Managing Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Ghana’s Volta Basin*

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Farmer-herder conflicts have become rather widespread throughout West Africa and constitute a threat to peace and stability in many countries. This paper examines the management of farmer-herder conflicts in the Volta basin of Ghana. Using information gathered from five communities through the use of participant observation, interviews and focus group discussions, the paper describes the increasing migration of farmers, herders, fishermen and traders into the Volta basin area. The increasing population has accentuated conflicts between farmers and herders as the two groups compete for the use of the resources of the area. The paper also examines in detail the role that the Livestock Farmers Association and other institutions play in mitigating and managing farmer-herder conflicts in the Volta basin.

Key word: Conflict, Volta basin, herdsmen, farmers and Livestock Farmers Association

Introduction

Conflicts between farmers and herders have always been a common feature of economic livelihood in West Africa. However, prior to the beginning of the 20th century, such clashes were largely limited to the Sahelian countries. Cattle-keeping was mainly concentrated in the arid and semi-arid areas of West Africa, where crop production was done on a limited scale. Farming activities in the arid areas were limited to the short rainy season. This meant that the vast expanse of semi-arid land and pasture available in these areas were left to the exclusive use of herders. Herders could, therefore, keep their animals away from farming areas most of the time and, thus, reduce the incidence of livestock destroying crops. During those times too, cattle numbers were low in the humid and sub-humid zones of West Africa. The low human population, the high numbers of wild animals, and the fear of losing animals to diseases, especially trypanosomiasis, prevented herders from settling permanently in the humid zone waters (Bayer & Bayer, 1994; Blench, 1994).

There is a consensus among observers that farmer-herder clashes have only since the 20th century become widespread in the coastal countries of West Africa.1 Factors that account for the increasing farmer-herder conflicts include: The southward movement of pastoral herds into the humid and sub-

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1 One of the few dissenting views on the idea that farmer-herder relations have been progressively deteriorating over the decades was expressed by Breusers et al. (1998). After an investigation of farmer-herder relations in Burkina Faso, they concluded that conflicts between Mossi farmers and Fulani herders was an old phenomenon. They also described the animosity between the two groups as not being sincere but rather a 'frontstage discourse'. (See Oksen, 2000)

* Northern Ghana is amongst the most deprived regions of Ghana and characterized by a general lack of social and economic infrastructure such as water, electricity, schools, paved roads, clinics etc. Furthermore, the savanna region experiences a long dry season from December to May which leaves the food barns of most households virtually empty forcing many of them to seasonally flee to southern Ghanaian towns in search of menial jobs. Opportunities for farming activities in the dry season are limited to settlements with dams and irrigation facilities. The high population density in parts of the region has resulted in a sharp reduction in the fallow period and an intensification of agricultural production, especially on farmlands close to areas of human settlement. The sizes of compound farms are small, having been fragmented amongst several household members, whilst distances to bush farms are far and growing (Folly, 1997; Benneh & Agyepong, 1990).
humid zones; the successful control of the menace posed by diseases; the widespread availability of veterinary medicine; and the expansion of farming activities into areas that hitherto served as pastureland. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that, since the 1950s, there has been a considerable growth in human as well as livestock population in the coastal countries of West Africa. The result has been a growing pressure on natural resources and a stiff competition for available resources between farmers and herders. (Adebayo, 1997; Bernadet, 1999; Breusers et al., 1998).

Since the Sahelian drought of the 1970s and 1980s, and the accompanying migration of a huge number of pastoralists into the fringes of the humid forest zone of West Africa, there has been a massive increase in the incidences of farmer-herder conflict. Besides, these conflicts are becoming increasingly violent, resulting in communal conflicts and deaths in several areas. There are frequent media reports of farmer-herder clashes resulting in mayhem and deaths in several countries, including Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Benin, and Cote d’Ivoire (see Akpaki, 2002; Diallo, 2001; Schlee, 1997; Tonah, 2001).

Throughout West Africa, the rising incidence of farmer-herder conflicts and the violence and mayhem that frequently accompanies such conflicts have become an issue of public concern. These conflicts are not only regarded as a threat to peace and national stability but also have implications for international relations within West Africa. Clashes between farmers and herders frequently spill across national borders, thus posing security problems along the often poorly patrolled borders. In Ghana, Fulani herdsmen frequently cross the border reports of Cote d’Ivoire or Burkina Faso during periods of conflicts with sedentary farmers. Similarly, Fulani herdsmen have, in the past, moved from their base in northern Cote d’Ivoire into the Ghanian side of the common border, following conflicts with Senoufo farmers (Bernadet, 1999). Besides, pastoralists (mainly Fulani) have now settled permanently in all the countries of West Africa. Most of the Fulani in Ghana, originally come from the Sahelian region. The development of farmer-herder relations and, in particular, the treatment of Fulani herders by indigenes have not only national implications but also implications for the relations between Ghana and her northern neighbours. Farmer-herder conflicts also have serious implications at the national and the sub-regional levels.

This paper examines the management of farmer-herder conflicts in the middle Volta basin of Ghana. It describes the increasing migration of farmers, herders, fishermen and traders into the area. The results of this study would be useful in understanding farmer-herder conflicts in other West African countries and would also provide some ideas in the management of such conflicts in the subregion.

**Study Area and Methodology**

The middle Volta basin of Ghana refers to that part of the country lying roughly between latitude 7° and 9° north. It consists of the entire central part of the country drained by the Black Volta river in the west and the Lake Volta in the east. Geographically, it includes the entire area between the savanna in the north and the rain forest zone in the south. It is often referred to as the transitional zone between the savanna and the forest. This is reflected in the varied rainfall and vegetation pattern of the area. In the savanna area, the rainfall pattern is uni-modal, with a peak rainy period between May and October, while towards the fringes of the forest zone, there is a bi-modal rainfall pattern (Atebubu District Assembly, 1996). The middle Volta basin is a flat plain scarcely rising above 200 meters and is traversed by Lake Volta and several rivers running into the lake. The generally low terrain with gentle slopes and the sluggishly flowing rivers leave a lot of alluvial deposits on the river beds and along the banks of the lake.

The Volta basin, in comparison to some other parts of the country, is very sparsely populated. The population density ranges from 41 persons per km² in the western part to 21 persons per km² in the eastern part. Administratively, the area consists of the Brong-Ahafo Region, and parts of the northern region and the Volta region (Zhekel et al. 1998).

The main indigenous ethnic groups in the study area consist of the Brong, the Gonja, the Nanumba and the Nchumuru. They are mainly subsistence farmers who depend on the cultivation of yam, maize, rice and vegetables. With the exception of the Gonja, livestock keeping is not a dominant economic activity of the indigenous population. Since the 1960s, the Lake Volta basin has witnessed a rapid increase in the number of migrants. The area has
become a destination for migrants from different ethnic groups from within and outside Ghana and for groups with different occupations. The main migrant groups include the Ewe from southeastern Ghana; the Dagomba, Konkomba, Gonja and the Gourounsi from northern Ghana. Other groups include the Fulani from northern Ghana, Burkina Faso and Niger. Each of the migrant groups specializes in a particular field of economic activity that it controls and dominates and with which it has become identified. The Ewe are mainly fishermen and fishmongers, while most migrants from northern Ghana are crop farmers. Livestock herding is the main occupation of the Fulani.

This study was conducted between May 2002 and November 2003 in five communities located in the Atebubu, Pru and Kintampo districts. The communities include Yeji (the main town on the basin), and 4 smaller settlements (Kwayease, Kadue, Ajantriwa and Kudua) along the northern banks of Lake Volta. Farmers and herdsmen living in these communities were observed during their farming and pastoral activities throughout the period of the research. The main method of data collection used was participant observation, in which the author lived with the population and participated in some activities that were considered relevant for the study. Although based mainly in Yeji, the author regularly visited Atebubu and Kintampo to ensure a comparative study of the three districts. In all, 35 households were observed and extensively interviewed on their livelihood and on matters relating to farmer-herder conflicts. Focus group discussions were also held with several households in the five communities. Individuals and institutions; such as the members and the executive of the Livestock Farmers Association, smallholder and commercial farmers’ groups, agricultural extension officers, youth groups, non-governmental organizations, chiefs, the police and some prominent residents in the three districts were interviewed.

Theoretical considerations

It is widely accepted in the social sciences that although individuals and groups may strive towards achieving consensus, social life is characterised by conflict as much as consensus. This is because norms and values are not equally distributed or accepted by members of the society. In its general usage, the term ‘conflict’ embodies notions of difference and disagreement, strife, and struggle. Hocker and Wilmot (1985) define conflict as ‘the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals’. Generally, conflict theories tend to assume that competition over scarce resources (money, leisure, sexual partners, and so on) is at the heart of all social relationships. Furthermore, inequalities in power and reward are built into all social structures. Individuals and groups that benefit from any particular structure strive to see it maintained while disadvantaged persons work towards change in societal structures. However defined, all conflicts share common traits: First, there is some form of contact between the parties involved. Second, the conflicting parties must have perceived divergent differences. Third, at least one of the parties should want to redress existing contradictions (Deutsch, 1991; see also Ekanola, 2004; Vanderlin, 2005).

Although farmers and herdsmen in West Africa have lived together and established reciprocal social and economic relations over time, their relationship has increasingly been described as being characterised by conflict. This is particularly the case in the guinea savanna and forest regions of West Africa where the presence of pastoralists is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Conflict is an umbrella term that has been used to describe a wide range of interactions between farmers and herders. According to Diallo (2001b), when used in the context of farmer-herder relations, conflict is generally used to describe not only the struggle over resources, but also struggles over values and power. Farmers increasingly compete with herdsmen for farmland, pasture, water, trees and the use of the rangeland in general (see Akpak, 2002; Bernardet, 1999; Breurers et al. 1998). Hagberg (1998) has also made a distinction between the various types of conflicts in farmer-herder relations. He distinguishes between disputes among individuals and groups, conflicts of interest, and violent conflicts. While a dispute refers to a disagreement between two or more persons or parties, a violent conflict involves mayhem, the destruction and killing of persons and livestock, arising from a dispute. A conflict of interest, on the other hand, is seen as the adoption of opposing views and concerns by different actors, which usually takes the form of non-violent competition, for the control of resources in a given area.
Farmer-herder differences are not only seen as resource conflicts but are also sometimes represented as ethnic conflicts involving the two groups. Since herder and farmer groups tend to have very different values, customs, physical as well as cultural characteristics, disputes between them are frequently characterised as being ethnic conflicts. The ‘we-feeling’ existing among group members is thus not only galvanized around their economic interests but towards the protection of the values, power and culture of the group. In many West African countries, the Fulani are a small minority with a unique culture and a strong sense of solidarity. They also tend to be spatially separated from the farming population. Conflicts between the Fulani and their agricultural neighbours, therefore, tend to be interpreted as ethnic, even where such conflicts are a result of personal animosity between individuals of the two groups.

Migration to the Volta Basin

Fulani herders did not settle permanently in the middle Volta basin until the 1960s. Prior to this period, transhumant herdsmen from northern Ghana and the Sahelian countries utilized the resources of the area on a seasonal basis. The successful installation of the pioneer group of hired Fulani herdsmen and the positive reaction of the host communities in the Volta basin resulted in a wave of Fulani migration into the area. Many indigenous livestock traders also began to hire Fulani herdsmen, whom they entrusted with their cattle herds. Other Fulani herdsmen who were looking for work as hired herdsmen or those intending to work in the livestock trading business moved directly to the main towns and settlements in the Volta basin. Upon the establishment of a foothold in their new home, they returned to northern Ghana to bring along their families and relatives. The process of searching for cattle to herd took several weeks and normally involved a young herdsmen moving from one settlement to the other or from one livestock market to the other in search of job opportunities.

Another factor that increased the population of Fulani herdsmen in the Volta basin was the drought that engulfed the Sahel region during the 1970s and 1980s. Drought and famine forced many Fulani to leave the Sahelian countries to the Volta basin and the fringes of the forest zone. Many pauperized Fulani, whose cattle herds had been completely wiped out during the drought, trooped to the area in search of jobs as hired herdsmen (Caldwell, 1975; Frantz, 1990; Adebayo, 1997). The decision to settle at a particular location was greatly influenced by existing kinship networks and clan ties. It was quite common for the established herdsmen to bring their relatives or invite persons from their villages in Burkina Faso to settle and work in communities within the Volta basin. While some of the new migrants settled permanently in the area, others stayed for only a few seasons, preferring to move ahead after they were able to recover from the effects of the drought. Many indigenous farmers, livestock traders and middlemen recounted waves of Fulani arrivals in the Volta basin at the peak of the drought years of 1975/76 and 1984/85. Until the 1970s, the number of Fulani herdsmen in the Volta basin was estimated to be less than 20,000. Many of them settled for only one or two seasons in a particular locality and then moved further. Within a period of two decades, the Fulani population grew considerably and is today estimated to be about 200,000.  

Another significant group of migrants to the Volta basin consists of sedentary farmers from Northern Ghana. They are mainly from the Konkomba, Dagomba, Dagari, Wala, Sissala and the Mamprusi ethnic groups. Just like their pastoral counterparts, most of the migrant farmers left their home regions in northern Ghana for the Volta basin in search of better economic prospects. High human and animal population densities, poor soils, unpredictable rainfall pattern and recurrent drought generally characterize their home areas in northern Ghana. Agricultural opportunities in the middle Volta basin are, in comparison to northern Ghana, quite rosy. An example of this is the fact that the population density is comparatively low (21 persons per km²) and land is relatively abundant, even though, recently, there appears to be increased competition for the best piece of land. Fallow periods are much longer in the area and could be as high as 10 years (Zchekel et al. 1998).

Following the impoundment of the Volta River and the expansion in the size of the Volta Lake during the 1970s, several groups of Ewe fishermen from Southeastern Ghana flocked into the Volta basin to

1 Personal communication of an Agricultural Extension Officer in Prang, in June 2002.
take advantage of the opportunities for fishing. Most of them came from fishing communities in the Mepe, Battor and the Ada areas of Southern Ghana. Large groups of fishermen and fishmongers have settled permanently in the Volta basin. Furthermore, increased economic activities and the expansion in the population of the area have led to the development of commercial towns which brisk business in fish, livestock, crops, and light industrial and household goods is done. Generally, the Volta basin can be described as a destination not only for Fulani herdsmen but also for farmers, fishermen and traders from other parts of Ghana and neighbouring West African countries (Atebubu District Assembly, 1996; Zchekel et al. 1998)

Farmer-Herder conflicts in the Volta Basin

The most frequent cause of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in the Volta basin is the destruction of crops by cattle. This is usually as a result of herdsmen leaving cattle unattended to and thus making them wander into cultivated fields. Some cattle may also go on the rampage and destroy seed crops or consume food items stored in barns. This is particularly the case during the planting season and the immediate post-harvest period. In many settlements, herdsmen have their grazing fields next to lands reserved for farming. The increasing cultivation of bush farms by migrant farmers has also contributed to the destruction of crops by cattle. During the farming season, herdsmen have to meander through farms to access their grazing fields and cattle are prone to trampling on farmers crops. In the pre-harvest period, cattle frequently destroy or eat ripened crops as they are being fed from the fields into their kraals (cf. Breusers et al., 1998; Hagberg, 1998).

The rising incidences of destruction of food crops by livestock has been attributed to the change in Fulani pastoral herding system. Herdsmen have, at the behest of the cattle owners, abandoned the transhumant practice whereby cattle are moved to pastures far away during the planting season and then returned to the settlements after the harvest season. As a result of the rising incidence of stock theft, cattle owners prefer to monitor their animals on a more regular basis and, therefore, instruct their herdsmen to utilize pastures not too far from the settlements so the cattle can be brought before dusk. Furthermore, the practice whereby cattle are kept away from the settlement for nearly three months during the planting season has been replaced with a herding system in which they are sent to pastures during the morning hours and returned to the settlement on a daily basis. The overall effect of this practice has been a dramatic rise in the incidence of crop destruction by cattle.

In spite of the abundant farmland and water in the Volta basin, there is intense competition between farmers and herdsmen for most fertile areas. Disputes about the use of the residual plain of the Lake Volta and the numerous tributaries that traverse the area is also a source of farmer-herder conflict. The residual plain is a very fertile area that provides ideal conditions for rice and dry season vegetable farming. However, the entire plain and its numerous riverbeds, left behind by receding rivers, are also key sources of water and pasture for livestock, especially during the peak dry season. During the dry season, herdsmen normally allow cattle to wander along the entire plain, ostensibly in search of pasture and water, but with the real aim of preventing the spread of farms along the plain and ensure its exclusive use by the herdsmen.

Similarly, there has been an expansion in dry season farming along the Lake Volta. Commercial farmers have acquired large tracts of land along the lake and the riverbeds and established permanent fields for the cultivation of rice and tomatoes. Subsistence farmers have also taken a cue from the commercial farmers and have started utilizing the plain for dry season gardening. The expansion in crop production has been facilitated by the increased demand for agricultural products in the area. The rising urban population and the accessibility of hitherto distant markets have contributed to increasing agricultural production in the Volta basin by commercial farms. This has in turn deprived Fulani herdsmen of key dry season pastures and made it difficult for livestock to have access to water (cf. Basset, 1994; Diallo, 2001a).

Herdsmen in the Volta basin are unwilling to confine their animals during the dry season. They fear they may lose critical pastoral resources. Farmers, on the other hand, do not want to be deprived of the lucrative opportunity of dry season farming in the basin and along the riverbeds. Farmers permanently watch over their crops to forestall damage from livestock, they frequently inflict wounds or even kill cattle that stray into their farms. There are several reported cases of farmers, frustrated by
the repeated destruction of their crops by livestock, taking the law into their hands by shooting Fulani herdsmen on sight (Daily Graphic, June 6th 2000; The Mirror March 17th 2001).

The farmers are, however, not the only victims of crop destruction by livestock. Fulani herders also complain about the frequent destruction of their crops by pigs belonging to sedentary farmers. All Fulani herders grow maize around their compounds, often on abandoned kraals, during the main farming season. To reduce the incidence of crop destruction by pigs, herdsmen in the Volta basin have reduced the size of their wet season farms and resorted to fencing them.

The frequent loss of cattle to rustlers has also worsened the already tense farmer-herder relationship in the Volta basin. Generally, an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust characterizes the relationship between farmers and Fulani herdsmen. This is particularly the case among farmers who have entrusted their cattle herds to Fulani herdsmen or indigenous livestock owners who have hired herdsmen to care for their animals. Many farmers and stock owners believe that their hired herdsmen are either actively involved in cattle rustling themselves or colluding with their “Fulani landsmen” to steal cattle from the area (cf Tonah, 2000). A stock owner argued that the usual explanation given by the Fulani for missing cattle is to claim “the animal got missing in the bush”. He added that:

*One cannot always trust the Fulani. They can tie the animal in the bush and come to tell you that it is missing. They may also drive the animal into those of their kinsmen. They have a lot of tricks, so if you have your animals with them, you have to monitor them properly.*

The Fulani herdsmen admitted that cattle sometimes go astray, but that this is often not due to any foul play or mischief on their part. They claimed that aggrieved parties frequently inflate losses so as to gain the sympathy of other farmers.

Generally, Fulani herdsmen often express solidarity or sympathize with their colleagues who are accused of stealing livestock. In their view, the poor working conditions and the exploitative relationship between hired herdsmen and the stock owners almost make stock stealing inevitable. Indeed, many herdsmen are poorly housed, equipped and remunerated. Remunerations for herdsmen in the Volta basin consist largely of the animal’s milk, manure and the use of farmlands around the compound (cf. Hill, 1970).

The poor remuneration of herdsmen is often a source of conflict between herdsmen and stock owners in the Volta basin. The younger generation of Fulani herdsmen particularly resent the conditions under which their parents work for farmers and stock owners. They also complain about the miserly behaviour of the indigenous stock owners and the poor treatment they mete out to their parents. They feel that the stock owners are becoming wealthier at their own expense and thus would want their parents to renegotiate the terms of agreement with these farmers or abrogate such agreements. A young herdsman who had taken over the cattle entrusted to his father by a local farmer expressed his misgivings thus:

*...look at the conditions under which we are living here. The cattle owner is getting richer at the expense of our father. We have to follow these animals throughout the day, even if it is raining you have to follow them. Look at the torn rubber-boots I am wearing. He can’t even buy rubber-boots for us to use to care of his animals. Last week, I sent one of his (the farmer’s) animals to the market and he sold it for 2,500,000 Cedis (US $350.00). Do you know how much he gave me? .... 1,000 Cedis (US $0.14), as transport back to the village...*

Farmers, on the other hand, are highly suspicious of the younger generation of Fulani herdsmen who have taken over the day-to-day management of cattle entrusted to their parents. They expect the young herdsmen to abide by the terms under which their parents were hired and, consequently, stick to the ascetic lifestyle of the Fulani. Many of them become anxious when told that their herdsmen are “spending lavishly, drinking or womanizing” in town. The typical reaction of stock owners to such news is to make unannounced visits to their herdsmen and kraals and to frequently check the number and condition of their cattle in an attempt to forestall any loss. Hired herdsmen, on the other hand, take unkindly to stock owners who frequently visit them to check on the state of the cattle entrusted to them. They interpret this to mean a personal slight on their character, an
indication of their untrustworthiness and a lack of confidence on the part of the stock owner. Many herdsmen believe that they are under constant surveillance by farmers who go to the extent of dictating the lifestyle they should live. Some farmers also find it difficult to accept the fact that the persons they had engaged as herdsmen are able to acquire considerable wealth in livestock after only a couple of years. To forestall the envy of the farming population, hired herdsmen, who are able to build large cattle herds, would give part of the herd to their kinsmen.

Managing Farmer-Herder Conflicts – The Role of the Yeji Livestock Farmers Association (LFA)

This section provides a brief description of the Yeji township and the Yeji Livestock Farmers Association (LFA). Thereafter, the role of the association in the prevention and management of farmer-herder conflicts is discussed. Finally, the section examines factors accounting for the success LFA in the management of farmer-herder conflicts.

The Yeji Livestock Farmers Association (LFA)

Yeji township has a population of 18,593 (Ghana Statistics Service 2002) and is the capital of the newly-created Pru District. It is located along the eastern bank of the Lake Volta and is the largest and the most commercially vibrant settlement in the middle Volta basin. The town has experienced tremendous growth during the last two decades, being transformed from a small lakeside settlement to a small town. This is attributed to its favourable location as an entrepot between the north and the south of Ghana. It is the main market centre for settlements along the Lake Volta and a transit point for goods moving from the north to the south of the country and vice versa. Beside being the main market centre for semi-industrial products, Yeji has a thriving livestock and fish market and is a major distribution point for agricultural produce, such as yams, grains, and vegetables. Yeji is also a multi-ethnic community. Beside the indigenous Nchumuru population, the town and its environs has received a large number of migrants from Ghana (mainly Akan, Gonja, Ewe, Dagomba, Gouronsi) and the neighbouring countries (Fulani from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria). The town also has several infrastructural facilities, such as schools, hospitals, banks, and offices for the growing number of government and non-government organizations.

The Yeji LFA is one of the numerous occupational associations in the town. It was formed in the early 1980s by a group of cattle owners and livestock traders in response to the increasing incidence of cattle rustling in the area. The aim of the association is to bring together the numerous but largely unorganized cattle owners into a well-organized and cohesive association, capable of defending the interest of its members. The rapid increase in smallholding and commercial farming in the area, as well as the growing population of cattle have resulted in an increase in the incidence of crop destruction by livestock. Consequently, the association has, since its formation, been preoccupied with finding ways through which livestock herders and crop farmers can coexist with minimum conflict.

The association currently has a membership of more than 100 persons, with most of the members engaged in the cattle trade. Others are farmers who have invested in cattle. Membership of the Yeji LFA cuts across all the various ethnic groups in the area, including the indigenous Nchumuru, Gonja, Ewe, Hausa, and Fulani. The association has no written constitution. Members are first recruited and then informed about the goals of the association through informal channels such as the lobbying activities of the leading members. The affairs of the association are currently managed by a three-man team of executive members under the leadership of a chairman. Membership of the association is renewed through the payment of yearly dues. One unique feature of the association is that its members have control over all Fulani herdsmen living in the Yeji area. The association also claims to have the authority to sanction all Fulani within the area, including those in transit or the so-called alien herdsmen.

LFA’s conflict prevention activities

The LFA plays a major role in the mitigation of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in the Volta basin. The executive of the association organizes meetings for farmers and livestock owners at the beginning of every farming season. These meetings serve as fora for deliberations on the commencement of the farming season. Livestock owners would, thereafter, be obliged to confine their animals or keep them away from the farms. The meetings are also
used to discuss problems faced by individual farmers and cattle owners during the previous farming season and devise ways of forestalling the future occurrence of such problems. These meetings between farmers and cattle owners offer both groups the opportunity to appreciate each other's concerns. Farmers are expected to confine their activities to the period reserved for farming. Thereafter, any destruction of crop by livestock remains entirely the responsibility of the crop farmer. Similarly, cattle owners or herdsmen who allow their animals to destroy fields, food crops or other property during the period designated for farming are liable for any damage caused.

The LFA also made a major contribution to the reduction of farmer-herder conflicts through its successful campaign for the allocation of specific areas within the Yeji Traditional Area as reserves for livestock grazing. The allocation of specific zones for farming and livestock rearing and the physical separation of the two economic activities have contributed enormously to reducing the incidence of cattle straying unto cultivated fields. Beside these measures, the association has also ensured that cattle trails are provided to link up the kraals (located close to the settlements) with the grazing reserves (located far from the settlements). This ensures the easy movement of cattle from the kraals to the grazing areas without damaging crops on the in-village fields or at the outskirts of the settlement.

The association also monitors the activities of the so-called alien Fulani herdsmen any time they bring their livestock to the Yeji area. These alien Fulani herdsmen are nomadic pastoralists who move across the country with their livestock in search of pasture and water. They normally come to the Volta basin during the peak dry season when herding conditions elsewhere are poor. Some of them come from Northern Ghana others are from the neighbouring countries, including Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali. They stay in the Volta basin for only a couple of weeks and then relocate to other areas at will. The ‘alien Fulani herdsmen’ have frequently been blamed for the rampant destruction of fields and crops and cattle rustling in Ghana (Tonah, 2002a). Nomadic pastoralists who enter the Yeji area have to seek permission from the LFA before they settle in the area. Those who refuse to do so are often expelled from the area.

The LFA has also been successful in reducing the incidence of cattle rustling in the Yeji area. The association has close ties with other groups in the neighbouring communities as well as with livestock traders, slaughter houses, middlemen in the cattle trade, herdsmen and cattle owners. Cattle that are found loitering in the area are brought to a central point for those who have lost cattle to reclaim them. Similarly, the network with other groups ensures that cattle rustlers do get away easily with their booty. Members of the association do accompany persons whose cattle are missing to visit all the main cattle markets in the area and to markets in Techiman, Kumasi, and Accra in search of their cattle. Livestock traders and slaughterhouses do provide information on persons suspected to be dealing in stolen cattle. These measures have considerably reduced the incidence of cattle rustling in the Yeji area.

Managing farmer-herder conflicts

Most farmer-herder disputes are usually resolved by the parties involved themselves. In cases involving the destruction of crops by cattle, both parties would usually agree on the extent of damage caused by the cattle and the level of compensation to be paid to the farmer whose crops have been damaged. Such amicable resolution of conflicts by the parties involved often occurs in communities where most households own cattle. There is often a general understanding among residents that cattle are capable of destroying crops at one time or the other. In such communities, cases involving the destruction of crops by cattle considered to be accidents and inevitable, especially in areas where farming and livestock herding activities are undertaken side by side. Farmers whose crops are destroyed by cattle sometimes refuse the compensation paid by cattle owners, knowing very well that their own cattle may someday destroy other people's crops.

In cases of farmer-herder conflicts, the home of the chairman of the LFA is often the first point of call for many aggrieved farmers whose crops or fields have been destroyed by cattle or who have lost cattle to rustlers, or have simply developed a quarrel with some herdsmen in the area. Herdsmen and cattle owners, on the other hand, do also report incidents of missing cattle, the invasion of pasture land by farmers or conflicts with farmers to the executive of the LFA. Besides, cases of farmer-herder conflicts reported to the chiefs, community leaders or the police are
frequently referred to the executive of the LFA. The executive of the association would normally investigate all reported cases of farmer-herder conflicts. The standard approach is to give the complainant an opportunity to present his case. If he can identify the culprit or, in most cases, the owner of the cattle responsible for the destruction of his crops or fields, the association attempts to mediate between the two conflicting parties. In most cases, however, the executive of the LFA has assisted the complainant to identify the animals responsible for the destruction, the herdsman involved and the cattle owner.

Depending on the level of animosity between the conflicting parties, the LFA examines all reported conflicts at executive meetings and attempts to find amicable solutions or, rather, to mediate between the conflicting parties. Once there is a general understanding about the nature of a conflict and the position of the feuding individuals or groups, the next step would be to verify the claims of the conflicting parties by visiting the sites of the reported incidents. The LFA finds out how the conflict arose and verifies the claims of the parties. In cases involving the destruction of crops or fields, the team would determine the extent of damage, the animals responsible for the damage, the herdsman involved and the cattle owner. In cases involving land disputes, the assistance of landowners and chiefs are sought in the determination of land ownership and use-rights on the land. Cases involving cattle rustling are more difficult to deal with, since it is not easy to identify the culprits. Stolen cattle are frequently driven to markets or kraals located far from the traditional area. In such cases, the LFA seeks the assistance of sister organization, livestock traders, cattle owners and middlemen in the livestock trade to help in identifying the stolen animals.

The main strategy of the LFA is to get the conflicting parties to negotiate and reach an amicable agreement, with the executive members acting as witnesses to the agreed terms. In cases where the conflicting parties cannot reach a compromise, the LFA may intervene by setting up a neutral team to determine the extent of damage, identify the culprits and recommend the level of compensation to be paid. In most conflicts, however, the parties do accept the mediation role of the LFA as a neutral arbitrator and abide by the decisions of the association. Where the cattle owner or herdsman accepts responsibility for the damage done, independent witnesses are again sent to the farm to assess the extent of the damage and provide an estimate of the compensation to be paid by the cattle owner. The cattle owner and the farmer would then enter into negotiations to determine the exact compensation to be paid, the form of payment and the period in which the compensation should be paid. Estimates of the compensation are usually based on the expected market value of the crops destroyed.

The determination of compensation is often a major source of contention between aggrieved parties. Cattle owners often claim that farmers tend to exaggerate the extent of crop destruction so as to obtain higher compensation than they deserve. Farmers, on the other hand, accuse herdsman of being dishonest, since they never report incidents of crop destruction by their cattle unless they are caught in the act. The burden of proof usually lies with the farmer. It is the farmer who has to convince the arbitrators that the damage to his crops were actually caused by the herds of the accused cattle owner. It is often difficult to provide proof of damage caused by livestock. Crops are frequently damaged in the absence of the farmer or during the night, thus making it difficult to identify the herd responsible for the damage. Also, farmers frequently claim that herdsman intentionally damage crops as a way of punishing mischievous farmers or to avenge an alleged maltreatment by farmers. An atmosphere of mistrust may therefore characterized the arbitration of conflicts between farmers and herders.

Irrespective of the extent of damage and the compensation to be paid, it is normally the cattle owner, and not his herdsman, who is responsible for meeting any claim. Herdsman who destroy crops are initially chided by the cattle owners while those who repeatedly destroy crops and other property risk being relieved of their jobs as herdsman. The frequency of complaints by farmers is often used in assessing the performance of herdsman. Herdsman who frequently allow cattle placed under their management to destroy crops are poorly regarded.

Compensation for any damage to crops is usually done in cash. The payment may, however, be spread over a period of time, usually in accordance with an agreed schedule between the parties involved. It is the responsibility of the arbitration team of the LFA to ensure that a cattle owner fulfils his promise of paying for the damage caused. The team may seek the
assistance of the police in ensuring that promised payments are made within the periods agreed upon by the parties.

The LFA has a number of ways through which it compels recalcitrant members to abide by its decisions. It may initially charge a small group of influential members with the responsibility of resolving the impasse. Thereafter, the association may decide to impose a fine and suspend the membership of such erring individuals in the association. The association may also decide to expel a recalcitrant member. Disputes that remain unresolved as a result of one of the parties refusing to accept the verdict of the association are often referred to the police or the chief for settlement. Very few cases of farmer-herder disputes reported to the police are sent to the courts for resolution. Informal channels of arbitration are preferred to the formal judicial system because of lower costs, swiftness of the process, and the proximity of informal institutions. Generally, the credibility of LFA is boosted by the fact that it has been able to bring all the Fulani herdsmen and cattle owners in the Yeji Traditional Area under its control. The association also claims that it does not seek to promote the interest of its members to the detriment of non-members. It ensures fairness and justice when settling farmer-herder conflicts.

Unlike community leaders, chiefs and organized groups such as the LFA, the response of local governments to farmer-herder conflicts in the Volta basin has often been to expel the herdsmen from their administrative areas. These interventions often involve sending security personnel from one settlement to the other in search of herdsmen and organizing raids on the main livestock markets where the Fulani are presumed to be hiding. Nkoranza and Atebubu local governments (District Assemblies) have frequently organized the expulsion of Fulani herdsmen from their districts. In 1999 and 2000, both districts engaged the services of police and security personnel to drive away Fulani herdsmen whom they claimed were the main source of farmer-herder conflicts in the area. Some local governments have acted mainly against the background of ensuring peace and security in their administrative areas and have thus supported indigenous farmers in any conflict with migrant herdsmen. To forestall further farmer-herder conflicts, some local governments in the Volta basin have abrogated existing contracts and settlement agreements that gave the herdsmen temporary permit to reside within the district. Many of these agreements were reached between landowners and Fulani herdsmen and the former had demarcated land to be used exclusively as grazing reserves by the herdsmen (Tonah, 2002b). Generally, however, the high-handed approach of local governments in the Volta basin have been less successful in dealing with farmer-herder conflicts. These local governments usually do not have the confidence of the conflicting parties, especially the herdsmen and cattle owners. As a result, state intervention in farmer-herder conflicts in the Volta basin have worsened the already bad and highly explosive situation.

Explaining the success of the LFA

Several factors explain why the LFA has such a high level of credibility among large sections of the population. First of all, ownership of livestock, especially cattle, is a major form of investment in the area. It is also the most preferred form of investment among large sections of the community, especially those working in the agricultural, trading, fishing and the informal sector. Almost every wealthy person in the community has investments in cattle. Therefore, the membership of the association includes the most wealthy and influential persons in the area, including those working in the formal sector. Several individuals who have accumulated wealth from farming, trading and fishing have invest part of their wealth in the livestock industry. Individuals working in the farming sector tend to appreciate and understand the concerns of those working in the livestock sector. For example, farmers in the Yeji Traditional Area generally tend to be more cooperative and accommodating towards cattle owners because most of them have investments in the cattle industry. This is unlike the situation in other parts of the country where there is a sharp division between persons engaged in the two forms of economic activities. The relationship between farmers and herdsmen tend to be better in areas where the population is engaged in multi-sectoral economic activities rather than in a single activity. The level of hostility tends to decrease considerably as a result of common economic interests and shared social activities.

Second, ownership of livestock in the Yeji area, and by implication, membership in the LFA, cuts
across ethnic and religious divides. This is unlike the situation in many parts of the country where particular economic activities tend to be dominated by members of a particular ethnic group. This ‘ethnicisation’ of economic activities tends to reinforce existing social barriers and prejudices towards a particular ethnic group. The Yeji Traditional Area is, as we have already indicated, a destination for migrant groups from several regions of Ghana and neighbouring countries. The indigenous Nchumuru, as well as other migrant groups such as the Konkomba, Frafra and Gourounsi are farmers, the Ewe are predominantly fishermen and fishmongers, the Ashanti and other Akan dominate the trading business, while the Fulani, Hausa and Gonja mainly work in the livestock sector. However, irrespective of their economic specialisation, individuals from all the different ethnic groups have invested in the livestock sector. The executives members of the LFA also reflect this ethnic diversity. Undoubtedly, having a membership that cuts across all the ethnic and religious groups in the area is a major reason why the association is able to successfully arbitrate farmer-herder disputes. Quarrels, misunderstandings, and violent disputes between persons in the community are often handled at the individual and household levels. This has reduced the possibility that quarrels between individual farmers and herdsmen would degenerate into religious, communal or ethnic conflicts.

Thirdly, the LFA is, very active and well organised in comparison with many other associations in the Yeji area. Its mode of operation is very informal; it is able to resolve farmer-herder disputes quite rapidly. Besides, the association’s services are offered free of charge to the disputing parties. On the contrary, disputants have to pay for the services of chiefs, community leaders and the police. Court cases are also considered to be too formal, expensive and very slow. Only persons who are extremely unhappy about judgements given by the executive of the LFA refer such cases to more formal institutions.

Despite its relative success in the management of farmer-herder disputes, the LFA remains essentially a set up for promoting the interest of cattle owners. Although its services are widely appreciated, its decisions are not always accepted by all sections of the community. Commercial farmers, in particular, frequently question the impartiality of the association when resolving farmer-herder disputes. One commercial farmer said:

...many farmers are abandoning their farms because of cattle. They (the cattle) eat our yam seedlings, destroy our rice and maize farms, especially those near the lake. The Livestock Farmers Association executives are sometimes partial. They often do not want to fine their members and therefore tend to keep such fines very low. They support the cattle owners. They also have very close and cordial relationship with the police and chiefs, so when we report cases to them (police and chiefs) they do not take action. The police tell us to go to the Livestock (farmers) Association.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has analysed farmer-herder conflicts in the Middle Volta basin of Ghana. The rich resources of the area have, since the 1960s, attracted farmers, fishermen, herdsmen and traders from Ghana and the neighbouring countries. The expansion in human and livestock population has resulted in increased farmer-herder conflicts. The main causes of conflict are the destruction of fields and crops by cattle, the rampant incidence of cattle rustling in the area and the intense competition for resources (land and water) between farmers and herdsmen.

Farmer-herder conflicts are often resolved at the individual or personal level by the parties involved or may be referred to community leaders, chiefs, landowners and the police for arbitration and compensation, if necessary. The paper also examined the role of the Livestock Farmers Association in the Yeji Traditional Area in the management of farmer-herder conflicts. Unlike other groups and institutions, the LFA does not merely resolve farmer-herder conflicts. It has put in place measures to reduce such conflicts to the minimum. These include the separation of farming and herding activities, the creation of grazing areas, the provision of cattle trails to link settlement areas to pasture areas, and the control of the activities of nomadic pastoralists in the area. Also examined in detail were the processes used by the LFA to manage farmer/herder conflicts.

This case study has shown the relevance of local institutions in the resolution and management of farmer-herder conflicts. This indicates that, given a
cohesive, vibrant and trustworthy group, it is possible to reduce farmer-herder conflicts elsewhere in Ghana and beyond. In the Yeji area, the Livestock Farmers Association works in collaboration with community leaders, chiefs, landowners and the police. Besides being composed of persons from the different ethnic groups in the area, the association endeavours not to work only for the parochial interests of its members but also makes effort at reaching impartial, fair, and amicable solutions to farmer-herder conflicts. The association has also successfully lessened the prejudices and stereotypes that hitherto characterized farmer-herder relations.

This case study has also shown that community-based associations and institutions can be very effective in controlling the activities of nomadic pastoralists, commonly referred to as alien Fulani herdsmen. These nomadic pastoralists have been responsible for many of the violent farmer-herder conflicts in Ghana and the neighbouring countries. They are frequently accused of destroying crops and farms, setting fire to the vegetation, polluting water sources, threatening farmers with mayhem, and raping women in the bush. Community-based associations should work closely with regional and national governments to ensure effective control of the activities of nomadic pastoralists and management farmer-herder conflicts beyond the local level. Efforts by local and national governments to mitigate farmer-herder conflicts through radical measures, such as expelling pastoralists from regional and national borders, have so far been ineffective and have even worsened farmer-herder relations. This paper has shown that where strong rapport and cooperation exist between local associations, farmers and Fulani herdsmen whether in Ghana or throughout the West African sub-region, governments should include these associations in the mediation, resolution and management of farmer-herder conflicts.

However, while the work of the LFA appears commendable, the association cannot continue to treat cases of farmer-herder disputes in the Yeji area single-handedly. There is the need to expand the composition of the arbitration team to include representatives of other associations, interest groups, and institutions in the area. This will enhance the management of farmer-herder conflicts. Besides, the Volta basin is undergoing rapid transformation that would inevitably lead to increasing conflicts in the near future—expansion of settlements into areas reserved for pasture; the recent rise in sand-winning on land reserved for agricultural use; the expansion in farming activities along the river banks and the lake; the rapid expansion in the population of cattle; and the destruction of the environment as a result of tree-felling and charcoal production. These are a few of the challenges that are likely to worsen farmer-herder conflicts in the Volta basin of Ghana.

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**Biographical Note**

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