

AGRO- PASTORAL FARMING ALLIANCE IN CAMEROON

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Country: **Cameroon** - Principal Organisation: **MBOSCUA**

ABSTRACT

The existing legal framework empowers the Agro Pastoral Commission to resolve conflicts between farmers and grazers; however, the process is expensive, cumbersome and ineffective. MBOSCUA introduced an Alternative Conflict Management (ACM) procedure

through which farming and pastoralist communities use Dialogue Platforms (DPs) to negotiate farming alliance agreements. Farming alliance has strengthened farmer-pastoralists relations and encouraged natural ecosystem management.

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CAMPAIGNING**

**LAND CONFLICT
RESOLUTION**

**ESTABLISHMENT AND
STRENGTHENING OF
LOCAL INSTITUTIONS**

BACKGROUND

Subsistence crop farmers and pastoralist in the North-West Region of Cameroon live side by side and share natural resources such as land, water and pastures for their livelihoods. However, the lack of demarcations between farm land and

grazing land often results in land conflicts leading to the loss of lives and destruction to property. The existing legal framework has failed to resolve these conflicts, resulting in a deteriorated relationship between farmers and grazers.

THE CHALLENGE

Whilst the Agro Pastoral Commission has designed legal frameworks for land conflict resolution, the prescribed procedures and measures are expensive, cumbersome and

ineffective. Community members needed an alternative conflict management (ACM) mechanism, that is community-led, faster, cheaper and acceptable.



OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

To facilitate community-led resolution of land conflicts, MBOSCUA has introduced ACM procedures, through which conflicting communities select representatives from both groups to facilitate dialogue and mediation between the conflicting parties. The mediators of the Dialogue Platforms (DP) are selected using set criteria, and work to promote dialogue between conflicting parties.

The introduction of DPs in the communities has facilitated dialogue on mutually beneficial community-led land use and planning. The communities have adopted farming alliance as a tool to strengthen the relationship

between farmers and pastoralists, and to maximise the benefits of land use. After the harvest season, farmers invite the pastoralists to graze their animals on farm residue in fallow farms, while the cattle in return manure the farmlands. This fattens the cattle while organically enriching the soil and improving its quality.

In the event of a conflict, the two parties are brought together and given a chance to dialogue, and if they fail to agree on a solution, the DP members are invited to mediate over the matter. Dialogue Platforms have successfully resolved 85% of land use conflicts, resulting in increased trust by community members.

MOVING TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE

The introduction of farming alliances has reduced the number of land conflicts and their severity in the North-West Region of Cameroon, thereby increasing trust and confidence between farmers and pastoralists, and giving them access to fertile lands and livestock feed. As a result of the DPs, community members are saving money which would

have been used for litigation and other related expenses, and are channelling it towards their socio-economic needs. As a result, local communities have set up DPs in their areas, and MBOSCUA has trained the DPs on mediation and conflict resolution; and has facilitated exchange visits to encourage the sharing of experiences and lessons learned.



THE GOOD PRACTICE IN FIVE SIMPLE STEPS

1

Community sensitisation and establishment of dispute platforms. Communities are educated on all the options for resolving conflicts, including approaching the Agro Pastoral Commission, the judiciary, traditional authorities and alternative dispute resolutions mechanisms such as the DPs. They brainstorm on the procedures of each institution including the ACM approach where cost and time effectiveness, reliability and satisfaction are prioritized. The ACM approach is generally accepted as it prioritises to negotiate a win-win solution that is acceptable to all.

2

Training of dispute platforms on mediation. The community is given set criteria to select honest people who will be trained as mediators. Experts are brought in to train the DP members on basic conflict management and mediation skills. The trained DP members are then presented to the community in an open ceremony. For legitimacy, they are also presented to key stakeholders, such as chiefs, traditional leaders and the municipal councils who manage the community's natural resources.

3

Resolution of conflicts by dispute platform members. The DPs encourage the conflicting parties to lead the negotiations, while DP members play a facilitation and reconciliatory role. The DP does not replace the Commission or the judiciary; but rather presents the community with an alternative and community-led dispute resolution mechanism. In all cases, DP members encourage mutually beneficial and amicable settlements.

4

Introduction of farming alliance practices. Community members are introduced to farming alliance practices that include farmers and herders sharing land which is alternatively used to grow crops and graze livestock. When the land is used to paddock livestock, their manure and urine fertilize the soil making it more productive. Crops are planted once the cattle are taken off the land; and trends have demonstrated that crop yield is higher when livestock spend more time on the land during fallow seasons. Conversely, cattle that graze on the land used to grow crops are healthier and more productive.

This practice is highly appreciated by the two community members who previously had a land use dispute, but managed to resolve it through a mutually beneficial agro-pastoral farming alliance.

5

Learning exchange visits. This is a practice that joins alliance farmers to share their experiences and best practices. They visit established DPs to learn from the experiences of others, and to encourage the replications and scaling up of best practices. Visitors from other regions demonstrate an interest in learning about the ACM model. The NES Regional Hub of Garoua visited Ndop plain in the North West Region in 2016 to facilitate learning and sharing of best practices.



KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS FOR REPLICABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY PURPOSES

1

First, the communities that represent different interests must be taught about agro-pastoral farming alliance as an ACM mechanism. Their buy-in is important; thus they should know the importance of the mechanism. Advantages of the tool, including cost and time effectiveness, reliability and satisfaction, must be highlighted to the community members to get their buy-in.

2

Negotiations through the tool should prioritise positive dialogue and mutually beneficial agreements; as such, DP members should be trained on how to facilitate negotiations.

3

Agro-pastoral farming alliance agreements must be followed to the fullest as both parties depend on the same land for their agricultural or pastoral activities. Where one party fails to honour the agreement, they will affect the other's farming activities and livelihood.

LESSONS LEARNED

The main challenge of agro-pastoral farming alliance agreements is the fact that they are solely built on trust of the parties as the agreements are not legally binding. Where one party decides to breach the contract, they affect the farming operations of their counterpart, with no real redress for the aggrieved party.

Some of the lessons learned include the fact that better management of natural ecosystems through the formation of agro-pastoral farming alliances not only allows the land to regenerate naturally, but also promotes good relations between community members. Of equal importance is the fact that this practice encourages organic farming, which is healthy for both the environment and humans, and increases crop and animal yields for the farmers.



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Sali Django

Programme Coordinator MBOSCUA NWR

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