

# ACTING FOR LIFE

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## Technical Note

### The dangers of an ethnicization of conflicts between crop and livestock farmers



©Gilles Coulon / Camp near the Kompienga junction, Burkina-Faso.  
Returning to Fada N'Gourma in Burkina-Faso. June 15th, 2016

#### Summary

*In Burkina Faso – as in the rest of the Sahel – conflicts between crop and livestock farmers are often more complex than ancestral opposition between communities with different interests.*

*Over the last 50 years, both crop and livestock farmers have largely converted to agropastoralism in the face of increasing climate risks. Thus, very few “pure” crop or livestock farmers remain today. What’s more, livestock farming is no longer the sole preserve of the so-called “pastoral” north, but now occupies a central place in the central and southern regions, particularly in the cotton-producing areas.*

*While this development has led to a certain intensification of production – especially with regard to the practice of animal fattening, herd mobility remains an absolute necessity which is, however, facing increasing difficulties. Despite the consultation frameworks put in place, conflicts can then take on worrying proportions, with the risk of a social fracture that can last beyond generations.*

*While significant breakthroughs have been recorded, these must be underpinned by appropriate public policies. From the RAF (1984) to the Orientation Law on Pastoralism (2002), Burkina Faso has distinguished itself by a compartmentalization of its approaches to agricultural and pastoral spaces. With the LOASPHF project, the legislature is also allowing the continuation of a fundamental ambivalence, recognizing the importance of mobility while at the same time maintaining the option of a general sedentarization of livestock.*

*By showing the increasing difficulty of accessing pastoral resources and of being mobile, conflicts highlight the fundamental role of arbitration that the State must play as a guarantor of a fair approach to agriculture and livestock farming, without which they will continue to be wrongly stigmatized on the basis of ethnicity.*

*At a time in history when West African countries are shaken by serious intercommunal clashes, recurrent conflicts between crop and livestock farmers are a social, as well as an economic and political issue, which thus requires careful attention. This is the object of this technical note.*

## **1. From Pastoralist to Agropastoralist: An In-Depth Realignment of Livestock Systems**

For a long time, the rural economy of Sahelian countries was based on a bipolarization of agricultural and pastoral production. Mostly practiced in the north, livestock herding was used to valorize areas in which erratic rainfall patterns imposed a natural limit on the farming of cereal crops. Conversely, agriculture mostly dominated the southern regions, while livestock diseases (especially trypanosomiasis) imposed a barrier to the development of herding, especially of cattle. Exchanges (milk, cereal, manure) between crop and livestock farmers during seasonal transhumance showed an economic complementarity between the systems and helped forge close social links between the communities.

This dynamic was also evident in areas in which crop and livestock herders already coexisted. Thus, in Burkina Faso in the late 1960s, the Sebba Subdivision was described as a region marked by profound differences between, on the one hand, Fulani livestock herders and, on the other, Gourmantche crop farmers, without there being any real combination of agricultural and pastoral activities within a single domestic unit. The abundant and regular rainfalls of the 1950s and 1960s marked an initial turning point, with the rise of the agricultural regions towards the north, prompting newly settled farmers to invest in livestock farming to take advantage of the available space. In Niger, during this period, a large intermediate agropastoral band thus developed from west to east across the country. In Burkina Faso, the abundance of cereal crops has also led some farming communities to become agropastoralists, such as the Yagha Gourmantche who, in the 1950s, exchanged lowland sorghum granaries with the Fulani for livestock.

Starting in the 1970s, droughts gave agropastoralism a vital function of adaptation to climate risks. Pastoralist communities have engaged in agriculture to recover more quickly from crises and to replenish their herds, while acquiring livestock has given agricultural communities the ability to secure their family economy in bad years, as well as to invest the income gained from agriculture in good years. Recent decades have also seen a penetration of some breeding systems towards the south, reflecting the growing adaptation of the zebu to trypanosomiasis.

Depending on the technical routes followed, agropastoralism now rests on multiple possible combinations between animal and agricultural production, in constant search for a delicate balance between two complementary but labor-intensive activities, and which require access to both farmland and pasture resources.

The convergence of rural communities towards agropastoralism has important implications. On the one hand, there are very few “pure” crop or livestock farmers who only live from one type of production. The “livestock-crop farmer” opposition thus reflects a reductionist view of a more complex reality. On the other hand, breeding is no longer the sole preserve of the so-called “pastoral” north, as it is now present in southern areas, some of which have become large breeding regions. In Mali, for example, the largest producing regions are now located in the center and south of the country, particularly in the cotton-producing areas.

## 2. Livestock Mobility: A Feature Common to all Agropastoral Systems

The convergence towards agropastoralism could have led to the sedentarization of breeding systems and to a general move towards intensification. The reality of things turned out to be more complex.

First of all, where the abundance and stability of the pastoral resources allowed it, a relative intensification of production has indeed been noted. Thus, Burkina Faso's spectacular increase in live animal exports between 1982 and 2001 (a 2.6-fold increase for cattle, 3.4-fold for sheep and 5.6-fold for goats) has only been possible through a strong agropastoral systems dynamic, inter alia with the development of ruminant fattening<sup>1</sup>.

But, with hindsight, it is clear that the Sahelian context is far from that of European or North American farms, in which it is possible to perfectly control the parameters of herbaceous production and to access large volumes of inputs. The intensification of animal production in the Sahel is often limited to privileged ecosystems (e.g. in Mali's Niger River delta), or in areas rich in quality agricultural by-products (the groundnut basin in Senegal, the cotton-producing areas in southern Burkina Faso and Mali). Such an intensification also requires inputs, which are expensive. A recent analysis by the FAO<sup>2</sup> notes that, in Burkina Faso, the cost of production for one kilo of meat goes from FCFA 720 for an animal raised in a transhumant system to FCFA 2,460 for one raised in an intensive system. In the face of the opening of the global meat market and of increased competition in the coastal markets, it is essential for these countries to maintain competitive prices for urban consumers, in order to maintain their market shares.

Secondly, for the vast majority of agropastoralists, the mobility of the family herd has remained an absolute necessity in the face of scattered, unpredictable and unbalanced grazing resources from one season or year to the next. Herd mobility is also found in the most sedentary agricultural systems, such as Mali's cotton-producing area where, depending on the size of the cattle herd, producers practice transhumance over long distances.

By allowing animals to access different types of herbaceous and wooded pastures, mobility increases livestock productivity, maintains reproductive capital and enhances resilience in crisis situations. Several comparative studies have thus confirmed that transhumant animals are more productive than sedentary animals. Mobility also makes it possible to optimize exchanges with local communities in reception areas and to access markets to sell animals and dairy surpluses. As such, the contribution of transhumants to the sector's supply is fundamental. What's more, in transhumant systems, mobility makes it possible to produce meat while moving, a fact which the sector's operators in Burkina Faso know how to take advantage of by lengthening travel times towards terminal markets in the coastal countries in order to make the animals gain more weight<sup>3</sup>.

Contrary to popular belief, mobility is also good for the environment. Rather than animal load, research and development contributions have confirmed the importance of climate when it comes the productivity of natural pastures. In addition, the interactions between the livestock and the vegetation are necessary for the stability of the herbaceous layer (dissemination and burying of seeds), as well as for the regeneration of the wooded layer (digestion of the fruits by the animals). In the final analysis, the phenomenon of the degradation of livestock corridors are rather the result of densely populated southern areas, in which the fragmentation of pastures within agricultural territories forces herds to be confined into restricted spaces and limits their mobility.

Thirdly, the practice of livestock herding and the organization of mobility require both time and skills. For many originally agricultural communities, the use of qualified outside (mostly Fulani) labor to guard and drive their animals is a widespread practice. The visibility of Fulani in herd movements should not, however, lead to a systematic conflation of herders with the ownership of their herds. In Mali, for example, Fulani often lead transhumance animals belonging to other communities, whose instructions (move quickly, ensure that the animals are in a good state upon arrival by exploiting all available resources along the way, etc.) are precisely a source of conflict.

1 RENARD J-F, 2003, Analysis of Livestock Production and Marketing Channels in Burkina Faso, Livestock Poverty and Growth Initiative (Initiative Elevage, Pauvreté et Croissance (IEPC) Ouagadougou.

2 FAO, April 2014, Capitalization of support for the development of pastoralism in Burkina Faso.

3 CORNIAUX C., THEBAUD B., GAUTIER D., 2012, Commercial Livestock Mobility Between the Sahel and Coastal Countries: the Future of Foot Transportation, Nomadic Peoples, Volume 16, Issue2, 2012 : 6-25.

### 3. Threat Factors and the Reality of Conflicts Between Crop and Livestock Farmers

Animal mobility faces major difficulties which weaken agropastoral systems and threaten their balance. Over the last 20 years, the decline in land fertility, demographic pressure and the development of off-season crops have resulted in an extension of cultivated areas (particularly in cotton-producing areas, which use a lot of space), to the detriment of pastoral resources: reduction of pastures, cultivation of low-lying and forested areas, fragmentation of pasture areas and blocking of many livestock corridors. The difficulties of driving livestock also harms the sector's operations, not only between the Sahelian countries, but also towards the coastal markets.

There are thus many reasons for conflict. Damages to cultivated fields can easily occur because of blockages in the livestock corridors, occupation of pastures during the dry season, or long-term crop storage in the fields. Development infrastructures tend to favour agriculture over livestock herding. Compared to a farmer's field, a pasture remains a precarious resource, and livestock herders are often perceived as landless, unattached and, therefore, without any real rights. While it continues to contribute to limiting the extent of conflicts, the existing social capital between communities is generally eroding. Having become agropastoralists, former crop farmers fertilize their fields with their own animals, to which they reserve their agricultural by-products, instead of resorting to livestock herders. Hosting conditions for transhumants have hardened and the system for lodgers, based on strong intercommunal social links and on mutual advantages, has weakened.

Thus, the events of December 21st in northern Togo will long remain in the collective memory: more than 10 bodies found, dozens of animals killed, many serious wounds, and more bodies discovered in the bush long after the events. Similarly, the situation in northern Nigeria and Ghana has reached alarming proportions, and the Sahelian countries are not immune to the sad report of a general deterioration of the social climate between the communities. In Burkina Faso, between 2005 and 2011, the Ministry of Animal Resources recorded nearly 3,900 conflicts. Admittedly, many of them are resolved locally. For 2011, the MRA's annual report indicates that 249 management committees have managed to amicably resolve 797 conflicts related to the use of natural resources, with a growing emphasis on the establishment of consultation frameworks at the provincial and municipal levels, as well as on the protection of victims by local authorities.

Despite this, deadly violent conflict remains recurrent and causes important human and economic losses in their wake. The most critical situations took place in 2007 in Gogo (Zoundwéogo) and in 2008 in Perkoura (Poni). In these two cases only, the media reported 55 dead and many wounded, 197 burnt houses, 28 motorcycles, mopeds and bicycles destroyed, 1,200 poultry killed, over 3,000 cattle slaughtered or missing, 450 sheep and goats killed, 14 plows burned, 30 tons of cereals burned, and 7 million FCFA francs missing. In Gogo, nearly 3,000 people were displaced<sup>4</sup>.

Increasingly publicized, these conflicts too often find an easy and immediate interpretation in the ethnicity of the parties involved, with the Fulani being alternately criminal instigators or, conversely, victims of organized genocide<sup>5</sup>. The problem of access to resources or of the growing precariousness of production conditions for livestock herding then takes a backseat, as these conflicts are indicative of deeper causes linked to the growing difficulty of gaining secure and peaceful access to pasture areas and water points.

<sup>4</sup> Le Pays, September 20th, 2011, Mechanisms to Create a Climate of Peace, Understanding and Solidarity.

<sup>5</sup> Le Faso.Net, May 31st, 2012, Conflicts Between Crop and Livestock Farmers: Towards a Fulani Genocide?

## 4. Strategic Alliances Between Civil Society and Other Development Actors

In recent years, the growing need, not just to manage conflicts, but also to better understand them, has led to an increased partnership between the world of development and civil society organizations, especially pastoral ones. This is the case of AFL which, thanks to co-financing from the EU, the AFD and the Air France Group, has been working since 2009 with some 20 local partners across eight countries in the sub-region for the inclusive and equitable management of pastoral resources, on support for cross-border livestock mobility, as well as in the livestock-meat sector. Among its partners in Burkina Faso, we should specifically mention RECOPA and its eastern office (Fada N’Gourma) which has done a remarkable job in recent years to secure livestock corridors. AFL also works closely with the Sub-regional Billital Maroobé Network (RBM) (Réseau sous-régional Billital Maroobé), in which Fulani and other communities are involved in livestock herding and which (along with ROPPA) plays a pivotal role in the current dialogue between ECOWAS and civil society organizations on the future of the livestock sector.

AFL is thus helping to strengthen the economic viability of livestock systems by supplying more than 10,000 tons of livestock feed, directly managed by agropastoralist organizations. In terms of livestock mobility, AFL has worked to secure livestock corridors (over 2,000 km of strategic sections negotiated, marked and equipped with wells and grazing areas), as well as equipment for 35 secondary cattle markets.

Another contribution has to do with the facilitation of multi-actor informed debates, designed to make them reflect together on topics that are essential for the future: securing pastoral mobility, developing agropastoral systems, the efficiency of traditional sectors, pastoral land use, taxation related breeding, and policies to promote livestock exports.

To do this, AFL has used innovative approaches developed since 2000 by the Association for Research for Education, an adult education NGO in national languages based in Dakar, and which had already developed and disseminated facilitation and training modules on pastoralism in the Sahel, using a unique pedagogical method. Since then, a new Facilitation and Training Module on Livestock Trade in West Africa has been designed by AFL, with ARED and CIRAD<sup>6</sup>. The appropriation of these tools by the actors concerned was based on the training of endogenous facilitators able to lead workshops bringing together both producers (including illiterate people), decentralized communities, technical services, producer organizations and representatives of civil society.

But these contributions, which are still modest, can only have a lasting impact if they are underpinned by appropriate public policies.

<sup>6</sup> CIRAD (French agricultural research center for international development) (Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement).

## 5. The Legislative and Institutional Framework

This framework is complex and has evolved over time. The long distance travelled can be measured from the 1984 RAF to 2002's Orientation Act on Pastoralism, 2007's National Policy on the Security of Rural Land Tenure and finally 2013's Agro-Sylvo-Pastoral, Fisheries and Wildlife Orientation Bill (LOASPHF).

However, compared to other Sahelian countries, Burkina Faso stands out by its compartmentalized approach to its agricultural and pastoral spaces, laid out in the RAF (with the developed pastoral areas), and which can also be found in the Orientation Act on Pastoralism (with the special developed pastoral areas). The spirit of these laws stems from a dichotomous vision of space and producers with, on the one hand, pastoralists and, on the other, herders, without any feeling of being in front of rural actors placed on an equal footing. The question of valuation criteria, still relevant today, is another demonstration of this. While land clearing and agricultural production in a given area provides de facto solid land rights, pastoral development requires investment and compliance with strict specifications.

At another level, there is still a basic ambivalence between, on the one hand, recognizing the importance of mobility and, on the other, a sedentary and intensifying vision of livestock farming. This duality is particularly striking in the guidelines taken by the draft LOASPHF<sup>7</sup>. While reaffirming the fundamental importance of transhumance, the text also underlines a need to create the conditions necessary for a transition from extensive systems to intensive and sedentary livestock farming (Title III.9), through the construction of a national plan for sedentary and intensive livestock farming in collaboration with local authorities. (Art. 98).

By establishing local democracy and empowering local decision-making bodies, decentralization has been a source of hope since it began. However, the exercise of this democracy too often tends to be in favour of indigenous communities, and risks marginalizing livestock herding and temporary resource users, such as transhumants. It is also striking to see that, when making collective decisions (e.g. for communal development plans), producers who are involved in livestock herding suddenly consider themselves to be crop farmers and decide against the maintenance of pastoral resources.

At the sub-regional level, there is also a long way to go. The strategic importance of mobility is now recognized by the African Union in its Political Framework for Pastoralism in Africa, and this mobility is now legally protected in most Sahelian countries. ECOWAS' international transhumance certificate also facilitates the cross-border mobility of herds between its member states. However, while they can still be improved, policies and legislation are no longer the main obstacles to mobility in the Sahel; it is rather their implementation that is currently critical. Livestock corridors must be rehabilitated and protected over long distances to secure the internal and cross-border movement of livestock. Services adapted to livestock mobility need to be strengthened (including access to livestock feed and veterinary care). Access to pastures and water points along the corridors must be guaranteed.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, October 2013, Study on the establishment of an Agro-Sylvo-Pastoral, Fisheries and Wildlife Orientation Bill (LOASPHF) in Burkina Faso.

## 6. Conclusion: A Vital Need for Coherence

The place of livestock herding in Burkina Faso is well established, as is the importance of maintaining social peace in the country, without which there can be no sustainable development.

The role of the State has been redefined and its repositioning has resulted in the transfer of skills at the local level. However, its importance remains undeniable as a guarantor of a frame of reference based on a fair approach to agriculture and livestock farming, without which intercommunity conflicts will continue to be stigmatized on the basis of ethnic affiliation.

This «ethnicization» of conflicts is all too often rooted in a series of factors, the most important of which is access to resources, linked to climate hazards and the vital need for coherence in the legislative and institutional frameworks. In order to facilitate negotiations between users, the rules governing the occupation of space and the exploitation of the environment must refer to fundamental principles whose function is ensured throughout the legislative and institutional apparatus. However, confining pastoralism to circumscribed areas and dissociating agricultural areas from pastoral areas can only lead to an artificial split between “Fulani livestock herders” and “sedentary crop farmers”. Recognizing the importance of mobility while stating that it is only a transitional phase towards a sedentarization of livestock farming also presents producers with an insoluble dilemma, since they know that their animals must always continue to move.

The feeling of injustice is a powerful driver of revolt and armed conflict. In central Niger, the rationing of food aid for pastoralists during the 1984 drought marked the outbreak of acute clashes between the Tuareg communities and the army, which were the precursors of a long period of insecurity. In the east of the country, a communal conflict between the Fulani, Tebu and Arabs lasted 15 years and revolved around the control of grazing areas and pastoral water points. Long catalogued as an ethnic conflict, a historical examination of its origins has shown that some communities were actually attempting to take back territories that had been confiscated 70 years earlier by the colonial administration.

The plight of some East African countries (Kenya and Uganda in particular) clearly shows that a pastoral lifestyle based exclusively on violence and the use of arms is very damaging, not just from an obvious political and social point of view, but also economically. As such, in northern Kenya in the late 1980s, it was estimated that approximately 40% of rangelands were inaccessible due to herd theft and armed robbery. And yet, these areas contained high quality pastures, the lack of which resulted each year in significant animal losses for the country<sup>8</sup>.

When conflicts die down without being truly resolved, grudges may develop over time, as shown by the recent conflict in the Mané Commune (Sanmatenga), where a livestock robbery in March resulted, a month later, in retaliations between villages, resulting in the death of a farmer, serious injuries, homes burned and many displaced people<sup>9</sup>.

Beyond their direct impact on livestock production and on the livestock farming sector, the conflicts between producers that are rocking Burkina Faso’s rural areas also carry the major risk of provoking a social fracture that could carry across generations and constitute a difficult legacy for the future. Such a perspective would be all the more regrettable as the rural history of Burkina Faso has been shaped by a unique mix of populations whose villages and neighborhoods still bear close ties of proximity and cohabitation between different groups of human beings.

Burkina Faso’s legislature rightly recalls that conflict management starts with prevention through a good organization, training and information of the actors, as well as through a good management of natural resources and the organization of equitable access so that all actors are entitled to them<sup>10</sup>. Directly linked to competition between crop and livestock farming (rather than between “crop farmers and livestock herders”) in rural areas, these conflicts thus highlight the fundamental arbitration role that the State must play in the management of pastoral resources in order to create favourable conditions for the securing of rights and the maintenance of peace.

8 (INTEGRATED PROJECT IN ARID LANDS (IPAL), 1984, Technical Report A-6, Integrated Resource Assessment and Management Plan for Western Marsabit District, Northern Kenya, Part 1, Unesco Programme on Man and Biosphere, Nairobi).

9 Faso Presse, April 28th, 2014, Conflicts Between Crop and Livestock Farmers in Mané: One Dead, Many Displaced.

10 LOASPHF, Title III-20 (Conflict Management in Rural Areas).

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