“IN SEARCH OF COMMON GROUND” FOR FARMER-GRAZER CONFLICTS IN THE NORTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON

BASELINE SURVEY REPORT SUMMARY

Background

This report is a summary of the year one evaluation of the Big Lottery Funded project ‘In Search of Common Ground’. The project was managed in Cameroon by the Mbororo Cultural and Development Association (MBOSCUDA) and in the UK by Village Aid. This evaluation study was conducted by Valentine Nehinda and his colleagues. It builds on the findings of an expert interview survey which questioned officials and other experts and helped develop the questions for the Baseline Study (Nchinda et al., 2014).

That there is a problem of conflict between farmers and grazers is a well-established fact. The Mbororo cattle herders and non-Mbororo subsistence farmers in the North West Region of Cameroon are at loggerheads and struggle over the use of natural resources such as land and water. The effects on families and communities are considerable.

It is not easy to reduce conflict. There are two main ways used here. Firstly, dialogue platforms have been devised by MBOSCUDA to encourage mediation between those in conflict. This project will extend these dialogue platforms to 14 new areas. Secondly agricultural interventions will be used: alliance farming, improving pasture using better seeds and biogas. Existing government provision does not address the root causes of farmer grazer conflicts and encourages legal action, rather than amicable settlement of disputes.

The new project will lead to:

- a reduced incidence and severity of conflict 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;

- improved skills in sustainable farming methods leading to better crop and livestock yields, greater cooperation between crop farmers and cattle herders and increased awareness of the need for environmental protection;

- equitable access to clean water contributing to reduced conflict between farmers and grazers and more sustainable use of a vital natural and economic resource;

- Mbororo people having greater capacity to exercise their rights, leading to more responsive legislation, reduction in human rights violations and improved opportunities for social and economic development.
Objectives of the Baseline Survey

The specific objectives were to:

- determine the livelihood practices of farmer and grazer households in the project area;
- determine the frequency and severity of conflicts between farmers and grazers;
- identify existing conflict mitigation mechanisms and the level of collaboration among the farmers and grazers;
- determine the extent to which farmer-grazer conflict influences equitable access to water, sanitation, hygiene and water conservation;
- determine the gender equity and empowerment practices or lapses in farmer-grazer conflict prone areas;
- provide statistical indicators to be used in the future to measure changes attributable to the current intervention.

Methodology

The Baseline Survey was conducted in February and March 2014 in 14 communities distributed over five administrative divisions (Mezam, Momo, Bui, Boyo and Donga Mantung). Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to heads of household of Mbororo cattle herders and subsistence farmers, 840 households in total. There were approximately equal numbers of farmer and grazer households. Data were collected with the assistance of trained enumerators using structured questionnaires.

The context of the project

Ethnicity, religion, gender and educational background are all potentially important factors in understanding the conflicts.

- The level of education of the respondents was usually low. Most farmers (81%) have no schooling beyond primary school and most grazers (93%) have at most primary or Koranic informal education;
- Most grazers are Mbororos and most farmers are members of other ethnic groups. The majority of Mbororos are Muslims and the majority of farmers are Christians.
- Agriculture is an activity carried out mostly by women and was reported as the main activity of 96% of the farmers. By contrast, 98% of grazers rear cattle and this is their main source of income.
- Per capita incomes were somewhat lower for the farmers relative to the grazers. The average per capita monthly food expenditure of the farmers (FCFA 3,700) was lower than that of the grazers (FCFA 5,700). Similarly, the average per capita non-food expenditure of the farmers (FCFA 4,300) was lower than that of the grazers (FCFA 5,000) but this difference was not statistically significant. It could be inferred from this difference that grazers are slightly wealthier on average than farmers but there could be other explanations. For example farmers grow a large amount of their own food and have less need to buy food.
- The average household size of farmer households was 5.5 and for grazer households 7.7. The land used was approximately the same for both groups, 1.7ha for the farmers and 1.6ha for grazers. The average cattle herd size for grazers is 42 with some very large herds of 1,000 cattle, an indication of a small number of wealthy herders. Very few farmers kept cattle.
Agricultural interventions: Alliance farming, pasture improvement and biogas

Alliance Farming has been promoted as a way to improve crop yield and collaboration between farmers and grazers but its use is not widespread and neither is pasture improvement and biogas. There is some way to go to encourage these measures.

- About 28% say they grow crops using cow dung and that this improves crop yields;
- Some of the respondents (154) received training on pasture improvement techniques;
- The main source of cooking fuel is wood for 98% of the households. The use of biogas is very rare (only one of the respondents) and also the use of slurry in crop production (only three of the respondents).

Land tenure system

Land tenure is a complicated issue and payments for land lease or to the traditional authorities is often required.

- Most land is inherited (85%) and some is bought (7%);
- In order to access and use land there could be land lease costs or payment to the traditional or administrative authorities, an average in the latter case of FCFA 15,000.

Access to clean and safe drinking water

There is competition between humans and animals (cattle, horses, sheep and goats) over access to water. The management of this is in the hands of water management committees in communities but they do not exist in most of the communities - they need to be put in place and supported with management training.

Figure 1: Respondents’ opinion on the months of the year when farmer-grazer conflicts take place

- The main sources of drinking water are streams, rivers and water holes for 60% of farmers and 73% of grazers. Access to tap water in the household is relatively rare, 11% for farmers and 8% for grazers;
• Streams, rivers and water holes are also sources of drinking water for over 97% of cattle. Cattle contaminate water consumed by humans thereby exposing them to waterborne diseases;
• The contamination of water sources exposes people to waterborne diseases such as typhoid. Such diseases were much more frequent in some areas (Nkowe) than others (Baba II);
• Water management committees exist in a few of these communities to manage access to safe and clean drinking water but there was criticism of their effectiveness.

Incidence and severity of farmer-grazer conflicts
Farmer-grazer conflicts are common and can be severe. Those who were involved in conflicts were questioned in details about these incidents.

• An overwhelming majority (75%) had been involved in at least one conflict situation over the past three years;
• About 91% of farmers say their conflicts were against grazers and 93% of grazers say their conflicts were against farmers. The interesting point here is that the problems were rarely farmer versus farmer or grazer versus grazer. This suggests a tension between Mbororos and non-Mbororos which is more than just about encroachment over land;
• The number of conflicts is particularly high in April, May and June which corresponds to agricultural activity and the wet season when cattle can easily browse around (Fig 1).
• Farmers and grazers have very different views on the causes of the conflicts in which they are involved (Table 1). The farmers said the causes were encroachment and trespass on farm land (77%) whilst the grazers said encroachment on grazing land was the main issue for them (47%). When asked a general question the destruction of crops by cattle was seen as the main cause;

Table 1: Main causes of farmer-grazer conflicts in North West Cameroon (column percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal cause of conflict</th>
<th>Farmers (%)</th>
<th>Grazers (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encroachment on farm land</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encroachment on grazing land</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trespass on farm land</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encroachment and Trespass on Farmland</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trespass on grazing land</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocked access to water source</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encroachment and Trespass on Grazing land</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil matter e.g. disputed divorce matter</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encroachment on Grazing land and Trespass</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encroachment into Grazing Land and Blockage of water source</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattles were driven from Grazing Land</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the above including legal/admin. Failures</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poisoning of Cattle</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>320</strong></td>
<td><strong>290</strong></td>
<td><strong>610</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent of respondents</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• The conflicts have devastating social and economic effects (Table 1). The farmers said the conflicts result in crop damage for them (85%) whilst the grazers report cattle injured, killed or stolen (29%) and intimidation (26%). Very few farmers mentioned intimidation which suggests that grazers are subject to intimidation to a much greater extent than farmers;

• It is estimated that a gross amount of about FCFA 55,000,000 (about £72.4k) has been lost by households exposed to conflicts in the 14 communities in the last three years.

**Sources of support for resolving conflict**

Dialogue platforms are seen as a desirable way to resolve conflicts whilst the agro-pastoral commission seems not to be working effectively.

• Amicable settlement, perhaps via the traditional council is the first approach in 33% of cases. The agro-pastoral commission is used by only 13% and the dialogue platforms by 12%. When people were asked about their preferred modes of conflict resolution the results were very different (Fig 2). The agro-pastoral commission was preferred by just 3% and the dialogue platforms by 40%. This suggests that there is considerable scope for the setting up more dialogue platforms and that if they were set up they would be used by large numbers of people;

• The uses of the court, traditional and administrative authorities are the least preferred modes of conflict resolution as the outcome is often lengthy and financially costly and the processes considered by many to be unfair;

• The agro-pastoral commission does not perform all functions required of it and funds are not allocated for their work by the state as required by the law of 1974. The financial burden is borne by farmers and grazers who have to finance the intervention themselves. This is a serious problem.

Figure 2: Respondents’ preferred modes of conflict resolutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue Platform and Amicable Settlement</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amicable settlement</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue Platform</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take matter to court</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report to agro-pastoral commission</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report to traditional council</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outcomes of conflict mitigation

The statistics here suggest that resolving conflicts is still a difficult issue.

- Some cases are settled with restitution (37%) whilst others are abandoned (30%) or settled without restitution (18%). Settlement by Traditional Councils or in the courts is relatively rare;
- It would be an oversimplification to say that farmers and grazers are continuously at loggerheads. There is a wide range of views about the extent of collaboration between farmers and grazers with a sizable number of positive responses (63%, Fig 3).

Visibility of MBOSCUDA

MBOSCUDA is an organisation with a long history of work amongst Mbororos and the farmers are also aware of these services.

- The services offered by MBOSCUDA are known to 59% of respondents. MBOSCUDA is well known for its literacy classes and training and also its awareness campaigns on Mbororo rights;
- About 57% of farmers believed the services of MBOSCUDA were useful whilst 70% of grazers did so. This suggests that their work is seen positively by the whole community.

Figure 3: Proportion of respondents that strongly agree or disagree as to whether there is collaboration between the grazers and the farmers

Baseline indicators for the measurement of progress and impact

A set of statistical indicators have been defined that will be used throughout the five year course of the project. These indicators show the following:

- Outcome 1: Conflict Resolution. Farmer-grazer conflicts are still common and have not reduced in the communities studied. Only a small proportion of those exposed to conflict actually used the dialogue platform as a source of help for conflict resolution. This may be because these platforms are yet to be set up in some of the areas covered;
• Outcome 2: Sustainable natural resources. The main agricultural interventions planned for the project and current take up are Alliance farming (28%), Improved Pasture (17%) and biogas (only one in the current study). There is some way to go in promoting measures for the sustainable management of natural resources;
• Outcome 3: Clean and safe water. The water management committees are rated to be efficient by over half of the respondents from the communities where the committees exist. However, these committees do not exist in most of the communities and need to be put in place;
• Outcome 4: Strong organisations. MBOSCUDA is seen as a valuable organisation and already provides a great deal of support for people involved in conflict, according to 25% of respondents. It has increased awareness of Mbororo rights amongst not only grazers but farmers too.

Recommendations

The findings of this Baseline Survey provide a sound basis to make judgments about the next five years of the project. Some policy issues have already been raised from the data already collected:

• Intensification of agriculture using alliance farming, improved seeds and biogas and the promotion of best practice should be encouraged and extended to other farmers and grazers;
• Access to clean and safe drinking water is essential for both humans and cattle and contamination of water supplies is a serious health risk. Common ground on access to water must be agreed upon. The setting up of water management committees and capacity building within them is essential for this;
• Conflicts are a serious issue and the impact of these on families and communities is considerable. The farmers and grazers have widely differing views on the causes. When conflicts arise amicable settlement should be encouraged as much as possible. At the same time dialogue platforms are emerging as an important mediation method and have an important role to play here. As more dialogue platforms are set up their impact could be considerable;
• The competent ministerial department needs to make budgetary allocation for the running of agro-pastoral commission. This would limit the need for farmers and grazers to pay for mediation which is seen by them as extortion.

References


The full report of the Baseline Survey is available on the websites of MBOSCUDA in Bamenda, NW Cameroon and Village Aid in Bakewell, UK.

You can download the report for free from www.mboscuda.org and www.villageaid.org. Information about project progress can also be obtained from Facebook pages www.facebook.com/mboscuda-cameroon and www.facebook.com/villageaid.