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Summary

This study is premised in the light of reports of increased violent conflicts between local farmers and Fulani herders in Ghana against the backdrop of debates of the role of environmental change/scarcie resources in these conflicts. In the midst of these violent conflicts, however, are cooperation and resource sharing between farmers and herders as well the building of strong social ties/networks. Using mainly a qualitative approach in data collection through extended case studies, comparative case studies, in-depth interviews, social network analysis and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), this study examines conflict, cooperation, environmental change and social networks in farmer-herder relations and how these forms of relations between farmers and Fulani herders in Ghana are expressed, shaped and determined.

The study shows that farmer-herder relations, whether conflict, cooperation or resource access and use, are multi-dimensional, complex and develop through several processes. These include long history of interactions and contacts; herder migrations and long-time settlements among local people; and the nature and type of social networks that exist between them. The study contextualises farmers' and herders' relations as cultural neighbours. As cultural neighbours, farmers and herders share cross-cutting ties, build everyday peace and cooperate even in the midst of violent conflicts. The two equally exchange and share natural resources (water, land, pasture), trade and build personal relationships (friendships, cattle entrustment and social solidarity). Further, conflict relations in particular cannot just be reduced to environmental/climate change and resource scarcity, but violent conflict escalation develops through plethora of social networks, constellation of diverse actors, political, historical, social and ecological processes and factors. In addition, there are equally important determinants and aspects of their interactions such as cooperation, nature of social networks/ties and resource use and access which are hardly ever emphasised in discourses and studies of farmer-herder relations.

The study recommends that the complexity of farmer-herder relations calls for harnessing issues of common cooperation and cross-cutting ties between local farmers and herders. Theoretically, the study questions simplistic and general conceptualisations of farmer-herder relations and rather calls for extended case studies and multi-theoretical studies of farmer-herder relations. Thus better comprehension and analysis of the totality of farmer-herder relations are needed. Also, a Bottom-up Peace Approach from the local-level and from the perspective of local peoples instead of the top-down national government approach is needed to addressing farmer-herder violent confrontations.