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THE TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS' METHODS OF MANAGING FARMERS-HERDSMEN CONFLICT IN OYUN LGA, KWARA STATE

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Abstract

Farmer-herder issues have become a large-scale problem in Nigeria, which is very much the case in the West African sub-region. They have led to many lives lost, property destroyed, and people displaced. In Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State, the conflict arises from competition for natural resources, the destruction of crops and farmland, and the issue of young boys herding. Therefore, the study examines the traditional institutions' methods for managing farmers-herdsmen conflict. The study adopted a descriptive research design that included both quantitative and qualitative data collection from a sample of 410 participants representing farmers, herders, traditional leaders, and security agents. The study revealed that competition for natural resources, destruction of crops and farmland, and underage herders were the main causes of the conflicts. The traditional institutional methods were negotiation, mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation. They were effective in managing the conflict, with dialogue being the most used. Strengthening traditional institutions' methods and capacity-building for traditional leaders, and developing modern ranching facilities and smart agricultural practices, will enhance the sustenance of peace in the study area.

Keywords: Farmer, Herder, Conflict, Oyun LGA, Traditional Institution

Introduction

Globally, perceived inadequacy of natural resources and conflicting value systems, among other factors, confirm that functional and dysfunctional conflicts are outcomes of incompatible goals. The work of Hussein and Al-Mamary (2019) on conflicts: their types and their negative and positive effects on organisations reveals that conflict has the function of pushing societies and leads to new economic systems, technologies, and institutions; their contribution is that they determined the functional and dysfunctional roles that conflict can play.

According to Okoli (2017), the conflict between nomadic Fulani pastoralists and farming communities in rural Africa, particularly in the West African sub-region, has been a recurring

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theme over the past two decades. Tamou et al. (2018) report that the herding tradition is commonly associated with nomads across Central, East, North, and West Africa, particularly in countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Sudan, with about 20 million herders in West Africa alone. The study recommends adopting modern farming practices to end the conflict. Nwankwo's (2021) work on "Discursive construction of the farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria" shows that violent clashes over water and land use between these herders and farmers have intensified in recent years, leading to deaths, property damage, and the displacement of people. The study recommends that the government implement strong measures to reorient both groups.

Similarly, Adeoye (2017) investigated land-use conflict between farmers and herders, showing that in Nigeria, pressure on arable land and water has repeatedly led to violent clashes between herders and farmers, which have claimed many lives and caused property damage in recent times in states such as Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Yobe, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi. The study recommends measures for joint use without resorting to conflict. Furthermore, the conflict has affected all facets of human life, be it psychological, social, or economic. According to Appiah-Boateng (2025), the conflict has wrecked communities, uprooting people from their ancestral homes, largely women and children, and has ruined farmers' livelihoods and jeopardised the country's food supply. The study therefore recommends adopting traditional methods to manage the conflict. In the same vein, Udosen (2021) reported that the conflict has been worsening; hardly any region or area of the nation has been left unaffected. The study also recommends culturally embedded alternative conflict-resolution methods to provide a viable solution to the conflict.

Before the advent of foreign legal systems, African societies had effective strategies, including traditional institutions. Oladipo's (2021) study of traditional institutions and conflict resolution in contemporary Africa shows that the family forum, age grades, and other institutions are used to address interpersonal, intergroup, and communal misunderstandings. The study recommends amicable settlement of conflicts through mediation, arbitration, and similar mechanisms to strengthen community ties. Similarly, Kiyala's (2024) study on the use of traditional African approaches in contemporary peacebuilding affirms that the African continent has well-established frameworks for conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and community harmony. The

study recommends legal support for implementing decisions made using these methods. Ojo-Ebenezer (2023) also affirms that the role of village heads, traditional leaders, elders, heads of families, and others is not only to resolve conflicts but also to anticipate and forestall them.

In many parts of Kwara State, farmer-herder conflict remains an unavoidable occurrence due to competition for land and water, among other factors. The study by Katibi et al. (2024) on the Impact of Farmers-Herders Conflicts on the Socioeconomic Well-Being of Specific Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Kwara, Nigeria, shows the persistence of the conflict across LGAs in the state. The study recommends local conflict-resolution methods to mitigate the conflict. Likewise, the work of Idowu et al. (2025) on assessing the role of third-party intervention in farmer-herder conflict in the ASA Local Government, Kwara State, Nigeria, reveals the significance of traditional institutions' methods of conflict resolution. The study recommends third-party intervention, such as the traditional heads, to facilitate peace among the conflicting groups. Although studies have shown the need to appraise the traditional methods of conflict resolution through the traditional head, this clearly shows a paucity of research in the Oyun Local Government of Kwara State, which has a significant number of farmers and herders, making conflict inevitable in the local government's communities. Against this foregoing, this study assesses the traditional institutions' methods of managing farmers-herdsmen conflict in Oyun LGA, Kwara State.

Objectives of the Study

- I. Identify causes of farmers-herdsmen conflict in Oyun LGA, Kwara state; and
- II. Identify the traditional institutions and methods adopted in managing farmers-herdsmen conflict in Oyun LGA, Kwara state.

Literature Review

Causes of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflict

Aminu et al. (2021) investigated the causes of the farmer-herder conflict in Taraba State, Nigeria. Data were primarily sourced and analysed using the Structural Equation Model. The study found that the major causes of the farmer-herder conflict in Taraba State were social, environmental, political, and religious factors, but not economic factors. The study revealed that increases in social, environmental, political, and religious factors would heighten the farmer-herder conflict in Taraba State. It is recommended that the government ensure job creation to stop social vices, protect the environment, and promote political and religious tolerance among

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the people. Also, Nnaeto (2025) examined the anatomy of the causes and effects of the farmer-herder conflict on food security in Benue State, 2015-2023. Benue State has recorded a significant increase in farmer-herder conflicts and major setbacks in communal coexistence. This study examines the causes of the conflict and its effects on food security in the state. However, triggers causing muted responses include, but are not limited to, illegal invasion of farms and destruction of crops by cattle, cattle rustling and theft, and the passage of the open grazing prohibition and ranch establishment law of 2017, among others. Effects of the conflict on food security include the destruction of human lives, livestock, farmland, and property; a drop in food production; a rise in food prices; a rise in poverty levels among the people; social dislocation and population displacement, among others. Against this backdrop, the study recommends that, in addition to intensifying campaigns and actions to address climate change, the Benue State government and its key stakeholders should strengthen and improve local peace-building and reconciliation systems, among other measures.

In addition, Adariku et al. (2026) applied conflict theory to examine the factors responsible for farmers-herders conflict in Benue State. The study therefore found that the majority of respondents emphatically agreed that all the factors mentioned above are the major causes of the conflict in Benue and Nigeria in general. It can therefore be deduced from the reports that unemployment, poverty, social, environmental, political, and religious factors, contamination of river bodies by cattle, cattle rustling/theft, rape/kidnapping of women, inadequate grazing reserves/blockage of grazing routes, communication barriers/mutual distrust, and land ownership tussles/indigenisation are the major causes of farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria. In addition, Atolagbe (2024) focused on the causes and consequences of farmer-herder conflict on food production in selected agricultural zones of Kwara State, Nigeria. The study reveals land encroachment as a major cause of the conflict. The study therefore recommends modern farming practices to end the conflict.

Traditional Methods of Managing Farmer-herder Conflict

Bello (2025) examined the extent of public participation and collaborative environmental policy formulation and implementation in resolving the farmer-herder conflict. The work concludes by establishing a collaborative environmental governance framework for peaceful intervention in the farmer-herder conflict and by noting the need to address inherent challenges, including

limited community-based participation, poor inter-agency collaboration, and corruption. This will consequently lead to inclusive policies that address the needs of both farmers and herders. Also, Wonuola and Adisa (2024) assessed African conflict resolution strategies as framed in Nigerian newspapers in relation to the farmer-herder conflict. Specifically, the study assessed the adoption of African Conflict Resolution Strategies in framing the farmer-herder conflict. The findings revealed that the newspapers' reportage tilted towards violence, as the assertiveness/violence-induced strategy of Thomas-Kilmann's African Conflict-Sensitive Instrument was predominantly used to frame the conflict. The study, therefore, recommended that Nigerian mass media organisations, especially newspapers, should adopt a peace-induced/cooperativeness strategy rather than the prevailing violence-induced/assertiveness strategy when reporting conflicts involving various tribes and religions. This can go a long way towards de-escalating the resulting conflicts and accompanying violence, thereby promoting peace and unity in the nation.

In addition, Makinta et al. (n.d.) assess the influence of traditional institutions on Farmer-Herder conflict management in three selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Borno State, Nigeria (Damboa, Jere, and Magumeri). However, the study recommends that traditional rulers, in conjunction with all stakeholders at the village level, should hold routine or annual meetings with farmers and herders to avoid conflict between them in the area. The reports reviewed revealed that the traditional system is the most appropriate mechanism for providing a sustainable solution to the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria.

Conclusively, reports clearly indicate that traditional institutions have been used to resolve farmer-herder conflicts in other parts of Nigeria, especially in Borno, Benue, and Kwara States. At the same time, the Oyun Local Government has not yet been investigated. The present study intends to use this instrument as one of the strategies that traditional institutions use to resolve farmer-herder conflict. This, therefore, constitutes the gap the study intends to fill.

Theoretical Framework

Human Needs Theory

The study is anchored in human needs theory to explain the causes of farmer-herder conflict in the study area. The theory, advanced by Abraham Maslow (1908) in 1954, holds that all humans have certain basic, universal needs and that when these are not met, conflict is likely to occur.

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The need for food, water and shelter is followed by the need for safety and security, a sense of belonging, self-esteem and personal fulfilment (Coward, 2018).

Human needs theory posits that the propensity for ethnic rivalry and conflict arises when human beings or ethnic groups are denied their biological or psychological needs for growth and development (Muller & Gries, 2024). Human needs theory is important because it teaches us how to address and resolve problems by meeting basic human needs. The state of felt deprivation and the need for fulfilment can be defined as human needs (Desmet & Fokkinga, 2020). Desmet and Fokkinga (2020) also claim that the essence of human needs is continuous and that it finds its expression in the changing climate. For example, human needs for protection are constant and only apparent when there is a perceived threat. Needs form an integral part of a human being, and actions seek to meet these needs. According to Hapla (2018), the human needs theory is an alternative to the theory of political control.

Also, Szocik et al. (2018) state that the philosophy of human needs emphasises the fulfilment of needs necessary for individual survival and that these needs become a major source of conflict when compromised. An example is the current dispute between Israel and Palestine, which has been ongoing for too long—the dispute centres on the countries' unmet defence and identity needs. The theory of human needs can be applied to intergroup and intragroup disputes, as well as to international conflicts, across all strata of the community. Likewise, the theory of Needs emphasises the root cause of the conflict and seeks to resolve it by addressing the needs of the parties involved (Zamoum & Gorpe, 2018).

In Compton's (2024) submission, the most significant criticisms of Maslow's human needs theory are its unscientific approach, the use of unreliable samples, and the specific research methods he employed to reach his conclusions. The scholar further noted that the study is not based on any credible empirical research. There is limited to no evidence from the scientific community regarding the validity of Maslow's hierarchy. However, it is often cited in various academic works and forms part of the syllabi of many academic courses, from school to university (Compton, 2024). In another argument put forward by Tripathi (2018), Maslow's theory involves the order of needs within the hierarchy. While it is logical to place physiological needs first and self-actualisation last, people do not necessarily pursue or satisfy these needs in this order. Despite these criticisms, the theory is useful for explaining the causes of farmer-herder conflict in this study, particularly regarding the need for land resources such as water,

farmland, and grazing land for both parties. The needs of the parties to the conflict have remained the root causes of the conflict.

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive research design. The design employed mixed methods, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Both methods were used to generate data because they were the most suitable research procedures for eliciting responses from a large population. A mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to gain balanced, holistic insight into farmer-herder conflict events by triangulating qualitative and quantitative analyses, thereby enhancing the validity of the study's conclusions. This study adopted a purposive sampling technique to select four hundred and ten (410) respondents. Three communities, namely Ojoku, Ipe, and Ira, were purposively selected due to their farming nature and the high presence of herdsmen in these communities.

The farmers and herders were assisted in completing copies of the questionnaire. Key Informant Interview (KII) sessions were held with one (1) traditional leader, two (2) chiefs, and one (1) security agent. In-depth Interview (IDI) sessions were held with two (2) representatives of the herders (Fulani/Bororo) and two (2) farmers in each of the three (3) communities selected for the study. The interview sessions were transcribed and analysed thematically, while descriptive statistics (means) were used to rank responses across the study's variables. The average numerical value for the response was calculated relative to a benchmark of 3.0. To achieve this, the average numerical value of the respondents' opinions was calculated as $(5+4+3+2+1)/5$. Respondents' opinions with a mean score of 3.0 were considered significant, while those with a mean score below 3.0 were not considered significant.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: What are the causes of farmer-herdsmen conflict in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State?

Table 1: Ranking order of the causes of farmer-herder conflicts in Oyun LGA of Kwara State.

Statement	SA	A	DK	SD	D	X	Ranking
Competition for natural resources	366	44	0	0	0	3.81	1 st

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(fertile land/water)							
Attack on cattle by farmers	14	29	36	121	210	1.46	5 th
Non-availability of grazing routes	202	179	8	14	7	3.28	4 th
Destruction of crops and farmland by herders	277	48	0	39	46	3.56	3 rd
Use of underage herders	341	19	0	39	11	3.65	2 nd

Source: Research Findings, 2025

X = mean (A mean score of 3.0 and above was considered a cause, while a mean score below 3.0 was not considered a cause)

The outcomes of the analysis in Table 1 present the causes of farmer-herder conflict in the Oyun Local Government Area of Kwara State. As shown in the table, in the order of ranking the causes of farmer-herdsmen conflict in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State, competition for natural resources (fertile land/water), use of underage herders for herding of animals, which led to destruction of crops, farmland by herders and non-availability of visible/designated grazing routes are regarded as the major causes of the conflict. In line with the quantitative data obtained, oral interview sessions conducted corroborated the above submission. A farmer in Ojoku has this to say;

Herders graze on our farmland whenever we cultivate our crops. Any time there is no food for herders to eat, particularly during the dry season when there is no greener pasture, that is when herder will bring their cattle to feed on our cassava farm. (Interviewee, 2025).

A herder who has been residing in Ira corroborated the above assertion that the lack of grazing routes has made it difficult to graze cattle without touching farmland—the herder explained further;

Compared to the olden days, when I was still small, and we hardly had issues with farmers or landowners, the lack of land resources for us to

occupy and conduct business has now resulted in a crisis. Our cattle need land to graze on and the routes to follow to the stream for water. Most of these routes and grazing land have been occupied by farmers (Interviewee, 2025).

This finding aligns with the study by Muhammed et al. (2015), which found that incessant clashes between farmers and herders were partly caused by population growth, leading to the utilisation of grazing pathways for agricultural activities and residential purposes. Further investigation revealed that herders complained about an increase in farming activities, housing, and development projects that were limiting grazing land or routes for the animals, compared with what was available in the past. This finding aligns with the Human Needs Theory, which holds that inter-group conflict can be addressed and resolved by addressing basic human needs, such as limited land resources (Osayi & Opara, 2018).

The use of underage herders to herd animals, which led to crop destruction, was identified as one of the major causes of farmer-herder conflict in the study area. This assertion was supported by respondents in oral interviews, who reported that underage herders are fond of moving cattle onto farms and leaving them to feed on farmers' crops.

A respondent in Ipe cited thus;

Some of these herders are underage. In most cases, they move around with the radio or phone and hide in the bushes to play, while the cattle go astray. When these cattle arrive at the farm without guidance, they have no choice but to feed on the crops (Interviewee, 2025).

Buttressing this assertion, a respondent explained that

You see, many of these herders always abandon their primary responsibility of guiding the cattle to their children to carry out. And the children are so playful that they abandon the cattle to graze freely on available farms without being monitored. (Interviewee, 2025).

This finding aligns with the submission by Uwuseba and Aboribo (2024) that underage herding creates apprehension between farmers and animal owners, which can lead to crises. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that herders are less concerned about property, particularly farmers' farm

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produce, when they allow immature children to move cattle for grazing.

This act has degenerated into a conflict that could have been avoided if the parents of the underage herders had taken cognisance of it. The lack of visible or designated grazing routes is regarded as the major cause of farmer-herdsmen conflict in the Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State. In this regard, the herder complained about the lack of grazing routes, which makes it difficult for cattle to pass without stepping onto cultivated land. In the account of a community leader in the Ira community;

Herders no longer have routes to graze their cattle as in the olden days, when farmers had a separate location for farming, distinct from the cattle routes. Population growth has made land resources scarce for herder-farmers across the community. Nobody is ready to sacrifice any portion of his/her land for grazing routes again (Interviewee, 2025).

This finding supports the study by Aver and Gwambeka (2020), which finds that the destruction of crops by cattle and other property (reservoirs, irrigation facilities, and infrastructure) by the herdsmen themselves is the main direct cause of farmer-herder conflict. Though oral interview sessions identified an internal motive of monopolising food production in the study area as the reason for such purposeful destruction, further findings also showed that a lack of food for cattle and grazing lands largely pushes herders to feed on cultivated farm crops in the area. Hence, this study suggests further investigation into the monopolisation of crop production in the study area.

Research Question Two: Which traditional institutions and methods are used to manage farmers-herdsmen conflict in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State?

Table 2: Ranking order of the traditional methods adopted in managing farmers-herdsmen conflict in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State

Statement/Item	SA	A	DK	SD	D	X	Ranking
Adjudication	65	82	71	79	113	2.88	6 th
Mediation	203	111	26	35	35	3.41	3 rd

Negotiation	307	91	5	3	4	3.44	2 nd
Dialogue	329	40	10	13	18	3.56	1 st
Reconciliation	61	76	26	111	136	3.36	5 th

Source: Research Findings, 2025

X = mean (Mean score of 3.0, and the above were considered a major method adopted, while the mean score.) Scores below 3.0 are not)

Table 2 presents the traditional institutional methods used to manage Farmer-Herder Conflict in the Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State. As indicated in the ranking, dialogue between the conflicting parties was the primary approach, with negotiation and mediation used when needed. This leads to reconciliation between the parties, after which the traditional institution pronounces adjudication of the matter.

Oral evidence from the interview session affirmed the significant role of traditional rulers in resolving conflicts as they arose. Most respondents to the intervention agreed that traditional rulers in the three communities consistently uphold fair hearing, minimal adjudication, and peaceful reconciliation of conflicts, making them the most suitable places to seek settlement. According to a respondent in Ojuku town;

The Oba has a standard platform to summon disputants, be they herders or farmers, and resolve the dispute. Already, the Ojuku community has registered, and the names of all Fulani settlements make it easy to control and summon any herder suspected of having invaded farmland. Besides, the traditional ruler employed equity and fair hearing in resolving the conflict (Interviewee, 2025).

In the account of farmers in the Ira community during an interview;

The peaceful coexistence between the indigenes and herders is due to the reconciliation and dialogue process implemented by the traditional ruler of this community; otherwise, given the gravity of

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the destruction of our farmland, trouble would have ensued
(Interviewees, 2023).

The finding is consistent with Tohar's (2025) submission that traditional leaders employ dialogue to restore harmony and integrity within the community, value consensus and social cohesion, and ensure that dispute management favours both parties' concerns. This methodology clearly indicated that traditional rulers in these communities are more interested in the peaceful co-existence of residents than in addressing the root cause of the conflict.

The traditional leader also used negotiation and mediation to settle the conflict peacefully. Oral evidence from the interview session confirmed the significant role of traditional rulers as neutral third parties in negotiation and mediation to resolve the conflict whenever it arose. A herder said as follows;

The Oba used to mediate between farmers and us whenever conflicts arose. He always ensured we reached a peaceful agreement whenever a monetary settlement was needed as compensation (Interviewee, 2025).

A herder who has been residing in the IRA for several years corroborated the above assertion that;

We preferred to come to the Palace for the settlement because the traditional ruler employed a process called fair hearing through mediation (Interviewee, 2025).

Miyetti Allah Chairmen in Kwara South said thus.

The Oba in this town (*IPE*) has made conflict resolution easier for us. He always initiates negotiations between herders and farmers whenever there is an issue of cattle-caused farm destruction (Interviewee, 2025).

On the other hand, the findings of this study demonstrated that indigenous farmers who consistently felt cheated continued to consult and respect their traditional methods of conflict resolution, even when these methods did not yield adequate outcomes. This finding aligns with Abdulkabir and Joseph (2023), study, which found that traditional mediators generally sought to ensure peace and harmony in society at every stage of the mediation process. This suggests that, without the cooperation and respect farmers accorded to their traditional rulers, the conflict resolution process might not have been successful in the study area. For instance, the traditional

negotiation method involves shifting the ground to a stage where the herder could avoid paying the compensation demanded by the farmer. The traditional mediation process entails persuasion and appeals by the ruler to both sides to allow peace to prevail, regardless of the damages the parties might have incurred. However, this brings about reconciliation between the conflicting parties, after which the traditional institution pronounces the adjudication. Most of the respondents to this study agreed that traditional rulers were always guided by fair hearing, less adjudication, and peaceful reconciliation of conflicts, making their places suitable places to go for settlement.

A farmer in Ojoku said thus:

“The Oba will not allow anyone to be cheated. Before he can adjudicate a resolution, conflicting parties might have exhausted every other available means, compelling the ruler to use his authority to invoke peace and harmony” (Interviewee, 2025).

Miyetti Allah Chairmen in Kwara South said thus.

“The Oba in this town (*IPE*) always reconciles and ensures that we arrive at a favourable position for both sides. There was no time he forced his decision on us; rather, he would ask us what we wanted and tell us if it was possible or not” (Interviewee, 2025).

The finding corroborated the moral consensus theory that traditional reconciliation of conflicting parties in any given society promotes interpersonal relations and communalism, respect for constituted authority and elders, fellowship, hospitality and extended family systems (Azenabor, 2018). In terms of adjudication, although it has secured reasonable responses in the quantitative findings, one of the adopted methods, it should be clearly stated that respondents in oral interview sessions believe that compelling disputants to obey the verdict of the traditional adjudication process is subject to the will of the parties concerned, because such a verdict could be challenged and reversed in the law court if not satisfied with.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that the major causes of farmer-herder conflict in the study area were underage herding, destruction of crops and farmland by herders, and competition for natural resources (fertile land and water). In resolving the conflict, traditional institutions' methods, such as negotiation, reconciliation, dialogue and mediation, were successful in

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sustaining peace and order, thereby enhancing food security in the study area. The continued use of these methods will further enhance peace in the communities. Hence, the following recommendations were made.

- i. The use of underage herders should be discouraged through government legislation and the creation of modern ranching facilities by the government, with support for private investors in the ranching business, alongside re-orientation of herders towards the need to adopt modern techniques, as opposed to herding cows, which primarily leads to conflict and unsustainable herding practices due to rural developments. In the same light, community-based early warning systems, through appropriate incentives and sanctions to influence the behaviour of key conflict actors and alter conflict dynamics, and peace-making dialogue to get conflicting parties to talk, build trust, and transform relationships.
- ii. Traditional institutions' methods should be further strengthened through sustained capacity-building and workshops for members of traditional institutions to handle conflicts in their localities, as well as through legislative backing for these institutions. Also, farmers and herders should be continually trained by the government, private firms, and NGOs with agricultural expertise, through the Association of Farmers of Nigeria and the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, in modern methods for maximising output from their business activities.

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