



doi: <https://doi.org/10.20546/ijcar.2026.1407.001>

Perceptions and Prejudices: Their Impact on Coexistence between Farmers and Livestock Farmers in Tchaourou Commune

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Abstract

This article analyzes the perceptions and prejudices between farmers and herders and assesses their influence on coexistence in the commune of Tchaourou, Benin. Data were collected through individual interviews with 210 respondents (105 farmers and 105 herders) distributed across the districts of the commune of Tchaourou, selected using purposive and random sampling methods. This data was supplemented by semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and field observations. Qualitative data underwent content analysis, while relationships between variables were examined using the chi-square test. The results show that perceptions and prejudices are predominantly negative in both groups. Farmers primarily associate herders with crop destruction (68.6%), non-compliance with local rules (17.1%), and being outsiders (8.6%). Livestock farmers, for their part, consider farmers responsible for land grabbing (62.9%) and the occupation of transhumance corridors (20.0%). These perceptions evolve into social prejudices, fueling mutual distrust, the stigmatization of stakeholders, and a climate of constant tension. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (62.9%) thus consider coexistence to be problematic. The study concludes that agro-pastoral conflicts do not result solely from competition for resources but also from social constructs that perpetuate mistrust and limit the effectiveness of mediation mechanisms. It recommends integrating psychosocial dimensions into public policies for conflict prevention through intercultural dialogue, awareness-raising, and trust-building initiatives between communities.

Article Info

Received: 10 May 2026

Accepted: 22 June 2026

Available Online: 20 July 2026

Keywords

Social perceptions, prejudices, coexistence, agro-pastoral conflicts, mediation, pastoral mobility, Tchaourou, Benin.

Introduction

In West African agropastoral systems, conflicts between farmers and herders are often viewed through the lens of competition for natural resources like farmland, pastures, and water. While land pressure, climate variability, and agricultural expansion are significant drivers, studies also emphasize the role of social and psychological factors. These include social representations, mutual perceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices that shape interactions between different groups. Such social constructs influence behavior, foster distrust, and can escalate minor incidents into full-blown conflicts. In Benin,

particularly in the Tchaourou commune, farmer-herder relations are characterized by significant pastoral mobility, expanding agricultural areas, and increased pressure on natural resources. The established presence of Fulani herders, the seasonal arrival of transhumant herders from across borders, shifts in land tenure, and regional security concerns have contributed to the development of often negative social perceptions. Farmers commonly link herders to crop destruction, insecurity, or a disregard for local customs. Conversely, herders may view farmers as encroaching on land and benefiting from favored institutional treatment. These perceptions, shaped by individual experiences and shared

narratives, significantly impact patterns of coexistence, conflict resolution, and the effectiveness of mediation.

Although many studies have explored the economic, environmental, and institutional roots of agro-pastoral conflicts, the perceptual and psychosocial aspects have been relatively under-examined in Benin. However, understanding perceptions and prejudices is crucial for explaining the persistence of tensions, difficulties in inter-community cooperation, and the limitations of mediation.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the reciprocal perceptions and prejudices between farmers and herders in the Tchaourou commune and to evaluate their impact on the quality of coexistence. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the social factors influencing agro-pastoral conflicts and can inform prevention and sustainable management strategies that promote dialogue, trust, and mediation.

Materials and Methods

Study Area

This study is conducted in the commune of Tchaourou, situated in north-central Benin. The commune spans an area of 7,256 km² and lies between latitudes 8°40' and 9°45' North, and longitudes 1°55' and 3°11' East. It shares borders with the communes of Parakou, Pèrèrè, and N'Dali to the north; the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the east; Bassila and Djougou to the west; and Ouèssè to the south.

The commune's landscape features plains and plateaus, interspersed with hills and mounds that can reach over 300 meters, especially within the Wari-Marou massif. This topography accounts for the numerous granite and gravel quarries across the territory, representing potential economic assets for the commune. Hydrologically, the area is primarily served by tributaries of the Ouémé and Okpara rivers, which provide ample irrigation for the various districts and support the development of fishing activities.

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to the east; Bassila and Djougou to the west; and Ouèssè to the south.

Tchaourou experiences a Sudano-Guinean climate, marked by a dry season from November to February and a wet season from March to October. The annual rainfall ranges from 1100 to 1200 mm, with 6 to 7 wet months. These conditions are conducive to cultivating long-cycle crops like yams and cassava, establishing the commune as a significant regional supplier of tubers. This climate also supports a diverse range of vegetation.

The primary economic activities in the commune are agriculture and livestock farming. While less prominent than agriculture, livestock farming is vital, especially for the Fulani communities. The main livestock includes cattle, pigs, goats, and poultry. In June-July 2019, during a bovine pasteurellosis vaccination campaign, the commune's cattle population exceeded 60,425 head. The districts of Kika, Tchaourou, and Tchatchou hold the largest share of the livestock. During the dry season, the commune becomes a destination for nomadic transhumant herders from Burkina Faso, Niger, and Nigeria. This influx intensifies pressure on local pastoral resources and can heighten conflicts between farmers and herders.

Sampling

The study's unit of observation is the farming or herding family. The sampling strategy employed is a combination of random and purposive sampling. This method is designed to ensure that the different groups involved are represented, while also accounting for the movement of pastoralists within the commune.

The commune of Tchaourou is divided into seven districts. Three of these districts were selected for this study due to their representative role in the commune's agro-pastoral dynamics: Kika, Tchaourou, and Tchatchou. Within each selected district, several villages were identified based on criteria such as size, population density, and the extent of agricultural and pastoral activities. In each of these chosen villages, 35 families, consisting of either herders or farmers, were randomly selected to participate in the study.

In addition to the surveyed families, various institutional and community stakeholders were engaged to enhance the data collected. These included state livestock services (ATDA), non-governmental organizations focused on rural development, transhumance management

committees, local facilitators, and traditional Fulani authorities. Two members of traditional councils were also interviewed to gain insight into local conflict resolution mechanisms.

This methodology facilitates a comprehensive data collection process, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative information, and acknowledges the diverse range of actors and viewpoints involved.

Data Collection

The data used for the analysis of perceptions and prejudices is primarily based on a qualitative approach, supplemented by some descriptive quantitative elements. It was collected from various stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the management of pastoralism and agropastoral conflicts in the municipality of Tchaourou.

The main data collection techniques used were:

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with farmers, sedentary and transhumant herders, traditional chiefs, community leaders, representatives of herders' associations, community leaders, and technical service agents. Village focus groups allowed for the collection of collective perceptions, the comparison of viewpoints, and the identification of dominant discourses within the communities. Field observations focused on daily interactions between farmers and herders, particularly around markets, water points, transhumance routes, and mediation spaces.

A list of perceptions and prejudices, previously identified from the literature and the exploratory phase, was submitted to the stakeholders to gather their feedback, their level of agreement or rejection, and their associated justifications.

Data Analysis Methodology

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for quantitative data and content analysis for qualitative data. This combination of methods made it possible to identify the main categories of perceptions and prejudices, their sources, and their effects on the relationships between farmers and herders. The most significant verbatim quotes were used to illustrate the results and strengthen their analytical validity.

Results and Discussion

Farmers' Perceptions of Herders

The results show that farmers' perceptions of herders in the commune of Tchaourou are predominantly negative, although they vary according to the villages and the history of local relations. These perceptions are primarily shaped by experiences of crop damage and past conflicts.

An overwhelming majority of farmers (more than two-thirds) perceive livestock farmers as crop destroyers, fueling a negative and conflictual perception of coexistence.

Farmers generally perceive livestock farmers as perpetrators of several negative actions:

17.1%; disrespectful of local norms, accused of not respecting field boundaries, agricultural seasons, and local regulations;

65.6%; responsible for significant economic losses, crop destroyers, and responsible for significant economic losses related to livestock roaming;

8.6%; foreigners or outsiders, particularly in the case of transhumant herders, considered to have no legitimate rights to local land. One farmer stated in this regard:

"These people are not from here. They come from elsewhere with their animals and want to use our land as if it were their own." (Farmer, Tchatchou district).

This statement reveals a strong identity-based prejudice, where the herder is perceived as an "outsider," even when they have been established for several years.

This perception denies the customary rights recognized by law and traditional pastoral practices, and implicitly legitimizes the social and land exclusion of herders.

5.7%; Violent or dangerous actors, especially in a regional context marked by insecurity. It also emerges that the majority of them sometimes prefer to flee or confront. The remarks of a farmer during a focus group illustrate this argument:

"Today, we no longer know who is a herder or a bandit. When there's a problem, they pull out their weapons." (Farmer, focus group).

This discourse reflects a conflation of herders and armed insecurity, largely fueled by the sub-regional context. This perception exacerbates fear, reduces opportunities for dialogue, and encourages violent or preemptive reactions against herders, even in the absence of a real threat. Another farmer states:

"When we talk about conflict here, it's always the herders. Their cattle come into our fields and destroy everything without asking" (Farmer, Kika district).

This statement illustrates a unilateral attribution of responsibility for conflicts to the herders. The farmer fails to distinguish between structural causes (reduction of pastures, occupation of corridors) and focuses on the visible cause of the damage: the livestock. This perception reinforces the stigmatization of herders and prevents any shared analysis of responsibilities.

These perceptions lead farmers to view the presence of herders as a constant threat to their livelihoods. Thus, even in the absence of an immediate incident, the mere proximity of herds is perceived as a risk factor, which fuels social tension.

Herders' Perceptions of Farmers

From the herders' perspective, perceptions of farmers are also marked by a strong negative bias. Livestock farmers feel that crop farmers have become increasingly hostile towards them due to the continued expansion of cultivated land. The table below summarizes the prevailing perceptions of livestock farmers.

The results show that nearly 63% of livestock farmers consider farmers responsible for land grabbing, which reinforces their feelings of marginalization and injustice. Herders perceive farmers as:

Hostile actors who seek to gradually exclude them from pastoral areas;

Usurpers of transhumance corridors, accused of deliberately cultivating tracks reserved for livestock. One livestock farmer similarly stated:

"Before, there were tracks for the animals. Now, farmers cultivate their fields everywhere, even on the corridors." (Transhumant herder).

This testimony highlights the perception of a gradual and deliberate appropriation of pastoral areas by farmers. For

livestock farmers, this situation is experienced as a structural injustice, as it makes livestock mobility difficult and mechanically increases the risk of conflict.

Intolerant actors, quick to resort to violence or denunciation at the slightest incident. Even minor incidents trigger excessive reactions. A herder stated during a focus group:

"Some deliberately cultivate land near our camps to create problems and drive us out." (Herder, focus group)

This perception reflects the idea of intentional agricultural strategies aimed at excluding herders. Whether real or perceived, these perceptions fuel mistrust and justify, in the eyes of the herders, behaviors that circumvent the rules or resist them.

Benefiting from the support of the authorities to the detriment of the herders. They use the laws to their advantage. A herder stated:

"When there is a conflict, the farmer is always sided with. Even if it's not our fault, we have to pay." (Sedentary herder, Tchaourou center).

This reveals a feeling of institutional marginalization among the herders. They believe that local conflict resolution mechanisms are biased in favor of farmers, which undermines their trust in traditional and administrative authorities.

One herder stated:

"Farmers know the animals will pass, but they deliberately cultivate the tracks."

These perceptions reinforce a sense of injustice and marginalization among herders, resulting in increased distrust of local institutions and formal conflict resolution mechanisms.

Social Prejudice and Mutual Stigmatization

Beyond individual perceptions, the results show that negative perceptions gradually transform into social prejudices, widely shared within communities. Herders, particularly the Fulani, are often associated with violence, armed groups, or insecurity. This includes the regional context, while farmers are perceived by herders as greedy, dishonest, and manipulative of local authorities.

These prejudices reinforce mutual distrust, reduce opportunities for dialogue, and foster a conflictual interpretation of any interaction between the two groups.

Regarding the overall assessment of coexistence, the analyses show that 62.9% of respondents consider it poor, compared to 25.7% who rate it as average and only 11.4% who consider it good. These results confirm the existence of a tense social climate, unfavorable to the peaceful management of agropastoral relations. The table below summarizes the level of coexistence between the two parties.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents considered cohabitation to be poor, reflecting a tense social climate in the municipality of Tchaourou.

Therefore, the chi-square test was applied to analyze the relationship between negative perceptions and the quality of cohabitation.

Analysis of the results indicates that among respondents with negative perceptions, 84.3% believe that coexistence is poor, compared to only 20% among those with non-negative perceptions. The statistical test yielded a calculated chi-square value of 48.72 with one degree of freedom and a p-value less than 0.05. This demonstrates a statistically significant relationship between negative perceptions and poor coexistence between farmers and livestock breeders. Thus, the more negative the perceptions, the more conflictual the coexistence.

Furthermore, a cross-relationship exists between the status of the actors and the nature of their perceptions. This reveals that negative perceptions are widely shared by both groups. The chi-square test performed did not reveal any statistically significant difference between farmers and livestock breeders ($p > 0.05$) at this level, as illustrated in the present table.

This means that perceived conflict is not specific to a single group, but constitutes a structural characteristic of agropastoral relations in the commune of Tchaourou.

Furthermore, these identified perceptions and prejudices have significant impacts on coexistence between farmers and herders, including: the deterioration of the social climate, marked by mistrust and persistent suspicion; the rapid escalation of conflicts, even from minor incidents; the increased use of violence and reprisals, to the detriment of peaceful mechanisms; the marginalization

of cooperative initiatives, which nevertheless exist during the dry season; and the difficulty of implementing mediation when the actors arrive with entrenched positions.

The results obtained show that perceptions and prejudices are major determinants of the quality of relations between farmers and herders in the commune of Tchaourou. They confirm that agro-pastoral conflicts are not solely a matter of competition for access to natural resources, but are also fueled by social constructs that shape behaviors, attitudes, and interactions between actors.

The observed mutual negative perceptions reflect a deficit of trust and a progressive erosion of social capital, elements that are nevertheless essential for cooperation and the collective management of natural resources.

These results align with the analyses of Thébaud (2017), who shows that pastoral conflicts in West Africa originate as much from social representations as from environmental constraints. Similarly, Moritz (2010) emphasizes that conflicts between farmers and herders are largely influenced by perceptions of injustice, marginalization, and exclusion held by the different groups of actors.

In the case of Tchaourou, farmers primarily associate herders with crop destruction, disregard for local rules, and, in some cases, insecurity, while herders perceive farmers as responsible for the gradual appropriation of pastoral lands and the erosion of their right to mobility. These opposing perceptions reflect differing interpretations of the same territorial realities and contribute to maintaining a climate of persistent suspicion.

The association of Fulani herders with insecurity observed in this study is part of a broader dynamic described by Brottem (2021), according to which security crises in the Sahel have reinforced the stigmatization of certain pastoral communities. This association between pastoralism and insecurity tends to produce connotations that further weaken intercommunal relations and reduce opportunities for dialogue.

The results thus show that individual experiences of conflict are often reinforced by collective discourses and community narratives that contribute to transforming individual perceptions into widely shared prejudices.

Table.1a Summary of the sampling by district and type of respondent

District	Selected Villages	Number of farmers	Number of herders	Total of family investigated
Kika	3	35	35	70
Tchaourou	3	35	35	70
Tchatchou	3	35	35	70
Total	9	105	105	210

Table.1b Dominant perceptions of farmers

Farmers Perceptions	Number	%
Crop destructives herders	72	68.6
Failure to comply with local regulations	18	17.1
Strangers	9	8.6
Non-peaceful actors	6	5.7
Total	105	100

Source: Field survey results, October 2025

Table.2 Predominant Perceptions of Livestock Farmers

Herders Perceptions	Pourcentage (%)
Land grabbing farmers	62.9
Non compliance with transhumance corridors	20.0
Possible partners	11.4
Without any clear opinion	5.7
Total	100

Source: Field survey results, October 2025

Table.3 Overall Assessment of Coexistence

Assessment of cohabitation	Purcentage %
Bad	62.9
Normal	25.7
Good	11.4
Total	100

Source: Field survey results, October 2025

Table.4 Cross-tabulation of negative perceptions × cohabitation

Negative Perceptions	Bad Cohabitation	Acceptable Cohabitation	Total
Yes	118	22	140
No	14	56	70
Total	132	78	210
Test Résultat of Khi-two: χ^2 calculated = 48.72, ddl = 1, p-value = 0.000 p < 0.05			

Source: Field survey results, October 2025

Table.5 Status, negative and positive perceptions

Statut	Negative Perception	Positive Perception	Total
Farmers	90	15	105
Herders	87	18	105
Total	177	33	210
Results: khi2 = 0.43 ; p-value = 0.51 ; p > 0.05			

Source: Field survey results, November 2025

Statistical analyses support this interpretation. The significant relationship observed between negative perceptions and poor coexistence ($\chi^2 = 48.72$; $p < 0.001$) shows that social representations constitute an important explanatory factor for tensions between farmers and herders. Conversely, the absence of a significant difference between the two categories of actors regarding the level of negative perceptions ($\chi^2 = 0.43$; $p = 0.51$) reveals that mistrust is now reciprocal and structural. This reciprocity of negative perceptions reflects less an opposition between two groups than a dysfunction of local mechanisms of social regulation. It confirms the work of [Ostrom \(1990\)](#), according to which the erosion of trust and collective rules permanently compromises the concerted management of common resources.

These results also highlight the limitations of approaches focused exclusively on legal or security-related responses. While regulatory reforms, the delimitation of transhumance corridors, and administrative sanctions help to regulate resource use, they remain insufficient when negative social perceptions persist between stakeholders. As [Guillaume-Hofnung \(2015\)](#) emphasizes, the effectiveness of mediation relies primarily on restoring communication, trust, and mutual recognition. In a context where the protagonists enter the mediation process with strongly polarized positions, the possibilities for compromise become limited, thus reducing the effectiveness of local conflict resolution mechanisms.

Furthermore, the results suggest that negative perceptions are not fixed; they are socially constructed and can evolve through positive interactions, cooperative experiences, and dialogue mechanisms. Joint water point management initiatives, local consultation frameworks, and awareness-raising activities thus appear as spaces capable of gradually deconstructing stereotypes and strengthening social capital between farmers and herders. This observation aligns with the work of [Putnam \(1993\)](#), for whom sustainable cooperation largely depends on trust, norms of reciprocity, and social networks

connecting actors. Finally, this study makes an empirical contribution to the understanding of agro-pastoral conflicts in Benin by showing that perceptual dimensions constitute a key lever of local governance. Beyond material factors, the results encourage us to consider perceptions, prejudices, and social representations as strategic variables in the development of public policies for conflict prevention. They suggest that future interventions should integrate intercultural mediation, community dialogue, and trust-building approaches, complementing existing institutional mechanisms for natural resource management.

This study aimed to analyze the perceptions and prejudices between farmers and herders, as well as their influence on the quality of coexistence in the commune of Tchaourou. The results show that relations between the two groups are largely shaped by social representations constructed through individual experiences, community narratives, and the socioeconomic transformations that characterize agropastoral areas. Farmers predominantly associate herders with crop destruction, disregard for local rules, and, in some cases, insecurity, while herders perceive farmers as responsible for appropriating pastoral lands, occupying transhumance corridors, and providing inequitable institutional treatment.

Conclusion, these results make a significant contribution to understanding agro-pastoral conflicts in Benin by demonstrating that they cannot be explained solely by competition for natural resources or by shortcomings in the institutional framework. They highlight the central role of social representations in the construction of tensions and underscore the need to integrate this dimension into local governance and mediation strategies. Sustainable conflict prevention thus requires acting simultaneously on both tangible and intangible factors, particularly through the promotion of intercultural dialogue, community awareness-raising, strengthening trust among stakeholders, and enhancing local consultation frameworks.

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How to cite this article:

GOUDI Dorcas, EL HADJ IMOROU Soulé, LAFIA JOSEPH Gounou Roland and KOTCHONI Abdul-Razak. 2026. Perceptions and Prejudices: Their Impact on Coexistence between Farmers and Livestock Farmers in Tchaourou Commune. *Int.J.Curr.Res.Aca.Rev.* 14(7), 1-8. doi: <https://doi.org/10.20546/ijcrar.2026.1407.001>