‘In search of Common Ground’ is a 5-year project to curb poverty in North West Cameroon by reducing conflict between indigenous crop farmers and semi-nomadic Mbororo cattle herders. Conflict is the result of increasing competition over access to natural resources (land and water) that are central to the lives and livelihoods of both groups. The project will achieve this by making a range of interventions in 23 conflict affected areas. It will expand work that has been piloted in three Divisions of the region (Menchum, Donga Mantung and Ngoketunjia) to the rest (Momo, Mezam, Boyo, Bui). The project will:

- Improve skills in sustainable farming methods leading to better crop and livestock yields, greater cooperation between crop farmers and cattle herders and increased awareness on the need for environmental protection.
- Encourage equitable access to clean water, contributing to reduced conflict between farmers and grazers and more sustainable use of a vital natural and economic resource.
- Manage conflicts so reducing incidence and severity of these between crop farmers and cattle herders (through dialogue and collaboration) resulting in more equitable access to natural resources and an improved environment for exercising basic rights.
- Support MBOSCUDA so that Mbororo people can exercise their rights, leading to more responsive legislation, reduction in human rights violations and improved access to clean water.

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The project will be delivered by adopting a three-tiered strategy for achieving its outcomes. Firstly, it uses conflict mediation forums known as Dialogue Platforms that have been successfully piloted in conflict affected areas to facilitate cooperation and reduce tension between farmers and herders. Secondly, it introduces a range of innovative agricultural practices that promote the shared and sustainable use of natural resources. These include Alliance Farming, Improved Pasture and improved water management. Thirdly, it will build the capacity of MBOSCUDA so that it can become a ‘centre of excellence’ for promoting Mbororo rights and, in turn, help to bolster grassroots community based organisations thereby ensuring that vital paralegal services are delivered closer to communities (and Mbororo people are better able to defend their rights).

### Promoting Dialogue con’t

For a long time spanning decades, the Mbororos have been viewed as intruders and strangers in many communities of the NW Region. This attitude generated many conflicts between Mbororo cattle herders and their crop farmers in these communities leading to lots of lost of cattle, crops, and properties and sometimes even lives. To help Mbororos became empowered of their rights as citizens of Cameroon, MBOSCUDA (Mbororo Cultural Development Association) was created in 1992 with the mission of socially, culturally and economically developing the Mbororos and Fulani in general of the entire country. MBOSCUDA has implemented many projects in different domains since creation like education, adult literacy, human rights, agro-pastoral development, health and natural resources.

‘Breakthrough’ is an annual magazine capturing the fallouts of ‘In Search of Common Ground’ project jointly developed by MBOSCUDA NW and Village Aid a UK charity with financing from Big Lottery Fund, another UK based charity. The main objective of this annual magazine is to showcase the work currently going on in the project outcome areas (conflict mediation forums known as Dialogue platforms, sustainable use of natural resources like Alliance Farming, Improved Pasture and improved water management and thirdly, it will build the capacity of MBOSCUDA so that it can become a ‘centre of excellence’ for promoting Mbororo rights)
and, in turn, help to bolster grassroots community based organisations (CBO)s thereby ensuring that vital paralegal services are delivered closer to communities (and Mbororo people are better able to defend their rights), while exposing avenues for more involvement in the future. To ease reading, the Magazine’s write-ups are grouped under the various project areas.

The Magazine offers opportunity for the main beneficiaries of the project (herders and croppers) to tell their stories exposing the positive impacts the project have in their lives and exposing where they need more assistance.

Considering that the past year of the project focused on initiation and creating awareness on the project outcomes, a few impact stories were captured which have been presented in this maiden edition. We hope that you will enjoy going through this special edition of the ‘Breakthrough Magazine.’
Madam Nyoh Winifred is the president of the Babessi Dialogue platform. She has been at the forefront of dialogue platforms within her community because conflicts were too rampant in her community in the past and it made life quite threatening. Today, close to six years since the notion of dialogue platform was introduced and she joint in the initiative, conflicts between farmers and grazers have drastically reduced leading to a more peaceful way of life between farmers and grazers.

She explained that in the past like 12 years behind, most of the conflicts were generated as a results of late planting of crops by some farmers. This generally led to late harvesting due to ignorance on the part of the farmers. As a result, when grazers descend from the hills in search of pasture and water from the valleys for their cattle when it is the dry season, believing that farmers would have harvested crops, some of their cattle would meet crops and feed on, thus destroying crops. Sometimes the passages of these cattle were blocked and farmed by heady farmers leading to chaos. Sometimes this would lead to community fights leading to lost of cattle, crops and even people.

On the part of the herdsmen, sometimes they would descend earlier in search of pasture than anticipated in November instead of late December when crops have not been harvested. This usually provoked the farmers into serious conflicts with them. Madam Nyoh explains further that, conflicts use to degenerate due to Heads of Government services like the Divisional Officers who would instead of solving the conflict, use it as avenues of making money by demanding 50,000 FRS from both the accused and the defendants. These worsen matters in a way that when MBOSCUDA started the sensitisation on the creation of dialogue platforms to solve problems, it was bought by community members who started with the creation of Sub Divisional executives of 12 members. That is 3 members from each of the 4 villages of the Sub Division, Bangolan, Baba, Babungo and Babessi. ‘As time went on, the work was quite much for this executive members and it became necessary to create dialogue platforms at village level with seven members each.’

With the various dialogue platforms within her community, unity between farmers and grazers have increased. Sometimes, farmers would shelter herdsmen when they come for transhuman in the dry season in exchange for manure for their crops. Also in case of destruction of crops by cattle, the herdsmen are simply notified and measures taken to rectify the situation. There is also exchange of gifts like sugar, corn, bread for milk etc between the two parties. All the mature used in her farms leading to better yields of crops is given by her friends who are herdsmen. Madam Nyoh says with a token of 2000frs by a complainant to enable dialogue platform members visit the venue of dispute, conflicts are solved within her community amicably making life much enjoyable.

‘Dialogue platform makes life worth living’

Nyoh Winifred

Dialogue platform members
Water, a rare gem in Ashong village

Ashong is a community located in Momo Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. It has boundaries with Guzang, Bali, Piyin and parts of the South West Region. The people practice agriculture - crop farming and animal rearing - as the main income generating activity, as well as the main sources of livelihood. Crops like beans, Irish potatoes, maize, cocoyams, palm nuts are mostly cultivated by most of the farmers. Animal breeders keep cattle, sheep and goats. Both the farmers and the graziers lament that they lack good drinkable water for their families and daily chores. Bih Sylvia talks to two women who paint a picture of the water situation in their community.

Adama Amadou, 28 years old was born in Ashong and has 6 children. She is a third wife to her husband and lives in Dimideng quarter with her family.

Q: What are some of the sources of conflict in your community?
Adama Amadou: Apart from the conflict we face with our farming neighbours on land, we both suffer from lack of good clean water for our families and animals. We have some taps around but water does not flow from them because of lack of maintenance. Also, we the graziers live up the hills and have to trek long distances down the valleys to get water. It is not easy. Sometimes, the farmers claim it is their water and are sometimes hostile when we come to carry.

Q: Do the farmers still refuse you people water?
Adama Amadou: The situation is gradually changing since the people from MBOSCUDA came and told us about the new project. They said we must live as one people so that they will help us have good water.

Q: Due to lack of water, what are the problems it causes you?
Adama Amadou: We carry water most of the time from streams. Though we sometimes boil and sieve before drinking, it still causes illness for children like diarrhoea. Also, we trek long distances with the children to get water which makes the children go late to school.

Q: How would the provision of clean water by MBOSCUDA help your community?
Adama Amadou: It will improve our lives a lot as we will hardly be sick from using clean water. Our children will not need to trek for long to get water which will make them go early to school.
‘Peace leads to riches’ Sundzeh Ismaila

From experiencing close to 14 complaints of conflicts between farmers and grazers in Baba 1 in a week in the past as against 5 complaints a week now, Mr. Sundzeh Ismaila Vice President of the dialogue platform in Baba 1 says this motivated him to become a grazer too. As a polygamist with 2 wives and 11 kids, he needed more money to take care of his large family. With the love of his community and his love for peace he joined the dialogue platform team when it was introduced in his community some 6 years ago. Being a farmer who farmed beans, corn, cassava, rice he decided to keep animal too for his family sustenance. In addition to the goats, chicken and sheep that he kept, he added 20 cattle which have increased to about 50 cattle within a span of 10 years all due to the peace that now reign in his community. 9 of his children conveniently go to school thanks to the proceeds from his farms. To him peace leads to riches because you can venture into whatever business and become rich in a safe environment.

Water, a rare gem

34 years old farmer Tiba Odilia, is a widow and mother of 5 children, she shares her experiences on the water crises in Wimgiyi quarter.

Q: Do you experience lack of water in your community?
Tiba Odilia: Yes. Very much, especially as the taps around have stopped flowing.

Q: How are you affected by this lack of water?
Tiba Odilia: Ill health especially among children abounds like malaria, and stomach upsets. Also, I don’t cook for my children on time who go to school late as a result.

Q: How do you think this community can contribute to solve the water problem?
Tiba Odilia: MBOSCUDA people say they will help us bring good water if we are peaceful with the grazers. We promise to live peacefully with the grazers and to do as the Fon have instructed.

Q: What has the Fon instructed?
Tiba Odilia: The Fon says, everyone who has eucalyptus trees planted around water sources should cut them because they cause the lack of water in our taps. We will cut them and do all it takes to have clean water in our community.
CBOs making MBOSCUDA a very viable development partner

ISCG project aims to make MBOSCUDA a good development partner by taking the organisation closer to the grassroots for a better impact. It is against this background that MBOSCUDA stimulates the creation and sustainability of cattle breeders associations as community based organisations (CBOs).

In the past years, after communities have created these CBOs, trainings were organised by MBOSCUDA which brought together 18 CBO leaders (male and female) from 6 divisions of the region. Only Menchum division was absent due to ongoing structuring. The workshop which held in Ndop was facilitated by Mr Shei Kanjo of Rural Development Consultancy (RDC), focused on strengthening the capacities and functioning methods of the Pastoralist Community Based Organizations (CBO) of the North West Region as a global objective of the training.

At the end of the 3-day training, participants had been groomed adequately on group dynamics, leadership and communication in a group. It is hoped that, after these skills acquisition, these CBOs will be more viable in their actions as expressed by Mr. Duni Jeidoh Human Rights officer for MBOSCUDA and overseer of the smooth functioning of the CBO’s.

Using a participatory approach, the main task of the facilitators was to facilitate exchange of experiences among participants and help them to acquire new knowledge and competencies through a number of interactive activities like case studies, group work and brainstorming in plenary sessions.

At the of the workshop the leaders of the Divisional CBO’s of the North West Cattle Breeders’ Associations confirmed that they became better leaders and communicators improving on group dynamics participation. Also render them more effective and efficient in representing and ensuring the participation of pastoralists in defining their development agendas.
Ali Julie Musa is the Paralegal extension officer for Donga Mantung Division working for the Mborororo Social, Cultural and Developmental Association (MBOSCUDA) since 1998. He is a native of Saah village in the Division where he works, married and a father of 4 children. In a recent chat, he shared some successes and challenges he experiences in the execution of his job in the ‘In search of common ground’ (ISGC) project which is financed by the Big Lottery Fund through Village AiD all charities in the UK, and carried out in all 7 Divisions of the North West Region of Cameroon by MBOSCUDA.

He says, when he started work as a paralegal extension worker, he barely had enough time for himself and his family due to the vastness of his work, especially as his Division is big. ‘I would get up very early and start intervening in so many problems revolving around conflicts between croppers and herders. I intervened in such problems like destruction of farms by cattle to theft of cattle. Sometimes, I would face problems with some administrative officials, who sometimes viewed the empowerment the Mbororos were gaining through MBOSCUDA as a thread to them. This is so because, big monetary demands used to be made to Mbororo herders when their cattle mistakenly encroached into farmland thus enriching these administrative officials.’

He says, most of the challenges in the past are changing and today, though conflicts between crop farmers and cattle herders are not completely over, changes are witnessed especially through the introduction of dialogue as an alternative mechanism for conflict management. ‘Through massive sensitisations, crop farmers and cattle herders try to sort out their differences amicably through dialogue in cases of conflicts. Too much dependence on MBOSCUDA to mediate in conflict situations is gradually reducing. As a result of sensitisations, they (crop farmers and herders) notice that, the frequency of incidences of land conflicts is being caused by them and welcome ideas that can sustainably reduce such conflicts.’

As concerns his relationship with administrative officers today, he shares great cordiality with them and gains lots of support from them as well. He cites the example of the Divisional Officer for Nkambe Central by name Mr. Abubakar Abdurahman who grants him authorisations for all the sensitisation meetings he sometimes organises and even attends the meetings when invited. At one of such meetings in Binshua recently, he acclaimed the work of MBOSCUDA and asked all present to follow the principle of dialogue as emphasised in the ‘Search of Common Ground’ project which promote amicable settlement of the conflicts through dialogue processes. He stressed that, he should be the last resort to situations of conflicts between crop farmers and herders. Ali Julie Musa, also cite the Mayor of Nkambe Mr. Ngabir Paul Bantar who supports the efforts of MBOSCUDA in reducing conflicts within his municipality.
The Paralegal Extension Officer for Mezam Division is Ousman Haman who is equally a father of 2 and has worked with MBOSCUDA since 2004. He has recorded the following successes in the course of executing his role as a paralegal extension worker for MBOSCUDA.

In his community, people are now more gender conscious respecting especially the rights of the girl child. This he says is seen through the so many girls who now go to school instead of engaging in early marriages as used to be the case in the past. Also, the whole idea of using dialogue processes in managing conflicts between crop farmers and herders is gradually gaining grounds in his communities especially in Baba 11 and Santa Akum, as the people are eagerly waiting for the establishments of dialogue platforms in their communities.

He says, ‘these two communities are notorious for conflicts over the use of natural resources like land, water and pasture for cattle and crops by crop farmers and herders. Realising that they lose lots of properties in conflicts, through many sensitisations, they are slowly adopting the dialogue processes in resolving their conflicts amicably. The idea of alliance farming is slowly being introduced too. The Ardo of Santa Akum has negotiated with the wife of one crop farmer Mr. Wara Joseph to work a farm on his piece of land for four years enriching the farm with manure from his cattle. After these four years, the Ardo intends to reclaim the land and use as a plot for improved pasture for cattle like bracharia.’

Ousman says he faces the following setbacks executing his job. He sometimes travel long distances to do mediation on very poor road networks especially in Baba 11. Not all of the crop farmers and herders have understood the nature of his role as mediator in managing conflict. ‘Some of them rely solely on MBOSCUDA to solve their problems.’ Irrespective of these setbacks, Ousman says greater peace is enjoyed these days in communities in Mezam, thanks to the ISCG project.
A close study of the various communities implicated in the ISCG project reveals the existence of many persons with disabilities. From physical disabilities like handicaps on the leg, the hands and others, to psychological disabilities like mental illnesses one finds a good number of such persons within these communities.

In all, 24 persons with disabilities in the 14 new communities in the ISCG project are making their voices heard.

The case of Tawah Godlove a 5 years old pupil is a glaring example. Godwill Tawah was born with no legs from the waist down. This kid is a class 2 pupil in a Government primary school Acha in Momo Division. The father of the child is equally handicap and can’t talk comprehensively due to a stiff neck. The mother to Godwill, Madam Tawah Alice Fri explains that, her husband was a tailor who all of a sudden became handicapped after an illness. She says this made her to stop bearing children for him after a first son in 2008. After a while, she was schooled by community members to continue with her life and have her kids which she did. Godlove is the last from a family of four kids. He is generally a happy intelligent kid who once asked the mother if God will one day give him legs if he stays a good kid. The hope of this kid is to one day have legs and move about like his siblings. The father carries him to school every day and brings him back to the house after school as his major responsibility for now. All other family expenses are provided by Godlove’s mother who is a subsistence farmer. She attests that the responsibility is generally tough for one person though she benefits from support of some of her community members. She hopes her son can be one day provided with artificial legs to help him move about because this is the most intelligent of her children.

In Ashong, 10 years old Nafisatu Yaya is also suffering from bad legs which hamper her movements. Though she goes to school, her self-esteem is lowered due to her handicap making her quite shy. Her parents say she was born normal but fell ill and this was the outcome.

Again in Ashong is Mr. Tifuh Paul who lost a leg due to an accident. He is a farmer, but finds his art quite challenging since his is lacking a leg. He says if he can be assisted with a wheelchair or an artificial leg, he would be very grateful.

Summarily, these handicap persons need assistance and would appreciate any kind gesture through MBOSCUDA.
SIDO Forum

What is sido forum?
Shuaibu Sali: ‘Sido’ in Fulfulde means ‘play’. Basically, Sido forum is a social drama troupe made up of 12 members with 5 females and 7 males. The group has existed for over 15 years and has been supported by many stakeholders. This group has worked with MBOSCUDA since its creation with the sole objective of using social drama as a tool for general sensitisation on themes like education especially for the girl child, herder/cropper conflicts, theft, prostitution, and HIV/AIDS awareness to name but these.

How does Sido forum works?
We have an executive which I am currently heading since February 2014. When we are contracted for a job, we get orientation on the objective and themes and work as such with support from the contracting group. We practise regularly to ensure a good output.

How do you value the job you do as a group?
It is very interesting to see the appreciation accorded us especially by our ever growing audience and contractors. As volunteers these acts as a big booster to our egos and make us value our contribution to the whole notion of development. Just seeing the changes among our communities especially among the Mbororos is a big plus to our output.

What are some of the challenges you encounter as a group?
First of all, considering that we are all volunteers, it is not easy to tie members to our objective as they are all youths mostly students with different aspirations. As a result, we constantly have change of membership who always need grooming and training into new roles for different plays. Another setback is the usual lack of adequate finances for motivation for members and running the group. Also, working with non Mbororos pose the challenge of educating them on cultures they are not familiar with. Apart from MBOSCUDA who use us from time to time, we really lack contractors to hire us for different jobs. We equally need regular trainings on the whole notion of role play to constantly improve our skills in acting.

What is your vision considering these outlined challenges?
First we wish to have constant membership of volunteers who can work with us for atleast five years duration, have a means for constant training of members on different themes and acting as a whole, empower Sido forum on income generating activities that can help the group to be more sustainable, video gadgets for recording our plays, and why not get more costumes.
MBOSCUDA’s main partner in the UK is Village AiD (VA) that directly links with BLF (Big Lottery Fund) which is the grants donor for the ISCG project. VA and MBOSCUDA-NW both acquired useful experiences working together in the development and implementation of the ISCG project.

VA provides advisory and monitoring support to MBOSCUDA on regular basis and funds are provided to MBOSCUDA on quarterly basis after receiving satisfactory reports.

Other local partners involved with the ISCG project include RDC (Rural Development Consultancy) that assisted in planning and also provided some training to PEOs (paralegal extension officers) and CRVs (community resource volunteers) on how to train dialogue platforms (DPs) and equally provided capacity building support to MBOSCUDA.

RDC and the relevant government technical services Ministry Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries (MINEPIA) Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) and Ministry of Water and Energy (MINEE) equally backstopped the staff during the implementation of some field activities as a way of strengthening partnership and supporting capacity building at different levels as required.

MBOSCUDA equally gained support to empower its various CBOs through a grant from PASC (Support to governance initiatives promoted by civil society organisations in Cameroon) financed by the European Union. The call for action titled ‘strengthening the collective voice of Mbororo Pastoralists for the promotion of local governance in the management of pastoral resources in the North West Region of Cameroon’ has as objective to enhance the participation of Mbororo pastoralists of the North West Region in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies governing pastoral livestock activities at local and regional levels.
The achievements registered during this reporting period could not have been possible without the financial and technical contributions from the partners mentioned in the diagram below. MBOSCUDA -NW Partners financial contributions is indicated on the pie chart below.

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