Cross-border transhumance is all too often reduced to an activity that generates conflicts that can easily be resolved by closing borders. This note to policymakers paints a much more complex picture. Pastoral mobility in West Africa contributes tens of billions of CFA francs to the economy every year in all host areas. In a region with a volatile security situation and employment and poverty challenges, the economic, social and political dimensions of transhumance are critical. Regulated, peaceful cross-border mobility would be an example for regional integration in the main sector concerned by sub-regional trade in West Africa. This challenge represents an opportunity for policymakers to adopt a truly regional vision and to work towards greater stability in the Sahel.

In West Africa, livestock movements during cross-border transhumance are considered outdated and a source of conflict (figure 1). Transhumant pastoralists are often seen as “locusts”, contributing nothing to either the host economy or to the livestock sector. Some coastal states suggest the total closure of borders, such as Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Benin, while others opt for temporary closure, such as Togo. These restrictions on mobility clearly threaten the future of pastoral herding. Yet mobility is the very basis of pastoralism, which directly concerns more than 20 million individuals, especially in the Sahel. In a volatile security context, and in a region characterised by high levels of poverty and unemployment, is it reasonable to support this restrictive path? In other words, what are the challenges of safeguarding pastoral mobility for West Africa?

Figure 1. Burkinabe herd returning from transhumance in northern Togo.
Pastoral mobility, from a Sahelian to a sub-regional issue

Regional interdependencies have increased since the 1980s within changing areas.

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 and sub-humid areas opened up regions that were previously inaccessible in the dry season because of water scarcity. After the rainy season, herds also moved, where possible, towards wetlands or rivers (Senegal River Valley, Inner Niger Delta) and to post-harvest agricultural land (grazing in exchange for fertilisation) or to 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. People and animals also 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 decline in trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) 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 shrinking 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 also often rear livestock. Competition for water and rangelands is therefore increasing and mobility is becoming very restricted, especially in the southern
areas. Yet this is where more and more transhumant pastoralists are now to be found looking for pastoral resources in the dry season. 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 (figure 2; box 1).

The Sahelian and Sudanian pastoral zones are now more interdependent than ever before, and will be even more so in the future. The shared use of land and resources is becoming more complex and needs to be addressed at the regional level.

Cross-border transhumance, an opportunity for household economy in host areas

Mobility is of considerable economic and social importance not only for transhumant populations, but also for host populations.

Demonstrating the volume of trade (purchases and sales) conducted during transhumance is essential in order to show its economic and social role for pastoral families as well as for families in the transit and host areas. But the data available is scarce or fragmented. The goal of the study on pastoral and agropastoral resilience in the Sahel was to remedy this problem at the level of West Africa (Thébaud, 2017; box 2). The survey involved 386 families along the main cross-border transhumance routes, from five different Sahel countries: Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger (figure 4). It was conducted in camps at the end of the 2015 rainy season and concerned transhumance in 2014-2015.

Buying... Figure 5 shows that, on average, every family spends around 1.2 million CFA francs during transhumance. Two thirds of this spending is on food and feed. The proportion spent on animal feed is particularly high in the

Figure 2. Livestock mobility in West Africa. (From Corniaux et al., 2016)
THE WEST AFRICAN RED MEAT INDUSTRY IS ALMOST SELF-SUSTAINING

West Africa imports very little red meat (beef, lamb and goat), which is not the case for chicken (figure 3). In other words, extensive pastoral systems – which are the main suppliers of urban markets – have thus far been able to meet demand in terms of volume and price. Reducing livestock mobility means reducing the capacity of pastoralists to produce and forcing retailers to increase the price of meat.

Figure 3. Evolution of meat imports from 1995 to 2014 in the ECOWAS region, in millions of USD.
(Source: http://unctadstat.unctad.org/)

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Pastoral mobility, an opportunity for regional integration

For West Africa, transhumance is therefore both a social and an economic issue, especially as it is added to trade mobility, on foot or by vehicle, which supplies all markets in West African capitals (box 1). But it is also a political issue. In a volatile security context in the Sahel, the states need to give far greater attention to

THE BRACED PROJECT, PASTORAL AND AGRO-PASTORAL RESILIENCE IN THE SAHEL

The BRACED project (Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters), financed by UK-Aid (Department for International Development, United Kingdom) and coordinated by AFL (Acting For Life), focuses on two transnational territories that interconnect Mauritania, Mali and Senegal on the one hand, and Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso on the other. The western territory links southern Mauritania (Trarza, Brakna, Gorgol, Guidimaka, Hodh-el-Gharbi and Hodh-el-Chargui provinces), north-western Mali (Kayes and Koulikoro provinces) and Senegal (Saint-Louis, Louga, Matam and Tambacounda regions). The eastern territory covers livestock movements from northern Mali (Gao region) towards the Burkinabe Sahel (Dori, Djibo, Sebba, Gorom-Gorom) and the eastern part of Burkina Faso (Fada N’Gourma). This territory also covers transhumance routes from western Niger (Tillabéri province). These zones encompass major seasonal movements of transhumant pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, who thus have access to grazing resources and markets, as well as to refuge areas during droughts. The most strategic routes (in red in figure 4) act as a circulatory system enabling herders to move with their animals. They are also trade routes for conveying livestock. In eastern Burkina Faso, for example, Fada N’Gourma is a key destination for pastoralists from Mali (Gao) and Niger (Tillabéri) and an important trade centre supplying rural and urban markets in Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo and Nigeria.
pastoralism, the region’s main activity. All of West Africa is concerned. Population growth means that the coastal countries are receiving and will continue to receive increasing numbers of transhumant herders. Local supplies of red meat to the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) region depend on this. What will happen if there is a major drought? Will the borders be closed, at the risk of new unrest with disastrous consequences? Ultimately, the issue is a regional one for a livestock industry that is undoubtedly the most integrated in terms of production and cross-border trade.

This is why livestock mobility is now the focus of special attention for many actors. Cross-border cooperation has become a mission for some regional organisations, bilateral cooperation programmes, non-governmental organisations and international financial institutions. Action covers different fields, even those previously absent from livestock development programmes: security, education, decentralisation, human health, employment, migration, etc. However, until recently, these organisations all operated according to their own priorities and, as a consequence, many programmes still overlap in the same areas without any systematic coordination. These initiatives, most of which are regional, could have a greater impact if the national policies underpinning them gave more importance to the challenges of livestock mobility, and if regional integration directives were applied more effectively.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area surveyed</th>
<th>Budget spent on animal feed (in CFA francs)</th>
<th>Number of families interviewed</th>
<th>Average budget per family (in CFA francs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>75 660 000</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1 080 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania (south)</td>
<td>60 320 000</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>862 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Mali</td>
<td>45 370 000</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>648 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Mali</td>
<td>4 460 000</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>127 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Burkina Faso</td>
<td>15 120 000</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>432 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Burkina Faso</td>
<td>460 000</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Nigeria</td>
<td>8 260 000</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>116 000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. Budget spent on animal feed according to area surveyed (from Thébaud, 2017)*
In conclusion

Cross-border transhumance provides welcome supplies of animal products, generates trade and tax revenue at borders, on markets and in municipalities, and supplies fodder for transhumant herders, as well as manure and opportunities for rural people in the transit areas.

Safeguarding and pacifying mobility at the regional level rather than obstructing or opposing it is undoubtedly the path forward. Putting an end to mobility would have serious economic, social and political consequences in both departure areas and host areas.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that efforts are urgently needed to safeguard this mobility.
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The pastoralism-peace-food security nexus rapidly emerged as a focal area of common interest. Substantial progress has been made in this field. For example, the results and lessons learned by the Pastoralism and Drylands platform (www.ppzs.org), the analysis of pastoralists’ needs in Chad and Cameroon in the context of the crisis in the Lake Chad basin (FAO, 2017), and the notes to decision-makers prepared in 2016-2017 in the framework of the PRAPS, are all highly instructive initiatives. However, despite this progress, there is still a great need for research, for information production and dissemination and for strategic advice. It was thus with the goal of further substantiating this knowledge that FAO and CIRAD jointly prepared and published three additional notes to decision-makers. The purpose of these notes is to guide and inform the actions of the regional organisations, states and key partners concerning pastoralism in the Sahel and West Africa.

The opinions expressed are those of the authors alone.