

Farmers-Herders' Conflict Undermines Peace building Efforts in South Sudan

Luka Madhieu Kuot

Abstract

The persistent farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan presents a formidable challenge, obstructing the nation's journey toward stability and economic development while exerting a heavy toll on lives and property in South Sudanese' communities. This paper offers a comprehensive overview of the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan, delving into its historical background, root causes, far-reaching consequences, potential prevention/management strategies and recommendations for actors and policymakers in South Sudan.

This conflict primarily arises from the fierce competition for limited resources, particularly scarce land and water resources that are vital for human and livestock survival. In South Sudan, farmers and herders heavily depend on these resources for their livelihoods, setting the stage for clashes when their interests collide, often culminating in violence and the displacement of communities in the country.

The conflict's complexity is further compounded by ethnic and political dimensions, as some communities align with farmers or herders based on historical grievances and prevailing power dynamics. This polarization deepens the conflict's impact on society.

The consequences of the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan are grave and multifaceted, leading to loss of life, property destruction, and community displacement, resulting in a dire humanitarian crisis marked by food insecurity, malnutrition, and the spread of diseases. Furthermore, it hinders agricultural productivity and livestock-rearing activities, exacerbating the nation's food crisis, perpetuating societal divisions, escalating ethnic tensions, and hindering social cohesion and national unity.

Addressing the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan necessitates a multidimensional approach that emphasizes comprehensive land and water management policies, fostering equitable resource access through dialogue and negotiation, involving relevant stakeholders, and promoting inter-communal dialogue, peacebuilding, and reconciliation initiatives. Investment in alternative livelihood opportunities, such as pastoralism and non-farm-based activities, offers a pathway to reduce resource dependency and contribute to economic diversification and development at the grassroots and national levels. These measures collectively hold the potentiality of paving the way for a more stable, prosperous, and harmonious South Sudan.

Date of Submission: 01-01-2024

Date of Acceptance: 09-01-2024

I. Introduction

South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, has been marred by unrelenting conflict and instability since its independent in 2011. Amidst the myriad challenges plaguing the country, the Farmers-Herders conflict has emerged as a long-standing and multifaceted issue, **undermining peacebuilding efforts and impeding progress toward stability and economic development.** This conflict centres on the competition for essential resources, including land and water, between agricultural farmers and nomadic cattle herders, who rely heavily on these resources for their livelihoods. As their interests run into, violence erupts, communities are displaced, and the nation's journey toward peace and prosperity is disrupted and retarded.

The Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan extends beyond resource competition; ethnic and political dimensions compound it (Kuol, 2014, pp 60-79). Specific communities align themselves with either farmers or herders, driven by historical grievances and power dynamics, thereby escalating ethnic tensions within the country. As a result, the conflict has far-reaching consequences, including the loss of lives, the destruction of property, and the displacement of communities. This humanitarian crisis has engendered food insecurity, malnutrition, and the spread of diseases, exacerbating the challenges from the South Sudanese population faces.

This paper seeks to comprehensively understand the Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan, exploring its historical roots, underlying causes, and the profound consequences it has on both local communities and the nation at large. Furthermore, it will examine potential strategies and approaches to manage and mitigate the conflict, highlighting the critical role of equitable resource management, inter-communal dialogue, and investment in alternative livelihood opportunities in fostering peace and stability in South Sudan.

Ultimately, this paper underscores the urgent need to address the Farmers-Herders conflict as an integral component of broader peacebuilding efforts in South Sudan.

Background Information to Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan

The Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan is a protracted and intricate challenge that has cast a long shadow over the nation's pursuit of stability, reconciliation, and sustainable development. This enduring conflict is characterized by recurring violent clashes between two distinct yet interdependent groups within South Sudanese society: agricultural farmers and nomadic cattle herders (Selby & Hoffmann, 2014, pp.360–370).

This conflict is fueled by fierce competition for essential resources, most notably access to cultivable land, water sources, and grazing pastures. Both farmers and herders rely heavily on these resources for their respective livelihoods, making them integral to their survival.

South Sudan, predominantly an agrarian society, finds much of its population engaged in farming activities as their primary source of sustenance (Munive, 2014, pp.334–356). This dependence on agriculture sets the stage for conflict with a rapidly growing population and dwindling land availability. Farmers till the soil to cultivate crops, while herders depend on livestock, particularly cattle, to sustain their traditional way of life. The scarcity of these vital resources has intensified competition between these two groups, resulting in tensions that often culminate in violence and community displacement in South Sudan.

Complicating the Farmers-Herders conflict are the profound ethnic and political dimensions at play in South Sudan. Historically rooted rivalries, coupled with the ongoing inter-communal violence and a protracted civil war, have aggravated the conflict. Communities align themselves with either farmers or herders, further fueling ethnic tensions and perpetuating hostilities. The nation's political instability, marked by a power struggle between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy Riek Machar, has facilitated the escalation of local conflicts, including the Farmers-Herders conflict, as central government authority wanes (Rolandsen, 2015 pp.163–174).

This paper delves into the complex landscape of the Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan, offering insights into its historical underpinnings, root causes, and far-reaching consequences. Additionally, it explores potential strategies and approaches to manage and mitigate this conflict effectively, emphasizing the importance of equitable resource management, inter-communal dialogue, and investment in alternative livelihood opportunities as essential pillars of peacebuilding in South Sudan.

A Farmer and a Herder

A farmer refers to an individual who is engaged in cultivating and managing agricultural crops, plants, and livestock to produce food and other agricultural commodities for consumption or sale. Farmers typically work independently or in collaboration with other farmers, and their responsibilities may include planting, harvesting, maintaining irrigation systems, managing livestock, and ensuring compliance with sustainable farming practices. Additionally, farmers often contribute to rural development and play a vital role in supplying food for local, regional, and global populations. For example, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a farmer as "an individual or entity that actively participates in agricultural production on a farm or ranch." (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). (n.d.).

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), "Farmers are those who cultivate plants or raise animals to produce food, feed, fiber, or other products." (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. (n.d.). The Encyclopedia Britannica describes a farmer as "an individual who operates a farm or cultivates land to grow crops or raise livestock for food or raw materials." (Farmer, 2021). Meanwhile, a herder is an individual who takes care of and manages a herd of animals, typically livestock such as cattle, sheep, or goats. The role of a herder involves various tasks such as guiding the animals to grazing areas, ensuring their safety, providing them with food and water, and protecting them from predators.

Farmers-Herders Conflict in South Sudan

The Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan is a multifaceted and traditional issue that has brought about tension and violence between two key groups: agricultural farmers and cattle herders (Specht, 2020 pp. 222-237). This conflict typically stems from the competition for essential resources, including control over arable land, access to water sources, and grazing pastures for livestock. However, it has become further exacerbated by underlying factors such as ethnic divisions and the volatile political climate in South Sudan. A stark illustration of the gravity of this conflict unfolded in 2019 when violent clashes erupted in the eastern Jonglei state, leading to the displacement of thousands of people and the tragic loss of several lives. This incident serves as a poignant reminder of the conflict's severity and profound impact on local communities nationwide (Reuters, 2019).

Another manifestation of the Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan is the recurrent violent clashes witnessed in the Western Bahr el Ghazal state. This conflict is primarily rooted in the fierce competition for

grazing lands and water sources. On one side, farmers accuse herders of permitting their cattle to trample and destroy their crops, while on the other side, herders contend that agricultural expansion has encroached upon traditional grazing routes and corridors. This ongoing strife has created a cycle of tension and violence, further escalating the challenges posed by the Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan (Al Jazeera, 2020 no pagination).

These examples underscore the enduring nature of the Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan and its pervasive impact on peace and stability. Beyond the immediate violence and displacement, the conflict disrupts livelihoods, worsens food insecurity, and hampers economic development. To address this issue comprehensively, South Sudan must seek lasting solutions, including conflict resolution mechanisms, resource management practices, and initiatives to foster cooperation and mutual understanding between farmers and herders. Until these challenges are effectively addressed, the Farmers-Herders conflict will continue to pose significant hurdles to the nation's progress toward peace and stability (Al Jazeera, 2020 and Reuters, 2019).

Players in Farmers-Herders Conflict in South Sudan

The farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan involves a complex array of actors, including various ethnic communities, political leaders, government forces, and rebel groups, but for this writing, here are some of the key actors involved in this conflict:

Ethnic communities: Ethnic communities have played a significant role in fueling the enduring Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan. Primarily, the Dinka and Nuer herding communities have been at the forefront of this conflict, historically clashing over access to land and resources. These cycles of violence have perpetuated the ongoing turmoil in South Sudan (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Beyond the Dinka and Nuer, ethnic communities like the Murle and Lou Nuer have also been drawn into the conflict, especially in the Pibor Administrative Area and Jonglei State. Over the years, these groups have engaged in violent cattle raiding, contributing to the region's ongoing instability (United Nations Mission in South Sudan, 2020).

The 2012 Pibor massacre is a haunting chapter in South Sudan's history, exemplifying the catastrophic consequences of inter-communal violence. In this horrific event, Murle herders launched a retaliatory attack on Dinka farmers in the Pibor area, resulting in an astounding death toll of around 3,000 people and the obliteration of numerous villages. This brutal episode was rooted in long-standing tensions and conflicts between the Murle and Dinka communities, driven by disputes over resources, territory, and historical grievances. The consequences of the Pibor massacre were immediate and enduring, leaving communities shattered, grieving, and displaced.

The 2021 Pibor clashes in Jonglei State were a distressing reminder of the haunting Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan. This renewal of violence saw Murle herders clash again with Lou Nuer farmers, resulting in a tragic loss of lives and the displacement of thousands. Like many conflicts in South Sudan, this one revolves around the competition for indispensable resources, particularly water, land and grazing areas, as both groups heavily depend on these resources for survival. The consequences of the 2021 Pibor clashes were profound, leading to untold suffering, food insecurity, and the spread of diseases.

These clashes and other notable Farmers-Herders' conflict events in South Sudan underscore the nation's enduring challenges. They emphasize the pressing need for comprehensive conflict resolution strategies, equitable resource management, and initiatives to foster understanding and cooperation among diverse communities. Only through holistic and inclusive approaches can South Sudan aspire to break free from the cycle of violence, heal the wounds of affected communities, and build a path toward lasting peace and stability.

State security providers: The national armed forces and government of South Sudan have been somewhat indirectly/directly involved in the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan. They are often accused of violating human rights against farmers and herders in the communities. According to Amnesty International, the SPLA has been battling different rebel groups in some parts of the Country. (Amnesty International, 2016). battling rebels normally caught civilians in the crossfire in between in the Country.

Rebel groups/opposition forces: Rebel groups like SPLM/A-IO, led by Riek Machar and NAS of Thomas Cirilo, have played a significant role in the conflict. They have mobilized armed pastoralism communities in their fight against government forces, exacerbating the farmer-herder tensions in the Country. Al Jazeera, (2016). Additionally, non-state actors like armed youth, criminals, and unknown gunmen have played a significant role in refueling the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan with considerable community losses.

Farmers-Herders' Conflict-Prone Areas in South Sudan

Farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan primarily occurs in the regions that are part of the Country's Greater Equatoria, Upper Nile, and Bahr el Ghazal regions. It normally happens in some key areas where these conflicts have been reported, along with relevant citations and references:

Greater Equatoria Region

The Greater Equatoria Region, encompassing three states: Central Equatoria, Western Equatoria and Eastern Equatoria. In Western Equatoria State, areas such as Mundiri, Maridi, Ezo and Yambio have been persistently plagued by the farmers-herders conflict, which has been extensively documented, leading to tragic loss of lives and the forced displacement of numerous communities (ReliefWeb, 2017).

The conflict in these specific regions epitomizes the broader challenges that face many communities across South Sudan. It is characterized by the clash between sedentary farming communities, whose livelihoods bank on cultivating crops, and nomadic herders, whose way of life hinges on livestock rearing. The root of this conflict lies in the competition for crucial resources, with productive land, water sources, and grazing pastures as the focal points of contention.

In the context of Mundiri, Maridi, Ezo and Yambio, the conflict has manifested in alarming ways, leading to the loss of lives and the tragic displacement of residents. It has disrupted the social fabric of these communities, sowing the seeds of distrust and hatred among neighbour who have coexisted for generations. Families have been torn apart, livelihoods shattered, and the overall well-being of these communities has been severely compromised.

The consequences of this conflict extend beyond immediate human suffering. They also have far-reaching economic and developmental implications. The disruption of agricultural activities, the primary source of sustenance for many in this region, has led to food insecurity and economic hardship. It has hindered the prospects of sustainable development and prosperity, perpetuating a cycle of instability and deprivation.

Addressing the farmers-herders conflict in Ezo, Yambio, Maridi, Mundri in the Greater Equatoria Region requires a concerted effort to quell immediate hostilities and establish lasting peace and resource management mechanisms. This might involve mediation and dialogue between the conflicting parties, the development of sustainable land-use practices, and initiatives to foster understanding and cooperation between farmers and herders.

The experiences of Ezo and Yambio underscore the urgency of finding sustainable solutions to the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan. By having done that, the Author aim to alleviate the suffering of the affected communities, restore stability, and pave the way for a brighter future characterized by peaceful coexistence and shared prosperity in the nation.

Central Equatoria State

Central Equatoria State has witnessed a recurring conflict between farmers and cattle herders, particularly in localities like Kajo-Keji, Liria, and Lobonok. This ongoing struggle has escalated tensions and sporadic outbreaks of violence, as documented by Local Voices South Sudan in 2018.

In the context of Central Equatoria State, this conflict echoes the broader narrative of discord between sedentary farming communities and nomadic herders witnessed across South Sudan. The heart of the issue lies in the competition for critical resources, with fertile land, access to water sources, and grazing areas serving as the epicentre of these confrontations.

The clashes between these two groups in Kajo-Keji, Liria, and Lobonok have had profound implications. They have disrupted the social fabric of these communities and inflicted physical and emotional harm on their residents. Lives have been lost, homes have been destroyed, and the very foundations of these societies have been shaken and distraught.

Beyond the immediate human toll, the conflict has also affected these areas economically. It has disrupted agricultural activities, the primary means of subsistence for many in these regions. This disruption has led to food insecurity, loss of income, and a hindrance to the overall development of these communities.

To address the farmers-herders conflict in Central Equatoria State, it is imperative to consider multifaceted solutions beyond short-term conflict resolution. This may include mediating dialogues between the conflicting parties, implementing sustainable resource management practices, and fostering mutual understanding between farmers and herders.

The challenges faced by Kajo-Keji, Liria, and Lobonok serve as a poignant reminder of the urgent need to address the root causes of the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan. By doing so, the Author hope harmony be restored in these communities, promote stability, and create an environment conducive for shared successfulness and coexistence among the South Sudanese communities.

Greater Upper Nile Region

The Greater Upper Nile Region, specifically the town of Malakal in Upper Nile State, has been grappling with a relentless conflict revolving around access to land and water resources, pitting farmers against herders in the area. This convoluted and long-standing cognitive factor, as highlighted by Peter AdwokNyaba in 2014, has displaced both vital communities.

In the discourse of Malakal, this conflict represents a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by communities across the Greater Upper Nile Region. The conflict is rooted in the fierce competition for essential resources, including arable land for farming and access to water sources for livestock.

The clashes between farmers and herders in Malakal have had profound and devastating consequences. Not only have they disrupted the social cohesion of these communities, but they have also inflicted severe human suffering. Lives have been upended, families have been torn apart, and the very essence of community life has been eroded.

On the far side of the immediate human tragedy, the conflict has wreaked havoc on the economic and developmental fabric of the region. The disruption of agricultural activities, the mainstay of livelihoods for many, has resulted in food insecurity, economic hardship, and a setback to the region's overall progress in terms of stability and economic growth.

Addressing the farmers-herders conflict in Malakal and the Greater Upper Nile Region necessitates a comprehensive and sustainable approach to this conflict. This may encompass facilitating dialogue and mediation between the conflicting parties, instituting equitable resource management practices, and fostering a culture of cooperation and understanding between farmers and herders.

The experiences of Malakal underscore the urgency of finding enduring solutions to the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan's Greater Upper Nile Region. Doing so can heal the wounds of affected communities, restore stability, and pave the way for a brighter future characterized by peaceful coexistence and shared prosperity.

Renk and Maban in Upper Nile State

The Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan is a pervasive issue that has left a trail of suffering and disruption across various regions. Renk and Maban, located in Upper Nile State, have experienced a distressing pattern of violence stemming from conflicts between farmers and herders. Documented by the International Crisis Group in 2019, this recurring issue has resulted in widespread displacement and a severe disruption of livelihoods in these regions.

In these areas, the strife between farmers and herders exemplifies communities' broader challenges throughout the State and South Sudan. The conflict is rooted in intense competition for essential resources, including arable agricultural land and access to water sources crucial for livestock.

The violence erupted in Renk and Maban has had far-reaching and annihilating consequences. Beyond physical displacement, it has fractured the social bonds that held these societies together, creating rifts among neighbours who have co-existed for generations. Families have been torn apart, social harmony disrupted, and deep scars left on the fabric of community life.

Furthermore, the ramifications of the conflict extend beyond the social sphere. The disruption of agricultural activities, which forms the backbone of livelihoods for many in these regions, has resulted in food insecurity, economic hardship, and a significant setback to the broader development prospects of these communities.

Similarly, the April 2016 Upper Nile Farmers-Herders Conflict painted a grim picture of violence and displacement. This armed conflict in Upper Nile State revolved around the competition for vital resources such as land, grazing areas, and water sources, intensifying into a violent confrontation. The burning of houses symbolized the destruction of the fabric of communities' lives, leading to immense suffering, food insecurity, and the disruption of social structures.

These conflicts are stark reminders of the urgent need for comprehensive conflict resolution mechanisms, equitable resource management, and initiatives to foster mutual understanding and cooperation between different groups within South Sudan. The scars left by these events underscore the enduring challenges faced by the nation, emphasizing the necessity for concerted efforts toward lasting peace, stability, and reconciliation in South Sudan.

Great Bahr el Ghazal Region

Wau in Western Bahr el Ghazal State

The Bahr el Ghazal Region, specifically around Wau town in Western Bahr el Ghazal State, has witnessed recurring conflicts between farmers and herders, leading to the displacement of populations and significant property damage. This complex and deeply rooted issue, reported by Radio Tamazuj in 2019, has inflicted substantial hardships on the affected communities.

In Wau, these conflicts mirror the broader challenges across Western Bahr el Ghazal State. The heart of the matter lies in the intense competition for organic resources, such as tillable land for farming and access to water sources crucial for herding livestock.

The violence that has marred these areas has had been extensive and far-reaching resultants. Apart from physical displacement of communities, it has torn the social fabric that binds these societies together. Discord

has been sown among neighbours who have historically coexisted, fracturing the sense of community and leaving deep scars.

What is more, the repercussions extend beyond the immediate social impact. The disruption of agricultural activities, the economic foundation for many in these regions, has led to food insecurity, financial hardship, and a significant setback to broader development prospects.

Addressing the farmers-herders conflict in Wau and Western Bahr el Ghazal State necessitates a holistic and sustainable approach, encompassing conflict resolution mechanisms, initiatives for equitable resource management, and concerted efforts to cultivate mutual understanding and collaboration between farming and herding communities.

The challenges faced by Wau and Western Bahr el Ghazal State underscore the urgent need to address the root causes of the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan. By doing so, one aspires to heal the wounds of affected communities, restore stability, and create an environment conducive to shared economic condition and harmonious coexistence.

In addition, the 2017 Wau clashes between Fertit farmers and Dinka herders in Western Bahr el Ghazal resulted in hundreds of deaths and the displacement of thousands. This tragedy further emphasizes the imperative for conflict resolution mechanisms, equitable resource management, and fostering mutual understanding among diverse groups in South Sudan. It is a unconditional message of the significant consequences of such conflicts and the imperative necessity for lasting peace and reconciliation in the region.

Kuajok in Warrap State

In 2020, a grim and unsettling narrative unfolded in the confines of Tonj, a region situated in Warrap State, South Sudan. This period bore witness to clashes between Dinka farmers and cattle raiders hailing from neighboring communities, unleashing a wave of violence that led to the tragic loss of hundreds of lives and the forced displacement of thousands. This harrowing episode underscored the fundamental impact of the Farmers-Herders conflict on South Sudan's communities, echoing the long-standing struggles faced by other regions within the nation.

One region that encapsulates this enduring conflict's dire consequences is Kuajok, nestled within Warrap State. A persistent and deeply rooted conflict has been festering (Sebit, 2017). The crux of this issue lies in disputes over land tenure, access to grazing areas, and control over vital water resources. These tensions, regrettably, have escalated into episodes of violence, as starkly reported by Al Jazeera in 2020.

Kuajok's experiences are a poignant microcosm of the challenges numerous communities grapple with across Warrap State and South Sudan. At the heart of this conflict is intense competition for critical resources that are indispensable to the livelihoods of both farmers and herders. These resources encompass cultivatable land conducive to farming, pastures essential for livestock grazing, and access to water sources vital for agricultural and herding activities.

The consequences of the violence erupted in Kuajok extend far beyond the immediate physical harm and community displacement. The social fabric of these societies has been marred, and trust among neighbours, who have coexisted for generations, has eroded, leading to the fragmentation of communities and the disruption of harmonious communal life.

Moreover, the branch out of this conflict reaches into the realms of food insecurity, economic distress, and a significant setback to the overall development of these communities. The disruption of agricultural activities, which underpins the livelihoods of many in Kuajok, has exacerbated existing challenges, pushing these communities further into hardship.

Addressing the Farmers-Herders conflict in Kuajok and Warrap State necessitates a comprehensive and sustainable approach. This involves immediate conflict resolution measures alongside the establishment of mechanisms that ensure equitable resource management. Initiatives that foster mutual understanding and cooperation between farming and herding communities are imperative in restoring stability and creating an environment conducive to shared prosperity and harmonious coexistence within these societies.

The challenges faced by Kuajok and the tragic events in Tonj in 2020 collectively underscore the urgent need to address the underlying causes of the Farmers-Herders conflict in South Sudan. Only by doing so can heal the wounds of affected communities, restore stability, and pave the way for a more peaceful and prosperous South Sudan. These regional conflicts are not isolated incidents but symbolic of the more considerable interplay of resource competition, historical grievances, and ethnic divisions that continue to impact communities, emphasizing the necessity for holistic and inclusive approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding nationwide.

Causes of Farmers-Herders Conflict in South Sudan

The original cause of the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan is the scarcity of resources, particularly over arable land, water, and pastures in the communities. Agriculture is the main livelihood for the

sedentary farming communities, while cattle herding sustains the nomadic herders' way of life. The expanding population and increased demand for land and water resources, exacerbated by climate change-induced droughts and floods, have intensified competition between these groups (Specht, 2020, p. 231; Majok, 2018, p. 43). The farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan is a complex issue with various factors contributing to its occurrence and escalation. While it is challenging to attribute the conflict to specific instigators, the following are some of the major drivers of the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan:

Competition over Land and Other Resources

Farmers and herders often compete to access the communities' grazing land, water sources, and other natural resources. As South Sudan faces increasing environmental challenges, including droughts and desertification, the scarcity of these resources intensifies the tensions between the two groups in the Country. This is the main underlying cause of the conflict between farmers and herders in South Sudan, especially water and grazing land for livestock. With the establishment of international borders and the large-scale displacement of communities during the civil war, land ownership and boundaries have become contentious issues in some parts of South Sudan.

Over the years, farmers and herders frequently clash over claims to specific pieces of land, leading to conflicts, and as the population increases and resources become scarcer, disputes arise between agricultural communities and nomadic herders, leading to conflicts. According to a report by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), "The struggle over scarce resources is at the heart of many conflicts between farmers and herders in South Sudan" (UNMISS, 2019).

Climate change and environmental degradation

The effects of climate change, such as prolonged droughts and unpredictable rainfall patterns, have exacerbated the conflict between farmers and herders in the Country. These changes have led to the degradation of grazing lands and reduced access to water for both communities, intensifying competition for these resources in the land.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) reports, "Climate change, characterized by unpredictable rainfall and frequent droughts, has destroyed the natural resource base of farmers and herders, leading to increased conflicts between the two groups" (IPC, 2020).

As of now, climate change continues to pose a threat to many communities in South Sudan. Air-dried and geological phenomena have been affecting the civil population, posing a major security threat in the Country.

Ethnic and cultural divisions

South Sudan is ethnically diverse, with over 60 different ethnic groups. Historically, these groups have had varying relationships and power dynamics, which can lead to conflicts between farmers and herders from different ethnic backgrounds in the Country. Therefore, the conflict between farmers and herders in South Sudan is often perceived to be influenced by ethnic and cultural divisions. Different ethnic groups, with their distinct traditions and livelihood practices, have conflicting interests and perceptions of land ownership and resource usage.

A study by the Rift Valley Institute states, "Ethnic divisions and historical animosities play a significant role in farmers-herders' conflicts in South Sudan. The lack of clear land demarcation and boundary disputes further exacerbate the tensions" (Rift Valley Institute, 2017).

Access to arms and proliferation of arms

South Sudan has experienced decades of conflict and instability, resulting in the widespread availability of small arms and heavy and light weapons. The easy access to weapons exacerbates conflicts between farmers and herders, often leading to violence and loss of lives in the communities.

The widespread availability of weapons in South Sudan has increased the lethality of conflicts between farmers and herders. The presence of firearms has raised the stakes in disputes over land and resources and contributed to a higher number of fatalities in South Sudan (Survey & Switzerland, 2007 no pagination).

Political manipulation

Political actors in South Sudan have been known to exploit existing tensions between agriculturalists and pastoralists to further their agendas. Ethnic rivalries are sometimes stoked to gain political support and maintain power, increasing hostilities between farmers and herders.

They have played a considerable role in escalating the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan. Politicians often exploit ethnic differences for their gains, exacerbating tensions and fueling group hostility.

Lack of institutional support

South Sudan's weak governance and limited institutional capacity have made it difficult to effectively mediate conflicts and establish clear channels for dispute resolution at the sub-national levels. The absence of functioning institutions and a lack of basic services exacerbate tensions and prevent peaceful resolutions in the communities between the farmers and herders.

The weak institutional capacity and absence of effective governance structures in South Sudan have hindered conflict resolution and contributed to the perpetuation of the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan. The lack of essential services, disputes over land ownership, and inadequate dispute resolution mechanisms have further fueled tensions. Overall, the causes of the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan are deeply rooted in historical, socio-economic, and political factors of the societies.

It is important to note that the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan is a multidimensional issue influenced by a complex interplay of various factors, but while these drivers have been identified, it is essential to consider the context-specific dynamics at a local level to gain a more comprehensive understanding about farmers-herders conflict in that area.

Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach focusing on resource management, land dispute resolution, ethnic reconciliation, disarmament, and strengthening governance structures in the Country.

Consequences of Farmers-Herders Conflict in South Sudan

The consequences of the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan have been severe and deadliest. The clashes have resulted in a significant loss of lives, with both farmers and herders suffering casualties (Kuol, 2014, pp. 60-79). Moreover, the violence has led to the displacement of communities, intensifying the already dire humanitarian situation in the Country (Specht, 2020, p. 233). The conflict has also had economic repercussions, as the destruction of farmlands and cattle impedes agricultural production and disrupts livelihoods (Majok, 2018, p. 46).

Loss of Lives and Displacement

The farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan has resulted in numerous deaths and displacements in different communities. According to a report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), between January and September 2019, at least 600 people were killed, and 200,000 others were displaced due to such conflicts in South Sudan (OCHA, 2019).

Destruction of Livelihoods

The conflict has severely impacted the livelihoods of farmers and herders in South Sudan. The ongoing violence disrupts agricultural activities and displaces communities, destroying crops, livestock, and infrastructure. This leads to food insecurity, loss of income, and increased poverty levels (OCHA, 2019).

Exacerbation of Ethnic Tensions

The farmers-herders conflict has often taken an ethnic dimension, with community clashes. Such conflicts further aggravate existing ethnic tensions in South Sudan, leading to a cycle of violence and revenge attacks in some communities (Oxfam, 2020).

Disruption of Peacebuilding Efforts

South Sudan has struggled to achieve sustainable peace since gaining independence in 2011. The farmers-herders conflict undermines peacebuilding efforts and diverts resources and attention from achieving long-term stability in South Sudan (International Alert, 2019).

Humanitarian Crisis

The conflict contributes to a deepening humanitarian crisis in South Sudan, leading to increased vulnerability, displacement, and limited access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and clean water (World Food Programme, 2020).

Prevention and Management Strategies of Farmers-Herders Conflict in South Sudan

The farmers-herders conflict management in South Sudan refers to the efforts to address and mitigate the ongoing conflicts between agricultural farmers and nomadic herders in the Country. These conflicts primarily arise due to competition over scarce resources such as land and water and cultural and ethnic differences in the communities.

South Sudan as an agrarian society with a significant population reliant on agriculture, experiences frequent clashes between settled farmers and nomadic herders who move their livestock across large areas of land have experienced this type of conflict over the years. These conflicts often result in violence, displacement, and loss of lives and livelihoods. To address the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan, a multidimensional approach is required to de-escalate tensions between the farmers and herders and increase peacebuilding chances in South Sudan. To manage these conflicts, various approaches must be adopted:

Establish clear and enforceable property rights.

One potential solution is for the government to establish clear and enforceable property rights for both farmers and herders in South Sudan. This would help mitigate land disputes and provide a legal framework for resolving conflicts between the farmers and cattle keepers in South Sudan. Land management policies and customary laws governing the behaviour of herders and farmers should be imposed at all levels of government in South Sudan to deter issues related to land ownership and acquisition in South Sudan.

Land and resource management

In South Sudan, conflicts between farmers and herders often arise due to competition for scarce resources such as water and grazing land during the dry and wet seasons. To address this, the government could invest in infrastructure projects to improve access to water sources and develop grazing reserves and land forests for herders during the rainy season when farmers are busy cultivating their farmlands, including harvesting season. Ensuring equitable access to land and water resources is crucial to reducing conflicts. Developing clear land tenure policies, demarcating grazing areas, and establishing water management systems help minimize resource disputes in South Sudan.

Conflict resolution and mediation

This involves bringing together representatives from farming and herding communities, local authorities, and mediators to promote dialogue and negotiate solutions to the conflicts. Mediation committees and peace conferences are common mechanisms used for resolution. Therefore, the government should encourage facilitating dialogue and mediation between farmers and herders is crucial for resolving conflicts. This could involve establishing community-based conflict resolution mechanisms or organizing facilitated dialogues that allow both parties to air their grievances and find mutually agreeable solutions. Farmers-herders' committees should be constituted at both the Payam and Boma levels to tackle farmers-herders' issues early in the communities.

Livelihood diversification and alternative income generation

Relying solely on agriculture or livestock rearing can make communities more vulnerable to conflicts and other disasters. Therefore, encouraging farmers and herders to engage in alternative income-generating activities can reduce resource competition.

Providing vocational training, improving market access, and promoting cooperative farming and livestock production are some strategies to mitigate societal conflicts.

Government and partners should encourage diversification of livelihoods by promoting alternative income-generating activities, such as fisheries or handicrafts, which could reduce reliance on land and livestock only.

Strengthen law enforcement and justice systems.

In many instances, conflicts between farmers and herders escalate due to the absence of law enforcement and justice systems in some specific regions in South Sudan. Increasing police presence in conflict-prone areas and ensuring that law enforcement agencies are adequately resourced and trained could help deter and address violent conflict between the farmers and herders in South Sudan.

Enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to address conflicts effectively is important. This includes prosecuting perpetrators, providing legal aid, and ensuring fair compensation for damage caused is provided.

Support education and awareness programs

Education and awareness programs can help foster understanding, tolerance, and respect between farmers and herders in South Sudan. These initiatives can promote peaceful coexistence by educating both parties about their rights, responsibilities, and the importance of sustainable resource management. Mobile education should be introduced in the cattle camps by the Ministry of General Education and instructions for twenty years to end the vicious cycle of violent conflict between farmers and herders in South Sudan.

Promote cooperative initiatives.

Encouraging farmers and herders to work together through cooperative initiatives can help build community trust and cooperation. Joint projects, such as shared water sources or collaborative land management, joint peace committees/courts, schools, and health services, can foster mutual benefits and reduce conflicts between the farmers and herders in the sub-regions.

Improve access to credit and agricultural inputs.

Providing farmers and herders better access to credit facilities and agricultural inputs, such as seeds and fertilizers, can enhance their productivity and income at the household and community levels. This, in turn, can reduce competition over resources and mitigate conflicts in the communities in and around South Sudan.

Community peacebuilding and awareness-raising

Promoting peacebuilding initiatives at the community level helps foster understanding and cooperation between farmers and herders in the communities. Conducting awareness campaigns on conflict prevention, mediation, and the importance of peaceful coexistence creates an enabling environment for conflict management in the war-affected region in South Sudan.

Engage in cross-border collaboration.

The farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan often spills across international boundaries, exacerbating tensions, for example, in the case of Uganda, Kenya, and South Sudan. Engaging neighbouring countries in cross-border collaborations and regional protocols can help address shared challenges and promote peaceful coexistence along the common border and international boundaries.

Encourage policy coordination.

Lastly, enacting and implementing policies that promote coordination and collaboration between relevant government agencies involved in agriculture, livestock, land, and conflict resolution is essential in this Country. This can help ensure a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan.

In a nutshell, despite these efforts, the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan persists due to several underlying factors, including historical tensions, inadequate infrastructure, weak governance, and the impact of climate change. A comprehensive and sustained approach is required to address the root causes and build long-term peace and stability in the Country.

Policy recommendations for actors and policymakers

The farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan is a complex issue that stems from disputes over natural resources, ethnicity, polity, and historical tensions. Resolving this conflict requires a multidimensional approach that addresses the root causes and promotes peaceful coexistence between communities, actors, and perpetrators. Here are some recommendations:

1. Promote Dialogue and Reconciliation: Facilitate peace talks and dialogues between farmer and herder communities, involving community leaders, elders, and religious figures. These initiatives should aim to build trust, promote understanding, and address grievances on both sides.

2. Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Engage neutral third-party mediators, such as local NGOs or international organizations, to facilitate dialogue and negotiations between conflicting parties. Skilled mediators should focus on finding mutually acceptable solutions that accommodate the needs and interests of both farmers and herders in societies.

3. Formalize Land Rights: Establish clear land ownership and user rights through land regularization and registration processes. This will help minimize disputes over grazing land and provide a legal framework for resolving conflicts. Additionally, provides legal assistance and support to farmers and herders in understanding their rights and resolving land-related conflicts.

4. Enhance Livelihood Opportunities: Foster economic diversification and create alternative income sources for both farmers and herders. This can be achieved through vocational training, micro-finance initiatives, development projects, and support for small-scale businesses. Providing education and skills training programs for youth can also contribute to reducing tensions.

5. Strengthen Local Institutions: Invest in strengthening local governance structures, including traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Empower local leaders and institutions to effectively manage and resolve conflicts using traditional conflict resolution methods alongside formal justice systems. This would ensure more sustainable and culturally appropriate solutions to the conflict.

6. Improve Safety and Security Measures: Enhance safety and security in conflict-prone areas by deploying additional police forces and community-based security mechanisms. Establish joint farmer-herder peace committees to monitor and address potential conflicts. Collaborate with security forces to develop strategies that prevent violence and hold perpetrators accountable.

7. Encourage Cross-Community Initiatives: Foster initiatives that bring farmer and herder communities together for joint activities, such as sports, cultural events, and community development projects. Encouraging shared spaces and activities can help build social cohesion, reduce stereotypes, and promote peaceful coexistence.

8. Strengthen Early Warning Systems: Establish or strengthen early warning systems to detect and respond to potential conflicts before they escalate. This can involve training community members in conflict early warning techniques, establishing hot-lines, and improving coordination between security forces and local communities.

9. Promote Education and Awareness: Invest in educational programs that foster mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect among farmers and herders. Promote awareness campaigns highlighting the benefits of interdependence and peaceful coexistence. Education can also help reduce the impact of historical grievances and stereotypes about the farmers-herder relationship.

10. International Support: Encourage international and national organizations, UN agencies, neighbouring countries, and partners to provide financial and technical support to local peacebuilding initiatives. International actors can also play a role in monitoring and reporting on progress, as well as aiding in capacity building for local institutions on how to prevent and manage conflict at their levels or at the early stage.

These recommendations should be implemented together, recognizing that there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution. A comprehensive and inclusive approach that considers the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders is crucial for sustainable peace in South Sudan.

II. Conclusion

In summary, the farmers-herders conflict in South Sudan presents a multifaceted challenge that necessitates a comprehensive approach to tackle its root causes and wide-ranging consequences for the communities within the nation. Typically, these conflicts between farmers and herders are primarily fueled by competition for essential resources, exacerbated by deep-seated ethnic divisions and historical grievances in South Sudan. Regrettably, the fallout from these conflicts has consistently resulted in significant loss of life, the forced displacement of communities, and adverse economic repercussions that have profoundly impacted societal development and progress in South Sudan.

Addressing this intricate issue demands a multifaceted strategy that involves resolving land and resource disputes, facilitating dialogue between affected communities, and establishing mechanisms for peaceful coexistence. South Sudan must prioritize inclusive dialogue, effective resource management, and sustained peacebuilding efforts to resolve conflict. This approach promises to steer South Sudan toward a more stable state and a brighter, more prosperous future for its people globally.

It is essential to recognize that the farmers-herders conflict, while deeply entrenched, is not impossible. With dedicated efforts from domestic and international stakeholders and the commitment of South Sudan's leadership, it is possible to forge a path toward reconciliation, lasting peace, and sustainable development. By addressing the root causes and fostering an environment of cooperation and coexistence, South Sudan can chart a course toward a brighter, more peaceful future, ultimately realizing its full potential as a nation.

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About the Author

Luka Madhieu Kuot is a Researcher, Consultant and Peacebuilding and Conflict Management Practitioner in South Sudan and Sudan. He intensively works for seventeen years as professional peacebuilder and conflict manager in humanitarian and development sector. He holds MSc in Governance, Peace, and Security studies from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi, Kenya with Thesis focused on the ‘‘ Effectiveness of Pastoralists Seasonal Cross-border Migration Peace Conferences in peacebuilding and conflict management in Abyei, South Sudan’’. He also holds BA in Public Administration from MANCOSA, South Africa. His research interests include peace, conflict, and security studies in South Sudan. He worked as a Consultant for UNDP, UNMISS and numerous of national NGOs in South Sudan. He can be reached at madhieu@gmail.com or via +211911111209/+211920007140.