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Title: Fisheries in the Waza Logone Floodplain: an analysis of the status of the fisheries sector and mitigation of conflicts within the sector in North Cameroon  
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Fisheries Conflicts in the Waza Logone Floodplain: Typology and Roots

6.1 Introduction

Broadly speaking, conflict emerges when ‘the interests of two or more parties clash and at least one of the parties seeks to assert its interests at the expense of another party’s interests’ (FAO, 1998). Conflicts do not necessarily have to be violent or highly disruptive. In fact, many conflicts that arise as a result of conflicting interests are low-level, non-violent phenomena (Warner, 2000).

As has been described above, the Waza Logone floodplain is characterized by a great diversity of natural resources, which attracts many users from diverse backgrounds. Historically, disruptions to these resources have led to strong competition and often also to conflicts between users. After the floodplain was partly reflooded, the number of sedentary fishermen in and around the Waza National Park increased rapidly (25% by 1994 and 34% by 1995; Scholte, 2003), and thus the potential for conflict situations.

Studies suggested a 90% decrease in fish production as a result of the hydro-agricultural activities conducted in 1979 under the SEMRY rice project (Loth, 2004; Mvondo et al., 2003; Scholte, 2005; Sighomnou & Naah, 1997). These hydrological disturbances led to the abandonment of traditional systems of natural resource management that guaranteed a relatively sustainable and peaceful mode of operation. Combined with population growth, the decline of fish stocks has resulted in strong competition over fishery resources. The most serious conflict over the past five years in the floodplain occurred in 2007 between the inhabitants of Sifna village and those of Tchede village. It was induced by conflicting interests over the control of a rich fishing waterhole located inside the Waza National Park and very rapidly turned into

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10 This chapter is based on research done jointly with Khari Boukar, a student of the University of Dschang (West Cameroon). I was his field supervisor. Sometimes, I use ‘we’ to underline this participation.
an ethnic conflict between the Kotoko and Musgum. The consequences were enormous: fighting, hundreds of huts burnt down, destroyed fishing equipment, at least forty people injured, a dozen people killed, children who lost an entire school year, while the trade between the two communities came to a complete stop. Economic losses due to this conflict have been estimated at nearly one hundred million FCFA (Sub Prefect of Zina, personal communication). Many people lost everything and, today, the memories of this very unfortunate event are still strong. Despite many external interventions, reconciliation between the two communities was still tentative during the time of my research (2008-2011).

This conflict is an example of the clashes that frequently occur in the Waza Logone floodplain and which are almost always related to conflicting interests over fisheries.

The construction of man-made waterholes is associated with several social issues, as these waterholes are considered by some traditional authorities as private property, and as open access by others. In the village of Araf for example, the local chief (*Blama*) and his family claim an exclusive right to fish in the waterhole. The chief uses a specific method to capture fish during the retreat of the water. At the end of his fishing period, when the community is permitted free access to the waterhole, there are hardly any fish left and, naturally, the fishermen complain about this situation.

Although not directly linked to fisheries, some conflicts arise from competition over access to waterholes for the purpose of watering livestock. Access by pastoralists is often not allowed until the community has organized their fishing activities.

Moreover, both groups (i.e. fishermen and pastoralists) often struggle with rules and limitations imposed by government. We have regularly observed them ignore the restrictions on entering the Waza National park for instance (see also Chapter 3), for which they sometimes get arrested. More often, however, fishermen as well as cattle owners are actively bribing conservation staff members to allow them to access the park. Such cases of ‘bad governance’ have been reported by the village head (*Blama*) of Hale village; certain individuals from the Ministry of Fauna and Forest had somehow been ‘persuaded’ to ignore the law and allowing several groups of transhumant fishermen to fish the waterholes inside the park.

According to the Musgum and the Kotoko, fishing channels are also responsible for recurring tensions among fishermen (Harkes, 1993). Their owners sometimes engage in a war over water. They always dig deeper to capture the water of the ponds charged with their stocks of fish. At the ponds themselves, the first people to have connected their channels insist on their
precedence and build dykes several hundred meters long in order to better
direct the water into their own channel.

The common rationale of the cases described here, is that conflicting in-
terests always tend to be destructive to the ecosystem and are thus always
compromising the sustainable use of natural resources in some way. In terms
of the sustainability of fishery resources, it is therefore essential to character-
ize these conflicts and to investigate their roots. The principal research ques-
tion is: what are the main sources of conflicts in the Waza Logone floodplain
and what are the main factors contributing to conflicts?

In chapter 7, I will elaborate further on the mechanisms of preventing and
solving these conflicts, and on the impacts they have in the area.

6.2 Methodology

6.2.1 Study area

This study covers a selection of 19 villages from a total of 91 villages in the
Waza Logone floodplain (Table 6.1). They belong to the sub-districts of Ma-
zer, Lahai, and Ngouden in the Zina sub-division, the sub-district of Hinale
in the Logone Birni sub-division, and the sub-district of Guirvidig in Maga
sub-division (see Chapter 2 for a full description of the study area, particular-
ly, Figure 2.2).

6.2.2 Data collection

Preliminary research included a review of several information sources and
10 open interviews with stakeholders. These stakeholders comprised of the
sub-divisional officer of Zina, two traditional authorities (the head of Tchede
village and Malazina village), three manguivini (the traditional authority who
is responsible for water and fishery management), four local NGO coordina-
tors, the local police officer and the Waza National Park conservator. I further
organized three focus group discussions in Tchede, Malazina and Zina in or-
der to gather more information on a number of case studies.

For the interviews in the 19 villages that were surveyed, I used a semi-struc-
tured questionnaire containing open and closed questions (Annex 5). A total of
143 heads of household were included in the survey (Table 6.1).

In addition to the heads of household, I conducted interviews with the fol-
lowing local authorities: the sub-divisional officer and the mayor of Zina, the
chief of Evie Fishing Centre, the chief of Mazera Fishing Centre, the fishing
manager of the Sultanate of Logone Birni, the chief of Hinale Village, the chief
of Ngoudeni Village, the chief of Mazera village, and the Head of the Regional Department of Fisheries of the Far North region in Maroua.

6.2.3 Population and sampling

Study Population
In the Waza Logone floodplain, fishing is an activity mainly performed by men. Women are more involved in post-catch activities (e.g. processing, including drying, smoking and selling) and therefore they are often not directly involved in conflicts related to fishing. In addition, some religious and cultural conventions isolate women from contact with males. For these reasons, our study population consists exclusively of men who are the head of a household and who are involved in management of fishery resources and/or are or have been involved in fishing conflicts in the Waza Logone floodplain.

In order to highlight multiple aspects of a conflict situation, I interviewed people of different status within the community (i.e. three governmental service officers, two traditional leaders, one elected leader, one members of an international NGO, one member of a local association and one anthropologist).

Sampling technique and sample size
To select a representative sample of the study population, I considered a sampling rate of 20% and used a systematic screening method, which included the following three main steps: (i) to establish a complete list of the population (preliminary survey in each village selected) and arrange them in alphabetic order; (ii) to choose a random number N that is then used as a standard interval to select each Nth unit on the list from a random starting point; and (iii) to compile a final list of people to interview.

Table 6.1 below shows the situation of our units of analysis per village. The study sample (N = 143) was thus established from the entire study population (N = 763). Table 6.1 provides details of the number of individuals surveyed per village.
Table 6.1
Sample size of households to investigate per village obtained from village chief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Total number of households</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Number of heads of household that migrated during the last 10 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lougouma</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahe</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tchede</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Araf</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zouang</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zina</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hale</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazera</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soufna</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngoudeni</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patmangai</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davagan</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tchoukouf</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sifna</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malazina (Lahai)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malazina (Guirvidig)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moukak</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zilim</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matkeu</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>763</strong></td>
<td><strong>143</strong></td>
<td><strong>856</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2.4 Processing and analysis

The data collected were processed manually and coded before being analyzed using Excel Microsoft software and SPSS 17.0 (Statistical Package for Social Science, 2010). Descriptive statistical techniques included representations in tables and calculation of frequency and averages. Certain information and study assumptions were tested using statistical tests such as correlations, T-test and chi-2.
6.3 Results

6.3.1 Categories of conflicts and their manifestation in the Waza Logone floodplain

Conflicts in the area
From the people interviewed, 93% are aware of the existence of conflicts in the Waza Logone floodplain.

The prevalence of conflicts between fishermen can largely be explained by the range, richness and consistency of the fishing activities in the area; as large numbers of fishermen seek out the same area for fishing, it becomes a potential zone of conflict. The interviews revealed that conflicts among fishermen are three times more important than conflicts between fishermen and farmers (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2
Number of conflicts per category in the Waza Logone floodplain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of conflicts present in the community</th>
<th>Conflicts among fishermen</th>
<th>Conflicts between fishermen and farmers</th>
<th>Conflicts between fishermen and herders</th>
<th>Conflicts among farmers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mazera</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahai</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngoudeni</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinale</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guirvidig</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The intensity of fishing activities is not constant throughout the year. During the flooding time (August-October), the whole floodplain is vulnerable to conflict. After the water starts retreating, any disputes tend to focus around fishing channels and waterholes, and the Logone and Logomatya Rivers.

Of the people interviewed who confirmed that they were involved in conflicts with other fishermen, over 50% had been involved in a fishing conflict at least once in 2009. In some areas, such as Lahai and Guirvidig, respondents were involved in disputes more frequently (64.70% for Lahai and 100% for Guirvidig).

I categorized the conflicts that existed among fishermen into three main types (Table 6.3): the quarrel (65.70%), the breakdown of communication (56.93%) and violence (35.76%). Although all reported conflicts were brief,
temporary, and did not require external intervention, they were said to be disputes which in the long-term often result in a situation of distrust and suspicion. People avoid each other and are sometimes not even on speaking terms. This state of affairs can persist if there are no external factors to change the situation. In the worst case it can evolve into a confrontation between individuals or groups of individuals. If this results in violence or fighting, it may lead to injuries, to materials losses, and sometimes even to fatalities.

Table 6.3
Forms of conflicts among fishermen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No of conflicts with violence / confrontation</th>
<th>No of conflicts with communication breakdown</th>
<th>No of conflicts with quarrels</th>
<th>Others forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mazera</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahaï</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngoudeni</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinale</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guirvidig</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>78</strong></td>
<td><strong>90</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>35.76</td>
<td>56.93</td>
<td>65.70</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3 also shows that over 35.76% of the disputes lead to confrontation or violence between conflicting parties. This violence highlights the importance of fishery resources for the population of the floodplain and the need for a mechanism to prevent and manage these conflicts. According to the sub-district officer of Zina, fishery resources are indeed vital for many households, and a poor fishing season can destroy all the efforts of several years. The breakdown of traditional management of fishery resources has given way to uncontrolled access to resources and, consequently, increasing conflict.

Figure 6.1 shows that conflicts among the fishermen have existed for a long time, but they were more localized in certain areas such as the sub-district of Mazera. From the 1990s, these conflicts have spread all over the floodplain, with 40.90% of people surveyed confirming the existence of disputes between fishermen.
People surveyed were asked to give their opinion regarding the annual frequency of conflicts among fishermen (Figure 6.1). 65% of the respondents (from several villages of the floodplain) mention that they were involved in conflicts once a year, during the peak fishing season. In villages along the Logone River and the Logomatya River, where fishing is practiced throughout the year, the conflicts also occur throughout the year. This strong relation between conflicts on the one hand and the seasonal use of fishery resources on the other hand is further supported by the increased numbers of fishermen per fishing spot (37.72 on average) during the peak fishing season.

**Influence of reflooding of the floodplain on conflicts among fishermen**

During the interviews, people were asked to give their assessment of conflicts among fishermen before and after the partial reflooding of the floodplain undertaken by the Waza Logone Project in 1994 and 1997. Over 80% of respondents mention that the number as well as the intensity of conflicts among fishermen increased considerably after the reflooding.

During the Zina case study, participants suggested that officials involved in the Waza Logone Project encouraged the introduction of fishing permits in the floodplains. As these permits gave fishermen the right to dig fishing channels and to use any destructive fishing method, without limits, they had a
direct influence on the proliferation of unsustainable fishing practices, which is the major source of conflicts among fishermen.

6.3.2 **Main conflicts in Waza Logone floodplain over the past five years**

The respondents were asked about the conflicts they knew about in the Waza Logone floodplain over the past five years and to name the one which had the greatest impact according to them. Of the twenty-seven conflicts that were mentioned, three appear to have had the greatest impact: the conflict in Tchede village (25.47%) in 2007, the conflicts in the Zina Township (12.26%) and the conflict in Malazina village (8.50%) in 2010. Below, these three major conflicts are summarized as case studies.

**Conflict in Tchede village: conflict for the hegemony between the Kotoko and the Musgum**

The Kotoko, descendants of Sao, were the first occupants of the Waza Logone floodplain. Because of their precedence in this location, they see themselves as ‘indigenous’ and as the owners of all the natural resources (land, fish, grazing, water) in the floodplain. Traditionally, the Kotoko are fishermen and they have successfully been operating a number of fishing techniques, including channel fishing.

Several centuries after the Kotoko people arrived, the Musgum people came to the area and were (still are) considered as ‘newcomers’ by the Kotoko group. The Musgum settled in areas vacated by Kotoko. After several centuries of submission to Kotoko rule, the Musgum people began claiming property rights on certain resources, including fisheries. They often grabbed the possibility to appoint village chiefs. For many years, Musgum groups were prepared to fight with Kotoko people in order to achieve their objectives.

In 2004, the sub-district of Lahai, which had always been administered by a Kotoko chief, was claimed by the Musgum. After several consultations, the Musgum people succeeded in appointing the head of the Lahai sub-district. For the Kotoko, this was an unhappy event.

There have been a number of clashes between Kotoko and Musgum causing injuries and fatalities. A major confrontation was avoided during the official ceremony for the appointment of a newly selected head of the District of Zina (now sub-division of Zina). During this ceremony, which was attended by many people, the new Musgum chief of Lahai demonstrated insubordination and defiance against the Sultan of Logone Birni. The Sultan of Logone Birni, who belongs to the Kotoko ethnic group, is the higher traditional authority in the area and he is greatly respected. For the Kotoko community, the
chief of Lahai’s actions were a public insult. This incident further raised the
tensions between the two ethnic groups.

Subsequently, the Musgum of Lahai blocked the road through their village
to the market of Pouss for several weeks. Pouss is a big market center in the
Maga sub-division, near the Maga Lake. For several weeks, economic activ-
ities were hindered in Zina. The Musgum group, liberated by their release
from the heavy yoke of Kotoko authority, continued to carry out attacks on
several locations in the floodplain. According to some of the people inter-
viewed, they had support from certain political authorities and other Mus-
gum people coming from Chad.

In 1997-1998, a conflict had already created tensions between fishermen
from Tchede village and those from Soufna village. The dispute centred on the
control of waterholes at the periphery of the Waza National Park. Through
the intervention of the local government, the conflict was resolved by assign-
ing a waterhole to each community. However, due to the fact that the water-
hole inside the Waza National Park is government property where officially
no fishing activity is allowed, there is no formal possibility to share this water-
hole among the riparian communities.

The Musgum, pursuing their goal of liberation, continued their prepara-
tion and mobilization. To prepare the clash, a group of Musgum fighters were
installed inside the Waza National Park. In Tchede village, young people were
advised to fish in groups and carry weapons with them in order to defend
themselves against any attacks. During the 2006-2007 period, when tensions
between the Kotoko and Musgum communities became inflamed in response
to previous events, some Musgum fishermen from Soufna village destroyed
several Malian traps, belonging to Kotoko fishermen from Tchede village, that
were installed along the Tchikam waterhole (this waterhole is located inside
the Waza National Park). One morning in 2007, a Kotoko fisherman was at-
tacked by a group of Musgum fishermen inside the park. Since fishing was
done in groups, the other members of the group came to help their ‘brother’.
The confrontation ended with one Kotoko fisherman seriously wounded and
one Musgum fisherman dead. For the Musgum, this confrontation was ‘the
straw that broke the camel’s back’ and consequently the Musgum mobilized
some 3,500 of their people and attacked the Kotoko inhabitants of Tchede vil-
lage (Zina police chairman, personal communication).

For many hours, the Kotoko people of Tchede village defended themselves
against Musgum fighters. However, their numbers were not enough to hold
them off.

No precautions had been taken by the local government to prevent this
event, and the handful of policemen (i.e. a maximum of ten) that were pre-
sent in the area did not have the power or the means to handle the situation.
The nearest policemen base in Zina Township did not have the possibility to rapidly intervene either, since the area was flooded during the time of the conflict (December-January). As roads are largely inaccessible during this period and communications are hampered, headquarters in Kousseri or in Maroua could not be reached. It took two days for reinforcements to arrive, only after a policeman walked on foot through the water to alert the security authorities.

This conflict caused significant damage. In addition to the loss of life (officially eight people died in the conflict), some 80 to 90 houses were burned down, approximately 1,000 animals (cattle, goats, sheep and donkeys) were stolen or killed, and large quantities of fish were plundered. The total monetary loss is estimated at about 95 million FCFA (€ 144,827), according to the local government.

Besides material losses, there were social consequences, including trauma and injuries. Moreover, the elderly, women and children, desperate to escape the clashes, had to take refuge in the bush for four days. The children lost an entire school year because the teacher, traumatized by the fighting, never returned to the village.

Since this conflict took place, there have been no common activities between the two villages. Even by 2011, four years after the conflict, the trade between the two villages was still not re-instated.

In order to reconcile the two communities and restore peace in the area, many interventions have taken place. After the clashes that took place in Tchikam (WNP), the sub-divisional officer, the security authorities (police and gendarmes) and other dignitaries from Zina visited both Tchede and Soufna villages to try to calm the opposing parties and encourage them to resolve their dispute through negotiation. The divisional officer of the Logone and Chari division, the Governor of the Far North region and the Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization visited the affected populations in an attempt to calm them down and seek solutions to the dispute. A commission was established to evaluate the damage and to compensate victims. It was decided to provide assistance to the people who lost everything in Tchede village through some 100 kg of sorghum, two lengths of cloth, seven pieces of soap, 7.5 liters of oil and 50,000 FCFA (€ 75), that were given to each family.

The Cameroon Red Cross has also provided support to the victims. They supplied each household with two lengths of cloth, two pieces of soap, kitchen materials (two pots, one bucket, one cup, four plates), four blankets, a package of 100 hooks, a mattress, 20 liters of oil, 50 kg of sorghum, 50 kg of maize and three sets of clothes for the children of the families. Financial support to the victims came in the form of three million FCFA (€ 4,573), which was raised by relatives and acquaintances.
The governmental commission evaluated the total compensation at 95 million FCFA (€ 144,827); however, until now, many people are still waiting for this compensation.

Despite many interventions, there has not yet been any real reconciliation between the two ethnic groups in the Tchede and Soufna villages and at the level of the floodplain. Although the distrust between the two ethnic groups seems to be ever present, people believe reconciliation efforts by the Sultan of Logone Birni might eventually be successful.

**Conflict in Malazina village: Conflict over sharing fishery resources in the same village**

Malazina Village, known as a conflict-ridden village, especially between 2008 and 2010, is a large village divided into several quarters, which have gradually become autonomous in their own right. Each quarter has its own Blama (the traditional chief of the village). Musgum fishermen from the same ethnic group claim the management of a portion of the Logomatya River that is abundant in fish. In 2009, Musgum people from Malazina North and some from Malazina Centre clashed, resulting in four injured and financial losses that were estimated at nearly three million FCFA (€ 4,573).

Below, I will present three different views of the same conflict: the first is the view of the inhabitants of Malazina North; the second is the view of a number of people from Malazina Centre; and the third describes the view expressed in an interview with a local mediator, known as Dangui David, from outside the village.

**View of Malazina North, including their Blama (B. Harouna)**

For 17 years, the population of Malazina (who are all Musgum) was a peaceful fishing community, until a dispute arose five years ago within the village. Tensions, due to the fact that people from Malazina North are considered as ‘newcomers’, while a number of the inhabitants of Malazina Centre are seen as ‘indigenous’, would have served as the major trigger.

In the beginning, the population of Malazina Centre sought to appropriate definitively the waterholes that provide important quantities of fish each year. As the conflict escalated and became serious, the sub-district chief of Guirvidig was informed, but his intervention was unsuccessful. The local government set up a commission to better understand the conflict and propose an equitable solution. Members of the commission conducted a field visit in order to assess the conflict and hold discussions with the people involved. The commission proposed that the village would choose a date on which the fishermen of both opposing quarters would all fish together, in the presence of the local government members. Both parties agreed on a date, yet the people
from Malazina North were fundamentally against the sharing of resources in the first place.

In early 2010 the two groups clashed. Four people were injured and the local government decided to forbid fishing activities at this waterhole. However, the Blama of Malazina Centre ignored the ban and started to use the waterhole for his own fishing activities. In doing so, he amassed more than two million FCFA (€ 3,049) to line his own pocket.

**View of inhabitants of Malazina Centre, including their Blama (B. Brahim)**
The population of Malazina Centre has lived on the site for over a century. Those who came later, settled in the North and South of Malazina, in the year 1980. There are four waterholes in the village, each more or less corresponding to the village divisions. Fishing activities in each of the waterholes had always been organized according to the divisions, but due to a decrease in productivity of ‘their’ waterhole, the people from Malazina North wanted to start sharing fish from the waterhole of Malazina Centre, which was more productive. The first manifestations of conflict started in 2007 and were initially limited to quarrels and public insults, but eventually escalated in 2010 when a serious confrontation between the two groups took place.

Several conflict resolution initiatives, including interventions by friends, traditional authorities, as well as the local government, could not persuade the disputing parties to settle their disagreement.

The divisional officer of Mayo Danay eventually set up a commission in an attempt to solve the conflict. In addition to a ‘joint fishing day’ during which the parties would fish together, the commission suggested that catches should be divided into four parts: one part to finance children’s education (school), one part for Malazina North people and two parts for Malazina Centre people. Malazina North was not happy with this proposition; they tried to bribe the President of the commission who is the sub-divisional officer of Maga sub-division with an amount of 720,000 FCFA (€ 1,097). When one day the fishermen from Malazina North came to harvest the waterhole outside the agreed hours, they were intercepted by people from Malazina Centre and the resulting confrontation resulted in injuries.

**View of a neutral and external person (David Bangui), who was involved as a mediator in the resolution of this conflict**
This conflict started ten years ago with a dispute over traditional authority. Malazina North and South, which have been under the authority of the Blama of Malazina Centre for a long time, sought independence. They received support from a local influential person, the Mayor of Maga.
The problem of leadership quickly transformed into a conflict over the control of the most productive waterholes in the village. The population of Malazina North wanted to participate in the harvesting of the waterholes owned by Malazina Centre. In 2009, the population of Malazina North used its power and relations to get the exclusive right to fish in this waterhole. When they wanted to repeat the same scenario in 2010, there was a confrontation between the two communities. This confrontation resulted in four people being injured, two on each side. Injuries were minor for those from Malazina Centre, but the two people from Malazina North were seriously hurt. They were transferred to a hospital in Maga and then to Maroua, the regional capital of the Far North.

Several attempts to resolve the conflict took place but without success. In addition to mediation attempts by friends from nearby villages, there was an intervention by traditional authorities and local government (sub-divisional officer of Maga and the divisional officer of Mayo-Danay). In 2011 the local government proposed that the waterhole be fished by the residents of Malazina Centre but that the fishery products should be divided into four equal parts. One part should be for the school, one part for Malazina North and two parts for Malazina Centre. However, this solution has never really taken effect because of the violence. The head of Malazina Centre, who was always open to negotiation, is now very reluctant because of the confrontation. At the time of the interview (2011) the case was still in court in the Kousseri, Logone et Chari division headquarters.

The conflict is now latent, but the people of Malazina North have lost a great deal and are still unsatisfied, so the conflict could flare up again, especially once the fishing season gets underway.

**Conflict in Zina village: conflict between rich (channels owners) and poor fishermen**

In the past, fish was abundant and there were hardly any conflicts between fishermen in Zina village. Common fishing activities were peaceful and everyone could find fish to satisfy their needs. Between 2001 and 2007 conflicts between the owners of fishing channels and the other fishermen started to occur much more frequently. Owners of fishing channels are considered to be rich people who harvest a considerable part of the catchable fish, using labor and intensive fishing materials. Compared to the past, when fish was consumed locally, most of the catch is now intended for external markets. Poor people are claiming to have no alternatives for generating an income and accuse fishing channel owners of monetizing the local economy and thus further impoverishing those who are already poor.
Although the problem regarding the polarization of fishing rights gradually aggravated with the expansion of fishing channel fisheries, the conflict has always been mainly restricted to quarrels or a breakdown in communications. Whenever a conflict arises, the people of Zina village prefer negotiations and almost always reach a resolution after preliminary discussions.

Although different in their intensity and solution, the three cases of conflicts over fishery resources discussed above highlight the importance of social conflicts in the Waza Logone floodplain. Fish is a vital resource for the people of this area and its control is a critical factor for every community, even within the same ethnic group.

6.3.3 Conflict actors and roots

**Actors**

Based on our sample population, stakeholders in conflicts can be divided into two groups: fishermen and other stakeholders. The group of fishermen includes four categories: fisherman-farmers, fulltime fishermen, migrant-fishermen and fish sellers (Figure 6.2).

![Figure 6.2](image)

Types of actors involved in conflicts within fishers groups (n=143)

These categories of fishermen do not have the same interests and the same range of activities. As a result of their strong presence in the sample (50.30%)
and their complex fishing materials, the fulltime professional fishermen appear to be more significant, in terms of the extent to which conflicts are related to fishery resources, compared to other categories. Moreover, for this category of fishermen, fishing is the main source of revenue. Because of the increase in the commercialization of fish, due to the strong demand coming from Nigeria, fishermen started to improve existing fishing methods, such as the fishing channels. They actively invest in them and are also digging new channels while maintaining the old ones. Owners of fishing channels now have ‘exclusive’ rights and deprive the ‘small’ fishers of accessibility to fishery resources.

Second to the fulltime fishermen as actors in conflicts are the migrant fishermen (20.10%). They come from surrounding villages during the intensive fishing period and share fishing spots with resident fishermen. The migrant fishers are accompanied by all their active family members, even children of school age. In the intensive fishing period, there are twice as many migrant fishermen as there are resident fishermen.

In addition to these main actors, an additional four external actors have been identified; these include neighbors, traditional leaders, political leaders and officials of the local government (Figure 6.3).

![Figure 6.3](image)

External actors involved in fishing conflicts (n=143)

For several years, the villages sharing the same waterholes have attempted to establish a system of community management of resources. The revenues generated are used to implement social and community projects. For various
reasons, the sharing of resources sometimes creates conflicts between neighboring villages (59.4%). Claims of ownership then arise between the villages.

To ease tensions between the villages, the local government has suspended the use of several community waterholes. In 2009-2010, this was the case with waterholes in the villages of Davagan/Patmangaï and Tchoukouf/Soufna.

According to 34.4% of respondents, traditional leaders are the main antagonists in fisheries conflicts in the floodplain. Traditional leaders, who are supposed to represent the collective interests, sometimes take decisions based on their personal interests. They sometimes use the revenues generated by the fishery resources to appropriate the waterhole with the support of the local government for example.

Political leaders also sometimes use conflicts related to fishery resources to achieve their goals. According to the administrative and municipal authorities, the violent conflict that took place in 2007 in Tchede Village is an example of this. The support given by political leaders to a certain ethnic group (e.g. Kotoko/Musgoum in the case of the Tchede Village conflict) is expected to be rewarded by a massive alignment of voters behind their candidacy. Some of the interviewed stakeholders (i.e. heads of the fishing center, responsible for fisheries in the Sultanate of Logone Birni) further concur that conflicts over fishery resources constitute an illegal but important source of revenue for the local government of the floodplain. Considerable sums are often paid by the parties in conflict to the authorities in order to generate their support. Moreover, since 2007, the local government has decided to suspend a number of waterholes at high risk of conflict.

**Causal factors of conflicts related to fishery resources**
The results summarized in Figure 6.4 indicate the main causal factors in terms of conflicts over resources in the Waza Logone floodplain according to the respondents. Ten causes of varying degrees of importance have been identified.

Practically, all causes are linked to natural resources, with competition over fish stocks (66.43%) being the main contributing factor, followed by the decline of fishery resources (54.34%). The ownership of fishing spots (37.76%) and the propagation of fishing channels (36.36%) are also predominant causal factors. Other relevant factors include human population growth (20.07%), and lack of respect for rules (14%). Attenuation of the authority by traditional leaders (3.5%), manipulation by politicians (2.1%), and lack of alternative (0.7%) are less often considered as a source of conflict.
6.4 Discussion

Although conflict is inherent in any society, its amplification and its intensification in the Waza Logone floodplain in recent years has had serious effects on natural resources and on the people living there. Despite numerous studies conducted in the floodplain, reliable and subjective inside-information on the impacts of these conflicts is still limited, and policy makers as well as other development actors are reluctant to adequately act on any information that is available.

My results show that in some areas (i.e. Lahai and Guirvidig), respondents were involved in disputes more frequently. This confirms the statements of the administrative and technical authorities in Zina who believe that these areas constitute pockets of conflict and should merit special attention. The village of Malazina is divided into two parts. One part belongs to the Maga sub-division and the other to the Zina sub-division. This administrative incoherence is a key factor impacting social cohesion in the village and is a reflection of the general understanding that common activities and decisions are always difficult to make and to follow up.
Despite the existence of mechanisms that aim to prevent conflicts between users of natural resources, the number of conflicts in the Waza Logone floodplain has not decreased. On the contrary, conflicts are increasing, have become more violent and increasingly involve multiple stakeholders (Loth, 2004). The Waza Logone floodplain has become an area of conflict between different users of the resources available in the area. Often perceived as inter-ethnic rivalries between Musgum and Kotoko, these conflicts occur in all seasons of the year and most often take place in the territory of the sub-division of Zina and Maga, or sometimes in the sub-division of Logone region-Birni. From the turn of the century, conflicts have resulted in permanent disabilities for a number of people, and even multiple losses of human life. They have also led to the imprisonment of more than a hundred individuals (ACEEN, 2007).

In addition to the four major factors that have been identified to cause conflicts (competition for fish stocks, declining of fish stocks, ownership of space and inequity in sharing fish production and propagation of fishing channels), institutional failure must also be considered as a substantial initiator of conflict. Conflicts resulting from the attenuation of the local traditional power constitute a great deal of the conflicts related to access to fishery resources.

The traditional Kotoko fishermen have lost their supremacy over fishing rights to the benefit of the Musgum ethnic group (Van Est, 1999). This situation has led to human exclusion and the explosion of fishing channels (Loth, 2004).

6.4.1 Conflicts and their manifestation

Our findings confirm the results of previous studies (Mvondo et al., 2003; Loth, 2004; Scholte, 2005), in that agro-pastoral conflicts and conflicts between farmers are less significant than conflicts among fishermen. This can be explained by the fact that agriculture and animal husbandry are both highly localized and seasonal activities in the area, while fishing is practiced widely and more intensive.

My findings reflect those of Sighomnou and Naah (1997), in terms of the impact of reflooding tests in the Waza Logone floodplain; the massive return of people that had fled the desiccation during the 1980s, led to a rapid growth of the population and consequently to increased competition over fishery resources. Some areas that were once abandoned have been reclaimed and fishing practices did not only become more frequent and intensive, the methods and gear that were used by fishermen were replaced for new ones or adapted to become more effective, as was for instance the case with fishing channels and Malian traps. Mitigation measures, which were implemented to limit the
access to fishery resources while at the same promoting their sustainable use, have clearly been inadequate.

6.4.2 Causal factors and actors

Competition over fishery resources

It is generally agreed that fish in the Waza Logone floodplain is a vital resource and that fishing has always been a subsistence activity. While a bad fishing harvest could critically affect a household for the rest of the year (sub-divisional officer of Zina personal communication, 2010), a good fishing season significantly improves the lives of all household members (Mvondo et al., 2003).

Today, money from community fisheries is also used to satisfy other needs (socio-cultural events, marriages, baptisms, etc.), to improve local infrastructure and for the acquisition of better and faster means of transport. The latter two measures have been deployed to better conserve fresh fish and to limit decay during its transport to larger cities such as Maroua in the South or Kousseri in the North. Also, such measures should protect transported goods from bandits (known locally as coupeurs de route) who are involved in ambushing traders returning from the market (Saibou, 2010).

Declining fish stocks

Due to the high demand for fish, associated to the strong human population growth and the increased demand for fish for the Nigerian market, fish has become a valuable commodity. People utilize all gear and fishing techniques available to enable them to catch as much fish as possible. As a result, conflicts were frequently reported (37.76%) to have been caused by issues over the appropriation of fishing spots (waterholes, river beds) and the unequal distribution of fish caught in the communitarian waterholes. This was particularly true for conflicts between fishermen in the sub-district of Lahai, where people from certain (sections of) villages appropriate the waterholes for their own interests.

This aspect of bad governance is a typical aspect of Cameroonian society. At every level of responsibility, people in charge of common affairs often primarily focus on their own interests. Inequity and injustice are present at every stage of the decision-making process. This kind of mis-governance and unreliable leadership, as shown by Colletta et al. (2001), provides the context for permanent conflicts.

Although such fraudulent affairs are generally linked to local authorities or political actors, local NGOs, such as ACEEN (Association pour la Conservation et l’Education Environnementale) and ACORD (Association for
Cooperative Operations Research and Development) could also potentially become stakeholders to either side of a conflicting situation. These organizations strengthen the capacity of the local community by elaborating new rules for fisheries management and are lobbying for more investment in the Waza Logone floodplain in order to create alternative revenues for the population and for themselves.

**Propagation of fishing channels**
Fishing channels contribute to increased conflicts, not only between fishermen, but also between fishermen and farmers (see also Chapter 5). The jealousy that results from better profits generated by some, while leaving others deprived from a good catch, has led to many conflicts in the area (Figure 6.6).

**Fisheries' regulations**
According to those interviewed (14%), some conflicts could have been avoided if existing regulations in the fishing sector were observed. In the past, traditional leaders played an important role in the control of fishing activities, including the prohibition of illegal fishing gear. Nowadays, the traditional regulations over fishery resources have been compromised according to the fishermen. The Technical Fishing Centre, which should ensure compliance with existing regulations, does not have the power to enforce the law and is generally facing resistance from fishermen if it tried to do so. They are said to sometimes even bribe authorities and to often seek the support of elites (Heads of the fishing centers in Mazera and Evie, 2010). This lack of reinforcement and general mismanagement by authorities has also been reported for other developing countries (e.g. Bennett et al., 2001 in relation to fishing conflicts in Ghana, Bangladesh and the Caribbean).

**Ethnic differences**
Although not a major determining factor in conflict situations, ethnic differences are still sometimes considered to be the cause of conflicts between fishermen (11.9% of those interviewed). Studies on the floodplain (Loth 2004 and Mvondo et al., 2003) and the interviews we conducted with the local government and the responsible person in charge of the fisheries sector in the Sultanate of Logone Birni (2010) confirm this. Especially the relation between the Kotoko (who claim to have made great sacrifices to keep fishery resources for many years) and the Musgum (who feel victimized by the traditional rule of the Kotoko for several centuries) is still subject to a lot of tension. Nevertheless, the advent of the democratic system and the numerical dominance of Musgum have partly changed some of the political, social and economic conditions, and the Musgum seem to start liberating themselves from the Kotoko ‘yoke’.
Attenuation of the authority of traditional leaders

The conflicts between Musgum and Kotoko have contributed to the weakening of the authority by traditional leaders over the use of natural resources in general, and fisheries in particular. Access to fishery resources became free and rather disorganized, promoting the development of certain illegal fishing gear, other forbidden practices and exclusive ownership of waterholes. This downward spiral of events has, in turn, increased the potential for conflict in the area.

Political manipulation

As is the case in other societies where poverty is pervasive and democracy is weak, authorities tend to act more often for their own benefit than for the common cause (Borrini-Fayerabend et al., 2004). The conflict in the village of Tchede, which quickly developed into ethnic rivalry, has been an illustrative example of the intervention of political leaders in the emergence of conflicts over fishery resources. During the conflict, politicians were backed up by the ruling party to negotiate with ‘their population,’ something that gives them power and a good image. They then used this power to promise better livelihoods for the population.

6.5 Conclusion

Conflicts among fishermen is the most prevalent type of conflict in the Waza Logone floodplain, and more than 50% of those surveyed have been involved at least once every year in a conflict between fishermen. These conflicts between fishermen manifest themselves in the form of quarrels, communication breakdown and violence/confrontation between the opposing parties. Over 50% of disputes usually end in violence between belligerents. The reflooding undertaken by the IUCN Waza-Logone Project, in order to restore the functions of the floodplain and to reduce the intense competition for fish, has had the opposite effect in terms of conflict frequency and intensity. The little attention paid to social aspects during the implementation of the project has contributed to increasing conflicts between fishermen.

The fishermen, neighbors from surrounding villages, traditional authorities, political leaders and local government are the main actors behind conflicts between fishermen in the Waza Logone floodplain. For fishermen, the competition for fishery resources, population growth, declining fish stocks, increasing fishing channels, ownership of land (waterholes and river bed) and lack of respect for existing regulations are the main causes of these conflicts.