

# MOBILITY OF TRANSHUMANT CATTLE HERDS IN BENIN: ORGANIZATION, ACTORS AND CHALLENGES

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## Abstract

*This study aims to understand transhumance through its organization, the actors involved in its management, and its challenges in southern Benin. With the large flow of transhumant herds that Benin receives in its southern part, we question the management of this pastoral system. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 300 transhumant actors in 13 villages of the commune of Djidja, which is a reception area for national and foreign transhumant herders. The results show that the organization of transhumance was divided into three periods that follow one another from the arrival to the return of transhumant from the reception areas. In this way, transhumance activities in these study areas involve direct and indirect actors with different interests, knowledge and assumptions. According to the herders surveyed, 72% of the grazing areas are occupied by other uses. This situation is at the origin of agro-pastoral conflicts and thus weakens the progress of transhumance in this region. The redefinition, materialization and effective securing of pastoral space is therefore essential for the proper organization of transhumance and the reduction of conflicts between actors.*

**Key words:** Transhumance, Complex conflict, Sustainable management, Djidja, Benin

## INTRODUCTION

In Benin, livestock farming plays an important role in the country's economy, accounting for up to 44% of the agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [1], and is a source of income for the population through its role as standing capital and means of fertilizing crops, etc. To ensure the feeding of cattle herds, farmers essentially resort to the use of natural pastures through the mobility of herds on grazing areas [2]. Among the different forms of mobility, transhumance corresponds to seasonal movements that make it possible to "take advantage of areas with strong complementary ecological potential, over often very vast spaces" and which, "far from being a simple habit, corresponds in fact to a real social, political and economic construction, constantly renewed and readapted" [3]. The phenomenon of

transhumance exists all over the world, but in West Africa, it seems to be a typical field event of transhumance on the African continent. Although the management of transhumance is the responsibility of the State, significant discontinuities appear in the chronology of its organization and this generally escapes it. This management of space and its natural resources is the responsibility of a group of actors (or "stakeholders") who are responsible for resolving conflicts of interest. It is often provided by the breeder, breeders associations or marginally by the breeding services [4]. Since the pioneering work on transhumance in Sub-Saharan Africa, few analyses have been produced on the process of its organization by pastoralists in connection with the difficulties experienced by stakeholders in its management. This subject of study is complex because it involves diverse actors, carrying multiple challenges, at various decision-making levels. It is therefore essential to have knowledge of the functioning and the new

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challenges of pastoralism and pastoral communities in order to be able to support the actors. Faced with this, it is therefore necessary to conduct a study that can provide information on the organization of transhumance by its various actors as well as the possible risks of this form of mobility in the context of socio-environmental changes in Benin.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study was carried out in the municipality of Djidja, which is a reception area for transhumant cattle herds in southern Benin [5]. This choice is justified by the fact that it traditionally receives national and regional transhumant herds from Burkina Faso, Niger and even Nigeria. As part of this study, interviews with resource persons and observations in the field constituted the approaches used, taking into account all the categories of actors involved in cattle transhumance. The sampling method used in this study was simple random sampling [6]. In order to understand the organization of pastoralists around transhumance and the management of natural resources in the context of environmental changes in southern Benin, data was collected from 300 stakeholders on the basis of semi-structured interviews [7]. Thirteen (13) villages were selected in five (05) districts of the municipality of Djidja. The choice of these survey villages was made with the heads of the breeders of the different districts according to well-defined criteria [2], [4]. The statistical processing and analysis of the data focused on the process of organizing transhumant herders, the actors, issues and the analysis of constraints related to the management of transhumance. Statistical analyses focused on the calculation of frequencies using R 4.0.5 software. The different percentages are obtained from calculations taking into account the total number of respondents.

## RESULTS

### Process of organizing transhumance in southern Benin

L'organisation de la transhumance demande des formes d'organisation sociale

complexe pour maintenir ouverts les aires de pâture, garantir l'accès aux pâturages des zones d'accueil et régler les conflits entre les acteurs. Les modes d'utilisation des ressources pastorales reposent sur un certain nombre d'étapes qui se succèdent de l'arrivée jusqu'au retour des transhumants des zones d'accueil. L'organisation de la transhumance a été divisée en trois périodes chez tous les éleveurs (100%) transhumants enquêtés. L'accès aux ressources pastorales varient en fonction de ces différentes phases.

#### - Before the departure in transhumance

The departure in transhumance of a group of transhumant under the authority of the Fulani leader is not the same as that of any transhumant. The steps followed by transhumant herders before leaving for transhumance begin with the organization of a consultation session. It takes place under the authority of the "Rugga" and aims to emphasize the importance of transhumance within the community and to recall the discipline to be observed. It was on this occasion that the **Garso** was appointed to prospect the reception areas. A prospecting report is exposed to the transhumant and together they decide to choose the most favorable reception area and the routes to be followed. During the same meeting, the herders will prepare their departure on transhumance during the dry season from Dabuundè to Seeto. During the rainy season, small transhumance is organized to keep animals away from cultivated areas, from the period from Nduungu to Djaamdè in order to avoid the destruction of the fields by the animals.

#### - During the transhumance

Transhumant herders are gradually moving to transit and reception areas. During the transit, some undertake negotiations for the parking and watering of their herds. Arrived in the municipality of Djidja, the transhumant continue to negotiate for access to pastoral resources, whether or not they fulfil their right (85.5%) before accessing them. Some breeders set up their camp which serves as a base during the transhumance stay.

### - Return of transhumance

The transhumant pastoralists surveyed affirm that their departure from the reception area is more difficult and depends on several parameters. For the most part, the determining factor of this return was the arrival of the rainy season (86.88%) in the reception areas which coincides with the installation of crops by the farmers. Others (91.8%) also added that their return is marked by the availability of pastoral resources in the home areas. Thus, situations are observable, some breeders prefer to leave at nightfall. Others, on the other hand, prefer the day. The steps followed for the return are:

- choice of return period;
- choice to follow trails such as fallow land, the edge of watercourses, unused areas to avoid going into the fields;
- return to the home area.

At the end of the transhumance, the Garso is honoured for his work. Each individual can indeed show gratitude to the Garso as he pleases while respecting a sort of ritual that requires informing other transhumant in his locality. Thus, according to custom, the symbol of gratitude to their Garso is a female animal which must bear a standard name (“*Hakpanaahein*” in the Peulh language) whatever the species. The Garso will not own the female but rather the result of her first birth. The animal thus stays in the Garso herd until it is given birth; after which, he must return the female to the donor and keep the young, which thus becomes his property.

### Actors of transhumance

Based on information from semi-structured interviews and focus groups, our study shows that the actors in the organization and management of transhumance in South Benin are diverse. Two main categories of actors have been identified: (1) direct actors (transhumant pastoralists and their umbrella association, agro-pastoralists, farmers and fishermen) who are responsible for complying with the regulations in force in the use of resources pastoral care, and (2) indirect actors represented by government or institutional officials at various levels: local and national.

By institution, these are the municipal authorities, district and village heads, municipal transhumance committees, the SCDA, the gendarmerie brigade, the Garso, the CTAF, and farmers' associations.

### Issues and conflicts linked to transhumance in Benin

Mobile livestock farming is now the subject of special attention from a variety of actors. While each of the stakeholder groups has their own interests, these can be contradictory. The analysis of these interests makes it possible to highlight the challenges of transhumance which are therefore at the same time socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental. Thus, mobility is a capital element of survival strategy and herd safeguard, and becomes a more productive system. It is recognized as beneficial for the environment and the quality of pastures because it allows to alternate periods of exploitation and rest, which promotes the sustainability of pastures. Transhumance has economic repercussions in the reception areas, in particular on the life of households, the animation of livestock markets, the creation of jobs, the functioning of management structures, etc.

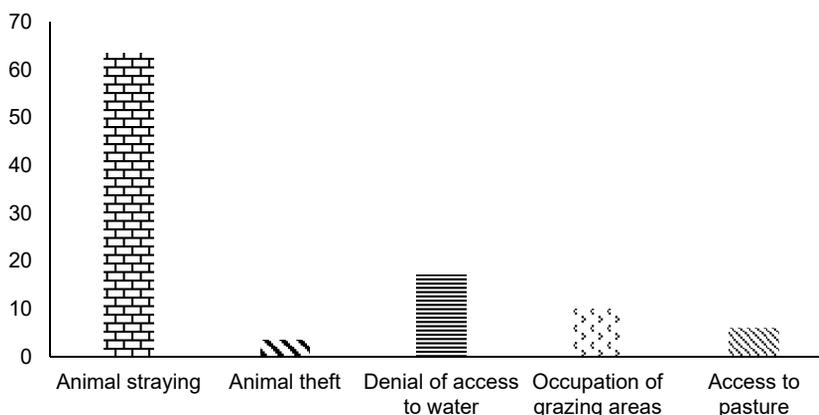


Fig. 1 Sources of conflicts linked to transhumance in South Benin

Around these issues also arise conflicts and tensions between the actors and more often than not, when the breeders are surprised by committing an offense. The origin of these disputes is the extension of agricultural land for pastoralists (72%) favoured by population growth. For these various actors, the upsurge in cases of frequent conflicts are linked to the wandering of animals (63.5%), access to pasture (6%), denial of access to a water point (17%), animal theft (3.5%), and obstruction of transhumance routes (10%). Those responsible for herders (100%) in the study

area agree that transhumance nowadays faces a lack of organization, management and a lack of reception facilities. Added to this is the failure to respect entry and exit posts, the length of stay, the lack of flexibility on return routes, the discontinuity of transhumance corridors, etc. which are linked to the socio-environmental changes faced by transhumant herders. The concern of transhumant (100%) is to meet the needs of their animals as well as possible. The types and causes of conflicts mentioned by the actors are summarized in the following table.

Table 1 Summary of the types of conflicts and the causes related to these conflicts

Type of conflicts	Causes of conflicts
Breeders - Farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Damage to crops, standing or in storage</li> <li>• Installation of fields on pastoral areas</li> <li>• Appropriation of water reservoirs by farmers, for market gardening</li> </ul>
Breeders - Forest Agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prohibition on the use of classified forests in the municipality</li> <li>• Non-compliance with the limits of classified forests by breeders</li> <li>• Non-payment of entry taxes in the classified forest</li> </ul>
Sedentary breeders - Transhumant breeders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Night damage to crops of cross-border breeders, which move away very quickly, but passed on to local breeders</li> <li>• Vehicle of diseases by transboundary transhumant animals</li> </ul>
Breeders - Fishermen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of chemical pesticides by fishermen poisoning the waters</li> <li>• Appropriation of rivers by fishermen</li> </ul>
Breeders - Hunters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traps set by hunters, in which the cattle fall</li> </ul>

## DISCUSSIONS

Transhumance, although very variable from one region to another, follows a certain number of requirements for its organization. The first thing is to send someone early enough to the reception area to take stock of available resources, transit routes and reception area. These results are similar to those of [8] who reports that the departure in transhumance requires an organization of the herdsmen which consists in a technical and material preparation of the transhumance. It is up to the herd owner who decides on the route and reception areas, based on traditional axes and on the relationship of customary structures such as the Rugga and the Garso. Thus, various actors are identified for the organization of the transhumant livestock system with shared responsibilities. Pastoral natural resources are highly coveted by several actors (pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, farmers, foresters, fishermen, etc.) because of the economic importance they represent [9]. For [7], transhumance involves several groups of actors including state institutions which are in charge of drafting regulatory texts and creating inter-state and regional consultation frameworks, NGOs, etc. and direct actors (transhumant breeders and their umbrella association). The competition for the control of the pastoral space constitutes the major stake resulting in conflicts between these various actors. In West Africa, the issue of mobility is therefore both social and economic, especially as it is added to commercial mobility carried out on foot or by truck, which supplies all the markets of West African capitals. [10]. This space has always been the site of pastoral exploitation which guarantees the feeding of animals in transhumance but also of many cases of conflicts between actors. The expansion of cultivated areas has assumed considerable importance, driven by the demographic growth of local populations and the arrival of transhumant from other regions in southern Benin. This situation, which considerably increases the difficulties of movement and exploitation of natural resources by transhumant, is conducive to conflicts. The source of conflicts between

farmers and herders is the harm caused by livestock to farmers in the fields. This same observation is made by [7] as well. For these authors, disputes and conflicts are essentially based on claims to property rights relating specially to pastures, cultivated areas and water bodies. This multitude of causalities also tends to increase due to the evolution of the context (demography, random climatology, new users of resources, etc.).

## CONCLUSIONS

The study made it possible to understand transhumance through its organization, its actors and issues and the causes of conflicts in southern Benin. Stopping mobility would have serious consequences for both the departure areas and the host areas in economic, social and political terms. Access to natural resources, when hampered, is a cause of disputes. Finally, we must be aware that it is urgent to work on this security in order to relaunch transhumance in the current context of socio-environmental changes.

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