforms, improved security, and community dialogue initiatives.

Conflict is considered as a social necessity, a normal and functional and indeed inevitable aspect of the healthy functioning of all societies (Alli, 2011). The inherent nature of conflict in the society, is also seen in the inbuilt of human nature to have flashes of temper. In every society, they have always been the have and they have not, the strong and the weak, the dominant and the vulnerable; a situation that is often accompanied by perpetual struggle between the divides. However, these are the stimulating causes of conflicts in Nigeria, they are:

- 1) Personalities
- 2) Sensitivity
- 3) Differences in perceptions, values and facts
- 4) Unfulfilled goals and priorities
- 5) Competition for scarce resources
- 6) Struggle for supremacy
- 7) Misunderstanding of issues

Personalities: Individuals and groups differed with one another in their objectives, purposes and aims of life, transaction of business. When these purposes, aims and objectives among others are thwarted or bridge upon, then conflict can occur in the society. Individuals and groups strife is sometimes traced to these personalities' traits.

Sensitivity: This is a situation where an individuals or groups have low self-esteem and feels insecure amongst others in their day-to-day life activities. Sometimes this feeling is attacked by perceived criticism by other individual(s) or group(s) against other individuals and groups, which can or may result to conflict in the general society.

Differences in perceptions, values and facts: Good number of conflicts in our society is as a result of the ways and perceptions people view the world. For instance, some people feel depressed knowing that they are poor while others are rich, this situation can cause conflict(s) to occur in the general society. As the quest for wealth and good life might over shadow the poor people in their state of poverty not knowing their actions to acquire wealth can or might cause conflicts with great havoc. These incongruent views are traceable to difference upbringing, culture, education, occupation, environmental factors amongst others in Nigeria. What is value for some people might not be the same for others. Folk's sometimes wrong placement value and disvalue of several people values might lead to conflict in the society.

Furthermore, facts are a piece of data that can be quantified or an event that can be documented. Several people in Nigeria engaged in severe discussion blindly when there are available facts to present their argument succinctly, due to lack of education, poor communication and upbringing, several people present their facts blinding resulting to conflict in the society. In a nutshell several facts in the general public in Nigeria are differed and people present it differently

sometimes in a blindly and biased manner which might escalate or give room for conflict(s) in the society.

Unfulfilled goals and priorities: individual(s) and group(s) goals and priorities in life are objectively differed and as such they present these goals and priorities differently in the Nigeria society. If these goals of individuals and groups are not fulfilled at terminus of every set period in their lives, such individuals or groups succinctly will not be happy knowingly and unknowingly transfer their frustration aggressively on their colleagues and family members among others in the society which might or can cause conflict.

Competition for scarce resources: There are competitions of scarce resources in every society in the globe, as Nigeria is not an exemption. Nigeria is blessed by God with several natural and man-made resources which individual(s) and groups) compete for regularly. In life every individual wishes him or herself well, as man is a jealous being and always protects its territories from external environment. The struggle and competition for scarce resources in the Nigeria society have triggered conflicts. Few example of such competition of scarce resource in the nation are the Niger Delta region versus Nigeria government over resource control and environmental degradation which started in 1966. Secondly, the Ijaw and Itsekiri conflict over Warri (Delta State) which have lasted for several decades, and the Andoni and Ogoni conflict in 1999 in Rivers state, Nigeria, amongst others.

Struggle for supremacy: Struggle for supremacy is another cause of conflict in the Nigeria society. Individual(s) and group(s) always try to outdo and out-shine others in their day-to-day events and activities of life. This can of conflict is commonly seen in the political, religious, economic, social institutions and organization of the Nigeria people.

Misunderstanding of issues: Lack of accurate and succinctly presentation of issues to individual(s) and group(s) sometimes lead to misunderstanding which in turn causes conflict in the Nigeria society. Also, several people are simpleton in nature and as such wiser people manipulate on this fact to instigate them indirectly in triggering violence, which will blow out as full conflict in the society (Asanebi and Okafor, 2019).

Cattle Theft: One of the issues that negatively affect herders-farmers conflict is the cattle theft (or cattle rustling) in the region. In more recent years there has been tremendous increase in the numbers of rustling incidents (Shehu, 2018). Circulation of arms amongst non-state groups, the government's inefficiency to control remote areas and forests, and the secret collaborations between some security officers and rustlers are the major causes of the thefts. The so-called "ungoverned places" are the riskiest areas for such thefts. Cattle rustling is causing herders big economic losses, which pushes them to try to increase their number of animals to make up for the losses. Therefore, they need to find more grazing areas so their animals can reproduce more (Olaniyan and Yahaya, 2016).

Socioeconomic and Security Implications of Herders-Farmers' Conflict

The herders-farmers conflict has significant socioeconomic and security implications, especially in regions where agriculture and pastoralism are dominant livelihoods. Below is an analysis of the key aspects of the issue:

The socioeconomic implications include:

- 1) Disruption of agricultural production: Attacks and reprisal violence often lead to the destruction of farmlands, reducing food production. This contributes to food insecurity and increased food prices, impacting the broader economy.
- 2) Loss of livelihoods: Both farmers and herders suffer economic losses due to the destruction of crops, livestock theft, and the abandonment of farmlands and grazing areas. Many people are forced to migrate, leading to displacement and economic hardship.
- 3) Decline in investments: Persistent conflicts discourage agricultural investments and rural development. Investors avoid conflict-prone areas, limiting economic opportunities and infrastructure development.
- 4) Displacement and humanitarian crisis: Large-scale displacement due to violence strains resources in host communities and increases the burden on government and aid agencies. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) face challenges such as inadequate shelter, poor health services, and loss of education opportunities.
- 5) Impact on education and health services: Schools and healthcare centers in conflict-prone areas may shut down or operate at reduced capacity due to insecurity. Children from displaced families may struggle to access quality education, affecting human capital development.

The security implications include:

- 1) Increased armed violence: The conflict has led to the proliferation of arms among both farmers and herders, exacerbating violence. Criminal elements, including bandits and militia groups, exploit the situation to engage in cattle rustling, kidnappings, and attacks on communities. Weakening of state authority: Continuous conflicts expose gaps in government security strategies, leading to a loss of public confidence in security agencies. Some communities resort to self-help measures, including vigilante groups, which may further escalate violence.
- 2) Ethnic and religious tensions: The conflict often takes on ethnic and religious dimensions, deepening social divisions. Politicians and interest groups sometimes exploit these tensions, fueling further unrest.
- 3) Threats to national security: The widespread nature of the conflict contributes to instability, making it difficult for the government to maintain order. The presence of violent non-state actors in affected regions poses a challenge to national security operations.
- 4) Cross-border implications: Given that some herders migrate across national borders; the conflict can strain diplomatic relations with neighboring countries.

Unregulated cross-border movements can facilitate the spread of weapons and criminal networks.

The Role of Peace Education in Conflict Resolution

Peace education plays a critical role in promoting conflict resolution by fostering a culture of non-violence, mutual respect, and understanding among individuals and communities. In a world characterized by diverse social, cultural, and political differences, conflicts are inevitable. However, through peace education, individuals can acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to resolve conflicts constructively and prevent violence.

Peace education refers to the process of acquiring values, knowledge, and attitudes that promote peace, tolerance, and social justice. It aims to equip individuals with the ability to address conflicts peacefully by encouraging dialogue, empathy, and critical thinking. Peace education is implemented in schools, communities, and institutions to instill a mindset that values cooperation and respect over aggression and hostility. Conflict resolution involves strategies and processes aimed at ending disputes and fostering reconciliation between conflicting parties. Effective conflict resolution helps prevent escalation, promotes social harmony, and contributes to sustainable peace. The approach often involves negotiation, mediation, and dialogue to find mutually acceptable solutions.

The Role of Peace Education in Conflict Resolution

- 1) **Promoting understanding and tolerance:** Peace education encourages individuals to appreciate diverse perspectives, reducing prejudices and fostering tolerance.
- 2) **Enhancing communication skills:** Effective communication is crucial in resolving conflicts. Peace education teaches active listening, assertiveness, and nonviolent communication techniques.
- 3) **Developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills:** By engaging individuals in discussions and role-playing, peace education enhances their ability to analyze conflicts critically and find peaceful solutions.
- 4) **Encouraging emotional intelligence and empathy:** Understanding emotions and developing empathy are essential in conflict resolution. Peace education helps individuals recognize their emotions and those of others, leading to compassionate interactions.
- 5) **Fostering a culture of non-violence:** By emphasizing non-violent approaches to conflict resolution, peace education reduces the likelihood of aggression and violence in resolving disputes.
- 6) **Strengthening mediation and negotiation skills:** Peace education equips individuals with mediation and negotiation techniques that help in finding common ground between conflicting parties.
- 7) **Building community cohesion:** When communities embrace peace education, social cohesion improves, and the likelihood of conflicts diminishes as people learn to coexist peacefully.

Peace education is an essential tool in conflict resolution, fostering a culture of understanding, tolerance, and non-violence. By equipping individuals with skills in communication, critical thinking, and empathy, peace education helps prevent conflicts and promotes peaceful coexistence. To maximize its impact, governments, educational institutions, and communities must work together to integrate peace education into curricula and social programmes, ensuring a more peaceful and just society. Peace education plays significant and tremendous role in conflict management in Nigeria, as it is the tool used by the state, diplomat, non-governmental organizations and social and co-operate bodies, among others in pre and post conflict management (Nwadike, 2017).

It is imperative to note that the aim of peace education to conflict is the pursuit of peace for a rancor free society, which has been a burden to several Nigeria citizens as this means remain the most peaceful means of conflict management and attaining peace in our society. Peace education is aimed with the role of teaching individuals the attitudes, values and behavioral competencies needed to resolve conflicts without violence and to build, maintain mutually beneficial attitude and harmonious relationships in the society (Johnson and Johnson, 2006). The role of peace education in managing conflict in Nigeria fall under two broad aspects namely, formal and informal peace education. Formal peace education is carried out in schools and colleges, while informal peace education is carried out in religious centers (church, mosque and shrine), family and community gathering/level, socio-ethnic and socio-political gathering and events, amongst others. Formal and informal peace education in Nigeria must address the prevention and resolution of all forms of conflict in the nation.

Challenges to Implementing Peace Education in Nigeria

Implementing peace education in Nigeria faces several challenges, including:

- 1) **Political instability:** The political landscape in Nigeria is often unstable, with ongoing conflicts, ethnic tensions, and insecurity in various regions. This instability hinders the establishment of a consistent and peaceful environment necessary for peace education programmes to thrive.
- 2) **Lack of political will:** Many policymakers fail to prioritize peace education in national development plans. Peace education often competes with other educational priorities, such as economic development or infrastructure.
- 3) **Cultural and ethnic diversity:** Nigeria's rich cultural and ethnic diversity, while an asset, can also be a challenge. Deep-rooted ethnic and religious differences sometimes lead to mistrust and resistance to peace education, as some groups may see it as a threat to their traditional values or beliefs.
- 4) **Educational system challenges:** The Nigerian educational system is often underfunded, with overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teacher training, and a lack of resources. These issues make it difficult to

effectively implement peace education programmes, which require well-trained educators and sufficient infrastructure.

- 5) **Violence and conflict:** Ongoing violence in certain regions, such as insurgencies in the northeast, communal clashes, and Boko Haram, poses a direct threat to peace education efforts. In conflict areas, students may be more focused on survival than on learning about peace.
- 6) **Inadequate teacher training:** Many teachers lack the specific training required to teach peace education effectively. The absence of structured professional development opportunities for teachers in this area limits the success of peace education initiatives.
- 7) **Social inequalities:** Economic disparities, high levels of poverty, and social exclusion contribute to the conflict and violence that peace education seeks to address. These deep-rooted issues often make it hard to foster long-term peace when the root causes are not being tackled.
- 8) **Limited curriculum integration:** Peace education is not always integrated into the formal curriculum in Nigerian schools. When it is offered, it is often treated as an extracurricular or temporary initiative, rather than as a core part of the education system.
- 9) **Public perception and awareness:** There is often a lack of awareness among the public about the importance of peace education. It is sometimes viewed as a "soft" subject that doesn't have the same immediate impact as subjects like science or mathematics.
- 10) **Funding and resources:** Adequate funding and resources are essential to implement peace education on a wide scale. With many areas facing budget constraints, this is often a barrier to the widespread introduction of peace education programmes.

In order to overcome these challenges, Nigeria would need to adopt a multi-dimensional approach, involving government support, international cooperation, effective teacher training, and community involvement in peace-building initiatives.

Policy Recommendations and the Way Forward

The herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria is a deeply rooted and multifaceted crisis with dire implications for national security, economic development, and social cohesion. This conflict, often characterized by violent clashes over land and resources, has been exacerbated by environmental stressors, demographic pressures, and institutional weaknesses. As noted by Benjaminsen and Ba (2019), the escalation of herder-farmer violence in Nigeria is not only a result of environmental degradation and desertification but also stems from the failure of governance systems to effectively regulate access to natural resources. Addressing this crisis requires a holistic policy approach that integrates legal, economic, security, educational, and diplomatic interventions.

- 1) **Strengthen Legal Framework and Policy Implementation:** One of the key drivers of the conflict is the ambiguity and weakness in Nigeria's land tenure system. Weak enforcement of land use laws and the

absence of clearly demarcated grazing routes have led to disputes between pastoralists and farming communities. Abbass (2017) emphasizes the need for comprehensive land reforms that recognize the legitimacy of both sedentary farming and nomadic pastoralism. The implementation of the **National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP)** is also crucial. The NLTP, developed by the Federal Government of Nigeria (2019), aims to modernize the livestock sector through ranching and value-chain development, offering a sustainable alternative to open grazing. However, effective implementation has been hindered by poor political commitment and logistical challenges (Mustapha, Egwu, & Mohammed, 2021).

- 2) **Promote Dialogue and Mediation Mechanisms:** Inclusive dialogue platforms are essential for transforming the dynamics of the conflict. Research by Adisa (2021) underscores the effectiveness of community-based mediation structures involving farmers, herders, traditional rulers, and local government authorities in resolving local disputes. Such conflict mediation committees can de-escalate tensions and promote reconciliation. Mercy Corps (2017) found that peacebuilding programs that promote inter-group dialogue and trust-building among conflicting communities significantly reduce the likelihood of violence. At the national level, peacebuilding efforts should integrate the voices of religious and cultural leaders to foster mutual understanding and collective ownership of peace initiatives.
- 3) **Strengthen Security and Governance:** Improving security infrastructure and governance is another vital pillar. Iroegbu (2021) argues that the failure of state security forces to act impartially and prevent retaliatory violence has eroded public trust. Deploying well-trained, neutral security personnel in conflict-prone areas can deter violence and protect vulnerable populations. Moreover, strengthening intelligence coordination among federal, state, and local authorities ensures timely response to early warning signals. Local governments must also be empowered to engage directly with stakeholders in their jurisdictions, facilitating proactive and localized conflict resolution (Mustapha et al., 2021).
- 4) **Livelihood and Economic Support for Farmers and Herders:** The economic underpinnings of the conflict cannot be ignored. Competition over shrinking resources is exacerbated by poverty and lack of economic alternatives. Omilola (2020) advocates for targeted livelihood programs that provide economic incentives for both farmers and herders. Such initiatives could include access to agricultural inputs, veterinary services, and subsidies for ranch development. Diversification of pastoral livelihoods such as engaging in crop production, livestock processing, or agroforestry can reduce the dependency on open grazing and minimize conflict (International Crisis Group, 2018).
- 5) **Enhance Education and Awareness:** Education plays a transformative role in shaping perceptions, behaviours,

and relationships. Bajaj (2019) emphasizes that peace education equips learners with conflict resolution skills and promotes values of coexistence, tolerance, and empathy. In the Nigerian context, embedding peace education in school curricula and community training programs can counteract narratives of hostility and encourage peaceful dispute resolution. UNICEF Nigeria (2020) highlights that when young people are engaged in peacebuilding initiatives, they become agents of change, promoting tolerance and de-escalation of tensions in their communities.

- 6) **Support for Research and Data Collection:** Evidence-based policymaking requires accurate and up-to-date data on the nature, trends, and drivers of the conflict. Zenn and Pearson (2022) recommend systematic conflict mapping and data analysis to track violence patterns and inform interventions. Establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework can also help in assessing the impact of various peacebuilding efforts and adapting strategies based on empirical findings. Without reliable data, interventions risk being poorly targeted or ineffective.
- 7) **Regional and International Cooperation:** Given the transhumant nature of herding across West Africa, regional cooperation is essential. Many Fulani herders migrate from neighboring countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, often without clear regulatory frameworks. The ECOWAS (2020) report stresses the importance of a regional transhumance protocol to manage cross-border grazing in a peaceful and sustainable manner. Additionally, international organizations such as the United Nations and donor agencies can offer technical assistance, funding, and peacebuilding expertise to support local and national efforts (United Nations, 2021).

Conclusion

The farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria is a complex crisis driven by environmental degradation, population pressure, weak governance, and socio-political tensions. Addressing it requires a multifaceted and long-term approach that combines land reform, inclusive policy frameworks, and improved security infrastructure. Crucially, peace education offers a sustainable pathway to conflict transformation by promoting dialogue, empathy, tolerance, and non-violent dispute resolution. To be effective, peace education must be institutionalized within Nigeria's national education policy, embedded in school curricula, teacher training, and community-based learning platforms. When implemented in tandem with socio-economic and governance reforms, peace education can serve as a cornerstone for building resilient communities and achieving lasting peace across Nigeria's most affected regions.

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