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FARMER-HERDER CONFLICT IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA UPDATE

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For the past few decades, farmer-herder conflict in West and Central Africa has both contributed to and been exacerbated by resource scarcity, ethnic conflict, and identity politics. Recent literature reviews have shown the main sources of farmer-herder conflicts to be climate-related environmental factors, resource competition, land tenure insecurity, and intergroup prejudice and conflict (Adams et al., 2023). According to the same literature review, within peace-building efforts, key actors include farmers and herders, formal and informal community leaders and organizations, and police and courts. Up to now, key conflict management strategies have included third-party mediation and arbitration, direct negotiations for compensation, and litigation (Adams et al., 2023).

Despite these efforts, farmer-herder conflicts have continued to escalate, contributing to UNICEF's forecast of 46.7 million children across West and Central Africa facing malnutrition, displacement, violence, and learning loss in 2024 (UNICEF 2023). Extreme fertilizer shortages resulting from Russia's war on Ukraine have aggravated the stakes and consequences of farmer-herder conflicts (Goodman and O'Reilly, 2023). These worsening humanitarian effects points to a need for different conflict mitigation approaches. More preventative laws (as opposed to primarily retributive ones) by local and national African governments are a clear potential route for action. Third parties can also pioneer alternative solutions, as exemplified by female leaders of the Fulani, an ethnic group of nomadic herders across West Africa and the Sahel. These women are designing digital maps to establish boundaries between the Fulani and the neighboring farmer communities with which they have historically faced territorial conflict (Wilkins, 2023).

Transhumance (i.e., pastoralism) law reform is another potential means of addressing farmer-herder conflict. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) established transhumance regulations for all its member states in 1998 and 2003, though no substantive changes have been made since then (Ezirigwe, 2023). Especially given the cross-border nature of farmer-herder conflicts, multinational gatherings like the Second

International Conference of Ministers on Transboundary Transhumance, taking place in Cameroon in July 2023, may provide promising models of potential cooperation (Kindzeka 2023).

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