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Attitude of Community Members Towards the Capacity of the Village Land Councils in Managing Land Use Conflicts between Farmers and Pastoralists in Tanzania: A Cross Sectional Case Study Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Village Land Councils have been established to resolve land use conflicts in rural Tanzania. The history reveals that Tanzania has been mostly affected with the endless land based conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. The presence of VLCs in rural Tanzania has brought significant changes in rural areas where farmers and pastoralists compete to utilize and possess scarce resources. However, rural dwellers have different opinions on the worthiness of the respective local organs in resolving land use conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. This study therefore intended to explore attitudes from the community members towards the capacity of the Village Land Councils in managing land use conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, where a semantic differential scale was used as the appropriate tool for exploring attitudes from the respondents, particularly: farmers and pastoralists who mostly rely on VLCs for mediation services. NVivo software 14 was used for analyzing such data. The results indicated that majority of respondents (farmers and pastoralists) in Mbarali and Kilosa District Councils had positive attitude towards VLCs due to their performance in resolving land use conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. Similar response was obtained from the farmers operating in Tunduru District Council. However, some pastoralists in Tunduru District Councils had remained skeptical on the capacity of the VLCs to resolve conflicts and create conducive working environment for both conflicting parties. Their doubts relied on injustice practices such as corruption, nepotism and tribalism that were directly associated with VLC members. Based on the findings, the study suggests for more capacity building programs for enhancing the capacity of VLC members to act firmly and objectively and for the community members so that they develop a sense of responsibilities in supporting the VLCs' operations for the common good.

INTRODUCTION

Land is the most important resource since it accommodates various economic activities that are undertaken to boost socio-economic development by uplifting the living conditions of individual members engaged in such operations. Some of the key economic activities being hosted by the respective natural capital are livestock keeping and crop cultivation involving pastoralists and farmers respectively. However, in some places, farmers and pastoralists engage in both economic activities to raise income and attain food security at the household level.

The presence of different actors who depend on common pool resources such as land for undertaking economic activities poses the possibility of conflicts between or among them sometimes because of weak land regulating systems within the government. Such conflicts prevail because land remains to be fixed while the number of land users increases every day. There are different opinions on the ultimate sources of land use conflicts in the rural communities. According to Millanzi (2018), land use conflicts in rural Tanzania are attributed to the increased competition for productive land for crop production and pastures among the livestock keepers.

Continuation of land use conflicts affects the wellbeing of farmers, pastoralists, and entire rural communities as they destroy their properties, causing injuries and death and creating social disharmony. Wehrman et al (2008), land conflicts in Tanzania occur in two forms.

The first perspective includes conflicts between single parties. These include boundary conflicts between neighbours, inheritance conflicts and conflicts over the use of pieces of land. Such conflicts are common in Tanzania, involving smallholder farmers and other ordinary Tanzanians who mostly live in unplanned areas. The second perspective rests on conflicts that involve several parties, such as group invasions or eviction of the entire settlement, which are difficult to deal with. The first form of conflicts is common in places where majority of dwellers are smallholder farmers who rely on land as the main source of their livelihood through crop production and livestock keeping which promote food security and human development as well.

In Tanzania majority of rural people experience land use conflicts among smallholder farmers who compete to use arable land which has the highest capacity to produce various crops in high quantities (Nkonyani, 2019). The struggle for land use raises conflicts

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between farmers and pastoralists which grow up and prolong to affects more people. This occur because the respective subsectors accommodate millions of people who participate in different aspects for securing their livelihoods and promoting socio-economic development in such communities (Danilson, 2021). Occurrence and prolonged conflicts prevail because the population increase, increase in land values, weak local institutions, unclear boundaries, and inheritance (Mohammed, 2018). The decision of the Government of Tanzania to establish Village Land Councils was made to resolve land use conflicts in rural areas where farmers and pastoralists reside and operate for securing their livelihood. The respective organ consists of seven members whose task is to mediate land use disputes prevailing in their area of jurisdiction. The organ operates closely with the rural community for the sake of creating socio-economic and political harmony in the peripheries. The presence of mediation services in rural Tanzania has created different opinions among rural community members. Some rural people perceive VLCs as appropriate organs that have been established to resolve land conflicts with the purpose of creating harmony in rural communities and boosting rural economy which depend on agriculture and livestock keeping. Other rural people have negative attitude towards the respective organs, perceiving them as one of the causes for the endless conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in different parts of the country. It was expected that these mediation organs could have helped much to resolve land use conflicts in rural Tanzania and create conducive environment for the local producers to continue with production for the common good. But the actual experience from the field reveals that most of the village land councils have failed to fulfil their duties and thus paves a way for the continuation of land conflicts in the agricultural communities. It was also expected that the presence of the Village Land Councils could have encouraged farmers and pastoralists to use them as responsible local institutions for resolving conflicts that involved the respective parties in their villages. But the situation seems not to yield the expected results as land disputants skip the VLCs and use other organs such as Police and Ward Land Tribunals since they expected to access appropriate services and experience fairness in the decisions being made. Tendency of ignoring the Village Land Councils has raised several questions among researchers in Tanzania as the number of land disputants who work with the respective organs decreases. The presence of different opinions towards the capacity of Village Land Councils to resolve land use conflicts between farmers and pastoralists implies the need of undertaking a critical analysis on the attitude of community members towards the capacity of VLC in managing land use conflicts between farmers and

pastoralists by selecting cases in Tunduru, Kilosa and Mbarali District Councils.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We used a cross-sectional design that incorporated both cross-sectional and exploratory components (Creswell, 2014). This design was useful in obtaining an in-depth understanding of land use conflicts between pastoralists and farmers and the effectiveness of Village Land Councils (VLCs) in addressing disputes. The qualitative method was used to comprehend the perspectives of community members. Data was collected in three district councils, namely Mbarali in the Mbeya region, Kilosa in the Morogoro region, and Tunduru in the Ruvuma region. The three districts prevalence of conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, as well as the presence and effectiveness of Village Land Councils (NBS, 2021). All three districts have experience of land use conflicts between pastoralists and farmers (Loserian and Jeckoniah, 2018; Mwalimu and Matimbwa 2019, and Sanga 2019). The literature emphasizes the importance of examining the effectiveness of VLCs in resolving such conflicts, as highlighted by Falanta and Bengesi (2018a) and Saruni *et al.* (2018). Consequently, this study focuses on community attitudes towards VLCs.

The purposive sampling technique was used to select key informants who have either experienced witnessing or were involved in land conflicts. Villages with frequent land disputes are purposively selected, aligning with the findings from Falanta and Bengesi, 2018b and Walwa, 2020 studies on the significance of selecting information-rich cases for in-depth analysis. The key informants, including VLC members, technocrats, and local leaders who were chosen based on their expertise, drawing on the recommendations of (Van den Berg *et al.*, 2020) regarding purposive sampling in qualitative studies.

Semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) were employed to gather primary data from each proposed village within the district. The premise that qualitative techniques, like semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), allow for in-depth understanding and capture subjective assessments of attitudes, guides the selection of these methods (Creswell, 2014; Ishtiaq, 2019).

In order to include a pilot test for tool evaluation and enumerator training, the study incorporates ideas from Rahman (2020). The study uses a strong strategy to collect up-to-date and comprehensive data, building on the suggestions of Dang *et al.* (2020) regarding participant selection and data collection techniques. Qualitative methods utilisation is in line. The use of qualitative methods is consistent with the findings of studies on the efficacy of these approaches in examining intricate research problems (Askun and Cizel, 2020; Djafar *et al.*, 2021).

Table 1: Sampling proportion of Key informative in the study based on districts and key desired characteristics

District	Category	Sample	Sampling Proportion (%)
Kilosa	Farmer	6	16.67%

	Pastoralist	6	16.67%
Mbarali	Farmer	6	16.67%
	Pastoralist	6	16.67%
Tunduru	Farmer	6	16.67%
	Pastoralist	6	16.67%
Total		36	100.0%

Source: Researcher survey 2023

Data Analysis

As recommended by Ahmad *et al.* (2019), the study intends to use NVivo software for qualitative data analysis, which will facilitate coding, identify important themes, and visualise data. Inspired by (Dang *et al.*, 2020; Turner *et al.*, 2017) insights on the limitations of descriptive research design and the necessity of exploratory analysis, the analysis includes case-by-case and cross-sectional approaches. By adding insights from (Stern *et al.*, 2021) on the importance of going beyond statistical modelling in qualitative studies, the study broadens its analytical approach.

Ethical Consideration

Informed consent, protocol sensitivity, confidentiality, and other ethical issues are critical to any study (Behi and Nolan, 1995). These moral guidelines are consistent with the suggestions made by Zareef *et al.* (2021) for fostering participant and researcher trust. Respondent privacy is prioritised, which aligns with the ethical

standards delineated by Goodwin *et al.* (2020) for research investigations. The study's ethical considerations are consistent with the guidelines for maintaining participant and researcher trustworthiness that have been covered by Burgess *et al.* (2023) and Stommel and Rijk (2021). The dedication to privacy and confidentiality is consistent with the ethical guidelines for using human subjects in research (Ryen, 2004).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary Analysis

We conducted a preliminary analysis of age, cattle numbers, field experience, household size, and land area to get important insights on demographic and contextual characteristics of farmers and pastoralists from the studied districts. The aim was to determine how the local people feel about the ability of Village Land Councils in resolving land use disputes between farmers and pastoralists. The results is as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Socio-economic characteristics of farmers and pastoralist in the study (n=36)

Variables	District	Mean	Maximum	Minimum	Standard Deviation
Age	Kilosa	45.08	54	30	7.43
	Mbarali	44.25	54	28	7.59
	Tunduru	46.17	56	35	6.56
Number of Cattle	Kilosa	229.17	800	0	301.86
	Mbarali	125.00	400	0	146.94
	Tunduru	300.00	1000	0	381.39
Experience in the Field (years)	Kilosa	22.42	34	6	8.46
	Mbarali	21.08	31	7	8.38
	Tunduru	22.17	38	8	10.98
Household size	Kilosa	8.83	15	3	3.49
	Mbarali	8.42	14	4	3.06
	Tunduru	7.92	13	4	2.68
Land size (acres)	Kilosa	3.67	7	2	1.30
	Mbarali	3.50	6	2	1.17
	Tunduru	4.50	8	2	1.98

Source: Researcher survey 2023

The average age of participants in Kilosa, Mbarali, and Tunduru districts is 45.08, 44.25, and 46.17 years, respectively, with an age range spanning from 28 to 56 years. The standard deviation offers valuable information regarding the spread of ages within each district. These results indicate that the surveyed population is generally

older, potentially influencing their viewpoints on land use disputes. Prior studies (Flintan, 2020) have demonstrated that age can significantly impact the attitudes and decision-making behaviours of individuals, particularly within rural settings.

Participants in the Kilosa, Mbarali, and Tunduru districts possess an average tenure of 22.42, 21.08, and 22.17 years, respectively. The range of experience spans from 7 to 38 years. This variation in the level of experience may impact individuals' comprehension of land use matters and their capacity to manage disputes. A study conducted by Falanta and Bengesi (2018) underscores the importance of practical knowledge in resolving land use conflicts within heterogeneous community groups. The average cattle ownership among participants in Kilosa, Mbarali, and Tunduru districts is 229.17, 125.00, and 300.00, respectively. The wide range between the maximum and minimum values demonstrates substantial diversity in cattle ownership. This diversity in cattle possession aids to evaluate the potential effects of conflicts on livelihoods. Mlekwa (2018) has emphasized the significance of livestock ownership in influencing

attitudes and behaviours within agricultural and pastoralist communities.

The average land size in Kilosa, Mbarali, and Tunduru districts is 3.67, 3.50, and 4.50 acres, respectively. Differences in land size can have an impact on the severity of conflicts, especially in regions with limited resources. A study by Awinia (2020) suggests that disparities in land size contribute to conflicts and emphasizes the importance of effective management by local authorities. The mean household size in the districts of Kilosa, Mbarali, and Tunduru is 8.83, 8.42, and 7.92, respectively. The household size dynamics signify that households may possess distinct requirements and viewpoints regarding land administration. Mwalimu and Matimbwa (2019) propose that household size can impact the utilization patterns of resources and potentially lead to conflicts among diverse user groups.

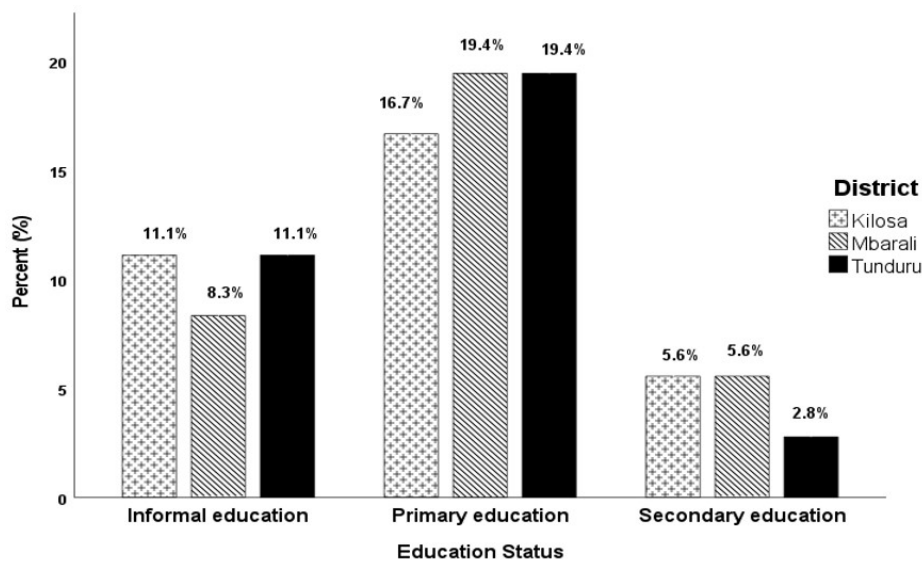


Figure 1: Education level of pastoralist and farmers in the study (n=36)

In terms of participants' education levels, many individuals in each district have received primary education, as depicted in Figure 1. The frequency distribution indicates that Tunduru and Mbarali have the highest percentage of members with primary education at 19.4%, followed by Kilosa at 16.7%. Variations in education level can influence the intensity of conflicts, particularly in areas with a shortage of skilled personnel. Sanga (2019) suggests that differences in knowledge

can lead to conflict and underscores the importance of empowering individuals with knowledge.

Altitude of Pastoralists and Farmers on VLCs Capacity

In gauging the sentiments of the community members towards Village Land Councils (VLCs), a prevailing trend emerges where farmers generally exhibit more optimistic views compared to pastoralists.

Table 3: Statements used in gauging the community members perception on VLC effectiveness

S/N	Statements
1	Village Land Councils have the capacity to manage land use conflicts between farmers and pastoralists.
2	Village Land Councils' offices have equipped with necessary facilities that enable their clients to access proper services.
3	The institutional procedures being applied by the Village Land Councils are relevant to farmers and pastoralists.
4	VLC members have sufficient knowledge and skills to manage land use disputes in your community.
5	VLC members can perform their duties fairly for the common good.

6	VLC members possess integrity in undertaking their daily operations.
7	VLC members represent both farmers and pastoralists and work for the interest of both parties.
8	Village Land Councils have developed sustainable strategies in resolve land use conflicts between farmers and pastoralists.
9	VLCs are the only institutions that can resolve land use conflicts between farmers and pastoralists.

Farmers often express confidence in the capacity of VLCs, as one respondent stated, "I believe Village Land Councils can effectively manage conflicts between us and pastoralists."

(P1, Farmer, Kilosa)

However, pastoralists, on the other hand, express scepticism, with sentiments like,

"Village Land Councils lack the ability to handle our land use conflicts adequately".

(P4, Farmer, Kilosa)

The attitudes of farmers and pastoralists towards the capacity of Village Land Councils (VLCs) across Tunduru, Kilosa, and Mbarali districts unveil several recurring themes. Notably, concerns about corruption within VLCs, perceptions of bias towards certain groups, inadequacies in transparency, and challenges related to political interferences and poor working environments emerge as the predominant themes (Mlekwa, 2018). Both groups express concerns about VLCs operating under pressure from higher government authorities and local political leaders, influencing their ability to perform impartially.

Quoting a farmer from Mbarali District,

"VLCs have the potential to resolve conflicts, but there is a need for more transparent procedures and a concerted effort to involve pastoralists in decision-making."

(P2, Farmer, Mbarali)

The statement captures the overarching theme of

transparency and inclusivity, emphasizing the necessity for VLCs to enhance procedural clarity and involve all stakeholders. Farmers commonly express optimism about VLCs' potential, highlighting the need for fairness and inclusivity, while pastoralists often convey scepticism, underscoring feelings of exclusion and concerns about the political influences on VLCs (Mwalimu & Matimbwa, 2019).

In contrast, quoting a pastoralist from Tunduru District, "VLC members often ignore pastoralists' contributions, creating a perception of exclusion and hindering effective conflict resolution."

(P6, Pastoralist, Tunduru)

This statement reflects the prevalent theme of perceived exclusion, indicating the urgency for VLCs to address issues of representation and inclusivity.

Relating to the Goodness and Weakness of VLCs across Districts

The goodness and weakness of VLCs across districts are discerned through these main themes. The recurrent themes of corruption, biases, and political interferences underscore significant weaknesses within VLCs, hindering their effectiveness. Conversely, the recurring theme of optimism among farmers indicates the potential goodness of VLCs when transparency, fairness, and inclusivity are prioritized as shown in Figure 2.

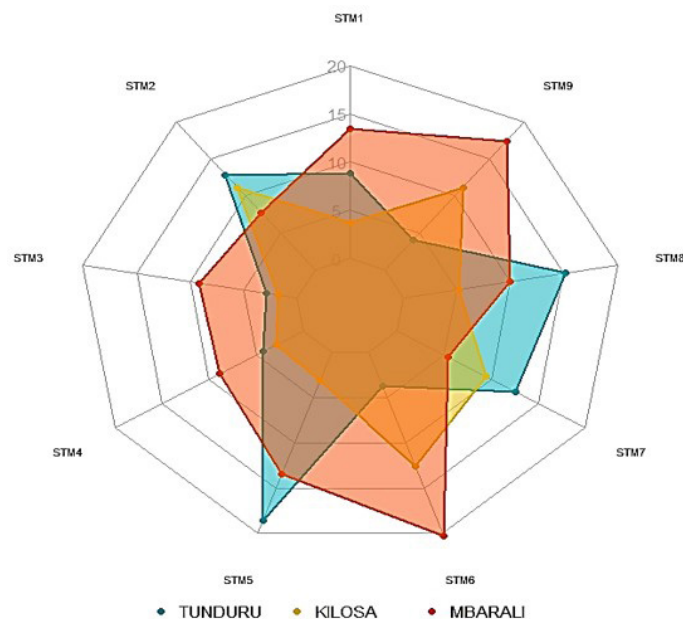


Figure 2: Radar charts displaying multivariate observations on the attitude of Pastoralist and Farmers on the effectiveness of VLC in resolving land use conflicts

Quoting a farmer from Mbarali District, "I have witnessed VLCs successfully resolve disputes through sustainable strategies, but there is room for improvement in ensuring representation of all stakeholders."

(P12, Farmer, Mbarali)

This statement encapsulates a nuanced perspective, acknowledging VLCs' successes while highlighting the need for continuous improvement. It suggests that Mbarali may be relatively well-off compared to other districts, with potential for VLCs to address shortcomings. Like the study by (Falanta & Bengesi, 2018) who revealed that regardless of the consequences of recurrent conflicts VLCs has a room for improvement.

In contrast, quoting a pastoralist from Kilosa, "VLCs often succumb to political pressures, compromising their ability to impartially resolve conflicts and leaving us, the pastoralists, with a sense of injustice."

(P12, Farmer, Mbarali)
This statement highlights a critical weakness and the vulnerability of VLCs to political pressures, which compromises their impartiality and contributes to perceptions of injustice. It captures the vulnerability of

VLCs to political influences and underscores the need for Mbarali to address external pressures for more effective conflict resolution as it has also been addressed by (Loserian & Jeckoniah, 2018).

Summarizing Districts' Status

While each district faces challenges, Kilosa demonstrates a more balanced and constructive perspective regardless of having low response level among both farmers and pastoralists, this is due to a widespread disagreement across districts, both among farmers and pastoralists, about VLCs being the sole institutions capable of resolving conflicts points to a weakness in perceived exclusivity. The acknowledgment of VLCs' potential, coupled with specific concerns, provides a foundation for improvement.

Tailoring interventions to address common themes and district-specific challenges is essential (Sanga, 2019) following the presence of variation in perception which arise the concern of different areas of improvement between districts for the effectiveness of VLCs in conflict resolution across all districts as shown in figure 3 which presents statement from Table 3.

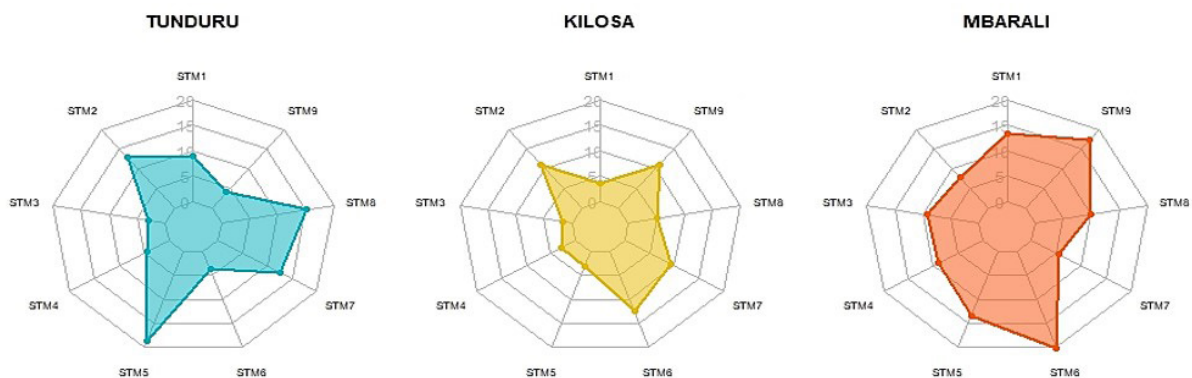


Figure 3: Radar chart showing perception of farmers and pastoralist based on VLCs capability

CONCLUSION

The exploration into the attitudes of community members toward Village Land Councils (VLCs) in managing land use conflicts has unveiled a complex tapestry of perceptions. Farmers, predominantly optimistic, stand in contrast to pastoralists who harbour reservations about the efficacy of VLCs. The divergent views underscore the intricate dynamics influencing community institutions. Beyond district-specific variations, overarching challenges emerge, suggesting the need for a holistic transformation in the operational framework of VLCs.

Bias, favouritism, political interference, and internal conflicts among VLC members persist as persistent obstacles to the effective resolution of land use conflicts. The nuanced perspectives shared by farmers and pastoralists collectively point to systemic issues that necessitate comprehensive attention. Re-shaping the role and functionality of VLCs requires a strategic approach that acknowledges and addresses these multifaceted challenges. The findings emphasize the imperative

of fostering a sense of trust and confidence in VLCs, ensuring their relevance and efficacy in serving the diverse needs of the community.

The nuanced perspectives of both farmers and pastoralists provide a rich understanding of the challenges facing Village Land Councils (VLCs) in managing land use conflicts. While farmers generally express more positive views, pastoralists' scepticism highlights crucial areas for improvement in the functioning of VLCs. The disparities in perceptions underscore the importance of acknowledging and addressing the multifaceted issues that contribute to negative attitudes within these community institutions. These findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach in reshaping the role and functionality of VLCs to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in diverse community settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the identified challenges and foster positive change within VLCs, a series of recommendations

emerges from the voices of the community members themselves. First and foremost, there is a unanimous call for comprehensive training programs to enhance the knowledge and competency of VLC members. Respondents emphasize the need for ongoing training that adapts to evolving conflict dynamics and equips members with the skills necessary for impartial mediation. Inclusivity and fair representation are key themes in the recommendations. Both farmers and pastoralists stress the importance of diverse representation within VLCs, ensuring that the interests of all community members are considered. Establishing and enforcing codes of conduct to prevent bias and favouritism is another crucial step forward, as suggested by a pastoralist respondent who stated, "Fairness should be embedded in the way VLC members operate to instil confidence among the community."

Improving the working conditions of VLCs, including providing necessary resources and facilities, is a consistent demand across responses. A farmer aptly observed, "For VLCs to function effectively, they need proper offices and facilities to carry out their duties successfully." Minimizing external interference, especially political pressures, is seen as essential to maintaining the integrity and impartiality of VLC operations.

In the long term, the community envisions VLCs that are transparent, unbiased, and capable of fostering equitable resolutions. A pastoralist respondent expressed hope, stating, "Striving for VLCs that are fair and capable of resolving conflicts is essential for the well-being of our community." These recommendations collectively form a framework for enhancing VLC effectiveness, acknowledging the voices of the community members as crucial guides in shaping the path forward.

Respondent Level

At the individual respondent level, a recurring theme centres on the imperative of continuous training and capacity-building initiatives for VLC members. The community's call for ongoing training programs that adapt to evolving conflict dynamics is a clarion call for sustained improvement. Respondents underscore the need for VLC members to be equipped not only with knowledge but also with the skills necessary for impartial mediation.

Community Level

Inclusivity and fair representation within VLCs emerge as pivotal elements in community-level recommendations. Diverse representation is seen as instrumental in ensuring that the interests of all community members, both farmers and pastoralists, are considered during conflict resolution. The establishment and enforcement of codes of conduct to prevent bias and favouritism are essential steps toward fostering an environment of fairness within VLCs.

Enhancing the working conditions of VLCs is an echoed demand at the community level. Adequate

resources and facilities, including proper offices, are viewed as prerequisites for VLCs to function effectively. Moreover, minimizing external interference, especially political pressures, is perceived as crucial to maintaining the integrity and impartiality of VLC operations. The community envisions VLCs that serve as beacons of fairness, impartiality, and community welfare. Therefore, the recommendations collectively coalesce into a comprehensive framework for enhancing VLC effectiveness, acknowledging the voices of the community members as instrumental guides in shaping the path forward.

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