



**International  
Institute for  
Environment and  
Development**

Drylands Programme

Issue paper no. 125

# **Mediation in a changing landscape:**

Success and failure in  
managing conflicts over  
natural resources in  
Southwest Burkina Faso

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December 2003

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# Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the DG XII of the European Union for financing the research "Development of pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihood systems in West Africa" (ERB IC18-CT98-0280). We would like to express our gratitude to our partners in Burkina Faso, INERA, Réseau MARP, the GTZ/PDR Poni, and to all who provided information at local, regional and national level.

## Acronyms

CIVGT	Commission inter-villageoise de gestion des terroirs (Inter-village committee on land management)
CPRM	Common property resource management
CVGT	Commission villageoise de gestion des terroirs (Village committee on land management)
GT	Gestion des terroirs (Land management)
GTZ	German agency for technical cooperation
HH	Household
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRM	Natural resource management
PDR	Projet de développement rural (Rural development project)
PRA	Participatory rural appraisal
PVP	Procès verbal de palabre (Minutes of the discussion)
RAF	Réorganisation agraire et foncière (Land tenure reform act)
RAV	Responsable administratif villageois (Local administration officer)
RGAP	Réforme globale de l'administration publique (Public administration reform)
TOD	Textes d'orientation de la décentralisation (Decentralisation guidelines)

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# 1. Introduction

In the Southwest of Burkina Faso conflicts between ‘farmers’ and ‘herders’ are reported to be becoming more and more frequent and sometimes violent, according to common perception, even though statistics about an increase are not available.

These conflicts originate in competition for access to natural resources, and appear to be caused by population growth, migration and land shortage and degradation. Differences between competing groups in cultural values and in the acceptance of modern and traditional law may contribute as well (Hagberg, 1998). The conflicts take the form of a mixture of social tension and avoidance, of political action and of violent confrontations (Turner, 2003).

A number of different actors and authorities at local level as well as State authorities are involved in the attempted management of these conflicts. Their activities are influenced by official and legal institutional arrangements for natural resource management, which are undergoing massive changes (land tenure reform and decentralisation). In this framework of already existing mechanisms and new institutional changes, the State is acting in an environment charged with the tensions of new challenges and of long-established barriers and obstacles.

In a period of environmental change, economic transformation and political uncertainty throughout West Africa, the problems of competition for and conflicts over natural resources are of growing concern. Farmer-herder conflicts are common and widespread. But although conflicts are commonly perceived as conflicts between “farmers” and “herders”, which introduces ethnicity as a factor into the equation, the fundamental issue is about reconciling and integrating different land use systems, and especially about access to strategic resources at specific moments of the year. This is particularly the case in an environment like the southern Sudanian zone, where most people practise, to different degrees, both farming and livestock keeping activities.

So understanding of the dynamics of these conflicts and their management cannot be achieved in the simplified terms of ethnic stereotypes, but

through a deeper analysis of the different actors, of their roles in the arena of conflict and conflict management, and of the accompanying institutional arrangements at local, regional and national level (North, 1990).

This paper presents, for the Southwest Burkina area, these different actors and their roles. It explores current conflict management practices in the area and the strengths and weaknesses of the actors involved in the mediation process. Finally it considers the potentials and problems of current political changes like administrative decentralisation and land tenure reform, which have impacts on conflict management.

## 2. Objectives and methods of the study

This paper is based on a case study of conflict management done by a multi-disciplinary team from October 2001 to June 2002 in six villages in the research area, and on investigations at the regional and national level in Burkina Faso from October 2001 to June 2003.<sup>1</sup>

The general objective of the research project was to identify types of conflicts and of conflict management strategies related to the use of natural resources, and to evaluate them in economic, ecological and social terms. The specific objectives were

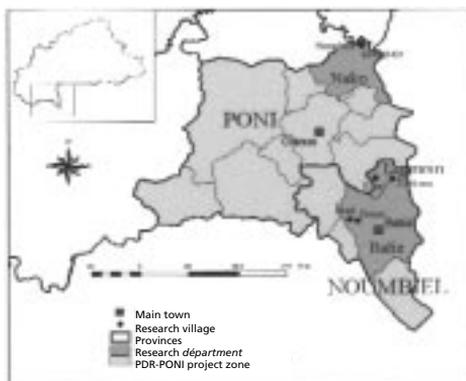
- at micro-level (households, villages) and meso-level (Prefects, High Commissioners, Technical Services, Development and Research Projects, NGOs): the identification and analysis of actors, conflicts and conflict management strategies (conflict inventory)
- at macro-level (national government and parliament): the identification and analysis of key actors and conditions with impacts on natural resource management and conflict management
- the synthesis of the results at micro-, meso- and macro-level to identify strengths and weaknesses of these management processes and their potential to support efficient conflict management

The methods used to carry out this study were PRA tools like structured, semi-structured and open interviews as well as focus group discussions and participant observation in the research villages.

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1. This research study was part of an EU-funded INCO/DC project under the title "Development of sustainable pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihood systems in West Africa".

The research in Burkina Faso was carried out from December 1998 to September 2003 by the Department of Livestock Ecology, Faculty of Agriculture, Justus-Liebig-University (JLU), Giessen, Germany, the Institut d'Etudes et de Recherche Agricoles (INERA), Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The Drylands Programme of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London, UK, provided backstopping for CPRM and PRA methods and subcontracted Réseau MARP in Burkina Faso to provide training in PRA for researchers and staff of collaborating institutions. To assure the transfer of research findings to the target groups and to ease contact with and involvement of decision makers, policy makers and state agencies at the regional or national level., it was decided to collaborate with development projects or state agencies applying GT (Gestion de terroirs) or land use planning approaches. The choice of the Provinces of Poni and Nounbiel in Southwest Burkina Faso as research sites resulted from the decision to collaborate with the GTZ funded development project PDR Poni that followed a NRM approach in these provinces.



**Figure 1. The research area and sample villages in Southwest Burkina Faso**

Six villages (Maal, Djeme, Kour, Dankana, Kourgbélé, and Hemkpa) were chosen covering the two provinces (Figure 1), on the basis of previous PRA surveys and of personal information from local project agents

Criteria for the choice were: potential for conflict and co-operation between groups predominantly practising either farming or livestock keeping; the expression of conflict in a latent or open manner; the socio-demographic composition of the villages in terms of the presence or absence of these groups.

A basic inquiry in all 375 village households (HH) took place, based on a previous study partially carried out by INERA in 1999/2000, recording household composition, agricultural resources and migration. A second field phase followed, covering a random selection of households (HH) to be studied more intensively.

In each village, at least 30% of the total number of the HHs were interviewed; however not more than two HHs per compound (a compound is formed by one or more households, which are members of the same extended family, e.g. the father's household together with the households of his already-married sons). All Fulani compounds (predominant activity: cattle keeping) and nearly all farmers keeping livestock at a larger scale (more than 10 cattle and/or 20 heads of sheep or goats) were interviewed (Table 1). The larger group of 'autochthonous'<sup>2</sup> farmers with either no or only a small number of cattle and sheep and goats was stratified on the basis of the manpower (household members between 14-50 years) at the

2. Autochthonous in the sense of long-term residency.

<b>Table1. Total number of households in 6 villages and number of households investigated in the intensive survey</b>		
	Total no of households	No of households investigated
Herders (Fulani)	64	24
Farmers (Dagara, Birifor, Lobi)	311	100
With livestock at a larger scale <sup>1</sup>	23	19
Manpower <sup>2</sup> > 3	116	31
Manpower < 3	159	42
Other migrants (Mossi, Bambara)	6	4
Widows	7	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>124</b>

<sup>1</sup>More than 10 cattle and/or 20 heads of sheep or goats.

<sup>2</sup>Manpower was here defined as the total number of household members between 14 and 50 years.

HH's disposal. This criterion was chosen because of the strong relation between manpower and the extent of a household's arable land, which was confirmed by the results of the first basic data inquiry. Other migrant households (Mossi and Bambara) as well as female-headed households (in all cases widows) were also investigated. In total, 124 household heads and the local authorities in the villages (*Chef de terre, Notable Peul, Notable Mossi, Responsable Administratif Villagois (RAV)*) participated in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The questionnaires covered natural resource management, social relations and conflict management.

Representatives at the meso-level (Prefect, High Commissioner, Technical Service, Development and Research Projects, NGOs) and macro-level (national government, Parliament) were interviewed to understand their involvement in and perception of conflict management, as well as their views on current political processes such as land tenure reform, and their ideas on the form of future conflict management between farmers and herders.

### 3. The research villages

The provinces of Poni and Nounbiel in Southwest Burkina Faso are part of the region which receives the highest rainfall in the country and plays an important role in agricultural development. The population is composed of 55% Lobi, 28% Birifor, 12% Dagara, all referred to in this paper as “autochthonous”, and 2% migrants, namely Fulani, Mossi and Dioula. Lobi and Birifor are often pure crop farmers, but among them there are also livestock-crop farmers owning larger herds with paid herders. Dagara are crop-livestock farmers with an emphasis on cropping, who invest their surplus in cattle. Finally the Fulani own large herds of Zebu cattle, but are nowadays often agro-pastoralists. The population in the research villages is mainly composed of the ‘autochthonous’ ethnic groups Dagara and Birifor.

The population density is 30 inhabitants km<sup>2</sup> in 1998, compared to the national average of 39 inhabitant km<sup>2</sup>. 44% of the total land is considered as arable (about 1.5 ha per inhabitant), of which 20% are exploited (0.3 ha per inhabitant); 27% of the land is covered by forests and 29% by degraded areas, settlements, roads, etc. The principal crop is sorghum covering 37% of the cultivated land, followed by millet (23%), maize (18%), yams (6%), groundnuts and others (5%). The livestock density is estimated at 16 TLU ha<sup>-1</sup>.

#### 3.1 Socio-economic situation and migration

The villages in the research area do not consist of agglomerations, but are composed of dispersed settlements called *yir*. Every *yir* is surrounded by house fields (‘champ de case’) located in a circle around the compound. Besides this, every compound disposes of at least one piece of land in the savannah, the so-called bush field (‘champ de brousse’). Field boundary marks are not common and were only observed in one case, as warning signs to herders where Fulani settlements were situated next to the house fields of an autochthonous farmer.

The traditional village structure, dominated by clans and extended families, is changing towards a more individualised system. Nowadays, young men often leave their father’s compound in order to found their own small farm. As a consequence, the number of households per compound

has decreased: 72% of the autochthonous farms consist of single households, whereas the traditional huge compound dwellings are becoming scarce. In combination with the traditional settlement form of scattered farms, this leads to a greater fragmentation of the land. Former continuous savannah areas that were used as pastures are now being interspersed by fields, and consequently the probability of damage caused by cattle in the fields during the rainy season has increased.

In spite of the relative abundance of land, economic capacity is limited by the traditionally extensive production system based on fallow cropping. When the soil fertility of a cropped field decreases, the farmer clears a part of the savannah in order to install a new field. He maintains a part of the ligneous vegetation for firewood, pasture, gathering and medical use. After a cropping period of two to four years, the field is abandoned. A fallow period of 10 to 15 years allows the regeneration of the natural vegetation and the regain of soil fertility. Cultivation is generally done with the hoe. Less than 3% of the households have draught animals and expenditure on agricultural investment is minimal (no use of fertilizer, no mechanisation). Increasing the farm area is the most common solution to increase production. Secondary sources of income barely exist locally, and harvests are mainly used for subsistence.

Although the population is increasing, the agricultural production system is short of manpower, and in particular of young men. More than 50% of the autochthonous households were concerned by a movement of labour towards the urban centres, Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, and towards the neighbouring countries, Ghana and Ivory Coast.

On average, every household concerned in migration lost two workers, most of them men between 20 and 25 years. 85% of the migrants went to Ivory Coast. This loss is highly significant: on average, families have lost 38% of their active labour force. Since manpower is the most important production factor for agriculture in the rural areas of Burkina Faso, this leads to serious economic problems for the households concerned.

There has recently been a return from migration due to the tense situation in Ivory Coast. Reintegration into the village structure for these "re-patriates" was often difficult. Equally, a sustained return might result in land conflicts with the new incoming migrant settlers, who would be the first victims of a sudden land scarcity.

**Table 2. Emigration among autochthonous groups, and destinations**

Village (year of enquiry)	Emigration in autochthonous HH* since 1981				Destination (% of emigrated persons)		
	No of HH concerned	% of all autoch- thonous HH	No of emigrated persons	% of total autoch- thonous active population <sup>§</sup>	Ghana	Côte d'Ivoire	Burkina Faso
Dankana (1999)	53	57%	102	33%	13%	87%	0%
Djémé (2001)	20	50%	42	34%	33%	67%	0%
Hemkpa (2001)	9	39%	21	38%	5%	57%	38%
Kour (2000)	22	40%	36	21%	8%	81%	11%
Kourgbélé (1999)	25	81%	56	65%	4%	96%	0%
Maal (2001)	34	53%	55	35%	0%	100%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>4%</b>

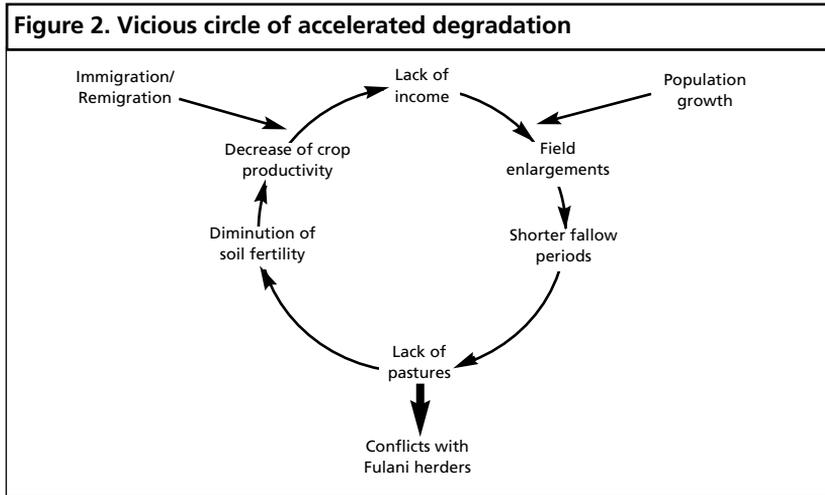
\*HH=household, <sup>§</sup>persons between 14 and 50 years

The research villages have experienced a sustained immigration of Fulani herders and of some Mossi farmers. While the share of Mossi farmers in the village population reached not more than 2%, the percentage of the Fulani population varied between 0% (Kourgbélé) and 34% (Kour). They have arrived in the villages since the beginning of the 90s. In the 70s and 80s the Fulani migration was described as fluctuating, driven by the droughts in the north, with herders coming in, settling down for a few years and then leaving the area again.

In all villages the Fulani live separately from the main village quarters. Their primary activity is large-scale cattle keeping with a household herd size varying between 50 and 100 head of cattle, in some cases accompanied by holdings of sheep and goats. The distance travelled to grazing areas according to these livestock keepers was up to 40 km, depending on the

varying availability of water and of grazing resources in space and time. As a secondary activity the Fulani also practised crop production on loaned or given fields, and most of them practised some permanent cultivation.

The combination of the beginnings of a trend towards individualisation, with population growth, immigration and return from migration, results in an increasing demand for cropland and pasture, and in changing land use practices with shorter fallow cycles or even a switch to permanent cropping.



production system towards intensification of agriculture, will be decreasing soil fertility on the one hand and on the other hand a rise in conflicts between farming and herding, since fallow lands used for grazing will get scarcer. Up to now, pasture and cropland are still sufficiently available in the research villages, and resource management is less constrained by ecological than by economic and social factors.

### 3.2 The customary land tenure system and natural resource management

The main actors involved in natural resource management are the 'Chef de terre' (the Chief of the Earth, the 'RAV' (Responsible Administratif Villageois, local administration officer), the Fulani chief in the village, and the concession heads. The 'Chef de terre' is a traditional authority in the autochthonous groups and acts as a mediator between the living people

and the ancestors. His medium is the land, and whenever there is a question of custom, he will be consulted. He is a kind of 'living land-register', knowing the different boundaries and the history of their evolution. Succession to this office follows the principle of male-inheritance in the first 'first-comer' family of original settlers in a village.

When newcomers belonging to a non-autochthonous group wish to settle down in a village, the 'RAV' has a mediating role to play. His authority in the villages dates from the revolutionary period of the 1980s when this position was created by the state and the RAV was elected by the local population; nowadays he is proposed by them and nominated by the Prefect (head of the Département). The RAV now serves as a non-traditional link between the autochthonous and migrant local population and the Departmental administration.

The Fulani chief represents the settled Fulani, for example in village meetings. He is responsible for all questions and problems internal to the Fulani group and serves also as a link between the settled and the transhumant herders.

#### **Box 1. Installation of newcomers in the village of Kour**

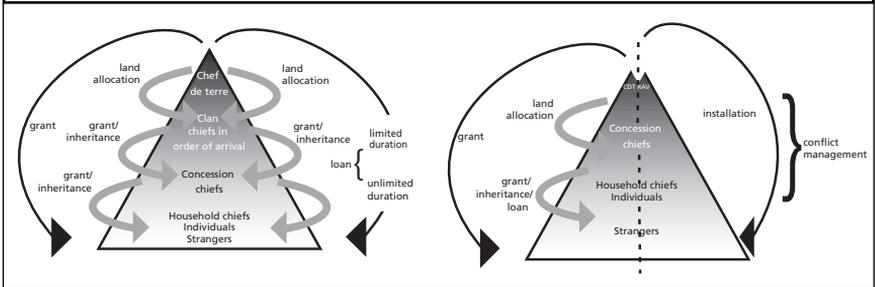
Hamidou, a Fulani herder, arrived together with his family in Kour. He had heard of the good relationships between Dagara and Fulani in this village and wished to settle. Firstly, he presented this wish to the Fulani chief in the village, who conducted him to the RAV. Together, they explained Hamidou's request to the *chef de terre*, who introduced the newcomer to the customary taboos. The place where Hamidou would install his house had been chosen by the Fulani chief and himself, and now had to be approved by the autochthonous village authorities. After this he was required to give the *chef de terre* a couple of chickens for sacrifice, and he was then welcome in the village.

The concession chiefs can be considered as land owners and can entail land or give it in grants or loans to family members or to strangers (Stamm, 1996). They can dispose of the land allocated to them as they will. The limits of the land allocated to a *yir* were well known by the concession chiefs, but generally not physically demarcated, an indication of the present abundance of land in the research villages.<sup>3</sup> Only in case of land scarcity or emergencies such as natural disasters can the *Chef de terre* redistribute land.

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3. More than 83% of the households' said that they disposed of a sufficient field size to guarantee subsistence and 75% regarded their own territory as sufficient to enlarge their fields.

**Figure 3. Land allocation and responsibilities of Chef de terre and RAV**



Left = customary, right = as found in research villages

The individualization of the traditional village structure referred to earlier, which accentuates the sprawl of settlements, has had an impact on land allocation: Nowadays land is still administered by the *chef de terre*, but is allocated to concession chiefs and no longer to clan chiefs.

In the research villages at the time of the study, more than 80% of the autochthonous *chefs de concession* regarded themselves as owners of the land they farmed compared to only 44% of the Fulani. Most of the Fulani were living in the village of Kour, where the Fulani population was above average with 34%. Only here did they consider themselves as owners of the land they cultivated, whereas in the other villages, they accepted the autochthonous settlers as owners and sometimes complained about legal uncertainty. Despite a higher conflict frequency due to the higher density of cattle, the interethnic relations in Kour were reported as good by both autochthonous and Fulani.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that the two factors “land tenure security” and “good interethnic relationships” are inter-dependent: if security of land access exists, a fruitful coexistence of farmers and herders is more probable, and vice versa.

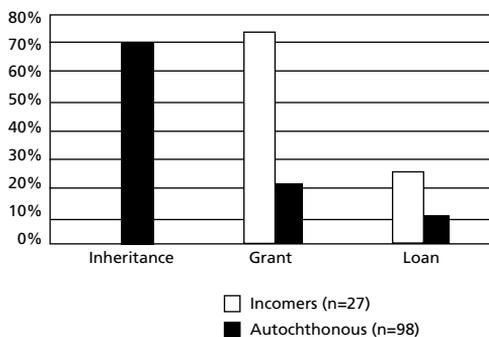
The existence of a right to land was rarely questioned. An exception was the village of Hemkpa: here, all migrants stated that they felt insecure concerning their right of access to land. The reason for this feeling was due to two open land conflicts: Firstly, the autochthonous group had refused to accept that a deceased Fulani woman be buried on their land; secondly, the relatives of a man who had loaned land to migrants claimed back the land after his death.

4. This statement can be confirmed by participant observation: Unlike in other research villages, the Fulani in Kour are able to speak the local language and often sit together with the autochthonous population. Certainly, this fruitful coexistence (which is also of economic interest) has a positive influence on the village’s conflict management practice.

The three traditional forms of land access were inheritance, grant and loan. No cases of sale of land were observed in the research villages. Among the autochthonous group, inheritance was the most common form of land access, whereas incomers usually benefited from a gratis grant of unlimited duration and from loan. The most common form of land access for incomers was the grant, which might include an informal contract about a limited use of the trees. Loans were less common. They differed from grants by the fact that the land might be reclaimed by the landowner who had the power to set a time limit on its utilisation. In this case, the user had the right of usufruct, but did not own the land. Just as in the case of grant, there might be an informal contract about permitted forms of tree use.

At first sight, the secondary role loans play in the customary system seems to be confirmed by the data collected in the research villages. In fact, the importance of this type of land access must have strongly increased since the migrants' arrival in the early 1990s. According to Stamm (1996), loans had more importance in regions where land was scarce, and for Ouedraogo (2001), the increasing importance of land loan was even a consequence of the modern land tenure system. The results observed in the research area delivered an additional explanation for the gain in importance of land loan: in spite of the fact that land was still a relatively unlimited resource and that the RAF (*Réorganisation Agricole et Foncière*) barely had any influence on land access in the research villages, the percentage of loan corresponded to that found in regions with land scarcity.

**Figure 4. Access to land (% of answers according to group)**



Here, the comparatively elevated percentage of land loans had to be seen in relation to immigration: the more immigrants of non-autochthonous origin settle down in a village, the more loans gain in importance. This proved the flexibility of the customary land tenure system under changing conditions (Mathieu *et al.*, 2003).

As expected for a region dominated by crop production, highly elaborated rules for land access operated in the research area. For water access, the regulations differed according to the water source. For artificial water sources that demanded investments of labour and money like wells and pumps, and which in most cases had been introduced by development projects, very complex rules existed particularly concerning cost sharing (in most cases, rights to water use depended on a monthly deposit per household) and concerning the regulation of access times. Rules were also linked to hygiene (for example forbidding of washing of dishes, or access by women during menstrual periods). These artificial water sources carried a latent conflict risk: the person in charge of the maintenance of a pump or well might misuse the deposited money or be incapable of guaranteeing the correct and timely maintenance. Or, as observed in one research village, the building of a pump in the autochthonous quarter might damage the relationships with other ethnic groups – in this particular case, autochthonous women regarded themselves as “owners”, and Fulani women complained that they were always the last in the waiting queue. For traditional water sources like water holes, the only rule of access was that the person who had dug it, had priority of access. For natural water sources like rivers and lakes, rules were less common, except those concerning customary taboos.

According to the respondents regulations were also less elaborated for pastures: the access to savannah (pastures and trees) was generally free. Mechanisms to control the carrying capacity did not exist (until now, there had been no need, since overgrazing was not yet a problem). The only rule to apply was to avoid damage to neighbouring fields. However, in some villages, more specific rules exist: in Maal, two village quarters forbade herders to pass with their animals. In Hemkpa, the answers given by the local authorities revealed the existence of a latent conflict: According to the autochthonous authorities, the Fulani had installed a corridor for animal passage without having any passage rights. In contrast to this, the Fulani chief stated: *“Il y avait un couloir de passage pour les*

*transhumants, mais maintenant il est barré par des champs*"<sup>5</sup>. Local agreements between autochthonous groups and Fulani concerning the use of pastures existed in Dankana. The population had designated two pasture zones. One was reserved for the Fulani and officially recognised by a *procès verbal de palabre* (PVD), the other one was destined for the autochthonous population, but not yet legalised by a PVD.

These findings show a dynamic and still functional customary land tenure system in action. Changes in actors' responsibilities and in institutional arrangements contribute to an adapted natural resource management, and have been the results of changes in socio-economic factors. The conflicts observed in the study over access rights to land and water were not yet violent, and could most often be resolved successfully at village level. However, limitations are visible, as in the case of Hemkpa. Arbitrariness in land tenure and the lack of mechanisms for a suitable rangeland management have led to an open conflict and a beginning of exclusion of settled Fulani herders by the 'autochthonous' population. The case of Hemkpa may not remain an exception, if the strong immigration of Fulani herders and Mossi farmers continues – as seems most probable- and as pressure on natural resources is further heightened by the return-migration of autochthonous farmers from Ivory Coast<sup>6</sup>, raising the possibility that the customary system may no longer be capable to cope with the resulting situation.

There is a need to develop further adapted institutions and institutional arrangements to enable population and authorities to maintain an equitable and sustainable natural resource management process- before overuse damages occur and before conflicts about increasingly scarce resources become more violent.

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5. "A corridor for transhumance passage once existed, but it is now blocked by fields".

6. In some villages situated further to the north, part of the research area but not part of this case study, the immigrant Mossi farmers are becoming the majority, and autochthonous ethnic groups feel disadvantaged.

## 4. Political processes affecting natural resource management

Decentralisation and land tenure reform were mentioned by all informants at both meso and macro level as political processes with a strong impact on natural resource management. For some of them decentralisation was the most important process, as it should enable the population themselves to articulate and manage their interests in natural resources in an effective and non-violent way. Others judged the land tenure reform (RAF, Rèforme Agraire et Foncière) to be of greater importance, because it should provide legal principles for equitable land access, land use and land management. In addition, regulations related to pastoralism were mentioned by informants at meso and macro level, particularly by the Technical Service (Animal Production) at Departmental and province level.

Decentralisation is defined as the transfer of decision-making power from central government to local-level entities. It aims at more participation of the local population in decision making processes and therefore at delivering more demand-oriented decisions than are possible with a centralised structure. Decentralisation should not be confused with deconcentration, defined as the redistribution of decision-making authority and financial management responsibility among different levels of central government.

In Burkina Faso a political reform process started with the new constitution of the 2nd June 1991, aiming at the reorganisation of territorial administration into a structure of democratic local municipalities. This decentralisation process became more concrete and precise in August 1998 with four laws concerning decentralisation, the *textes d'orientation de la décentralisation* (TOD) au Burkina Faso. A first change of the TOD took place in July 2001, a second change with four new laws in August 2003. Today, the administration in Burkina Faso is organised in two different structures:

- a deconcentrated structure, composed of four different levels of administration districts without legal personality, without financial sovereignty and represented by nominated agents (13 regions with governors, 45 provinces with High Commissioners, 350 departments with Prefects and ca. 8000 villages with RAVs),

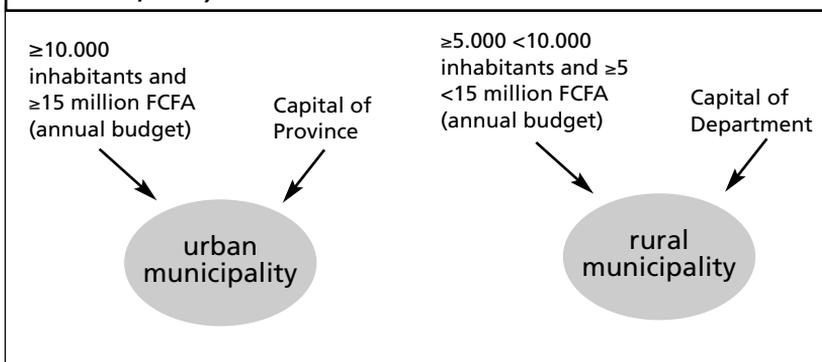
- a decentralised structure, composed of territorial entities, with their own legal personality, with financial sovereignty and represented by elected agents. These will ultimately be, once the decentralisation is in effect, the 13 regions and a non-specified number of urban municipalities with elected Mayors and of rural municipalities with elected Prefect-mayors.

The new decentralised democratic structures (regions, urban and rural municipalities) are intended to be supported by the deconcentrated administrative structures (regions, provinces, departments, villages), particularly in the realisation of economic, social and cultural development.

The administrative reality of today, however, does not yet involve the 13 regions, either as deconcentrated or as decentralised units, since the processes to constitute them are still not implemented. Under the new laws of August 2003 the regions should become decentralised entities by 2011. The 45 existing provinces will remain, as deconcentrated units. The appearance of the two other decentralised entities is also still limited – up to now only 49 urban municipalities with elected mayors exist in Burkina Faso.

In principle the classification of municipalities into ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ is based on the number of inhabitants and the volume of the annual budget, with the exception that all province capitals are nominated as urban municipalities and all departmental capitals as rural municipalities.

**Figure 5. Distinction between urban and rural municipalities (adapted from Rothe, 2002)**



Today, in the rural municipalities a *Conseil special* with members nominated by the Prefect supports the tasks of the director, the Prefect-Mayor. Elections are planned between 2003 and 2006. Since the elections in 1995 and 2000 urban municipalities have an elected Mayors (as an executive agent) and an elected Conseil Municipal (as an advisory body). With the transfer of responsibilities and resources they have obtained the power needed to be a decentralised entity. But so far only 18% of the population is directly affected by this decentralisation process. Even if the proposed decentralised rural municipalities come into being, the percentage of the population affected by this would not reach 50; and large rural areas, which do not fulfil the criteria to become municipalities will still remain.

At village level, the community is supposed to be organised in a *Commission Villageoise de Gestion des Terroirs* (CVGTs). The CVGT, created in the framework of the RAF, is an administrative structure for land use planning and development, with decision-making power but without legal personality. The responsibilities of the CVGT are the inventory of the village territory, the guidance of land use planning, management and development, the implementation of activities, the attribution and withdrawal of land. The CVGT is composed of an assembly, an office, sub-commissions (the number of these depending on local conditions) and an evaluation and control committee. Several CVGT can constitute a CIVGT (inter village commission). The implementation of the CVGTs and CIVGTs, partially executed by private organisations, has yet not reached very far, particularly in the research area.

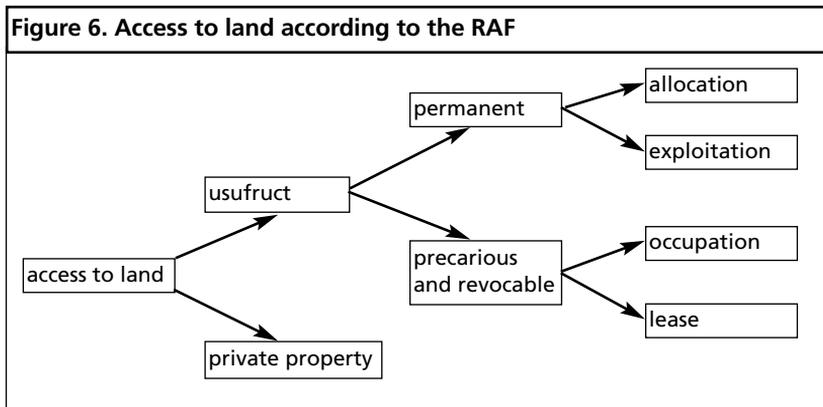
The process of decentralisation is accompanied by the *Réforme Global de l'Administration Publique* (RGAP), and the already mentioned *Réorganisation Agraire et Foncière* (RAF). The RAF aims at the reorganisation of land tenure to enhance productivity and to guarantee social justice. It contains regulations concerning property, access to land and land rights as well as the organisation of natural resource management.<sup>7</sup> As part of the decentralisation process, the transfer of resources from the centralised state to the decentralised municipalities includes the transfer of land tenure. In the terms of the TOD of 1998 it was stipulated that municipalities disposed of communally-owned territory consisting of parts of the state-owned land transferred to them. This must be seen in the

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7. In the beginning (RAF, 1984) it was also intended as a means to limit the power of the traditional chief. Recent reflections about the RAF have embedded the traditional chiefs into the decision-making process and take the value of the traditional rulers and their experience into account.

context of the RAF of 1984, which effectively nationalised all land, and the changes of the RAF in 1996, which implemented the right of the State to transfer land titles to legal entities and private persons.

In the RAF, access to land and land rights for private persons are organised in two different structures, private property and usufruct (use rights linked to land titles). Private property remains an exception compared to the still dominant form of state property (Ouedraogo 2001). The resulting limited land market in Burkina Faso constitutes an exception in the West African context (Stamm 1996). According to the RAF, the precondition to buy land is the holding of a use right. Usufruct titles are subdivided into two groups: permanent land titles (allocation and exploitation) and precarious, revocable titles (occupation and lease).



However, the population only rarely takes advantage of these official land titles, partly because of lack of information, and partly in order to avoid the payment of the taxes and fees which are linked to the process. The majority of Burkinabé citizens, especially those located in rural areas, continue to use natural resources in the traditional way. Such customary rights are taken into account by the RAF in allowing continuing occupation for subsistence without any administrative permission or the accordance of a land title. Only new clearings need to be authorised by the administration (Ouedraogo 2001).

In addition to these reforms, the implementation of a law related to pastoralism is in process in Burkina Faso (*loi d'orientation relative au*

*pastoralisme au Burkina Faso*). This law, aiming at sustainable development and peaceful integration of pastoral, agro-pastoral and silvo-pastoral activities was introduced in November 2002 and regulates the access to pastures and transhumance. The implementation of the law seems to be still distant, but in May 2003 a national workshop was held to reflect on the application of these more general regulations.

The realities observed in the research area show the existence of a gap between these political processes and visions as described here, and the *de facto* situation. In spite of the fact that officially the village in Burkina Faso represents an administrative entity, village boundaries were not yet registered officially. None of the six research villages met the criteria to gain the status of a municipality: the most populated village, Dankana, counted less than 1000 inhabitants and is therefore far from reaching the threshold of 5000 inhabitants, and the villages did not dispose of any budget, since they were composed of subsistent, autonomous compounds that were contributing little to the monetary market system. When asked about decentralisation, the interlocutors at this level only gave a shrug. No cases of realization of the articles on land tenure and resource management mentioned in the RAF were observed. In none of the researched villages had a CVGT been founded. The most common statement on the RAF was: "*La terre appartient à l'Etat*"<sup>8</sup>, which however did not hinder at all the persistence of the customary land tenure system. Even the village as an administrative entity did not play an important role, and family linkages remained the dominant structure.

Informants at meso and macro level saw the main potential of these political processes in the development and the mobilisation of civil society in Burkina Faso, and in achieving stronger land tenure security through formalized regulations for access to land, land use and land management. Through this formalisation, according to these informants, the plurality of local interests should become more visible and negotiable, which would lead to more participation of local actors and actor groups in decision making processes, for example in processes related to the management of natural resources. The potential for reduction of conflict could then be a result of these processes.

The observed dynamic of institutions in the research area, related to the separation of roles and responsibilities of the Chef de terre as a customary

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8. "The land belongs to the state."

and the RAV as a modern institution, may present a strong potential for an effective synthesis of 'customary' and 'modern' regulations and arrangements. The strengthening of already existing local institutions and their harmonization with other planned local structures like the CVGT could in theory support an effective natural resource management system at village level.

But the obstacles to attaining this positive outcome can equally be seen as manifold. Firstly, informants emphasised the lack of capacity building – a lack of capacities and competences not only in the population (because of a high rate of illiteracy, a low level of organisation, and low economic power), but also in the administration itself. Information is a key word in the context of capacity-building, and a main obstacle was seen to be the limited access to information and the deficient distribution of information about the reform processes both in the administrative services and in the population in general. Secondly, the lack of implementation and the unclear definition of responsibilities between the new structures (e.g. rural municipalities and CVGTs) were mentioned – although in fact up to now in the research area, no rural municipality and no active CVGT have yet come into existence. The lack of applicability and of regulations for the implementation of the RAF was also mentioned. This could even lead to a situation of insecure land tenure, and informants feared a black market in land without any formalisation, and an open door for abuse: by the authorities disposing of 'traditional' power and no longer hindered by social sanctions, by the authorities disposing of 'modern' power, and by 'urban elites', using their advantages related to information, influence and economic power. These obstacles, as a result of the gap between political vision and rural realities, can lead to a marginalisation of rural areas by the RAF and by the decentralisation process, even though it aims at the opposite (Hilhorst *et al.*, 2003).

Informants also feared the exclusion of certain actors, notably pastoralists, and particularly the transhumant pastoralists. For them, participation in local decision-making processes will be difficult. In this context, the readiness of the 'autochthonous' population and other local actors to involve all actors in decision-making processes is doubtful. Invitation of settled Fulani herders to village meetings and their participation in them (even if it these were organised by development and research projects) was only rarely observed in the research area. Pastoralist informants also remarked that the expectations in the law related to pastoralism are not yet

fulfilled. And informants at the macro level referred to the weakness of the political lobby of pastoralists at the national level, which is likely to lead to a marginalisation of pastoralists and their interests in Burkina Faso.

The hesitant progress in the approximation of political visions to field realities was explained by informants by referring to the plurality of powerful stakeholders at national level, with no or little readiness to abandon or share their present power.

What are the implications for conflict and conflict management? The political processes as described and planned have in common a preventive character, whether through the development of institutions for effective natural resource management or through the intended strengthening of civil society and local institutions. However, an actual impact is yet not perceivable in the research area; and the aim to ensure equitable, sustainable and peaceful natural resource management is a long way from being achieved.

## 5. Conflicts and conflict management in the research villages

When conflicts over the use of natural resources occur, different actors, besides those immediately concerned, are involved in the conflict management processes. This chapter will describe and analyse the processes identified in the research villages and the strengths and weaknesses of the different mediators.

### 5.1 Conflicts

The main cause of concern in the research villages was the in-migration of Fulani herders, which had been ongoing over the last two decades. In some settlements the Fulani had left again (sometimes because they had been forced out by the 'autochthonous' inhabitants), and newly arriving Fulani families had come in. In Dankana the situation had escalated a few years ago, as informants explained. Access to key resources (water and pasture) for the Fulani herds had been blocked by new fields, and cases of crop damage became more frequent. A negotiation process started between the 'autochthones' and the Fulani, animated by the development and research projects active in the village, and a demarcation of a pasture area for the Fulani herds took place. Meanwhile, some of the Fulani families left the village, but the remaining Fulani herders now described the situation as more relaxed although lasting resentments were still observable. Another case of pushing-out of settled Fulani and of very tense relations between Fulani and 'autochthones' was reported for Hempka as a result of the land conflicts referred to earlier (chap. 3.3).

Informants complained mainly about conflicts between crop farmers and livestock keepers. The conflict inventory in the six villages confirmed this account. In total, 111 conflicts were reported by the 124 households during the last three years. 97 of these (87%) were conflicts over cases of crop damage caused by livestock (74 were reported by farmers, and 23 by the Fulani herders). Only these are discussed here. The remaining 14 conflicts mentioned were about 'theft of animals and food', 'theft of women' and quarrels in the *cabaret* (village premises where *dolo* local beer is drunk). Two conflicts which related to land access (Hempka) and land property between two 'autochthonous' families (Kourgbèlè,) were also mentioned. More than 75% of the 97 crop-damage conflicts

happened in Dankana, Kour and Maal. Here the highest numbers of cattle were found and the frequency of cases is clearly related to the numbers of heads of cattle present in the villages (Table 3).

Research villages							Total
	Maal	Djemé	Kour	Dankana	Kourgb	Hemkpa	
Conflicts:							
reported by autoch.	15	9	11	27	5	7	74
reported by Fulani	4	2	10	6	–	1	23
<b>Total no reported</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>97</b>
No of interviews	23	17	24	36	12	12	124
Heads of cattle in the village	607	370	1787	1065	10	42	

Most of the 97 cases of crop damage conflicts occurred at the time of harvesting, and some during sowing. These conflicts became public, with discussions about the subject at every public platform (e.g. in the cabarets) and generally tense relations between farmers and herders in the villages concerned. The form taken by these conflicts was with two exceptions non-violent. In 89% of the 97 crop-livestock cases the presence of the herders (7% cases were caused by the herds of autochthonous farmers) were seen as the root cause of the conflict.

Even if, as the primary cause for conflict the obvious crop damages were mentioned, the underlying causes were presented as manifold and embedded in a spectrum of fears about the effects of newcomers or 'outsiders' on today's traditionally accepted social, ecological and economic structure. This also included a fear about a loss of rights for future 'insider' generations when outsiders come in, even if resources like land were still available. As secondary causes the interlocutors mentioned

the negligence of the herdsman; on the other hand and as a counter to this, Fulani herders pointed to unjustified accusations and to the impossibility of avoiding crop damage because access to water points or pasture areas had been blocked by fields.

### **Box 2. A 'typical' farmer-herder conflict**

My family and me, we have champs de case and some champs de brousse – which are a bit far away. Last year, while it was time for harvesting the Yams in the champs de brousse, my wife I were guarding the fields over there. But my wife was falling asleep, so cattle came in and destroyed the Yams tubers. We followed the tracks and found the Fulani herder with the cattle. It was one from the settlement nearby our village. We started to shout at him, because he said, he would not pay. Then we informed our RAV and he started to talk with the Fulani. In the end, they paid 20.000 FCFA. We had asked for more, because they could afford more, but this was better than nothing.... Yes, you can also ask the Technical Service for estimation of damage, but then you have to pay them too, and you can never be sure..... You know, the animals, you cannot drive them like bicycles, so you always will have problems like this..... (Source: Dagara farmer)

In 10% of the 97 conflicts a culprit could not be identified and no conflict management took place. Asked about the management of the remaining 90% of conflicts, the interlocutors mentioned a range of different actors who became involved. The preferred mediators varied among the villages as well as among those immediately concerned.

## **5.2 Actors, roles and relationships**

The two central actors in the arena of conflict and conflict management were the farmers and the herders. The farmers (Dagara, Birifor, Lobi), referred to as 'autochthones', were the 'first-comers' in the region. Strong relationships among farmers as members of the same family or clan existed, even within the different ethnic groups, particularly because of shared values and norms. 'Neighbourhood support' was a pre-dominant pattern of co-operation, for example in times of seeding and harvesting or in case of illness; by strengthening the collective character of village life, this could be seen as an investment in social capital by farmers.

The herders were mainly sedentary Fulani who arrived in the villages in recent years. In all villages they lived separately from the main village quarters. Relations between the farmers and the Fulani herders differed

among the villages and varied from total disregard (Hemkpa) to friendships (Kour).

**Box 3. Relations and co-operation between farmers and herders (from a farmer's point of view)**

Yes, you can have relationships with them (*the Fulani*): you can sell to them your products and you can buy for example their chickens, because they have bigger breeds. My sons are working for them on their fields – for money, but I don't like it... I don't know why, but I don't like it. Now my sons do it secretly. People say, it would be good for the soil to let the cattle on the fields after harvesting, but the cattle from the Fulani comes from the bush, so they will bring with the manure many seeds of bad weeds, I think, so I don't want that, either. My neighbour is friendly with one of them, and last year he (*the Fulani friend of the Dagara farmer*) was coming and ploughing his fields with his draught-oxen, as my neighbour was ill, that was good.... If you're at the same time farmer and herder, then it would be good, even in bad years you will have your animals, and it would be good for your soil, too. But a farmer and a herder is difficult... you know, like a man with two wives: They can cope with each other for a while, but if there is even the smallest thing happening, immediately you will have a big clash and they will never again speak a word to each other. (Source: Dagara farmer)

The village's social life happens essentially in the *cabaret*, a locality where the local millet beer (*dolo*) is produced and consumed. Fulani participation in a village's social life is therefore minimised, because of the interdiction of alcohol in Islam. An indication of the cabaret's importance for social relationships is given by the following statement made frequently by the autochthones: "*Il n'y a pas de relations sociales. Les Peul ne boivent même pas le dolo!*"<sup>9</sup>. Only in Kour, the village with the highest percentage of Fulani population (34%) an exception could be observed: here the 'autochthonous' Dagara and the Fulani frequently shared this public platform and strengthened the social ties between them.

The local authorities, the Chef de terre, the RAV and the Fulani Chief are also involved in conflict management. Apart from RAV's role as a 'door opener' for newly arriving Fulani and Mossi, his main task was mediation in cases of conflicts between farmers and migrant herders. A crisis or conflicts of competence between the Chef de terre and the RAV was never mentioned, and this can be explained by their clearly divided responsibilities and duties. Their responsibilities are complementary: the chef de terre remains the spiritual village head and is responsible for land tenure and

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9. "Social relationships don't exist. The Fulani don't even drink dolo!"

land allocation, whereas the RAV, whose role can be compared to that of a mayor, is responsible for conflict management.

At the Departmental administration level the Prefect was resorted to for conflict resolution, sometimes with the help of police officers, when management at the local level failed. The different technical services at the Département were responsible for the estimation of compensation in cases of crop damage. In the event that conflict management at this level also failed, an engagement of the 'Haut Commissaire' (High Commissioner) and/or the law court, as the next hierarchical regional administration level would be necessary.

Other actors in the research area were the two development projects, the PDR-Poni (Projet de développement rural) and the PDR-Sud-Ouest, as well as a research project (EU-funded INCO-DC project). Their role was related to activities in local and regional natural resource management. In the area of conflict management, their role was ambivalent. On one hand, an initiation or support of reconciliation activities between farmers and herders could be observed, for example in village meetings, or through support for the demarcation of livestock zones and corridors to prevent future conflicts. On the other hand, project activities such as the introduction of a new well can also cause conflicts, as reported for another village in the research region.

Farmer/Herder organizations or other forms of NGO were rare in the research area and performed locally limited special tasks (rice production, horticulture, cattle vaccination, credits...), but were initiated and supported mostly by the above-mentioned projects. In general, the degree of organization in the researched villages was very low. Beside the customary organisation in 'neighbourhood help' groups and task-oriented groups at local level no regionally active groups or organisations were identified. Some Fulani in Maal, Djeme and Kour mentioned a forthcoming organization to represent their interests at regional level. A further development of such organizations would be helpful for the prevention of conflicts, as informants explained, because of their potential role as multipliers and disseminators of information and as partners in local and regional negotiation processes related to NRM.

A last group of actors may be summarized as 'urban elites' or 'sons of the village' who followed a career in the public service, for example as former

members of the National Assembly, and who now influence opinions and/or decision-making in their home villages. They act in some cases as consultants in mediation processes but their impartiality is compromised by their affiliation to the 'autochthones' and by their own, sometimes hidden interests.

Both formal and informal duties and obligations, and participating roles in the village's decision-making processes form the basis for roles in conflicts and conflict management. But reputation, personality and experience influence the extent to which the different authorities or actors can realise these roles, as shown in the next section.

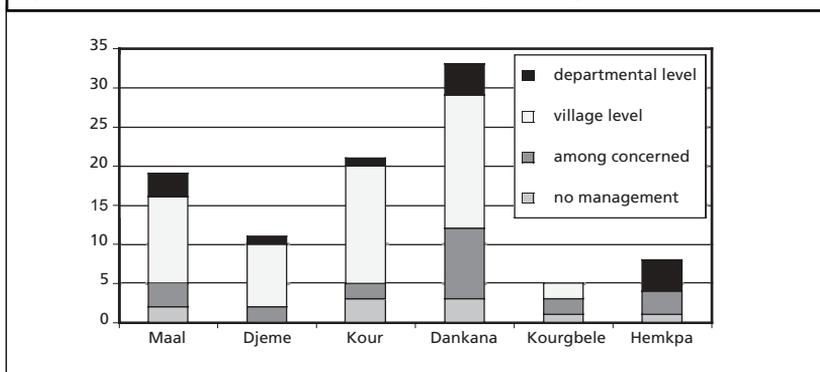
### 5.3 Mediators, strategies and the degree of satisfaction

The mediators in the management of the 97 conflicts encountered between farmers and herders act at different (hierarchical) levels. Actions at these different levels occurred with the following frequencies:

- no management: **10%**
- inter-personal level (among those immediately concerned): **22%**
- at local level with mediator: **55%**
  - RAV (37.1%)
  - RAV with Fulani Chief (12.4%)
  - RAV with Chef de terre (2.1%)
  - Chef de terre (2.1%)
  - RAV with Chef de terre and Fulani Chief (1%)
- at departmental level: **13%**
  - RAV with Police (1%)
  - Prefect and others (e.g. the Technical Service) (12.4%)
- Law Court: **0%**

At local level the RAV as a mediator, alone or assisted by other local authorities, was involved most frequently (53%), while the Chef de terre was rarely involved (5%). The Fulani chief was able to assist in 13% of the reported cases, always in association with the RAV. This was particularly the case in Dankana and is a newer institutional arrangement between Fulanis and farmers. The origin of this development can be seen in the negotiation processes related to the demarcated pasture area. The Chef de terre mediated only two cases on his own and three others together with the RAV and the Fulani chief.

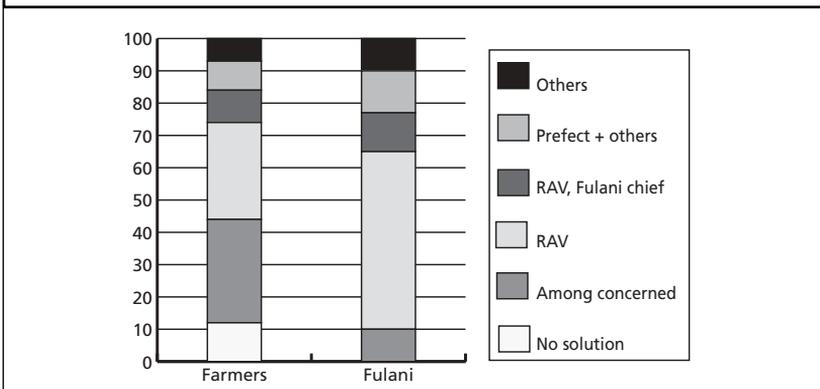
**Figure 7. The different level of mediation per village**



13% of the reported disputes could not be settled in the village and had to be transferred to the departmental level for a solution. In Hemkpa arbitration by the Prefect and/or technical service took place four times and none of the eight conflicts was managed by the RAV. Here the RAV was declared to be 'too young and inexperienced' to be a competent mediator. Both parties preferred management at the village level (Figure 5). This was explained by the possible perturbation of wider social ties, if the conflict goes beyond the village borders. Conflict management limited to the immediately concerned parties was said to be rare and difficult if the field and the herd owner did not belong to the same ethnic group. Therefore, a mediator was frequently necessary and the Fulani clearly preferred the RAV, as he was already the link between them and the 'autochthonous' farmers. The RAV was engaged in 70% of all cases reported by the Fulani (Figure 6).

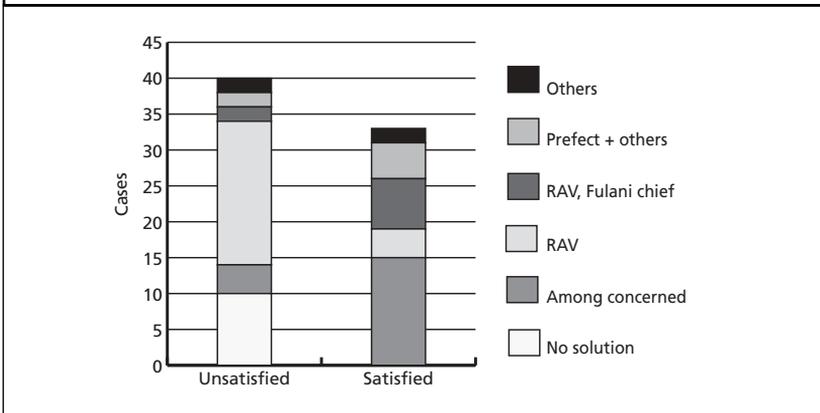
The degree of satisfaction with the result of the management process varied considerably between the two concerned parties. All Fulani were satisfied with the different types of conflict management but more than half (54%) of the autochthonous farmers complained of no or inadequate compensation for damage to crops. In general, the farmers did not define 'inadequate compensation' by monetary values but by verbal expressions like the above cited "they can afford more". The implication is that a farmer's dissatisfaction is caused more by his perception of the herder's wealth than by the amount he actually received. Here, the so-called weak monotonicity principle (the economic situation of one agent does not deteriorate when that of the other agent improves), is violated. The

**Figure 8. Preferred mediators (% of cases) in the conflicts reported by farmers and herders**



wealth of the farmer falls and he deems this decline all the more unjust and unacceptable because it is seen as the result of the increasing wealth of the herder (Platteau, 2000).

**Figure 9. Farmer's dissatisfaction and satisfaction with different mediators for the reported cases**



This form of dissatisfaction may indicate the beginning of a 'commercialisation of conflict' as feared by one informant at the meso level. This phenomenon could be interpreted as a **moral hazard** problem caused by asymmetric information, when farmers show opportunistic behaviour in claiming more damage than has really been caused by the Fulani herds.

Dissatisfaction of the autochthonous farmers was particularly strong for arbitration by the RAV (Figure 4). As an alternative mediator the interviewees mentioned resort to the Prefect, which would mean leaving the village level. This was avoided by most of them because of the costs (e.g. transport costs of the technical service which would become involved in the case) and because of the fear of persisting resentments between parties. Therefore, conflict management by the Département was not perceived as a good option, even if there was dissatisfaction and the risk of moral hazard at the village level.

Asked for a better method of future conflict management, both parties preferred management at the village level, most of them even with the existing institutions. Only 21% proposed the foundation of a village committee.

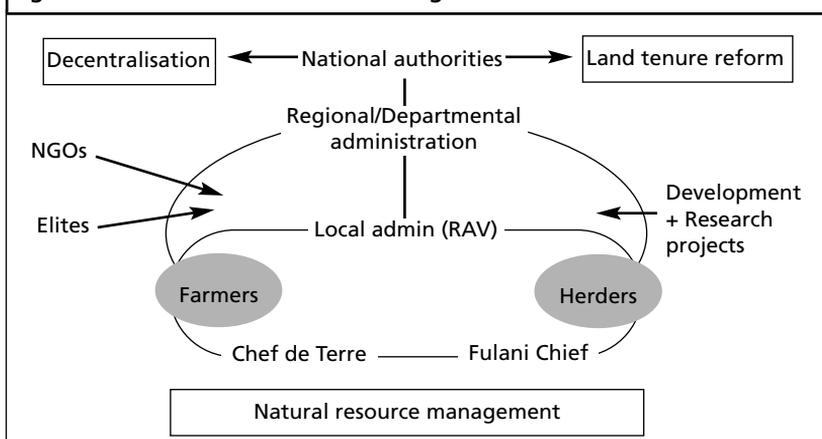
## 5.4 Strengths and weaknesses of mediators

Conflict management among those immediately concerned or at least at village level appeared to be the most effective method, because it enabled the avoidance of social costs (persisting perturbation of social relations) and of higher transaction costs if mediators at Departmental or Regional level were involved. Therefore, the farmers and herders most immediately concerned were in effect mainly responsible for the development of efficient conflict management, remaining below the juridical level and without resort to violence. This suggests that although the existence or the build-up of social capital will not preclude conflicts, it will help to find a solution without long-lasting resentments among those concerned (Brockhaus et al., 2003).

In spite of the high degree of dissatisfaction by autochthonous farmers with the RAV's arbitration his opinion in cases of conflict was the most important for 70% of the 124 households interviewed, and 56% trusted him as the best decision-taker for all parties. His role was accepted by the traditional local authorities as well as by the local autochthonous and Fulani population. Therefore, he played a central role in the arena of conflict management.

The RAV's strength as a mediator resulted from his great potential influence, and from the trust of all concerned parties, as well as from his proximity in space and time. The high degree of trust placed in the RAV might be explained by the fact that although he is a state authority, he is not perceived as such by the local population but still as a 'son of the

**Figure 10. The arena of conflict management**



village'. However, the RAV's limit or weakness in fulfilling his role was that success depended on his personal motivation and capacities. Furthermore the future role of this office is prejudiced by the fact that the RAV today is not elected but proposed and nominated by a non-transparent process, and that even succession by inheritance occurs (as was the case at Hempka).

The strength of Departmental and Regional state authorities as described by the informants was the hierarchical power, the state force, and in some cases the assistance of the police. But in the perception of the local actors the state (Regional/Departmental level) failed as a real alternative, because its decisions lacked transparency and therefore trust. The challenge for the state would appear to be to ensure more transparent processes in estimation and judging of damages, especially to avoid a further risk of 'conflict commercialisation'. Also the lack of proximity in space and time was perceived by the locals as a problem. Another problem, mentioned by the Departmental authorities such as the Prefect, High Commissioner, Technical Services and Police, was their limited financial resources. Cases were described where no fuel was available to mount a mission to a village. One other obstacle to State involvement in and support of efficient conflict management was seen by informants at the meso and macro level in the rotation principle in postings of the Prefects and High Commissioners, which leads to a lack of continuity and therefore consistency in decision making.

## 6. Conclusions

As we stated at the beginning of this paper, conflicts cannot be understood if they are reduced to isolated, local or ethnic phenomena. They have a complex history influenced by social, political, economic and ecological factors, which together determine their course and how they are manifested. For these reasons, the institutional arrangements and regulations not only at local but also at national level are important conditions for effective conflict management. The conditions which impact on the arena of conflict management are various and range from general processes like decentralisation to specific regulations for land tenure in particular places and times such as south western Burkina Faso at the present time.

The key issue is how natural resource access and use is managed, as it combines the other influencing factors in conflict, and exerts a strong effect on socio-political, ecological and economic local realities. The institutional framework provided by the state and the institutions and arrangements at local level should, ideally, ensure an equitable, peaceful, sustainable management of resources, managed by a capable civil society, and taking all interests fairly into account. Conflict management in a dynamic social, economic and ecological environment needs the development of well-adapted formal and informal institutions, even if – and perhaps especially if - this environment is dominated by constraints like a weak economy, high migration, an erosion of traditional norms and values and political reform processes failing to reach the community level, as was the case here.

The dangers presented by this type of environment are that potential benefits from political reform are not realized, and that a climate of dissatisfaction and insecurity may lead to opportunistic behaviour seeking to “commercialise” take advantage of conflicts, provoking a further escalation, in this case of conflicts between ‘autochthonous’ and “immigrant” groups. If authorities and opinion leaders, both customary and modern, abuse their influence by introducing ethnic overtones and interpretations instead of supporting equitable and sustainable management, they will heat up latent conflicts.

Other actors in the arena of conflict management, such as development and research projects and national-level authorities, are responsible for developing and supporting institutions and arrangements for sustainable NRM and for recognising that conflicts are not essentially a question of ethnicity but are a feature of competition for resources in space and time.

In the research villages the development of new institutions was particularly observed for migration related issues. A transfer of responsibilities from the customary authority *Chef de Terre* to the modern authority RAV had taken place. New rules for the allocation of land to migrants and the management of conflicts between farmers and migrant herders were developed. The RAV as the state authority at village level had the trust of both farmers and the herders, but his role was limited due to the lack of support by the higher administration levels, and was strongly dependent on his personal capacities. At the district level the regional and Departmental authorities often failed to perform their mediating role due to formal (financial and technical) and informal (distrust) reasons. Therefore, the challenge for the state will be the development and support of local institutions for efficient conflict management. Decentralisation includes a strong potential for such a development, but processes of political and economic transformation in West African countries (like in many other developing countries) are often driven by an outside force under fashionable principles like 'good governance' or 'globalisation' with little specification. This may lead to a 'top down approach' with little political willingness for implementation, little grass root participation and, consequently, a passively rejecting or "consumerist" behaviour on the part of the local population (Sawadogo, 2001). The process of decentralisation in Burkina Faso is no exception in this wider context, and for the land tenure reform process the same assumption may be valid. Here, the challenge for the state will be to learn from local realities and from local practice, and to animate a more bottom-up process, and to avoid a reinforced marginalisation of rural areas and actors.

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The Drylands Programme aims to contribute towards more effective and equitable management of natural resources in semi-arid Africa. It has a particular focus on decentralised management of natural resources, pastoral development, land tenure and resource access. Key objectives of the programme are to strengthen local capacity for sustainable resource management, by building effective and accountable local institutions; identify and promote national policies that legitimise and enable local-level decision making and authority; argue and lobby for global policies and institutions that support the development needs and priorities of dryland peoples.

It does this through the following five activities:

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ISSN 1357 9312  
ISBN 1 843 69 5030