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*Integrated and Secure Livestock and Pastoralism Project in West Africa (PEPISAO)*

Experience in the area of collaboration between the NGO POTAL MEN and the Defence and Security Forces in the prevention and management of pastoral conflicts in Benin



CAPITALISATION NOTE

# Introduction

This experience was shared at a workshop held in Lomé (Togo), from 29 to 31 October 2019, organised by the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) as part of the implementation of the Projet Elevages et pastoralisme intégrés et sécurisés en Afrique (Integrated and Secure Livestock Farming and Pastoralism in West Africa Project) (PEPISAO). It was supplemented and improved by inputs from some forty pastoral and agricultural associations in West Africa and Chad.

The "Collaboration with defence and security forces (DSF) in the prevention and management of conflicts linked to pastoral mobility" experience was conducted in Benin by POTAL MEN "Notre Union", a national NGO under Beninese law, created in 1997. The mission of this NGO is to contribute to improving the living conditions of agro-pastoralists.

The experience was carried out in the départements of Atakora/Donga and Borgou/Alibori in northern Benin. It was implemented with technical and financial support from the German Cooperation in Niger (GIZ/ZFD) and the Swiss Cooperation (SDC) through the "Conflict transformation and crisis prevention in the field of cross-border transhumance in Benin, Niger and Burkina Faso" and the "Regional Education and Training Programme for Pastoral Populations (PREPP)" projects respectively.

Our warmest thanks to:



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<sup>1</sup> BURKINA FASO (ANDAL et PINAL, ROPPA, RECOPA) MAURITANIE (GNAP, APSS Mauritanie) SENEGAL (DIRFEL, Kawral de Younouféré) NIGERIA (PARE, CORET) GUINEE CONAKRY (CAP Bokondjon, CONASEG), LIBERIA (Association of Cattle Advocate) TOGO (ONG – CDD, FENAPFIBVTO) BENIN (ANOPER, POTAL MEN; FUPRO Bénin, APSS Bénin) COTE D'IVOIRE (AEFRB, OPEF, COFENABVI-AO) GHANA (GDCA GNACAF) MALI (RBM, FEBEVIM) TCHAD (KAWATAL, CONFIFET, COPAFIB) NIGER (CODE RURAL, CONACOOOP, EFK FNEN-Daddo, RBM)



## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Since the 1980s, the Republic of Benin has become a host and transit country for transhumant herders from the Sahelian countries in the north and from Nigeria in the east. Transhumance activity has become difficult over time as a result of the demographic pressure, the expansion of agricultural activities and the degradation of natural resources. Managing transhumance remains a major source of concern for all stakeholders because of the many conflicts it generates. Since 1987, the Beninese State has adopted several laws and inter-ministerial decrees to regulate national and cross-border transhumance on its territory.

In northern Benin, the départements of Atakora/Donga and Borgou/Alibori, i.e., POTAL MEN's intervention zone, host transhumant herders from Burkina, Niger and Nigeria. During the transhumance period, several conflicts arise between herders and local farmers, generally due to the damage caused to crops by the animals. These are sometimes violent conflicts, resulting in loss of life and extensive material damage. Consequently, transhumance is perceived by the Beninese State as a security problem. Defence and Security Force (DSF) agents, particularly the gendarmes who are responsible for ensuring the security of the people and their property, are deployed in the field to dissuade herders from carrying weapons, but also to avoid conflicts, which is a prerequisite for a peaceful transhumance.

But very quickly, POTAL MEN "Notre Union", a national NGO, realised that the DSF agents had very little knowledge of how transhumance works and of the texts governing transhumance. DSFs sometimes abuse the herders. So, the NGO set out to find a mechanism to facilitate the work of the DSFs in supervising transhumance. The aim is to make them understand the basis of transhumance and how it operates, as well as the national and regional regulations governing transhumance, in order to prevent and better manage conflicts related thereto. This was the beginning, in 2011, of the search for a collaborative approach between POTAL MEN and the DSFs for better management of transhumance through capacity building.

The distinctive feature of this experience is that it is the only initiative of its kind in the area of working with DSF agents for better conflict prevention and management. It is based on the principle that good collaboration with a military structure in charge of managing transhumance (from a persuasive and even repressive point of view) cannot be achieved unless the capacities of the actors are built so that they can know the basis and *modus operandi* of pastoralists and the regulations that govern them.



Figure 1: Map of the linguistic groups in the Republic of Benin



Photo credit: PRAPS Project



Photo credit: POTALMEN

The gendarmes are dissuasive and repressive forces for the protection of people, particularly nationals, and their property. They are also responsible for managing transhumance. POTAL MEN was thus convinced that some of the negative behaviours of the gendarmes towards transhumant herders can only change when the gendarmes understand the principles of non-violent conflict management (NVMC), as well as the basis and functioning of transhumance and regulations that govern it at the national level and in the ECOWAS region.

Thus the strategy adopted by POTAL MEN is the RPP (Reflection on Peace Practices) method. It is based on working either with 'more people' or with 'key people' to achieve change at the individual and socio-political or institutional level. Taking into account the particularity of the target of change, i.e., the Defence and Security Forces, POTAL MEN has opted to work directly with the key people, notably the leaders of the gendarmerie hierarchy who, in turn, involve the men in the ranks who make up the majority of the troops.

The following steps were taken:

- 1** Contacting and negotiating with the hierarchy of the Gendarmes in Benin to obtain their agreement and willingness to become involved in a process of seeking to understand the principles of non-violent

management of conflicts, the way pastoralists operate and the regulations governing transhumance;

- 2** Holding a training workshop for gendarmerie officers on these issues. In turn, the trained officers were responsible for training the men in the ranks;

- 3** Exchanging with the gendarmerie hierarchy on the possibilities of including these principles of non-violent management of conflicts and the ways pastoralists operate in the basic training courses for DSF officers.

This experience takes into account the "Do No Harm" principle, which requires that any action or initiative for peace or development should ensure that it does not generate new conflicts. The experience itself aims to prevent conflicts between transhumant herders and local farmers through better supervision of transhumance, which must be carried out in compliance with human rights and the regulations governing transhumance. This approach corresponds to the peace objectives pursued by POTAL MEN and its technical and financial partners.

## STAKEHOLDERS

In this experience of working with the DSFs for the prevention of conflicts related to pastoral mobility, the two main stakeholders involved are:

**Gendarmerie officers:** these are the heads of the various gendarmerie units in the Atakora/Donga and Borgou/Alibori départements, as they are the ones who give instructions to the men in the field during transhumance. When these people have a good understanding of the pastoral system and its regulations, they will be better able to give positive guidance to their collaborators so that they do not abuse the transhumant herders.

They were the first direct beneficiaries of the training on Non-Violent Conflict Management (NVCM) and transhumance functioning and regulations.

**The men in the ranks:** these are the agents deployed in the field and who act on the instructions of the hierarchy. If they are well trained in pastoral operations, regulations and NVCM, they will not make misjudgements about transhumant herders, as they are themselves liable to disciplinary sanctions if they make a mistake.

## OUTCOMES



Crédit photo : POTAL MEN

Training has been provided for 20 officers and 400 non-commissioned officers of the gendarmerie of the northern regional group on NVCM, pastoral operations and its regulations. This has enabled POTAL MEN to strengthen its collaboration with the gendarmes for better management of transhumance. In terms of results and effects, as testified by some gendarmes at the end of the trainings and during the assessment of the 2018-2019 transhumance campaign, it is noted that:

### At the individual level:

- There has been a change in the gendarmes' perception, in particular respect for the rights of herders, their protection and that of their property, as stipulated in the ECOWAS decision on cross-border transhumance; Better supervision of herders during transhumance movements by the gendarmes thanks to their better knowledge of regulations governing transhumance;
- Trained gendarmes now have a positive understanding of transhumance and act in accordance with the laws and regulations in force

### At the institutional/socio-political level:

- Greater involvement of officers and non-commissioned officers in the dialogue processes for the promotion of peace and social cohesion;
- The Gendarmerie hierarchy is committed to integrating the concept of NVCM, pastoral operations and regulations into the basic training curricula of student gendarmes. The gendarmerie had reiterated this commitment during the evaluation of the 2015-2016 transhumance campaign. However, in view of the new security reforms, in which the police and gendarmerie will be merged into a single new corps called the 'Republican Police', the base of the people to be trained will necessarily have to be broadened, as this merger will also affect the police and gendarmerie training schools.
- A change is perceptible in the culture and perception of transhumance amongst those defence and security forces that have been trained to uphold the rights of herders and farmers. Finally, better supervision of transhumance actors by the defence and security forces thanks to the appropriation of the contents of transhumance regulations and laws.

This experience is relevant because it is difficult to measure or assess the efficiency of peace actions in terms of results/cost ratio, as it is often said that peace is priceless. The loss of human life and the degradation of social relations that this experience has helped to mitigate are invaluable. Thus, taking into account the enormous loss of human life and material damage caused previously by farmer-herder conflicts in this area, and weighing this against the modest resources committed to develop this collaboration, it is clear that this experience is efficient.



## ANALYSIS

The analysis of this experience of working with the defence and security forces for the prevention and management of conflicts linked to pastoral mobility brings out the elements that explain the results achieved, the lessons learnt and the recommendations for scaling up the experience.

### 1- LESSONS LEARNT

The following key lessons can be learnt from this experience of collaboration with DSFs in the context of conflict prevention linked to pastoral mobility:

- It is possible to positively involve DSFs in the supervision of transhumance through capacity building tailored to their needs and status.
- The behaviour and attitudes of DSFs in situations of conflict related to pastoral mobility can, for sure, be positively changed by getting them to be impartial when they take actions and decisions. They have a good capacity to assimilate knowledge in pastoral and NVCM matters.
- The gendarmes are also concerned about a peaceful transhumance, contrary to the widespread assumption that they take advantage of the transhumance period to ransom herders.
- Provided they are well trained and informed about pastoral issues, the gendarmes can supervise transhumance without violence.
- Collaboration with the gendarmes is also a deterrent to bandits who infiltrate the transhumant herders with the sole aim of committing crimes such as theft and others.

The main limitation of this experience is that some of the trained gendarmes are assigned to areas where the issue of transhumance does not arise. Even then, it is not an investment that is lost simply because the trained gendarmes now have a non-violent attitude but, moreover, they remain sensitive to conflicts and pastoral issues.



Photo credit: POTALMEN

### 2- RECOMMENDATIONS

To increase the chances of scaling up this experience of collaboration with the DSFs for the prevention of conflicts linked to pastoral mobility, it is necessary to:

- Regularly adapt the content of the training module on NVCM, pastoral operations and regulations to suit the administrative and legislative realities of each country. Even if transhumance regulations in the ECOWAS region are the same, some practical provisions are based on national regulations and vary from one country to another. Also, the willingness to engage the DSFs in a process of learning how transhumance works varies from one country to another.
- Gendarmes are part of a military corps, which has its own specificities to be considered when conducting the training, in particular: avoid long sessions (maximum 3 to 4 days); bear in mind that this is a corps that functions on the basis of the orders that they receive from the hierarchy; choose the right period and the right place, etc.
- Place emphasise on the quality of training through the choice of competent trainers who could provide good responses to the needs of the DSFs in this area. In a military corps, when there is some doubt about the competence of the person passing on the knowledge, then the training loses its interest.
- The implementation of this experience has shown that, in addition to DSFs, other actors concerned by transhumance, especially journalists and magistrates have the same capacity-building needs that must be addressed.
- Have a follow-up mechanism for those trained to record and document the expected changes. This will later allow for assessing change at the individual and institutional levels because of the influence of the people.

The process of involving the gendarmes in conflict prevention related to pastoral mobility began in 2011, with a series of training sessions in 2015. Until 2019, i.e. 8 years later, the gendarmerie hierarchy has welcomed this collaboration and suggested involving the police, with whom they now form a single force; this proves the relevance of the experience, but also its capacity to resist the socio-political shocks, including merging the police and the gendarmerie to form a single corps.

The willingness of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries in Benin to support, with technical and financial support from the Swiss Cooperation, the adaptation of the training module for DSFs on NVCM, pastoral functioning and regulations to the context of pastoral mobility is further evidence that it can withstand socio-political shocks, since this experience was initiated well before the current political regime comes to power. In addition, the trained gendarmes continue to sensitise their police colleagues on pastoral and NVCM issues.



## About PEPISAO

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The Integrated and Secure Livestock and Pastoralism in West Africa (PEPISAO) Project is implemented by ECOWAS, which has delegated the implementation of Components 1 and 2 to CILSS, with the financial support of the Agence française de développement (French Development Agency) (AFD). It aims to strengthen the capacities of the States and regional and national actors, deploy approaches to secure pastoral mobility and to integrate livestock farming methods (i) within a shared regional vision, (ii) offering maximum guarantees for the peaceful cohabitation of the various users of natural resources. It aims to be inclusive in terms of its approach.

Its general objective is to "Strengthen the resilience of the populations and contribute to the economic and social development of the region" and specifically, to reduce conflicts related to pastoralism through the construction of a shared regional vision on the different modes of ruminant breeding. Through these specific objectives, the project has been designed to support and complement the various initiatives underway to develop a sustainable regional capacity to manage issues related to the various livestock farming systems, particularly in the transhumance host areas of the three major corridors in West Africa and the Sahel (Eastern, Central and Western transhumance corridors) in order to build a sustainable social fabric of peaceful cohabitation and regional integration.

PEPISAO is implemented in the 15 ECOWAS countries as well as Mauritania and Chad. The main partners include CILSS, UEMOA, ARAA, and AFD.



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**CILSS Executive Secretariat**

03 BP 7049 Ouagadougou 03 BURKINA FASO

**Telephone:** 00226 25499600

**Email:** [cilss@cilss.int](mailto:cilss@cilss.int)

**Twitter :** @PredipR // **Facebook :** Predip@

**Websites :** [praps.cilss.int](http://praps.cilss.int) // [predip.cilss.int](http://predip.cilss.int)

**ECOWAS Commission**

Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources Department

Agriculture and Rural Development Directorate

River Plaza Annex - 496 Abogo Largema Street - Central Business District

PMB 401 Abuja FCT - Federal Republic of Nigeria

**Email :** [agri\\_rural@ecowas.int](mailto:agri_rural@ecowas.int)

**Twitter :** [@ecowas\\_agric](https://twitter.com/ecowas_agric) // **Facebook :** [ecowas.agriculture](https://www.facebook.com/ecowas.agriculture)