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## Farmer-Herder Conflicts in the Sahel: Causes, Consequences and Starting Points for Conciliation

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### Abstract

Conflicts between farmers and herders are common in the Sahel. At first sight these conflicts seem to be related to the use of land and water resources. With an ongoing encroachment of cropland onto pastures, the feed resources for herders decline. Herders intrude into cropland to acquire forage for their animals. However, scarcity of resources alone is an inadequate explanation for most farmer-herder conflicts. The recurrent droughts of the 1970s and 80s in the Sahelian zone had strong repercussions for farmer-herder relationships. Relationships involving mutual trust, such as manuring and entrustment contracts, were replaced by potentially more confrontational arrangements, such as wage and tenancy contracts. Another direct effect of this change was the increased tendency of farmers to harvest all crop residues and withdraw this resource from the common pool. Herders tried to settle (part of their family) on strategic spots in order to claim land and secure resource access rights. In some cases herders even tried to obtain private rights on wells in order to fully control the surrounding pasture land. Therefore, most conflicts are also shaped by the “political strategies” of the people involved.

Farmer-herder conflicts escalate from time to time sometimes resulting in serious casualties. For this reason, conflict mediation has become a focus for several institutions. This presentation addresses some starting points for mediation of farmer-herder conflicts at different intervention levels, based on the experiences of several development projects and local organisations.

At an (inter)national level, administrative and judiciary institutions should recognise pastoralism as a valuable, ecologically sound production strategy which utilises common natural resources. Equal rights for all populations to access common natural resources should be provided.

At a local and regional level, investing in the social capital and infrastructure is of the utmost importance (e.g. supporting dialogue structures, meeting places, meetings/forums). These investments will encourage dialogue and favour / enable agreements between the populations. Such activities are also required to regulate the interactions between all resource users and to introduce decentralisation processes, which at present are at the implementation phase in many Sahelian countries.

**Keywords:** Farmer-herder conflicts, conflict mediation, Sahel