



**Rural and Pastoral
Crises, Security Crises:
The Urgent Need
to Break the Vicious
Circle of Violence**



Problems rooted in failing governance systems

The spiral of instability and violence into which the Sahel is currently sinking is partly rooted in the overall crisis of governance of rural areas. For the most part, the management of these areas is marked by ever-increasing competition and recurrent conflicts over access to and use of natural resources. Another important concern is the persistence of injustices against certain segments of the population, particularly livestock breeders.

Social inequalities and inequity in access to natural resources, the result of poor governance, are largely responsible for pastoral crises

that have destabilising effects both in the herders' home areas and in their fallback areas. Moreover, they also constitute a breeding ground for the formation of armed groups that recruit fighters from among herders who have fallen into precariousness and, increasingly, have broken with the socio-political order that marginalises them. While some herders have taken the path of violence by joining jihadist groups, the vast majority of herders are victims of both the pastoral crisis and the security crisis.

The basis of the crisis in pastoralism is the failure of the governments to secure the mobility of livestock and effectively protect pastoral land

In almost all agropastoral areas of the Sahelo-Sudanian belt, crops are continually expanding and encroaching on pastoral areas (transhumance routes, grazing areas, pastoral enclaves, livestock staging areas, etc.). In addition to these constraints, there is the scourge of privatisation of common natural resources.

Overall, the continued expansion of cash crops, the monetisation of access to water for livestock watering, and the taxation of transhumant livestock access to pastoral resources are common dynamics in the region that hinder herd mobility and have multiple negative consequences: decapitalisation of livestock, increased conflicts between users of rural areas, and distancing of social ties between communities.

The problems are above all political

Population growth, climate change, internal and cross-border migration are some of the reasons for the high pressure on natural resources. However, more fundamentally, it is the local governance system that is the main source of the difficulties encountered because local powers are held largely by sedentary populations, which results in poor representation of transhumant or nomadic herders in local decision-making bodies where their interests are poorly defended.

Local institutions suffer from a presumption of partiality that undermines their legitimacy. In some predominantly pastoral areas, such as central Mali, traditional notabilities have built up unequal systems, especially with regard to the organisation of herd grazing in the 'Bourgou' pasturelands.

Governance at national level has not been able to correct the local imbalances. Public policies tend to be pro-agriculture and implement programmes that increase the pressure on dwindling natural resources, notably through the promotion of agribusiness or ranching, the development of conversionist or mining policies and the promotion of sedentarisation as the only strategy for adaptation to climate change.

The limitation of access to pastoral resources is a structural cause of the decapitalisation of the herders' livestock

Difficulties in accessing pastoral resources force herders to sell their animals; this leads to a loss of their means of production, thus their capital, threatening their livelihoods. The continuous increase in land pressure leads to the shrinking and fragmentation of pastoral rangelands, with a consequent increase in the risk of damage to grazing lands. The arbitrations made are generally unfavourable to herders, who are required to pay heavy fines, forcing them to sell their animals.

In some cases, the outbreak of open conflict following livestock wandering off into unharvested crop fields, leads to reprisals against the surrounding pastoral communities.



The process of decapitalisation of livestock is amplified by the injustice suffered by herders, who are exposed to multiple forms of ransom

The various forms of ransom are sometimes corruption, benefiting from the complicity of breeders, and sometimes organised racketeering such as abusive or even illegal impoundment. The latter practice has become more common as states do not or rarely apply the laws that are supposed to regulate this practice.

In most pastoral areas, extortion and disguised theft of livestock have been reported and involve Dozo hunting communities, security forces, customary leaders or judges.

Feelings of injustice are reinforced by the widening social inequalities among herders, especially during the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s. During these pastoral crises, many officials, military, businessmen and farmers bought animals at low prices. The concentration of livestock in the hands of a small number of owners thus increased.

With the increase in mutual grievances, tensions between farmers and herders are overtaking the age-old complementarity and traditional rules of co-operation and exchange.

The immeasurable security effects of the pastoralist crisis

The latent crisis of agropastoral territories in the Sahel has countless consequences and, above all, strengthens the capacity of armed groups (jihadists, self-defence groups) to take advantage of the many failures in the territorial governance of agropastoral areas, in order to integrate themselves into the social fabric and consolidate their influence. These facts are observed in several areas of the Sahel:

- In eastern Burkina Faso, armed groups have skilfully exploited the resentment caused by the privatisation of protected areas and the inability of the state to promote a community-based model of shared usage. In this region, farmers and fishermen have gained access to protected areas, taking advantage of the new order established by armed groups.
- In central Mali and north-central Burkina Faso, jihadist and self-defence groups are exploiting numerous latent conflicts over

access to natural resources to position themselves as defenders of the interests of certain segments of the population.

- In the Inner Niger Delta and the Soum area of Burkina Faso, jihadist groups have provided arms to rural populations deprived of access to socio-political power, which is held by customary authorities. The latter are the main targets of terrorist violence.

This accumulation of factors of instability and violence has the effect of aggravating the pastoral crisis. The security crisis primarily affects herders, who pay a heavy economic and human price. The economic and security damage suffered are so heavy that many of them are wondering about the future of mobile livestock and the future of their families.

To act in favour of better governance and peace in rural territories, in order to give hope to communities and reinvent «living together»

In order to break the vicious circle of violence, it is urgent that public authorities, in consultation with the concerned users, make commitments to promote a pastoralism that is sustainable, resilient and respectful of the interests of agropastoral communities. The Billital Maroobè Network (RBM) calls for vigorous actions by the public authorities which, even if they do not succeed in stopping the multiple forms of violence in the Sahel, will make it possible to better anticipate, prevent and reduce the scale of the security crisis. Given the complexity of the problem, the responses should be multifaceted and the first priorities could be as follows.

Finding sustainable solutions to pastoral crises

Securing pastoral land tenure is a crucial step in resolving pastoral crises. This requirement is based less on the construction of pastoral infrastructures than on the acceptance by all users of their location and of the systems of access and use of resources.

This is built around dialogue, local consultation and the establishment of local governance rules for natural resources that are both inclusive and truly owned by the concerned stakeholders. Thus, the social agreements negotiated around infrastructure and pastoral resources will give shape to land-use planning schemes at all scales (local, national, regional). This approach implies that the local level takes precedence over 'top-down' approaches that at most allow herders (rarely transhumant herders) to be consulted, without offering them the possibility or the means to become actors of change.

Flexibility, a concerted territorial approach and inclusiveness should be the cardinal principles of this participatory process. The legal recognition of the pastoral vocation of certain areas, the mapping of resources, the delimitation and marking of areas and the construction of infrastructure should only be the outcome of the process of negotiating grassroots social agreements.



Adopt strong measures to strengthen the presence and participation of pastoral communities in natural resource governance and decision-making bodies

The local political arena is where some of the land issues are played out. It is essential that pastoral communities are represented in this arena so that they can influence public policies and the local political economy.

The effectiveness of the territorialisation strategy requires better representation of transhumant pastoralists on communal and regional councils. This is a way for them to have a say and influence over the management of pastoral resources. This political influence can be exercised through new customary representations, but also through the dynamic mobilisation of professional herders' organisations and transhumance chiefs. These different levels of power are closely intertwined and their effects can converge to defend and preserve the land interests of pastoral communities.

Eradicate the seeds of injustice in rural areas, especially in the pastoral domain

Eradicating the seeds of injustice is the way to not only reduce the temptation of young herders to take up arms, but also to help them build a promising future in their areas of residence. Restoring justice requires the eradication of the roots of injustice associated with the weaknesses and dysfunctions of formal justice.

Social injustices are one of the main facets of the pastoral crisis. An open and frank dialogue between the defence and security forces, self-defence groups, local elected officials, farmers and herders could significantly reduce the incidence of abusive power practices. As an extension of such an initiative, it is essential that networks of paralegals are trained and supported to provide grassroots advice to herders in cases of alleged injustice. At a higher level, pastoral organisations should be supported by states to play an effective role in defending pastoralist rights. This could consist of both strengthening the initial and ongoing training of magistrates and notaries on pastoral and land tenure texts, establishing an annual inventory of cases of violation of pastoralists' land rights or using the services of specialised lawyers to cancel, for example, the illegal sales of pastoral land.

Farmers' organisations could play an important role in improving the functioning of conciliation mechanisms, by making them more inclusive and legitimate, but also by facilitating their use by breeders involved in conflicts. More generally, the expectation is that public authorities will overhaul the judicial system related to natural resource governance in order to guarantee the impartiality and quality of dispute resolution, as well as the effective implementation of deliberations.

Create the conditions for restorative and impartial justice for blood crimes

The security crisis has produced violence that will be difficult to overcome by improving the pastoral sector alone. Crimes perpetrated against citizens, and pastoral communities must be prosecuted and their perpetrators punished, regardless of their ethnic, religious or professional affiliation. This requires the establishment of appropriate political and legal instruments dedicated to reparation. The reconciliation of the pastoral world with the state requires this reparation, as well as the exercise of equitable justice, the improvement of the governance of natural resources and the compensation of pastoralists' user rights in the event that the state's pastoral domains are granted to private concession.



This policy brief was prepared based on the results of the RBM study "Listening to herders in the Sahel and West Africa: What is the future for pastoralism in the face of insecurity and its impacts?" (September 2021)



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