

INTEGRATING NOMADIC AND AGRICULTURAL LAND USE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Getso, M. M.^{1*}, Barde, A. M.², Iliyasu, A.³, Hassan, A. A.², Muhammad, N.⁴, Abdullahi, S.⁵, Muhammad, S. A.¹, Kaboshio, K. Y.¹, and Gandi, B. R.¹

¹Department of Animal Science, Kaduna State University (KASU).

²Department of Animal Science, Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State.

³Department of Biological Science, Kaduna State University (KASU).

⁴Department of Animal Science, Bayero University Kano.

⁵Department of Animal Science, Federal University of Agriculture Mubi, Adamawa State.

***Corresponding author: munirmukhtargetso9@gmail.com; 07035173276**

ABSTRACT

Nomadic pastoralism supports millions but faces challenges like land conflicts, environmental degradation, and restrictive policies. Tensions with farmers often arise over resource use. However, solutions such as inclusive land-use planning, agro-pastoral cooperation, legal recognition of land rights, and climate-resilient practices offer pathways for peaceful coexistence and sustainable rural development.

Keywords: Nomadic, agricultural, land use, integrating, opportunities.

DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM

Nomadism is still the main livelihood for more than two hundred million people in mostly dryland regions around the world. The intentional and regular movement of herds and people to pastures is the defining characteristic of nomadic pastoralism, and a key feature of its adaptiveness. There are about 30–40 million nomadic pastoralists in the world, most of whom live in Central and East Asia, the Sahel region of North and West Africa, and other parts of Africa such as Nigeria and Somalia (7). Nomadic livelihoods have been recognised as a sustainable way to utilise marginal pasturelands (8). As a result of government efforts to settle nomads through sedentarisation programs and implement land reforms, as well as the ongoing effects of dispossession associated with colonialism, nomadic populations are continuing to decrease (9).

CHALLENGES

1. Land Tenure Conflicts

The consequent pressure on land and water resources in the transition and forest zones of Sub-Saharan Africa has led to increased competition among traditional user groups—farmers on one hand and herders on the other—and poses challenges to customary land tenure

security. Cotula *et al.* (6) posit that smallholder farmers' customary land rights, defined by their indigeneity to the land-holding community, are especially threatened by increased competition and demand for land by pastoralists. Continuous land contestations create tenuous relations among competing use groups; degenerating into conflicts (4). Competing claims to land between nomadic groups and settled farmers (with formal titles) can lead to disputes.

2. Environmental Degradation

The grazing and overgrazing of fields and farm lands by ruminant herds leads to vegetation depletion, erosion, destruction of food and economic crops, loss of biodiversity and other adverse environmental effects. The dung of the cattle poses health care hazards to the herds, the nomads and the host communities whose farm lands and waters they transverse (2). However, excessive concentration of animals in a limited area has have had a negative impact on woody vegetation, pastures and soil and hence poor nature through overgrazing (1).

3. Mobility Restrictions

National borders, land privatization and infrastructure development (e.g fences, roads) can block traditional migratory routes for herders thereby loosing access to seasonal

grazing areas. Pastoral vulnerability was caused by restrictions of mobility and environmental degradation (12). The system has been threatened by enormous external and internal pressures that caused land alienation from pastoral use. Presently, there is a growing trend towards crop cultivation and establishment of private enclosures reserve accompanied by land grabbing. Encroachment of agriculture into pastoral areas limits the mobility of pastoralists and exacerbates resource conflicts.

4. Policy and Governance Gaps

Many national policies favor sedentary farming over pastoralism, leading to biased investment and support. The unfavorable development policies oriented towards pastoralists' resulting from the persistence of unfavourable narratives and governments' desire to control pastoral groups and the resources present in pastoral land (11). The diversity and strength of such drivers has deepened the vulnerability of many pastoralist groups leading to reduced herd sizes, livelihood insecurity and reliance on remittances and aid (10).

5. Cultural and Social Tensions

Differences in lifestyle, land-use priorities and ethnicity between herders and farmers can fuel mistrust and violence. Inadequate conflict resolution mechanism exacerbate disputes (13).

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Participatory Land Use Planning

Farming and herding, as vital human activities, significantly influence the dimensions of land use (13). Involving both farmers and herders in land-use planning fosters mutual understanding and shared decision - making. Mapping migratory routes and key resources helps formalize access and prevent encroachment (14).

2. Agro-Pastoral Collaboration

Agroecology can be a conflict mitigation strategy, where collaborations between farmers and pastoralist mainly build on the interdependent relationship of exchanging fodder with organic manure (5). Also, recently agroecology is seen as a potential solution for reducing farmer-pastoralist conflict (3).

3. Legal Recognition of Customary Rights

Secure land tenure is a cornerstone for agriculture as it incentivizes investment and improves livelihoods through improved productivity and management of resources (11). Pastoral livelihood decisions have always been largely influenced by the availability of vast rangelands that allowed free and flexible mobility. Strengthening tenure security for pastoralists through recognition of Customary land rights can reduce conflict and innovative legal models can accommodate mobility (10).

4. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Establishing local mediation committees and early warning systems can mitigate tensions. Traditional conflict resolution practices can be adapted and integrated in to formal systems (15).

5. Climate - Resilient Practices

Promoting sustainable grazing practices and water harvesting benefits both systems (1). Joint climate adaptation strategies can strengthen resilience in shared landscapes (13).

CONCLUSION

While integrating nomadic and agricultural land use is complex, it is essential for sustainable rural development and peaceful coexistence. A balanced approach that respects the rights, needs, and knowledge of both communities—backed by inclusive policies and cooperative governance—can transform conflict into opportunity and ensure equitable access to land for future generations.

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