

Waging Peace One Dispute at a Time

Resolving Conflict with Nonviolent Peacforce's Early Warning/Early Response Council

On April 24, 2019, after receiving reports from civilians in the community of the presence of Mundari cattle keepers in Madiba and high tensions between the Mundari and the host community, the NP Mundri team met with the commissioner of Mundri Town to gain further insight into the situation and the potential for the escalation of conflict between the two groups. The armed cattle keepers were refusing to leave Madiba due to contentions over compensation for the death of four Mundari cattle at the hands of Madiba youth in revenge for the destruction of their crops and farmland in September 2018. Though the case was heard in court and the cattle keepers were ordered to pay compensation to the farmers for the destroyed crops, the Mundari maintained their demands that the four killed cows be repaid with twenty cows from the community. Therefore, no agreement was reached, and the case was eventually dismissed. Given tensions between farmers and cattle keepers throughout greater Mundri and the risk of escalation into violence, the team decided to delve into the issue in an attempt to bring peaceful resolution to the conflict. On April 23, the NP team conducted a patrol to Madiba to confirm the presence of cattle keepers in Madiba territory and learned of the Madiba youth's plan to fight the cattle keepers if they refused to leave. NP team advised the community chief and members of the EWER council (established by NP in 2018) to summon a community meeting to discuss nonviolent ways of resolving this conflict.



The Madiba EWER group during its initial trainings by NP in September 2018

On May 8, 2019, the team met with the early warning/early response (EWER) group in Madiba to conduct a conflict analysis session. During the conflict analysis activity, the EWER group discussed the issues of cattle migration which they saw as a potential trigger for violence. Almost every participant expressed their anger about the movement of Mundari cattle on their land and the destruction it caused to their crops. They also blamed the government for inaction and voiced their thoughts about potentially confronting these armed cattle keepers. The community was concerned about their ability to cultivate the land for the

upcoming rainy season as well as their ability to supplement their diets and ameliorate food insecurity given the threats they received from the cattle keepers when they went into the bush for hunting, gathering firewood, and collecting honey, wild vegetables, and fruits. If the cattle keepers did not leave soon, participants reported that members of the community could use guns to fight against the cattle keepers.

However, one of the participants stressed that NP has supported them in finding nonviolent ways to prevent and reduce the impact of violence in the past. The group decided to take the necessary steps to conduct a dialogue with the mayor and commissioner of Mundri as well as chiefs of the Mundari. As a response, a committee of 12 members, comprised of both men and women, was formed to represent the interests of the community and they asked NP to serve as observers during the dialogue. They said if the dialogue with the commissioner did not work, they planned to bring the issue to the deputy governor and then to the governor. As a result, the conflict analysis session created an avenue for the Madiba community to analyse their situation and plan for the necessary steps to prevent the escalation of conflict into violence.

On the morning of May 17, the day of the community-led-initiative meeting, the chief of Madiba was threatened by two Mundari cattle keepers. Therefore, NP accompanied ten of the members of the EWER group from Madiba to Mundri town for the meeting to ensure the safety of the participants. This is the first time a dialogue meeting was called between the Mundari cattle keepers and the Madiba community. During the dialogue, the community, the Mundari chiefs, the mayor, and the commissioner all presented their views. At the end of the dialogue, the chief of the cattle keepers said they would leave the community on May 28 but also mentioned that, due to the death of the four cattle in September 2018, the Mundari youth may be unwilling to leave until they received compensation. The commissioner urged the Mundari cattle keepers to respect the resolution reached and move with their cattle on the stated date. Meanwhile the Mundari chiefs should nominate two or three people from the Mundari community to follow up the case of the four cattle. The commissioner further promised to hire a motorbike to transport the Mundari chief to the cattle camp so that he could join and mobilize his colleagues to move away from the community with the cattle.

The women representatives of the EWER group commented that they were happy with the outcome of the meeting and they encouraged cooperation and patience among the two communities during times of misunderstanding. The women also gave credit to NP for mentoring them to advocate their concerns without fear during public events and formal meetings.

Despite these positive steps forward, the tensions between the Mundari cattle keepers and the host community is not yet resolved. The cattle keepers stayed past the date negotiated; however, there has been indications that local authorities have heard and are responding to the needs of the community in regard to this issue more than before. Further, this dialogue session demonstrates that the community thought of the nonviolent option as the first and primary option supported by the trainings and workshops provided by NP. Though there will likely be continued difficulties between farmers and cattle keepers in this area, through continued capacity building, advocacy, and relationship building with local stakeholders, the Madiba community will be more likely to utilize nonviolent means to resolve intra and intercommunal conflict in the future. As one man said during the dialogue, “we Moru people do not first resolve disputes through violent means, we embrace peaceful dialogue because we want to maintain peace in our community.”