PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE AMONG FARMERS AND PASTORALISTS

LOCATION	Jur River County (Marial Bai, Udici and Kangi Payams)
IMPLEMENTER	Hope Agency for Relief and Development (HARD)
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"At last we made and owned resolutions for peace between farmers and pastoralists in Marial Bai". These are the words of the paramount chief Longar Makuac of Marial Bai during a meeting between farmers and pastoralists in November 2016. The existence of dialogue for peaceful settlements of conflicts between farmers and pastoralists is a great milestone after decades of civil strife. The participation of both groups in several peace conferences and local Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) committees that have been set up and supported by the program has helped a great deal to realize peaceful co-existence.

Competition over scarce resources in Marial Bai

Marial Bai is one of the seven payams of Jur River County in Western Bar el Gazal (WBeG). It is situated along the geographical corridors used by cattle keepers who migrate to Marial Bai from Warrap State in search for water and pasture. Conflicts between the migratory pastoralists and local Marial Bai communities have always existed. As grazing land is limited, cattle often trespass farmland and cause damage to crops, leading to conflicts with local farmers. Additionally, competition over scarce water sources creates conflicts between the cattle herders and women and girls that fetch water for domestic use.

Climate change exacerbates conflict

Before 2014, the cattle migration patterns were more or less predictable. Pastoralists that moved to Marial Bai set up their cattle camps during the dry season (November-April) and returned back to Warrap State when rains started in May. But as climate change has increased seasonal rainfall variability, cattle migration now starts much earlier. Longer periods of overcrowding have increased the competition over grazing land and water resources. It also contributes to the outbreak of livestock diseases and creates local market distortions. Conflicts now occur more frequently escalate quicker. Community institutions and local administration lack the skills to engage in effective conflict resolution, dialogue and reconciliation.

A series of peace conferences

In 2014, WBeG State and Warrap State with support of VNG organized the Roc Roc Dong peace conference to promote and consolidate peace during annual cattle migration. With the

Roc Roc Dong peace conference 2014. Chiefs, community groups such as the DRR committees and local authorities from Western Bahr el Gazal and Warrap states meet.

Photo Fréderique van Drumpt

Celebrating the successful peace conference at Roc Roc Dong 2014.

aim to review and build on the 2014 Roc Roc Dong peace agreements with support from the program, facilitated the Marial Bai Peace Conference (2016). Cordaid's partner Hope Agency for Relief and Development (HARD) supported farmers from Udici, Gette and Tharkueng Bomas to participate in the 2016 peace conference. During the conference the farmers presented recommendations on how to resolve existing conflicts, resulting in the validation of 14 concrete peace resolutions.

'Institutionalizing' peace dialogue on community level

HARD also built the capacity of already existing community peace institutions, such as the DRR committees, to ensure that social justice initiatives align with South Sudan legislation. It is the DRR committee's role to identify problems between farmers and pastoralists and refer cases of conflict to stakeholders who have the mandate to intervene and resolve conflict, such as the dispute resolution committees or relevant administrative authorities.

In Udici, Marial Bai and Kangi Payams, the program supported the DRR committees, local administration and community members to carry out conflict analyses, and to develop, present and discuss local action plans. Also, the DRR committees held six community meetings with farming and pastoralist communities. The aim of these meetings was to discuss the progress made in implementing the Roc Roc Dong peace conference resolutions on farmer-pastoralist conflict mitigation.

Peaceful solutions to cattle-related conflicts

Following the support offered, the DRR and dispute resolution committees play a significant role in monitoring cattle migration procedures, timing for migration and compensation of damage using the peace conference resolution guidelines. The effects are positive, as the Marial Bai paramount chief Longar Makuac testifies: "This year the cattle arrived under the control of mature men who restrained the cows better than boys. Now only 20 farms were destroyed by cattle, as compared to 60 farms in 2016."

The peace conferences also contributed to improved communication, collaboration and coordination among peace stakeholders, such as local governments, civil society and community-based peacebuilding institutions. This in particular helped the implementation of the conferences' peace resolutions, favoring improved peaceful co-existence between farmers and pastoralists. Peter Mel, the DRR committee secretary in Tharkueng says: "The peace conference resolutions are practical and a majority of the farmers and pastoralists adhere to them." He also gives an example. "We no longer kill cattle as revenge for crops being destroyed. Instead, we follow resolution number 6 that guides compensation for damage of farms".

Local participation is crucial

Conflicts between farmers and pastoralists are better mitigated when individuals, families, communities and other stakeholders are involved and take ownership over the planning and implementation of localized conflict resolution strategies. Empowerment of community-based peace institutions and local government, for example on advocacy and lobby strategies, enhances the sustainability of local peacebuilding and human security initiatives.

Way forward

To further strengthen a sustainable environment where peace and security thrive, it is critical to integrate support to livelihoods development, especially for women, who are highly vulnerable to the consequences of the farmer-pastoralist conflicts.