

## Mitigating Conflict between Farmers and Pastoralists in WASE LGA

### Background

Resource-based conflicts between Pastoralists and Farmers have become a major source of concern in Northern Nigeria. In the first quarter of 2014, 16 separate violent conflicts in Plateau and Kaduna States claimed 139 lives and left scores of people injured.<sup>1</sup> Several women have also been abducted and raped in ensuing violence between the two groups in affected communities. The incessant conflict has also taken its toll on livelihoods of both Pastoralists and Farmers as loss of livestock and interruptions of farming activities contribute to a reduction in income in the affected areas.



A pastoralist takes his cattle to graze

The root cause of this persistent conflict lies in the paucity of pasture and water. The impact of Climate Change in the form of desertification, declining water points and loss of foliage coupled with increasing human and livestock populations has intensified competition over scarce land and water resources<sup>2</sup> and exacerbated relationships between both groups. The jostle for grazing land and watering points for cattle, against farmlands and irrigation sources for crops has caused immeasurable human and material loss and demands urgent attention.

Lamba community in Wase Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau state is a community that has experienced its share of resource-based conflict. The community stream, which is the only source of water, caters to the domestic needs of community members and is also utilised by livestock for drinking. The source of the conflict stemmed from the daily muddying of the water by livestock which made it unsuitable for consumption by farmers and their families. Concurrent water use by community members and livestock has fuelled recurring conflict between Pastoralists and Farmers in the community.

<sup>1</sup> NSRP(2015) Policy Brief: Addressing Rural Banditry in Northern Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> NSRP(2015) Policy Brief: Addressing Rural Banditry in Northern Nigeria

## **Dialoguing for Peace in Lamba Community**

Recognising the need to put a halt to rising conflicts in Lamba Community, Justice Development and Peace Caritas (JDPC) with the support of the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) facilitated the constitution of a Dialogue Committee (DC) composed of the District Head and representatives of Pastoralists, Farmers, Women and Youth groups. The Dialogue Committee members were then trained on Mediation and effective Dialogue and began utilising their newly acquired skills in follow-on consultations with the conflicting groups.

Several dialogue fora initiated by the Dialogue Committee culminated in a simple solution that ended several years of conflict: farmers and their families were to access water from the main entrance of the stream while Pastoralist and their livestock were restricted to the far end thereby not affecting water being accessed for domestic use. Additionally, the use of the stream was to be rotated to give sole access to persons requiring water for domestic use and to livestock respectively.

## **Results**

The major result of the Dialogue Committee initiative was the opening up of a trusted communication channel between the two groups. Community members have resorted to placing all forms of grievances before the members of the Dialogue Committee who have now assumed the role of mediators within the community. The success of the dialogue initiative in quelling longstanding conflict over the use of water has inspired confidence amongst community members to the delight of all concerned. Speaking on the initiative, a community member stated that:

*“The dialogue committee has been recognized as a counselling team in Lamba and their resolutions are binding on us because they have gained our confidence. We are particularly happy about the way it was able to resolve the water problem”*

The Lamba community continues to reap the fruits of improved relations amongst residents. The presence of an alternative dispute resolution body, such as the Dialogue Committee, has provided aggrieved parties with a credible and trusted solution instead of resorting to self-help. This has impacted positively on peace and security within the area.

## **Challenges**

Initial feelings of suspicion amongst community members posed a challenge to the formation of the Dialogue Committee. Given the background of violent conflict and insecurity in the area, Pastoralists and Farmers responded with caution to overtures by the committee members in their efforts aimed at fostering peace. The coincidental death of a vocal contributor to one of the consultative forums during the period led to rumours that his death was a result of his views at the meetings. This singular incident created fear amongst community members and stalled the progress of the Dialogue Committee for a significant amount of time.

**Lessons Learned**

A key lesson from the initiative is the need to ensure proper research into the dynamics underpinning any conflict issue before proceeding to tackle it. The Dialogue Committee's success was greatly aided by local knowledge obtained from intense information-gathering activities prior to their engagement with the conflicting parties. A significant contribution to the success of the initiative was the fact that the committee involved representation from all stakeholder groups within the community. This inclusive process enabled all parties to understand each other's interests and positions resulting in a balanced and broadly agreed upon decision-making process.