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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR- 59798

Title: Social Cohesion as a Community Resilience Strategy in Response to Pressures Exerted by Transhumance on the Agonlin Plateau in Central Benin.

Recommendation:
Accept as it is .....
Accept after Minor revision.....
Accept after Major revision .....
Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity			✓	
Significance		✓		

Reviewer Name: Faheem Abdul Muneeb

Reviewer's Comment for Publication.

The manuscript examines an important issue concerning farmer–herder relations, community resilience and social cohesion in the Agonlin Plateau of central Benin. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data, it explores how farmers and sedentary Fulani communities maintain social relations and develop local mechanisms to manage the pressures and conflicts associated with transhumance. The discussion of collective ceremonies, political participation, livestock entrustment (*confiage*), animal penning (*parcage*), the hiring of young herders and amicable conflict settlement provides useful insights into the local arrangements that sustain intercommunity relations. The combination of interviews, questionnaires, observations and documentary analysis is a strength of the study, and the manuscript makes a worthwhile contribution to understanding locally developed approaches to managing agropastoral tensions.

A few aspects of the manuscript require clarification and improvement. First, the methodology should be presented more consistently. The abstract mentions 39 interviews with a broad range of stakeholders, including traditional and religious leaders, political and administrative authorities, intervention organisations and other representatives. However, the detailed breakdown in Section 1.2 accounts for four representatives of livestock organisations, two multi-stakeholder committee representatives, eight village chiefs, seven sedentary Fulani camp leaders and eighteen farmers. These categories do not fully correspond to the description in the abstract. The authors should clarify the actual composition of the interview sample and ensure that the abstract and methodology provide the same information. The

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discussion of participant observation would also benefit from clarification: the manuscript reports ten observations, followed by visits to three Fulani settlements and seven farms, but it is not clear whether these visits form part of the ten observations or constitute additional field activities.

The quantitative sampling procedure also needs a little more explanation. The study includes 244 respondents, comprising 219 farmers and only 25 sedentary Fulani respondents. Although the sample is distributed across the three communes, the authors should briefly explain the implications of this unequal representation when interpreting comparisons between the two communities. It would also be useful to clarify how the random selection of respondents was carried out from the sampling frames. These details would make the research procedure more transparent and help readers assess the scope of the findings.

The presentation of results is generally informative, particularly the discussion of the economic and social arrangements between farmers and sedentary Fulani communities. However, the figures require some attention. Figure 2 on page 7 presents comparisons of collective activities, while Figure 3 on page 9 identifies sources of information concerning the movement of transhumant herds. The categories and numerical values in these figures should be explained more explicitly in the accompanying text, including whether the figures represent percentages, frequencies or another measure. This would make the results easier to interpret. Figure 4 on page 12 is useful in illustrating the different arrangements for managing livestock, but the text should clearly identify the population to which the reported percentages refer.

The conceptual discussion of social cohesion and community resilience is relevant, but the relationship between these two concepts could be articulated more clearly. The manuscript sometimes treats social cohesion as a component of community resilience and at other points as a strategy through which resilience is achieved. The authors should briefly explain this relationship and maintain the distinction consistently throughout the discussion. In particular, it would be useful to clarify how trust, social networks, collective initiatives and economic interdependence contribute to resilience, rather than treating all these elements as interchangeable indicators of social cohesion.

Another aspect deserving attention is the interpretation of the findings concerning ritual ceremonies. The manuscript reports that some respondents believe these ceremonies contribute to reducing conflicts and violent incidents, while acknowledging that they do not possess tangible evidence of this relationship. This distinction is important. The authors should present these findings explicitly as community perceptions and reported beliefs rather than as demonstrated causal effects. The same care should be taken when attributing reductions in crop damage or conflict to particular arrangements, since the study does not establish that these arrangements alone account for such changes.

The discussion of the *confiage* and *parcage* arrangements is among the most interesting sections of the paper. Nevertheless, the authors could acknowledge more directly that these arrangements may involve

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unequal bargaining positions and practical limitations, even where both communities perceive mutual benefits. The findings themselves mention low levels of trust among some respondents, disagreements over compensation and cases in which conflicts remain unresolved through amicable settlement. Incorporating these qualifications would provide a more balanced account of the opportunities and limitations of local cooperation.

Finally, the bibliography and in-text citations need careful checking. Some references appear unrelated or only indirectly connected to the arguments for which they are cited. For example, the Bardsley et al. (2021) reference concerns Salmonella survival in agricultural soils, while the manuscript cites it in the discussion of social cohesion. The Inoue et al. reference is cited as a 2022 publication in the text but appears as a 2015 publication in the bibliography. Similarly, the Jordan and Zgolli references have inconsistencies in their publication years. The entry beginning with "heda, M." also appears to contain an incomplete author name. The authors should verify these entries, ensure that every in-text citation has a corresponding bibliography entry, and remove references that do not directly support the discussion. A general language and formatting revision would also improve the manuscript, particularly the section numbering, spelling of names and consistency of technical terms.

Final Recommendation

The manuscript addresses a relevant subject and offers useful empirical insights into the local practices through which farmers and sedentary Fulani communities manage the pressures associated with transhumance. Its combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence, particularly the discussion of collective initiatives and livestock-related arrangements, gives the study practical and academic value. The suggested revisions mainly concern methodological transparency, interpretation of findings, presentation of figures and consistency of references. These corrections can be addressed without changing the overall design or central argument of the paper.

Decision: Accept with minor revisions.