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Conflict Management Related to Natural Resources in South-West Burkina Faso

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Abstract

Land conflicts caused by deterioration of natural resources and migration brought about by a rapidly increasing population and droughts are a rising issue in West-Africa. Areas where both pastoralism and agriculture are possible and where “modern” and “traditional” legal norms are simultaneously in use are particularly concerned. The sub-humid south-western part of Burkina Faso is such a region where violent land use conflicts between autochthonous farmers and Fulani pastoralists occur.

To investigate the conflict management strategies, a six month’s study was carried out by an interdisciplinary team in the Poni and Nounbiel Provinces. Six villages were investigated by semi-structured interviews with farmers, pastoralists and the formal institutions on district level involved in conflict management. The questionnaires covered land tenure, interethnic relations, land use systems as well as conflicts and conflict management.

Results show that the traditional land tenure system provides three ways to obtain an usufruct right to land: heritage, donation and loan. Since land is still abundant, the expansion of the crop-land area is mainly restricted by labour shortage. The population is composed of autochthonous farmers (Birifor, Dagara) and immigrating Mossi farmers as well as transhumant agro-pastoral Fulani. Social interactions among these ethnic groups vary and range from a complete lack of relations, in part due to the language barrier, to friendships across ethnic borders. There are different forms of cooperation between the ethnic groups: the farming groups (Lobi, Birifor and Mossi) often obtain cattle dung from the Fulani, sometimes in exchange for labour. The farmers work as daily labourers on the Fulanis’ fields or help them constructing houses. Commercial relations exist as well. Good farmer-herder-relations are essential for an effective conflict management and are an important possibility to increase incomes. Two thirds of the households are affected by conflicts, most of them by the farmer-pastoralist-conflict about crop damages caused by livestock. The conflicts can be managed on several institutional levels: by the concerned persons themselves, by the village’s chairman (who plays an important role in conflict management) and the traditional chief (*chef de terre*) or by the formal institutions on district level. In some districts, the inadequate and unsatisfactory way how prefectures acted in conflict cases has caused a sceptical attitude of the population. Hence, the village population does no longer involve the district administration in conflict management.

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