



Left: Communal stakeholders delimitate livestock corridor to link the village of Bouka with the Zao Zao grazing areas. Photo: TerresEauVie (August 2020)
 Above: Delimitation resulted on a map clearly showing passage corridors and grazing area. Map: TerresEauVie, October 2020.

STOPPING HERDER-FARMER SPIRALLING VIOLENCE IN NIGER

TerresEauVie Niger

TerresEauVie provided the necessary skills and tools to the communes of Damagaram Takaya and Mazamni to demarcate cattle passage corridors and secure pastoral areas, reducing recurring conflicts between herders and farmers which sometimes leads to injuries or even death.

In September 2018, Smail Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security for the African Union stated that “Today, conflicts between pastoralists [i.e. livestock breeders] and farmers on the continent take more lives than terrorism.”

In Niger, West Africa, these conflicts arise especially when cattle come to graze and damage farmers’ crops, and because of illegal land grabbing and encroachment by farmers on cattle corridors used by enable pastoralists to access pasture areas and water sites. Clashes often end in injury or death, or in costly property damages. Population growth (Niger has one of the highest population growth in the world at 3.9%), and protracted droughts are leading to a decrease in pastures for herders and a need to extend farmer fields to ensure food security for

their family.

According to national statistics, about 100,000 to 120,000 hectares of land are lost annually due to climatic conditions (desertification or soil depletion): farmers encroach on cattle corridors and pastoralists allow their cattle to invade farms as their grazing areas are disappearing. Conflicts also happen due to the disrespect of the mutually beneficial field occupation period—a legally recognized right when livestock can enter farmer fields to feed on crop residues after harvest and then leave before the seeding periods, leaving behind animal manure to enrich the soil. However, farmers now often do not harvest soon enough for the herders—because of climate change the seeding is starting later—and the herders cannot wait for all the crops to be harvested due to diminishing of natural pasture and animal feed.

Niger’s legislation on pastoralism and pastoralist transhumance is among the most advanced in West Africa. It is part of a broader legal body called Rural Code (Code Rural) that has been developed since the 1990s to guide natural resource use in the rural areas. The Code, and subsequent decrees, give pastoralists two levels of access to natural resources: (1) common rights of use over livestock corridors, grazing areas and paths used to as cattle

trails and (2) priority rights of use over their “terroirs d’attache” or ‘home areas’ where pastoralists often spend much of the dry season to access permanent water resources. Despite progress achieved through the Rural Code, many pastoralist organizations feel that it implicitly disadvantages pastoralists by granting them secondary rights to land only and does not clearly define the status of pastoral lands.

Seeing time-period maps was an eye-opener: the grazing area was about to disappear

In Zinder region (Centre-East of Niger), according to the Departmental Land Commission (COFODEP), almost 60 conflicts have erupted in the communes of Damagaram Takaya and Mazamni since 2018 over the so-called “Zao Zao” (in Kanouri, a local language, “Zao Zao” means “pain and suffering”) grazing area and its livestock corridors. This huge grazing area welcomes up to 9,400 head of livestock (sheep and cattle) in the period between October and December (when transhumant herders coming from other regions and countries add to numbers from local livestock breeders).

Most of these disputes involve the mediation and negotiation by traditional leaders and local institutions. When USAID’s TerresEauVie Activity provided period land use maps (from 1980 and 2018, produced by United States Geological Survey) and trainings on their interpretation, comparisons, and use, it was an eye-opener for the communal leaders. Seeing how the grazing areas and their cattle corridors have drastically reduced and been replaced by crop fields, they realized that it was urgent to take action. Otherwise, all of the grazing areas would disappear, leaving herders without dedicated spaces and this would increase violence between herders and farmers.

Traditional leaders were involved to help people understand the importance of securing pastoral lands to improve coexistence

To break the cycle of violence and facilitate peaceful coexistence between land users, leaders of the two

communes called upon TerresEauVie to help them examine the issues and develop solutions for sustainable land management and conflict resolution.

TerresEauVie brought all stakeholders around the table to plan the process of designating and securing grazing areas, and ensure that the stakeholders and community members were informed and in agreement with the need to protect this space for everyone’s benefit. TerresEauVie then helped the COFODEP inform the local population on the importance of securing the shared land areas and resources which were not physically marked. The COFODEP mobilized the Communal Land Commissions, the departmental prefect, mayors, and traditional chiefs to co-lead assemblies in each of the affected villages. Thanks to the respected social status of the leaders, they were able to effectively communicate the need to develop and practice a new shared resources approach to more than 7,000



Awareness-raising meeting led by the Peulh leader with local land users bordering grazing areas. Photo: TerresEauVie, (September 2020).

villagers. Villagers understood that securing and delimiting land use is a useful tool in protecting their communities, properties, and guaranting sustainable peaceful use of land. TerresEauVie then provided

technical and financial support for COFODEP’s land-securing mission to delineate boundaries with stakes, and red paint markings. Communes measured the perimeter of pastoral areas by using the USGS land use maps, establishing a perimeter of more than 57 km with a total area of around 3,500 ha. This area was then geo-referenced by TerresEauVie to produce commune maps.

The communes have taken ownership of the process to secure land tenure from delimitation to formalization of the pastoral area

The departmental prefect from Damgaram Takaya, was very involved throughout the process, and issued an official decree establishing the newly assigned limits for pastoral use and designating it as a common public space. The Zao Zao grazing area and its corridors have thus received formal recognition and acceptance by the local population and authorities: farmers will no longer be able to occupy this space to grow crops and herders will not be able to grab farmer fields claiming that it is on pasture land.

The next steps, with support from the TerresEauVie Activity and other USAID-funded partners, involve the development of communal local conventions to plan and implement natural resource strategies and management taking into consideration climate change, and including restoration of pasture land and farmer managed natural regeneration activities.

“This work has been a relief for all the communities benefiting from the land-securing activities”

Mr. Gourgoudou Hadi’s testimony, Leader of the Peulh Group in Zinder

“This area includes the main grazing lands in the Damagaram Takaya Prefecture. In the 1970s, only four villages were established here. Currently, there are 16 villages. All of them have gradually nibbled at resources which, year after year, has contributed to the reduction of available space for grazing and other vital uses, especially for herders. We are very pleased with TerresEauVie’s support in raising awareness with all stakeholders, farmers and herders, in the interest of preserving this area and in monitoring enforcement of boundaries. It is a relief for all the communities benefiting from these land-securing activities. People will be able to sustainably benefit from this space, which is a unique area for grazing and collecting firewood and timber – it is also an authentic wildlife reserve. This now-secure area will allow us to reduce conflicts between farmers and herders and to improve communities’ social cohesion. We thank TerresEauVie for this.”

USAID’s Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE) project has been implemented in Niger and Burkina Faso since 2012. The second phase, RISE II, continues the same efforts with the overall goal that chronically vulnerable populations in Burkina Faso and Niger, supported by resilient systems, effectively manage shocks and stresses and pursue sustainable pathways out of poverty. Within RISE II and led by Winrock’s Sustainable Water Partnership, the USAID “TerresEauVie” Activity enhances communes’ self-reliance by making social and ecological systems resilient through three components: (1) Improved water security; (2) Enhanced sustainable productive land use; and (3) Improved management of shocks, risks and stresses.

As stated by USAID in Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE) II Technical Approach Working Paper, “well-functioning ecological systems provide and regulate the water essential for human health, keep landscapes productive for agricultural and pastoral livelihoods, and in doing so reduce risks of natural resource-based conflicts and climatic shocks.”