



## Restoring Hope and Dignity to Young Pastoralists By Giving them a Central Role in the Resolution of Current Crises

Demographic statistics in the Sahel and West Africa indicate that young pastoralists make up the majority of pastoralist populations. They are strongly affected by the dual pastoral and security crisis that is shaking the Sahel.

As a result of the pastoral crisis, these young people are heavily represented in the ranks of armed groups. However, the majority of pastoral youth are currently caught between refusing to join armed groups and the lack of prospects for economic and social integration due to the worsening pastoral crisis.

The future dreamed of by these young pastoralists is diverse. Some young people aspire to a better future in the cities, where they hope

to follow a career path far removed from livestock farming. On the other hand, others wish to remain in their territories to develop modern forms of livestock breeding or to continue practising transhumance.

Even if young farmers are largely emancipating themselves from the social, economic and professional environment of their families, they are not yet at odds with their elders.

Because they are losing their bearings, young pastoralists must be accompanied by public policies that offer them the means to find a place in society, realise their aspirations and be fulfilled through the life they choose.

## Youth hard hit by the impacts of the security crisis

Today, pastoral youth are in an extremely precarious situation, both economically, socially and in terms of security. Victims of the pastoral crisis, they also suffer the full impact of the security crisis.

Although they are the main driving force of the livestock sector, young people suffer from socio-cultural constraints and a lack of social mobility due to the social constraints placed on their age group.

Less connected to socio-political and traditional networks than their elders, young pastoralists have limited capacities to overcome the inconveniences they experience in the exercise of their profession. The difficult realities experienced by young pastoralists due to the pastoral crisis, reinforce the current movement to challenge the established order.

The overexposure of young herders to the pastoral crisis makes them the main actors and the first victims of the security crisis. Along with young people from other socio-professional groups, they are the main target for recruitment by armed groups.

In the eyes of distraught pastoral youth, these groups appear to be the ideal way by which to challenge the socio-political system and

protest against the impacts of the pastoral crisis. The existence of such profiles encourages amalgamation, making young herders de facto suspects in the eyes of other actors, in this case the Defence and Security Forces and self-defence groups.

From 2017 onwards, these amalgamations have led to numerous acts of violence against young herders, but also against individuals—often from the Fulani or Tuareg communities, but not only—who do not make their living from livestock breeding, but are suspected of collusion with jihadist groups.

In central Mali, as well as in the Soum and eastern regions of Burkina Faso, it is rare to meet a young herder who has not had a relative arrested or killed by the army or self-defence groups. Their parents or relatives—driven by desperation or a desire for revenge—are the potential new recruits for armed groups, regardless of their livestock background, education or standard of living.

The vast majority of young farmers still refuse this solution. However, they are now faced with entirely uncertain and deadlocked situation that could lead them to turn to armed violence, for lack of viable prospects for the future.

## Young people in search of professional guidance and levers to secure their future

Caught between the pastoral crisis and chronic insecurity, young people are now looking for new reference points. In their minds, livestock farming is not a sector with a future, but rather one associated with numerous risks and problems and without any real prospects for development (climatic hazards, decapitalisation of livestock, administrative hassles, theft of livestock, etc.). The security crisis has reinforced this perception and pushed many young people—on their own initiative or that of their parents—to leave for the city, in their country of origin or in other West African countries.

### The exacerbation of economic insecurity and the degradation of the means of production

Young herders are suffering the full brunt of the security crisis and are deprived of their livelihoods and production, particularly because of livestock theft, the weakening of livestock mobility systems and the decline in market attendance.

At the same time, these young people are being penalised by the decline in service provision, due to the diminished capacity of the state and other external actors to directly access populations living in insecure areas.



Similarly, their traditional coping strategies (reducing the range of livestock movements, splitting up family herds, diversifying the species of animals reared, sharing information through the herders' traditional social networks, etc.) are becoming increasingly uncertain in the face of accumulating crises.

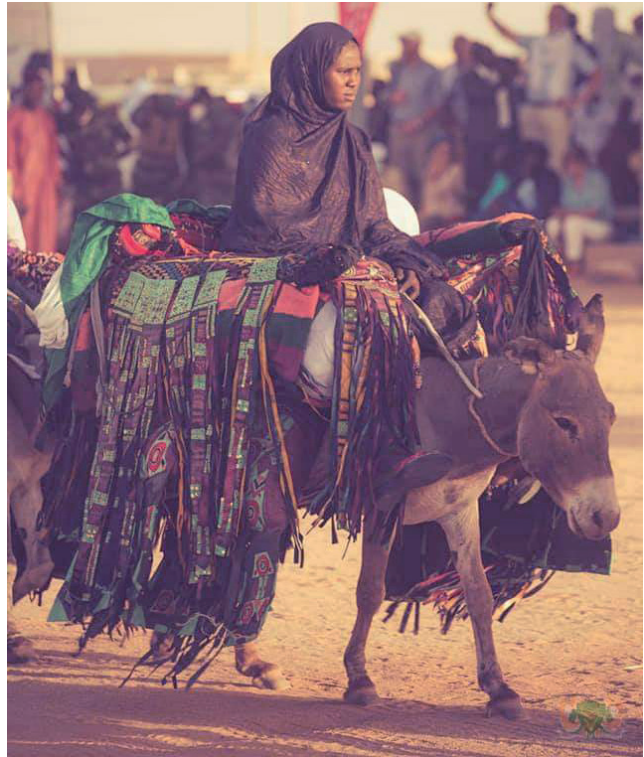
Despite this, some young people hope to prepare for their professional future by focusing on sedentarisation and intensification of livestock systems, as well as on diversification of income sources, in order to protect themselves from climatic and economic hazards. Other young people want to continue transhumant livestock farming. These different projects for the future of young pastoralists reflect the diversity of action levers for adaptation to a multifactorial crisis.

### The difficult reconversion of young breeders due to the lack of viable opportunities

In the medium term, young pastoralists are forced to follow difficult trajectories and face enormous challenges that they are not prepared for: How to change the mode of production and realise the dream of a better life in agro-ecological conditions that do not lend themselves to this? How can we promote successful economic activities when we do not have the financial capital and the required technical support?

Other economic alternatives, such as trade or gold mining, are forced choices for young pastoralists, but which are not appropriate because they lack skills and solid relational networks. However, the successful professional conversion of young herders is the last hope for preventing them from falling into criminal networks. Establishing effective professional reconversion mechanisms for young pastoralists is one of the main challenges that the Sahelian states must take up.

In the current context, the lack of prospects for pastoral youth



is both economic, social and individual. Young people do not feel fully recognised as citizens and doubt their place in an essentially sedentary environment that they consider less and less welcoming. This situation prevents them from projecting themselves into the future, including through attractive livestock sectors, such as dairy production for example.

On another level, it should be emphasised that this capacity for individual projection is closely linked to measures to redress abuses, injustices, stigmatisation and violence perpetrated by self-defence groups or the defence and security forces.

## Act to support young breeders in their new aspirations, before it is too late

Aware of the urgency of proposing rapid responses to enable young pastoralists to regain their undermined dignity and in order to limit the attractiveness of the offer made to them by armed groups, the Billital Maroobè Network (RBM) encourages public authorities to take vigorous actions based on paradigm shifts.

Sahelian states now have a real opportunity, but also a responsibility, to redefine the foundations of a new social contract with young people. The majority of young people are aware that taking up arms is not the right option. It is up to public authorities to offer them other viable and sustainable alternatives. Rural professional organisations, including the RBM, are credible relays to facilitate the link between the herders and the national authorities. The commitment of governments must be translated into concrete and strong actions aimed to (i) demonstrate to pastoralists that they are

full citizens; and (ii) provide support to enable young pastoralists to achieve their new professional aspirations.

### To strengthen the feeling of citizenship within pastoral communities

It is essential to strengthen the provision of basic services in agro-pastoral areas, in order to deliver useful services to the citizens living in these territories. «De-sanctuarisation» of pastoral areas that have become “No Man’s Lands” will not only give a more positive image of the state and its services, but will also create a climate of trust between communities and the administration.

Currently, one of the priorities is to strengthen civil status services in pastoral areas, because the issuance of civil status documents is an



essential act of recognition of the citizen by the republic. It also limits the exposure of pastoralists to racketeering and arbitrary arrests and gives them the opportunity to participate in elections.

The authorities should rethink the way government services are located in pastoral areas, to avoid the need for pastoralists to travel long distances to access public services. To this end, the development of digital tools allowing herders to accomplish their administrative formalities remotely or to benefit from other public services (educational, health or professional, etc.), seems very relevant. Young people could then invest in the related jobs and services generated by this new digital environment.

In addition, given the inherent shortcomings of traditional approaches (use of fixed health infrastructures versus provision of mobile health services), concerted reflection should make it possible to identify appropriate approaches for the organisation and provision of health services for pastoral and agro-pastoral populations, in particular for girls and young mothers, with the full involvement of local authorities.

Strengthening the practical aspects of citizenship stems from good societal integration, in particular improving relations between users of rural spaces through participatory and inclusive governance of natural resources. Rural professional organisations could play a role in social dialogue, in order to facilitate relations between transhumant herders, host communities, village chiefs, traditional authorities and hosts.

### Develop education and vocational training in pastoral areas

Education in the pastoral environment is a priority as long as it enables herders to develop their own future prospects and, above all, enables young pastoralists to succeed in their professional reconversion. Taking stock of the experiences in schooling (institutional mobile schools, relay schools, community schools, etc.) and vocational training (regional education and training programmes for pastoral populations) should make it possible to find viable and sustainable solutions, supported by rural professional organisations and eventually by national education programmes.

Public authorities and co-operation agencies must devise incentive mechanisms and design education systems adapted to the expectations of pastoral populations, in order to ensure their support: development of specific modules, establishment of boarding schools, free school canteens, adaptation of the school calendar to

mobility constraints, curricula integrating livestock farming, including more adapted educational materials, teacher training, etc.

Finally, innovative territorial development policies would enable young people to strengthen their professional networks, their leadership and their access to knowledge, through the development of “knowledge spaces” for learning and doing together. In agro-pastoral areas, the concept of «knowledge spaces» could take various forms: shared workspaces (shared workshops), manufacturing laboratories (FabLab), solidarity sheds, centres dedicated to social innovation, cultural laboratories, houses or service centres open to all, etc.

### Help young herders to achieve their aspirations through public policies that take into account the diversity of their expectations

In order to support young people who have chosen transhumant livestock farming as their priority professional activity, provisions should be adopted to facilitate livestock mobility. This implies a real political will to secure pastoral land for the benefit of these breeders, in order to protect them from the privatisation of common resources.

Young people who aspire to develop sedentary and semi-intensive livestock activities need support from public authorities to develop their livestock systems, including structural investments, upstream and downstream services in support of production (credit, trade facilities, innovation and advisory support, etc.) and structuring of value chains (supply, collection, management, processing, distribution and sales, etc.).

With regard to support for young people wishing to leave the pastoral world, public authorities must put in place proactive policies to assist them in retraining, including vocational training, support in the formulation and implementation of micro-projects, fundraising, etc.

Overall, the support strategy should be in line with the mobile lifestyle of certain communities from which the pastoral youth come from. To this end, information caravans or digital tools on business opportunities, vocational training, youth retraining, etc., could be used.

Professional organisations can be valuable relays to help identify the many expectations of young pastoralists, in order to ensure that the provision of services meets the social demand.

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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