

# Empirical Evaluation of Farmer-Herders' Conflict in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria

Azeez, B.S<sup>1,6\*</sup>, Tajudeen, H.T<sup>2</sup>, Asiru, A.A<sup>3</sup>, Onche E<sup>4</sup> and Abdulkareem A.O<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Agriculture Industries, Kangwon National University, South Korea.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Animal Industry Convergence, Kangwon National University, South Korea.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management, University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

<sup>4</sup>Division of Animal and Dairy Sciences, Chungnam National University, South Korea.

<sup>5</sup>College of Business, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas, USA.

<sup>6</sup>Kangwon National University, Chuncheon, Gangwon-do, South Korea.

## ABSTRACT

The conflict between crop farmers and cattle herders has become a persistent issue in many regions of Nigeria, including the Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State. This study evaluates the nature of such conflict in the state and how it is managed using a multistage sampling technique to select 120 arable crop farmers in the state. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires. The study findings show that poor communication, crop destruction, and cattle theft are the primary causes of conflict between the crop farmers and cattle herders in Kwara State. Of all these causes, 84.4% of the study participants ranked poor communication as the first major cause of conflict, 67.5% ranked crop destruction as the second major cause of conflict, and 53.1% ranked cattle theft as the third major cause of conflict. These conflicts result in detrimental effects, such as property damage and loss of life. This study reveals that negotiation (83.1%), mediation (3.2%), and sanctioning (3.3%) are the conflict management strategies employed in addressing conflicts among the farmers and herders in Kwara State. Despite the use of negotiation, mediation, and sanctioning as conflict management strategies, conflicts persist between arable crop farmers and cattle herders in the study location. This persistence shows there is a need for improved education and communication between stakeholders to address this issue. The study recommends educational programs and enhanced communication channels to foster peaceful coexistence. Overall, the findings underscore the complex dynamics of farmer-herder conflicts and the importance of sustainable conflict resolution approaches.

**Keywords:** Farmer-herder conflict, conflict management, communication, sustainable coexistence.

\*Corresponding author. Email: [adebimpe22@kangwon.ac.kr](mailto:adebimpe22@kangwon.ac.kr)

## INTRODUCTION

The conflict between crop farmers and cattle herders has been a longstanding and pervasive issue across sub-Saharan Africa, with its impacts reverberating through communities and economies. The escalating tensions between these two groups have been documented in countries, such as Burkina Faso (IRIN, 2012), Ghana (Bukari and Schareika, 2015), Kenya (Olaniyan, 2015), and Nigeria (Okoli and Atelhe, 2014). These conflicts have led to loss of lives, destruction of properties, and disruption of livelihoods (Abbass, 2012; Adisa and Adekunle, 2010).

The Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria stands as a microcosm of this broader trend, where the collision of agricultural and pastoral livelihoods has

sparked tensions and violence (Adisa and Adekunle, 2010; Cabot, 2017). The Asa region's geography, characterized by the presence of the Asa River and abundant pasture during the dry season, attracts nomadic herders from northern regions seeking resources for their cattle. However, this influx intensifies competition for arable land, water, and grazing areas, leading to simmering tensions between herders and settled farmers (Adisa and Adekunle, 2010). Poor communication exacerbates misunderstandings and grievances, while instances of crop destruction and cattle theft fuel animosity and resentment among both groups (Tonah, 2006).

The consequences of these conflicts extend far beyond

individual grievances, encompassing broader societal and economic ramifications. Instances of violence between arable crop farmers and cattle herders have devastating consequences, including loss of lives and property, disruption of local economies, and increased food insecurity and rural emigration (Nzeh, 2015). The recurrent nature of these conflicts underscores the urgent need for comprehensive understanding and effective resolution strategies.

This study adopts the model of frustration and aggression from conflict theory to elucidate the underlying mechanisms driving farmer-herder conflicts in the Asa region. According to this theoretical framework, conflicts emerge when parties become frustrated in their pursuit of goals, leading to aggression directed at perceived sources of hindrance (Anifowose, 2006). In the context of Asa, socio-economic disparities, resource competition, and historical grievances contribute to feelings of frustration among farmers and herders, escalating tensions and conflict (Meier et al., 2007). Additionally, perceptions of injustice and relative deprivation further fuel aggression, exacerbating intergroup hostilities (Baron and Kerr, 2003).

To navigate the complexities of farmer-herder conflicts in Asa, this study delves into several important aspects: the primary factors that contribute to conflicts between arable crop farmers and cattle herders in the study area, assessment of the frequency and intensity of conflicts between farmers and herders in the study area, examination of the socio-economic and humanitarian effects of farmer-herder conflicts in the study area, investigation of the various methods employed for conflict resolution and management in the study area, and determination of the perceived effectiveness of the measures used for conflict settlement and analysis of their impact in reducing intergroup tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence. By elucidating these aspects, the research aims to inform targeted interventions and promote sustainable coexistence between farmers and herders in the Asa Local Government Area.

## METHOD

This research work focuses on the Asa Local Government Area (LGA) of Kwara State, Nigeria. Its headquarters is located in the town of Afon. It covers an area of 1,286 km<sup>2</sup>. According to the 2006 census, its population was 126,435. The LGA is named after the Asa River, located just outside the city of Ilorin. Asa River Dam was constructed to increase the supply of potable water by approximately 50,000 cubic meters per day, to the towns within the state.

The study employs a multistage sampling technique. The first stage involves the purposive selection of Asa LGA as a result of the predominance of cattle herders in the environment, and the high population of crop farmers. In the second stage, five villages in the local government were randomly selected. Lastly, twenty-four respondents were randomly selected from each village which

consisted of twenty farmers and four cattle herders, making a total of one hundred and twenty. Data were collected through interviews using structured questionnaires. The variables covered in the questionnaires included the socio-economic characteristics of the study participants, conflict causes, and conflict resolution measures. The analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics to derive meaningful insights.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the survey provided valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of conflicts between crop farmers and cattle herders in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. An in-depth socio-economic analysis conducted in this work revealed a predominantly male agricultural workforce in Asa Local Government Area. 65% of the respondents identified themselves as males (Table 1), which is consistent with rural demographics in similar contexts (Adisa and Adekunle, 2010; Nzeh, 2015). The distribution of age groups, particularly the concentration between 31 to 50 years, underscores the pivotal role of this demographic cohort in agricultural activities. The significant presence of this age group reflects their significant contribution to the local economy of the state (Table 2) (Okoli and Atelhe, 2014).

Also, variations in household sizes suggest diverse socioeconomic dynamics within the community, with larger households potentially facing heightened resource pressures and socioeconomic challenges (Ofem and Inyang, 2014). The disparity in educational attainment, notably a substantial proportion lacking formal education, underscores potential barriers to effective conflict resolution and emphasizes the need for targeted interventions aimed at enhancing communication and conflict resolution skills (Imo, 2017).

### Major causes of conflict among crop farmers and herders

An analysis of attitudinal statements revealed poor communication as the primary driver of conflicts between the farmers and herders of the study area. Specifically, 75% of the respondents cited it as a significant factor (Table 3), echoing findings from previous research (Akorede, 2018). Inadequate communication channels exacerbate misunderstandings and tensions, leading to escalated disputes and violence (Tonah, 2006). Furthermore, the detrimental impact of herders' activities on crop yields highlights the economic losses incurred by farmers. 60% of the farmers reported crop destruction as a major concern (Table 4), fueling resentment and hostilities within the community (Abbass, 2012). The persistent issue of cattle theft (ranked third) underscores broader challenges related to property rights and security, necessitating comprehensive strategies to address underlying grievances and vulnerabilities (Okoli and Atelhe, 2014).

**Table 1:** Socio-economic characteristics of the study respondents.

Socio-economic characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean ( $\pm$ SD)
<b>Age</b>	$\leq$ 30	16	10.0
	31-40	56	35.0
	41-50	33	20.6
	51-60	30	18.8
	>60	25	15.6
<b>Gender</b>	Male	148	92.5
	Female	12	7.8
<b>Marital status</b>	Single	11	6.9
	Married	135	84.4
	Widowed	7	4.4
	Separated	6	3.8
	Divorced	1	0.6
<b>Education</b>	Non- formal	64	40.0
	Primary	41	25.6
	Secondary	34	21.2
	Tertiary	21	13.1
<b>Household size</b>	$\leq$ 5	67	41.9
	6-10	66	41.3
	>10	27	16.8
	$\leq$ 10	58	36.3
	11-20	42	26.2
<b>Farming experience</b>	21-30	45	28.1
	31-40	15	9.4

Source: Field survey, 2017.

**Table 2:** Major causes of conflict among crop farmers and herdsmen in the study area.

Attitudinal statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean ( $\pm$ SD)	Rating
Most farmers tend to record more than what was destroyed on their farm	77(48.1)	24(15.0)	43(26.9)	16(10.0)	3.01 $\pm$ 1.09	7 <sup>th</sup>
Cattle herdsmen roam their cattle on the farm without farmers' consent	94(58.8)	64(40.0)	1(0.6)	1(0.6)	3.37 $\pm$ 0.59	5 <sup>th</sup>
The herdsmen's activities lead to crop destruction	90(56.2)	67(41.9)	2(1.2)	1(0.6)	3.53 $\pm$ 0.61	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Grazing of cattle results in defacing of the road with cattle dung	67(41.9)	92(57.5)	1(0.6)	0	3.40 $\pm$ 0.56	4 <sup>th</sup>
There is poor communication between the farmers and the cattle herders	124(77.5)	30(18.8)	8(5.0)	2(1.2)	3.73 $\pm$ 0.58	1 <sup>st</sup>
Stealing cattle is also a factor that leads to conflict	84(52.5)	66(41.2)	8(5.0)	2(1.2)	3.44 $\pm$ 0.68	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Some community dwellers tend to harass the cattle herdsmen	84(52.5)	30(18.8)	36(22.5)	10(6.2)	3.17 $\pm$ 1.00	6 <sup>th</sup>

Source: Field survey, 2017.

### Perceived effect of Farmer-herders conflict

The impact of conflicts between farmers and herders extends beyond economic losses to encompass broader socio-economic ramifications. Crop destruction emerged as the most significant consequence. 60% of the respondents cited it as a major concern (Table 3), echoing findings from similar studies (Nformi et al., 2014). Loss of stored produce further compounds food insecurity challenges, exacerbating vulnerabilities within

farming communities (Akorede, 2018). Also, incidents of cattle theft not only result in material losses, but also contribute to heightened tensions and retaliatory actions, perpetuating the cycle of violence and instability (Olaniyan, 2015).

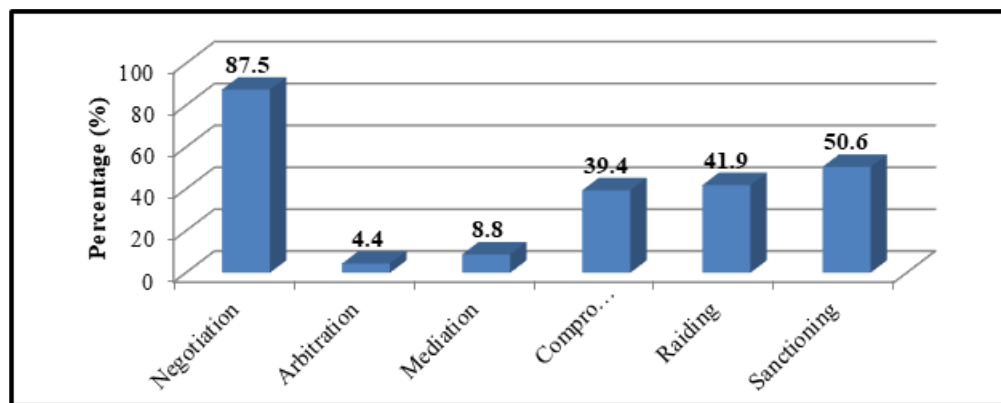
### Measures used for conflict settlement

The survey explored various approaches employed to mitigate conflicts between farmers and herders in the

**Table 3:** Perceived effect of Farmer-herders conflict.

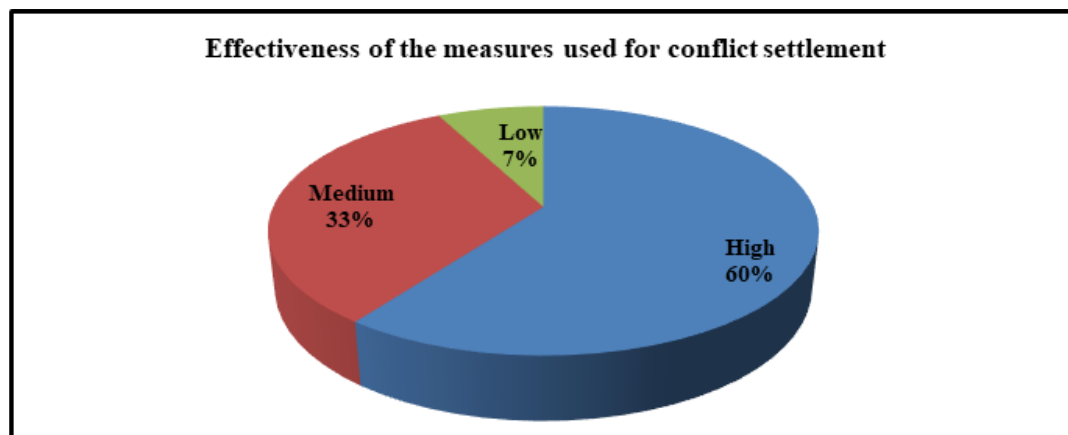
Effect of conflict	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean ( $\pm$ SD)	Rating
Crop destruction	112(70.0)	48(30.0)	0	0	3.70 $\pm$ 0.46	1 <sup>st</sup>
Stealing of cattle	94(58.8)	52(32.5)	12(7.5)	2(1.2)	3.49 $\pm$ 0.69	5 <sup>th</sup>
Harassing of cattle herdsman by rural dwellers	74(46.2)	39(24.4)	47(29.4)	0	3.17 $\pm$ 0.86	7 <sup>th</sup>
Loss of life and properties	93(58.1)	25(15.6)	3(1.9)	3(1.9)	3.25 $\pm$ 1.00	6 <sup>th</sup>
Food insecurity	119(74.4)	35(21.9)	3(3.1)	3(1.9)	3.67 $\pm$ 0.69	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Loss of products in storage	121(75.6)	31(19.4)	5(3.1)	3(1.9)	3.68 $\pm$ 0.69	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Rural emigration	58(36.2)	26(16.2)	67(41.9)	9(5.6)	2.82 $\pm$ 1.02	8 <sup>th</sup>
Reduced farmers' and cattle herdsman's income	97(60.6)	58(36.2)	3(1.9)	2(1.2)	3.56 $\pm$ 0.63	4 <sup>th</sup>

Source: Field survey, 2017.



**Figure 1:** Measures used for conflict settlement by the study respondents.

Source: Field survey, 2017.



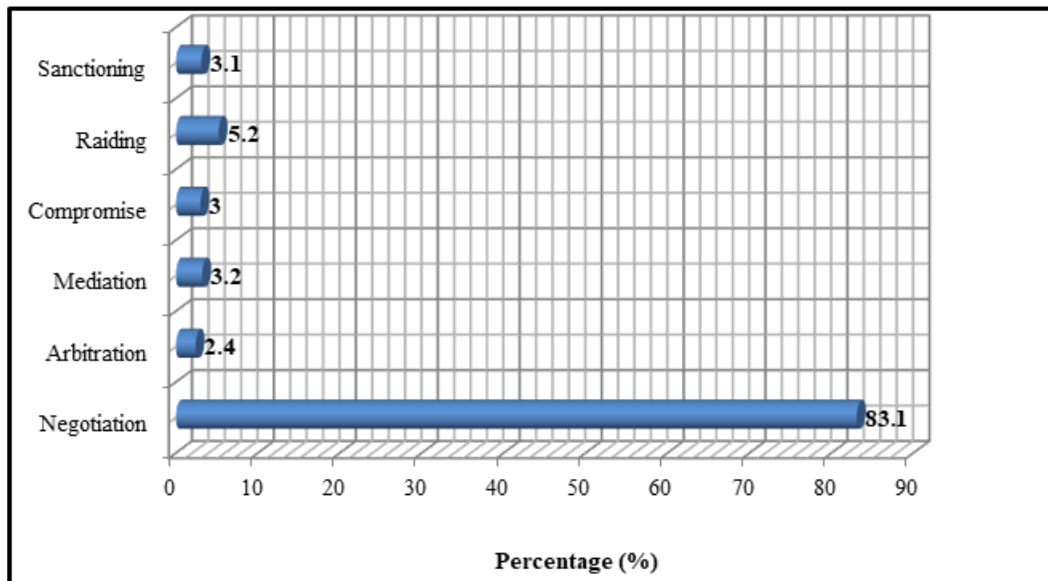
**Figure 2:** Effectiveness of the measures used for conflict settlement among the study respondents.

Source: Field survey, 2017

study area. 87.5% of the respondents endorsed negotiation as the predominant strategy (Figure 1). Negotiation facilitates dialogue and consensus-building, offering a constructive avenue for resolving disputes and promoting mutual understanding (Abbass, 2012). However, the relatively lower endorsement of arbitration and mediation underscores potential gaps in formal conflict resolution mechanisms, warranting enhanced institutional support and capacity-building initiatives (Okoli and Atelhe, 2014).

### Effectiveness of the measures used for conflict settlement

Assessment of the effectiveness of conflict settlement measures revealed a generally positive perception, with 60% of the respondents rating the measures as highly effective (Figure 2). Negotiation, in particular, was the most effective approach, according to 83.1% of the respondents (Figure 3). This aligns with previous research that highlighted the efficacy of dialogue and



**Figure 3:** Effectiveness of each of the measures used in conflict settlement.  
**Source:** Field survey, 2017.

negotiation in resolving conflicts (Adisa and Adekunle, 2010).

### Effectiveness of each of the measures used in conflict settlement

The various conflict resolution methods used in resolving conflicts were evaluated based on the respondents' perceptions (Figure 3). Negotiation was overwhelmingly considered the most effective measure (83.1%), followed by raiding (5.2%), mediation (3.2%), sanctioning (3.1%), compromise (3.0%), and arbitration (2.4%) (Figure 3). These findings highlight the importance of negotiation in resolving farmer-herder conflicts and emphasize the complexity of conflict resolution processes.

References support the effectiveness perception of each measure, offering insights into cultural, social, and psychological factors influencing conflict settlement strategies (Abbass, 2012; Akorede, 2018; Meier et al., 2007; Baron and Kerr, 2003; Anifowose, 2006; Antonioni, 1998).

### Limitations and Bias Acknowledgment

While this study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of farmer-herder conflicts in the Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State, it is important to acknowledge several limitations and potential biases inherent in the research process.

Firstly, the study's reliance on a cross-sectional survey design may limit the ability to establish causal relationships between variables. Longitudinal studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how conflict dynamics evolve over time.

Secondly, the data collection process, primarily through structured questionnaires, may introduce response biases. Respondents may provide socially desirable answers or may not accurately recall past events, leading

to potential information bias.

Additionally, the study's sample size, although sufficient for the research objectives, may not fully represent the diverse perspectives and experiences within the community. Certain groups, such as marginalized populations or those with limited access to education, may be underrepresented in the sample.

Furthermore, the study's findings are context-specific to the Asa Local Government Area and may not be generalizable to other regions or communities experiencing similar conflicts. Variations in socio-cultural factors, geographical conditions, and governance structures could influence conflict dynamics differently in other settings. Finally, despite efforts to minimize researcher bias and maintain neutrality in data interpretation, the researchers' perspectives and backgrounds may have inadvertently influenced the study findings.

In conclusion, while this research provides valuable insights into farmer-herder conflicts, it is essential to recognize and address these limitations and biases to ensure the validity and reliability of the study findings.

### CONCLUSION

The research undertaken in the Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State sheds light on the persistent conflicts between crop farmers and cattle herders, while also evaluating the efficacy of various conflict resolution measures. The findings underscore the prevalence of clashes and violent incidents between these two groups within the study area. However, despite the inherent tensions, the implementation of certain conflict settlement strategies, coupled with the socioeconomic characteristics of the population, has contributed to a partial containment of these conflicts.

To effectively mitigate these conflicts and promote

lasting peace, it is imperative to prioritize education within the community. Both formal and informal educational initiatives can play a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of the farmers and herders, fostering mutual understanding, and cultivating a culture of peaceful coexistence. Additionally, targeted training programs aimed at conflict resolution and mediation can equip community members with the necessary skills to navigate disputes constructively.

It is also paramount to bridge the communication gap between farmers and cattle herders in the study area. Extension agents and community leaders should actively facilitate dialogue and collaboration, fostering channels for open communication and mutual respect. By fostering dialogue and understanding, these efforts can contribute significantly to conflict prevention and resolution.

In conclusion, while conflicts between farmers and herders persist, proactive measures centred on education, training, and communication hold promise for mitigating tensions and fostering sustainable peace in the Asa Local Government Area and similar contexts. Through collaborative efforts and community engagement, lasting solutions can be forged, to ensure the harmonious coexistence of farmers and cattle herders for generations to come.

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