Sustaining peace through the prevention of transhumance-related conflicts

1. The importance of addressing transhumance-related conflicts

Often underestimated, transhumance is a key form of livelihood across the globe that is based on mobile livestock farming methods, with regular seasonal movements, that supports a substantial population in arid and semi-arid areas less suitable for crop production. It is particularly practiced across Africa and is one of the most integrated economic activities in West Africa. According to the African Union’s policy framework for pastoralism, there are 268 million herders who live in and travel across 43% of Africa’s land mass. Transhumance is distinct from nomadic migration because of its use of pre-established routes that have been travelled extensively for previous decades and centuries.

Historically, the livelihoods of farmers and herders complemented each other and had longstanding agreements which allowed for peaceful dynamics between the two groups during the season of transhumance. Even when conflicts between these two groups occurred, they were normally addressed by traditional institutions and existing conflict resolution mechanisms. However, over the past few decades, these arrangements have come under increasing pressure due to a multitude of factors. These include: competition over access to dwindling natural resources; growing populations; evolving socio-economic patterns; the adverse effects of climate change; poor governance; political instability; the proliferation of small arms, and the breakdown of traditional mechanisms. This has led to rapidly escalating tensions and conflicts that have claimed thousands of lives between herder and farming communities, including women and children.

In September 2018, Ambassador Smail Chergui, the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security (PSD), reminded the audience of a two-day workshop on transhumance conflicts in Africa that “today, conflicts between herders and farmers on the continent take more lives than terrorism”. Far from being a localized phenomenon, these conflicts hamper national and regional security and damage the social and economic fabric of communities, while also representing the main driver of intercommunal conflicts and leading cause of civilian casualties in most of the affected countries. For example, from July 2017 to September 2019, UNMISS reported 207 incidents relating cattle and access to land and water which resulted in 1,025 fatalities. In Mali, a single clash between farmers and herders in March 2019 ended in 130 killed, while in DRC a similar clash resulted in 161 killed. Given the increasingly deadly nature of these conflicts, its far-reaching consequences on sustainable peace and regional security and the impact on several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it has become pertinent to address this issue in a collaborative and systematic manner.

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1 This paper was drafted by the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) in collaboration with International Migration Organization (IOM). While the paper refers to other UN entities that peacekeeping operations work with to address transhumance-related conflicts it does not cover the broader array of UN interventions in this area nor accounts for the whole spectrum of UN entities that have worked with peacekeeping operations to address transhumance related conflicts.

2 http://www.west-africa-brief.org/content/en/transhumance-and-nomadism


4 https://au.int/sw/node/34947

5 SDG 1 (poverty eradication), SDG 2 (hunger), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 15 (life on land), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships).
This paper discusses the current complexities and challenges of transhumance and focuses on interventions by UN entities to address conflicts resulting from transhumance movements. It focuses on transhumance in Africa, specifically in the Sahel and adjacent regions, and highlights the importance of addressing the challenges associated with transhumance from a conflict prevention perspective in order to contribute to sustaining peace initiatives in spaces fraught with insecurity and instability.

2. **International and regional frameworks and processes focused on transhumance**

Global and regional focus on transhumance-related conflicts has steadily increased due to the its negative impact on sustainable peace, making it a pressing issue to tackle at the local, national and international levels. A number of UN Security Council resolutions\(^6\) recognizes the adverse effects of climate change on stability and sustainable peace, as well as the need for long-term strategies by governments and the United Nations to support countries emerging from crisis to become more resilient. In addition, the Peacebuilding Commission and ECOSOC\(^7\) have also highlighted the importance of addressing transhumance not only as a peace and security matter, but also as one deeply rooted in development questions.

In 2018, the SG Executive Committee (EC) requested the UN system to strengthen its cross-pillar approach and integrated support to stem the ongoing violence between herders and farmers. A Core Group\(^8\) was to be established to implement this decision and to develop a roadmap on how to link regional- and country-level efforts to support efforts to address the root causes of farmer-herder conflicts at all levels. This complements ongoing efforts at the regional level like in the Sahel, for example, where UNOWAS is working with UN partners and with ECOWAS on implementing several recommendations outlined in the 2018 UNOWAS study on pastoralism and security in West Africa and the Sahel.

The World Food Programme (WFP) and International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) are working on projects that impact on transhumance routes and in areas where malnutrition, food insecurity and tensions between farmers and herders are most prevalent. The UNDP-DPPA-UNEP Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) was established in October 2018 to strengthen UN capacity to address the linkages between climate change, peace and security. Peacekeeping operations have been playing a key role in convening stakeholders, forging partnerships and developing space for community dialogue to mitigate the violence. For example, MINUSCA is working with the host government and FAO to elaborate national transhumance operational plans regulating transhumance flows and supporting the establishment of local transhumance conflict management committees.

3. **How UN interventions on addressing transhumance-related conflict contribute to sustaining peace**

Transhumance-related conflicts often occur at the local level (including transborder), although they have wider consequences which may result in significant insecurity and deaths within communities which, in turn, threatens peaceful coexistence. UN peacekeeping and various UN entities such as the International

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\(^{7}\) Joint meetings of ECOSOC and PBC on the Impact of Cross-border Transhumance on Sustainable Peace and Development in West Africa and the Sahel, 2019, the Linkages between Climate Change and Challenges to Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace in the Sahel” 2018 and on the Situation in Sahel 2017 and

\(^{8}\) The Core Group includes UN resident coordinators in all relevant countries, as well as UNOCA, UNOWAS, OHCHR and the Office of the Special Advisor for the Sahel), and DPPA, UNDP, FAO, DPO, OCHA, OHCHR, UNHCR, UN women, PBSO and UNESCO at UN headquarters.
Migration Organization (IOM), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) engage in conflict prevention and community stabilization activities aimed at addressing farmer and herder conflicts and challenges arising from them, including cross border projects.

**UN peacekeeping:** Peacekeeping missions (Mali, South Sudan, Darfur, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo) in which transhumance is a conflict driver all have a mandate to protect civilians and to address and mediate inter-communal conflicts. Peacekeeping missions, for example, conduct activities that contribute to preventing conflict, promoting peaceful coexistence and support governments in their efforts to address the root causes of transhumance-related conflicts, while mitigating their spillover effects on the lives and livelihoods of civilians. The immediate and short-term activities supplement existing reconciliation and peacebuilding processes and help strengthen early warning efforts. The medium and long-term activities enhance the capacity of existing institutions, encourage reform and implement targeted interventions that can sustain peace. These interventions mostly address, short-term issues and some medium-term solutions include: convening stakeholders; supporting reconciliation efforts; forging partnerships; prevention through early warning; implementing Quick Impact Projects; capacity building and developing space for community dialogue to mitigate violence and build resilience of communities.

**FAO:** FAO’s corporate framework to support sustainable peace in the Context of Agenda 2030 is rooted in FAO’s mandate and informed by the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Through its work, FAO fosters social cohesion and identifies ways to minimize, avoid, positively transform and resolve conflict where food, agriculture or natural resources are (or have the potential to be) conflict drivers. These conflict drivers include: those driven by competition over land, water and other natural resources; the multiple dimensions of food insecurity; government neglect of marginalized areas, and environmental mismanagement.

**IOM:** IOM efforts to prevent and manage agro-pastoral conflicts include working with local herder associations, national and local authorities and regional bodies in order to support efforts aimed at reducing and preventing violence between herders and farmers. For example, as part of its efforts to support the Government of Chad to improve border management and resolve conflicts linked to transhumance, IOM is implementing a project, ‘the restoration of peace and dialogue between communities affected by transboundary transhumance’ which aims to strengthen dialogue and peace through data collection of pastoral mobility. The project is funded by PBF and jointly implemented by IOM and FAO. Together with FAO, IOM works on a two-prong approach by ensuring that not only is early warning provided in relation to herders and farmer conflict, but also that livelihood options are presented to communities.

**PBF:** PBF has also been instrumental in this area by providing catalytic funding to entities such as the IOM and FAO to address transhumance-related challenges. For example, in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, PBF has invested over US$ 18 million over the past two years in 7 projects addressing farmers and herders’ conflicts and transhumance (Liptako Gourma, Nigeria, Niger, Chad-Niger, Chad-CAR, Mauritania, Mali). These projects have been developed in close partnership with UNOWAS and UNOCA and are currently implemented by FAO, IOM, OHCHR, UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women and WFP. PBF’s investments are in line with the “Plan d’Investissement Prioritaire” (Investment Priority Plan) of the G5 Sahel – and its priority of resilient pastoralism and the implementation of the UN Strategy for the Sahel.

4. **Impact of UN Interventions**

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UN entities work together and collaborate with governments, traditional and community leaders as well as other stakeholders such as civil society organizations and regional organizations to prevent and mitigate transhumance-related conflicts for sustainable peace between farmers and herders. These efforts are guided by a three-pronged strategy to prevent, mitigate and resolve transhumance-related conflicts. It should be noted that these three elements are not necessarily sequential but can occur simultaneously and be mutually reinforcing. For instance, the strengthening of local institutional capacities to resolve transhumance-related conflicts falls both under the pressing need to resolve conflicts, but also within the longer terms strategy of preventing them.

Prevention: The prevention of transhumance-related conflicts requires reliable early warning and early response mechanisms and constant engagement with authorities and communities to promote dialogue between farmers and herders. The UN plays a critical role not only in fostering such dialogue but also in providing direct support to the implementation of joint agreements on the demarcation of migration routes; enhancing the capacity of leaders and existing mechanisms such as joint local committees to diffuse tensions before they escalate, and in conducting military patrols to improve security along the migration routes.

Pre-and post-migration conferences are critical tools in managing transhumance activities and relations between the communities involved. Representatives of these communities gather to agree on ground rules for the migration season, such as migration dates, migration routes, sharing of resources, trading relationships, management of weaponry, and other issues of concern to those involved. Participants commonly come from both traditional institutions and formal ones, the latter often including governors of regions or districts where cross-border activities will occur. The conferences may result in the creation of mechanisms to monitor compliance or follow up on issues as they occur. Often, though not always, pre-migration conferences are followed by post-migration conferences, conducted after the transhumance season. These bodies ideally involve the same participants from the pre-migration conference, allowing them to reflect on the results of the agreements and the migration season more broadly.

In Abyei, to prevent conflict between the Misseriya and the Dinka-Nkok over access to grazing land and water along the Misseriya seasonal migration routes, to neighbouring West Kordofan and South Kordofan states, IOM and UNISFA jointly conduct pre- and post-migration conferences for Dinka farmers and Misseriya herders. IOM provides community mobilization efforts, facilitation and documentation while UNISFA provides venue and force protection.

In South Sudan, UNMISS, FAO together with other partners such as USAID/VISTAS and UNDP, developed and implemented the Joint Border Peace Committee and Court (JBPCC) between Greater Lakes, Western Equatoria and Central Equatorial regions. The JBPCC is modeled on the best practice of the controlled migration between Sudan and South Sudan. It has worked to good effect in controlling the pastoral movement between the communities. UNMISS is replicating this best practice around the country in coordination with UNDP, FAO, UN WOMEN and UNESCO.

Working with the FAO and Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources in South Darfur, UNAMID has been undertaking efforts to widen and demarcate migration routes. Rigorous engagement by state authorities and traditional administrations led to the demarcation of 225 km of migratory routes in nine hotspot localities. This was identified as a priority to prevent recurrent conflicts triggered by farm destructions, resulting in the decision to establish four veterinary clinics and two haffirs (manmade rainwater reservoirs) as ancillary services to be established along those routes in order to ensure sustainability and maximum impact in the identified areas.
Early warning is one of the key mechanisms used in the prevention of conflict in both mission and non-mission settings, and UN entities play a key role in this regard. IOM, for example, is implementing its Transhumance Tracking Tool (TTT) in Mauritania, Burkina Faso and soon in Cameroon to track herders and their cattle. In addition to mapping the herders’ environment (roads, water and grazing lands, ongoing tensions/incidents) this information is used by herders to make informed decisions regarding their movements and routes. The TTT aims to mobilize local authorities, line ministries and herders to ensure a smooth crossing or station ahead of the arrival of a herd in hot spots; thus, preventing conflicts.

In the Central African Republic, IOM and FAO are jointly implementing a project funded by the peacebuilding fund (PBF) in which IOM uses the TTT to track the movement of herders as well as provide conflict mediation and community stabilization support, while FAO focuses on livelihood options which are necessary and crucial to not only prevent but also mitigate conflict.

Actor mapping is one of the most important activities undertaken by MONUSCO to contribute to address transhumance issues. The mission specifically maps all key stakeholders, resource tensions, cattle owners, and markets to identify people to engage. Currently, efforts are underway to expand activities to map transhumance grazing areas and routes in Maniema and Tanganyika provinces. Marking the transhumance migration routes is crucial to manage relationships between herding and farming communities. These activities are regularly done by the respective governments or local authorities in advance of the migration season and accomplished between representatives of herding and farming communities. They are often conducted in partnership with IOM and FAO, with funding supplied by the PBF. Such collaboration allows the UN to pool expertise and conflict-resolution knowledge and, in turn, maximize their presence on the ground.

For example, MINUSMA partnered with the PBF in the Liptako-Gourma region and constructed and rehabilitated 31 corridors of passage of about 800 km, six water points, four vaccination parks, two 70-hectare rest areas, two cattle tracks of 86 km which contributed to the reduction of conflicts between farmers and herders.

**Mitigation:** Mitigation measures are put in place after a clash has occurred or a conflict has erupted to mitigate the violence and contain the situation from spreading further, allowing conflicting communities to reach a cessation of hostility agreement. These include the creation of buffer zones, deployment of police/military to the buffer areas, facilitation of mediation efforts, confidence-building missions to the areas, engagement of local leaders and key actors who are key to containing the violence.

For example, in February and May 2019, MINUSCA received information of the destruction of crops by animals belonging to herders in Yangouasso and Maraomba areas. In both instances, MINUSCA organized an integrated mission and held meetings with leaders of both the local community and herders. In Yangouasso, the meeting, which also included representatives from the local transhumance platform office and the municipal authorities, resulted in financial compensation for the destruction of the crops. In Maraomba, the local community and herders agreed to coexist, and the herder representatives stated that they would instruct other herders to stay away from fields.

In the DRC, after a clash between Mbororo herders on 12 August 2018. MONUSCO held a meeting with the Provincial Minister of Interior and advised him to launch a consultation with local stakeholders to mitigate the tensions and prevent escalation. On 15 August 2018, MONUSCO held a follow up meeting with the Provincial Minister of interior who reported that following a successful consultation meeting the herders signed a new Act on Mbororo Commission.
In South Sudan, following fighting between the Murle and Dinka Duk communities and between the Waat and Ayeil communities in late 2017. In both incidents, UNMISS arranged for national assembly members to travel to the areas to meet with stakeholders from the respective communities and encouraged them to live together. These engagements significantly contributed to reducing violence and tensions.

Resolution: The success of achieving this objective depends on establishing and sustaining successful peacebuilding mechanisms and associated institutions that can competently and impartially address the root causes of the conflicts often associated with resource management. These include institution building and strengthening interventions to resolve conflicts resulting from competition over access to dwindling natural resources; growing populations; evolving socio-economic patterns; the adverse effects of climate change; poor governance; political instability; the proliferation of small arms, and the breakdown in traditional mechanisms.

The majority of the institutional capacity building as well as the long-term reconstruction and development activities are carried out by the UNCT and other international partners in collaboration with the governments. In many instances, the factors that encourage or provoke transhumance-related conflicts can be linked to an absence or inadequate provision of infrastructure. Infrastructure can include water sources; demarcation of routes; veterinary parks or clinics; border management facilities; police facilities, and common spaces that allow interaction between different communities.

In 2018/19, MINUSMA conducted 60 community dialogues for about 2,400 people in collaboration with the Governmental Equipes régionales d'appui à la réconciliation (ERARs) to address local intercommunal conflicts in regions of Kidal, Timbuktu, Taoudénit, Gao, Ménaka, and Mopti. The aim of the dialogues was to support mediation and conflict management activities of the ERAR, thereby strengthening community engagement and enhancing social cohesion in Mali’s northern and central regions. To enhance the ability of local authorities to address land-related disputes and conflict, the Mission launched a program to strengthen the capacity of 108 members of land commissions in Mopti region. The inter-community fora and dialogues resulted in 5 local peace agreements covering 10 villages which led to reduced incidents of violence.

In 2017, MINUSCA, FAO and the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) worked with local authorities to establish and empower sub-prefectural and municipal committees for the prevention and peaceful settlement of transhumance-related conflicts in hotspots areas. A total of 11 committees were established in Bossangoa and members of the committees were trained in dialogue facilitation and mediation. As a result of these efforts, local committees in Benzambe and Bowara intervened to discourage youths and anti-Balaka elements from taking retaliatory action after crops were destroyed by cattle in Kaboro and Bowara.

Many of the communities displaced by the Darfur conflict are still unable to return home, be it due to unresolved land issues or occupation by new settlers, despite the efforts of local government and traditional administrations. To address these land issues, the government in East Darfur implemented a “right to land restitution policy” which allows displaced people to reclaim land ownership rights through formal processes. To support this, UNAMID, in partnership with the local judiciary and El Daein University, conducted a number of workshops for herders, farmers, IDPs, returnees, local government and native administration. The workshops were instrumental in enabling voluntary return by raising awareness on the issue, given the lack of information regarding the complex situation. The land policy initiative is a positive step in addressing issues regarding land ownerships and use, which remains one of the root causes of conflict in Darfur.

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of conflict in Darfur, the policy initiative is a positive step in addressing them: the workshops were instrumental in enabling voluntary return by raising awareness on the issue, given the lack of information regarding the complex situation.

IOM has been working to build the capacity of regional bodies such as ECOWAS and its member states to collect data related to the movements of herds from Sahelian to Coastal countries and back as an important step for integrated policy in favor of peaceful transhumance. In partnership with the Regional Herders Network (RBM), IOM is currently engaged in a counting exercise at the Burkina Faso borders with Niger and Mali with the view to expand collaboration with the respective line ministries of Sahelian and Coastal Countries within the Central Corridor. Other forms of capacity building include work on border management conducted by IOM in which border agents are trained in managing borders and working with communities that cross borders.

United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) is supporting the efforts of Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) towards the adoption of a sub-regional regulatory framework on pastoralism and transhumance. Throughout his advocacy in the region, the UNOCA Special Representative urges leaders to fully integrate transboundary transhumance into their security strategies, including through joint bilateral commissions between countries sharing a common border. For example,11 in April 2018, ECCAS and UNOCA met in Gabon to exchange experiences on conflict prevention and pastoralism. The meeting ended in the adoption of several recommendations including the need to undertake joint UNOCA/ECCAS actions to prioritize the issue of conflict prevention and pastoralism.

5. Conclusion and Observations

The UN’s efforts to address the challenges and conflicts related to transhumance is focused on preventing and mitigating the conflicts by working with government authorities, traditional and community leaders as well as other stakeholders, such as civil society, to support: dialogue between farmers and herders; mediation and confidence building efforts; the establishment of local joint peace committees, as well as targeted interventions. These interventions – which number among those that peacekeeping missions and other UN partners most frequently support – are critical to mitigate the violent consequences of growing tensions between farmers and herders and represent a good foundation to fostering social cohesion and peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms but are not the ultimate solution to the problem.

For sustainable peace, there is a need to address these conflicts by holistically tackling conflict drivers that are rooted in political fragility, insecurity and socio-economical transformations that hinge on dwindling natural resources and are exacerbated by climate change. These factors have altered the once-manageable tensions and conflicts into deadlier and more frequent ones with far reaching consequences on security and sustainable peace.

More efforts are required by the UN and other regional organizations to support capacity building of national, regional and local institutions to strengthen their interventions that seek to directly address the root causes such as good resource management, land reform and legislation. There is the need for continuous efforts to understand the triggers and root causes of the conflicts, as well as to acknowledge that a lot of the movements happen across borders and thus interventions should be dependent on long-term and integrated approaches including with partners that work across borders.

UN entities in peacekeeping mission settings are handicapped by country-specific nature of their mandates, which limits their ability to coordinate with other relevant UN entities and regional organizations on longer term strategies to regulate transhumance related violence and yet are in a privileged position to support the implementation of such regional strategies. Increased coordination across the UN and regions is therefore critical to consolidate the gains of short-term solutions to reduce violence and civilian casualties.

The increasingly deadly nature of transhumance-related conflicts has made it necessary for more attention be paid to this issue, including through the Peacebuilding Commission, ECOSOC and the Security Council. Doing so will not only put an accent on these issues, but also increase donor attention so as to fund innovative projects that support local populations, herders and farmers themselves in resolving and preventing conflict and thus enhancing the efforts of achieving sustainable peace.