



SYNTHESIS REPORT | JULY 2021

## LISTENING TO HERDERS IN WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL:

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WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR PASTORALISM  
IN A CONTEXT OF RISING INSECURITY?

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## Executive summary

Pastoralists' voices in the Sahel and West Africa are rarely heard even though they are among the most exposed to insecurity because of their mobility. This study is based on interviews with 1,898 stakeholders, including nearly 1,700 herders from 7 countries and 23 administrative regions in the Central Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) and its immediate vicinity (Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo, Nigeria). The study was initiated by the Billital Maroobé Network (BMN) to analyze how herders experience this insecurity. It clearly shows that the vast majority of herders are victims of insecurity, but a minority are involved in armed movements and have therefore become players. The result is a vicious cycle between the pastoralism and the security crisis. The pastoralism crisis in rural areas feeds the recruitment of armed groups, whose development exacerbates the violence and conflicts of which pastoralists are the first victims. Pastoralist victims of violence are, in turn, impoverished, their future darkened, and this risks further amplifying the security crisis. This study aims to chart a way out of this reinforcing security and pastoral crises.

**The present state of insecurity is part and parcel of the context which fuels it.** It is the reflection of a crisis in governance in rural Sahelian and West African areas which also constrains the mobility of pastoralists. This context provides a breeding ground for armed groups, that recruit pastoralist herders by promising to redress the many injustices they face: progressive appropriation of pastoral resources (land, water, animals) by other players (farmers, agro-businessmen, civil servants, elected officials, etc.); exposure to various types of abuse (administrative harassment, theft, rackets, etc.); and rising inequalities among pastoralists themselves with the emergence of "new pastoralists" from urban or agricultural areas. In the Sudano-Sahelian region, these injustices are structurally linked to a political land economy that is highly disadvantageous to pastoralists. These trends are not new, but they are worsening. They result in the loss of herders' livestock, but in an almost invisible manner. Since pastoralists are politically and institutionally under-represented, their voice is barely heard. This makes it impossible to fully measure the current pastoralism crisis. What is new, however, is that organized groups are using herders as tools and offering them the possibility for self-protection, justice, retaliation, or for self-enrichment through force. In the Central Sahel, the study provides many examples of how yesterday's victims or marginalized people now rule the rural territories, sometimes becoming executioners themselves.

**While some herders take up arms, the vast majority are above all victims of the pastoralism crisis and now of the security crisis.** They find themselves with no good options. They need to move around for economic reasons but when they do, they risk operating in jihadist zones and being associated or assimilated with them. If they don't move, they also risk exposing themselves to racketeering, theft, and the destruction of their livestock. Nor do they have the possibility of protecting themselves because they are not allowed to join or form self-defence groups. The traditional coping strategies are therefore no longer effective and they are forced to "make do". While most of them try to occupy a neutral position, this is difficult, if not impossible, to find. They are caught between a rock and a hard place: they are under suspicion of, and sometimes repressed by, the armed forces and self-defence groups on the one hand, and jihadists on the other. The security crisis exerts a heavy price on pastoralists. It has resulted in a drop in the number of people going to markets; the closure of some markets; an overall decline in the price of livestock; a huge increase in livestock theft; and arrests/kidnappings and executions by all armed actors.

**The counter-terrorism response has made things worse for pastoralists.** Although only a tiny minority of pastoralists have been lured away by jihadist groups, this has been enough for people to view the crisis through an ethnic perspective. This trend has had a profound effect on the way in which the fight against terrorism has been conducted, leading to abuses perpetrated by defence and security forces and self-defence groups. These groups are suspected of settling disputes - often over land - with other communities under the guise of counter-terrorism, as happened in the Centre-North and East of Burkina Faso, for example. When self-defence groups support the defence and security forces, the information they provide is often suspected of being biased, thus increasing the likelihood of abuses. The security crisis and the way in which it is addressed therefore undeniably amplify the pastoralism crisis to the point of breaking 'pastoral resilience'.

**These dual crises raise the question of the status of mobile pastoralists in states that are built around a model of sedentary societies.** This issue has a long history in the Sahel and West Africa. The abundance of legislation, mechanisms, and institutions dedicated to recognising the value of pastoral mobility shows that states have long tried to manage it. However, their response has clearly not been as effective as expected, given herders' limited attachment to official provisions and institutions. Herders express a lack of knowledge of and interest in the regulations relating to access to resources. This is compounded by the feeling that they are not heard by, and poorly defended by the institutions tasked with delivering justice through conciliation. These institutions are presumed to be biased, which undermines their legitimacy and their tools for regulating access to resources and managing conflicts.

**The vast majority of pastoralists questioned their own future and that of pastoral farming more broadly.** Pastoralism is becoming associated with problems, with some people talking about the death of mobile and transhumant farming. The reasons for hope come from their capacity and readiness to adapt, notably towards a more intensive, sometimes even sedentary, mode of livestock farming. However, many herders say they are firmly attached to mobility and are not considering another mode of production. Semi-transhumant livestock farming is an option for many farmers, when agro-ecological, political and security conditions allow it. Leaving livestock farming particularly appeals to young people seeking to migrate to urban areas and interested in trade or gold panning. However, this departure is often not definitive and does not necessarily result in an 'inter-generational divide'. Young people become socially and economically emancipated - sometimes even by taking up arms - creating tensions within families, but the children do not systematically break with their families or home territories.

**This study is not intended to make specific policy recommendations.** It rather suggests the following axes around which a crisis exit strategy could be designed, with pastoralists central to the design:

## **1. THINK ABOUT HOW TO DO THINGS AND THEIR POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES BEFORE DOING THEM**

In contexts as deteriorated as those of the study areas, the way in which things are done appears to be as important if not more so than the substance of policies and projects themselves. Through a conflict-sensitive approach, the political economy analysis of land should be central to the design of public policies as well as of development projects, to prevent them from generating more tensions or conflicts.

## **2. ADDRESS THE STRUCTURAL CAUSES OF THE PASTORALISM CRISIS IN A SUSTAINABLE MANNER**

- **Secure pastoral land tenure.** This should be based on the acceptance of local agreements between all stakeholders on the choice of infrastructure in a particular locality. Securing pastoral land also requires a holistic approach that takes into account all of the competing uses for natural resources.
- Rebalance the political economy of land tenure in favour of pastoralists. This requires better political representation and greater participation of pastoralists in local and national decision-making, to guarantee their management rights over pastoral resources. This political influence is gained through the ballot box, but also through new customary representation. This rebalancing requires improved access to legal and judicial defence for pastoralists, and more inclusive official conflict resolution mechanisms.

## **3. MANAGE THE IMPACT OF THE SECURITY CRISIS ON THE PASTORAL CRISIS**

- **Mobilise Pastoral Organisations (POs) to improve social cohesion.** POs should play a more active role in improving social cohesion, by supporting dialogue on the issue where they have legitimacy, namely on "consensual management of space and resources". Their role should be strengthened in insurgent areas where they are sometimes the only ones that can support pastoralists' livelihoods.

- **Make the Defence and Security Forces (DSF) protectors of rather than a threat to pastoralists.** This could be achieved by: allowing these stakeholders to talk to each other in order to better understand each other; by mobilising the DSF for missions to safeguard pastoral mobility or combat livestock theft; and by encouraging the integration of pastoralists into the DSF so that they feel they are fully fledged Sahelian citizens.
- **Regulate self-defence groups** by involving them in dialogue initiatives; revising their governance so that they are not made up of a single community and by sanctioning abuses which they commit.
- **Address mis-information about livestock farming** in the media and on social networks in order to reduce stereotypes and inter-community tensions.

#### **4. SUPPORT HERDERS' ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF LIVESTOCK AND PASTORALISM**

**Given that herders' aspirations are diverse, public policies must enable a plurality of possibilities when it comes to livestock farming.** This also requires making education in pastoral environments a priority by tailoring the educational opportunities to the specific characteristics of the environment.

**The future of livestock farming depends heavily on open borders and regional integration. Today, this is being called into question by states who fear security spillover from the Sahel.** It is essential that regional institutions respond to this challenge, which touches on the fundamentals of regional integration, by updating existing legislation and by being more effective in mitigating the impact of insecurity.

# Introduction

**The Sahel is going through the worst security crisis in its history.** While its economic, security, and political impacts are barely felt in the capitals, they are severe in rural areas. Since 2012, armed insurgencies have created more than two million refugees and internally displaced people from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the three countries that have been most affected by this crisis. Rural populations are both actors in and victims of this situation: actors, because a minority of them are a driving force behind these armed groups; and victims, because most of them suffer from its impacts. The current crisis is the expression of a governance crisis in rural areas, which provides fertile ground for armed groups to recruit among pastoralists. This has increased ethnic prejudices. Among other consequences, people overlook the fact that most pastoralists are doubly victimized: first, by the pastoralism crisis and second, by the security crisis, with the latter aggravating the former.

**While herders find themselves at the centre of current concerns, their voices are barely heard.** This study aims to remedy this. The Billital Maroobé Network (RBM), with the support of technical and financial partners, gathers the perceptions of more than 1,700 herders representing the full variety of profiles which the “herder” category includes. Interviews with herders were conducted in 23 administrative regions of 7 countries in Central Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) and its immediate neighbours (Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo, Nigeria). In addition, the study also collected perceptions of farmers, local elected officials, technical services, and members of self-defence groups, forest guards and the military. A total of 1898 individuals were interviewed.

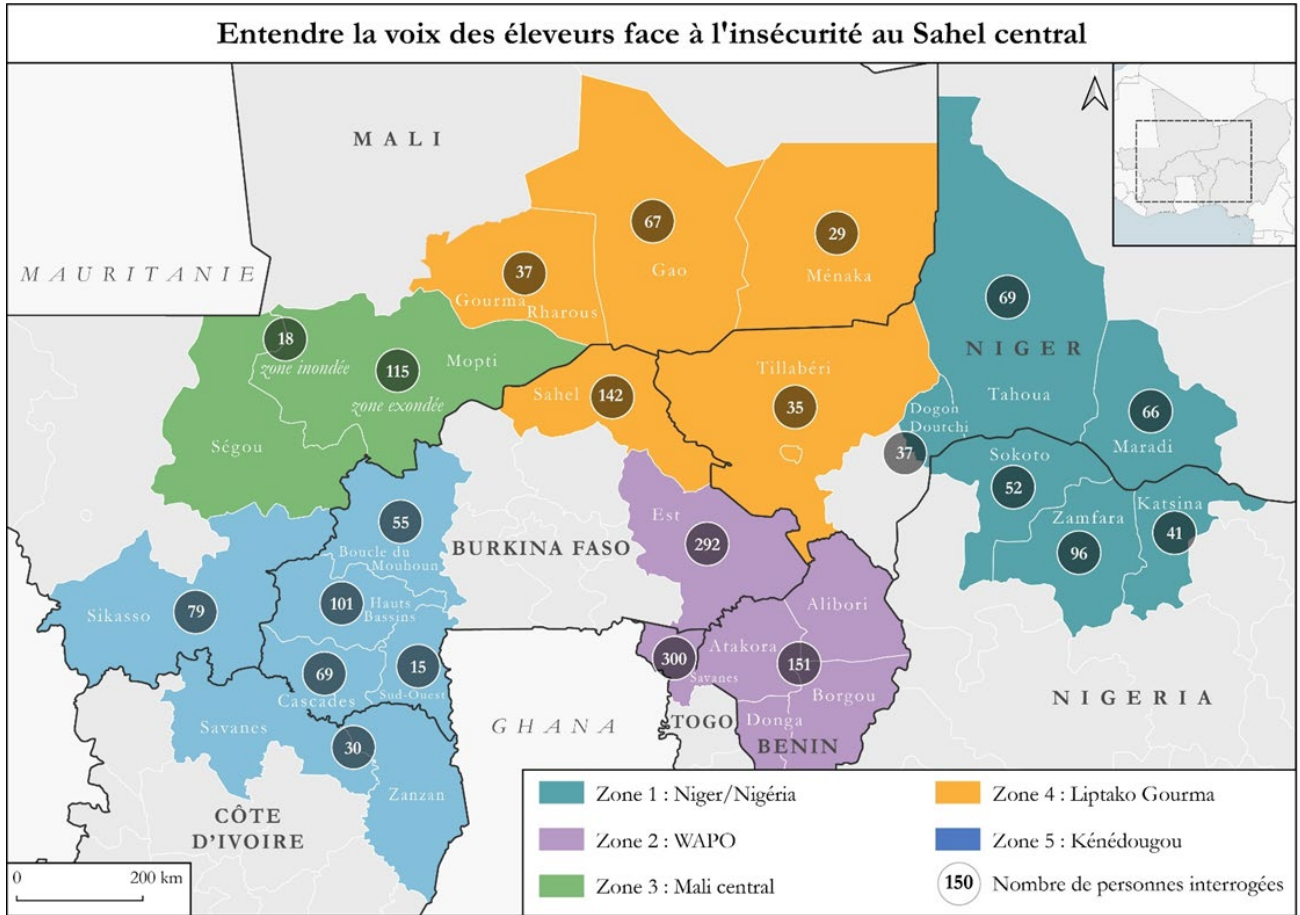
**Most herders are strongly impacted by the different dimensions of the pastoralism crisis, which fuels a sense of injustice and distrust of institutions.** This does not, however, translate into massive support for armed jihadist<sup>1</sup> groups. Most herders distrust and reject them but less so than they do the Defence and Security Forces (DSF) and self-defence groups. Herders are trying to find a neutral position to enable them to conduct their economic activities. In the current situation, however, they are finding it difficult to do so. They pay a heavy economic price for the security crisis. Adapting as best they can, their "resilience" is being tested: many are considering alternatives to livestock farming.

**This study findings suggest that resolving the pastoralism crisis could help stem the ongoing cycles of violence.** The solution largely depends on reserving a place for pastoralists in societies built around a sedentary model. Making herders full-fledged citizens who no longer suffer from systemic marginalization, who are duly represented politically and administratively, and whose pastoral mobility and livestock are protected, would be a decisive step around which technical solutions - often tried and tested - could finally deliver their expected impact.

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<sup>1</sup> The characterization of these groups is subject to debate. Both governments and the international community favour the terminology of Armed Terrorist Groups (ATGs), while herders are divided between several names. Some share this terminology, but most herders interviewed during the study prefer to use more neutral terminology: "jihadist groups," "bush people," "mujahideen," etc. As this study is largely built around the perceptions collected, the RBM has chosen to respect these perceptions and keep the term "jihadist". This is not a way to legitimize the appropriation of the term "jihad" by these groups.

## Entendre la voix des éleveurs face à l'insécurité au Sahel central



# The impact of the pastoralism crisis on pastoralists: a growing sense of injustice

The pastoralism crisis is in no way recent, but it is deepening, and its impact is now also being felt in rising insecurity. The main consequence of the pastoralism crisis is the loss of pastoralists' capital – namely, of their livestock. Reduced access to pastoral resources forces herders to sell their animals and increases the risk of losing animals and of conflicts with other users - for which herders also pay a high price. The rise in violence targeting herders through cattle rustling or kidnapping also results in the loss of livestock. The fact that this loss benefits other actors further accentuates inequalities between herders and other actors and fuels a growing sense of injustice.

## THE CAUSES OF THE PASTORALISM CRISIS: REDUCED ACCESS TO PASTORAL RESOURCES

“All existing pastures are potential fields. You stay in a pasture or a parking area, and the following year, in the same place, you come across a field and your animals cause damage to it. Every year, there are new agricultural developments”.

Herder in Sikasso (Mali)

A core element of this crisis lies with the inability of Sahelian states to protect pastoral land from **appropriation for other uses**. In the Sahel, pastoral land is land that has not yet been cultivated or to which access has not yet been privatized by certain users. The privatization of land rights is detrimental to collective pastoral rights. Undermining collective pastoral rights reduces herder access to pastoral resources. This dynamic affects the pastoralists' mobility and their social network. It reduces their livestock capital and increases the number of conflicts. The study confirms these already documented realities and specifies the extent of the phenomenon through testimonies collected in all the study areas. Above all, it distinguishes between what is associated with structural - and partly natural - dynamics such as population growth, internal and cross-border migration, or even climate change, from what derives from the local political economies. The study reveals that in most areas, local political and social power relations mostly benefit other users over pastoralists. In Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso these power dynamics often override existing regulations, which are supposed to protect collective pastoral rights.

In almost all the zones studied the primary cause of reduced access to pastoral resources, according to the herders, is the continued expansion of cropland. This includes **cash crops** (cotton, rice, cashew nuts, onions, mangoes, etc.) in the Sudanian zone, the exploitation of newly coveted lowlands by farmers in the Sahelo-Sudanian zone, or **riverbanks** that deprive herders of access to water in many regions. In all zones, herders also denounce **the obstruction or occupation of pastoral areas**, be it transhumance tracks and roads, grazing areas, pastoral enclaves, or parking areas.

Other dynamics feed into the reduced pastoral land phenomenon. **The expansion of cities into the countryside** is widespread throughout the study areas and includes peri-urban lands reserved for dairy production. This phenomenon is further driven by illegal land sales and speculative land attribution projects. **Agribusiness, ranching, and mining** also result in the private occupation of land without compensation for the users, including pastoralists.

State public policies and certain agricultural or environmental projects carried out by their partners sometimes suffer from the lack of a holistic vision. Guided by specific objectives such as agricultural needs or the protection of ecosystems, they do not always take into consideration the competing uses of resources (particularly temporary or seasonal resources) and thus destabilize local socio-economic relations. This leads to reduced access by herders to some cultivated land, developed grazing or protected areas.



**Reduced access to pastoral resources is a structural driver of the loss of livestock for herders.** Reducing herders' access to pastoral resources forces herders to sell their animals and increases the likelihood of their loss, while the decrease in forage biomass affects the weight - and therefore the value - of the livestock. By increasing land pressure, the likelihood of damage to crops increases, which leads to further reducing the herders' capital. At worst, a conflict arises, generally accompanied by the loss of livestock, which are stolen or killed. At best, the herder compensates the plaintiff, forcing him to again sell animals. Herders in several regions have denounced the compensation mechanisms as unfavourable to them, especially during the planting season.

"When you start a season with a herd of 50 animals, it can happen that in the end we have between 15 and 20 left."

Herder in Hauts-Bassins (Burkina Faso)

**Herders are exposed to various forms of ransom from DSF, self-defence groups, or "bandits."** While some forms of corruption involve herders' complicity, others are akin to organised racketeering, such as abusive or illegal impoundments. In most areas, racketeering and disguised theft of livestock involving Dozos, gendarmes, customary leaders, or judges have been reported. The fact that the authorities do not – or only loosely – enforce the laws which are supposed to govern this further facilitates illegal impoundment. This creates opportunities for abuse and applies broadly to various types of ransoming.

## THE RISE OF INEQUALITIES AND TENSIONS WITHIN THE WORLD OF ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

**There is increasing concentration of livestock in "new herders"**, whose herds are growing and who employ the decapitalized herders as shepherds. This socio-economic downgrading began with the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, when many civil servants, military personnel, and businessmen bought up the herds at low prices. Since then, the concentration of livestock in the hands of a small number of owners has increased. The growth of herds and the good health of the meat and milk markets in West Africa and the Sahel therefore only benefits certain herders.

**Farmers increasing possession of livestock has increased competition over pastoral resources with transhumant and agro-pastoralists.** The social agreements which bound these actors based on the complementarity of their activities are gradually being eroded and tensions are increasing. They threaten to take on an ethnic dimension when socio-professional groups are superimposed on specific community affiliations. One of many examples is the case of relations between Peulhs and Dogons in the Seno plain of Mali, where the Dogons became economically - and subsequently, politically - dominant.

The development of agro-pastoralism has fostered tensions and inequalities within nomadic communities, often reawakening old rivalries: the descendants of slaves in particular (Bellahs, Rimaïbés) took advantage of agricultural development to enrich themselves, become important livestock owners, and overturn the socio-economic - and sometimes even political - hierarchy. These tensions are exploited by armed groups.

**The "herder" category, far from being homogeneous, contains important fault lines and inequalities.** Herders benefit from different levels of protection depending on their: degree of mobility (domestic or cross-border transhumance); level of education; home territory or community membership (or status within the community); degree of socio-political integration; connection with local, national or regional networks of influence; herding system (breeding, dairy, meat etc.); or on the type of animals they raise.

## WHAT PLACE FOR PASTORAL COMMUNITIES IN THE SAHEL?

The different expressions of the pastoralism crisis raise the question of the acceptance of the pastoral way of life by local and national authorities, which are largely built on a sedentary model. Since pastoralists are largely excluded from this system, they have difficulty identifying with it.

"The farmers are favoured quite simply because all the positions are held by their sons, for example the gendarmerie, the police, the deputies, the municipal councilors, so there is political and ethnic influence. Besides, the Peulh herders are considered as people from elsewhere ".

Herder in Togo

**In most of the agro-pastoral study areas, pastoralists consider that they do not have a place in local power systems and see them as favouring sedentary people.** Herders presume that local institutions are biased against them. This undermines their legitimacy, including when it comes to tools for regulating access to resources and managing conflict. The arguments put forward are often the same from one zone to another: farmers are said to be favoured because they constitute the electoral base of their elected representatives, to whom they are related. But these accusations of bias are far from one-sided: farmers deplore the fact that "herders always win," questioning the herders' ability to corrupt decision-makers. From the herders' perspective, corruption is seen as the only remedy for the lack of political representation, to restore fairness, given the natural bias of the authorities.

"What good is knowing the law when you know it will not be obeyed? "

Herder from Tenenkou (Mopti)

**The herders acknowledge that they lack knowledge of the laws regulating access to resources.** They provide a number of reasons for this: the regulations are issued by authorities who do not represent them; they were not involved in their elaboration; the authorities don't follow the regulations; or they are out-of-step with the herders' realities. Furthermore, herders are not interested in the state's regulations because they follow the large body of traditional, oral rules for managing resources. This low level of interest is coupled with the feeling that they are not listened to and poorly defended by the institutions, whose mission it is to render justice through conciliation. This raises the question of the representation of nomadic populations within the civil service and local authorities. Their limited representation is, in turn, linked to their limited access to competitive examinations and education and to their limited elected and customary representation. Without representatives whom they trust and a truly effective mechanism to defend their rights, herders are naturally inclined to seek protection and justice from non-state actors.

# The pastoral crisis: a breeding ground for jihadism

Today, the injustices arising from this pastoral crisis are being exploited by jihadist groups. While they are far from being a model of justice, they nonetheless often embody this ideal in the eyes of their recruits, offering them the means to protect themselves, to take revenge, to take justice into their own hands or to take power.

## THE JIHADISTS, NEW PROTECTORS OF THE BUSH

"The Islamic and Muslim Support Group (JNIM) really helped the population by arresting last year (2019) all the known thieves in the area, they broke up several groups of organised petty thieves."

Herder from Ntilit (Malian Gourma)

As early as 2012, the withdrawal of the Malian state and the formation of armed groups prompted some herders to seek their protection from rival communities, particularly in response to cattle rustling. In Douentza, as on the Ménaka-Tillabéri border, Peulh herders joined the jihadists from the Movement for the Unity of Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) very early on to protect themselves against the Tuaregs who took advantage of their membership of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) to settle old conflicts, some of which remain unresolved today. There was a second wave in engagement for protection from 2018. This was linked to the proliferation of self-defence groups, the spread of violence between communities and the atrocities perpetrated by the DSF. In this wave the desire for revenge often took precedence over the need for protection. For example, in the Centre-Nord region of Burkina Faso, after the Yirgou massacre in 2019, entire families joined the jihadists for protection or revenge.

This dynamic of protection via armed groups also exists with bandit groups in places where they are the only ones to bear arms. However, the dynamic of "jihadization" of banditry that is affecting the Sahel raises concerns that banditry is a step towards Jihad. In areas under jihadist control, bandits who share an insurrectionary sentiment or opposition to the state with jihadists are largely "tamed" and sometimes recruited. In northwestern Nigeria, pastoralists join Peulh bandit or self-defence groups to protect themselves from cattle rustling or kidnapping and from Hausa self-defence groups. The situation possesses pre-insurgency characteristics that can be easily instrumentalized by jihadists. At present, in areas that are still stable, such as northern Benin, banditry has neither a community dimension nor pre-insurgency characteristics.

## JIHADISTS, THE NEW VIGILANTES OF THE BUSH

"Herders take up arms for two reasons in our area: either to defend themselves or to take revenge".

Herder in Banibangou (Tillabéri)

The second reason for joining jihadist groups is because they are seen as delivering justice in conflicts over the control of resources. The justice system is not always corrupt. It also struggles to deliver its decisions due to lack of resources or will, while the decisions it delivers are often unenforced or contested. This dysfunctional judicial model is further compromised by the widespread use of arms in insurgent areas: the injured party in court takes revenge through violence, either through jihadist groups, or by using the DSF or self-defence groups. Justice through armed violence is increasingly common.

Central Mali is home to many local conflicts that have been exploited by jihadist groups since 2015 to further entrench themselves by restoring justice through armed violence. For example, in Sari (Koro) in 2012, a dispute between Dogons and Peulhs over the use of a well enabled the penetration of MUJAO, which allowed the herders to take revenge. Elsewhere, similar cases were mentioned, particularly in Soum province. Many of the conflicts between self-defence groups (Koglweogo, then Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie (VDP)) and jihadist groups are rooted in old conflicts between farmers and herders or agro-pastoralists.

**These conflicts do not systematically involve transhumant pastoralists.** In the Soum, these conflicts are about agro-pastoralist land ownership. In the circles of Djenné and Bankass, in Central Mali, cases of justice by force have involved only sedentary communities seeking the support of Dozo.

Violent conflict over land ownership can also occur in areas spared from insurgencies, where former violent conflicts remain unresolved. The cases of the Bouna conflict (Côte d'Ivoire) in 2016 and the Bangui conflict (Niger) in 2017 deserve the attention of the authorities to avoid justice ultimately being served by force.

## JIHADISTS, NEW GOVERNANCE PROVIDERS

“Some shepherds who feel aggrieved and excluded from the management of natural resources have joined the radicals in order to take revenge and have more control over this management”.

Herder in Youwarou

**Jihadist groups do not only seek justice through force, but also through establishing their system of governance.** They feed on the lack of legitimacy of local institutions and their dysfunction to impose themselves as the main governance providers of rural areas. They fight theft, deliver justice, settle conflicts, negotiate peace with communities with whom they were in conflict, and regulate access to resources based on religious precepts.

**In central Mali, the Macina katibat of JNIM defines the rules for resource exploitation.** The strength of this "model" is that its actors are often yesterday's victims, young people who have been downgraded and victimized by a system that they denounced loudly and clearly, and who are now in charge of imposing order and justice. Formerly disempowered youth are now in the driver's seat.

**The regulation of resources is generalized (with some differences) to all jihadist zones.** Jihadist groups regulate dung collection and the herders' obligation to free up bourgou fields in the flooded zone of Central Mali. They also impose restrictions on tree cutting in Gourma or Tillabéri.

**This jihadists' security, social, and even economic influence makes them de facto unavoidable in any local dialogue process.** In Central Mali, since 2019, local peace processes between communities have only worked when the Macina katibat has been involved. For example, the Kareri in 2019 and the Koro and Bankass in 2020.

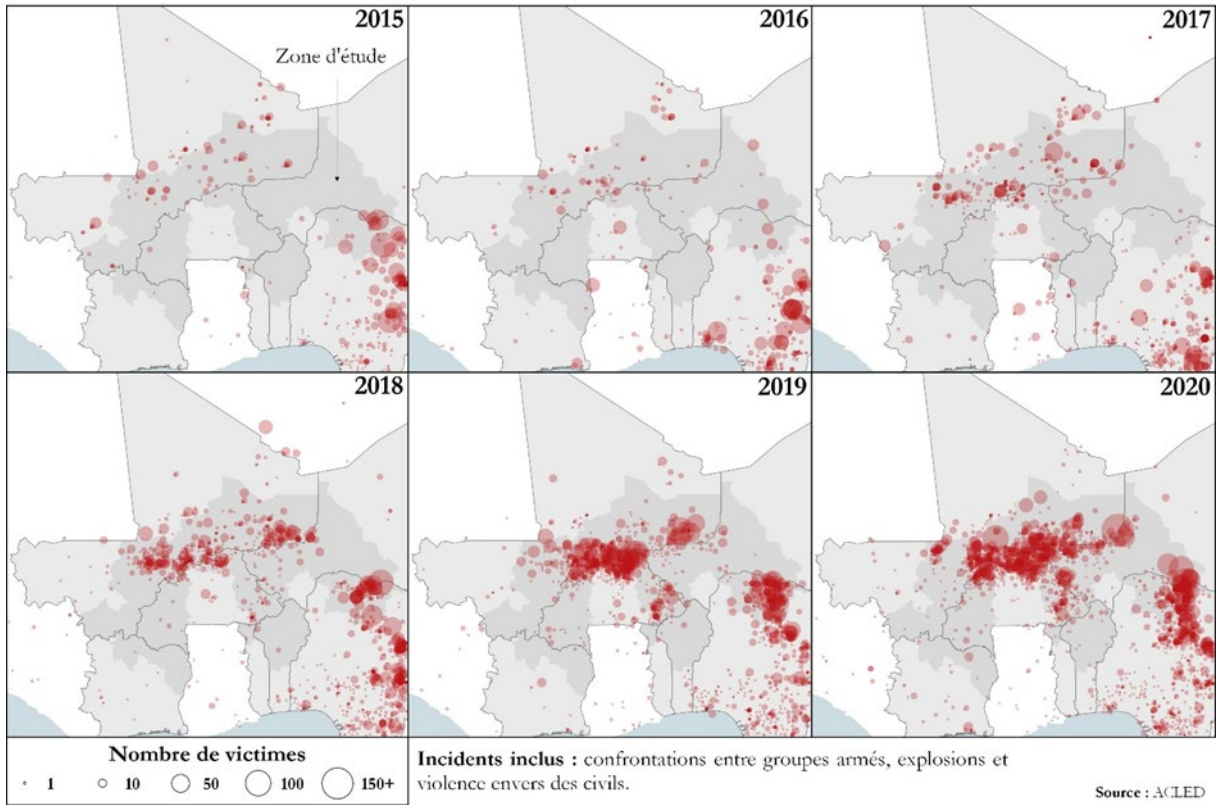
## JIHADISTS AS A PATH SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

**Joining jihadist groups is also a way to overturn social hierarchies.** The case of the Inner Niger Delta is illustrative. Until 2015, the gradual monetization of access to bourgou fields gave rise to predatory practices by nomadic elites and local authorities, of which the "foreign" users, especially the herders of the exposed zone, were the main victims. The Macinah katibat took advantage of this context to recruit among them. This issue of fee-based access to bourgou fields is so common that it was one of the main causes of clashes between jihadist groups in Central Mali in 2020.

**These groups are also a way for some herders to kidnap livestock from actors in the system they perceive to have impoverished them.** The complicity of some herders in this jihadist economy of livestock kidnapping

can partly be explained in this way. The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) has turned to predation, with widespread kidnapping of livestock viewed as the spoils of war.

### Evolution des incidents violents au Sahel central



## Jihadism: the cause of the deteriorating pastoralism crisis

While some herders have joined jihadist groups, the vast majority have been victims of this security crisis of unprecedented scope and duration. They are victims of the jihadists, the DSF, and the self-defence groups. The counterterrorism response has only aggravated the situation, leading to a crisis of confidence in the Sahelian states.

### CATTLE RUSTLING AT THE HEART OF THE WAR ECONOMY

**Cattle rustling is at the heart of the war economy and involves all arms bearers: self-defence groups, rebel groups, jihadist groups, and even the DSF.** Taking up arms can be the result of individual or family loss of livestock, but it can also be an opportunistic attempt by some herders to gain at the expense of other livestock owners. Conversely, sedentary communities seek the protection of self-defence groups to protect their livestock. The fight against terrorism also generates a hidden economy of livestock theft. In Liptako-Gourma, arrests and even executions of herders sometimes cover up cases of livestock rustling. In Kéné Dougou, the herders interviewed suspect that self-defence groups are at the heart of the racketeering economy and receive stolen livestock, either independently or in complicity with the DSF.

**Cattle rustling has particularly violent consequences in northwestern Nigeria and southwestern Niger.** It is at the heart of clashes between Hausa self-defence groups, bandit groups, and Peuhl self-defence groups, which have multiplied since 2013 in Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina states. These are the same actors who are now involved in kidnapping, primarily in northwestern Nigeria, but increasingly in neighbouring Niger and Benin. Livestock abductions and kidnappings have taken on unprecedented proportions, directly affecting the pastoralists' livelihoods, and forcing them to modify or reduce their mobility patterns, or even to destock. This phenomenon affects both herders and agro-pastoralists.

### JIHADISM: ANYTHING BUT A SOLUTION FOR THE MAJORITY OF HERDERS

“The jihadists only bring us problems: they suspect us, kill us and because of them, everyone is suspicious and attacks us”.

Herder in eastern Burkina Faso

**The vast majority of herders interviewed deplore the jihadist presence and consider themselves to be the primary victims of it.** The fact that some herders have joined jihadists and that some fear them less than the DSF or self-defence groups does not translate into massive support for their cause. In the Liptako-Gourma region, herders are particularly against the imposition of the zakat, which leads to numerous abuses. On the one hand, the ISGS often does not respect the Islamic precepts in this area and collects larger or multiple amounts. On the other hand, bandits use the fear inspired by jihadists to act in their name and extort the herders. The payment of zakat also divides the herding community, as it becomes a business in which many herders are involved. For example, in Liptako some herders denounce others who evade payment, either out of jealousy or in exchange for a commission. Similarly, farmers are concerned by zakat, particularly in central Mali and southwestern Niger.

## INCREASING INTER-COMMUNITY PREJUDICE AND TENSIONS

“The Peulhs have become the enemies of the whole world”.

Herder in Sikasso

**The idea that armed violence is the work of nomads - the Peulhs in particular - has gradually gained ground in the minds of Sahelian and West African decision-makers.**

In areas affected by jihadist insurgencies, mass arrests and executions - mostly of nomads - are increasing. The Sahel and eastern Burkina Faso, central Mali, and the Tillabéri region are the areas most affected by this phenomenon, because these are the areas where the DSF and self-defence groups are in active conflict. Regions that have not yet been affected by jihadist insurgencies are also being affected, as racketeering and violence against members of these communities is on the rise. Herders are increasingly arrested in northern Benin, Togo, and Kéné Dougou, on suspicion of being responsible for the spread of jihadism.

“Before we were extorted, now we are being killed”.

Herder in Eastern Burkina Faso

**Violence further alienates these populations from public authorities, in which they already had little trust, and gives them more reason to rebel.** Almost all the respondents felt stigmatized, both in insecure areas and in areas free of threats. This prejudice obscures the socio-economic dimension of the pastoralism crisis: transhumant herders, mobile herders, agro-pastoralists, and sedentary nomads are increasingly perceived in terms of their ethnic identity. This primacy of ethnicity obscures the need to resolve the pastoralism crisis.

## COUNTERTERRORISM AND COMMUNITY SCORE-SETTLING

“Many herders have been killed and their livestock taken away by the ‘Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland’ VDP, and some are forced to flee for their lives, with or without their livestock”.

A herder from Pobe-Mengao (Soum)

**Herders perceive self-defence groups as their main threats, even more so than the threats posed by jihadist groups and national armies.** This is due to the increasing number of acts of violence committed by these self-defence groups against nomadic populations in general, and the Peulhs in particular. Under the guise of counterterrorism, these almost exclusively sedentary groups are suspected of violently settling disputes - often over land - with other communities. In Burkina Faso, the Koglweogo and the VDP in the Sahel, the Centre-North and the East are also involved in the fight against terrorism to protect sedentary land interests, or even to occupy new land on the Peulhs' rangelands or home territories. The Dan Na Ambassagou in central Mali and the Yan Banga in northwestern Nigeria also defend land and/or ethnic interests which bring them into opposition with the Peuhl - thus vitiating the objective of counterterrorism.

In all the contexts analyzed, the involvement of self-defence groups in the fight against terrorism is an aggravating factor: the violence they generate reinforces the existing feeling of insurgency and even spreads it among new populations. Not only do herders join armed groups for protection or justice, sedentary nomads, who do not necessarily herd livestock, join to avenge their relatives' deaths. The areas newly affected by insecurity will be

tempted to form self-defence groups to make up for the DSF's shortcomings. This is likely to generate tensions between communities, which may lead to violence and increase risks.

**The collection of information by the DSF is suspected by many herders of being distorted because it is based on sources motivated by the desire to settle individual, family, or community scores.** This sentiment was echoed in several regions of Burkina Faso, in the Centre-North, the Sahel, and the East of the country, as well as in Niger in the Tillabéri region, Sokoto and Zamfara states in Nigeria, and in the flooded zone of Mali. In most cases, the involvement of self-defence groups with the DSF is questioned: since self-defence groups are not impartial, can the information they provide to the DSF be objective? How can the DSF distinguish between information and accusations? This challenge is further complicated by the fact that herders are sometimes forced to cohabit - or even passively collaborate - with jihadists (as described below).

## THE HEAVY ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE SECURITY CRISIS

Most herders pay a very heavy price for this security crisis, to the point where their livelihoods are threatened. Livestock mobility is no longer guided by the search for the most nutrient-rich pastures, but by security constraints. The pastoral economy has suffered greatly, which has led to a clear deterioration in the terms of trade and an impoverishment of Sahelian pastoralists.

**Insecurity and COVID-19 have massively reduced the mobility of transhumant herders.** The closure of borders by Nigeria and then Benin for economic and security reasons at the end of 2019, followed by those of the Sahelian countries in 2020 due to the health situation, kept transhumance departures from occurring in the WAPO area (W, Arly, Pendjari, Oti Mandouri) and on the western Niger-Nigeria border. Changes in transhumance routes inconvenience herders and their animals in terms of lost time and additional border control and other costs. Animals' loss of body weight due to the lack of good pastures decreases their value. The change in the animals' habits requires stricter guarding and can lead to the loss of animals. These mobility difficulties have led to a concentration of livestock in certain areas. This stretches pastoral infrastructure, increases the pressure on resources, and creates the risk of tensions over access to water and grazing. A surprising finding from our field studies is that in areas that are still stable, such as Kéné Dougou for example, herders also restrict their mobility for fear of being targeted by the DSF, particularly in the event of jihadist attacks.

**The forced displacements, arrests and summary executions that are currently taking place in the most insecure areas have very serious economic consequences for herder families.** In all the regions studied, theft or loss of livestock following arrests - or even executions - are very frequent. Many herders wonder whether these acts are sometimes motivated by the intention to steal livestock. Forced displacement because of insecurity impacts the economy of pastoralist households and results in the loss of animals. Women, children, and the elderly are strongly impacted by insecurity. It limits their mobility and activities, exposes children to single-parenthood, orphanhood, or isolation, and family reorganisation, including forced or early marriage, which destroys family balance. The precariousness of households has been aggravated by COVID-19, one of the impacts of which was the decrease in cross-border cash transfers during the lean season, when the need for transfers was greatest. Because of border closures, some young exiles in coastal countries were unable to join their families during the winter months for field work and transhumance.

Insecurity and COVID-19 in 2020 adversely affected the pastoral economy of Sahelian countries. This has resulted in a decline in market attendance and cross-border trade, a decline in the price of animals, and an increase in the price of livestock feed and transport. However, it is difficult to distinguish between the impacts of the health crisis (market and border closures, restriction of trade flows) and those of the security crisis (sale of stolen animals at low prices, problems of accessibility to markets, etc.). The combined economic impact places additional stress on herders and traders who depend on the sale of animals for their livelihoods.

**A downward trend in livestock prices is observed everywhere other than in Sikasso and Central Mali.** The sharp decline recorded in 2020 seems to be due more to COVID-19, which reduced market attendance by the exporting networks and led to large slumps in sales. This downward trend in animal prices contrasts with the



increase in production costs observed in almost all the study areas. In most of the regions exposed to high insecurity, transportation costs increased by about 100% between the pre-pandemic situation and the first wave of the pandemic in early 2020. On the other hand, the increase in feed costs, potentially linked to the increase in transaction costs resulting from insecurity, also appears to be linked to the poor cotton harvest in 2019, seasonal price changes, or the health crisis.

**Market attendance remains extremely volatile from one year to the next, depending on the changing security situation.** In eastern Burkina Faso and in the center, some markets have been deserted for the past year after several killings and waves of arrests in markets attributed by some herders to the DSF. In Gao, Ménaka and southwestern Niger, it is mainly banditry - now the work of organised armed groups - which generates insecurity around markets. The jihadist impact on markets is less clear. The situation in the Burkinabè Sahel reflects this contrast. The secondary markets around Déou, Oursi, and Tin-Akoff - located near the Malian border and in the jihadist influence zone - remain functional, but jihadist groups have already imposed blockades that are undermining livestock trade. Market attendance has been greatly affected by the introduction of curfews in some areas of Liptako-Gourma, giving rise to new informal markets.

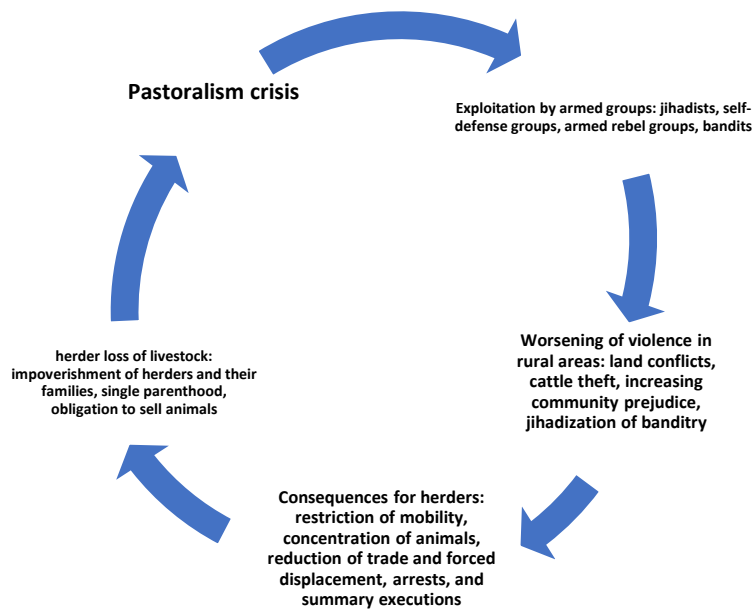


Figure: Vicious cycle of the pastoralism crisis

## Surviving and adapting

The multiple threats to which herders are currently exposed - and which vary from one area to another – have clearly increased the scale of risk and uncertainty which they face in their daily lives. To survive the security crisis, they must try to cope. Adaptation strategies are the prerogative of herders who are not yet affected by the security crisis. At the same time, they are committed to a neutrality that is increasingly difficult to maintain in the face of the growing militarization of Sahelian societies.

"In the North, there are jihadists, in the South the VDP and in the cities the DSF: where can one be safe? "

A herder in the Soum

### COPING STRATEGIES

**The use of bribery to move around is the pastoralists' main coping strategy, especially in areas that remain stable.** This allows them to access forbidden areas and to cross borders without difficulty, whether in the face of the DSF, bandits or self-defence groups. In insurgent areas, corruption has largely disappeared where jihadists operate, but it persists in the communes' administrative centres, or even increases with the development of self-defence groups or in the context of pressure exerted on herders by the DSF. In some cases, corruption has been replaced by other types of predation, including by jihadists.

**Traditional adaptation strategies that are often used to deal with cyclical pastoral crises vary according to the specificities and level of insecurity in each region.** They include: departure to neighbouring countries; changes in grazing routes or sites; reduction in mobility or range of movement; securing families in urban areas; destocking and intensification of fattening activities; hiring of shepherds, use of livestock feed; free grazing of animals without a shepherd; extension of the duration of transhumance or even definitive settlement in the areas of stay; diversification of activities within livestock farming (within the family unit itself) or in other economic sectors; diversification of species, etc.

**In stable areas, herders devise coping strategies, while in insurgent areas, herders say they are 'managing to survive'. All the choices are risky and none of the strategies mentioned can guarantee the resilience of the herders:**

- Some practices are common across zones, such as dividing herds to attract the less attention from bandits, increasing communication between herders when moving, and minimizing movement to markets. Diversification towards species that are more difficult to contain in the event of theft - such as goats or dromedaries - seems to be a strategy adopted by some herders to protect themselves from zakat or theft in Gourma-Rharous and in Tillabéri. However, this diversification is limited by agro-ecological constraints (e.g., aridity) of the Sahelo-Saharan zones.
- Other practices, on the contrary, seem to divide the herders, such as the relationship with jihadist groups. Some avoid them as much as possible, others say they try to get to know them to protect themselves, or they prefer to frequent their zones of influence rather than those of the DSF or self-defence groups. Furthermore, regrouping normally favoured in the context of mobility is now imposed on certain camps. Joining family or community can help protect from theft, arrest, or execution.

## PASTORAL ORGANISATIONS (POS): A SOLUTION AND A CHALLENGE IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF INSECURITY

**The use of technical services has also been affected by insecurity.** This is mainly the case for veterinary services, which have seen their mobility restricted in many areas, sometimes experiencing serious difficulties in vaccinating and treating animals. In insurgent areas, vaccination numbers have often declined, as has feed distribution to a lesser extent. The reduced availability of livestock services further alienates these service providers from the herders, with whom relations were already marked by distrust in most of the study areas.

**The support of networks of pastoral organisations and certain NGOs has been invaluable in ensuring minimum vaccination coverage.** The POs are generally appreciated by the respondents, albeit with some reservations. Their effectiveness is judged insufficient by many of them, particularly their ability to influence authorities to better defend the rights of herders. Their representativeness is often questioned. Some are accused of representing only large-scale herders or, on the contrary, of not involving them, while others are said to be more concerned about sedentary herders because they are easier to monitor and support. Criticism has sometimes been levelled at POs or networks that gradually become structures for implementing projects for the benefit of the management teams and a small family circle around them. Some herders denounce corrupt or patrimonial behaviour.

**Insecurity has had diverse effects on the relationship between the POs and the herders.** In some areas, the POs appear to be the last resort and are seen as being increasingly useful and visible as the state and its services disappear. In other areas, herders indicate that the POs can no longer do anything for them because the expansion of insecure areas has affected their operational capacities. Herders in rural areas where jihadists also operate are increasingly unable to reach the towns, for risk of arousing the suspicion of the jihadists. POs find it difficult to operate because they - like their members - are suspected of bias, both by armed groups and by state authorities.

## THE SEARCH FOR NEUTRALITY IS DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE

"The herders are obliged to submit to the principles of those who control the territory to stay in the bush with their animals: here, they are the terrorists".

A herder in Komondjari (eastern Burkina Faso)

In many Sahelian regions where armed groups operate but where self-defence groups and/or the DSF are also active, most of the population seeks a neutral position that is not easy to maintain. They generally find themselves stuck "between a rock and a hard place".

**The vast majority of herders interviewed in insurgent areas find it difficult, if not impossible, to be neutral,** especially where DSF, jihadists, and self-defence groups operate. Herders who insist on remaining neutral often have no choice but to flee. This difficulty is also observed when community polarization is strong. In northwestern Nigeria, for example, herders have no choice but to join bandits or contribute financially to Hausa self-defence groups to protect their livestock. Where jihadists dominate, staying in the bush implies a "submission", a "passive collaboration", simply because jihadists and herders share the same bush.

**"Passive collaboration" is often presumed to mean belonging to jihadist groups. This fuels stigmatization and summary executions of herders.** Passive collaboration means respecting the prescriptions of jihadist groups without collaborating with them. This is the condition for enjoying relative, but far from total, mobility. Given the number of summary executions of civilians recorded since 2018 - and of herders in particular - the national authorities seem to think that passive collaboration is enough to consider them full-fledged terrorists. They should question the value of such an approach, which amounts to eliminating individuals whose close or

distant relatives are certain of their innocence. This undoubtedly leads to more frustration and provides a breeding ground for jihadist recruitment, while making the fight against terrorism more complicated.

«The first Fulani who picks up a weapon will be eliminated and everyone will be convinced that he is a jihadist.»

A herder in Bankass (Mopti)

**Forming a self-defence group is not an option for herders, with rare exceptions.** Herders are vulnerable to certain sedentary communities authorized to arm themselves, with whom they may come into conflict. In places where pastoralists are in the minority, most refuse any armed training, which would be counterproductive for them because it would expose them to local reprisals. Despite this, herders say they are obliged to defend themselves with weapons in the event of conflict with other users or in the face of rural banditry, which targets them. In areas where jihadist groups rule the bush, herders refuse to arm themselves individually, either for fear of the jihadists - who will not let them arm themselves unless they are under their authority - or for fear of the DSF - who would equate them with jihadists. The same sentiment prevails in all insurgent areas.

## An uncertain future

The future of pastoralism is insecure and uncertain because of the resurgence of conflicts between farmers and herders, increased stigmatization and violence and environmental constraints and pressures.

“We are not even at home; we can't think about the future”.

A displaced herder's wife in Nassougou (eastern Burkina Faso)

The vast majority of those interviewed were seriously worried, with some speaking of the impending death of transhumant livestock production. Some herders say they are resolutely attached to transhumant livestock production and do not consider choosing other modes of production. However, others are willing and able to adapt, particularly to a less extensive, sometimes even sedentary, mode of livestock production. In relatively stable areas such as the Great West of Burkina Faso, many predict the end of mobile livestock production and are considering other forms of livestock production. In Sikasso, most herders remain confident despite the difficulties encountered and believe that cross-border mobility should be a priority to be addressed at the sub-regional level. In the insurgency zones, opinions are generally negative, and most herders, whether in the Sahel or in eastern Burkina Faso, are considering diversification. In northwestern Nigeria, where the situation is getting worse, most herders, despite everything that is happening, are not considering abandoning livestock farming.

"Young people no longer want to stay in the bush, let alone sacrifice themselves for the animals as their parents and great grandparents did".

An elderly herder in Falagountou (Burkina Faso Sahel)

Young people seem to be increasingly leaving livestock farming because of the many difficulties that it now entails and because of insecurity. This exit is often - but not always - against parents' advice and is reflected in a certain defiance of parental authority, which some see as a generational divide. Young people often accuse their elders of being responsible for the situation in which they find themselves and are inclined to follow different paths, sometimes breaking with parental authority. Young herders tend to move away from their families and rural areas to the cities, which offer other work prospects. From one zone to another, this generational fracture is characterized by: break-up of families, sale of livestock or investment without the approval of the rest of the family, rejection of livestock raising and economic migration (for trade, gold panning).

"I want to leave this business because I am afraid for my life".

A herder from Ténenkou (Mopti)

This exit is often neither complete nor definitive, and it should not obscure the fact that for many young people, herding remains the only possible horizon. The exit from livestock farming is much more the result of a desire to diversify risks and sources of income than it is a systematic calling into question of family solidarity. These dynamics are manifestations of crises of authority and the desire for social and economic emancipation. Young people who no longer believe in the future of livestock farming do not usually break irreversibly with either their parents or with livestock farming. Even for those who join jihadist groups, this break is not absolute. Many of them continue to support their families financially so that they can continue to farm.

"Herders need guidance, but we just wonder if the space in our communes will be sufficient to conduct this type of (intensive) livestock farming, as our pastoral areas are being nibbled away every year."

A herder in Seytenga (Burkinabé Sahel)

**The study shows that most herders seem to be keen to change their production methods, but not without reservations.** In the Sahelian zone, transhumant livestock production remains the norm, but many herders wish to limit their mobility and move closer to the cities to move towards semi-transhumant livestock production. However, some herders fear that this type of livestock farming will expose them to greater insecurity or require additional resources that they do not have. They feel that more support from the state and their partners is needed. In wetter areas, most individuals interviewed said they were concerned about moving towards a more intensive form of livestock production, which some describe as "modern". Large numbers of livestock farmers are considering complete or partial settlement. They wish, among other things, to move towards the milk sector, which is by far the most promising in terms of market demand and which an incentive-based public policy would help increase tenfold. In Kéné Dougou, where the development of the sector is more advanced, it remains conditional on securing herders' land in the face of "rurbanization." This involves, inter alia; meeting needs for livestock feed at a competitive cost; and revitalizing downstream elements of production (collection and distribution, processing by mini and industrial dairies).

"With this phenomenon of climate change, transhumance remains the only resilient technique".

A herder in Tillabéri

**It would be a mistake for authorities to support only one type of herding.** The tendency of livestock farmers to move towards a more intensive mode of production - usually by stabling the productive core and sending the reproductive core on transhumance - benefits from a strong commitment from Sahelian and West African states to support sedentary livestock farming. This is both an opportunity and a risk for livestock production. An opportunity because this productive orientation seems to be in the interests of many livestock farmers, but it also risks reducing the reproduction of livestock through transhumance. Public policies on livestock should reflect the complementarity of the different breeding, suckling and fattening livestock systems, while preserving pastoralism. Several interviewees remain deeply attached to this type of livestock production, which is essential to the agro-ecological balance and to food security in West Africa.

# Defining an exit strategy to the crises

This study has highlighted that a minority of herders are fueling the security crisis for a variety of reasons stemming from the pastoralism crisis. Most herders are above all victims of this double crisis. Hence, an exit strategy must stop the mutual reinforcement of the security and pastoralist crises. It is premature to identify specific recommendations at this stage. However, this study suggests strategic importance of working towards an outcome in which mobile pastoralists are full-fledged citizens. The key is that an exit strategy be developed in an inclusive process, that is above all owned by the herders themselves. They must be the main actors and not mere spectators. This process must fully involve the state authorities from the most local level (local authorities) to the highest level (Heads of State) so that the commitments made are binding on all and have the best chance of being implemented. The consultations would benefit from being initially developed in the central Sahel, to align perceptions and the axes of reform, with a view to expanding discussions to the coastal countries of West Africa in a second phase.

## KEY AXES OF ACTION TO CONSIDER AS PART OF AN EXIT STRATEGY:

### 1. THINKING ABOUT HOW TO DO THINGS BEFORE DOING THEM

**In contexts as degraded as those of the study areas, the way in which things are done appears to be as important, if not more so, than the content of the policies and projects.** Most of the recommendations from the field interviews dealt with securing pastoral land, but not in very operational terms. For example, "Freeing up of transhumance corridors" is a priority for securing pastoral land, but one which will not be achieved as long as attention is not paid to how it is undertaken. This requires, first and foremost, understanding the local political economies of land tenure, at the level of each region - and even at the level of each intervention site. Local analysis often reveals specific vulnerabilities of livestock farmers which need to be addressed.

**The political economy analysis of land tenure should be central to the design of public policies as well as of partners' projects when it comes to pastoral matters.** It is essential to avoid that policies, projects and programmes either create new conflict situations with "host" populations or accentuate certain symptoms of the pastoralism crisis, while trying to restore pastoralists' rights. Policies or projects must benefit all users without any political or community orientation. To do so, care must be taken with the choice of personnel employed, of targeting methods (POs have developed tools to guarantee their inclusiveness, for example), and with the projects' governance framework. Applying a social cohesion and conflict-sensitivity lens to programme design and monitoring is critical, while strengthening accountability mechanisms at the local level appears key to achieving sustainable results. The conflict-sensitive approach, rather than being a tick-box exercise, must guide governments' and their partners' actions at both the strategic and operational levels.

### 2. ADDRESS THE STRUCTURAL CAUSES OF THE PASTORAL CRISIS IN A SUSTAINABLE MANNER

#### THINK ABOUT THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SECURING PASTORAL LAND TENURE

**Securing pastoral land tenure is key to the resolution of the pastoralism crisis and is part of the solution to the current security crisis.** Above and beyond the creation of pastoral infrastructure, all actors must accept the process that led to the choice of pastoral infrastructure in a particular locality (location, rules of use, control mechanisms, etc.). This process relies most importantly on local consultation as a basis for the negotiation of local agreements which, when combined, can result in regional land-use planning schemes. This approach requires that the local level take precedence over top-down approaches, where herders are at best consulted, but are never agents of change.

**An inclusive and locally- concerted approach should guide this process, which must also be flexible to adapt to pastoral mobility.** Social agreements must also be living, i.e., they must be monitored, evaluated, and adapted to the changing context. This, in turn, requires sustainable funding for the actors who will be responsible for this work. POs, like other actors with a direct or indirect territorial influence, should not simply play the role of an extra or be symbolically associated, but be central actors, trained, equipped, and involved in their own right.

**These processes for securing pastoral land must be holistic and consider all competing uses for natural resources.** The status, rules of use, mapping, and function of spaces are not yet clearly determined, nor are they accepted by all communities. For example, in eastern Burkina Faso, "conservationist policies" and the management of protected areas have been challenged by force. This reality requires a re-thinking of the access conditions and how to manage protected areas. The same is true of grazing areas, whose development and fencing generate frustrations which could easily be avoided by partial and temporary access to certain parts.

## REBALANCE THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LAND TO THE BENEFIT OF HERDERS

**The political economy of land should not disadvantage livestock farmers.** This requires better political representation and greater participation of nomadic populations in local and national decision-making to guarantee their management rights over pastoral resources. This political influence is gained through the ballot box, but also through new customary representation. Especially in the short term, it relies on the enhanced mobilization of the POs responsible for defending herders' interests. They will be even more effective if their representativeness and accountability are strengthened. These different levels of power are closely intertwined and work together to defend the communities' land interests.

**Solutions for herder representation must reflect the specificities of each area.** The study shows that where pastoralists are in the minority, they do not always seek greater political influence. Some consider that seeking greater political and institutional representation could create more problems for them vis-à-vis communities who consider themselves "indigenous".

## DEFEND PASTORALISTS TO PREVENT THEM FROM TAKING UP ARMS

**Strengthening pastoralists' access to justice is probably the best way to reduce the attractiveness of armed groups.** Conflicts over natural resources are often poorly resolved because local conciliation mechanisms and judicial systems are dysfunctional. Pastoralists are under-represented and again often victims of abuse.

**The first priority is to strengthen herders' access to legal and judicial defence.** Networks of paralegals should be trained and supported to provide local advice in cases of alleged injustice. At a higher level, POs should be supported to defend pastoral rights, whether by training magistrates or notaries on pastoral land laws, or by initiating proceedings with the help of specialized lawyers. POs can also engage with local human rights organisations and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) already involved in human rights defence, particularly through advocacy activities which POs cannot always undertake alone or directly.

**A second priority is to make official conflict resolution mechanisms more inclusive.** It is necessary to find ways to systematize the involvement of livestock services and/or representatives of pastoral organisations in land commissions, as provided for by law. The study revealed that these structures are often unknown to pastoralists, and awareness-raising work must first be carried out among pastoralists: so that in the event of a conflict where livestock services are not present, they know to refer the matter to a PO to defend their rights. This requires that POs increase their efforts to provide herders with legal assistance through the establishment of focal point networks responsible for informing POs of conflict situations, so they can intervene quickly. Where such structures do not yet exist - particularly in the insurgency zones of Burkina Faso and Mali - POs should be proactive in enforcing compliance with the laws when they are created and ensuring that their membership is truly inclusive. Periodic evaluations of the functioning of the commissions could be conducted with the participation of the POs to ensure their proper functioning.



**Last but not least, it is important to strengthen herders' accountability so that they are encouraged to behave more responsibly.** It would be wise to draw inspiration from existing good practices in the Sahel, such as the "self-monitoring" system that exists in some of the regions studied, which allows herders to limit the risk of reprisals against them in the event of damage to crop fields. In areas where the Rougas exist, the Peuhl herders' representatives' community accountability should be strengthened. Their function is both to represent and defend herders, and to sanction those who make mistakes. However, this traditional role is increasingly being lost. Greater power devolved to herders to control the Rougas' actions would make them more accountable. In addition, the Rouga function could be expanded in some areas where there is interest in their function. The same effort to strengthen community accountability should be made in other nomadic communities where mechanisms like the Rougas exist.

### **3. MANAGE THE IMPACT OF THE SECURITY CRISIS ON THE PASTORAL CRISIS**

**The security crisis has reinforced the long-standing stigmatization of herders.** The association of pastoralists with jihadists has gained ground, aggravating relations between pastoralists and the DSF, and opening the way to numerous acts of violence against civilians, including by community self-defence groups. These associations are based on poor understanding of the challenges which herders face in comparison with other rural populations. Confidence can only be re-established through better mutual understanding between these actors; through a change in behaviour; and through strong acts that serve as examples and have a positive awareness-raising impact.

#### **MOBILIZE POS TO IMPROVE SOCIAL COHESION**

**The POs should play a more active role in improving social cohesion by engaging in dialogue to enable "consensual management of land and resources".** This is often central to the causes of conflict. The POs would thus contribute to preventing and managing several types of conflict. They could facilitate dialogue between transhumant and host communities, or between transhumant and sedentary herders, whose relations have been affected by the growing insecurity in the Central Sahel. Dialogue could also take place between herders and farmers to rebuild complementarity between these users. POs should also serve more systematically as relays between transhumant herders, village chiefs, traditional authorities, and lodgers. If the authorities so wish, they could also facilitate dialogue between the conflicting parties thanks to the privileged access they sometimes have in certain insurrectionary zones.

POs could conduct awareness-raising actions on social cohesion by involving other actors (DSF, farmers, self-defence groups) and by mobilizing different peace promotion tools (joking kinship, economic complementarity, inter/intracommunity festivals, fora, etc.).

#### **MAKE THE DSF PROTECTORS, NOT THREATS, IN THE EYES OF HERDERS**

Rather than feeling sufficiently protected, the nomadic communities feel threatened by the DSF. There are a number of ways to address this:

- **Increase dialogue to better understand and improve perceptions of each other.** Dialogue should not, however, be developed in such a way that would require herders to become DSF collaborators to prove their good faith.
- **Put the DSF at the herders' service in the same way as they serve other citizens.** In collaboration with the local authorities, the DSF could initially also be called upon to facilitate livestock farmer's mobility in areas which are particularly high risk for them. More ambitiously, discussions could be initiated to make the fight against livestock theft a priority for certain DSF units. The fight against livestock theft must also include

universal animal marking - possibly even electronic - and the expansion of cross-border electronic alert platforms to trace stolen animals, etc.

- **Promote the integration of nomadic populations into the DSF so that they feel like full-fledged Sahelian citizens.** In addition to the fact that this would contribute to their sense of citizenship, herders' integration would be an essential element in the fight against livestock theft and would provide security for transhumant herders along transhumance routes.

## **SUPERVISE SELF-DEFENCE GROUPS**

Self-defence groups are one of the main drivers of the current security crisis and they are aggravating the pastoralism crisis. To limit the community-based violence in which they are involved, it is key to limit their development and to supervise their actions. There are several ways to do this:

- **Increase local dialogues between self-defence groups and communities,** including when jihadist groups need to be involved, as is currently being done in Central Mali. Local governments, CSOs, and NGOs are already active in this area, but POs could also be more involved.
- **Rethink the governance of these self-defence groups so that they are not composed of a single community** but are part of a territorial governance framework (local, regional, or national) which also includes other communities. This may be the best defense against community violence that could result from their actions. Here again, POs have a role to play in advocating for the integration of nomadic populations into these groups.
- **Put an end to the impunity of these groups by conducting national and/or international investigations,** if necessary, with the technical and financial support of international partners (financing investigative missions, the transportation of witnesses, etc.)
- **Prevent the formation of such groups where they do not yet exist, and where they do exist, promote their dissolution and/or integration into the DSF.**

## **REGULATE THE HANDLING OF LIVESTOCK-RELATED INFORMATION IN THE MEDIA AND ON SOCIAL NETWORKS**

The media amplify - intentionally or not - the stigmatization of pastoral people through the way in which they process information. To reduce this:

- **Establish legal provisions criminalizing any false information which incites hatred or ethno-community stigmatization**
- **Mobilize POs in the training of journalists and influential hosts on social networks**

## **SUPPORT THE LIVELIHOODS OF LIVESTOCK FARMERS BY STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF POS**

**Strengthen the role of POs in insurgent areas where they sometimes are the only ones able to intervene.** This would allow them to reduce the divide that may exist between the elites of these organisations and some of their members who express a feeling of abandonment.

**To enable them to fulfill this role, POs will require support to:** strengthen their capacity to negotiate humanitarian access with armed groups, either autonomously or in concert with NGOs that have more experience in this area; train them in conflict-sensitive approaches when monitoring their activities in the field; and more generally, invest in their institutional development beyond specific projects.

**Stronger involvement of POs in areas where other actors can no longer go also requires fostering renewal within POs.** PO networks should value new members, including very small organisations with strong local

legitimacy and which could be supported in their development, following well-tested models. This renewal must also be generational so that the POs match the demographic reality of Sahelian societies.

## 4. SUPPORT HERDERS' ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF PASTORALISM

**A major finding which emerges from this study is that young herders all see the future in different ways.** The majority are seriously concerned about the future of livestock farming, but they do not all draw the same conclusions between continuing to herd, diversifying their activities, or leaving livestock farming. Whatever the future the herders see for themselves, offering them the opportunity to choose - and not to be subjected - would in and of itself constitute real progress.

**In the long term, make education in pastoral settings a priority.** It is necessary to adapt the educational system to the pastoral production system through advocacy for: nomadic schools, boarding schools or school canteens, reversed calendar with respect to mobility periods, curricula which integrate herding and with better adapted educational materials, etc. The Swiss “Regional Programme for Education and Training of Pastoral Populations” (“Programme Régional d'Education et Formation des Populations Pastorales (PREPP)”) should be reviewed, in order to be reproduced on a larger scale and promoted by the education services of the Sahelian States.

**Considering the plurality of possibilities for livestock breeding is in itself a step forward.** The simple fact that herders have different horizons calls for differentiated responses from states and a holistic vision that is still lacking.

**The future of livestock production is threatened by the challenges to regional integration resulting from the security contagion in the coastal countries of West Africa.** Security threats are inciting these countries to close their borders more. By restricting cross-border pastoral mobility, they are jeopardizing the future of a multitude of actors who depend on the pastoral economy. Regional institutions must respond to this challenge, which fundamentally affects regional integration and their own existence. ECOWAS and WAEMU must define new rules of the game by updating existing policies to reassure both states and other actors of the region's pastoral economy. These organisations should also strengthen their inter-departmental synergies (agriculture/food, early warning, human rights, etc.) to limit the impact of insecurity.

These major axes of action do not exhaust the many questions that these pastoralism and security crises pose for the Sahelian and West African states more generally. They cannot be answered immediately because they first require a multi-level dialogue between actors who do not talk to each other, or who do not talk to each other very much, particularly on subjects that are still taboo or not sufficiently taken into consideration, namely pastoral crises and insecurity in pastoral areas. The present study puts its finger on these critical challenges in the hope of opening the way for an inclusive and frank dialogue which will enable progress to be made.



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