

LIVESTOCK IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA

Promoting and Supporting Change in Transhumant Pastoralism in the Sahel and West Africa

Transhumant pastoralism: a reality in animal production systems in the Sahel and West Africa (SWA)

What is transhumant pastoralism?

Transhumance can be defined as “a system of animal production characterised by seasonal and cyclical migration of varying degrees between complementary ecological areas and supervised by a few people, with most of the group remaining sedentary”. Transhumant herds usually move from areas that are difficult, unbalanced and changeable, such as the Sahel and agro-ecologically vulnerable zones. Transhumance is a way of adapting to these conditions and making use of ecological complementarities between the Sahel and Sudan regions. It is a livestock system based on practical and economically viable management of pastoral resources that has enabled pastoral people such as the Peulhs, the Tuaregs and the Moors to survive the major ecological and climatic crises that periodically occurs in the Sahel countries.

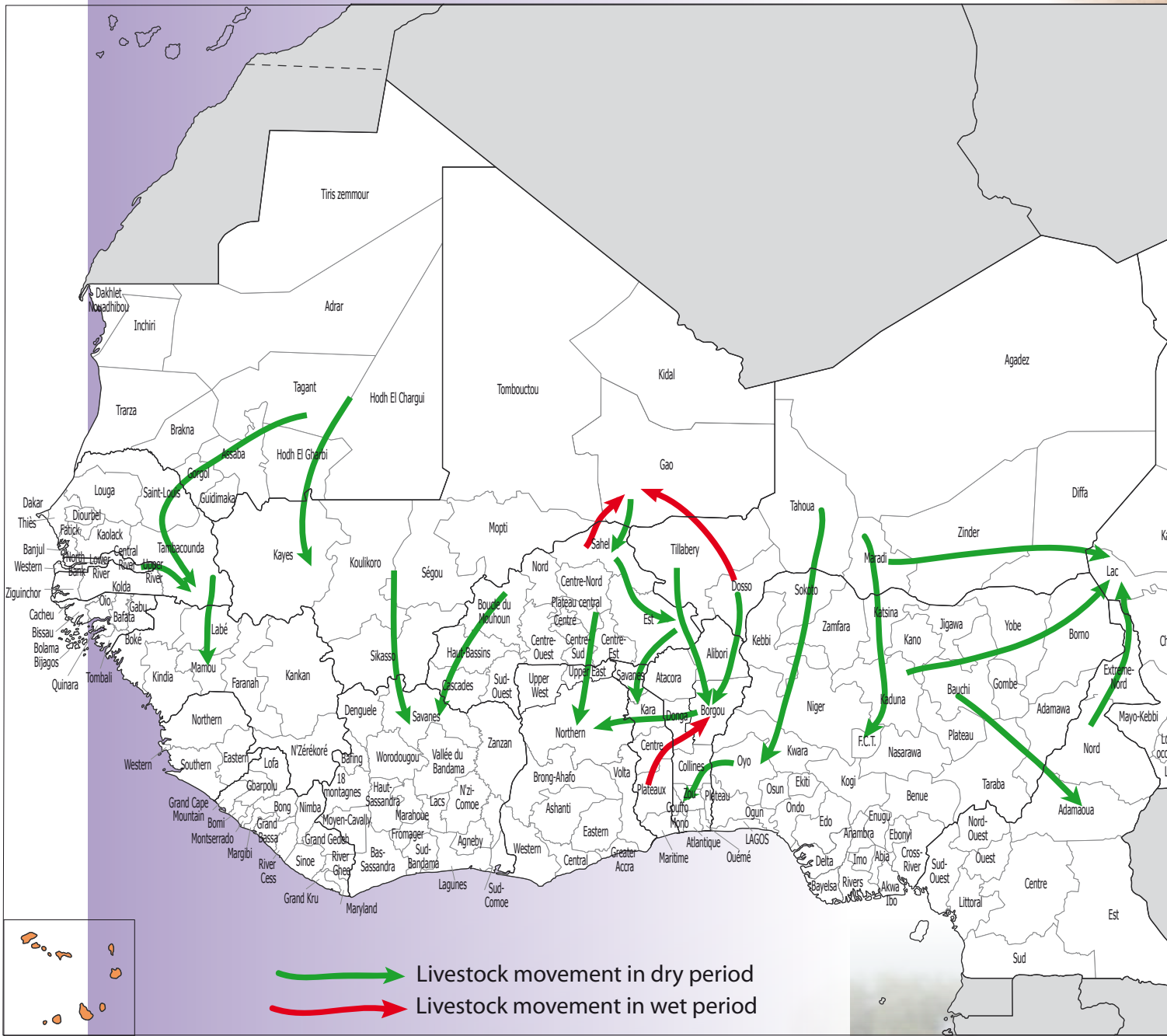
Transhumant pastoralism in the Sahel and West Africa

Transhumant pastoralism is important in the SWA's livestock sector and involves 70-90% of the Sahel's cattle and 30-40% of its sheep and goats. It occurs mainly in the arid areas (the Sahel countries, northern Nigeria and Cameroon) and is the only activity that valorises the area. Experts agree that it protects the environment and is profitable and competitive, as well as allowing some West African communities, especially the Peulhs, to affirm their cultural identity. Transhumant pastoralism supplies about 65% of cattle meat, 40% of mutton and goat meat and 70% of milk.

Despite its importance, it still faces serious obstacles that threaten its potential production. The dramatic shrinkage in pastures as a result of expanding crop cultivation and the takeover by agriculture of key pastoral areas (providing food in the dry season) and the neglect of livestock in major dam projects on the Senegal and Niger rivers restricts the access of cattle to the Sahel's resources. This is exacerbated by periodic social, political, ecological and weather crises. On the social level, difficulties and conflicts continue over movement of herds in the region, despite the adoption by Heads of State of Decision A/DEC.5/10/98 regulating transhumance between ECOWAS member States. Each year, cattle migration is hindered by administrative red tape and serious incidents in pastoral areas due to failure to comply with national and regional regulations, damage to fields and harvests, grazing in protected areas and loss of animals. This permanent tension between transhumant livestock breeders and inhabitants in pastoral areas leads sometimes to bloody clashes.



Figure 1 – Cross-border transhumance routes in the Sahel and West Africa.

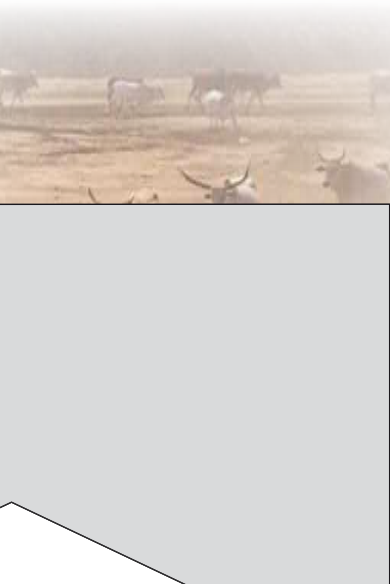


Comparative advantages of transhumant pastoralism

Environment. Transhumance enables over-used Sahel pastures to seasonally recover and reduces damage to the land. For example, the annual carrying capacity of pasture in Niger’s Say district is between 5 and 7 hectares per tropical livestock unit (TLU). In 2002, the net fodder deficit there was 264,000 tonnes of dry matter equivalent to the annual needs of half the district’s herbivore cattle.

Transhumance allows the burden to be seasonally shifted to the south, which has much more pasture, such as in Benin where the average carrying capacity of natural pasture is very high 1-3 ha/TLU. These areas can feed between three and seven times more animals than those in the Say district.





Production. Transhumance enables increased herd productivity (more milk and higher fertility) and the preservation of the animals as capital. Livestock breeders of the *Plate-forme paysanne du Niger* say the interval between births is a year in transhumant herds and two years in sedentary herds in the Sahel. They say that if transhumance stops, the number of cattle will halve in 20 years with no rise in productivity.

Economically. Transhumance involves low production costs, which means animal products in coastal markets compete well with heavily-subsidised meat imports from outside Africa.

Socially. Transhumance builds social relationships between communities through ties such as marriage, which helps social integration and peace.

Transhumant pastoralism is changing in the region 2



Factors that are changing transhumant pastoralism

The changes underway since the 1970s are caused by environmental, social, economic and political factors.

Environmental. The ecological and weather crises that severely affected the Sahel in the 1970s and 1980s have led to changes that encourage agro-pastoralism (links between livestock and agriculture). Livestock breeders began agricultural activities to reduce the risks of confining themselves to livestock. There are now more cattle in agricultural areas of Sudan, either because Sahel livestock breeders have gone there to practice semi-transhumance or because local farmers have used their crop profits to invest in cattle.

Social and economic. Greater pressure on land and other natural resources is leading to occupation of traditional pastoral areas (pastures and cattle routes) and causes greater tension between transhumant livestock breeders and other users of natural resources (crop farmers and foresters). Between 1986 and 1994, conflicts linked to transhumance killed 90 people in Benin (57 of them in Zou province alone, which has rich pastures) and maintained tension between transhumant livestock breeders and local communities, thus limiting transhumance.

Political. Decentralisation and transfer of natural resource management to rural communities is an opportunity for pastoral farmers because it should ensure better access to pastures. They also risk being more marginalised because of their low representation on relevant local decision-making bodies. There is also the risk of various local taxes that may be an obstacle to access to pastures.

The future of transhumant pastoralism: examples of change in the region

So transhumant pastoralism is slowly becoming agro-pastoralism, which is sedentary or semi-transhumant livestock farming that links crop-growing and livestock.

Transhumant livestock breeders from Mali and Burkina Faso have been gradually settling in northern Côte d'Ivoire since the eco-climatic crises of the 1970s and 1980s and lease land there to grow cereals for their own consumption. They practice semi-transhumant livestock farming along with growing crops, which enables a transfer of natural fertiliser to farmland and the use of excess crops for livestock.

The same trend can be seen in northern Benin, where transhumant livestock breeders from Niger and Nigeria have settled and created new villages. They practice semi-transhumance while diversifying into growing cereals for their own consumption and sometimes cotton.



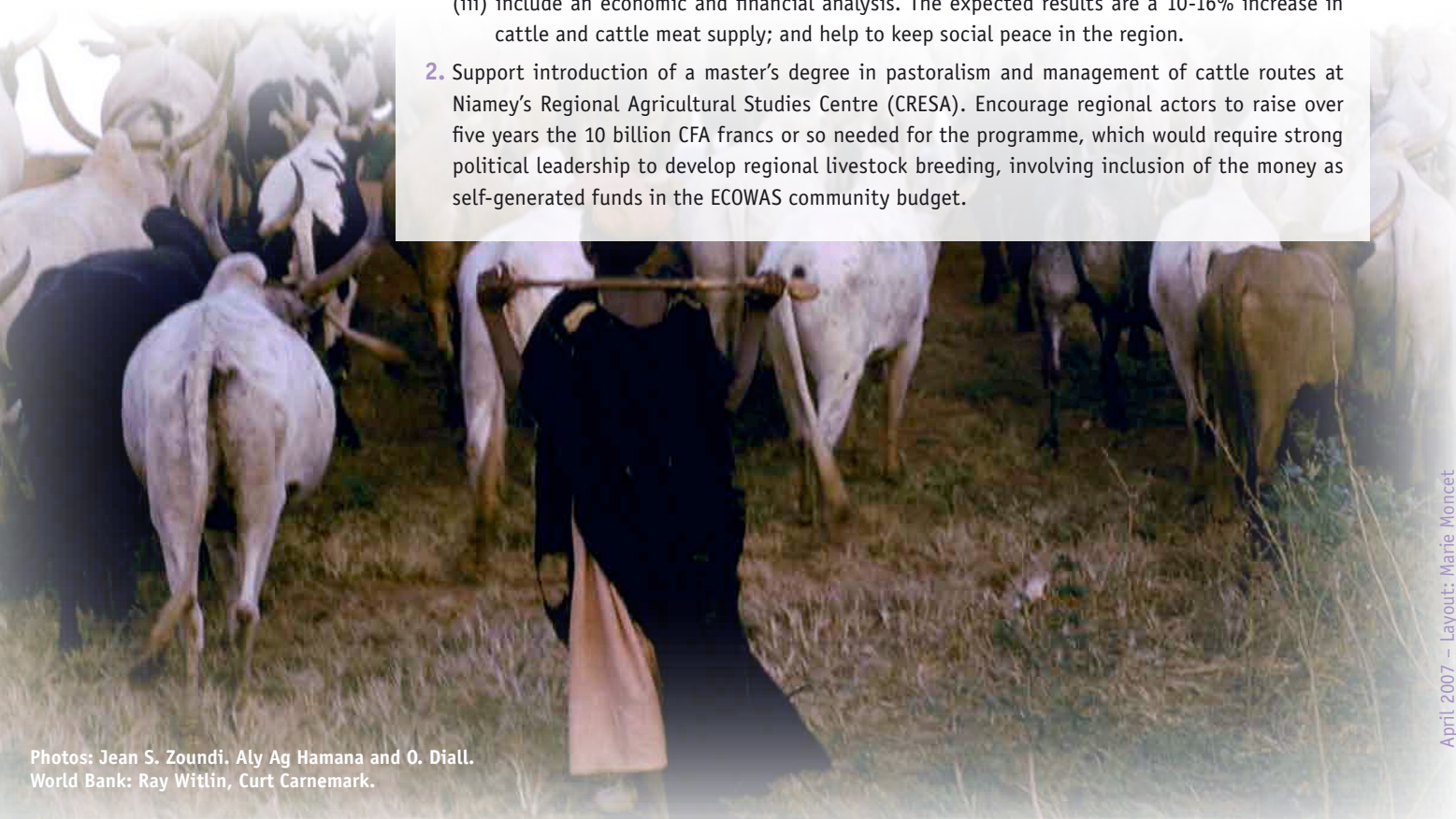
National level

Develop and implement policies and strategies aimed to support transhumant pastoralism while creating conditions for change to sedentary agro-pastoralism:

1. Draw up and harmonise pastoral codes taking account of regional aspects.
2. Strengthen capacities of livestock farmers by encouraging creation of professional farmer organisations; training in integrated management of pastures and herds and improving livestock production systems, in particular in the direction of crop-livestock integration.
3. Promote teaching and research on how to improve pastoral systems.
4. Promote access to agricultural services (advice, markets, funding) and basic social services (health, education, access to clean water).

Regional level

1. Implement the ECOWAS programme for sustainable management of pastoral resources and monitoring transhumance and review it to:
 - (i) take into account of extra measures needed;
 - (ii) expand the area covered to Mauritania, Cameroon and Chad; and
 - (iii) include an economic and financial analysis. The expected results are a 10-16% increase in cattle and cattle meat supply; and help to keep social peace in the region.
2. Support introduction of a master's degree in pastoralism and management of cattle routes at Niamey's Regional Agricultural Studies Centre (CRESA). Encourage regional actors to raise over five years the 10 billion CFA francs or so needed for the programme, which would require strong political leadership to develop regional livestock breeding, involving inclusion of the money as self-generated funds in the ECOWAS community budget.



Photos: Jean S. Zoundi, Aly Ag Hamana and O. Diall.
World Bank: Ray Witlin, Curt Carnemark.

**For more details, please refer to the complete document:
“The Future of Livestock in the Sahel and West Africa: Potentials
and Challenges for Strengthening the Regional Market”,
available on SWAC website: www.oecd.org/sah**



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