



Photo Credit: Ezra Millenstein for Mercy Corps in Daddere, Nasarawa state, Nigeria

WHAT MERCY CORPS HAS LEARNED FROM THE FARMER-PASTORALIST CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

The [farmer-pastoralist conflict](#) has become Nigeria's gravest security challenge, now claiming six times more lives than the Boko Haram insurgency in 2018 ¹, with more than 7,000 deaths in five years. It is costing Nigeria about \$ 13 billion annually due to the mass destruction of properties, livestock and crops ².

These attacks, once sporadic incidents, have now spread across the Middle Belt region of Nigeria leaving over 300,000 people displaced ³ and leading to the many deaths due to the alarming uptick in violence. Originally, a resource-based conflict over limited water and land, the farmer-pastoralist conflict has over time developed religious and ethnic dimensions which have further polarized farmers and pastoralists in the states of Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Adamawa, Taraba, Kaduna and Kogi in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria.

Engaging Communities for Peace in Nigeria (ECPN) is a four-year program funded by the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The program was implemented by Mercy Corps and a local partner, the Pastoral Resolve (PARE). Activities carried out by the program since 2015 was aimed at reducing and preventing violence between farmers and pastoralists in Benue and Nasarawa states by peacefully resolving farmer-pastoralist conflicts.

As the program has recently ended, it is crucial that Mercy Corps reflect on the successes, challenges, lessons learned and the opportunities of implementing a conflict mitigation/management program in an active and protracted conflict setting.

¹ "International Crisis Group Report No. 262 "Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder conflict" Africa, July 2018
<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence>

² According to Mercy Corps research Effects of Farmer-Pastoralist Conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt on State, Sector, and National Economies in <https://www.mercycorps.org/research/economic-costs-conflict-nigeria>

³ According to Humans Right Watch World Report 2019 of Nigeria in <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/nigeria>

Overcoming Laws that Do More Harm



“I lost almost everything. I lost family members, friends, cattle and other property as we tried to escape from the Anti-Grazing Law enforcers in Benue in January 2018,” says Mubaba, a displaced Pastoralist now living in Nasarawa state. Photo Credit: Ezra Millenstein for Mercy Corps in Tunga, Nasarawa state, Nigeria

During ECPN implementation, an [anti-open grazing bill](#) was passed into law in 2017, making it illegal for cattle to graze outside enclosed ranches in several states, with Benue State enforcing the law by January 2018. This State sponsored action resulted in an escalation of violence leading to 308 deaths⁴, destruction and widespread displacement of both farmers and pastoralists which in turn impeded the implementation of some program activities.

⁴ In article by Thisday Newspaper on <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2018/04/30/901-killed-in-middle-belt-since-january/>

The increased violence in the communities surrounding ECPN sites led to fear and apprehension in the ECPN communities. However, despite these challenges, the intervention communities remained resilient in the face of the growing conflict, there was reported increased trust between farming and pastoral communities, especially in Anyiin and Zongo/Daudu communities in Benue state.

“Mercy Corps’ intervention could not have been timelier. The implementation of the law triggered a lot of violent clashes and attacks in neighboring communities. The pastoralists in Anyiin were terrified and told us that they had to leave. One of them trusted me with his property for safekeeping until he returns. I hope he is fine,” says Galim James, a farmer from Anyiin community in Benue state.

Mercy Corps’ activities included setting up a community-driven early warning and early response system in our program sites, this played a crucial role in averting violence between migrating pastoralists from Benue state and Tiv farmers in the Tunga community of Nasarawa state.

Mubaba recalls the initial apprehension he felt when migrating as part of a large number of pastoralists to the border community of Tunga as he feared being attacked by the farmers.

“To my utmost relief, we were accommodated and we later learned that the community members had anticipated our arrival in one of their peace forum meetings.”

Mercy Corps’ response here buttresses the importance of building community capacities in areas where tensions are prone to lead to violence, as this helps them withstand negative influences from larger societal events.

However, although our intervention communities got better, the situation in neighboring communities became considerably worse. These results highlight the need to match community-level peacebuilding efforts with high-level advocacy so that government policies will support local interventions and enable scale up when proven effective.

Engaging Displaced People



SP Shindi, a farmer from Anyiin community in Benue state. Photo Credit: Michael Madukwe for Mercy Corps in Anyiin, Benue state, Nigeria

The widespread displacement also had an effect on our programming activities as some Mercy Corps' ECPN sites witnessed a large influx of displaced people as well as mass migration of our participants from their settlements and communities.

Our team responded by engaging displaced persons in their respective settlements with specific activities such as the interest-based negotiation (IBN) training, dispute tracking and program evaluations. By including the displaced community members in our programming activities, this aided in improving the relations with their host communities.

These interactions served to give Mercy Corps a broader picture on the scale of the crisis, but also to remind team members of the human element that transcends the conflict.

“I miss my friend Saleh Tambaya from the pastoralist community of Anyiin. Having lost touch with many of our pastoralist neighbours, I asked for Saleh’s contact at one of the IBN training in 2018. I was happy to learn about Saleh’s wellbeing and that his family had found a safe haven in Nasarawa,” says SP Shindi (pictured above), a farmer from Anyiin community in Benue state.

Shindi also expressed his regret that the pastoralists had to flee in this way, with many having to leave their property in the care of farmers with hopes of returning when things became calm.

Mercy Corps’ response here highlights the importance of utilizing adaptable programming methods.

Responding to Changing Conflict Dynamics



Photo Credit: Michael Madukwe for Mercy Corps in Tundun Adabu, Benue state, Nigeria

As hostilities grew in Benue state, this saw the migration of a large number of pastoralists from Benue to other states in the MiddleBelt region, leaving some communities without any pastoralists. Given that key site selection criteria for ECPN sites were the presence of both farmers and pastoralists, this affected two of our sites in Benue state, the Mbaku and Torkula communities respectively.

During site selection for the implementation of the ECPN cost extension, the Mbaku community was dropped due to the absence of pastoralists, who had migrated to untraceable locations or to states we were not operating in.

Although Torkula experienced similar migration of pastoralists, Mercy Corps was able to continue implementation here because we knew the location (which was the Tunga community in Nasarawa

state) that majority of the pastoralists resettled in. In order to maintain our engagement with the resettled pastoralists in Tunga community, we adopted it as a new site.

In Tundun Adabu and Assakio (Mercy Corps' sites) in Nasarawa, the conflict dynamics were never between farming and pastoral communities but rather inter-ethnic conflicts between farmers of the Alago and Eggon ethnic groups over land and leadership issues respectively. The pastoralists in these communities were indirectly affected by the conflicts as either collaborators or victims.

“The violent conflict in the Tundun Adabu and Odobu communities between the major ethnic groups - Eggon and Alago caused a lot of anguish for many people. Some of us lost relatives, some lost property while others were either displaced, left injured or stranded in neighboring communities,” says Ramatu Erdo, a farmer from Tundun Adabu Community, Nasarawa State.

Mercy Corps' responded with interventions catering to the Alago and Eggon farmers as well as the affected pastoralists, whilst classifying the Tundun Adabu and Assakio communities as special sites during the cost extension.

Yakubu Gambo Akosi, an Alago farmer from Odobu community in Nasarawa State tells us of a time he could not enter the Eggon dominated Tundun Adabu community for fear of being attacked, when the violence was terrible as the inter-ethnic conflict was very dire.

“Today, things have tremendously improved because of interventions by the government and peacebuilding efforts by stakeholders and I am set to marry the love of my life who is Eggon from Tundun Adabu,” enthuses Yakubu.

Mercy Corps' work in these communities was able to stabilize and improve social cohesion between the conflicting groups by providing opportunities for community leaders and people to build conflict-management skills as well as ways to collaborate and solve common challenges and disputes which enabled them to strengthen their community from within.

Increasing Women Participation in Peace-Building Activities



Photo Credit: Michael Madukwe for Mercy Corps

When Mercy Corps' began implementing in Benue and Nasarawa States, women's participation in program activities were low, especially among the pastoralists' communities due to cultural and religious limitations. This is coupled with the escalation in violence and displacement of people which made it even more difficult to access women.

"As women, we are often overlooked and our needs are overshadowed by that of the men," says Veronica Suswam (pictured above), a farmer from Anyiin community in Benue state.

The team addressed this by embarking on rigorous sensitization of the men to encourage women's participation in project activities and by the enforcement of a female participation quota on each community within the project sites.

Also, Mercy Corps' facilitated safe spaces for women to express themselves by implementing separate activities for women groups, such as the IBN training. This led to an increase in women's participation in peacebuilding activities by 124% as of September 2018.

Veronica Suswam tells us of how she now enjoys speaking to large groups of women about the triggers of conflict in their communities and ways to mitigate it.

“Being a part of the Anyiin Peace Committee has given me a better platform to air my views and encourage other women to understand our roles in influencing our men and our youths.”

By supporting the inclusion of women and girls in peace building; we were able to ascertain what the needs of women were to ensure our interventions proved beneficial to them.

Strengthening the Organizational Capacities of NorthEast CSOs



Northeast CSO Senior Management Meeting at Mercy Corps Office, Abuja. May 18, 2018

In 2017, the scope of the ECPN project intervention was expanded to include organizational capacity development for influential civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Northeast. Mercy Corps' was required to implement capacity development trainings for the CSOs as well as conflict sensitivity/ Do No harm training for USAID Mission staff and implementing partners.

At the beginning of our capacity development activities for the selected Northeast CSOs, we noticed that there was little to no investment being made by CSOs to strengthen identified gaps within their organizations for several reasons such as inadequate resources and high staff turnover thus, resulting in unsustainable structures/mechanisms.

In order to address this, Mercy Corps worked with each organization in identifying their priority areas to ensure that capacity-building activities were tailored according to the needs of the organizations.

The team learned that partners' support was crucial to provide the right enabling environment for successful course development and implementation.

Our approach to implementing the capacity building with the CSOs, was by training some of the personnel who were then expected to institutionalize the concepts within their organizations. However, due to the high staff turnover, when the participants of our program activities leave their organizations, the existing gap remains.

To address this situation, Mercy Corps' ensured that all the Northeast CSOs develop an organizational learning culture, where the participants of capacity building activities are mandated to conduct step-down trainings to their colleagues in those organizations.

Another key learning is that the most effective way to go about identifying the core gap(s) and potential solutions is by conducting a participatory capacity assessment, which also aids in getting the required buy-in from the CSOs.

The CSOs were also trained in context analysis approach which also recommends a participatory analysis and needs assessment to be carried out in target communities before administering interventions in prospective communities.

"Before now, we entered communities without analyzing the context, but after we got the training from Mercy Corps we have changed our approach and there are better results to show for it. Especially with the just concluded Small Grant, the impact has been tremendous," says Bishop Mohammed Naga, Chairman of Christian Association of Nigeria, Borno State Branch.

Mercy Corps has established its reputation as a credible and effective organization for capacity development in the international development sector among networks of local and international organizations in Nigeria.

To highlight this, the success of the ECPN capacity building activity for the Northeast CSOs is the identified motivation behind the engagement of Mercy Corps by the Presidential Committee on Northeast Initiative (PCNI) to train 120 civil society organizations operating in the Northeast through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding for the duration of January to June 2019.



Do No Harm 'Exposure' Workshop for USAID Implementing Partners'. Abuja. March 27, 2018

As a result of the significant accomplishments and successes of the ECPN program, USAID awarded Mercy Corps one of its largest peacebuilding programs in Nigeria to prevent violent conflict in the most at-risk communities across six states in the North West and North Central regions.

Mercy Corps will be implementing the Community Initiatives to Promote Peace (CIPP), a five-year, \$15 million program which will work with communities, local and state government officials to build conflict mitigation skills—including elevating the role of women in peacebuilding to ensure they occupy leadership positions, establishing networks to improve collaboration and resource sharing among groups, and working with policymakers to adopt conflict sensitive legislation that will pave the way for sustainable peace and development in Nigeria.

Mercy Corps will be applying the programmatic lessons learned into the implementation of the CIPP program.

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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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