

## The Role of Community Development Associations in Managing Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Conflicts over land and water between farmers and herders in Nigeria have frequently resulted in the loss of life and property. Despite several government interventions aimed at mitigating these conflicts, they persist in many communities across the country. Therefore, this study examines the role of Community Development Associations (CDAs) in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Ekiti State, Nigeria. This study is anchored on the frustration-aggression and stakeholder theories to explain the causes of the conflicts and the roles played by CDAs in their management. An explanatory research design was adopted, employing a qualitative approach. A total of 42 volunteer informants were purposively selected for interviews. Data were analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed that the use of underage herders, herders' claims of being community indigenous, physical development, and the presence of migrant herders are the major causes of farmer-herder conflicts in the study area. The study also found that CDAs managed conflicts through negotiation, mediation, dialogue and reconciliation. The study concludes that these roles have contributed to a reduction in farmer-herder conflicts within communities, thereby serving as an effective conflict management tool. Consequently, this study recommends improved capacity-building training on conflict resolution mechanisms for CDA members, as well as effective collaboration between host communities and herders' stakeholders to address the root causes of the conflicts.

**Keywords:** Conflict, conflict management, community development associations, farmer, herder, Ekiti State, Nigeria

### Introduction

The global perception of insufficient natural resources and conflicting value systems, among other factors, confirms that the consequences of incompatible goals are conflicts. One of these conflicts that has remained unresolved, particularly in developing countries, is the farmer-herder conflict. For almost 20 years, there have been ceaseless conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in various parts of Africa, especially in the West African sub-region (Ewoh et al., 2025). Nwankwo (2021) posits that West Africa is home to the largest group of cattle herders. The conflict between farmers and herders has

been worsening for some time, resulting in the destruction of lives and property as well as the uprooting of people from their ancestral homes in countries such as Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Cameroon. Similarly, farmer-herder conflicts in some states in Nigeria have progressively compounded the security situation in the affected states, while the country at large is faced with dire humanitarian consequences (Brottem, 2021), leading to increased violence, displacement of communities, and a strain on local resources.

In Nigeria, the conflicts between farmers and herders have persisted for a long time and continue to heighten tensions in the affected communities. The study shows that the conflict between herders and farmers has been getting worse for a long time, with more and more deaths being reported (Bukari et al., 2018). Furthermore, Brottem (2021) states that data from the Nextier SPD Violent Conflict Database showed farmer-herder conflicts occurred 71 times, accounting for 406 deaths, 49 injured, and 15 kidnapped individuals. The conflict is particularly intense in the northwestern states, the Middle Belt, and, more recently, the southern states. However, Ekiti State, Southwest Nigeria, is known to be relatively peaceful, except for the farmer-herder conflict in some parts of the state, such as the Ikole and Ikere Local Government Areas. This situation made the Ekiti State government enact an anti-grazing law in response to the ongoing violent conflicts between herders and farmers, specifically due to the assaults in Ikole and Oke-Ado, where two people were killed (Folasade & Olawale, 2019). In addition, a man's lifeless body was discovered on his farm in the Ikole Local Government Area of Ekiti State. People who were often thought to be armed herders had shot him (Oluwole, 2022). Buhari and Edigbonya (2023) reported numerous widespread massacres caused by farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria's states, such as Ekiti State. Consequently, the rural Ekiti sedentary villages have turned to neighborhood vigilante groups for self-defense. Such behavior has worsened violence, resulting in the loss of lives and properties.

Despite significant government interventions, farmer-herder conflicts have continued to defy several management models, with no indication of an end to the severe loss of unquantifiable lives, properties, social ties, and economic values, which has led to increased tensions and instability in the affected regions. It is obvious that a solution to farmer-herder conflicts will promote peace, security, and the development of communities and serve as resistance to further conflict. Therefore, this study examines the role

of Community Development Associations in managing farmer-herder conflicts in the Ikole and Ikere Local Government Areas of Ekiti State, Nigeria.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To identify causes of farmer-herder conflicts in Ekiti State, Nigeria; and
2. To examine the roles of Community Development Associations in managing farmer-herder conflicts in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Dynamics of Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Ekiti State, Nigeria**

Land disputes have become a major challenge between farmers and herders since both need arable land for their economic activities. Obikaeze et al. (2023) posit that land disputes were the root cause of many confrontations in Ekiti State between farmers and herders, which consistently result in fights over grazing land. Buhari and Edigbonya (2023) also discovered that when herders used more land, there was an increase in overlap; that is, grazers extended or encroached into farmers' accessible acreage for their consumption. Since the economic survival of both farmers and herders depends on the use of land resources, the inability of the state (government) to address the indigene and settler phenomenon in the country's constitution, and the unresolved issues of grazing land and water spots are factors that keep the conflict lingering (Olamide Sowale, 2024). Furthermore, Onipede (2020) posits that it is an undeniable reality that Oke-Ako's economy in Ekiti State has suffered greatly as a result of the alleged actions of the Fulani herdsmen against the farmers. Farmers flee their settlements or communities and struggle to return out of fear of being attacked again by the so-called herdsmen, which has consistently made sowing and reaping more difficult, thereby artificially reducing the supply of food. Similarly, Silas et al. (2023) reported that the pace at which cattle devour crops and the restrictions imposed

on people have caused a decline in the overall productivity of the population. Egbuta (2024) highlights the brutal cycle of retaliation that often follows failed peace interventions. Their findings underscore a worrying pattern: law enforcement measures are reactive rather than preventive, allowing conflicts to resurface even after temporary calm has been restored. Hence, this strategy necessitates the quest for a holistic approach that sustains lasting peace.

### **Community Development Associations**

Community development is an age-long practice among different communities achieved through the collective implementation of tasks and policies for the benefit of all members. Morse et al. (2023) argued that community development refers to intentional efforts aimed at building various forms of community capital, such as human, financial, social, political, environmental, and cultural resources that empower residents to improve their overall well-being. In Nigerian society, community development has been a long-standing social activity, even before the establishment of the colonial government (Chukwu, 2023). Individuals have previously banded together in various historical eras and used shared resources to develop their communities, such as homesteads, clear farmlands, roads, and even some public utility structures, such as town halls, market stalls, and palaces of traditional rulers (Grabska-Szwagrzyk et al., 2024).

According to Ahmad and Islam (2024), community development is a comprehensive strategy based on human rights, empowerment, inclusion, social justice, and group decision-making. However, for a community to meet its needs in the current stage of globalization, members must form an association to enhance effective collaboration. Similarly, through local Community Development Associations (CDAs), residents can collaboratively identify sustainable responses to the socio-economic challenges their communities face in Nigeria's current economic climate (Joshua et al., 2023). Community Devel-

opment Associations (CDAs) play a crucial role in promoting local development.

Often, these groups help the education system by building classrooms and other school facilities that the government uses for public purposes (Olaniyi & Alabi, 2022). Aside from the collective provision of infrastructure, security, and others, CDAs have also been able to interfere and resolve conflicts among families, traders, and neighbors, which is essential for fostering a peaceful community environment and promoting local development. Similarly, Maraire (2024) observed that while conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution present major challenges across Africa, they remain achievable through deliberate and sustained effort. In addition, the Northern Region Young and Development Association (NORYDA) is connected to the recent aspirations of the youth in Northern Ghana, particularly Bawku, to abstain from involvement in the conflict in the community (Afetorlom, 2021).

Furthermore, findings from a study by Okeke and Nnamani (2023) show that local associations play an important role in conflict resolution of farmer-pastoralist conflicts in the Chikun local government area of Kaduna State, Nigeria. The above studies explore the transformative capacity of CDAs to foster local development, strengthen social ties, and mitigate conflict. However, their potential to address farmer-herder conflicts, specifically in Ekiti State, Nigeria, remains largely underexplored. For instance, these studies often treat development and conflict resolution as distinct domains. There is little empirical work examining how Community Development Associations (CDAs) integrate peace-building strategies within their developmental activities to prevent or manage farmer-herder conflict. Moreover, the general role of CDAs in community development or conflict resolution did not focus directly on their interventions in the farmer-herder conflicts specific to Ekiti State, Nigeria. This lack of information limits our understanding of the state's unique sociocultural and ecological dynamics.

## **Community Development Associations and Conflict Management**

Conflict management is essential for resolving conflicts that arise during community development. Conflict in sub-Saharan Africa can limit the potential of communities and hinder the utilization of resources for development (Aleer, 2022; Curcija et al., 2019). Group differences in beliefs, opinions, practices, and cultural variations inevitably lead to conflicts in communities (Odey & Ugar, 2023). Unacknowledged and unresolved conflicts can negatively impact the growth and sustainability of community partnerships for development (Asenjo Palma, 2019). This aspect underscores the importance of embedding conflict resolution skills within the training of community development practitioners, as effective conflict management not only supports development outcomes but also fosters inclusive participation and long-term peace (Akintayo et al., 2024). By proactively managing conflicts, stakeholders can strengthen collaboration, enhance development outcomes, and promote sustainable peace at the community level.

Conflict management plays a vital role in sustaining community coalitions by enabling timely recognition and resolution of disagreements that could otherwise undermine collective action. Conflict is an inevitable outcome of social interaction within communities. Konrad et al. (2020) observed that community actors are often unprepared for its emergence and tend to delay seeking support, thereby allowing tensions to escalate. This reactive approach highlights a significant weakness in many community development settings, where conflict is viewed as a disruption rather than a potential catalyst for positive change (Mac Ginty, 2022).

Therefore, effective conflict management requires a deliberate effort to transform conflict from a destructive force into a constructive mechanism that supports dialogue, learning, and growth. As Ige and Fajimi (2023) argue that conflict in community development reflects the dynamic relationship between human interaction and the pursuit of developmental goals.

However, existing studies largely emphasize the conceptual value of conflict management while paying limited attention to the practical capacities and institutional structures required at the community level to operationalize these ideals. This research opportunity calls for empirical research that examines how community-based organizations and local actors can be equipped to proactively manage conflict in ways that enhance sustainability and inclusive development.

Essentially, the idea of the relevance of community development associations to conflict resolution stems from the relative inability of government agencies to restore lasting peace in communities in many instances. This is largely because they often adopt a top-down model for conflict resolution (Vogel, 2016) and, at times, use a kinetic approach that has proven to be unsustainable (Johnson et al., 2024), which fails to engage local communities and address the root causes of conflict effectively. Hence, the use of conflict resolution techniques by community development associations has become increasingly popular. For instance, reducing antisocial behavior, addressing family conflicts, preventing homelessness, addressing prejudice, and facilitating community involvement have all been accomplished through conflict resolution (Odey & Ugar, 2023). Meanwhile, Ananga and Naiga (2023) found that some community development associations reinforce the interests of the powerful through manipulation and the free-rider syndrome.

In instances where community members develop complicated relationships as a result of long-standing violent conflict, people who have been hurt in affected communities or who have been hurt by others often need to bond to access efficient resources and locate solutions to issues that affect the community (Adekola & Clelland, 2020). Developing strong alliances and coalitions is the solution for community development associations that seek to reduce conflicts, such as farmer-herder conflict and border disputes, among others, which are outside the purview of

most community organizations (Udemadu et al., 2023).

In addition, Ige and Fajimi (2023) posited that community development associations should embrace the indigenous participatory approach mechanism for conflict management in Nigerian communities because members can identify its local mode of operation, and it is a cost-effective means of resolving conflicts to promote community development among members. Facilitating a culturally sensitive conflict resolution process will result in a more successful and long-lasting community development process, whether it is used to settle conflicts within community groups or between the community and outside forces.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is anchored on two theories: frustration-aggression and stakeholder theories. According to the frustration-aggression theory, which was developed in the late 1930s, people frequently become aggressive when they encounter challenges in reaching their goals (Breuer & Elson, 2017). When people are frustrated and unable to focus their anger on the real cause of their annoyance, they may project it onto helpless or innocent groups through aggressive behaviors (Yaseen et al., 2024). This idea, which emphasizes how unfulfilled demands, such as safety or basic supplies, can result in hostile acts, has a strong connection to human history.

Similarly, in the context of this study, the theory helps us to understand that if the herders are unable to obtain a field for their cattle to graze, they may become frustrated and aggressively attack the farmers or graze on their farms. This is because of population explosion and increasing physical development in the areas where cattle graze. However, farmers may become frustrated and aggressively attack cattle or herders for illegal grazing on their farmlands. Often, such aggression stems from the use of underage people who lack the capacity to ensure that cattle do not encroach and destroy crops on farmlands. These factors, among others, have led

to aggressive behavior from both sides, leading to violent conflict that has resulted in the loss of lives and property (Bello & Abdullahi, 2021). To manage conflict effectively, all stakeholders must be fairly involved in the process or methods adopted, including farmers, herders, local authorities, and community leaders, to ensure that their perspectives and needs are addressed. In essence, the integration of frustration-aggression theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the farmer-herder conflict in Ekiti State, Nigeria. This model explains the psychological and emotional roots of the violence involved in the conflict.

Furthermore, this study employed the stakeholder theory to explain the CDA's intervention in managing the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria. The theory suggests that organizations have stakeholders beyond their shareholders, and it is crucial to manage these groups with consideration (Brown & Forster, 2013). The accomplishment of an organization's mission has the potential to influence or impact individuals and groups known as stakeholders (Awa et al., 2024). Applying the theory to this study, the CDAs are stakeholders whose aim is to collectively develop their communities by engaging in activities that enhance peace in their community. By applying stakeholder theory, this study situates CDAs as community-based entities with both moral and functional responsibilities to sustain peace. As a third stakeholder, they play the role of mediator in the farmer-herder conflict in the study area. Their effectiveness depends on inclusive participation, transparent communication, and collective ownership of the solutions. All stakeholders may reach resolutions through concession or compromise, and they may also involve sacrifice to achieve sustainable peace.

For instance, CDAs and farmers could donate land for ranching, provided that herders refrain from open grazing. When CDAs include both farmers and herders in decision-making, they follow Freeman's idea that sustainable progress happens when everyone who is affected is recognized and works together to reach common goals.

However, frustration-aggression theory has been challenged for oversimplifying the link between frustration and aggression and for its limited applicability as a standalone theory (Alam, 2023), while stakeholder theory has been criticized for a vague identification of stakeholders and a potential for bias (Orts & Strudler, 2002). Notwithstanding, the integration of the theories provides a comprehensive understanding of the farmer-herder conflict in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

## Methodology

### Research Design

An exploratory research design was employed in this study. It uses a qualitative research approach to better comprehend the respondents' opinions rather than speculating. In other words, it helps gain a better insight into the complex social realities surrounding how community development associations mediate farmer-herder conflicts in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Therefore, to aid in understanding the meaning, qualitative research, which focuses on real experiences and situational descriptions (Lim, 2025), was adopted.

### Sampling Techniques and Research Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select informants among community development association members, farmers, and herders in the *Oke-Ako*, *Ipao-Ekiti*, and *Ikere* communities in the Ikole and Ikere Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Ekiti State. This technique was adopted because it allowed us to obtain relevant information from those who have experience and knowledge of the conflicts. Thus, five (5) members from the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN) and the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) were selected from each of the two LGAs. Ten (10) members of the Ikere Progressive Union in Ikere LGA and twelve (12) members of the Egbeoba Unity Forum, consisting of members from the Oke-Ako and Ipao-Ekiti towns in Ikole LGA. The study area was purposefully selected

because of the persistent conflict between farmers and herders in the state. Essentially, the researchers exited the field after reaching the information saturation point.

### Data Collection Method and Analysis

Primary and secondary data sources were used in this study. Primary data were derived from in-depth interviews (IDI) with farmers, herders, and members of the community development associations (CDAs). Primary data help researchers gain insight into the actual realities of the conflict within the study area. In addition, secondary data were sourced from relevant journals, news reports, and government data. The secondary data allow the researcher to understand the trends of the farmer-herder conflicts in other settings and identify how they differ from the realities of the study area. Primary data were collected using a voice recorder. The interviews were conducted in English and Yoruba [depending on the preference of the informant]. They were given the option to grant the interview in either language to ensure that correct and reliable information was gathered. Moreover, some of the informants lacked formal education. The recordings were then transcribed and analyzed using content analysis. The researchers specifically used ATLAS.ti, a computer-based application that allows for systematic management of data, to code the data based on keywords and phrases and to generate themes and categories, which aided the entire analysis process.

### Ethical Issues of the Study

The informants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality; hence, with informed consent, they voluntarily participated in the interview sessions (Hwang, 2023). The aim and scope of the research were duly clarified to the respondents, and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any point during the interview. Both are critical to building trust, guaranteeing the reliability of the results, and shielding participants from any damage or humiliation. In this study, fictitious identities

were used to conceal the individuality of all participants, ensuring their privacy and encouraging open and honest responses during the interviews.

### Credibility and Trustworthiness Table

**Table 1:** *Summary of Trustworthiness Measures in the Study*

Criteria	Strategy	Application in this study
Credibility	Triangulation	Utilizing several data sources, techniques, or researchers to validate the results.
Transferability	Thick Descriptions	Providing detailed, rich, and in-depth explanations of the study setting and context to enable comparability.
Dependability	Audit Trails	Maintaining an accurate and thorough record of every choice and modification made throughout the research.
Conformability	Reflexivity	The researchers consistently reflect on their biases and how they may influence the research.

The researchers ensured credibility by fostering confidence in the “truth” of the results. The researchers used several checks to ensure credibility, including providing participants with research findings and an interview guide so that they could verify that the researchers had accurately recorded their responses during the interview sessions. Additionally, the researchers used data triangulation to establish credibility (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023). Various techniques were used to enable a fuller comprehension of the role of CDAs in managing conflict. To increase the study’s credibility, triangulation was used with in-depth interviews and document analysis. To increase the study’s credibility, data from the various research tools were compared and validated. Transferability demonstrates how the results can be applied to different situations or circumstances. By carefully choosing communities experiencing farmer-herder conflicts, applicability was attained. Reliability in quantitative investigations is replaced by the concept of dependability in qualitative studies. Researchers are encouraged to provide an audit trail, which is a record of data, procedures, and choices that may be subject to an outside review. In other words, dependability indicates that the results

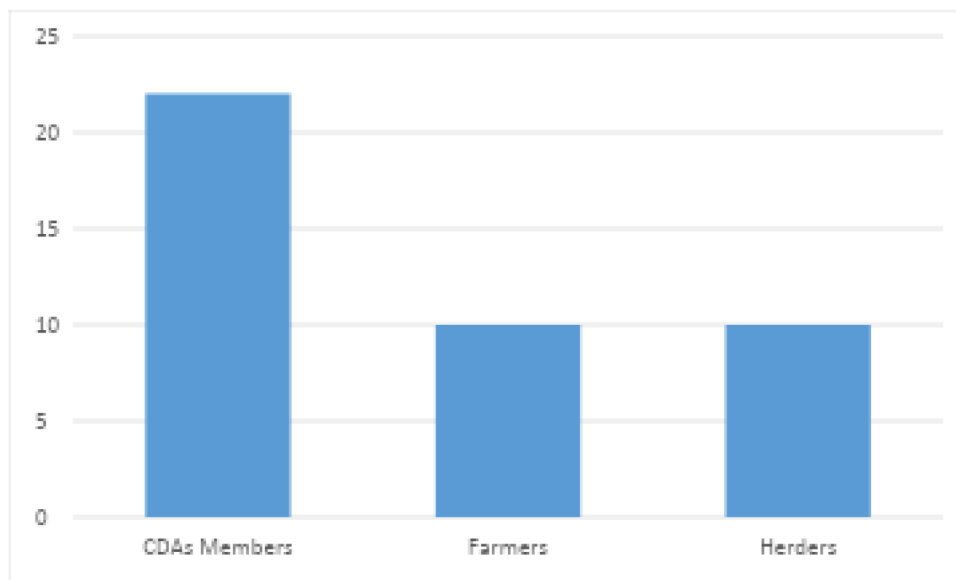
are reliable and repeatable (Wang et al., 2024). As a result, in terms of reliability, the researcher followed the specified protocols for carrying out the investigation. Conformability is the degree of neutrality or the degree to which the results of a study are influenced by the participants rather than the researcher’s bias, incentive, or interest. This quality is another component of credibility and trustworthiness. To attain conformability, the researchers performed a self-critical and reflexive review of the study technique, allowing the perspectives of the researchers and respondents to validate their findings.

#### Researcher’s Reflexivity

None of the researchers is a member of the CDA, a farmer, or a herder. Thus, there were no personal biases in the data analysis process. The data were also verified and triangulated to enhance their credibility and reliability. Additionally, the researchers remained open-minded, understanding that the goal of this study was to uncover intricate insights into how CDAs have handled farmer-herder conflict within their communities.

### Result and Discussions

**Figure 1:** *Frequency Distribution of Respondents*



Source: Researcher Field Study 2025

Figure 1 shows the data of the informants who participated in the study. Of the 22 (52.4%) respondents who were members of the community development associations, 10 (23.8%) were farmers and 10 (23.8%) were herders from *Ikere* and *Ikole* local government areas, Ekiti State. This indicates that most

respondents were members of the community development associations in the study area and were involved in conflict management.

#### The Causes of Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Ekiti State, Nigeria Table

**Table 2:** *Key Findings of the Study*

Theme	Key Findings	Codes	Farmers, Herders and CDAs Views	Analysis/Implications
Theme 1: Use of Underage in Herding of Cattle's	The underage are not fit and often lose focus while herding, thereby leading to the destruction of farmlands by the cattle. This act is more of a cultural activity for herders and continues to lead to loss of investment on the part of the farmers.	Competition over farmland; grazing on cultivated land.	Farmers: The practice of herding cattle should be discouraged through the provision of ranching facilities. Herders: This is a cultural practice held in high esteem. CDA: This act should be stopped through legislation.	The divergence between the responses of farmers and herders needs to be adequately addressed because of the importance of both in the agricultural value chain and to enhance food security.

Theme 2: Land Ownership and Indigenship Claims	The non-recognition of herders as members of the communities despite many years of residing in the area is also part of the causes of the conflict in the area because herders cannot claim ownership of any part of the land.	Land ownership claim.	Farmers and CDAs claim that herders are not indigenous members of the communities. Hence, they have no right to claim any part of the land without paying dues or rent. Herders claim to have lived in the communities for several decades and believe they should be seen as part of the communities.	The issue of indigenship needs to be revised by the government through legislation to build the confidence of herders as members of the communities and enhance sustainable peace.
Theme 3: Migrant Herders and Responsibility Attribution	Herders who do not reside in the communities also contribute to the reoccurrence of conflicts because they are not traceable and often destructive with their movement. They move about with thousands of cattle and graze on farmlands within the communities.	Non-visibility of grazing routes.	Herders, farmers, and CDAs claim that migrant herders who move from country to country and interstate are often the cause of conflicts due to the non-traceability of their movements, and farmers or the communities are often caught unaware of their movements.	The government must enforce all laws banning open grazing of cattle and effective border policing to check the inflow of foreign migrant herders.
Theme 4: Rural-Urban Growth	Some farming and grazing areas have been developed due to urbanization. However, farmers and herders have difficulty accessing or acquiring adequate land for their activities.	Rural-urban development.	Farmers, herders, and CDAs are of the opinion that the communities are witnessing infrastructural and physical developments, thereby limiting the space for large-scale farming activities and herding of cattle.	The government, private sector, and NGOs should train farmers on smart agricultural practices. In addition, herders should be encouraged and funded to ranch their cattle.

**Theme 1: Use of Underage in the Herding of Cattle**

The findings of the study revealed that the use of underage girls for herding large numbers of cattle has also added to the conflict in the study area. According to a participant: This is as a result of the herdsmen who leave the underage to herd hundreds of cows without strict supervision,

and the children do not have the knowledge and fitness to control the cows, thereby leading to the cows eating our crops without control. Therefore, we have no choice but to engage them in a fight if needed (KII/Male/Farmer/45 yr./2025). Similarly, an informant claimed that:

*One day, I saw cows in my farm eating my cassava and immediately looked out for the*

*herdsman controlling them and couldn't locate him early but discovered it was a small child who had left the cows and went to play and pluck mangoes in a nearby farm. I beat the boy, and the parents were angry and almost fought me, but we exchanged heated words (KII/Male/Farmer/39 yr/2025).*

These findings reveal that a combination of cultural, demographic, and environmental factors shape farmer-herder conflicts. The use of underage herders is aligned with the study of Mwendwa (2023) who reported that boys who herd cattle are said to be going through a rite of passage. This is because they have labored alone. Child herders are frequently subjected to harsh weather, long hours, and the possibility of being ambushed by armed robbers in cattle posts. Such conditions in turn encouraged these underage herders to take a long rest at the detriment of the destruction cattle can cause to the farmland. Reports indicate that underage herding of animals has led to the destruction of farms and is a major cause of conflict in some other parts of Nigeria (Obasanmi & Enoma, 2022; Tari, 2021). Therefore, this study shows a similar narrative of the implications of underage herding for crop farming and suggests the vulnerability of agricultural livelihoods to the practices of underage herding in communities and the risk of conflict when supervision is inadequate.

### **Theme 2: Land Ownership and Indigeneship Claims**

The findings showed that herders in the study area now claim ownership of land and indigeneship, having lived in the area since birth and built properties across the land. One participant noted:

*I was born in this town. My parents were born here, as well as my grandparents, who died before I was even born. He is a citizen of this state and has equal rights with other tribes in town. I have nowhere to even go because I cannot actually say I am from any other state (KII/Male/Herder/59 yr/2025).*

The findings also showed that herdsman have resorted to claiming ownership of some of the lands and, in some cases, claimed to be citizens of the state, having spent long periods in the host communities. The indigenes considered this claim as "land-grabbing," driving out people from their ancestral land and renaming their villages in the process (Nanlong, 2022). In contrast, Buhari and Edigbonya (2023) found that the Fulani herdsman have resided in Ekiti State for many centuries and are entitled to citizenship and a portion of the state. In this study, the issue of land claims and citizenship is a source of conflict between migrating herders and indigenous farmers over the rightful use of land for grazing and farming. This further underscores the need for fairness and equality in land ownership rights in the study location. Similarly, it illustrates that conflicts are not only about immediate resource competition but also about claims to identity, belonging, and legal recognition within the community.

### **Theme 3: Migrant Herders and Responsibility Attribution**

Some participants said that the herders who destroy most farms are not from the town. A participant said that;

*Some of those that do high damage to farmlands in most cases can be referred to as migrant herders; that is, they move from town to town and state to state at midnight and in most cases are heavily armed with dangerous weapons, based on what some of our association members who are also farmers told us, and they leave no traces of where to be found, but they don't have a choice but to blame the local one they see (IDI/Female/CDA Executive/67yr/2025).*

This distinction between local and migrant herders complicates conflict management, as farmers may wrongly attribute all damage to local herders, thereby heightening tensions and mistrust. Herdsman have been pitted against farmers due to their persistent southerly migration in quest of grass for their animals, which has finally resulted in violence and devastation (Rosenje et al., 2020). Hence, there is a need to

address the identified causes of conflict in the area to enhance sustainable peace. This distinction between local and migrant herders complicates conflict management, as farmers may wrongly attribute all damage to local herders, thereby heightening tensions and mistrust, which can further exacerbate the conflicts fueled by urbanization and competition for resources.

#### Theme 4: Rural-Urban Growth

In addition, the study found that urbanization is a new cause of conflict. Rural areas are now developing into semi-urban and urban areas, which has resulted in the physical development of virgin land into buildings, industries, schools, etc. One participant stated:

*When I was under 10 years old, most of the areas where you now see buildings and other infrastructure were once bush or farms, but most have since been developed into new sites with various types of buildings (IDI/Male/CDA Executive/51yr/2025).*

This is further corroborated by the assertion of a respondent who said:

*We used to live in the bush or thick forest with my parents and grandparents, with very few huts in our domain. We used to walk long distances with our cows without seeing any farms or houses, but now everywhere is used for farming*

*or building, and we still have to find food for our cows. Therefore, the quest for our survival can be attributed to the conflicts (KII/Male/Herder/24 yr/2025).*

Urbanization and industrialization have occupied almost all accessible land, severely limiting farmers' survival. As settlements grow, large areas of land that were formerly utilized for farming or grazing are taken over for housing, businesses, and infrastructure (Tadesse & Baye, 2024). Consequently, less land is accessible to farmers and herders. While herders require open grazing areas for their animals, farmers require space to cultivate crops. Conflicts frequently occur when farmlands and grazing paths overlap because of the decreasing land area (Nwankwo, 2021).

In addition, the devastation of grazing pathways is another consequence of urbanization; these pathways are blocked by urban growth, such as factories, roads, and estates. Cattle may wander into farmlands and cause crop damage. Such behavior often results in resentment, arguments, and occasionally violent confrontations between farmers and herders.

#### The Roles of Community Development Associations in Managing Farmers-Herders Conflict in Ekiti State, Nigeria Table

Table 3: Key Findings of the Study

Theme	Key Findings	Codes	Farmers, Herders and CDAs Views	Analysis/Implications
Theme 1: Negotiation and Compensation as First-Response Mechanisms	In resolving conflicts, parties were allowed to agree on costs and payments in relation to damages arising from the conflict.	Compensations and claims between parties in conflict	The parties have the privilege to settle between themselves and ensure that the agreement is known to the CDAs.	Claims and compensation are dependent on the agreement of both parties. However, this needs to be brought to the notice of the CDAs in case of any party's default in the agreement.
Theme 2: Mediation to Prevent Escalation and Formal Litigation	CDAs serve as a neutral third party to assist farmers and herders in reaching a reasonable agreement on claims and compensation.	CDAs serves as neutral third party	Both farmers and herders agree that CDAs are effective in mediating conflicts.	CDAs effectively mediate conflicts between farmers and herders. Therefore, its role in conflict management is highly efficient.

Theme 3: Dialogue, Inclusion, and Community Integration	The role of the CDAs through dialogue has enhanced trust in their activities by both farmers and herders, as it has often resulted in a win-win situation for both parties.	Sustainability of communal living	Herders and farmers see the role of the CDAs as effective in sustaining peace in the communities.	Through dialogue, the farmers and herders in the communities have been able to live peacefully.
Theme 4: Reconciliation and Social Healing	Farmers and herders often see the role of the CDAs as imperative in restoring peace and managing conflicts.	Restoration of peace	The farmers and herders agree that the CDAs' role in reconciling aggrieved parties has helped reduce conflicts. Therefore, food security should be enhanced.	Through the involvement of the CDAs, farmers and herders have been able to reconcile their differences, thereby enhancing sustainable peace and food security.

### Theme 1: Negotiation and Compensation as First-Response Mechanisms

As a CDA executive member, I have been on the committee that witnessed a negotiation between some of our farmer members and herdsmen who claim that the herdsmen's cows eat their cassava farm, which is ready for harvest. Although they admitted to it, they claimed that it was not deliberate and paid some money to the farmer (IDI/Female/CDA Executive/63yr/2025).

A participant further corroborated the above assertion by saying:

*Some CDA members once told me my cows were eating their crops, and they asked to negotiate because my child was supposed to watch them. The owner of the farm was also there, and we agreed on a certain amount, which I paid him. After that, I also begged him for forgiveness (KII/Male/Herder/54yr/2025).*

### Theme 2: Mediation to Prevent Escalation and Formal Litigation

Furthermore, the study found that the CDAs also adopted the role of mediator in cases where the farmers and herders were unable to reach an agreement. A participant said:

*There was a time when herders allowed their cattle to eat all the crops on my farm. After several months of hard labor and financial investment, I*

*sincerely wept because there was nothing left for me. They offered me some money, but it was not enough. If not for the Community Development Association (CDA), who intervened between us and later helped to increase the compensation, I would have already made up my mind to report the matter to the police (KII/Female/Farmer/43yr/2025).* Similarly, one informant said:

*Those herdsmen would listen. Because we have been trying to make peace with them through our CDA's intervention, in order to sustain peace in our community, the conflict is better than it could have been. The CDA is doing its best and outstanding work (KII/Male/Farmer/55 yr/2025).*

### Theme 3: Peace Maintenance and Conflict Containment

*Our CDA is very effective and proactive when it comes to issues involving farmers and herdsmen in our community because we don't want further crises. We quickly call both parties when the need arises and help to reach an amicable settlement, and that has contributed to the relative peace we have so far (IDI/Male/CDA Executive/57yr/2025).*

#### **Theme 4: Dialogue, Inclusion, and Community Integration**

The study also found that the CDAs used dialogue to intervene when conflicts arose between farmers and herdsman. A participant said:

*Through our CDA, we engage the herders in dialogue because we consider them part of our community; many have lived here for a long time and have even named their children after us. We even marry their daughters, although very few. So, we engage them time after time to make them see themselves as part of us (IDI/Female/CDA Executive/42yr/2025).* One participant agreed with this assertion, stating:

*I have been a member of this community since I was young and even gave birth to all my children here. The CDA has continued to carry us along in their activities and been so accommodating. They contact me when they want to do their festivals to inform my people and also call me when some of my people have problems with them (KII/Female/Herder/53 yr/2025).*

#### **Theme 5: Reconciliation and Social Healing**

The study further reveals that Community Development Associations (CDAs) are involved in reconciliation, having adopted some of the processes of reconciling community members, especially farmers who have had negative encounters with herdsman. A participant revealed that:

*Despite some of the conflict between the farmers and herders, which in some cases had led to loss of lives and properties, the CDA still engages in various ways to bring everybody together because we don't have another community, and the herdsman have been here for long. Sometimes we fund those who lost properties during the conflict so as to reduce their task of regaining back their lost properties (IDI/Female/CDA Executive/42yr./2025).* One participant further supported the above point by saying:

*At the CDA we ensure all parties to the conflict develop a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society by admitting and dealing with the past through building of strong relationships, which will enhance substantial socio-economic change by creating new platforms such as combined markets, trading, etc. (IDI/Male/CDA Executive/64yr/2025).*

Community development associations serve as a tool to manage farmer-herder conflicts and have been relatively effective in facilitating dialogue and negotiation between the two groups, which is essential for achieving lasting peace and cooperation. Olorok (2022) asserted that only negotiation and dialogue could resolve the state's persistent crises between farmers and herders. Similarly, Brottem (2021) posits that negotiations are crucial for reducing violence between farmers and herders. However, confidence in the entire process is undermined if adjudicating institutions, such as CDAs, are thought to be susceptible to inducements, which can lead to biased decisions and further escalate tensions between farmers and herders. Furthermore, regular issues cannot be resolved informally and amicably if there is mistrust in the mediation process. Some members of the CDAs settle conflicts and decide how much compensation herders should pay farmers, who usually abide by their decisions (Bukari et al., 2018).

Direct discussions on damage compensation and third-party intervention were the primary dispute management techniques employed. Farmers and herders, local authorities, community-based organizations, the police, the courts, and unofficial community groupings are important players in the peacebuilding process (Adams et al., 2023). To transform, restore, and (re)create relationships impacted by conflicts, as well as to allow the complexity surrounding issues and identities that armed conflict would otherwise shut down to flourish within society, reconciliation plays a crucial practical role in fostering peace (Tauchnitz, 2025). However, the role of CDAs is very important because they offer crucial grassroots services, serve as a vital conduit between the public and the

government, and promote peace. CDAs meet local needs, particularly in areas with inadequate public services, through initiatives such as dispute resolution between farmers and herders and the construction of roads, schools, and medical facilities. Because they promote public engagement and are closer to grassroots people, CDAs are crucial for bolstering sustainable peace.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the participants affirmed that the use of underage herders, land ownership and indigeneship claims, migrant herders, and urbanization were responsible for the conflict. They also affirm that CDAs effectively manage conflict through negotiation, mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation. This points out the potential for inclusive community-based conflict management structures to mitigate local disputes while promoting cooperation and mutual understanding. Further studies could explore the long-term effects of CDA interventions on socio-economic development, intergroup trust, and the sustainability of mutually beneficial approaches to managing farmer-herder conflicts. Therefore, the following recommendations are made in line with the findings:

1. The CDAs, farmers, and herders, as found in the study, should address the use of underage people for herding cattle. The recognition of herders who have lived peacefully in the communities for many years as members of the CDAs, because the majority of CDA members are farmers and indigenes of the communities, enhances intelligence sharing and gathering on cross-border herders. More importantly, the herdsman should receive sustainable and adequate funding for animal ranching facilities to put an end to the conflict.
2. Government and private institutions should provide financial resources and training to farmers on smart agricultural systems that require less land to cultivate with larger outputs.

3. The government should build the capacities of the CDAs in terms of conflict prevention and management through workshops, professional training, and peace education to serve as complements to other government measures in ending the farmer-herder conflict.
4. CDAs should partner with NGOs involved in peace-building advocacy to enhance conflict management skills and sensitize community members on peaceful coexistence to improve the peace already achieved.

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