CONCEPT PAPER ON AGRICULTURE AND PASTORALIST CONFLICTS IN WEST AFRICA SAHEL

BACKGROUND

The West African sub-region is renowned for bloody civil wars and complex political crisis. The armed conflict that engulfed the sub-region in the 90s have become one of the most apparent causes of poverty and population displacement thus equally contributing to environmental degradation, resource scarcity, demographic change and political instability – resulting in intense competition for limited resources. Despite its relative significance, international attention is distracted away from farmer-pastoralist conflicts across the corridor of West Africa, particularly the Sahel region. Take into consideration that farmer-pastoralist conflict is deeply rooted in the history, ecology and political economy of the region with strong ethnic, religious and political implications.

However silent such conflict may be, agriculture and pastoral-related conflicts have been a recurring experience for centuries in the West African Sahel. Many scholars including Homer-Dixon and Percival (1997) accentuated the causal link between resource scarcity and conflict. They argued that the scarcity of renewable resources such as farmland, forests and water generate social effects and thus produce conflict and instability. This causal links are significant for tracing the process between resource scarcity and the occurrence or recurrence of conflict.

These conflicts have, in recent years, escalated and become violent, indiscriminate and destructive. This escalation is attributed to among other factors, inadequate policing and state presence, disputed land ownership, political incitement, proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons, commercialization of ‘traditional cattle rustling’, lack of alternative livelihoods, increasing levels of poverty, retrogressive cultural practices and an increasing breakdown of traditional governance systems. Violence in the pastoralist areas has had a severe negative socio-cultural, political and economic impact on the pastoralist communities including loss of human lives and properties, displacement of communities, breakdown of economic activities and infrastructure, environmental degradation, inter-ethnic hatred and mistrust.

Context

Pastoralists have intermingled with farmers for centuries, with established reciprocal-trade relationship, as well as collaborative symbiotic traditional practice in grazing of livestock. However, these ancient practices and many generations of coexistence have been threatened by many modern factors such as population growth and increasing commercialised agricultural production and climate change. These factors have led to the expansion of agriculture on formerly shared grazing lands, and have increased tension and conflicts between these groups in many parts of West Africa.1

Most importantly, the West African livestock industry is a traditional system of production dominated by the nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists. They possessed the largest percentage

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of cows, horses, camel, sheep and goats – depending largely on open rangelands, crop residues, and browsing to feed their animals. They move within an expansive geographical latitudes, going back and forth between semi-arid north during the rainy season, and the wetter south during the dry season2. They move within and across countries principally in search of pastures and water for their herds. Hence coming in constant with farmers and other herders – as such competition for livestock and renewable resources are inevitable factors that often lead to violent clashes between herders and farmers.

Owing to the limited availability of cultivatable land, the farmers’ expansion into marginal lands is increasingly resulting in a heightened competition between livestock and agricultural production. Conflicts often erupt between herders and farmers over access to land and water resources (Williams et al., 1999). Moreover, governments’ initiative to encourage commercialized agriculture and promote crop production thus backed farmers’ efforts to encroach on most of the traditional cattle routes. The increasing number of farms thus left insufficient passage for livestock to reach drinking points. The close relationship between these factors and the survival of the communities means that the pastoralists will usually employ any possible means necessary, including violence, to get access to resources.

Most importantly, migration in this part of West Africa is a widespread phenomenon with very serious implications on land, and the terms and condition upon which different migrants gain access to resources. Cattle raiding across the porous borders into neighbouring countries are a widespread recurring phenomenon in this area. For instance, there has been a steady increase in cattle raiding from Guinea Bissau across the Casamance region in Senegal due to conflict-related dynamics of both countries, including increased poverty and small arms proliferation.

To a larger extent, the conflict in Cote d’Ivoire is characterised by a pronounced trend towards agricultural intensification and competition for limited farmland. Marginalisation of agricultural-pastoralist minded migrants from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger currently number almost 3 million, which is estimated roughly at a quarter of the country’s total population3. Similarly, access to agricultural farm land in Burkina Faso is dominated by the perception of increasingly scarce natural resources and environmental degradation. The sub-humid south western part of Burkina Faso is such a place where land use conflict between autochthon farmers and Fulani pastoralist frequently occur.

Burkina Faso is characterized by ecological differences between the heavily degraded low rainfall regions in the north and centre, which generate major flows of migrants seeking work and land elsewhere, and the southern regions which are perceived to be much better endowed in terms of land availability and rainfall. Thus herder-farmer conflicts not only have a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of those involved in the conflicts, but they are also disrupting and threatening the sustainability of agricultural and pastoral production systems.

The Goal
The principal goal of the workshop is to collectively identify and examine the factors contributing to agro-pastoralists conflicts, and discuss issues and priorities for preventive peacebuilding prospect in the West Africa Sahel. This also include discussing new ideas and innovative approaches in the light of emerging socio-economic and environmental concerns in response to the changing societal


3 West Africa Long Term Perspective Study, CILSS/ Club du Sahel, 1995
realities and needs relevant to the enhancement and sustainability of farmers-herders livelihoods and peaceful coexistence.

The Objectives

- To enhance the understanding of the dynamics and trends of such conflicts and explore options for the establishment of Early Warning and proactive response mechanisms;
- To enhance co-ordination and opportunities for information sharing between the eight (8) countries selected for the workshop;
- To promote co-ordination and the identification and dissemination of good practices.
- To encourage networking and partnerships among actors at intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions that is positioned to design, and promotes participatory preventive peacebuilding initiatives.

Methodology

Approximately 30 participants representing a combination of CSOs especially those working on issues of agro-pastoral conflicts, relevant national government agencies and ministries as well as intergovernmental organizations and grassroots communities - reflecting gender, ethnic, religious and other related difference across the seven other selected countries will be brought to Burkina Faso between 21 and 24 February 2011.

There will be paper presentations focusing on current dynamics of the conflict in the sub region and ways of addressing them while group works will be adopted to elicit best practices and synergy building towards addressing current trends of the conflict and forestalling its future occurrences. The workshop will examine and propose various preventive peacebuilding mechanisms and options in view of proposing some policy recommendations.

Expected Outputs

By the end of the two-day workshop from 22 to 23 February 2011:

- Various preventive peacebuilding mechanisms and options, as well as policy recommendations will have been generated and made available.
- Enhanced understanding of the dynamics and trends of such conflicts and options explored for the establishment of Early Warning and proactive response mechanisms;
- Networking and partnerships among actors at intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions that is positioned to design, and promote participatory preventive peacebuilding initiatives would have been encouraged.
- New and innovative coexistence strategies and conflict sensitive management policies and programmes in the West Africa region would have been enhanced.
- Enhanced understanding of stakeholders contribution for the prevention and management of farmers and herders conflicts
- Increased awareness and capacity for civil society to address issues of social inclusion and coexistence in and across the borders of targeted countries.