

## FARMER-HERDER VIOLENCE: A CONTINENT-WIDE CONCERN

By Sarah Constantine

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Osaka Sansui, a farmer living in the Ardor Siding community in central Nasarawa state, speaks at a USAID-conducted peace dialogue, one of dozens held in Nigeria to promote understanding and reduce bias between farmers and herders. (Source: USAID/The Search for Common Ground, July/August 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/ybkg7wdw>.)

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Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, walks away after signing the African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) Agreement during the 10th Extraordinary Session of the African Union (AU) in Kigali, Rwanda, Wednesday, March 21, 2018. (Source: AP Photo.)

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Ambassador (ret.) George F. Ward is editor of Africa Watch and a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

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### About IDA

The Institute for Defense Analyses is a non-profit corporation operating in the public interest.

IDA's three federally-funded research and development centers provide objective analyses of national security issues and related national challenges, particularly those requiring scientific and technical expertise.

IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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Across Africa, the growth in violence can largely be attributed to three factors. First, environmental changes have forced many pastoralists to seek out new land for their cattle, bringing them more frequently into contact with neighbors. Second, the changing profile of pastoralists and availability of small arms have increased both the likelihood of young men engaging in violence and the lethality of the violence when they do. Finally, elites incentivize violence by using cattle as a store of wealth, thus increasing the size and destructiveness of herds and exercising greater influence over herder behavior.

## Environmental Factors Force Farmers and Herders into Proximity

In both West and East Africa, desertification and environmental shocks have made it increasingly difficult for pastoralists to sustain herds of cattle along their traditional routes. In [West Africa](#), pastoralists who traditionally traversed the borders of Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad have been forced further south by the expansion of the Sahel and the retraction of [Lake Chad](#). Similarly, in East Africa, recent [drought](#) conditions encouraged pastoralist communities to move their cattle to surviving grasslands, including into wildlife conservatories in Laikipia, Kenya. Changing routes bring herders into contact with large settled populations, creating opportunities for violence, as both groups vie for scarce resources.

While environmental degradation may be encouraging more contact between nomadic and fixed populations, it does not fully explain episodes of conflict. A [2016 study](#) examining the relationship of environmental shock in Africa, such as drought, to the likelihood of violent conflict found that “environmental stressors were only partly predictive of conflict events.” Similarly, an [analysis](#) of 11 case studies of pastoralist conflict in Africa found that although environmental shock was a contributing factor in five cases, it never proved the most important cause and could not explain conflict intensity.

## Guns and Changes to Pastoralism Increase Likelihood of Violence

The lethality of pastoralist conflict is better explained by the widespread availability of small arms and the changing profile of pastoralism. In East Africa, regional conflicts have created a growth industry for arms and ammunition, with weapons [transferred](#) from Uganda, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Somalia and also [allegedly sold](#) by corrupt security officials. Similarly, in West Africa, the [UN](#) estimated there were approximately [8 million](#) small arms in circulation, with illicit transfers originating from regional conflicts and corrupt security officials, transfers from regional governments, and a small number of imports.

Alongside the proliferation of small arms, changes in the norms and profiles of herding communities have contributed to an uptick in violence. In East Africa, [researchers](#) have noted that within pastoralist communities traversing the borders between Uganda, South Sudan, and Kenya, customary rules governing cattle raids changed over the past 30 years. While raids were traditionally conducted with limited violence, and had compensation mechanisms for injured or killed raiders, since the 1980s, raids have become [more violent](#) as raiders began to steal cattle for profit rather than to replenish herds.

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In both [Kenya](#) and [Uganda](#), the influx in small arms has also created an arms race between communities in which violent retaliation is seen as necessary deterrence against further attacks.

In West Africa, recent upticks in violence may reflect communities' reaction to the [perception](#) that herders are increasingly composed of groups of armed men with criminal ties, more akin to a militia than a nomadic community. Although some West African herders are involved in [terrorism or crime](#), criminal elements likely represent only a fraction of the estimated [50 million](#) pastoralists across West Africa. In Nigeria, however, as all sides perceive heightened risk of aggression, small violations, such as property damage, can quickly degenerate into tit-for-tat [reprisals](#). In some Nigerian states, rural communities have formed [vigilante groups](#) to protect against armed herdsmen. Conversely, pastoralists argue they must be armed to protect themselves from these types of groups.

### **Elites Stand to Benefit from Spreading Conflict**

One of the largest changes to the culture of pastoralism over the past 30 years has come from the commodification of cattle. Across the continent, elites use cattle as a [store of wealth](#), investing in vast herds and paying armed young men to oversee and protect them. While many investments are legitimate, cattle ownership has also proved valuable to [criminal](#) and [terrorist](#) networks as a way to launder money and recruit young men. Anecdotally, observers [report](#) that armed young herders who answer to urban-based elites, rather than local leaders, are more likely to ignore national land-use laws and may be more likely to escalate conflict situations.

In both East and West Africa, communities affected by conflict also believe politicians have used herders to incite violence for political ends. In Kenya, many [observers believed](#) Matthew Lempurkel, a Kenyan MP, encouraged the Laikipia standoff by directing the herders to take land to strengthen his chances at a local election. Similarly, in Nigeria, farming communities affected by violence [allege](#) that the Nigerian President, Mohammedu Buhari, is sympathetic to the herders because he is of the same ethnicity.

Whether real or perceived, the implication of elite political involvement in pastoralist conflicts may lead to spikes in violence during periods of political uncertainty. In both [Kenya](#) and [Nigeria](#), observers have related pastoralist violence to [elite manipulation](#) around elections.

### **Changing Nature of Conflict Challenges Both Local and Top-Down Solutions**

As herders are increasingly perceived to answer to elites, solutions to violence have become more complicated. An observer in [Kenya](#) notes a generational difference in how conflicts are resolved: "Elders, who once negotiated grazing rights with their neighbors in times of drought, are now ignored by smartphone-wielding teenagers who get their orders from WhatsApp."

Similarly, government attempts to provide solutions have backfired. In Nigeria, recommendations to create "cattle colonies" or [ranches](#) for pastoralists to contain their herds have come under fire over concerns about property rights, with some farmers [arguing](#) the proposals represent an elite attempt to steal land. Meanwhile, some states have [outlawed grazing](#), leading [herders](#) to accuse the state governments of inciting violence against them.

### **To Reduce Violence, Political and Technical Solutions Needed**

The interlocking environmental, cultural, and political drivers of pastoralist conflict suggest multifaceted responses are necessary. Although no organization has yet to successfully address the challenge, a number of efforts created through partnerships with local organizations, aid agencies, and regional governments appear promising. For example, the [World Bank](#) has created several initiatives designed to lessen the economic impact of climate shocks on pastoralists, while [USAID](#) has provided funding for community-level peace talks. Moving forward, the most successful efforts to reduce violence will likely involve partnerships to address the unique economic and political concerns driving pastoralists and settled communities into conflict.

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Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, walks away after signing the African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) Agreement during the 10th Extraordinary Session of the African Union (AU) in Kigali, Rwanda, Wednesday, March 21, 2018. (Source: AP Photo.)

## What Happened in Kigali?

In addition to the agreement establishing the AfCFTA, [two other documents](#) were signed in Kigali. The first was the Kigali Declaration, which emphasizes the objective of African economic integration. It was signed by representatives of 47 countries, including a few, such as South Africa, that did not join in the AfCFTA. For some of those that did not sign, the Kigali Declaration provided an opportunity to be on record in support of continental free trade even though their national legal requirements precluded them from signing the AfCFTA agreement. The second additional document was a Protocol on Free Movement that was agreed to by 30 countries.

The AfCFTA agreement itself is incomplete in at least three respects. First, the current [text](#) is an umbrella framework that will be operational only after the addition of protocols and annexes. Of those additional documents, the Protocol on Trade in Goods is well advanced. Others will require significant negotiations. Second, the agreement will come into force only after it has been ratified by 22 of the signatory states. Third, Africa's two largest economies, Nigeria and South Africa, did not sign the AfCFTA agreement.

Of the two, Nigeria's failure to sign is the most troubling. Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari had abruptly [canceled](#) his travel to Kigali. His cabinet had indicated that additional time was needed for domestic consultations even though it acknowledged that the agreement would create jobs and foster growth. The Nigerian labor union opposed the agreement, calling it a “[radioactive neoliberal policy initiative](#).” It is noteworthy that the Buhari government, which leans toward protectionist policies, recently also [decided not](#) to sign a free trade agreement between West Africa and the European Union. The failure of South Africa to sign is probably less consequential—Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies [told](#) the media that only technical, process reasons prevented his country's signature, adding, “South Africa is very much part of the process. We are not holding back. We don't have reservations or differences.”

## What Happens Next?

If past is prologue, the AfCFTA ratification process is likely to be lengthy. As [reported](#) previously in Africa Watch, on June 10, 2015, three Regional Economic Commissions—the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC)—launched the Tripartite Free Trade Area, which would cover about half the continent and over half of its GDP. Deadlines for completion of negotiations on tariffs and other issues related to the Tripartite Agreement have repeatedly been missed, and the ratification process



has lagged. South Africa [signed](#) the Tripartite Agreement only in July 2017, and Botswana [adhered](#) only in January 2018. Now, after almost three years of delay, it is unclear how the Tripartite Free Trade Area will be coordinated with the AfCFTA. There is little reason to believe that the ratification process for the AfCFTA will be less complicated and drawn out than that for the Tripartite Agreement.

### **What Would the AfCFTA Do—and Not Do?**

There is no question that the AfCFTA projects a bold vision: a free-trade area covering an entire continent, 1.2 billion people, and \$2.6 trillion in GDP. Today, intra-African trade compares quite [unfavorably](#) with trade within other world regions. Only about 16 percent of the total trade of African countries is intra-African. That contrasts sharply with the figures for intra-regional trade in Asia, 51 percent, and in Europe, 70 percent. When fully agreed to and ratified the AfCFTA would provide the policy and regulatory framework for significant expansion of intra-African trade.

An improved framework for trade would be an important accomplishment, but at least two other roadblocks to increased intra-regional trade would remain: (1) the high costs of trading within Africa and (2) the relative lack of tradable products.

According to [researchers](#) at the International Growth Center, the high costs of getting goods to and from border or ports in Africa restricts the continent's potential gains from international trade. Poor roads and other factors increase the cost of transporting goods over long distances. The researchers report that in some areas of Africa, transport costs constitute higher trade barriers than tariffs or other restrictions. They cite statistics that the unit costs of road transport in Africa are 40–100 percent higher than in Southeast Asia. In landlocked African countries, the comparisons are even starker—300–400 percent higher than in other regions. The majority of roads in sub-Saharan Africa are poorly maintained, and around 53 percent remain unpaved. Long waiting times at ports and borders persist. Even though these non-tariff barriers to trade are gradually being reduced, importers require 50 percent more time to bring goods to market in Africa than in East Asia.

Even with an improved regulatory framework and better physical infrastructure, Africa would still suffer from a deficit of tradable products. Africa's rapidly growing middle class demands consumer goods, but many African economies continue to [depend](#) on exports of commodities, mainly fuels, metal ores, and other minerals. In fact, several countries depend on the export of just one or two commodities (e.g., oil and gas for Angola and copper for Zambia). African manufacturers have been under pressure for decades, largely because of the difficulty of competing with cheap consumer goods from China and elsewhere. Today, Africa is less industrialized than two decades ago. In 2014, only [9.8 percent of Africa's GDP](#) came from manufacturing, a quarter lower than in 1990. Until African manufacturers and farmers are able to produce efficiently for African markets, the prospects for significant growth in intra-regional trade are likely to remain limited.

### **Conclusion**

That the AfCFTA agreement will not solve all of Africa's trade problems should not distract from the importance of achieving swift completion, ratification, and entry into force of that agreement. Rather, the governments and entrepreneurs in all the countries of Africa should push forward to expand trade on parallel tracks, building up a robust legal and regulatory framework for trade through AfCFTA while also reducing the inefficiencies and non-tariff barriers that currently pose such formidable obstacles.

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