

Pastoral Systems in Dar Sila, Chad: A Background Paper for Concern Worldwide

A FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL CENTER BRIEF 

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This study is a contribution to the understanding of pastoralism-farming dynamics in Dar Sila, in relation to their natural, social, and economic environment. It was originally intended to inform and support the integration of pastoralism resilience building as part of the work of Concern Worldwide in the region. It is also directly relevant to a range of audiences: those who are seeking an up-to-date and informed review of pastoralism in the eastern Chad context; those with an interest in the wider policy and institutional context and how to engage effectively in related processes in order to support the development of pastoralism; and finally, those with an interest in ways of working to build resilience in contexts such as the Sahel.

Key Findings

In the drylands, environmental inputs for food production are highly variable in time and space. Nutrients for livestock become available in short-lived concentrations. Uneven and largely unpredictable distribution of environmental inputs happens at a variety of scales, from macro-level differences between seasons and ecological zones, to micro-level differences between plants and plant parts. Uneven distribution of nutrients also occurs over time, during a plant life-cycle (nutrient content increases, peaks, and decreases), and between day and night (nutrients accumulate through photosynthesis during the course of the day).

For the best part of its history, pastoral development has operated with the assumption that environmental variability is a disturbance for food production. Efforts therefore focused on reducing variability, and a “return” to conditions of stability and uniformity. On the other hand, pastoral

systems’ specific adaptation consists even today of taking advantage of the variable distribution in environmental inputs. By interfacing the variability in the environment with variability built into the processes of production (for example, “moving with the rains”), pastoralists can create conditions of stability *relative to the experience of their herds*, lowering the variability of outputs compared with the variability in inputs.

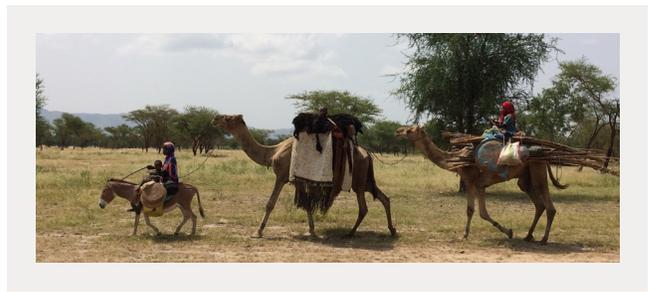
During the colonial period and for well over a generation after independence (1920-1990), the Chadian State and its technical and financial partners have combined development programs with sedentarization policies, particularly through water development interventions meant to fix pastoralists in their rainy season grazing areas. From the 1990s, this approach has been problematized and accompanied by an alternative perspective based on the recognition of pastoralism as a

well-adapted livelihood and production system, ecologically sustainable and economically viable. This perspective has emphasized the importance of supporting pastoral mobility as key to the productivity and resilience of these systems. The uncertainty of oil revenues in recent years is also contributing to granting the potential of pastoral systems new attention. For the time being though, the complicated process of reconsidering inadequate assumptions and tackling the divisive and undermining legacy of past interventions is still at its early steps.

Throughout the Sahel, nuanced and variable forms of integration of pastoral and farming systems translated for the various administrations into the rigid, and ultimately dividing, categories of “pastoralists” and “farmers.” The introduction of the concept of “agro-pastoralism” in the late 1970s could have been a move away from this tradition, towards a more systemic representation of herding-farming relationships as circular and inextricable from each other. Unfortunately, the new category was soon used to describe an additional group rather than a higher systemic order.

As far as pastoralism is concerned, Dar Sila is best understood as a crucial piece in the much bigger puzzle of the Eastern Chad complex, a system of systems stretching over some 800 km across different ecological zones. This complex developed as a form of intermittent crop-livestock integration between specialized farmers and specialized grazers. Farmers and herders have engaged in contracts of cooperation concerning the organization of agricultural work, animal breeding, and the exchange of services, in particular for the transport of cereals. Collective agreements between owners of herds and owners of fields have regulated exchanges of manure and crop residues. The complex includes ramification into other livelihood strategies near and far, from livestock trading and urban-based business to remittances from relatives in other countries.

Operating with a blanket notion of variability as a problem, and faced with the impossible challenge of eliminating variability in environmental inputs, development generally focused on reducing process variability, starting from mobility and extending to



land tenure and rangeland management, breeding, and patterns of crop-livestock integration. As this focus triggered sharp spikes in the variability of outputs (e.g., increased vulnerability to drought), the understanding of variability as a problem became self-supporting, calling for renewed efforts to introduce stability and uniformity. With a few important exceptions, the reproduction of this vicious cycle has continued to the present day. Reflected in mechanisms of appraisal for the generation of public data, this legacy continues to contribute to the exclusion and invisibility of pastoralists on technical grounds (technical exclusion).

The intended and unintended outcomes of this approach have triggered processes of social division, loss of specialization, and increased competition for the same resources. Many pastoralists have settled in Dar Sila and taken up crop farming, while crop farmers now keep significant numbers of livestock. With a focus at the household level, these trends are represented as economic diversification. When considered at the scale of the Eastern Chad complex, they are more a shift towards uniformity.

While the war against variability waged by pastoral development has not so far succeeded in stopping mobility, it has unsettled and often disrupted its well-rehearsed patterns, forcing producers out of familiar uncertainty into higher-cost and often higher-risk trial-and-error processes. Climate change adds a layer of complication. Today, migrations tend to be over longer distances but in a shorter time, with a longer period spent in dry season areas. The arrival in Dar Sila is overall earlier and the departure north is later. There is also growing importance of absentee owners and waged herders operating in ways that often elude control from both customary mechanisms and the formal legal system.

Vulnerability within pastoral systems does not exclude the creation of economic value. Managing a breeding population estimated to represent about 1,000 billion XOF (about 1.8 billion USD), pastoral systems in Chad generated an annual value close to 140 billion XOF (about 240 million USD) in 2002. Directly or indirectly, they are an important livelihood resource for 40% of the rural population (some 3.5 million people). In 2010, pastoral systems represented 80% of the livestock sector, or about 15% of national gross domestic product (GDP); the state allocated about 1% of its budget to the livestock sector overall. Pastoral systems are the largest suppliers of livestock to urban and export markets, yet still critically “invisible” in public data, with an estimated 44% of cattle exports and 80% of domestic butchering uncaptured or missed by current monitoring mechanisms. Dar Sila’s seven livestock markets are all close to pastoral migration routes and sensitive to fluctuations in the flow of herds along these routes.

Rebuilding resilience in this context is therefore advisable but requires a fundamentally new approach, based on the understanding of variability not as a problem but as constitutive to resilience under these operating environments.

In Dar Sila, as part of the Eastern Chad complex, a crucial dimension of process variability is social and economic connectivity across the different production systems, the main motor of which remains pastoral mobility.

In order to respect the “do no harm” principle, pastoral development must learn to *recognize* the functional variability pastoralists build into their processes of production, starting from mobility, and refrain from getting in its way. Beyond that, development interventions can support process variability in pastoral systems at different levels: i. by lifting existing obstacles to the process variability pastoralists are more familiar with (many of such obstacles are the legacy of development itself and the ways different sections of pastoral societies adjusted to changing conditions, including new, more, or less, sustainable opportunities); ii. by helping producers to disentangle themselves from maladaptive practices and unsustainable distortions in their social organization, strategies of production, and relationships with other production systems; iii. by facilitating a two-way relationship with scientific research and technological innovation, for opening up new pathways of process variability in pastoral systems and across pastoralism-farming dynamics.

Recommendations for the work with pastoralists in Dar Sila

1. Build institutional capacity for working with pastoral systems. Particularly, promote a multi-donor framework to deliver training to administrative, customary, and law-enforcement authorities as well as pastoralist organizations, with a focus on conflict analysis and mediation, and post-conflict peacebuilding.

2. Develop or promote the development of strategic infrastructures to support pastoral mobility. Particularly: i. water points in the “dry forest” (northern Dar Sila); ii. a solution to the problem of crossing the seasonal rivers (Bahr Azoum, Batha, and Doué); iii. communication mechanisms for the coordination of pastoral seasonal migrations with

the sedentary communities along the way; iv. fora for social dialogue among pastoral producers, and between producers and the local authorities.

3. Focus on innovation and adaptation. Particularly: i. adapt the community animal health worker (CAHW) model to animal health services needs at the level of the migration unit; ii. secure continuity of service to households moving between areas served by different health centers; iii. secure a better “pastoral fit” for polio vaccination procedures; iv. explore ways to overcome the need to settle for securing administrative visibility and recognition of land development.

Recommendations for the work with pastoralists at the national level

1. Contribute to promoting the dialogue between pastoralists and the state, including its technical and financial partners. This is a necessary condition if the long-overdue “rebalancing” of the policy and legal environments is to be started, to correct the legacy of antagonism and technical exclusion.
2. Support the Pastoral Platform (as a multi-stakeholder and multi-sector steering forum), and the effective and efficient implementation of the Plan National de Développement de l'Élevage (PNDE).
3. Strengthen the role of pastoral organizations in the ongoing process of developing the livestock sector. Particularly, strengthen the ability to: i. involve grassroots members in building vision and in advocacy; ii. secure representativity; iii. provide a set of services to members; iv. promote autonomous financing systems.

4. Engage in advocacy at the different levels of governance, respectively, to i. make operational all decentralized services at the Dar Sila level (Ministère du Développement Pastoral et des Productions Animales — MDPPA); ii. replace the 1959 “Law on Nomadism” (national government); iii. take into account, in all development policies, the need to support pastoral systems and secure pastoral strategic mobility (government and local authorities).

Following the finalization of this study in April 2017, Concern Chad has used it to develop new activities, focusing on the prevention and management of conflict.

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