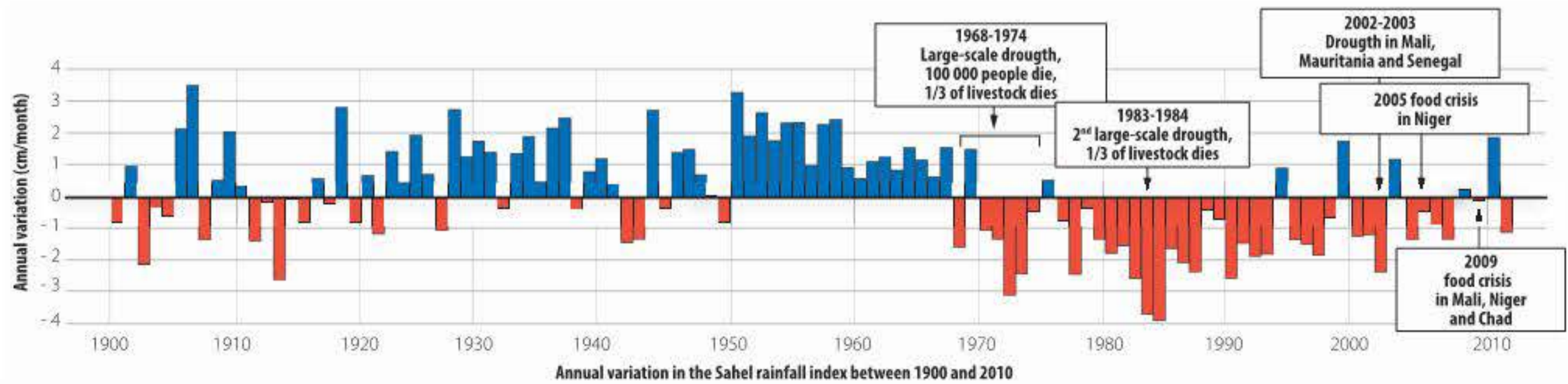


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Fig. 23. Annual variation in the Sahel rainfall index between 1900 and 2010

Source: Touré et al 2012



PASTORAL MOBILITY, FROM A SAHELIAN TO A SUB-REGIONAL ISSUE

Public policies have long seen pastoral mobility as a problem, in connection with a sometimes divisive approach to productive land use. Today, because of the population, land tenure and economic dynamics at work in all territories, securing mobility is becoming an economic and political challenge of regional or even continental importance.

• Mobility, the core of an economy of shared resources

Extensive cattle, sheep and goat breeding are the predominant activities in the Sahel region. Pastoralism is characterised by close interactions between the family organisation, the herd structure and the natural surroundings, and these interactions require a great capacity for adaptation. Rangeland resources are heterogeneous, scattered and transient; rainfall varies by 30% every year around an average of 400 mm. In the dry season, surface waters are rapidly transformed into strings of pools and plant cover disappears, making mobility an essential condition for the reproduction of Sahelian pastoral systems. Furthermore, the sustainability of this pastoral economy, with its uncertain, shared resources, depends on bundles of collective rights to the basic factors of production, in other words livestock and access to shared water points. It is based on the division of tasks within the family and rights to livestock and to temporary labour. Finally, it responds to growing demand on markets that are located a long way from the pastoral areas. The dispersion of the resources needed for production is therefore not the only reason

pastoralists leave their home area. Looking for salt (natron), avoiding contagious diseases or land conflicts and driving herds to end markets in the large cities are also reasons for moving livestock within the region.

• The intensification of regional interdependence in changing territories

Until the recurrent droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, pastoral mobility was relatively unrestricted and confined globally to the Sahel countries. Indeed, from the 1950s, a number of pastoral hydraulic works built in dry sub-humid areas opened up regions that were previously useless in the dry season because of water scarcity. After the rainy season, herds thus moved, where possible, towards wetlands or rivers (Senegal River Valley, Inner Niger Delta) and to post-harvest agricultural land (grazing in exchange for fertilisation) and the huge territories under long fallow.

During the last drought events of the 1980s, up to 80% of herds were decimated in some pastoral zones, and this mortality opened up areas for surviving herds. Moreover, people and animals migrated to the south, in the Sahel countries and even in the coastal countries, joining livestock farmers who had been living for decades in northern Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. At the same time, the reduction in trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) prevalence and crossbreeding by livestock farmers made it easier to move zebu and zebu cross cattle herds to the south, these

animals being less susceptible to this disease. Not all of these farmers returned to the Sahel zone after the crisis. Some stayed in their host areas, maintaining links with pastoralists in their areas of origin and forging new ones with those in their new location.

But since the 1980s, population growth has been altering the structure of pastoral and agro-pastoral areas. Human and animal population densities are increasing and pastoral areas are diminishing due to the expansion of agricultural land and of irrigated areas around water resources. In agro-pastoral areas, fallow periods are now limited. Moreover, farmers often also rear livestock. Competition for water and rangelands is therefore exacerbated and mobility is becoming very restricted, especially in the southern areas. This is where more and more transhumant pastoralists are now to be found looking for pastoral resources. The mobility of trade has also increased towards the capital cities of the coastal countries, which are becoming more and more populated, with growing demand for red meat.

More than in the past, but less than in the future, pastoral areas both within and outside the Sahel are necessarily interdependent and the shared use of land and resources is becoming more complex. Cross-border transhumance provides welcome supplies of animal products as well as trade and fiscal revenue at the borders, on markets and in towns, and provides fodder and fertiliser in the areas crossed.

• Renewed interest in pastoralism as an opportunity for integration

Mobile pastoralism is currently attracting much attention from a range of different stakeholders. Cross-border cooperation is in fact becoming a hobbyhorse for some coastal and Sahelian countries, for bilateral cooperation, regional

and non-governmental organisations, and for international financial institutions. Interventions cover different fields, even those that were not previously included in livestock development programmes: security, education, decentralisation, human health, etc. However, the stakeholders all have their own priorities and, consequently, programmes overlap in the same field without any subsidiarity or coordination. These initiatives, most of which are regional, could have a greater impact if the national policies on which they are based were to better integrate mobile pastoralism issues, and if regional integration directives were applied more effectively.

More secure, better regulated cross-border mobility would be an example for the regional integration of the main sector concerned by sub-regional trade in West Africa. This policy challenge represents an opportunity for decision makers to adopt a truly regional approach and to work towards greater stability in the Sahel, which also undoubtedly depends on these cross-cutting processes.

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