



Clean Technology Hub
Energy Innovation Centre

Position Paper

Beyond the Mandate to Vacate - Reframing Land Rights, Grazing Policy, and Climate Fragility in Nigeria

Peace and mediation outlook: November 2025

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Framing The Issue

In a bold and urgent call to action, the Idoma [Area Traditional Council of Benue State](#) on Wednesday 21st May 2025 demanded that Fulani herdsmen vacate all farmlands in the state to allow displaced farmers return to agricultural activities. Issued after a high-level emergency meeting on “Security Concerns, Land Use, and Peacebuilding in Idoma land, the communiqué calls for a review of land policies, reinforcement of anti-open grazing laws, disarmament of armed herdsmen, and the prosecution of land law violators.

While this directive echoes the frustrations of many farming communities in Nigeria's Middle Belt, it also opens a broader conversation about the legal underpinnings of grazing routes, the historical (and sometimes mythical) provisions governing land access for pastoralists, and how climate-induced pressures are intensifying already fragile contexts.

Statutory Foundations and Legislative Realities

Much of the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria is fueled by contested legal interpretations around grazing routes. The often-cited **Grazing Reserve Law of 1965** was enacted in the old Northern Region, enabling the establishment of grazing reserves and recognized livestock routes. However, this law:

1. **Predates the 1978 Land Use Act**, which centralized land ownership under the state governor's authority.
2. Was **never national in scope**, applying only to states that domesticated it.
3. It exists **in only 141 gazetted grazing reserves**, the vast majority (138) of which are in Northern Nigeria.
4. Is **not a Federal Act**, and thus lacks binding power outside the Northern region unless a state legislature chooses to adopt it.

In Nigeria, 141 out of the 415 grazing reserves have been gazetted, meaning they have been officially declared and legally recognized for grazing purposes. These gazetted reserves are spread across 21 states, covering a significant portion of the total grazing land area of 4.27 million hectares. The gazetted grazing reserves, which are primarily found in the northern states, aim to provide designated areas for livestock herders, potentially mitigating conflicts with farmers.

Further more, to put in context

5. **Total Grazing Reserves:** Nigeria has 415 grazing reserves across 21 states.
6. **Gazetted Reserves:** 141 of these reserves have been officially gazetted.
7. **Land Area:** The gazetted reserves cover approximately 2.9 million hectares of land, while the ungazetted reserves cover around 1.2 million hectares.
8. **Location:** The majority of grazing reserves, including the gazetted ones, are located in the northern states of Nigeria.

9. **Purpose:** The gazetted reserves are designed to provide designated grazing areas for livestock herders, potentially reducing conflicts with farmers who cultivate land in the same areas.
10. **Legal Framework:** The National Grazing Reserve Law of 1965 is the primary legal framework for grazing reserves, but it is primarily applicable in states created from the former Northern Region that have chosen to adopt it.

More critically, the **Land Use Act of 1978**, which remains the prevailing legal authority on land rights, makes no mention of grazing reserves or cattle routes. Under the current constitutional order, for grazing routes to carry national legal weight, they must either be:

1. **Enacted by the National Assembly** as a federal law (per Section 4(2) of the Constitution); or
2. **Modified by the President** under Section 315(2) to conform with constitutional principles, a power clarified in landmark cases like **AG Abia State v AG Federation (2003)** and **Govt of Plateau State v Nwaokorie (2014)**.

Therefore, the assumption that grazing routes are constitutionally protected or automatically enforceable across Nigeria is a **legal fiction** unless appropriate legislative steps are taken.

Climate as a Conflict Multiplier

The issue cannot be divorced from Nigeria's broader climate fragility. Between 1900 and 2020, northern Nigeria has experienced intensifying droughts, desertification, and erratic rainfall patterns, pushing herders southward in search of arable land and water. Over **60% of land in Nigeria is now threatened by desertification**. In 2020 alone, **flooding displaced 120,000 people** and affected **97% of Nigerian states**. In Borno, **IDP camps housing 16,000 people were destroyed by floodwaters**. This combination of **climate stressors and weak governance** is turning environmental challenges into violent land use conflicts, especially where land tenure is poorly defined or contested.

The Cost of Legal Silence and Policy Incoherence

We are not merely dealing with grazing disputes, we are witnessing a **systemic governance failure** where outdated, regionally-bound laws are used to justify unregulated transhumance in places where they hold no legal validity. Without:

- A. **Nationally harmonized land use policies,**
- B. **A legal review of obsolete grazing provisions, and**
- C. **Robust, climate-informed planning** at the state and federal levels,

Efforts to curb herder-farmer violence will remain palliative.

The Way Forward: From Eviction to Ecosystem Co-Governance

1. **Affirm State Land Sovereignty:** States must continue to exercise their constitutional right to legislate on land use, including enforcing anti-open grazing laws where applicable. The judiciary must uphold these rights to deter impunity.
2. **Harmonize Legislation:** The National Assembly should initiate a review of the Grazing Reserve Law and the Land Use Act to resolve contradictions and align them with Nigeria's climate realities and human rights obligations.
3. **Promote Modern Ranching:** The federal government must incentivize modern ranching practices, not through coercion, but through land grants, extension services, and veterinary support especially in regions historically aligned with pastoralism.
4. **Community-Based Conflict Resolution:** Traditional institutions like the Idoma Council should be formally integrated into early warning and conflict prevention systems. Their role in peacebuilding is pivotal, but must be backed by institutional capacity and legal recognition.
5. **Climate-Resilient Land Use Planning:** Deploy climate data from NiMet and NASRDA to map flood-prone areas, water stress zones, and safe grazing corridors. These maps should guide not only emergency planning but also long-term land allocations and zoning.
6. **Establish a National Resilience and Land Dialogue Platform:** Bring together pastoralist associations, farmer unions, traditional leaders, security agencies, and climate scientists to develop a consensus-driven, multi-sectoral national grazing framework

Executive Summary

The persistent herder-farmer conflict in Benue State, Nigeria, represents a volatile intersection of climate-induced mobility, fragile governance structures, land-use pressures, and contested legal frameworks. While the Benue State Anti-Open Grazing Law was enacted to curb violent clashes and promote more sustainable livestock practices, its implementation has been marred by contradictions with federal constitutional provisions, ineffective enforcement mechanisms, and the rise of armed non-state actors operating under the guise of community protection. This legal and institutional ambiguity has deepened insecurity, strained livelihoods, and undermined efforts at peacebuilding in a region already vulnerable to the compounded impacts of displacement, and food system disruption.

This position paper asserts the need for a harmonized, rights-based, and climate-informed approach to address the root causes of the conflict. We argue for a constitutional review to clarify land tenure rights and security mandates, the establishment of a hybrid peace and security framework that brings together state and federal actors with local communities, and a redirection of policy focus toward sustainable land-use systems and early warning/early response mechanisms. By addressing the governance vacuum, reinforcing legitimacy, and investing in data-driven, inclusive interventions, Nigeria can move from reactive crisis management to proactive conflict prevention and resilience-building in Benue State and beyond.

Background

The nexus of land rights, grazing policies, and climate fragility in Nigeria represents one of the country's most persistent and complex governance dilemmas rooted in a confluence of historical legacies, geographical pressures, socio-political contestations, and environmental degradation. At its core lies the protracted struggle over access to and control of land, particularly between sedentary farming communities and nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralist groups, most notably the Fulani herders. This competition has evolved into an increasingly volatile crisis marked by communal violence, displacement, and deepening national fragility.

Historically, Nigeria's grazing routes and rangelands were formalized during the colonial and early post-colonial periods, culminating in frameworks such as the **Northern Grazing Reserve Law of 1965**, which aimed to demarcate pastoral lands and reduce farmer-herder conflicts. However, successive administrations have failed to adequately invest in the maintenance, adaptation, or equitable implementation of these policies, especially in the face of a rapidly growing population and environmental changes. Today, the lack of clear and enforceable land tenure rights for both pastoralists and farmers has contributed to widespread insecurity and intercommunal clashes. According to the **International Crisis Group**, **over 8,000 people were killed in farmer-herder conflicts between 2011 and 2021**, with hundreds of thousands displaced, particularly in the Middle Belt and Northwestern regions of Nigeria (ICG Report, 2021).

Compounding this situation is the intensifying climate crisis. Nigeria loses about **350,000 hectares of arable land annually to desertification**, particularly in the northern states, while the Lake Chad Basin has shrunk by more than **90% since the 1960s**, drastically reducing water and pasture availability (UNEP, 2023). These changes have forced pastoralist communities to migrate further south into agricultural zones, igniting fresh disputes over territory and resource use. This environmental displacement largely underreported in formal displacement data highlights a critical blind spot in Nigeria's land and migration policy frameworks.

The Federal Government's recent decision to mandate the eviction of pastoralists from forest reserves in some states (e.g., Ondo, Oyo, Benue, and Ekiti) addressing security concerns further exposes the institutional fragility of Nigeria's land governance systems. Such eviction orders, often issued without due consultation or sustainable alternatives, risk violating constitutional protections and human rights norms, while exacerbating the underlying drivers of fragility. Meanwhile, proposed reforms such as the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) and the Grazing Reserves Act remain either stalled or unevenly implemented across states, raising critical questions about inclusivity, enforceability, and political will (Brookings Institution, 2020).

Urgently, Nigeria stands at a policy crossroads. As climate pressures intensify and fragile communities become more vulnerable, the need for a reframed, rights-based, climate-resilient approach to land and grazing policy has never been more crucial. The challenge lies not only in balancing ecological sustainability with economic livelihoods, but also in reconstituting trust in state institutions and legal frameworks that govern land access, mobility, and security.

The urgency of addressing these intertwined issues is underscored by the escalating food insecurity crisis. As of 2024, **over 31 million Nigerians face acute food insecurity**, a situation aggravated by climate change, conflict, and economic instability. Without comprehensive and inclusive policy interventions that recognize and integrate the rights and needs of all stakeholders, Nigeria risks further socio-economic fragmentation and environmental decline.

Problem Statement

Despite multiple government efforts and policy frameworks, Nigeria's land and resource governance remains marred by fragmentation, exclusion, and reactive enforcement mechanisms that do not reflect the complex realities of its agro-pastoral communities. The **1978 Land Use Act** vests land ownership in state governors, effectively marginalizing indigenous land tenure systems and weakening the customary rights of both sedentary farmers and nomadic pastoralists. This legal ambiguity fuels competing claims, leading to the frequent eruption of violent conflicts, especially in North-Central states such as Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa (Library of Congress).

Moreover, climate-induced pressures are accelerating the frequency and severity of these clashes. Desertification rendered 60–65% of Nigeria's land mass at risk, pushing herders farther south in search of grazing pastures, often into densely populated agricultural zones (UNCCD). As climate conditions worsen, particularly in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, the absence of inclusive adaptation frameworks continues to drive displacement, food insecurity, and inter-communal strife.

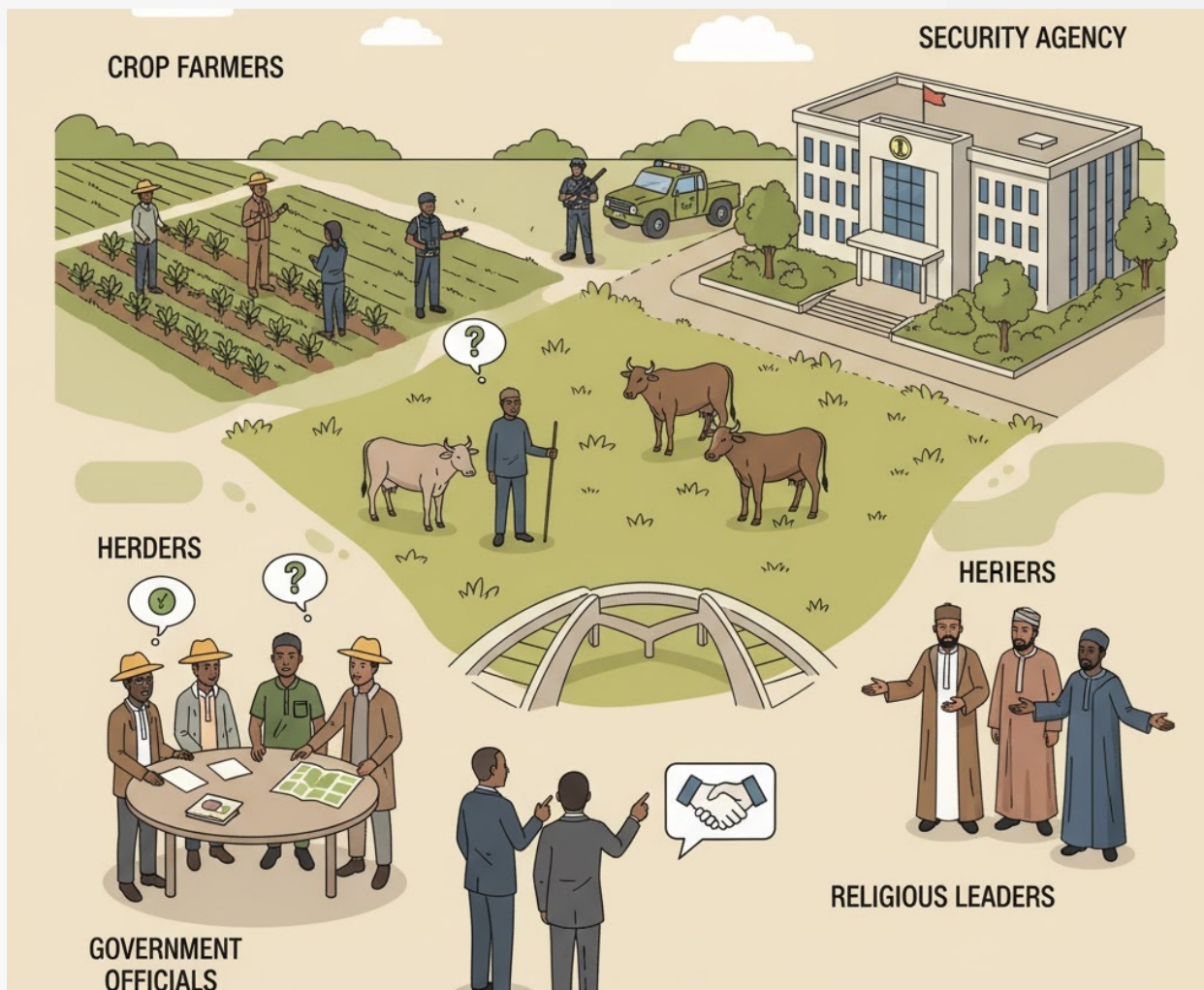
The Grazing Reserve Law of 1965 and the more recent push for RUGA (Rural Grazing Area) settlements remain highly controversial. Their implementation has been patchy, largely due to poor stakeholder engagement, the failure to address historic grievances, and politicization of land allocation. Additionally, states such as Benue, Taraba, and Ekiti have passed anti-open grazing laws, which, while aiming to reduce violence, have also criminalized mobile pastoralism and escalated tensions. There is little clarity on enforcement and no viable alternatives offered for herding communities (Crisis Group).

Furthermore, federal and state policies continue to treat herder-farmer violence primarily as a security issue, deploying military or police forces instead of investing in land-use planning, conflict-sensitive climate adaptation, or community-driven solutions. This securitized approach overlooks the root causes: governance vacuums, socio-environmental degradation, and structural inequalities.

In summary, the current land and grazing governance framework in Nigeria fails to accommodate the historical, cultural, and climatic realities of herders and farmers. Without reframing land rights to reflect ecological fragility and human mobility patterns, Nigeria risks entrenching cycles of displacement, conflict, and environmental collapse, undermining national development goals and regional stability alike.



Stakeholder Analysis



The complexity of land rights and grazing policy reform in Nigeria implicates a diverse constellation of stakeholders with overlapping and sometimes competing interests. Understanding the perspectives, power dynamics, and roles of each group is essential to designing interventions that are conflict-sensitive, climate-informed, and socially inclusive.



Herders (Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Pastoralists): Primarily from Fulani ethnic groups, pastoralists are among the most vulnerable populations affected by climate change, shrinking grazing lands, and increasing mobility restrictions. They rely on traditional transhumance routes, which have become blocked or contested due to farmland expansion, urbanization, and insecurity. Marginalized from political processes and stigmatized in public discourse, pastoralists often lack legal recognition of their land use rights (IOM Nigeria 2021).



Farmers (Sedentary Agrarian Communities): Communities engaged in subsistence and commercial farming, especially in Nigeria's Middle Belt and southern regions, frequently report crop destruction, land encroachment, and insecurity related to herder movements. In many cases, these [communities operate under customary land tenure systems](#) that are not formally recognized, leaving them without legal recourse or compensation when conflicts arise.



State Governments: Under the Land Use Act of 1978, state governors hold authority over land within their jurisdictions. This has led to divergent approaches: some states (e.g., Benue, Ekiti, Taraba) enforce anti-open grazing laws, while others support the establishment of grazing reserves or RUGA settlements. The inconsistency fuels regional fragmentation and undermines coordinated national policy efforts (Nigeria Governors Forum).



Federal Government: The federal government has introduced various frameworks, including the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) to modernize livestock management and reduce conflict. However, implementation has been sluggish, partly due to poor state buy-in and a lack of transparent funding mechanisms. Federal ministries responsible for agriculture, environment, and humanitarian affairs often operate in silos, leading to policy dissonance (NLTP Overview, PWC Nigeria).



Traditional and Religious Institutions: Local chiefs, emirs, and religious leaders continue to hold significant influence over land disputes, conflict mediation, and social cohesion. However, their roles are often underutilized in formal policy processes. Integrating these actors into land governance could enhance legitimacy, trust, and cultural resonance of proposed solutions (United States Institute of Peace).



Civil Society and Community-Based Organizations: Grassroots organizations play a critical role in peacebuilding, early warning and response, environmental education, and humanitarian support. They are often the first responders in fragile areas and can bridge the trust gap between communities and state institutions. However, many face funding constraints and lack access to policy platforms.



Private Sector and Agro-Investors: Agro-industrial expansion, land grabs, and speculative development—often backed by domestic and international investors—are exacerbating land pressures. Without safeguards, these ventures risk deepening exclusion and sparking new forms of displacement (Land Matrix Nigeria Profile).



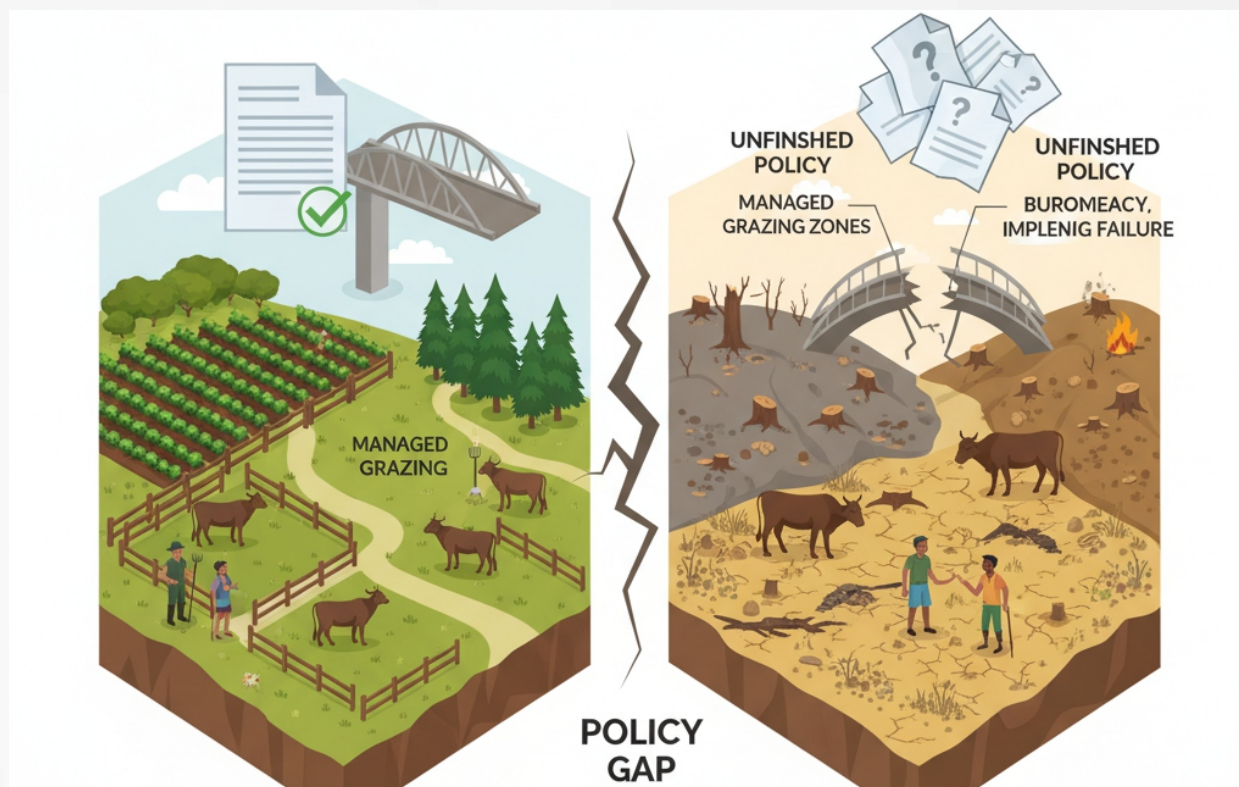
Security Actors: Military and police forces are frequently deployed to manage herder-farmer violence but often lack training in conflict-sensitive engagement. Their presence can either de-escalate or inflame tensions, depending on their approach and accountability mechanisms (Amnesty International Nigeria).



Development Partners and International Agencies: UN bodies (e.g., UNDP, FAO), the African Development Bank, and bilateral donors (e.g., EU, Germany, USAID) have supported various initiatives on climate adaptation, sustainable agriculture, and peacebuilding. Greater coordination and local ownership of these programs are needed to ensure their sustainability and impact.

Analysis of Policy Gaps and Implementation Challenges

Despite the presence of multiple legal and policy instruments, Nigeria's land governance and grazing systems remain mired in systemic dysfunction. The gaps between policy formulation and implementation have contributed to persistent conflicts, environmental degradation, and deepening fragility, particularly in climate-affected and agriculturally dependent regions.



1. Weak Institutional Coordination

Nigeria's land and grazing governance involves multiple overlapping institutions at federal, state, and local levels, each with varying mandates and political motivations. This often results in poor coordination, delays in decision-making, and inconsistent implementation of policies such as the **National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP)**. [A 2021 report by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect highlights that, despite its promise](#), the NLTP has failed to gain traction due to fragmented stakeholder engagement and unclear governance responsibilities.

2. Failure to Integrate Customary Land Tenure Systems

While the 1978 Land Use Act centralizes land control under state governors, it insufficiently recognizes and integrates customary land tenure arrangements particularly in northern Nigeria, where pastoralist and indigenous farming communities rely on communal land ownership. This legal exclusion fosters land insecurity, reduces local legitimacy, and fuels conflict.

3. Inadequate Funding and Capacity

The implementation of strategic initiatives such as the NLTP and environmental rehabilitation programs under the **Great Green Wall** initiative has been hindered by insufficient financial commitment and technical capacity. In many states, budgetary allocations to agriculture, land reform, or climate resilience programs remain below international benchmarks. As of 2023, [less than 5% of Nigeria's national budget was allocated to climate-related interventions](#).

4. Political Sensitivities and Ethnic Polarization

The anti-open grazing laws enacted in several southern and Middle Belt states—while legal and arguably necessary—have been interpreted through an ethnic lens, creating a [perception of targeted exclusion against Fulani pastoralists](#). This has eroded trust in governance and stoked retaliatory attacks and resistance to policy adoption, especially in northern states.

5. Climate-Driven Displacement Not Addressed in Policy

Most national policies on land and livestock management fail to sufficiently integrate climate change projections and displacement patterns. There is limited use of meteorological and ecological data to inform zoning decisions, grazing routes, or migration pathways. [This is especially problematic given that desertification now affects over 60% of Nigeria's land](#), driving pastoralists further south and heightening land pressures.

6. Lack of Gender-Inclusive Land Reforms

Existing frameworks inadequately address women's land rights, despite women comprising a significant portion of the agricultural workforce. Insecure land tenure among women—especially in pastoralist and agrarian communities—limits livelihood recovery, food security, and resilience to climate shocks.

Our Position: Reframing Land Use and Grazing Policies for Climate-Resilient Peacebuilding



The Clean Technology Hub and its partner network assert that current approaches to land rights and grazing policies in Nigeria are inadequate to address the root causes of conflict, fragility, and climate vulnerability. We hold the position that **a shift from punitive, exclusionary, and fragmented policies to inclusive, climate-informed, and locally grounded frameworks is both urgent and non-negotiable.**

This position is founded on the recognition that environmental degradation, state fragility, forced migration, and resource-based conflict are interconnected challenges that must be addressed holistically. Displacement, contestation over land and water, and weak enforcement of land use rights have coalesced to drive violent conflict across Nigeria's rural and peri-urban areas. These dynamics demand a **reframing of land and grazing governance as a peacebuilding imperative.**

1. We reject one-size-fits-all bans on open grazing

While recognizing the need to modernize livestock management and reduce environmental pressures, we oppose blanket anti-grazing legislations that fail to provide realistic alternatives for pastoralist communities. These laws, enacted without inclusive consultations or supportive infrastructure (e.g., ranches, water points, or feed reserves), worsen pastoralist marginalization and deepen ethnic divides. Our position aligns with the African Union's **Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa**, which calls for mobility, [rights-based access to resources](#), and [inclusive policy development](#).

2. We advocate for climate-sensitive land use reforms grounded in customary tenure systems

Nigeria's Land Use Act (1978) must be reformed to reflect realities on the ground, particularly the need to legally recognize communal and indigenous landholding systems. Failure to do so continues to disenfranchise rural and nomadic populations and weakens local conflict resolution capacities. This is supported by international obligations under the **Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests** [endorsed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#), which Nigeria has committed to.

3. We emphasize that land governance reform is key to climate resilience and conflict prevention

Evidence from the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute \(SIPRI\)](#) confirms that inclusive natural resource governance reduces fragility and fosters peace in climate-stressed environments. [In Nigeria, poorly managed land scarcity has contributed to over 7,000 deaths from herder-farmer conflicts since 2015](#). We therefore assert that climate adaptation funding and planning must prioritize land access, grazing corridors, and reforestation of degraded ecosystems as peacebuilding strategies. This must include investment in sustainable agriculture, rainwater harvesting, and rewilding efforts along key migratory corridors.

4. We support community-driven, gender-inclusive solutions anchored in local knowledge

Pastoralists and smallholder farmers, especially women must be empowered through secure land rights, capacity-building, and participatory governance. Evidence from Kaduna and Plateau states shows that peacebuilding efforts led by women in agrarian communities have significantly reduced reprisal violence and improved early warning systems. This position draws on commitments made under the **UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security**, and Nigeria's National Action Plan for its implementation.

We believe that reframing land and grazing policies through the lenses of **peace, climate resilience, and social inclusion** offers Nigeria a path out of entrenched conflict and environmental fragility. The current mandate to vacate land or enforce grazing prohibitions must give way to a rights-based, data-informed, and community-anchored approach, one that uplifts livelihoods, reduces climate risk, and builds durable peace.

Supporting Arguments

1. Legal Basis: Constitutional Mandates and Land Rights

Nigeria's **1999 Constitution** enshrines the principle of federalism, granting states the authority to enact laws that address local concerns. This legal framework supports state-level initiatives like the **Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law of 2017** in Benue State, which was upheld by the Federal High Court in Abuja. The court affirmed the state's right to legislate on matters concerning land use and livestock management, [emphasizing the importance of such laws in maintaining public order and protecting citizens' rights](#). However, the **Land Use Act of 1978** centralizes land ownership under state governors, often neglecting customary land tenure systems prevalent in rural communities. This disconnect between statutory law and traditional practices has led to disputes and undermined the legitimacy of land governance structures.

2. Social and Humanitarian Concerns: Displacement and Livelihoods

The ongoing farmer-herder conflicts have resulted in significant humanitarian crises. According to SBM Intelligence, over **2 million people** have been displaced, and **542 civilians** killed since [2019 due to these clashes](#). The displacement not only disrupts communities but also strains resources in host areas, leading to further social tensions. Women, who constitute a substantial portion of the agricultural workforce, are disproportionately affected. Despite their contributions, only **10%** of landowners in Nigeria are women, primarily due to customary laws that restrict women's land rights. This inequality hampers [women's ability to secure livelihoods and exacerbates their vulnerability in times of conflict](#).

3. Environmental and Economic Impacts: Climate Change and Food Security

Climate change has intensified the competition for land and water resources. Desertification and drought have rendered up to **60%** of [Nigeria's land barren, pushing herders southward into farming communities and escalating tensions](#). The resultant conflicts have dire economic consequences. A study by the Environment for Development (EfD) initiative found that the fear of violence reduces farmers' investment in fertilizers, [leading to lower crop yields and threatening food security](#).

4. Security and Peacebuilding Concerns: Escalating Violence

The farmer-herder conflicts have evolved into a significant security challenge. In Benue State alone, recent attacks attributed to herders have resulted in the deaths of more than **218 people**, including women and children. [These incidents underscore the urgent need for effective conflict resolution mechanisms and the enforcement of existing laws to prevent further violence](#)

5. Ethical and Human Rights Dimensions: Equity and Justice

The marginalization of pastoralist communities and the failure to recognize their traditional land rights raise ethical concerns. Policies that criminalize open grazing without providing viable alternatives infringe upon the rights of these communities and exacerbate social inequalities. Moreover, the lack of enforcement of gender-equitable land rights violates international human rights standards and undermines efforts to achieve social justice and sustainable development. These arguments collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of the farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable policy interventions.

Policy Gaps and Limitations of Existing Frameworks

Despite numerous efforts to address the farmer-herder crisis and related land governance challenges in Nigeria, existing policy and legal frameworks remain fragmented, under-enforced, and insufficiently adaptive to the country's shifting climate and social landscape. The following are key limitations:

1. Lack of Federal Coordination and Political Backing

Although some states like Benue, Taraba, and Ekiti have enacted anti-open grazing laws, there is **no overarching national legislation** that standardizes or supports such measures across all 36 states.

The absence of a federal grazing policy or a unified national framework has led to **legal ambiguity**, uneven enforcement, and resistance from other tiers of government.

For instance, the Federal Government has, at various points, **opposed anti-grazing laws**, undermining state efforts ([Premium Times, 2021](#)).

The **National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP)** introduced in 2019, intended to shift pastoralism to ranching, remains poorly funded, inconsistently applied, and limited in scope ([World Bank Report, 2021](#)).

2. Weak Enforcement and Implementation Gaps: Even where laws exist, enforcement mechanisms are frail:

Benue State's Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law of 2017, for example, lacks adequate funding for enforcement, has insufficient personnel, and faces security threats from non-state actors who often act with impunity (ICG Report, 2021).

Implementation agencies such as **livestock guards and agro-rangers** often operate under poor logistical conditions and are sometimes accused of human rights violations, further eroding community trust ([Daily Trust, 2023](#)).

3. Neglect of Climate and Environmental Dimensions

Current policy responses do not integrate the **climate change factors** fueling migration and competition for land. Rising desertification in the North and erratic rainfall patterns are forcing herders to migrate southwards. Yet, major policy instruments such as the **NLTP** and various state-level laws lack climate-sensitive provisions or adaptation strategies.

According to the **Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet)**, the country is losing an **estimated 351,000 hectares of land annually to desertification**, predominantly in the north ([NiMet, 2022](#)).

Nigeria's **National Adaptation Strategy and Plan of Action on Climate Change (NASPA-CCN)**, developed in 2011, has not been fully implemented and remains outdated.

4. Lack of Community Engagement and Customary Integration

Most policies are **top-down**, with **minimal input from affected communities**, especially traditional leaders, women, and youth. This alienates local populations and creates resistance to government initiatives.

Customary land tenure systems remain unrecognized in many statutory frameworks, **especially in conflict-affected areas**, leading to dual claims over land ownership and further fueling conflicts ([Landesa, 2021](#)).

The **absence of gender-sensitive land policies** means that women, despite comprising a majority of the agricultural workforce, remain excluded from decision-making around land use and grazing policy ([CFR Women and Foreign Policy Program](#)).

5. Absence of Conflict-Sensitive and Peacebuilding Approaches

There is **no national framework that explicitly links grazing and land management policies to peacebuilding efforts**, despite the deadly nature of the conflicts. Many security responses have been militarized, reactive, and short-term.

Programs lack conflict-resolution components such as **dialogue platforms, mediation mechanisms, or reconciliation projects** at community level.

The **absence of psychosocial support** and trauma healing interventions for communities affected by farmer-herder violence is a critical omission, especially in zones experiencing repeated displacements (UNDP Nigeria Conflict Report, 2023).

Nigeria's current legal and policy framework addressing land use, grazing rights, and environmental migration is **piecemeal, politically divisive, and insufficiently climate-informed**. These gaps continue to hinder national cohesion, equitable development, and climate resilience.

Conclusion

The Benue monarchs' call for herders to vacate farmlands is not just a security demand, it is a desperate plea for **policy clarity, legal enforcement, and climate-conscious land governance**. In a nation where **science is not the problem but the relay of its insight is**, the time has come to stop managing symptoms and begin reforming the system.

The path to sustainable peace, equitable land governance, and climate resilience in Nigeria lies not in blanket evacuation directives or militarized enforcement but in inclusive, data-driven, and climate-smart policies that recognize the complexity of the land-use challenge. At the heart of the current conflict is a failure to integrate environmental realities with governance frameworks, customary rights, and socio-cultural dynamics.

I firmly reaffirm our position that forced evictions and reactive grazing bans, without robust engagement, consultation, and sustainable alternatives, deepen fragility and entrench cycles of violence. Instead, Nigeria must seize this moment to reframe land-use and grazing policies as tools for climate adaptation, peacebuilding, and inclusive development.

The urgency is now. The confluence of desertification, population growth, resource stress, and social tensions demands immediate yet thoughtful intervention. Without coordinated action, the structural violence embedded in our current land systems will continue to exacerbate insecurity, displacement, and intergroup resentment.

We stand ready to support and lead collaborative efforts, including multi-stakeholder policy dialogues, pilot implementation of climate-smart land governance models, community peacebuilding programs, and evidence-based research partnerships. Together, with political will, civic commitment, and international solidarity, Nigeria can build a land policy framework that heals, rather than harms.

Because while the cattle may be migrating, and the farmers displaced, **the real threat is that our laws and responses remain stagnant**

Let us not wait for the next crisis to begin what should already be underway.