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Conflict in Resource Use among Livestock and Crop Farmers in West Africa

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Abstract

Nigeria, like many agrarian countries in Africa, is experiencing high population growth with an accompanying increased demand for arable cropland. The need to provide food of crop and animal origin to meet ever-growing demands necessitates opening up of lands hitherto uncultivated including marginal lands. In many cases, especially where high population densities have led to overcrowding of existing farmlands, agricultural intensification has inevitably resulted. This kind of population-driven agricultural intensification often necessitates the adoption of certain farming techniques such as irrigation procedures and the adoption of agro-chemicals or improved organic farming techniques. Farmlands that were left to fallow for natural regeneration of the soil nutrients are fast disappearing so also are grazing lands, which have traditionally provided dry season grazing to pastoralists.

This changing pattern of agricultural production occasioned by population and/or market driven intensification has recently adopted measures for increased dry season irrigation farming for the promotion of agricultural growth through conjunctive exploitation of surface and shallow aquifer water resources for small holder farm-owned and managed small-scale irrigation development cited in wetland areas. Such lands have alternative and competitive uses by different producing groups. With the advent of the dry season irrigation project, pastoralists and other groups have been denied access to this dry season grazing resource. The competitive uses to which wetland is put is the source of potential and real conflicts amongst the various rural land users. Furthermore, the development of the wetland areas is an interference on the ecosystem which has the potential of adversely affecting plant and animal species bio-diversity. Thus, a conflict between environmentalists and the actual landless is an issue to contend with. Using the Nigerian irrigation project experience, this paper presents the different facets of conflict arising from resource utilisation and the principal actors involved. The various modes of conflict resolution are presented with a discussion of the merits and demerits of each settlement mechanism. Mitigative measures are also presented and discussed.

Keywords: Conflict, crop and pastoral production, irrigation, resource use