

Harnessing the Social Energies of Youths in Farming and Pastoral Communities in Managing Conflicts in Nigeria

Patience Adzande 

Abstract: In spite of the growing recognition of the agency of youths in volatile societies, youths continue to be an under-utilized resource in conflict management. Thus, drawing on qualitative fieldwork in Nigeria, Adzande examines how youths are contributing to the management of farmer-herder conflicts. This study shows that youths are involved in informal policing as community vigilantes, as well as participating in mediation and the enforcement of restorative justice. A new initiative which is yet to be evaluated is the community-based security architecture in which youths can work with other actors to facilitate early warning, prevention, and resolution of conflicts between farmers and herders.

Résumé: Malgré la reconnaissance croissante de l'apport des jeunes dans les sociétés instables, les jeunes continuent d'être une ressource sous-utilisée dans la gestion des conflits. Ainsi, en s'appuyant sur un travail de terrain qualitatif au Nigeria, Adzande examine comment les jeunes contribuent à la gestion des conflits entre agriculteurs et éleveurs. Cette étude montre que les jeunes participent à des services de police informels en tant qu'autodéfense communautaires, ainsi qu'à la médiation et à

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l'application de la justice réparatrice. Une nouvelle initiative qui n'a pas encore été évaluée est l'architecture de sécurité communautaire dans laquelle les jeunes peuvent travailler avec d'autres acteurs pour faciliter l'alerte précoce, la prévention et la résolution des conflits entre agriculteurs et éleveurs.

Resumo: Apesar de se reconhecer cada vez mais a agencialidade da juventude em sociedades voláteis, os jovens continuam a ser um recurso subutilizado na gestão de conflitos. Neste contexto, partindo de um trabalho de campo de natureza qualitativa realizado na Nigéria, Adzande analisa o modo como os jovens têm contribuído para a gestão dos conflitos entre agricultores e pastores. Este estudo mostra que os jovens estão envolvidos em ações de policiamento informal, servindo como vigilantes comunitários, e que têm participado na mediação e na aplicação de uma justiça reparadora. Entretanto, está em curso uma nova iniciativa, ainda não sujeita a avaliação: um esquema securitário baseado nas comunidades, no qual os jovens podem trabalhar com outros atores para facilitar e detecção precoce, a prevenção e a resolução de conflitos entre agricultores e pastores.

Keywords: farmer-herder conflicts; social energies; pastoralists; youth; peacebuilding; Nigeria

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Introduction

Youths have been consistently implicated in the violent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria. As Alpaslan Ozerdem rightly noted, male youths between the ages of sixteen and thirty years old are usually viewed as the perpetrators of violence (2016). The demographic realities and economic conditions of the African continent particularly encourage this stereotypical classification, as youths between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four years old and those younger than fifteen years old constitute 21 percent and 42 percent of the continent's population, respectively (Mbassi 2017).

While youths have been vilified for their roles in instigating and perpetrating conflicts generally, a growing recognition of the agency of youths in transforming conflict situations has led to the creation of opportunities for their engagement in conflict management in Nigeria. This study addresses two pertinent questions: In what ways are youths engaged in managing conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria? And, how do the conflict management strategies used by youths reflect and deal with the complex multidimensional drivers of farmer-herder conflicts? While conflicts may be viewed as the expressions of the restless and unbounded energies of youths, the social energies of youths could potentially be channelled toward conflict transformation. However, even though youths make up a significant proportion of the population of Africa, and Nigeria in particular, there is inadequate attention in the existing literature to how

the farmer-herder conflicts specifically affect this subset of the population and how these demographic sets can and do contribute to building peace on the continent.

Meanwhile, reports and research across the continent suggest that the trajectory of relations between pastoralists and farmers has changed from symbiotic or complementary but competitive to increasingly violent interactions over time (Davidheiser & Lune 2008). Research in Cameroon (Hickey 2014), Burkina Faso (Brockhaus et al. 2003; Moritz 2010), Ghana (Yembilah-Barre 2012; Olaniyan 2015; Olaniyan, Francis & Okeke-Uzodike 2015; Bukari, Sow & Scheffran 2018), Mali (Benjaminsen & Ba 2009, 2019; Gaye 2018), Tanzania (Mwamfupe 2015) and Nigeria (Higazi 2016) all present evidence that confirms this transformation of relations between pastoralists and farmers across Africa. In Ghana, for instance, Kaderi Bukari, Papa Sow, and Jurgen Scheffran (2018) show how through everyday interactions, pastoralists and farmers display cooperation and coexistence through intermarriages, friendships, visitations, social solidarity, and communal labor. On the other hand, Azeez Olaniyan, M. Francis, and U. Okeke-Uzodike's (2015) analysis shows how persistent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists led to the introduction of the policy of expulsion, which was targeted at pastoralists who were seen as "strangers" in Ghana.

In Nigeria, historical accounts of intergroup relations suggest that conflicts between farmers and pastoralists are not a new phenomenon. Though historically there have been low-intensity conflicts resulting from encroachment on cultivated farmlands and cattle rustling, these were amicably resolved through dispute resolution mechanisms overseen by traditional rulers and elders. The strategy for dispute resolution often involved the determination of what the aggrieved farmer or herder was owed as compensation. When the alleged offender was unyielding, the case was handed over to law enforcement agencies for investigation and prosecution in a court of law. The recent escalation of violent conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria, which is a significant threat to security across the country, has revealed the changing dynamics in the interactions between the two groups. Recent incidents claimed an estimated annual average of two thousand lives between 2011 and 2016, leading to massive destruction of property and the displacement of tens of thousands of people (International Crisis Group Africa 2017).

There are indications that the grievances and drivers of conflict between farmers and herders go beyond crop damage, competition for grazing fields, and incidents of cattle rustling. For instance, a list of grievances presented by representatives of the Fulani community include: the alleged killing of herders by members of the Berom community; the closure of stock routes and grazing reserves by farmers; the exclusion of members of the Fulani community in the affairs of government; and the denial of "indigeneship" status by the local government authorities, which implies that the Fulani herders do not have equal citizenship rights to other ethnic groups in the state (The Fulani Community 2015). On the other hand, the Berom, who are

predominantly farmers and Christian, have accused the predominantly Muslim Fulani herders of destroying cultivated farmlands, killing “innocent” people, and forcefully annexing their land (The Berom Community 2015). Thus, in their own narratives, both groups referred to the conflict as one between the Berom and the Fulani and not between “farmers” and “herders,” as it is widely perceived, named, and reported. This highlights the role of ethnicity and religion, as well as underlying power relations, in shaping the dynamics of these conflicts. The labels of “farmer” and “herder” refer to occupational categories that have historically been associated with ethnic identities in most areas of Africa (Turner 2004). This implies that farmer-herder conflicts are deeply rooted in broader identity politics, since occupations often define ethnic identities in Africa.

In Benue State, historical accounts show that the warriors from the Tiv ethnic group disrupted the Othman Dan Fodio-led Fulani Islamic jihad (Islamic religious war of 1804–1808) which conquered most of what is now northern Nigeria. The recent resurgence of violent conflict between the Muslim Fulani herders and largely Christian Tiv farmers is perceived by local farmers and the elite as a renewal of the aborted Fulani conquest. The Fulani herders, on the other hand, have propagated narratives that suggest that they are the “original inhabitants” of the Benue Valley—the geographical area where Benue State is located. However, in Adamawa State, the conflicts between farmers and herders have been attributed to the influx of a “new breed” of herders who were referred to as Fulani *daji* (literally translated as “bush Fulani”). The Fulani *daji*—a group of itinerant herders who are new entrants—are supposedly different from the “legitimate” herders who are inhabitants of the local communities. These itinerant herders allegedly migrated from other states in Nigeria and neighboring countries such as Mali, Niger, and Chad.

While different researchers have advanced varied reasons for the increasingly violent confrontations between farmers and herders in West Africa generally, Mark Davidheiser and Aniuska Luna (2008) state that these conflicts have been exacerbated directly or indirectly by changes in power dynamics and demographics. It is undeniable that young people make up more than half of Africa’s population, with about 60 percent of the continent’s population currently twenty-four years old and younger. This suggests that youths in both farming and pastoralist communities are predominantly the victims, perpetrators, and potentially the key to conflict prevention and management in Africa. How, then, do youths understand and transform these broader tensions in building peaceful social relations between farmers and pastoralists in Africa, and in Nigeria in particular? Though the literature is replete with studies of youths as victims and perpetrators of violence, the role of youth in positively transforming conflict situations has not been adequately documented (Atuhaire 2019) or analyzed in academic research (Del Felice & Wisler 2007). Martha Mutisi (2012) also acknowledges that the focus on the positive aspects of youth engagement in post-conflict societies is lacking in the extant literature. According to Mutisi, the recurring theme in

youth literature has tended to largely portray youths as passive beings instead of active community members who possess agency to alter their social conditions. Even the negative discourse on youths has not been specifically targeted at conflicts involving pastoralists and farmers; the literature has largely analyzed other violent conflict situations. One probable reason for this seeming lack of attention to the role of youths in farmer-herder conflicts could be linked to the observation that “farmer-herder conflicts are viewed as local, endemic, low-intensity conflicts and not wars and so they have been largely ignored in the literature on violent conflicts in Africa and elsewhere” (Moritz 2010). This further affirms that there is a dearth of evidence-based research on the role of youths within the specific contexts of farmer-herder conflicts across Africa.

Understanding the roles of youths in these conflicts could help to suggest more productive ways to apply the social energies of youths to enhance sustainable peace. Thus, in this article, I focus on how the youths navigate complex multidimensional facets of conflict drivers in negotiating peaceful coexistence between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria. Building on qualitative fieldwork, I examine the ways in which the youths are currently engaged in preventing conflicts and settling disputes between farmers and pastoralists in three Nigerian states—Benue, Plateau, and Adamawa—which have been hotbeds of farmer-herder conflicts over the years. Drawing from the insights obtained from my research, I analyze the implications of the involvement of youths for sustainable peace. This is crucial because it has been projected that African nations will face the greatest challenges from the management of their rapidly expanding youth population. Consequently, in this article, I de-emphasize the “youth bulge” and “youth crises” theses and shift the focus from the dominant narratives in the extant literature which generally vilify youths in Africa. Instead, I present an alternative perspective that examines the potential youths have for positive action and change, especially within farming and pastoralist communities in Nigeria.

“Youth” in the Context of Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Nigeria

Deconstructing the notion of youth is an uphill task and beyond the scope of this essay. This is because the meaning of “youth” and who fits into that category can be quite ambiguous. Marc Sommers (2006) presents an elaborate description of the complex concept of youth. Generally, there is no consensus on the definition of youth, as there are many variations in the meaning of the concept across space, time, cultures, gender, and disciplines and within societies. A synthesis of various notions shows that youth can be viewed as an age group, as a social construct, or from the perspective of gender. According to Ozerdem (2016), youth is a historically constructed social category, a relational concept, and a group of actors that is far from homogenous. Youth are generally heterogeneous in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and politics. From the gender perspective, female youth as a category in many cultures scarcely exists (Sommers 2006). In many

societies, especially the more conservative ones in Africa, girls are sheltered and policed while boys are given autonomy and freedom of movement and public engagement earlier in life than girls. In terms of age, the range for youth across the world is not consistent. However, the age cohort is the most commonly used criteria for the categorization of youth.

In the context of farmer-herder relations, children are employed in the herding of cattle. In some of the reported cases of cattle encroachment into cultivated farmlands across Africa, the culprits have almost always been children. However, the National Youth Policy of Nigeria (2009) classifies youths as individuals between 18 and 35 years of age. The age- and gender-based categorizations of youth are prevalent in Nigeria. The concept of female youth is relatively non-existent, mainly due to cultural or religious reasons (Sommers 2006). In terms of culture, African societies are highly patriarchal, elevating male capabilities, dominance, or supremacy over the agency of females. From the religious perspective, Muslim women, especially in most rural and pastoralist communities in Nigeria, are shielded and not allowed to air their opinions on matters of interest publicly. Thus, for the current analysis, the youth engaged in managing conflicts between pastoralists and farmers in Nigeria are between the ages of 18 and 40 years old and are predominantly, if not exclusively, male. This portrays a stark lack of attention to and imbalance in gender participation and representation in the management of farmer-herder conflicts.

Intersection of Youth, Conflict, and Peacebuilding

Available estimates suggest that about 42 percent of the world's population is under the age of twenty-five. About half of this youth population can be found in South Asia and Africa. In fact, Africa has been described as the world's youngest continent because a significant percentage of the population is under thirty years old. The current and future trends suggest that youths are an important subset of the population, capable of making significant contributions and influences on the directions of conflicts, security, and development in Nigeria. The literature is replete with studies that link high youth populations to violent conflicts, especially in Africa. Generally, the discourse on youth and violence provides a lopsided view of high youth populations by employing terminologies with negative connotations, such as "youth bulge," "youth crisis," and "at risk youth." Violent conflicts are prevalent in African countries with large youth populations, such as Mali, Central African Republic (CAR), and Somalia (Kujeke 2017). A country's risk of conflict rises by 4 percent for every one-point increase in the youth population (Urdal 2007). Mutisi (2012) presents an extensive literature review of the nexus between youths and conflicts, particularly in Africa, affirming that "dominant conceptualisations of the youth perceive young people as being under threat or as a cause of societal crises." A study commissioned by the Christian Aid (2018) in South Sudan enumerated the structural factors underlying youth exclusion and violence to include youth bulge, unemployment,

underemployment and a lack of livelihood opportunities, poor education, poor governance, and poor socialization.

Researchers have long linked youth bulges (high proportions of youth aged fifteen to twenty-four years) to social uprisings, political instability, and conflicts. Youth bulges tend to increase the risk of internal armed conflict, terrorism, and rioting, especially under conditions of educational and economic stress (Urdal 2007). This has become the dominant explanation given for conflicts occurring in developing countries in Asia and Africa which have disproportionate youth populations and high levels of inequality. According to the UNDP (2017), the inability of governments to adequately provide for the high youth population is capable of exposing Africa to economic underperformance, increased migration, criminality, political or social unrest, and armed conflict. Unemployment and frustration have been identified as factors that make young people attractive recruits for Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria (Kweitsu 2017). The UN high-level panel on threat, challenges, and change refers to youth as a potential threat to security, and asserts that “a surging youth population” combined with unemployment, urbanization, and other factors can lead to violence. Similarly, youthful populations portend an increased risk of social instability; in the African context, widespread unemployment and other forms of socio-economic and/or political marginalization will compound this risk (Schunemann 2017).

In Nigeria, youths are at the heart of 90 to 95 percent of violent conflicts (Omeje 2006). Young people have been involved in attacks on oil firms in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, engaging in the destruction of oil pipelines, hostage taking, and youth militancy (Ukiwo 2011). Youth participation in violence in the oil-rich region has been attributed to their marginalization and the suppression of their voices amid the agitations for competing resources (Arowosegbe 2009). These reports seem to suggest that there is a correlation between the high percentages of youths (youth bulge) and political or social violence in Nigeria. One possible explanation for this is that youths, especially males who are unemployed and who feel disenfranchised and alienated, with fewer opportunities for positive engagement, are ready recruits for those seeking to instigate violence.

However, attributing youth engagement in conflicts to unemployment, low levels of education, and poverty provides an overly simplistic view of the drivers of conflicts. This perspective also presupposes that the eradication of unemployment, illiteracy, and poverty will produce violence-free societies, particularly in Africa. Though researchers have generated statistical evidence to demonstrate the links between high youth populations and the risk of armed conflict, there still exist countries with significantly high youth populations that have not experienced violent conflicts (Hilker & Fraser 2009). This implies that the underlying factors that give rise to conflicts are far more complex than the “youth bulge” and deprivation viewpoint suggests.

Most of the analyses on youth in Africa adopt a binary perspective; positively, youths are seen as viable assets for economic growth, and negatively, they are considered to be the drivers of instability and civil unrest.

This view places great limitations on the capabilities of youths, because it often leads to overlooking the positive contribution of young people to other aspects of society, including their potential role in sustaining the social fabric and promoting peace. On the flip side, only a handful of examples can be found of societies that have engaged their youth in peacebuilding. Ozerdem (2016) identified the efforts of youths in strengthening community cohesion, building trust, and promoting reconciliation through livelihood programs in South Sudan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Burundi. In the Central African Republic, youths play important roles in negotiation, reconciliation, peace promotion, and mediation; a youth organization called Bird of Peace is engaged in peace education programs in that country (Tunda 2017). In a similar vein, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a grassroots initiative involving youths has established “baraza” courts that mediate and resolve land conflicts. Additionally, theatre is sometimes used as a tool to project the role of young people in facilitating reconciliation in South Sudan (Kujeke 2017). In Central Nigeria, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are providing interventions in areas ravaged by farmer-herder conflicts include Mercy Corps, Search for Common Ground, Inter-Faith Mediation Centre and Justice Development, and Peace Caritas. These NGOs work with local actors to develop community-based programmatic interventions for the management of farmer-herder conflicts through dialogue and mediation (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin 2017). However, it is not clear how the youths are directly or indirectly involved in these programs, as the emphasis has been on traditional rulers and community leaders.

Generally, youth voices and experiences are still far from integrated or understood in critical security or other scholarly deliberations about peace practice (Berents & McEvoy-Levy 2015). This assertion succinctly captures the current dilemma of peacebuilding practice and policy across those countries affected by violent conflicts, particularly in Africa. Such observations further point to the stark reality that youths are oftentimes not engaged in everyday practices of peacebuilding in their communities. This study therefore examines the ways in which youths collaboratively do participate in preventing and managing conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria.

Theoretical Underpinnings

There are a number of theories that can be employed to explain conflict and its management, irrespective of the demographic configuration of the society involved. Here, I adopt the frustration-aggression theory and the human agency framework to explain the interface of youths and violent conflict, and the management of conflict. The frustration-aggression theory posits that “if a goal is blocked, people often become frustrated. The frustration then leads to aggressive behaviour. If the source of frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression is transferred onto an innocent target” (Dollard et al. 1939). Members of society may, therefore, express their frustrations over

deprivation, inequality, disenfranchisement, or other matters of concern through violence, either voluntarily or involuntarily. These acts of violence may be induced using cash, by coercion or radicalization, or by the use of drugs. The frustration-aggression theory attempts to offer explanations for the causes of violence, riots, and revolutions. Many critics of the frustration-aggression theory have argued that the response of society to frustration is not always aggressive, and not all conflicts are disruptive. For instance, available evidence suggests that young adults aged fifteen to twenty-nine years old are more likely to migrate in reaction to unfavorable living conditions (Deotti & Estruch 2016; Dibeh, Fasih & Marrouch 2018). Though the frustration-aggression theory emphasizes negative responses, it is possible for people, especially youths, to respond to frustrations in non-violent, innovative ways, such as channelling their unbounded energies into seeking improved standards of living, conformity (using socially approved means), and reliance on their social capital.

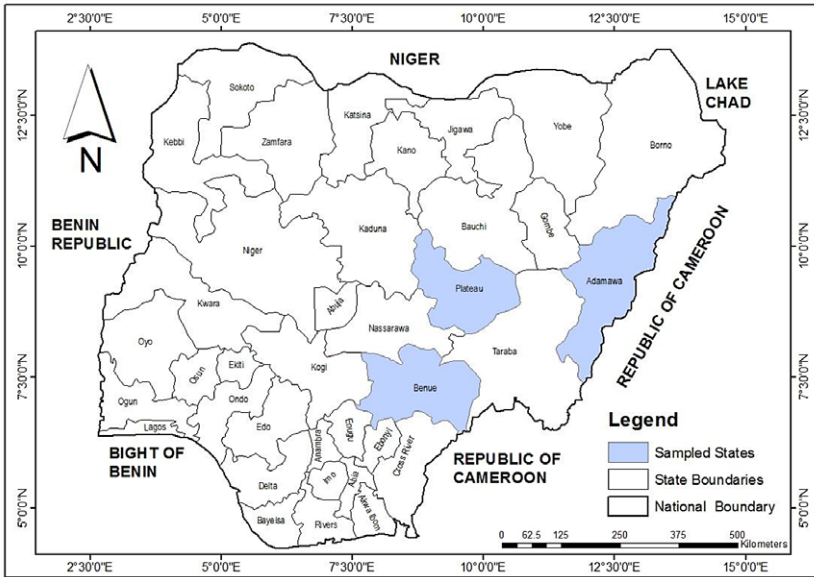
On the positive side, the human agency framework, which is derived from and central to the social cognitive theory propounded by Albert Bandura, accords due recognition to and advocates for the utilization of human agency. This theory views human agency as a quality that characterizes the experiences of human living. Bandura (2018) argues that “humans as agents can intentionally influence their functioning and immediate circumstances.” According to the human agency framework, human functioning is a product of three determinants: individual perception, the behavior an individual engages in, and the environmental forces that shape an individual’s perception and behavior. Human agency suggests that “since judgments and actions are partly self-determined, people can effect change in themselves and their situations through their own efforts” (Bandura 1989:1175). People can exercise agency by believing in their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives. In the context of this article, that will mean that youths in both farming and pastoralist communities could exert some measure of control on what happens within and between their communities. This further implies that by positively deploying their agency and social energies, youths can act as agents to prevent the occurrence of violent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. And where and when such conflicts occur, youths can effectively manage the situation.

The Study Area

Benue, Adamawa, and Plateau are three states in Nigeria where conflicts between farmers and herders are a frequent occurrence. Benue and Plateau states are located in the central part of Nigeria, while Adamawa state is situated in the northeast. Figure 1 shows the location of Benue, Plateau, and Adamawa states in Nigeria.

Benue state has a land area of 34,059km² and a population of over five million people. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, with about 75 percent of the population gainfully engaged in the sector. The major

Figure 1. Map of Nigeria showing the location of Benue, Plateau, and Adamawa States Source: Benue State University, Makurdi GIS Laboratory



ethnic groups in Benue are the Tiv, Idoma, and Igede, while the herders in this state, who are of Fulani ethnic extraction, are predominantly transhumant pastoralists. The semi-nomadic pastoralists are viewed as “settlers or visitors” who come into the local communities seasonally and temporarily to graze their cattle before relocating to other areas. Guma, Gwer-West, and Makurdi (Figure 2) are the local government areas significantly affected by farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State.

Plateau state covers an area of 30,913 km², with a population of about four million people, according to the 2016 population estimates. Available statistics suggest that a significant percentage of the people who constitute the over forty ethno-linguistic groups in Plateau State are farmers. In Plateau state, there are Fulani herders living in established communities. Though the Fulani herders claim to be indigenes of Plateau state, the other ethnic groups refer to them as settlers. The conflicts between farmers and herders are prevalent in the Barkin-Ladi, Riyom, Jos South, and Jos East local government areas, which were selected as the study sites. Figure 3 shows the locations of these local government areas in Plateau State.

On the other hand, Adamawa state covers 36,059 km². According to the 2016 population estimates, there are about four million people in the state. The major occupation of the people of Adamawa state is farming. Adamawa, like Benue state, is located on the bank of River Benue; thus, some of the people are fishermen. Out of these three states, Adamawa is the only state where the Fulani are recognized officially as indigenes. This is because the

Figure 2. Map of Benue State showing the Sampled Local Government Areas
Source: Benue State University, Makurdi GIS Laboratory

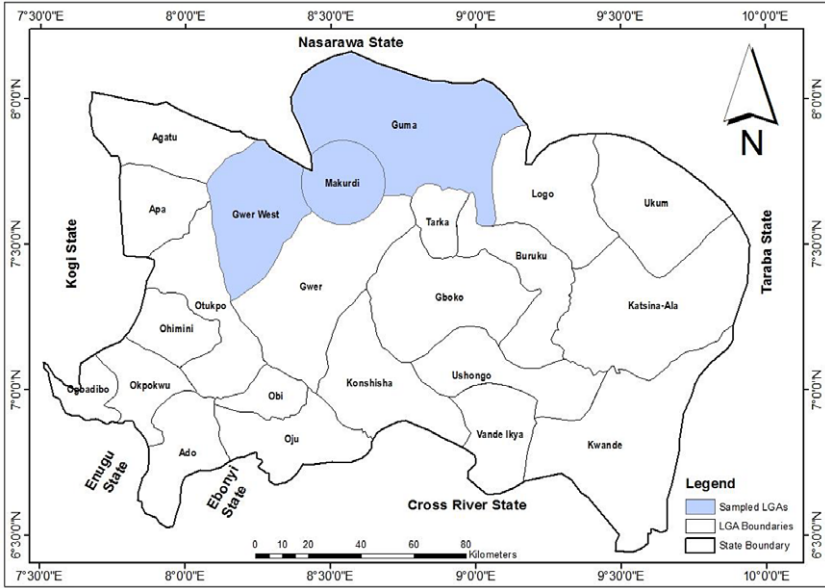
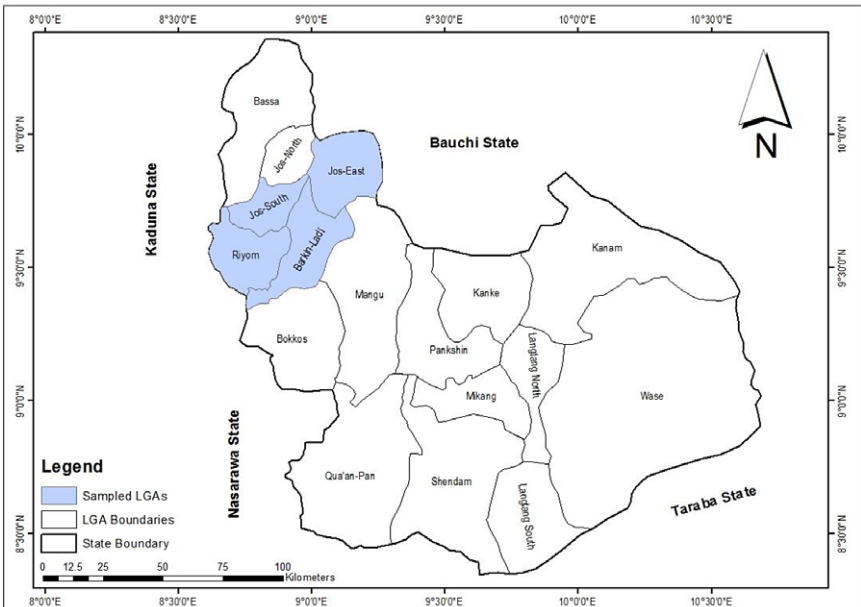


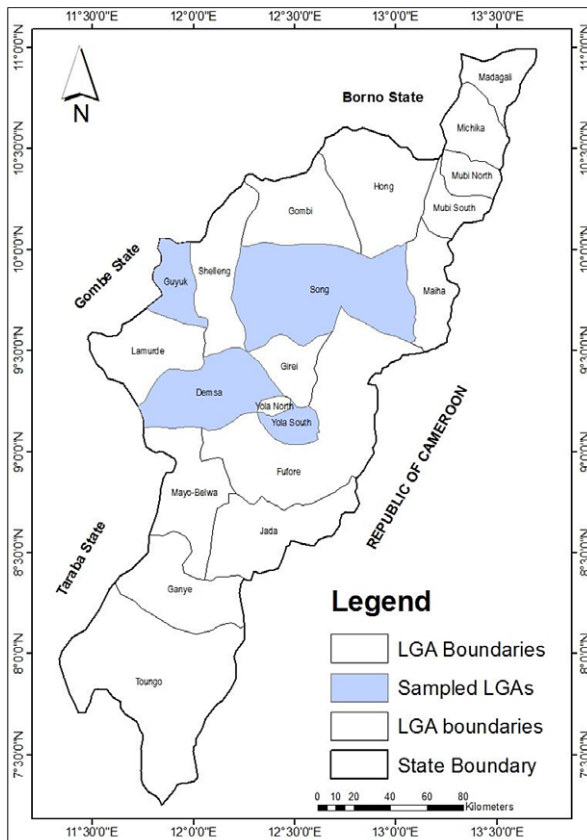
Figure 3. Map of Plateau State showing the Sampled Local Government Areas
Source: Benue State University, Makurdi GIS Laboratory



Islamic jihad of 1804 successfully captured some areas in the state, leading to the installation of an ethno-religious traditional ruler known as an Emir. Thus, even though the Fulani are not the dominant ethnic group in Adamawa, they have a strong hold on and control of the traditional, religious, and political structures in the state. This is quite different from the scenarios in Benue and Plateau states. The conflicts between farmers and herders in Adamawa state are common in the Song, Guyuk, Demsa, and Yola South local government areas (Figure 4).

Demographically, statistics for 2016 suggest that over 61 percent of the population in Nigeria is younger than thirty-five years old (Figure 5). Given the exponential growth rate, it is expected that the population of youths will double in the coming years, with consequences aggravated by the prevailing level of poverty and unemployment. A breakdown of the population for 2006 as presented by the Nigerian Population Commission shows

Figure 4. Map of Adamawa State showing the Sampled Local Government Areas Source: Benue State University, Makurdi GIS Laboratory

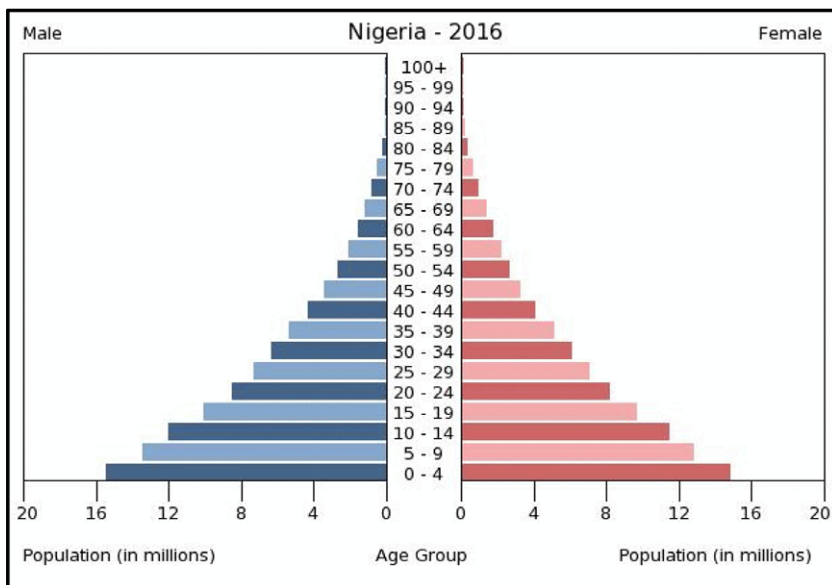


that Benue, Plateau, and Adamawa states have relatively high percentages of youths. The figures indicate that more than three-quarters of the inhabitants of these three states are younger than 39 years old. The 2006 census was the last time the Nigerian National Population Commission provided such detailed disaggregated data of the population characteristics broken down by states and local government areas. If the “youth bulge” and “youth crisis” theories are valid measures of assessment, then the high youth population coupled with high unemployment rates present a worrisome and gloomy picture for the current and future state of security in Nigeria. On the other hand, if the social energies of this significant demographic are channelled positively, it could present a formidable force for conflict transformation and social change.

Methodology

This article presents some findings from a larger study that examined the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of peacebuilding strategies adopted in the management of conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria. In 2017, in-depth interviews were conducted with members of the communities most severely affected by farmer-herder conflicts in Benue, Adamawa, and Plateau states. In Benue State, interviews were conducted in Guma, Gwer-West, and Makurdi local government areas. Riyom, Barkin-Ladi, Jos South, and Jos East were the local government areas examined in Plateau

Figure 5. Population Pyramid for Nigeria Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2018)



State. In Adamawa state, the respondents were selected from communities in Guyuk, Song, Yola South, and Demsa local government areas. The targeted groups were traditional or community leaders, leaders of youth groups, and non-governmental organizations intervening in the selected communities. (The NGOs were found only in Plateau state; two representatives each were interviewed from two NGOs, Search for Common Grounds and Humanitarian Dialogue.)

For this aspect of the study, a total of twenty-two interviews were conducted with community and youth leaders in eleven communities in the three states. Focus group discussion sessions were also held with youths aged fifteen to thirty-five years old. One major observation during the fieldwork in these communities was the absence of female youths in the focus group discussions. This suggests that males dominate the peacebuilding process in these communities. The interviews and focus group discussions sought information on the ways in which the youths have been contributing to conflict prevention, dispute resolution, and peacebuilding within their communities. Some of the challenges associated with the strategies used by the youths and issues that need to be addressed to ensure more active and inclusive participation of youths in the peace process were identified and examined. The interviews were translated from the local languages (Hausa and Tiv) into English and analyzed according to the dominant themes, which describe the particular ways in which the youths are engaged in conflict management. Excerpts from some of the interviews are presented here to support the findings and discussions.

Youth Engagement in the Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Nigeria

The results of this study show that there are variations in the ways in which youths are engaged in managing conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Central Nigeria. The ethno-religious and ethno-political dynamics in Benue, Plateau, and Adamawa states have also significantly influenced the execution, perception, and acceptability of peacebuilding interventions. During the interviews, it was determined that the youths have contributed in ways which often led to the restoration of relative, but sometimes temporary, peace in the affected communities. The study found that youths currently contribute to conflict prevention and management through their engagement in informal policing, mediation, and advocacy through peace clubs. These strategies are discussed in the following sections.

Youth Engagement in Informal Policing

In parts of Adamawa state, one of the steps taken by communities to engage the youths positively in managing the conflicts between farmers and herders was through informal policing. Community vigilante groups comprised of male youths were engaged to participate in informal policing and surveillance of the communities to check grazing of cattle in undesigned areas.

This strategy was adopted in response to the absence of formal police structures in the rural farming communities in Adamawa state. Community leaders in Song and Guyuk local government areas of Adamawa state met and designated areas for grazing and cattle routes to water sources to eliminate or reduce the incidences of crop destruction by cattle. Thus, there was the need to establish the youth vigilante system to keep watch and prevent the grazing of cattle beyond the spatial boundaries set by the community. One of the community leaders in Song local government explained the reason for the establishment of the community vigilante system:

Historically, herders came into our community during the harvest season and waited till the end of harvest to graze the cattle. Sometimes, they helped the farmers to harvest the crops in order to hasten the process. In other cases, the farmers leased land to the herders for the purpose of grazing. However, in recent times, herders deliberately led their cattle into our farms to graze even when the crops have not been harvested. Every season, we lose our corn, guinea corn and rice farms to the activities of these pastoralists who carry guns while the cattle destroy our crops. We have a vast area of land with inadequate police. So, as a community, we have taken the responsibility of protecting our lives, property and livelihoods upon us. This is the major reason why we introduced the community vigilante. (Yungur Community Leader, interview, Adamawa, 2017)

During the interviews, the researcher found that youths in some of the selected communities participated actively in inciting conflicts either by engaging in cattle rustling or by leading cattle to graze on farms. This means that some youths were conflict instigators too. It was difficult to differentiate between youths who were members of the community vigilante group and by extension peacekeepers from those who are conflict instigators. The eligibility criteria for recruitment into the community vigilante group was not clear. The study found that any adult male who was interested in doing the job was automatically made a member of the group. The vigilantes in the communities in Adamawa offered unpaid voluntary service to their communities. These community vigilante groups emerged as local arrangements within the farming communities and were not recognized formally by the state.

The use of youth vigilante groups in informal policing is a response to the resource scarcity and defense of livelihoods strand of the drivers of conflicts. Through the informal policing arrangement, the vigilante is entrusted with the responsibility of preventing conflicts or reducing skirmishes that may arise when farmers' crops are destroyed by cattle. Thus, youth vigilante teams carried out patrols within the communities and reported any offenders to the community leaders for necessary action. Whenever the community vigilantes found herders grazing on cultivated farmlands, they discreetly followed the herders so as to identify their abode. The incidents were then reported to the local community head, who in turn notified the *Ardo* (the Fulani leader who

then reported to the police). The police arrested the offender, assessed the damage caused on the farmland in conjunction with the farmer, community leaders, and the offender, and enforced the payment of compensation to the farmer. The chain of command showed that the final point of settlement was by the police. This chain of command may pose some problems, however, especially in a country such as Nigeria, where the incidences of corruption among members of the police force are high. Another issue that may arise is the ability of the police to make an impartial determination. Will the police be able to execute their duties without attempting to show partiality to either of the parties? Will the police be able to resist the temptation of accepting a bribe in lieu of prosecution? There is a widespread distrust of the police in Nigeria, and this may affect the outcomes of the cases of farmer-herder clashes.

In Benue State, on the other hand, the introduction of the open grazing prohibition and ranches establishment law in 2017 led to the employment of agro-rangers and livestock guards, who are predominantly male youths in the affected Tiv farming communities. These agro-rangers and livestock guards receive monthly allowances from the Benue state government. Like the youth vigilante teams in Adamawa state, the agro-rangers and livestock guards are charged with the responsibility of enforcing the law which prohibits open grazing of cattle across Benue state. The agro-rangers and livestock guards engage in patrols and arrest herders who are seen grazing their cattle in the open fields. The arrested offenders are handed over to the police for further prosecution in the courts. The law in Benue state criminalizes open grazing of cattle and currently insists that all cattle must be ranched. Herders who transgress this law are required to serve a minimum jail term of five years or pay a fine of one million naira, which is currently the equivalent of about USD2,000 (as of July 2021). In recent times, a number of pastoralists have been convicted in the courts and assigned jail sentences or a fine in lieu of the jail term. Since this law came into effect in Benue state, a significant number of pastoralists have relocated to neighboring Nasarawa state.

What is similar in both the Benue and Adamawa scenarios is that the members of the community youth vigilante teams, agro-rangers, and livestock guards are all from the “indigenous” farming communities. Thus, there is a general feeling that the current arrangement favors and protects only the farmers’ interests. The principle of indigeneship:

...is about ownership of the community, local government or state. This ownership is about the right to recognition as the dominant ethnic group within the unit. It is about the right to determine the rules of engagement in inter-ethnic relations and the right to dictate who benefits from the collective resources (which includes land). (Ehrhardt & Mustapha 2014:1)

These claims of entitlement are enabled and supported by the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, which recognizes the alienating configuration “indigenes” (autochthonous or first inhabitants) as against the more

embracing term “citizens.” In Benue and Plateau states, the Fulani pastoralists are seen as “visitors or settlers,” while the farmers consider themselves to be autochthonous members of these communities. In Adamawa State, the situation is more complicated, as the pastoralists live within the same communities as the farmers, but the farmers still categorize the herders as settlers. The implication of these categorizations in the states covered by this study is that the pastoralists have little, if any, formal rights to land in the states where they are categorized as “visitors.” From the interviews conducted in these three states, it was learned that in the past, access to grazing land in any community was negotiated between the traditional rulers or local farmers and pastoralists. But, with the current perceptions of pastoralists as people who want to wrest land from the farming communities by any means, including violence, these arrangements have been suspended. The popular representation and perception of the Fulani herders in Nigeria as savages is a factor that shapes the relationship and acceptance of Fulani herders (Eke 2020).

Thus, the community vigilante teams, agro-rangers, and livestock guards have been recruited formally or informally to police the territory, enforce boundaries, and guard against trespass. This arrangement has the potential to fuel more violence between farmers and pastoralists, as the pastoralists feel increasingly ostracized. In an interview, one of the Ardos captured the feelings in these words, “We feel mistreated and marginalized. The community leaders do not have the authority to stop us from grazing the cattle anywhere in the community.”

The land tenure systems and land laws in West Africa tend to be biased against pastoralists, as they are designed to prevent “outsiders” from gaining access to local land (Davidheiser & Luna 2008). Local configurations of power shape the ways that existing tensions within and between groups can develop into “resource conflicts” (Turner 2004).

Youth Engagement in Mediation

The engagement of youth in mediation is an attempt to put the peacebuilding process in the hands of local actors and communities. Using this approach, disputes are resolved through negotiation, assessment of damages, consensus, payment of compensation, and other sanctions where applicable. In Benue state, youth energies were harnessed through the collaborative efforts initiated by the State Conflict Resolution and Peace-building Committee in 2014, which led to the formation of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). This task force is made up of youths from the farming and pastoralist communities and is delegated the responsibility of checking the activities of criminal elements on both sides. As mentioned earlier, the herders in Benue state are predominantly nomads; thus, farmers outnumber pastoralists in the Task Force. The methods of conflict resolution adopted by the CJTF are dialogue, negotiation, mediation, and restorative justice, where an offender (farmer or cattle owner) is made to pay for damages either to crops or cattle. Members of the CJTF are paid a monthly stipend by the state government;

additionally, they are provided with motorcycles to facilitate their movement within the rural communities. Many of the unemployed youths in the rural communities view this as a source of income, in addition to what they earn from the sale of their farm produce. In addition to the stipend, some members of the CJTF have been accused of receiving bribes, either from pastoralists or even from farmers to make judgments in their favor. This kind of situation can be described as an emergent political economy which benefits those in charge of resolving conflicts. One female farmer interviewed narrated her experience with the CJTF:

On that fateful day, I went to my farm and discovered that it had been destroyed by cattle. Another farmer who witnessed the incident gave me information on the identity of the offender because the herders had arrived in our community to graze their cattle. I reported the incidents to the CJTF, and they demanded “mobilization fees”—which is a token amount that I had to pay for my case to be handled. I refused to pay the money and my case was never taken up. (Interview, Guma, Benue state, 2017)

There have also been cases where the CJTF overestimated the damage caused to farmlands and demanded kickbacks from the victims afterwards. Thus, while some consider the role of the CJTF in managing farmer-herder conflicts to be valuable, others view it as a money-making opportunity for the youths.

In spite of the flaws associated with the program, one major advantage of this initiative is the transfer of the responsibility of conflict resolution and mediation to the youths and community members who are directly affected by the conflicts. This encourages peacebuilding efforts from below and enables the affected parties to participate in the amicable resolution of conflicts using local institutions and methods. In advocating for community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, the International Crisis Group Africa (2017) argued that interventions that allow farmers, pastoralists, community vigilantes, and state security agencies to monitor, identify, discuss, and manage potential threats on their own may be more helpful. By employing such collaborative efforts, it is anticipated that the conflicting groups may be able to explore mutually beneficial ways to coexist. Community-based programs have the capacity to address many of the failings of the top-down approach to peacebuilding (Turner 2004). It has been reported that youth in the Central African Republic (CAR) were able to play active roles in negotiation, mediation, conflict analysis, and inclusive dialogue to restore peace in their war-torn country (Tunda 2017).

However, one of the major challenges of this initiative is the concern about the application of restorative justice and the tendency for the peacebuilding process to be captured by the dominant group (Braithwaite n.d.). In some communities in Benue state, there have been allegations of compromise and high-handedness on the part of the CJTF. The members of the Task

Force were accused of overstepping their official mandate by demanding that all herders obtain permission in addition to payment of a stipulated settlement fee to the Task Force as a precondition to be granted entry into communities in Benue State. Lack of trust between the farmers and herders is another factor that threatens any peacebuilding initiatives in the state. This distrust is fueled by historical narratives that have strained the relationship between the Tiv farmers and the Fulani herders. The indigene-settler debate also has the potential to hinder these peacebuilding initiatives. Farmers and traditional rulers have consistently maintained that there are no grazing lands in Benue state, and that herders should be restricted to their states of origin in order to forestall conflicts. One of the members of CJTF explained in an interview that the former practice where local communities allocated parcels of land on a temporary basis to herders for grazing is no longer feasible because of the fear that the herders might eventually claim ownership of the land and dispossess the original owners. This is a clear testament to the level of distrust that exists on the part of local farmers, which is capable of threatening the existing peace and the sustainability of the peacebuilding initiatives. The nomadic nature of pastoralism in Benue state means that there is an imbalance in the composition of the CJTF; this is likely to affect the level of participation and representation, and ultimately justice, for the pastoralists.

Another shortcoming exposed by this strategy is the dynamics of power relations between farmers and pastoralists in all the communities covered by the study. This power play is worsened by the claims of autochthony. The politics of belonging significantly determines who will participate, how they will participate, the rights of individuals to access land resources, and arguably, the right to a fair hearing. This situation is worsened by the failure of the government, NGOs, and local communities to acknowledge the multifaceted drivers of farmer-herder conflicts. Ignoring the micro-politics of farmer-herder relations could lead to the introduction of interventions that perpetuate the underlying power relations characterizing land and environmental management. Following the enactment of the law prohibiting open grazing in Benue state, the activities of the CJTF have been suspended, and currently, the agro-rangers and livestock guards have a legal mandate to check the activities of pastoralists within the state.

Community peace and security architecture

Plateau state reports efforts by an international NGO which led to the introduction of the Community Peace and Security Architecture at the local government level. The Peace and Security Architecture is a platform that brings together traditional rulers, religious leaders, and representatives of women and youths from the farming and pastoral communities. The aim was to develop partnerships and provide a platform for dialogue and joint problem solving. The mandate of the donors to the NGO was for an equal ratio in the gender composition of the Community Peace and Security Architecture. However, achieving an equal ratio in the gender composition

in both farming and pastoralist communities was a major challenge. The community peace and security architecture promoted youth inclusion, participation, and the development of partnerships in peace processes at the grassroots level. So far, the progress made on its implementation has been slow, and as such it is difficult to assess the success of the intervention.

The development of early warning systems to prevent the occurrence of conflicts or to minimize the effects of conflicts was identified as one of the ways of positively utilizing the energies of youths in farming and pastoral communities. This is in response to the fact that some of the attacks were coordinated. In communities in Plateau and Benue states, youths reported that on some occasions they had received prior information about impending attacks. Such information was passed on to youths in the farming communities by their acquaintances in pastoralist communities, either through phone conversations or through informal meeting spaces such as the market. The information on impending attacks was then passed on to the police and military to ensure the reinforcement of security in the targeted communities. Opportunities for cooperation where they exist between farmers and pastoralists could lead to the development of responsive early warning systems and, in the long run, peaceful co-existence. Encouraging collaborations and information sharing/intelligence gathering between youths in farming and pastoral communities will ensure that information on impending attacks will be communicated to the appropriate security agencies for necessary action. When youths feel a sense of shared responsibility for the safety of others, they will volunteer information which could be used to prevent the occurrence of conflicts. To ensure that they feel this sense of responsibility, there must be a commensurate feeling of belonging. If the pastoralist groups continue to feel “othered,” there is a greater likelihood that collaborative ventures such as this will fail.

Peace Clubs and Associations

One NGO in Plateau state has introduced an initiative for peace clubs and associations that positively engage youths from farming and pastoral communities; this is another platform the youths have adopted to contribute positively to conflict transformation. At the time of writing, it was undergoing a pilot test to determine its efficacy in enhancing peaceful coexistence between youths in farming and pastoralist communities. In 2017, when the interviews were conducted, there were no program reviews, as the program was in the early stages of implementation. The peace clubs and associations are avenues by which children and youths can learn about the cultures of other groups, learn to accept and coexist with others, and learn the basics of conflict resolution. The students are expected to teach other youths and their parents the lessons learned from the peace clubs, in addition to practicing all the modules covered by the instruction they receive. The challenge with targeting schools is that many of the children and youths from the pastoralist communities attend the nomadic schools provided in their localities rather

than the conventional schools. In Benue state, nomadic schools are no longer functional; this presents a challenge in creating avenues for an integrated peace education program for the children and youths. However, independent youth associations with the core aim of restoring dysfunctional relationships could be established to provide an avenue for youths to interact and acquire the requisite training to drive peacebuilding initiatives in their communities. According to Mutisi (2012), "Youth-to-youth interactions have the potential to reduce the social distance between disparate groups, between individuals and within societies at large." She further pointed out the successes of such community-based youth associations in Liberia and Sierra Leone which have helped to provide support to members, facilitate social control, enable socialization, and strengthen the engagement of the youth with the state and society.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted some of the roles youths play and opportunities for them to channel their social energies to ensure sustainable peace within farming and pastoral communities. The study found that only very few female youths were members of the Civilian Joint Task Force in Benue State, while in Adamawa State, the peacebuilding process involved only males. This may be due to cultural or religious beliefs which support the unequal distribution of power between men and women. The findings of the study suggest that youths contribute to peacebuilding through their engagement in informal policing, mediation, participation in early warning systems, and advocacy through peace clubs. These strategies were all initiated by the government, non-governmental organizations, or community leaders, while the youths were then delegated to execute the tasks. Though these efforts are laudable, the findings show that the peacebuilding potential of youths in Nigeria is greatly underutilized. The analysis indicates that youths are directly engaged in some peacebuilding activities in Benue state through mediation and the application of restorative justice.

However, with the enactment of the law that prohibits open grazing in the state, the youths are now engaged as livestock guards whose tasks involve apprehending offenders for prosecution in the courts. This means that the role of youths in Benue State has been changed from peacebuilding to peacekeeping. In Adamawa State, the youths are also engaged more in peacekeeping activities, whereas in Plateau State, the programs involving the youth were still in the early stages of implementation, suggesting that the idea of engaging the youths in conflict management has been downplayed over the years, despite the ongoing and protracted conflicts in the state. In addition, the strategies adopted in these three states have focused on managing conflicts based on the resource scarcity narrative, without addressing the broader multifaceted grievances expressed by both farmers and pastoralists.

The dominance of youths from farming communities in peace efforts has affected the achievement of successful and sustainable outcomes. For instance, in Benue State, youths from the farming communities dominated the Civilian Joint Task Force which was set up to mediate and enforce restorative justice in managing farmer-herder conflicts. Therefore, there were suspicions on the part of pastoralists, who expressed fears that their interests may not be equitably considered. Another noticeable challenge to sustainable peacebuilding in these communities is the lack of coordination of these initiatives. It is not clear how the youths are recruited; this means that youths who may be conflict instigators may hide under the umbrella of the community vigilante teams or CJTF groups to instigate violence. It is therefore crucial to strengthen these initiatives to ensure inclusivity and openness in the management of conflicts between farmers and pastoralists.

In accordance with the human agency framework as discussed earlier, it would be interesting to see the innovative ways in which youths in these communities can effect change in themselves and their situations through their own ideas and efforts. Since Nigeria possesses a significantly high youth population, it is imperative to adequately harness and apply the agency and social energies of youths in conflict management. People (and especially youths in this context) are able to exercise agency by believing in their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives (Bandura 1989). The beginning point is the opening up of the peacebuilding space and provision of opportunities for youth to collaboratively design and drive initiatives that will bring about sustainable peace in farming and pastoral communities in Nigeria in particular as well as in Africa at large.

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