

The Central Niger Delta: socio-spatial reconfigurations, governance challenges, and farmer–herder conflicts in a wetland under pressure (Oral)

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ABSTRACT

The central Niger Delta is one of the largest wetland systems in West Africa, structured by the seasonal alternation of floods and recessions that sustain flood-recession agriculture, irrigated schemes, and pastoral mobility around *bourgon* grazing areas. In recent decades, increasing hydrological variability, combined with agricultural development policies, demographic growth, and persistent insecurity, has profoundly reshaped the socio-ecological balance of this fluvio-deltaic environment. This paper aims to analyze the ongoing socio-spatial reconfigurations in the central Niger Delta and examine their implications for wetland governance and farmer–herder relations, with particular attention to how changing water dynamics, land-use transformations, and shifting institutional arrangements redefine access to resources in a fragile context. The study is based on a qualitative case study conducted in the commune of Sio in Mopti Region, drawing on focus group discussions and key informant interviews with farmers, herders, local authorities, and community leaders. The findings indicate that the expansion of irrigated perimeters and the conversion of former pastoral lands often supported by public development policies have restricted access to strategic grazing areas and fragmented transhumance corridors, while interannual flood fluctuations have altered the availability and productivity of flood-recession lands, intensifying spatial overlaps between agricultural and pastoral uses. In a context marked by weakened local institutions and the growing presence of non-state armed actors, tensions over water and floodplain resources increasingly escalate into open conflict, revealing that farmer–herder disputes in the central Niger Delta reflect not only competition over scarce resources but a broader transformation of wetland socio-ecological systems in which water management, territorial planning, and insecurity are deeply intertwined.

Keywords:

Central Niger Delta; Wetlands; Hydrological variability; Governance; Farmer–herder conflicts