Conflict Factsheet

Farmer-Herder Conflict between Fulani and Zarma in Niger

Type of conflict | Intensity | Time | Countries | Resources
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Sub | 1.5 | 1944 –ongoing | Niger | Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

Conflict Summary

Climate change has driven nomadic Fulani herders of the Sahel further south, where they compete for access to land and water with settled Zarma farmers. Sporadic ethnic violence has erupted on a local scale, which has caused casualties. Mitigation efforts target resource accessibility and conflict mitigation. However, these policies remain frequently ineffective and have in some cases even increased tensions.
Conceptual Model

**Climate Change**
- Gradual Change in Temperature and/or Precipitation
- More Frequent / Intense Extreme Weather Events

**Environmental Change**
- Natural Resource Scarcity

**Intermediary Mechanisms**
- Change in Access / Availability of Natural Resources
- Grievances between Societal Groups

**Fragility and Conflict Risks**
- Displacements / Migration

**Social and Economic Drivers**
- Economic Development

**Context Factors**

- Insecure Land Tenure
- Water-stressed Area

- Eroded Social Contract
- Food Insecurity
- Low Level of Economic Development

- Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water
Conflict History

Changing climatic conditions and human activity in the Sahel, such as over grazing, deforestation and the exploitation of soils for export-oriented crops have led to increased temperatures and contributed to desertification. This has pushed nomadic Fulani herders further south, which has brought them into competition for land and water with the settled Zarma agriculturalists. As a result, tensions between the two groups have risen, leading to sporadic episodes of violence.

Rising temperatures and enlargement of the desert

Various ecological and institutional factors contribute to the tendency for violence between Fulani and Zarma groups. According to the "pulse model", the Sahara shifts back and forth along a north-south axis, defining historical period of southward enlargement and contraction of the desert. At present the Sahara is in a period of southward enlargement, accelerated by climate change. A report from the United Nations Environmental Program in 2011 highlighted a 1-2 degree temperature increase in the Sahel regions of Niger and Mali between 1970 and 2006, which has affected water sources and soil quality (Furber, 1997; UNEP, 2011).

Migration and farmer-herder disputes

Rainfall patterns in this region are also affected by deforestation and overgrazing, leading to soil degradation and desertification. As a result, herders in the Sahel, such as the Fulani, are forced further south, where they frequently encroach on the farmland of other groups, especially in times of drought. Crop damages caused by herds and strained water sources then become a frequent subject of discord between pastoralists and sedentary farmers. Tensions can intensify and lead to violence. For example, following the drought and famine conditions in 1997, seven people were killed and forty-three injured as attacks were carried out between Zarma farmers and Fulani herders (Herrero, 2003; Furber, 1997).

Legal pluralism and weak institutions

This situation is further aggravated by the weak enforcement of land registration laws. Introduced in 1993, Niger’s Rural Code (Principes d’Orientation du Code Rural, Ordinance 93-015) regulates tenure rights, management of resources and resource distribution. The code allows the registration of customary rights but remains unclear about which rights are eligible for registration. Frequently overlapping claims and the simultaneous existence of private ownership and communal use rights render the application of the code difficult. Moreover, the Land Commissions mandated with the enforcement of the code at different administrative levels lack the authority and frequently also the capacities to address land disputes (USAID, 2010).

Resolution Efforts

Introduced in 1993, Niger’s Rural Code remains the most important legislation in the government’s attempt to promote individualized land-use rights and increase land tenure security. Yet, the pre-existence of different and sometimes contradictory layers of land rights and the limited authority of Land Commissions
undermine its effective enforcement. Local land disputes are seldom taken to court and mostly addressed by traditional resolution bodies, leaving considerable discretionary power to traditional chiefs and room for contestation and conflict. Less influential groups often lack the power to assert their rights to use particular resources. This situation is further complicated by the fact that formal land legislation traditionally disfavors pastoralist communities (USAID, 2010).

Improving land rights and pastoralist livelihoods
In order to circumvent this problem, aid agencies, such as Oxfam, have been working to strengthen pastoral organizations across the Sahel. Efforts include initiatives to improve pastoralist’s access to services and promote their participation in national decision making processes. As part of a three year project (2008-2011), USAID has focused on improving rights and access to land, pushing for administrative reforms in order to decrease the time and costs connected with land ownership, transfer etc., and assisting the government in reforming its land registration institutions (USAID, 2010). Moreover, national government policies, such as subsidies for herding and subsistence farming, have been introduced to mitigate losses of livelihoods caused by drought and desertification (Bamidele, 2011).

Development of infrastructures
The government and aid agencies have also targeted infrastructure to improve water access and food aid. In 2013, over a 6 month period, the EU alone donated more 184 million euros to address the water and food issues in Niger (European Commission, 2013). However, these policies have in some cases compound fragility. Supplying water in water-stressed areas has attracted more herders, thus further overwhelming water resources. It has been suggested by policy analysts that drought resistant crops and sustainable water usage should be emphasized, while greater integration of local conflict resolution would assist in preventing violent conflict (Bamidele, 2011).
### Intensities & Influences

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<th>3</th>
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- **Violent Conflict**: Yes
- **Salience with nation**: Municipal
- **Mass displacement**: None
- **Cross Border Mass Displacement**: No

### Resolution Success

- **Reduction in Violence**: Violence reduced significantly, but did not cede.
- **Resolve of displacement problems**: Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.
- **Reduction in geographical scope**: There has been no reduction in geographical scope.
- **Increased capacity to address grievance in the future**: The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.
- **Grievance Resolution**: Grievances have been partially addressed.
- **Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity**: Decrease in conflict intensity at least partially the result of conflict resolution strategies.
Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

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<th>Peacekeeping</th>
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<td>Greater integration of local conflict resolution would assist in preventing violent conflict.</td>
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<th>Social inclusion &amp; empowerment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aid agencies, such as Oxfam and USAID, have supported initiatives to improve pastoralist’s access to services and promote their participation in national decision making processes.</td>
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<th>Strengthening legislation and law enforcement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Niger’s Rural Code is the most important legislation for individualized land rights and land tenure security. However, it is not effectively enforced.</td>
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<th>Coping with uncertainty</th>
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<th>Improving resource efficiency</th>
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<td>Policies supporting the use of drought resistant crops and sustainable water usage should be emphasized.</td>
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Resources and Materials

References with URL

- Bamidele, O. (2011). Climate change and conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa. Trends, challenges and policies sustainability
- Furber, A.H. (1997). Fulani and Zarma tribes pushed into fights by desertification?
- UNEP (2011). Livelihood Security Climate Change, Migration and Conflict in the Sahel

Further information

https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/fulani-zarma-niger