

AT THE CROSSROADS

Analysing the impact of pastoral policies upon pastoralists based in Abalak, Niger

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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BACKGROUND

This research focuses on livelihoods of pastoralists who reside in the Department of Abalak (Abalak), located in the northern pastoral zone of Niger. Tearfund partner 'Jeunesse En Mission Entraide et Développement' (JEMED) has worked with pastoralists in this region for 25 years.



Figure one: Map showing location of Abalak

Traditionally pastoralists in Abalak had highly mobile lifestyles and would move in family or clan groups in a seasonal migration known as transhumance. This system began to change during the great droughts of 1973 and 1984/85, which resulted in large losses of animals.

In 1990 a group of Tuareg pastoralists from Abalak were searching for a strategy which would allow them to develop economically and socially, overcome the recurrent droughts, yet maintain their culture and livelihood.

They approached JEMED with a request for assistance and, after a year of research, developed a strategy of fixation and integrated development.

Fixation

Fixation involves developing a location in the pastoral groups' home territory and encompasses access to water, grain banks, health care, improved pasture and other physical and social structures. The pastoralists' primary economic activity of animal herding is reinforced through herd reconstitution.

Within fixation, mobility is encouraged; however, a number of external factors have reduced pastoralists' capacity to do so, including climate variability, animal losses, environmental degradation, a decrease in milk production, pressures from population growth and an increase in conflict.

A large number of the resident pastoralists in Abalak have now opted for fixation. This approach is no longer considered a crisis response, but rather a permanent adaptation to these external factors.

For these pastoralists, secure access to natural resources is essential to their livelihoods, as fixation requires the use of a smaller space for raising animals. However, they do not have secure land tenure rights, no matter how many centuries they have been using the land.

Lack of secure land tenure means that non-resident herders, who visit the area on transhumance in the rainy season, are entitled to let their animals consume all the pasture in and around the fixation points used by resident pastoralists.

This leaves the resident pastoralists without pasture for the rest of the year. There has also been an increase in the number of farmers (who do have land tenure rights) from the south owning animals and they too send their animals north into the pastoral zone during the rainy season.

Farmers are also increasingly using land in the pastoral zone for their livelihood, for reasons that include population pressures and resource scarcity. This is despite a 1961 law that limits the expansion of agriculture into the pastoral zone.

For resident pastoralists in Abalak, their lack of secure land rights, coupled with competition over resources, can have a devastating impact on their livelihoods.

Policies impacting pastoralism

At a regional level, in recent years there has been an increased focus on pastoralist policies. This includes the Global Alliance for Resilience (AGIR), which contains specific indicators on pastoralism, and a \$250 million project called the **Regional Sahel Pastoralism Support Project (PRAPS) supported by the World Bank**.

At a national level, the Rural Code was passed in 1993. It does not give pastoralists secure land rights, though there is an allowance for limited tenure in a provision known as priority use rights. **Obtaining priority use rights is crucial to the livelihoods of pastoralists living fixed lifestyles**; however, the process required to attain these rights is extremely expensive and complex.

At a local level, a policy aimed at decentralisation was passed in 2004, giving greater autonomy to local level authorities to enforce national level policies within their local context.

RESEARCH AIM

At a regional, national and local level, systems and structures are put in place to ensure that the livelihoods of nomadic pastoralists, pastoralists practising fixation, and farmers in Abalak can all thrive in a sustainable way.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the method of pastoralism practised by those in the resident populations of Abalak, and what are the key reasons for this?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of regional, national and local policies in light of these realities?

METHODOLOGY

Oussouby Toure, an independent consultant from Senegal, was appointed to conduct this research due to his renowned expertise of pastoralism and associated political processes.

Following a review of relevant literature, a set of interviews were held at a national level in Niamey, the capital of Niger. This included key individuals from the Ministry of Livestock and the Permanent Secretariat of the Rural Code.

This was followed by a field visit to Abalak. Meetings were held with a range of stakeholders, such as local authorities, and focus groups were held with farmers and pastoralists in eight sites within the department.

RESULTS

Fixation is a key method of pastoralism

A series of crop failures and significant losses of livestock at times of pastoral crisis (especially in 1984/85), have tipped many local households in Abalak into poverty, and since 2004 they have been faced with almost continuous food insecurity. Households have subsequently developed several coping strategies, including diversifying local economic activities, migrating to neighbouring countries, changing dietary habits and increasing their reliance on family and community solidarity.

It is against this backdrop of crises that fixation has developed in Abalak as a key method of pastoralism. This is due to several factors, including:

- Land in the lowlands and dune pastures being taken over by farmers to grow crops. This is also contributing to the early arrival of herders undertaking transhumance.
- An increase in the privatisation of common resources (including water points) through the creation of ranches.
- An overall increase in competition for access to pastoral resources.

Regional Policies

The realities of Abalak are not reflected in regional policies

The renewed focus on pastoralism at a regional level presents a key opportunity to benefit pastoralists. The involvement of the World Bank may also increase the interest of other donors in pastoralism.

However, to date, these regional processes do not incorporate the concerns of the communities living in the pastoral zone of Niger, particularly their need for the full implementation of priority use rights.

National Policies

Priority use rights are not realised

The provision of priority use rights in the Rural Code is crucial for resident pastoralists.

More than 20 years after the adoption of the Rural Code, there has still been no attempt to formalise these rights and implement them in practice.

This reflects the inherent inadequacies of the Rural Code, which does not specify either the actual content of priority use rights or the practicalities of exercising them. The lack of priority use rights can have a devastating impact upon pastoralists implementing a fixed lifestyle. Without priority use rights formalised and implemented in practice, they have no rights to prevent their pasture being consumed by animals of non-resident herders and farmers.

The privatisation of water points is detrimental

There has been a growing trend on an unprecedented scale in the privatisation of water points. This is detrimental to the livelihoods of resident and non-resident pastoralists alike, as they are obliged to pay a substantial sum of money to water their livestock. Privatisation also tends to occur with little concern for sustainable management of the surrounding grazing areas. National policies need to address this.

Land Management Scheme tools should be implemented

Alongside the adoption of the Rural Code, guidance for Land Management Schemes was also issued. These are designed to act as tools to regulate rural activities in order to prevent and manage conflict, and ensure sustainable use of natural resources. However, these tools have yet to be applied in the pastoral zone of Niger, including Abalak.

Local Policies

Policies should be enforced locally

Following the 2004 decentralisation policy, local authorities have a responsibility to enforce the Rural Code at a local level – in particular the formalisation of priority use rights. However, this has yet to occur effectively. Developing a code of conduct which is binding on all stakeholders (including transhumant herders) could be a pragmatic way to actualise these rights effectively at a local level.

CONCLUSION

Against a backdrop of conflict, food insecurity and pastoral crises, many pastoralists in Abalak have developed a lifestyle of fixation. Though initially a coping strategy, it is now a permanent and favoured way of life. It is therefore crucial that relevant policies at a regional, national and local level support this, especially the implementation of priority use rights. Civil society groups, including JEMED, will have a key role to play in advocating for, and supporting the implementation of, these recommendations, as listed below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional level policymakers, donors and technical partners should support the following:

1. Regional policies, including the Regional Sahel Pastoralism Support Project (PRAPS), supported by the World Bank, must take account of the realities of pastoralists in Abalak, particularly their need for the formalisation of priority use rights and structural investment in the area.

The government of Niger should proactively support the following processes:

2. Priority use rights must be enforced as a mechanism for promoting the sustainable management of pastoral resources.

This process should start as a pilot scheme in three diverse home territories in Abalak: (i) territories used by herders on transhumance travelling to the salt rich pasture in Ingall Department; (ii) territories that are central for transhumance flows between June/July and December; (iii) territories infrequently visited by transhumant herders.

This will enable the practicalities of formalising priority use rights to be established, and useful lessons to be learned. This pilot scheme should then be amended (as necessary) and scaled up across the pastoral zone.

3. Privatised water points should be inventoried and then control should be transferred to local resident communities through the creation of management groups.
4. Land Management Scheme tools should be implemented in Abalak to help to facilitate pastoral mobility.

Local authorities in Abalak should implement the following processes:

5. The process for formalising priority use rights (as outlined above) should be enforced and supported by the adoption of a code of conduct binding on all stakeholders.
6. A system for coordinating the transhumance routes within Abalak should be established.
7. Land Management Scheme tools should be contextualised at a local level

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