

## Making Peace Sustainable: Transforming the Struggles of Improving Resource-Based Relations Between Farmers and Herders



Addressing deep-seated resource-based conflicts between farmer and herder communities in Adamawa and Taraba States and their spiralling effects on peaceful coexistence requires transformational actions that empower local actors to collectively understand the root causes of the problem and pursue collaborative problem-solving. This approach deepens group knowledge about the drivers of resource-based disputes, transforms the prejudices that escalate tensions, and builds community peace by empowering local actors to reflect on how their choices, behaviours and actions impact one another. The culmination of these efforts ensures the building of community impact models for peaceful interactions that strengthen creative thinking and problem-solving skills among conflict communities. Therefore, building the institutional capacities of local actors and their communities to prioritise and negotiate their shared natural resource needs empowers them to focus on addressing common problems using constructive rather than dysfunctional methods.



*Picture 1: Herders drawing the natural resource map of Shelleng Ward, Shelleng LGA, Adamawa State*

Through Mercy Corps' ongoing efforts in Adamawa and Taraba States, the COMITAS II project addresses the root causes of shared natural resource conflicts between farmers and herders and facilitates collaborative resource management actions. Mercy Corps is strengthening the conflict Resolution capacities of the Natural Resource Management Committees (NRMCS) across the 22 project wards in Adamawa and Taraba states. The organisation employs its Interest-Based Negotiation model to deepen farmer-herder community knowledge of conflict resolution while utilising evidence from the community-led conflict and natural resource mapping as a foundation for improving distinct and complementary understanding of resource-based conflicts. These capacities empower the project communities and the NRMCS to analyse and develop a nuanced

understanding of resource-based conflicts, recognise how the conflicts threaten the group agency of farmer and herder communities, and identify various community-based social resources they leverage to advance resource-based peacebuilding efforts. It also **allows farmer and herder communities to learn about innovative methods of integrating resource-based conflict resolution into their community social resources and how to operationalise negotiation frameworks distinctively in farmer and herder communities.**

### Learning from Action:

1. **Building community understanding of the linkages between isolated conflicts:** Following the complicatedness of resource-based conflicts, evidence from the project, particularly the natural resource mapping, reveals a linkage between isolated conflicts, some of which are episodic or protracted. Through collaborative conflict and natural resource mapping and analysis, project communities realised the influence of isolated conflicts, such as ethnopolitical and intragroup violence, on resource-based conflicts between farmers and herders. Through the project, communities have become better empowered to recognise that **transforming resource-based violence between farmers and herders requires understanding how the interconnectedness between isolated conflicts is embedded in a broader conflict pattern and could reverberate resource competition between groups.**

2. **Moving from individuality to collective transformational responses and action:** Due to the spread of resource-based conflicts between farmers and herders, different individuals from the project communities rely on their distinctive relationships to negotiate or resolve land and water conflicts. Noting the inability of homogenous relationships to



*Picture 2: NRMCMembers in Lau A Ward mediating a crop destruction dispute between two herders*

address the collective concerns and needs of larger farmer and herder groups, NRMCMembers who have developed conflict resolution capacities indicated that **“if we [NRMCMembers] believe that this [natural resource] conflict does not affect us directly and we don’t plan to negotiate in ways that benefit the community instead of resolving it individually, the result will come to all of us... and we will be unprepared for its impact”**. By building local negotiation capacities and enhancing the integration of conflict resolution into local dispute resolution mechanisms

and social resources, NRMCMembers realised that positive farmer-herder interactions represent a web of relationships within a larger social context.

3. **Addressing unfounded assumptions that escalate resource-based conflicts:** The amplification of besiegement narratives, rumours, misconceptions and stereotypical assumptions in farmer and herder communities impede opportunities to negotiate resource-based conflicts. While miscommunication sustains these attitudes across both communities, NRMCMembers acknowledge that identifying and strengthening communication

within their institutions enables them to understand better how their actions and stereotypical assumptions shape peace or conflict across farmer and herder communities. NRMCs noted that **“miscommunication among ourselves (farmers and herders) allows people to misunderstand and change the context of our words and actions. This makes our community members... to escalate resource disputes further. We must deal with rumours and create ways to verify the information before drawing conclusions that will increase the conflicts”**. Hence, addressing assumptions creates opportunities for communities to begin the journey of forgiveness, transform mistrust and prejudices, and focus on building a long-term vision of peaceful coexistence.

#### **Way Forward for COMITAS and Peacebuilding Practitioners:**

- 1. Encourage strategic locally-led advocacies by community-based structures:** Although the NRMCs developed conflict resolution skills through the IBN training, Mercy Corps will support NRMCs to leverage the community enlightenment and awareness-raising activities to advocate the integration of conflict resolution into their various social resources that connect farmers and herders. **Integrating conflict resolution into the community social resources will empower local actors to develop measures to prevent and mitigate conflicts and improve social interactions creatively and collaboratively.** This effort will empower local actors to take ownership of community peacebuilding and transform underlying grievances that fuel conflicts, including resource-based disputes.
- 2. Support community-based structures to develop local plans that replicate and operationalise conflict resolution skills: As Mercy Corps empowers the NRMCs with IBN, mediation, and natural resource planning skills, it will also accompany them in transferring these capacities to their local institutions.** By replicating these skills, NRMCs support their communities and institutions to co-visualize how different ebbs and flows of energies and stereotypical behaviours by farmers and herders reinforce resource conflicts. These skills will also enable them to identify sustained negotiation methods to reduce resource-based conflicts. Overall, **comprehensive negotiation capacities in community-based institutions allow groups to understand natural resource conflicts systematically,** empowering them to reflect on how to adapt negotiation at different points of the conflict system and strengthen community safety partnerships.

3. **Sustain messages on social cohesion and intercommunal cooperation:** In addition to increasing community awareness about sustainable natural resource management, Mercy Corps' community enlightenment activity will provide information that enables farmer and herder communities to understand and collectively reflect on the underlying relational and structural drivers of resource-based conflicts while also consolidating diverse efforts to improve social cohesion. Therefore, **utilising positive messaging to reinforce the relevance of transactional peacebuilding offers a powerful means of transforming interconnection between farmer and herder communities**, creates change at behavioural and attitudinal levels, encourages mutual actions and catalyses local institutional response to resource conflicts.



*Picture 3: NRM-led dialogue in Monkin B Ward, Zing LGA, Taraba State*

## **About COMITAS**

**Contributing to the mitigation of conflict over natural resources between farmer and herder communities in Taraba and Adamawa States, Nigeria (COMITAS II) is an integrated project funded by the European Union to address the root causes of resource-based conflicts and improve collaborative access, use, and management of shared natural resources. The project is being implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Search for Common Ground, and Mercy Corps.**