

Original Paper

# Impacts of Crop Farmers - Herdsmen Conflict on Crop Farmers' Livelihoods in Ghana: A Case Study of Asante Akim North District

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**Abstract** - This paper explores the impacts of crop farmers - herdsmen conflict on crop farmers' livelihoods in Asante Akim North District, Ghana, with a special focus on the socio-economic and ecological effects. In the past, crop cultivation and livestock grazing have existed together in harmony in West Africa, but current land and resource factors, such as population pressure, rising environmental stress, population migrations, and cultural frictions, have resulted in violent conflict. Such conflict leads to the destruction of farmland, the elimination of crops, food insecurity, the rise of poverty, and distress, especially amongst women. Using the qualitative method of semi-structured and unstructured interviews, the study evaluates the conflict management practices, which are mostly ineffective because of the lack of participation of the stakeholders, unacceptable compensation, institutional prejudices, and language difficulties. Competition over resources is made even worse by environmental pressures, climate change, and demographic shifts. The findings show the necessity of sustainable land management, including the step of stakeholder involvement, building capacities of the local institutions, and regional collaboration to promote peace and resilience. Recommendations involve enhancing the voice of stakeholders, setting up equity-based compensation schemes, and encouraging conflict resolution provisions based on dialogue. The results support the relevance of a comprehensive, long-term conflict prevention and rural development approach and feed useful information to policymakers, development practitioners, and local communities seeking operational relevance of sustainable peace and socio-economic sustainability in West Africa.

**Keywords** - Famer-Herdsmen Conflict, Crop Farmers' Livelihoods, Socio-economic Impact, Conflict Management.

## 1. Introduction

Agriculture is a critical means of socio-economic survival for rural dwellers and has huge potential for poverty reduction in communities. In West Africa, crop farming and cattle rearing have co-existed for centuries, and interdependent relations and support have evolved between many cattle-rearing and crop-growing towns and villages. Disagreements between crop farmers and cattle herders (Fulani) have, however, been occasioned by competition over farmland. Cattle herders are predominantly Fulani, an ethnic group spread out in many countries in Africa, particularly West Africa.

These herders have moved towards West African wet areas since the 20th century, but Sahelian droughts of 1973 to 1984 made herder migration take off explosively, which has resulted in declining natural resources at destination points (Adeoye, 2017). The Fulani herdsmen have migrated into Ghana from Burkina Faso through the Upper East region, progressing southward step by step to Agogo via the Afram plains in search of grazing fields



for their cattle (Bukari & Schareika, 2015). There is abundant grass and water for the cattle owned by Fulani cattle herdsmen in Ghana. However, in their migration from one grassland to another, the cattle at times pass through farms belonging to crop farmers and destroy the farms as well, since they feed on crops like plantain, cassava, and watermelon in most of the farms in Ghana (Kuusaana & Bukari, 2015). Disagreements of a destructive nature have been the resultant characteristic between the Fulani cattle herdsmen and the crop farmers in the region. Disagreement between crop farmers and cattle herders directly affects the lives and livelihoods of crop farmers and their communities, and also distorts and undermines the sustainability of cattle and crop production in Ghana (Olaniyan et al., 2015). Socio-economic development in developing nations still depends on agriculture, which has the direct possibility of alleviating poverty and increasing the linkage effects on all sectors of the economy.

The negative effects of conflicts between Fulani cattle herdsmen and crop farmers on crop farmers' livelihood and crop production in the study area have been increasing. Conflicts between the two groups are normally termed ethnic conflict since the two groups have very different physical and cultural backgrounds. The socio-economic effects of such clashes include low yields of crops, loss of income of farmers, displacement of farmers, and loss of lives and property. As a result of the behavior of such Fulani cattle herdsmen, Fulani herdsmen are not generally welcome in countries like la Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, and Nigeria (Dimelu et al., 2016).

The foreign status of Fulani herdsmen in host communities such as the Asante Akim area, Afram plains, north-eastern Ghana, and its environs has created a movement of locals that aims to push Fulani herdsmen out of their territory on the grounds of loss of livelihood and misconduct (Soeters et al., 2017). Fulani herdsmen, however, resist relocation because their new locations offer the best grazing fields for their cattle. According to Ogo-Oluwa (2017), the Fulani herdsmen engage farmers in physical combat, overpower them, and feed the crops to their cattle. The affected communities sometimes restrict the movement and grazing of cattle in given places, which is enforced through killing stray cattle or arresting and prosecuting violators.

When the farmers who grow crops attempt to moderate their activities or request the cattle to vacate, the Fulani herdsmen become violent and assault the farmers in the host community. After the conflict, the Fulani cattle herdsmen again attack the crop farmers when they are most vulnerable, such as on their way to their farms, in the farms, or when returning from their farms. Fulani herdsmen have been reported to kill male crop farmers and rape female crop farmers. Most of the very violent conflicts caused by Fulani herdsmen occur in Ghana, which is particularly known for grazing. This has generated fears and frustrations on the part of the crop farmers (Soeters et al., 2017).

Environmental and ecological dangers have also aggravated the root issue of resource scarcity, which is one of the causes of the crop farmer-cattle herder clashes in these Ghanaian societies and the research location in particular (Bukari & Schareika, 2015). Most of the farmers, particularly females, have abandoned their farms for fear of rape and for their lives. The leaders of the people bemoaned that the Fulani herdsmen use their cattle to pollute available sources of drinking water, destroy crop farms, and do many other things. The Agogo Police command in Ghana discloses that more than 300 acres of farmland have been reportedly destroyed between 2014 and 2016, and at least 25 of the crop farmers have been killed as per the 2015 Agogo Police command report within the district (Soeters et al., 2017). Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap in the literature on the impact of crop farmers and Fulani cattle herdsmen on the livelihoods of crop farmers in Ghana.

The research objective was mainly to assess the effect of the conflict between crop farmers and Fulani cattle herdsmen on the livelihood of crop farmers. The study will contribute to the academic discourse of the multifaceted nature of crop farmer-cattle herder conflicts, particularly as it relates to crop production, food safety, the lives of crop farmers, the allocation of land by chiefs to cattle herders, and the conflict that arises between crop farmers and Fulani cattle herdsmen over the use of farmlands.

Finally, this study will influence policymakers to enable them to institute effective and adaptive management strategies that will help reduce the negative effects of crop farmer-cattle herder conflicts in rural agricultural communities.

## 2. Problem Statement

The livelihoods of the rural farming communities in Ghana have been under threat from the farmer-herder conflicts, especially the Fulani cattlemen against the crop farmers. Although crop production and cattle grazing have co-existed over several centuries in West Africa, increased competition associated with access to land and grazing grounds has expanded to the existence of disruptive activities that hurt agricultural production and food security. Fulani herdsmen's migration into Ghana seeking grazing lands has led to the destruction of crops, resulting in the displacement of farmers, thus losing their income source, incurring destruction of property, and even loss of life due to cattle farming by Fulani herdsmen.

All these have aggravated into conflicts because of limited resources caused by environmental degradation and population pressures. In addition, there is the racial/ethnic divide and the cultural tension that worsens the intensity, and reports of violent altercations and human rights violations are documented. These are conflicts that have adverse socio-economic consequences in terms of undermining the immediate survival of crop farmers, besides destabilizing rural development and sustaining poverty in those communities that are affected. Although the significance of agriculture cannot be overstated in terms of the socio-economic welfare of Ghana, there are comprehensive studies on how these conflicts impact the livelihoods of crop farmers entirely and how effective the current set of policies in this regard is (Usman et al., 2017). The research will address this gap by evaluating the consequences of the farmer-herder conflict experienced by crop farmers in Ghana and also by providing evidence-based information to be used as guidance to achieve long-term sustainable conflict solutions and rural agricultural development.

### 2.1. Research Questions

- What are the effects of farmers-herders conflict on crop farmers' livelihood in Asante Akim North District in Ghana?
- To what extent are the effectiveness of the conflict management strategies in the study area?

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1. Overview of Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Ghana and West Africa

Conflicts between farmers and herders have escalated to become a prolonged problem and a protracted cause of conflict in West Africa, including in Ghana. In the past, however, the interaction was mostly peaceful as farmers and herders interacted in mutually beneficial exchanges. These relationships, however, have worsened in the last twenty years, with environmental, demographic, and political factors contributing to the situation. Brottem (2021) contends that these conflicts have become more complex due to crosscutting ethnicity, land issues, and climate change that have made the old dispute resolution vehicles impracticable.

The conflict is most evident in areas such as Agogo, Afram Plains, and the Northern Regions of Ghana. Adomako (2019) documents the conflicts between Fulani herders and local farmers that have achieved the status of the leading security threat in Ghana. Cattle grazing, killings, and night raids have caused loss of lives and their properties due to the destruction of crops by cattle. The reaction of the Ghanaian Government, which initiated Operation Cow leg, is said to be reactionary, short-term, and unsustainable. In spite of the violence, there are still cooperative relations. The authors point out that in regions where it is risky to sustain both trade relationships and social ties, farmers and cattle herders accompany both relations (Bukari and Schareika, 2015). Such relations are tender yet indicate the possibility of coexistence through the embracement of friendly policies and a community approach.

The condition is worse at the regional scale. According to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2021), since 2010, more than 15,000 people have been murdered because of so-called farmer-herder violence, with Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ghana becoming hotbeds. Rather than calm these tensions, the police and the military had further worsened the situation regarding security. Due to the increasing levels of conflict between crop farmers and Fulani cattle herdsman, the situation has transformed into conflict over identity, rather than resource competition; thus, the conflict is complex to resolve.

### ***3.2. Impact of Farmer-Herder Conflicts on Agricultural Productivity and Livelihoods***

The consequences of farmer-herder conflict on both farming and livelihoods are wide and deep. These conflicts interfere with agricultural production, lower harvests, and destabilize food security. According to Nnaji et al. (2022), farmer-herder conflicts enhance food insecurity among the rural households in Nigeria due to their incidence and severity. The research also found that exposure to conflict undermines dietary diversity and multiplies the days on which households go without food.

There are similar patterns in Ghana, especially in the Agogo area. In another study by Sadiq et al. (2021), the researchers carried out a study in the middle belt region of Nigeria and revealed that people in conflict houses recorded massive losses on farm incomes because of invasions of farmlands. The magnitude of the income differentials between highly and less conflict-prone households was better realized in farm income, representing 79.3% than in non-farm income, which is 55.5%. That indicates that agricultural life is overrepresented as victims of conflict.

Muriuki et al. (2023) looked into the complementary consequences of conflict and climate change in Ethiopia and Malawi. Their results demonstrated that response to the conflict reduced the Food Consumption Score by 16.13 percent, and Malawi was subjected to more harsh effects. The study highlights the confounding effects of conflict and environmental shocks that shake the foundation of households and dwindle agricultural yields.

Alhassan et al. (2024) determined the impacts of the conflict adaptation strategies on the multidimensional poverty and the subjective well-being in Ghana. They discovered that the households that used on-farm and non-farm strategies had much success in reducing poverty and enhancing well-being. Nevertheless, land accessibility, being close to grazing routes, and extension services had some effects on the use of these strategies.

On the whole, the literature establishes that farmer-herder conflicts do not only interfere with crop and animal production but also reinforce poverty and social exposure. Its economic impacts are drastic, and its effects will have lingering impacts on rural growth and national food security.

### ***3.3. Land Tenure Insecurity and Its Role in fuelling Farmer-Herder Conflicts***

Farmer-herder conflict in Ghana and West Africa in general is a major outcome of land tenure insecurity. Poor definition of land rights and sharing contributes to conflicts between herders and farmers, as cases of violent conflicts have been reported. According to Kugbega and Aboagye (2021), analysis of the tenure insecurity situation in Agogo, Ghana, revealed that the indigenous crop farmers considered themselves denied their customary lands because they were granted leases to pastoralists by traditional authorities. Such a feeling of dispossession compromises trust and builds conflict.

According to the SPARC report (2023), tenure insecurity is a neglected aspect during the analysis of conflicts. Few of the reviewed studies refer openly to security tenure as one of the root causes despite its centrality to resource conflicts. The report reasons that poor governance, intergroup relationship, and ethnic discrimination are commonly mentioned; however, tenure insecurity is a vital underlying issue.

Opitz-Stapleton et al. (2023) reported that land tenure insecurity is giving a mammoth economic burden to Nigeria pastoralist households. The extorted or the one facing evictions cannot be very certain whether to cultivate crops or not, and this affects their productivity negatively as well. The report also demands the education of rights and the provision of laws on disputes over tenure. It is also evident in the literature that decision-making with regard to investment is influenced by tenure insecurity.

Crop farmers are unlikely to believe it is worth their investment to make land improvements only to have them lost. Nonetheless, other literature, such as Kugbega and Aboagye (2021), found that crop farmers did not withdraw investments based on the tenure security constraint, as its withdrawal would jeopardize their livelihoods. Altogether, tenant insecurity enhances the rivalry for resources and weakens the actions against resolving crop farmer-cattle herder conflicts. To tackle this challenge, reforms that facilitate better governance with regard to land, the adaptation of customary rights, and participatory planning of land use are required.

### ***3.4. Policy Responses and Conflict Mitigation Strategies in Ghana***

The policy solutions to crop farmer-cattle herder conflicts in Ghana have changed due to the changing nature and intensity of the instances of these conflicts. Traditionally, the state made use of security-oriented measures, such as Operation Cow leg, the focus of which was the removal of cattle herders from conflict-prone places. These initiatives mitigated tensions in the short-term, but were ineffective and accused of militarization and thereby failed to solve the causes of the conflict (Adomako, 2019). Ghana has in recent times applied a more holistic approach in which a National Framework Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism content that involves an element of prevention, pre-emption, protection, and response. This model is also an element of the general security policy of the country and in line with regional programs like the Accra Initiative, or a collaboration system among states in West Africa that may respond to cross-border risks and radical terrorism (CSIS, 2023).

Ahmed (2022) points out that crop farmer-cattle herder relations in Ghana have been politicized by the lack of well-ordered land use regimes and discriminatory ways of accessing land. Ahmed (2022) has a view that land-use planning should be participatory, and livestock passes and grazing reserves should be established to eliminate competition for resources. Such measures would need to be coordinated between local governments and ECOWAS member states to be effective.

Locally, measures taken to mitigate the conflict include the introduction of a bylaw to regulate grazing and crop farming activities. Traditional authorities tend to enforce these laws, and they are important in the settlement of disputes. Nevertheless, they can be more or less effective in accordance with the presence of strong local institutions and the openness of decision-making processes. There has also been a boom in community-based approaches. The study by Bukari and Schareika (2015) established that the establishment of trusting and constructive interpersonal relations, as well as the mitigation of negative tensions between crop farmers and cattle herders, was possible provided that dialogue forums and common work on community projects took place. The most effective form of such efforts is through the partial facilitation of Non-Governmental Organisations and local governments that supply resources.

With all this, there are still issues. The conflict is worsened by climate change, population increase, illegal surface mining activities, and ethnic conflicts. According to the CSIS report (2023), the stability of Ghana is becoming more precarious, and active conflict prevention is the order of the day. It suggests external assistance and technical aid, which would enhance the conflict resolution capability and shock resistance of Ghana to environmental crises. This has led to a transition of Ghana's policy responses with regard to security being changed into proactive and more participatory practices. Regardless of the advances that were necessary to stabilize the region, future generations will demand long-term investment in governance of the land, involvement of the community, and cooperation in the region.

#### 4. Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative research method. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources, including crop farmers, key informants, and government reports. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were used to solicit in-depth views on the research problem and objectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to solicit views from District Agricultural officials, Police officials, traditional leaders, Assemblymen, unit committee members, Crop farmers, and Fulani cattle herdsmen representatives in Agogo, Amantena, and Hwidiem. Participant and physical field observations were employed to obtain first-hand information on crop farming activities in the study area.

The target population included affected crop farmers, District Agricultural officials, Police officials, traditional leaders, Assembly members, unit committee members, and the Fulani cattle herdsmen's representative in the district. Non-probability sampling techniques were employed to identify affected crop farmers in selected communities, while purposive sampling was used to select key informants and opinion leaders. The units of analysis were affected crop farmers in the affected communities, chosen based on their experience and awareness of the conflict.

The study used semi-structured and unstructured interviews to gather data from crop farmers in the affected communities in the Asante Akim North District, Ghana. The population is 69,186, representing 1.4% of the Ashanti Region's population, with a sex ratio of 95.1, which is higher than the Ashanti Region's average of 94.0. The district has a high age dependency ratio of 82.5%, with males having a higher dependency ratio than females. Ethical considerations were upheld, as the researcher issued a student identification card to the farmers and key informants to obtain their consent and authenticate their identities. Data was analyzed using content analysis after transcription, and descriptive statistics were used to compare and contrast the responses. The study aimed to understand the problem in the affected communities and provide insights for future research.

### 5. Results and Findings

#### 5.1. Effects of the Conflict between Crop Farmers and Fulani Cattle Herdsmen on Crop Production

Both male and female crop farmers have confirmed that the conflict reduced their harvest output. This situation is true because most maize, plantain, and cassava have been burnt. A male crop farmer from Agogo who had a watermelon farm witnessed destruction in his farm. This was his narration.

*'Those Fulani cattle herdsmen used their cutlasses to cut open my watermelon for their cattle to feed on in my presence. The two men then asked me to run away from my farm or lose my life, so I left without questioning them because of the weapons they had' (Male at Agogo, 2017).*

A crop farmer reports the destruction of 2-3 acres of watermelon, reducing income and causing fear among farmers. Fear and security breaches have led to abandonment and low crop yields, affecting crop production negatively and increasing prices. Crop farmers and Fulani cattle herdsmen negatively impact crop production in the Asante Akim North district. Low yields after harvest, food insecurity, reduced labor size, security challenges, and increased food crop prices have led to malnutrition and starvation. Fear and ethnic tension have led to crop farmers abandoning their farms, resulting in increased demand and higher prices. Additionally, crop production has negatively affected income levels, as cattle invasions destroy crops and discourage savings in affected communities.

#### 5.2. Effects of the Conflict on the Welfare of Crop Farmers at the Household Level

Female crop farmers in Agogo, Hwidiem, and Amantena reported that Fulani cattle herdsmen destroyed their farmlands, leading to food shortages and increased tensions. The destruction of crops like plantain, yam, cassava,

watermelon, and maize has forced some crop farmers, particularly females, to abandon their farmland. A female respondent who grows plantain on a large scale at Hwidiem narrated that;

*'I went for a loan to invest in my plantain farm. During the time of harvest, I hired people to assist me to harvest. After spending about three hours on the farm with the labourers, Fulani cattle herdsmen approached us with a gun, warning us to allow their cattle to feed on the harvested plantain because they were starving. We immediately took to our heels to save our lives. Fortnight afterwards, we went back to the farm to find not a single plantain on the land, all fed on by the cattle, including the suckers' (Female at Hwidiem, 2017).*

Female crop farmers and Fulani cattle herdsmen face vulnerability due to a lack of compensation and sexual harassment. Mixed cropping allows them access to food crops like cassava, yams, plantain, and cocoyam, making fufu their traditional food. No wonder an old woman interviewed complained that;

*'The Fulani cattle herdsmen set fire to my plantain farm. Now I have been deprived of fufu, so I have resorted to eating banku, which is not my favourite food. I feel hungry always since fufu is out of my diet now' (Female at Agogo, 2017).*

Female crop farmers in Agogo and Hwidiem have reported that Fulani cattle herdsmen set fire to their farms, resulting in violent conflicts and injuries. These farmers are unable to pay off loans and face food insecurity due to the destruction of their crops. Most crop farms have been destroyed completely, leading to food shortages and poverty. Female crop farmers also struggle to sell their crops, causing psychological effects on their livelihoods. The destruction of crops has led to a reduction in crop yield, food insecurity, and low income for the crop farmers. Some crop farmers are unable to repay loans from financial institutions due to the destruction of their crops. One female crop farmer who is a victim at Hwidiem bitterly narrated that:

*'I went for a loan of five thousand Ghana Cedis to invest in my plantain farm. A day before harvest, I was called by one farmer who said that the cattle were on my farm feeding on my plantain. The Fulani cattle herdsmen helped cut the tall plantains down for the cattle to feed on them. This is wickedness; now I cannot pay back the loan. How do I survive because the farm is my only source of livelihood?' (Female at Hwidiem, 2017).*

Female crop farmers in the study area are fearful of Fulani cattle herdsmen, leading to abandonment of farms and financial burdens. This discouragement has led to food insecurity, as traders in Accra and Kumasi purchase scarce crops, thereby increasing the prices.

Furthermore, the majority of male crop farmers in Agogo, Hwidiem, and Amantena have their farmlands destroyed by Fulani cattle herdsmen, leading to food insecurity, psychological effects, and difficulty in paying utility bills. The destruction of farmlands has resulted in a shortage of food for crop farmers and their families, affecting their ability to pay off loans, access healthcare, pay school fees, and electricity bills. The population of cattle in the study area has increased over the years, allowing cattle herdsmen to destroy farmlands within hours of feeding. Most crop farms are destroyed completely, with Agogo and Hwidiem farmers suffering most at the household level. Male farmers prefer to store food for their families, as food is scarce during off-farming seasons. Some crop farmers fear being killed by cattle herdsmen due to their armed nature. Only one crop farmer reported difficulty paying utility bills, while all female respondents and male respondents in the study area did not raise this issue.

Male crop farmers in Ghana struggle to pay school fees due to the constant destruction of their crops by Fulani cattle herdsmen. This conflict affects crop yield, income, and livelihoods, affecting the community and the farmers' ability to sell their produce and store food. No wonder a male crop farmer narrated that.

*'I don't have any formal job, and I rely solely on my farm for my livelihood. But because my watermelon, plantain, cassava, and tomato farms have been destroyed by these Fulani cattle herdsmen, I cannot pay back my loan, pay my children's school fees, because I have nothing to harvest and to sell for money' (Male at Agogo, 2017).*

This situation in the study area has led to increasing hardships, food insecurity, and deepening poverty levels of crop farmers.

### **5.3. Key Informants' Views on the Effects of Conflict on the Welfare of Crop Farmers at the Household Level**

The conflict between Fulani cattle herdsmen and crop farmers in the Asante Akim North district has significantly impacted the livelihoods of farmers. The destruction of farmlands and crops, often caused by cattle feeding on crops or setting fires, has led to food insecurity, family insecurity, and increased poverty levels. The conflict has had a profound impact on the livelihoods of farmers. An Assemblyman narrated that;

*'I had an opportunity to visit some destroyed farms in the district. I nearly wept because those crop farmers have lost everything on their land. These farmers are married and would be very difficult for them to perform their duties as men in the house'.*

Victims of farm destruction often do not receive compensation from cattle herdsmen, leading to livelihood loss for affected CROP farmers. Paid compensation for crop farmers is also too small to cover losses.

### **5.4. Effectiveness of Conflict Management Strategies in the Study Area**

Conflict management mechanisms in Agogo and Amantena have failed, with female crop farmers disregarded as key informants and losing confidence in traditional authorities and police. No effective conflict management strategies have been implemented in the area. A female crop farmer narrated that;

*'The chiefs and the police here have aligned themselves with the Fulani cattle herdsmen and their owners. They even complicate the situation and stress you so you just forget about your farm and think of what to do next. Our chiefs and the police have never been supportive' (Female at Agogo, 2017).*

Female respondents at Hwidiem and Amantena reported that conflict management strategies in the district have not yielded profitable results, with crop farmers being cheated and cattle herdsmen not paying compensation, affecting their human rights. A female crop farmer narrated;

*'Cattle destroyed my cultivated cassava worth four thousand Ghana cedis. But the Fulani cattle herdsmen only wanted to give me just a thousand Ghana cedis as compensation after destroying all my crops. I did not accept that little money but had also reported to the police, but yielded no results' (Female at Amantena, 2017).*

In addition, male crop farmers at Agogo, Amantena, and Hwidiem have expressed concerns about the lack of conflict management strategies, leading to farm destruction by Fulani cattle herdsmen. Few have benefited from conflict management strategies, and compensation for farm destruction is often minimal. The lack of effective conflict management strategies further exacerbates the situation.

### **5.5. Key Informants' Views on the Effectiveness of Conflict Management Strategies in the Study Area**

Few key informants in affected communities report effective conflict management strategies benefiting crop farmers, while the majority of informants believe such strategies should benefit crop farmers, who are disadvantaged. The Fulani cattle herdsmen's representative explained;

*'The crop farmers overcharge us for accidentally destroying their crops. Therefore, paying that much for compensation becomes a challenge, but only pay based on the money we have at our disposal' (Key informant, 2017).*

The conflict management strategies in the Asante Akim North district have been found to be ineffective due to the lack of participation and representation of crop farmers and Fulani herdsmen. Traditional elders and police have reported that Fulani cattle herdsmen often pay part of the compensation but never pay the rest. The national and district-level conflict management strategies have also failed to effectively manage conflicts, with crop farmers losing confidence and farmers receiving partial compensation. The lack of local language and representation at the community and district levels further complicates the situation.

### **5.6. Discussion of the Findings**

The evidence provided in this paper highlights the deep and complex nature of crop farmer–cattle herder conflict, especially that between Fulani cattle herdsmen and crop farmers in Asante Akim North District of Ghana. Such conflicts have led to great destruction of agricultural land and crops, making food insecure, further impoverishing people, and causing difficulties in households. Destruction of agricultural productivity negatively affects the livelihoods of farmers, which increases their economic vulnerability and jeopardizes rural development. This is in line with the previous literature, as, according to Brottem (2021), land use conflicts prompted by competitive use of resources are one of the major contributors to rural instability in West Africa. The fact that the study has found that the victims do not tend to get proper compensation further adds to the economic plight of the victims, which reflects the structural failures of a conflict-resolving mechanism. Such an ineffective implementation of the conflict management strategies leads to another key problem.

The conventional methods of dispute resolution, which are usually carried out within a community, have missed the mark in solving the intricacies of such conflicts. Institutional incompetence, the prejudice of traditional authorities and law enforcement agencies, reduces the trust between the stakeholders and reinforces tensions (Brottem, 2021). This observation is reflected in the study of Adeoye (2017), who also maintains that the failure of both formal and informal institutions to abide by the currently changing socio-economic dynamics obstructs sustainable conflict resolution. Trust is also lost due to the marginalization of farmer voices in the decision-making processes, which undermines the elaboration of inclusive solutions.

It is found that environmental degradation, climate change, and demographic pressures are factors that exacerbate the conflict. It influences the availability of pastures and water resources as a result of climate variability, aggravating competition between farmers and herders (Adeoye, 2017). Land encroachment and land tenure conflict are a result of the pressure due to population growth and migration. Such environmental and demographic pressure aligns with the study by Brottem (2021) that emphasizes that resource-based conflicts in West Africa are distinguished by environmental degradation and insecure land tenure. The recommendation the study gives on participatory land governance and regional cooperation concurs with the wider demand of sustainable land management practices using local knowledge and the involvement of the stakeholders.

Also, psychological and social effects on the families in distress are noticeable. Women, who are key carers and suppliers of food, mostly suffer the impact of the lack of food and economic crisis, and it may result in an increase in stress in the family and even the disintegration of society. The same feature of a gendered dimension of conflict effects has been observed in the same context, and therefore, all these prove that there is always a need for a gender sensitive approach to handling conflict. The inclusivity and participatory nature of the study are consistent with what is abundant in the literature that urges the inclusion of the community and equal distribution of resources to enhance sustainable peace.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Crop farmer - Fulani cattle herder conflict in Asante Akim North District is a complicated problem based on competition in the use of resources, environmental factors, and socio-cultural vibes. The existing approaches to conflict management are highly inefficient because of the problem of reduced participation of the stakeholders, the

inefficiency of compensations, and the language barrier, which disrupts trust and resolution attempts. The scarcity of resources and violence is further aggravated by climate change, population growth, and ethnic differences that threaten the socio-economic stability and rural way of life. The solution to these challenges has to be a multifaceted approach focusing on equitable governance, sustainable management of resources, and regional collaboration. Investment in building land tenure security, community engagement, and conflict prevention mechanisms over long periods is the best way to support peace and resilience. In the absence of these measures, the vicious cycle of violence and socio-economic degradation is bound to continue, resulting in poor development and coexistence in the rural area.

Based on the results of the research, the following recommendations were stated;

- The government ought to increase the representation of stakeholders in conflict resolution mechanisms such that crop farmers, Fulani cattle herders, traditional leaders, and government agencies should be well represented.
- Sustainable land usage planning and management of the environment through government control should be adopted to minimize competition and degradation of resources.
- The current status of the local institutions dealing with the management of conflicts needs to be enhanced by capacity building and training to enhance mediation and dispute resolution.
- Encourage cross-border cooperation/dialogue between neighbouring communities in order to control transboundary pastoral movements.
- A just system of compensation in case of damages caused by the cattle of Fulani herders should be developed and established to increase trust and accountability.

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