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Technical Report · December 2011

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.4643.5366

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TECHNICAL BRIEF: How shared resource use management through reciprocal grazing agreements can increase resilience

By Eunice Obala, Fernando Garduno Jaenz and Andreas Jenet, VSF Germany, November 2011¹

Summary

Drought disasters are a common and recurrent phenomenon in arid areas, and are not only caused by failed rains but are worsened by human malpractices that attempt to counter fast depleting resources and weakened coping mechanisms. VSF-Germany, as part of the consortium with VSF Switzerland and VSF Belgium, is focussing on approaches and practices used among communities that support dialogue and negotiation as pre-requisite for creating disaster resilient communities. Such practices include the reciprocal resource agreements that are a common feature in pastoralist customary traditions. By strengthening traditional reciprocal grazing agreements it is possible to enhance feasible climate change adaptation practices among the pastoral communities who are highly affected.

VSF uses a participatory planning process to facilitate reflection among the communities, basing it on customary validated knowledge and integration of intercommunity water and rangeland management plans. One of the key milestones in this process is the resource sharing agreement, which enables a critical flexibility and resilience aspect in the property rights of these community resources. Without sharing water and grazing resources, mobility is limited and resilience less elastic. During the process a team—made up of a veterinary grassland specialist, a water engineer and a conflict sensitive programming specialist—facilitates a group that represents the broad community. Maps are drawn using PRA technologies so that all relevant information is included. This is then followed a mapping validation process.

This technical brief highlights how establishing inter-community resource use sharing and management through reciprocal grazing agreements can play a vital role in catalysing and creating a unique synergy for: indirectly attaining sustainable peace building; increasing access to conflict prone—and therefore underutilized—grazing areas; improving conflict resolution mechanisms, enhancing environmental conservation, and strengthening socio-economic cohesion among pastoral communities. The process is vital and extremely valid: The reciprocal grazing agreements that were developed among Hamar, Gabra and Borana neighbouring communities before the onset of the current drought for example have promoted sharing of pasture and water across Kenya (Marsabit North District) and Ethiopia (South Omo and Oromiya Zones), cushioning the drought effects and enhancing the resilience of these vulnerable communities.

CONTEXT

¹ The good practice and lessons learned documented are experience of VSF Germany Cross border drought preparedness project implemented in Northern Kenya- Masabit North District and South Omo and Oromiya Zone of Ethiopia. Under the DCM decision VSF Germany works in partnership with VSF Belgium and VSF Suisse. This technical brief has been edited by Vanessa Tilstone, MEL Manager, and Helen de Jode, Consultant, REGLAP.

For centuries Kenyan Gabra clans have been using Borana land in Ethiopia as a fall back region during droughts. The Borana could in turn access the wide grazing resources and trade routes in Kenya during normal years. Following the well-documented incidents during the last decade, these arrangements were cancelled and a difficult and dangerous period was experienced for both ethnic groups. Their significantly hampered resilience in the face of drought then forced both groups to re-establish their relationship and renegotiate terms of conduct. There are similar stories from the Turkana, the Karimojong, the Dasanach and the Toposa.

Many pastoral areas in East Africa have been characterized by ethnically triggered resource based conflicts, usually inflated by: negative cultural beliefs and practices; adaptation to effects of drought through perceived re-stocking using cattle rustling techniques; and haphazard movements across borders in search of pasture and water. Reciprocal resource agreements are a traditional component of customary inter-ethnic treaties. They govern the use of shared resources—resources that are under the custody of one community, but the access to which forms the essential **elasticity of resilience** for a neighbouring community in times of drought. Resource agreements are intrinsically connected to pastoral mobility, and thus form an essential legal basis for mobile livelihood systems. When dealing with mobile pastoral systems Disaster Risk Reduction must encompass the functionality of these arrangements, which form an essential part of pastoralist coping strategies.

APPROACH

The reciprocal grazing agreements developed with VSF use an integrated participatory approach that stimulates communities to make a holistic analysis of their problems or needs (e.g. water & pasture) in order to develop conflict sensitive solutions or options. The aim is to establish mutual agreement and understanding, and resource-sharing action plans with a clearly described operational framework (rules and regulations). It is worth noting that such an agreement needs to be elaborated predominantly for drought times, as during normal times no resource sharing may be necessary.

The process involves the use of different participatory tools including participatory methodologies such as Participatory Integrated Community Development (PICD), peace building, and Do No Harm tools during the facilitation process. The tools used depend on the needs of the process with regard to the context of the conflict, or of possible foreseen conflict.

Process steps

Step 1: Mobilization and sensitization of communities - Communities are sensitized using a participatory approach (in this specific case it was PICD, but it could be CMDRR) in which they acknowledge their problems and identify the need for durable solutions. The community selects a core working group, using criteria developed through general community meetings.

Step 2: Establishment of core working groups – (As far as is possible) gender balanced working groups are created consisting of people with a clear understanding of the community boundaries, existing resources and detailed historical information. The working group's roles and responsibilities are clearly stipulated.

Step 3: Drawing of resource use maps – The core group develops maps showing boundaries, neighbouring communities, existing resources, dry, wet and reserve grazing areas, migration routes to markets and grazing areas (water & pasture), conflict prone zones and existing institutions. The maps are then critically analysed through brainstorming on the resilience strategies and coping capacities used in the case of prolonged drought, which lead to the use of all the pasture. There is a need to negotiate beyond the community boundaries to incorporate neighbours in order to access conflict prone areas and the sharing of resources. This establishes options for a resource-sharing plan. Maps drawn by

three groups—youths, women and men—are triangulated and the most comprehensive adopted with additional inputs from plenary discussions.

Step 4: Community validation of resource use maps – Maps are then shared with the entire community in a general meeting, where they are analysed, inputs made and they are endorsed—promoting ownership. The process of deliberation on the map, and its outcome, enlightens the community on their need to recognize that they can't live in isolation, and enhances their decisions to seek inter-community meetings in order to reach consensus and mutual agreement with their neighbours. This is often resisted at first but is accepted after more sensitization meetings.

Step 5: Inter-community meetings - These require several meetings, depending on the facilitation process, and are aimed at creating understanding among communities. The team involved in the meetings are representatives from each community that are selected to negotiate the process. The maps are not shared at this stage, due to the overlapping boundaries, in order to avoid potential boundary-based disagreements, but the outcome of the discussions at community levels is appraised at this inter-community meeting. Special focus is given to the identification of grazing areas with un-utilized or under-utilized pasture and water resources as a result of resource based conflict, as well the zoning of potential existing resources for possible sharing (e.g. Gabra having pasture with no water, while Borana having water with no pasture could negotiate exchange use of their resources).

The first two or three meetings are aimed at attitude change and trust building in order for members to own the process until a favourable and conducive environment is acquired. The subsequent meetings are aimed at identifying the conflict zones and the potential resources (e.g. pasture and water) available for future sharing. The inter-community representatives then share the outcomes of their meetings with their own community through general community dialogue meetings, in which they receive guidance in terms of approvals, amendments and rejection of the different elements proposed, and are told what to feedback to the inter-community meetings.

Step 6: Inter-community resource use strategic planning – The elements that are agreed upon during the cross border or inter-community meeting in consultation with the respective communities are then translated into action plans. They are put into a systematic framework that can be monitored, which forms the terms and conditions on how the agreement will be operationalised. The plans consist of a Reciprocal Agreement Framework Matrix which is further subdivided into precisely what elements are agreed upon, where, when, responsible persons, how to implement it, and the nature of penalties.

Step 7: Ratification and validation of the proposed plan's elements – The draft plan is shared again by the core committees among their own communities for common understanding and endorsement in community dialogue meetings. It is essential to ensure that the Reciprocal Grazing agreement is owned and gains the acceptance of the whole community.

Step 8: Final signing of the Reciprocal Agreement – Once the Reciprocal Agreement is approved or endorsed by the community members, the agreement is then signed by the representatives of the communities in an event witnessed by local opinion leaders, political leaders, and the Government District or Zonal security team – necessary for reinforcement. Ordinary community members are advised to send as many members as possible. For cross border reciprocal resource use plans the inclusion of governmental representatives is particularly important. There must also be documented proof of an agreement to allow cross border movements of livestock with significant numbers of people in times of disaster.

Step 9: Implementation of Reciprocal Grazing Agreements - The committees, leaders, and general community are responsible for ensuring that the agreements are implemented. Outreach meetings are conducted at community meetings & foras, Chiefs Barazas and market centres, to increase publicity and awareness on the agreement's terms and conditions.

Step 10: Monitoring of the Reciprocal Agreements - The committees have the responsibility of monitoring the implementation process through their scheduled meetings—taking note of indicators of violation of the agreement or emergencies, and sharing them with leaders and government representatives as soon as possible for reinforcement. This is a difficult task for the local authorities since customary agreements traditionally were carried forward only orally, but written agreements need to be regularly revisited.



Picture 1: Resource use map

Picture 2: Cross border CAHWs service delivery in foras

Picture 3: DC Marsabit North _ Kenya and Zonal Administrator – South Omo during cross border reciprocal agreement

Picture 4: Inter-community peace meeting

Picture 5: Joint pasture and water use

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

VSF G has integrated Reciprocal Grazing Agreements in their project implementation strategies with very good results, as follows:

- Gabra and Hamar communities who have lived in conflict for years have developed a reciprocal grazing agreement that has been very instrumental in enhancing pasture and water resource sharing around Sabare, Minongerti and Hado areas along the Ethiopian Kenyan border. This increased their resilience and reduced the impact of the drought in 2010 and 2011. This agreement is not limited to grazing but has had a multiplier effect in terms of trade, creation of roads to increase access, establishments of joint *fora* settlements, and other peace building initiatives. The very successful community managed monitoring systems has ensured regular dialogue meetings, stray cattle being returned, meetings leading to social cohesion and an improved general security among the communities.
- Reciprocal grazing agreements between the Dasanach and Gabra successfully started with sharing grazing areas during the drought in 2009 - 2010 in Sabare, Darate and Bulluk—which were for decades only seldom utilized due to conflicts. Gabra traders visiting Dasanach community started sleeping inside the villages and *foras* for trade (sale of cattle and shoats); Dasanach trucks were allowed to get to Ileret for transporting food relief and shoats for commercial de-stocking in Nairobi; while the peace and water users committees when they visited Ileret for trainings and meetings were invited by their Dasanach counterparts into their manyattas and later ex-changed gifts. This progress however was then affected by the occasional uprising of conflicts in Darate and Bulluk, leading to the temporary negation of the agreement from mid 2010. The cancellation of customary agreements are a powerful tool in penalising an entire community, and for this reason it is important to focus on the institutions or groups that are able to take up the dialogue again once it has been stalled.
- Reciprocal agreements between Dasanach Kenya and Hammer communities have been developing steadily in 2011, leading to peaceful sharing of pasture and water around Surge, El-Nyakuwanga and Langai along the Kenya – Ethiopia borders. These areas were not fully utilized in the past due to resource-based conflict, but the agreements have led to improved security and coexistence.

- The Gabra and Borana also developed a reciprocal agreement that successfully enhanced resource sharing in 2009 – 2010 but faced some challenges in 2011. The Gabra had pasture around Hurri Hills, which is their dry season reserve, but had no water, whilst the Borana of Dillo *woreda* had water with no pasture. The two communities agreed to share the resources with each other, leading to increasing coping and resilience during the prolonged drought, which led indirectly to reduced livestock mortality, trade, and co-existence.
- The reciprocal grazing agreement between the Dodoth community of Uganda and the Turkana community of Kenya was established as part of the EDF funded DMI project, conducted between 2008 and 2011. This activity started off by mapping the entire district to identify high potential grazing areas that were prone to conflicts, and thus only offered limited accessibility. The areas identified included Naporoto, Loile, Pire, Matakul, and Kalopeto, which, after the agreement was signed, became accessible to the communities bordering these areas. Other actions undertaken by the village planning committees of the two communities included land use planning, early warning sensitization, and drought preparedness planning.

After some delays caused by heavy rains in Uganda in early 2010, the CBO Dodoth Agro Pastoral Organization (DADO) assisted in mobilizing the Dodoth community as well engaging them in drought preparedness planning together with the Turkana. By organizing a forum of stakeholders with the key community leaders, DADO managed to improve the relations between the two communities that led to a grazing agreement. On the 17th of December 2010 the agreement between the Turkana community of Oropoi village, Kenya, and the Dodoth community of Kotido - Kaabong Villages, Uganda, was signed together with the following statements: a) Coexist peacefully with each other as a result of reduced resource-based conflict. b) Share scarce resources especially pasture and water for livestock during the dry season when there is scarcity of these resources. c) Establish Village Land Use Planning Committee (VLUC) members to ensure that through regular participatory monitoring & evaluation meetings all parties adhere to the agreement.

- An agreement between the Turkana bordering South Sudan and the Toposa has also been implemented during the Drought Management Initiative project, with a similar methodology. However, as the government of South Sudan had been actively engaged in civic education, mobilization of communities, and campaigns for the referendum in 2010, the agreement activity was postponed until January 2011. Together with the CBO Losilia Relief Rehabilitation and Development Agency (LRRDA), an agreement was reached allowing the Turkana to access dry season foliage on Toposa grounds. The communities were hesitant about signing the agreement as they were both uncomfortable making documented agreements, but both vowed to keep the peace and acknowledged the importance of stability.
- On the 21st of February 2010, VSFG facilitated an intergovernmental meeting between the Kenyan government and an Ethiopian government delegation to address the official closure of the Kenya – Marsabit North and Ethiopia – South Omo Zone border. The Kenyan District Commission (DC) for Marsabit North had implemented the closure in September 2009 after a Gabra community was raided by the Dasanach community—resulting in 5 deaths and thousands of livestock lost at Darate. The closure was having a huge negative affect on the Hamar, Dasanach Kenya/Ethiopia, Borana, Gabra, and Albore, due to restrictions on movement. Drought, cholera outbreaks along the Dasanach, the negative impact on trade and the impaired project implementation of development and relief agencies, was further evidence of the need for an open border and better security regulations.
- The meeting concluded with the two governments agreeing to reinforce the reciprocal grazing agreements developed by both communities, and stating that disobeying these regulations would result in penalties in order to keep a peaceful co-existence. In addition the governments agreed to frequent future meetings in order to share information and to improve the coordination of their actions across the border. And most importantly, they declared the Kenya – Ethiopia border reopened. Cross border security has recovered since assigning as a ‘border security team’ the police station in Illeret and Eubua, and the division officers in Omorate, Turmi and North Horr.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognising that mobility is intrinsically linked with access to resources in neighbouring communities, and that these access rights traditionally were negotiated and captured in customary settlements, resource agreements play an essential role in defining elasticity of pastoral resilience to drought. The key driver in making reciprocal resource agreements successful was to integrate it within different approaches— such as conflict sensitive programming, water resource management, participative rangeland management (planned grazing). This interlinked the resource sharing agreements and transformed them into a tangible output.

VSF Germany and its partners have seen reciprocal resource agreements emerge as a powerful tool in increasing resilience—particularly in cross-border areas. Reasons for the success probably include: the previous lack of legally mandated mediators; the lack of communication strategies among the border authorities; the vague security services; and the grey legislation for border movements. In spite of being certain of its very positive impact, VSF G were not able to ensure that customary and national institutions would sustain the role of developing reciprocal resource agreements, and nor was it possible to find a way of encouraging national government members to establish joint cross border task forces to resume communications after disruptions. This task remains in the hands of NGOs, but is being implemented successfully.

What is crucial to recognise in this activity is that it is not the agreement document that is of importance, but rather the opportunity to link customary traditions with national authority practices, and the establishment of permanent dialogue and understanding between two ethnic communities. It is the process itself that makes the methodology a success.

For the future the following recommendations are made:

- The capacities of the communities, in particular the local authorities, are limited when operating across borders, and therefore there is need to give further legitimacy to local authorities and customary authorities. Most importantly this should enable representatives to take up dialogue and negotiations after a disruption and stalled relationship amongst two ethnic groups. Quality facilitation, backstopping, replication along the region, as well as a conducive policy environment is of importance here.
- Uprising incidences between the Gabra, Dasanach and Borana repeatedly affected the development of the implementation process with these groups. Therefore further investigation into the involved institutions and reflecting on ways to restart and sustain dialogue among these cross-border groups will need to be undertaken.
- There is a gap in the documentation of the different grazing agreements developed by various stakeholders. An attempt to link them so they can learn from each other in order to mainstream the harmonization of approaches is necessary.
- There are legal uncertainties and policy weaknesses in regard to cross-border pastoral resource sharing and movements, which have implications on the mandate of local authorities. There is need to clearer formulate the rights and opportunities of pastoral representatives and authorities.
- There is a missing link between the reciprocal grazing agreements developed at local levels with the sub-national, national and regional efforts on natural resource management and peace building, as enshrined in the AU Pastoral policy framework. There is a need to enhance the recognition and implementation of the AU Pastoral Policy Framework in order to strengthen and create more ownership and formal functioning of the reciprocal grazing

agreements developed by various communities. UNOCHA and FAO could support the strengthening and streamlining of reciprocal grazing agreements from local, district, sub national, national and regional levels.

Please send comments/suggestions on this document to:

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The project is funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO)

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