

Community Cohesion and Dispute Resolution Strategies for Farmer-Herder Conflicts: Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) in Upper West, Ghana

This study evaluates the effectiveness of a three-pronged strategy for reducing conflicts between farmers and cattle herders in Ghana. NORC worked collaboratively with a Ghanaian NGO to implement an RCT across 46 communities in the Upper West region of northern Ghana in 2024.

Context

Conflicts between **Fulbe pastoralists** and **farming communities in northern Ghana** have intensified in recent years, driven by **competition over scarce resources** and exacerbated by climate change, migration, and complex social dynamics. The Fulbe are commonly denied citizenship, excluded from local decision-making, and face entrenched discrimination and insecurity.




As grazing land becomes increasingly scarce, **cattle frequently enter farms and damage crops**. When crop destruction occurs, it may be difficult to identify the herder responsible to obtain compensation for the loss. Even if the herder can be identified, **mutually agreeable dispute settlements are often elusive**, as existing mediation mechanisms rarely include Fulbe representatives, and the cattle are often owned by other, more powerful community members. **It is not uncommon for disputes to escalate into violence**, resulting in displacement or death.

The Intervention

The Center for Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies (CECOTAPS), with technical support from Save Ghana and funding from USAID, implemented a **three-pronged strategy** aimed at **inter-ethnic cooperation** and **community resilience** in Northern Ghana.

Inter-Ethnic Dialogue Sessions

A discussion on prejudice, feelings about community issues, and opportunities for cooperation.

-  Held over 2 days, March 2024
-  30 participants each
-  Roughly equal representation of Fulbe and non-Fulbe




Mixed Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)

An opportunity for inter-group cooperation and social interaction.

-  Established April - May 2024
-  In 23 communities, 20-30 members each
-  33.1% Fulbe
71.9% women

Mixed Mediation Committees (MMCs)

Alternative dispute resolution mechanism with Fulbe and non-Fulbe mediators.

-  Representatives selected after dialogue sessions
-  In 23 communities, 7-8 representatives in each
-  43.4% Fulbe
19.2% women

NORC conducted a **rigorous study** using a **randomized control trial (RCT)** with 46 communities in the Upper West region, where half were randomly assigned to receive the intervention and half were assigned to serve as a comparison group. The team collected household survey data in each community before and after the program to compare changes in the treatment and comparison groups over time. This approach helped isolate the effects of the program from other changes happening in the region

Data Collection

Sources



Household Survey with 920 households (460 Fulbe and 460 non-Fulbe), interviewing both the primary male and female decisionmakers in each household. The same households were interviewed before and after the intervention.

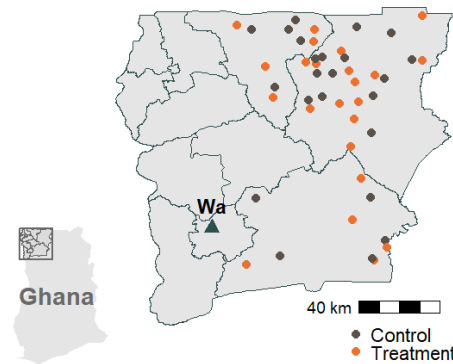


Community Leader Survey with 92 community leaders (46 Fulbe and 46 non-Fulbe).



Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with Fulbe and non-Fulbe men and women, and with members of newly formed mixed mediation committees. A total of 14 FGDs were held across three treatment communities.

Map of Study Communities

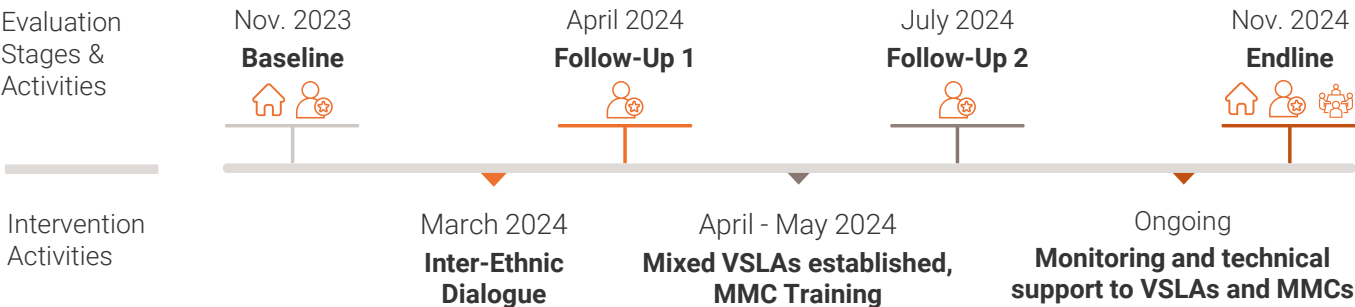


What Was Measured

NORC collected data on outcomes across **five broad categories**: Implementation, Dispute Resolution, Land Tenure Security, Security and Stability, and Community Cohesion.

Outcomes for the RCT are measured using **household survey data**. FGDs and community leader surveys **add depth and context** to the RCT results.

Timeline



Limitations

Findings reflect **short-term impacts**, measured approximately six months after the intervention.

Only Fulbe who consider themselves **permanently settled** in the communities were included in the study. The results may not extend to nomadic and semi-nomadic Fulbe, who were not included in the sample.

The evaluation outcomes are measured from **self-reported survey questions** around perceptions and opinions.

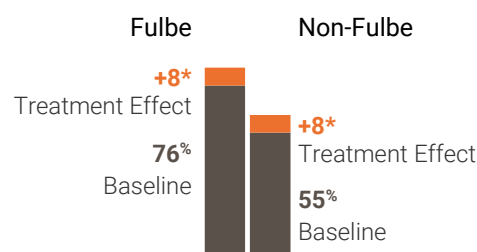
Completed just a few months after program implementation, **endline analysis already finds evidence for positive impacts across multiple key outcomes**. On outcomes where no impact was detected, particularly those related to community cohesion, it is important to note that **estimates reflect average effects across all community members**, regardless of individual participation in intervention components. **Some changes**, such as shifts in social norms or inter-ethnic marriage perceptions, **may require more time to emerge**.

Results and Discussion

The intervention improved dispute resolution in treatment communities.

Fulbe and non-Fulbe were more likely to report community disputes are usually resolved peacefully. Satisfaction with resolution outcomes also increased, particularly among non-Fulbe.

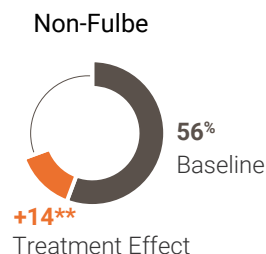
Believes dispute resolution is usually or always peaceful



*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Non-Fulbe were more confident their crops wouldn't be destroyed without compensation, crediting MMCs and dialogues for reducing crop destruction incidents and improving Fulbe cooperation when crop destruction does happen.

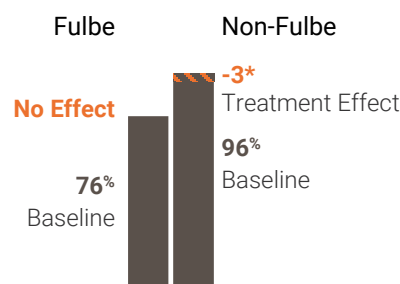
Unlikely your crops will be destroyed without compensation in next three years



While MMCs and dialogues contributed to dispute resolution, the new MMC mechanism caused some confusion about where to go for mediation.

Treatment communities saw a small shift towards using MMCs to mediate disputes, though less than 10 percent of respondents with disputes reported using MMCs at endline. The intervention may have contributed to a small decline in non-Fulbe reporting they know where to go if they have a dispute.

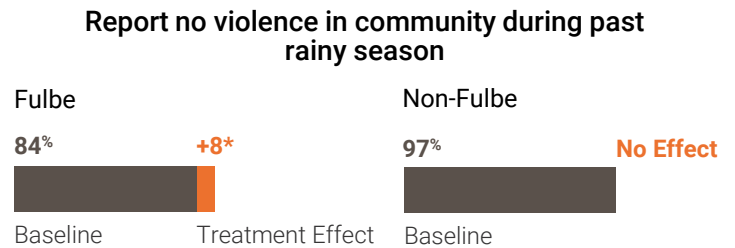
Knows where to go if they have a dispute



Opinions of the MMCs were largely positive, though awareness of MMCs varied by community. However, FGDs from one community in Wa East showed Fulbe MMC members there had been excluded from the committee by non-Fulbe members. Fulbe in that community held low opinions of the MMC.

The intervention shows signs of success in improving perceptions of security.

Fulbe respondents were more likely to report no recent violence in their communities. This was confirmed in community leader surveys, showing reduced reports of recent violence and cattle killings.



However, no significant changes were observed among non-Fulbe household respondents or in behaviors such as avoiding parts of the community due to insecurity.

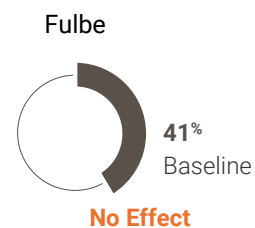
The intervention does not yet show strong evidence for improving community cohesion.



The RCT generally did not find impacts on outcomes related to community cohesion. Although we cannot discard the possibility that the intervention is not producing the expected changes, it is important to recognize that social interactions and norms take time to change.

Not worried about losing land rights in next three years

The RCT also finds no effect on Fulbe perceptions that they could lose land rights in the community, for example due to forced eviction or community agitations leading to displacement.



However, qualitative evidence points to early signs of improved inter-group relations, particularly among women participating in mixed VSLAs. Both quantitative and qualitative findings also show improvement in women's interactions at the borehole, likely due to improved cooperation around maintenance and collection of usage fees following the dialogue.



Opinions of the VSLAs and inter-ethnic dialogues were almost universally positive, though awareness of the dialogues varied by community and Fulbe women, in particular, were largely unaware of the dialogues. VSLA participants were disproportionately women.



Recommendations



Invest in ongoing oversight and conduct monitoring with MMC members to verify how MMCs are working and identify needs for continued support. This should be done in one-on-one settings or in separate sessions for Fulbe and non-Fulbe MMC members so that members feel free to express their opinions without the influence of others.



Standardize and verify the socialization of MMCs, so that all community members are aware of their presence, how they work, and when they should be used. The implementer should participate in socialization and engage traditional leaders.



Find avenues for women to engage in inter-ethnic dialogue. Since cultural norms may limit the extent to which women can substantively engage in these dialogues in the presence of men, it may be useful to hold a separate women's dialogue.



Consider investing in an additional intervention component that specifically identifies existing groups and activities where Fulbe could be included in each community (e.g., school committee, health committee, borehole maintenance) and provide assistance to help integrate Fulbe into those groups. Find additional avenues to increase cooperation and positive social contact amongst men.



Invest in ongoing monitoring and evaluation efforts, since community cohesion outcomes may require more time to manifest.



Consider follow-up dialogue sessions for the Fulbe and non-Fulbe to discuss and validate progress.

This document summarizes research by NORC's Global division, reported in "Community Cohesion and Dispute Resolution Strategies for Farmer-Herder Conflicts: Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) in Upper West, Ghana", by Gregory Haugan, Alejandro Ome, and Mayumi Rezwan, 2025. The full report is available at: <https://www.norc.org/content/dam/norc-org/pdf2025/ghana-lri-final-report.pdf>

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