

ACTING FOR LIFE

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Research Summary

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This article is based on the results from a study published in June 2017: Acting For Life – Nordic Consulting Group. Brigitte Thébaud, Pastoral and agropastoral resilience in the Sahel: portraits of the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 transhumance.

Local Economies: what do transhumant herders leave behind?

A survey was carried out on 386 families of mobile herders in the Sahel during the 2014-2015 transhumance. Against many expectations, this survey showed that mobile herding contributes significantly to the local economy in the host areas. It has also shown to what extent transhumance has become difficult and risky.

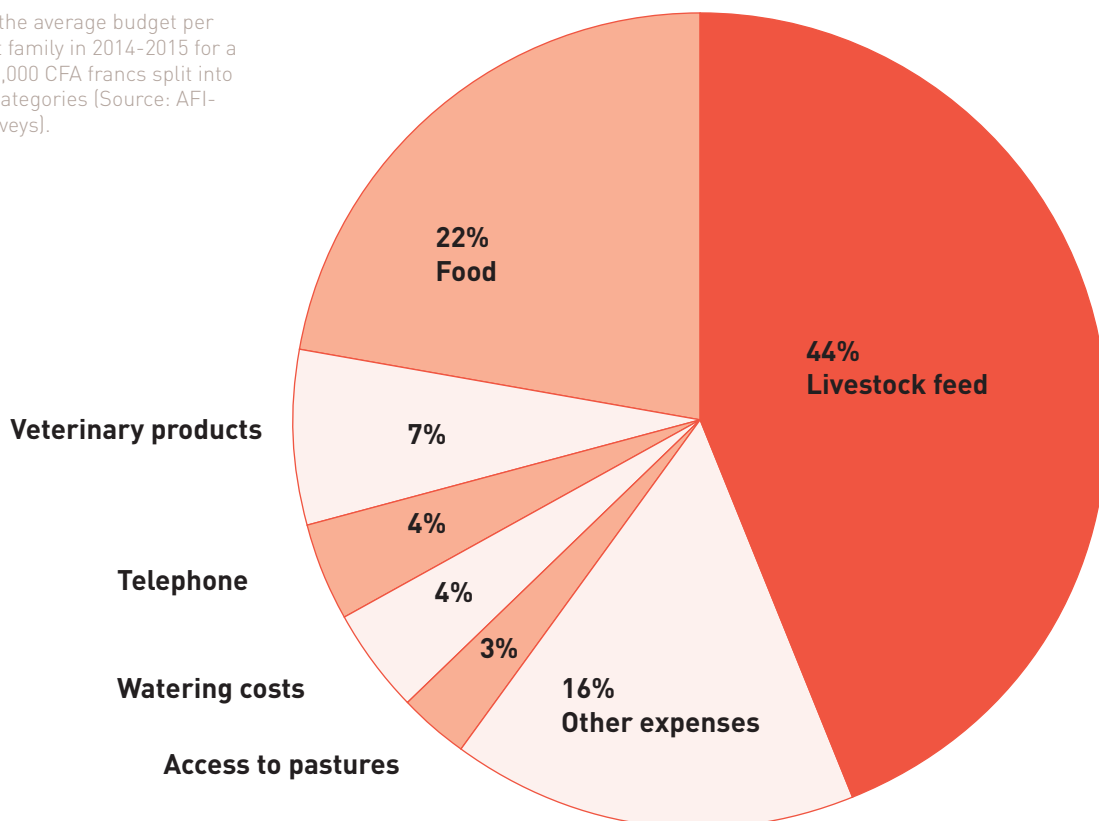
http://www.inter-reseaux.org/IMG/pdf/afl_etude_resilience_juin2017_abregefr.pdf

This study was carried out for the Project to Strengthen the Resilience of the Family Economy through Livestock Productivity in southern and eastern Mauritania, funded by the European Union, and for the Project to Strengthen Resilience through Livestock Mobility as part of the BRACED program of the British Government (UK Aid). It was carried out in collaboration with the ISRA-BAM of Dakar (Astou Camara and Mouhamed Rassoul for the 2014-2015 transhumance surveys, and with Christian Corniaux, Jérémy Bourgoïn, Tangara Pape Ousmane (CIRAD-Dakar) for counting operations along the transhumance corridors.

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Structure of the average budget per transhumant family in 2014-2015 for a total of 1,230,000 CFA francs split into 17 expense categories (Source: AFI-BRACED surveys).



Although transhumance routes and the conflicts they cause are well documented, information about what mobile herding gives back to local economies and the livestock trade remain scarce. As a result, the image of herders is often that of consumers of resources who go back home without the local populations, local authorities, or governments being able to derive any long-lasting benefits from them.

In order to provide proof to debunk this view, in 2015, Acting For Life surveyed 386 families in Niger (Tillaberi), Mali (Gao, Kayes), Burkina Faso (Dori, Fada N’Gourma), Senegal (Ferlo, Bakel), and Mauritania (Sud). Carried out as part of the BRACED (UKAid) and PRREF (EU) projects, this study examined the process of the 2014-2015 transhumance.

Up to 27 host areas

The study demonstrated that transhumance initially has a cost in terms of family labor: 71% of those accompanying transhumant animals are families of livestock herders themselves (53% of the men and 18% of the women). Yet in eastern Burkina and western Niger, few women set off on transhumance due to insecurity in the coastal countries (Benin, Togo, Ghana). The contribution of paid herders is therefore essential.

Far from the image of widescale mobility practiced by “pure” livestock herders, the study shows that transhumance is part of living systems with a complex architecture, integrating farming yields, revenue-generating activities (livestock trade, small shops, transportation, craftsmanship), and money transfers made by migrants.

In the eastern part of the area studied (Niger, Burkina, northern Mali), transhumance is primarily cross-border, while in Senegal, Mauritania, and in western Mali (except in cases of drought) it is mostly internal. With few exceptions, herders leave their home bases after the harvests or during the cold season, and return the following rainy season.

On average, the families surveyed stayed in 5 different host areas during their transhumance. For a third of them, this number varies between 7 and 27 areas. The “descent” and “return” of the herds may take several weeks and involve multiple steps. Thus, transhumance is not simply moving from point A to point B, and the corridors are not rapid livestock highways leading to a final destination.

High risks

In the families studied, nearly 40,000 bovines, 47,000 ovines, and 16,000 caprines set off on the 2014-2015 transhumance, or 75 to 90% of the family herd, respective to the species. The routes taken are extending further and further south. As a result, transhumance is very long on average (230 days or more than 7 and a half months), but the ones to the coastal countries are shorter (5 months). In total, the families studied and their herds were in movement (including within the host areas) for more than 88,000 days (386 families, each for 230 days on average).

Despite preparing to leave (stocking up on medications, vaccinations, anti-parasite treatments, etc.), the risk of disease is high, mostly due to a lack of access to quality medication and professionals on-site. Adding to this is the risk of injuries, livestock theft, feed shortages, snakebites, and even drowning. In the end, the rate of loss is 8.5% for bovines, 12% for ovines, and 23% for caprines. These numbers should highlight the increasing need for a debate on a subject that has, until now, been largely ignored: livestock insurance for mobile herders.

“With fewer than 40 cattle, we lose more than we make”

Essential contributions to the local economy

Transhumance costs money. The total amount of expenses reported by the 386 families surveyed was nearly a half-million CFA francs (474.4 million), with an average budget of 1,230,000 CFA francs per family in 17 expense categories (see diagram). The biggest expenses are livestock feed and food for the family. The total of taxes declared is however low but this does not include those paid in livestock markets.

Every year, the contribution of transhumant herders to the local economy is thus considerable. Expenses are spread out over long periods and vast areas. During the 2014-2015 transhumance, thousands of transactions were made every day in different locations in markets (60%), directly with villagers (15%), and in other miscellaneous places: health centers, veterinary pharmacies, livestock farming services, blacksmiths, welder-mechanics, well-drillers, water management committees, veterinary accessories, phone chargers, Water and Forests, bicycle and cart repairs, dugout oarsmen, etc.

Livestock sales are proportionate to the costs to be covered. In 2014-2015, the total number sold by the families studied was 2,040 bovines (or about 5% of the number herded), 5,120 ovines (11%), and 1,900 caprines (12%), generating revenue of 496 million CFA francs, leaving a small profit (21 million) that is quickly reinvested when returning from the transhumance: vaccination, grain, motorcycles, or even children's school expenses. Most of the revenue from the sale of animals is therefore spent on-site.

Bovines represent 60% of the revenue, and small ruminants 40%, which confirms their importance in transhumant systems. The sales were spread out over a period of 10 months (November 2014-August 2015). Females took up most of the sales (40%) and the animals sold were young. Nearly half of male bovines were between 1 and 3 years old, and only 17% of the females were older than 10 years old. Half of the sales of bovines were made in markets, 32% in camps, and 18% directly to villagers.

An obstacle course

In recent years, transhumance has transformed into an obstacle course that many herders dread having to take on. To some, since they are forced to constantly travel alongside paved roads or on rural pathways, the very concept of a "corridor only for animals" is completely foreign. Wherever these corridors exist, herders have to make constant risky detours. Insufficient watering stops and rest areas may result in marching the animals several days without any real pastures or water. The families surveyed also brought up the access to host areas that are becoming increasingly restricted, as well as on the weakened position of host families. These host families have to deal with competition from local herding and increasing numbers of actors in the villages and towns that step in during negotiations with transhumant herders to access resources. In parts of Sudan in particular, commercial speculation and the extreme fragmentation of resting areas force animals and their herders to constantly shift their paths to avoid conflicts.

Therefore, only herders who have sufficient numbers to quickly make up for their losses can assume the price to be paid in terms of money and animals. For the rest, they can no longer afford to be mobile, which explains the growing imbalance between rich and poor livestock herders: "With fewer than 40 cattle, we lose more than we could make." Yet in many cases, transhumance is not a choice, but an absolute necessity due to the reduction of pastoral resources at their home bases.

Subject to the many difficulties, conveying livestock on foot is an increasingly risky enterprise, one which road transportation can still not substitute completely. Compromising the mobility of livestock also means affecting the functioning of the livestock industry, and eventually, sub-regional integration. Transhumance is the cornerstone of a vital industry around which critical issues emerge: supplying consumers with meat, food security, the fight against poverty, and social peace.

However, in certain host countries, the trend is clearly moving toward a physical separation of livestock farming and strictly controlling movement. The draft of a transhumance law recently proposed in the Ivory Coast aims to toughen the living conditions of transhumant herders and to prohibit conveying livestock on foot throughout the entire country. In many places, the situation has become explosive.

So, transhumance does indeed provide an essential contribution to the economies of many regions, but for how much longer?

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