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Farmer and Herder Conflict Dynamics in Ghana: The Role of Environmental Scarcity

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Abstract

In West Africa, sedentary crop farmers (farmers) and pastoral herders (herders) have coexisted for many centuries. However, in the past two decades, conflicts between these two groups keep rising steadily across the subregion, in sharp contrast to the symbiotic relationship that farmers and herders had enjoyed. For instance, in March 2020, at a farming community in eastern Ghana, a herder killed a farmer when the latter and his two brothers tried to arrest the fleeing suspect after his cattle destroyed their crops. In October 2017, nine herders and an unspecified number of farmers were killed following altercations in the farm fields. In February 2016, in central Ghana, a herdsman shot a 25-year-old farmer dead following brief interactions on his farm. The next day, farmers launched a reprisal attack that killed over 500 cattle. In a separate incident in the south-eastern part of the country, farmers poisoned the only dam, intending to kill animals belonging to herdsmen in February 2016. From 2015 to 2020, more than 300 conflict events, with about 100 people, were allegedly killed in two districts close to the capital.

What factors explain the location and intensity of farmer-herder conflicts? This project probes the farmer-herder conflict dynamics in Ghana terms of their setting and intensity. It engages the literature on the climate change and conflict nexus, and common-pool resource (CPR) regimes to propose theoretical mechanisms underpinning the clashes. It uses empirical qualitative evidence from detailed interviews conducted in the hotspots to explicate these clashes. It probes how common-pool resource-use regimes in the conflict flashpoints regulate and alter the conflict processes. The study describes how rangelands and small water management practices interact with resource use and evaluate the implications of different user stratifications on the conflicts. The analysis focuses on the effects of climate change, concentrating on changes in resource availability, contrasting cases of abundance and scarcity.