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ISSUE BRIEF

PASTORALISM IN CONTESTED SPACES OF SOUTHWEST CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

SUMMARY

The Artisanal Mining and Property Rights (AMPR) project in the Central African Republic (CAR) supports the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Land and Resource Governance Division in improving land and resource governance and strengthening property rights for all members of society, especially women. AMPR serves as USAID’s vehicle for addressing complex land and resource issues around artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) in a multidisciplinary fashion. The project focuses primarily on diamonds and, to a lesser extent, gold production in CAR, as well as targeted technical assistance to other USAID Missions and Operating Units in addressing issues within the ASM sector.

CAR’s Southwest has become increasingly contested due to competition over natural resources. Rich deposits of diamonds and gold cover most of the area, concentrated along rivers and streams. Historically, symbiotic relationships have brought mutual benefits and social goods to farmers, livestock herders, and artisanal miners through inter-community trade and mutually beneficial social interactions. The southwest has long been integrated into the international economy from the earliest days of the slave trade to the present-day export of timber and minerals.

This issue brief frames the current political struggles and outbreaks of violence in the southwest of the around CAR the deeper struggle for territorial control of grasslands and water resources required for

Authors : Freudenberger, M.S., Dejong T.U., & Brottem, L. (June 4, 2021). Photo credit : Moens-Lecumberri, A. & Marsden, P. (2020).

livestock production. While generic descriptions of the country at times highlight the complex interactions between artisanal mining and livestock production, little in-depth empirical analysis was carried out until the USAID projects in the country began to examine the nuanced relationships between herding diamond mining and farming communities. Field assessments summarized here highlight the many types of issues confronted by Fulani pastoralists in their relations with farming and artisanal mining communities. Weak land governance, within the context of a fragile state, exacerbates the effects of environmental change and resource scarcity. Recently, coalitions have been created between politically motivated insurgency groups and some pastoralist groups that have led to insecurity and violence in the country.¹ Recent applied field research carried out by USAID through Concordis International and its own field assessments² offers pragmatic proposals addressed to stakeholder groups to address current conflicts between pastoralist, sedentary, and artisanal mining communities in southwest CAR (Moens-Lecumberri & Marsden, 2021).

EVOLUTION OF PASTORALISM IN SOUTHWEST CAR

Pastoralism is a dryland livelihood production system that has long been practiced in the Central African Republic. Ethnic groups known by the labels of Fulani in English, Peulh in French, FulBe in their own language, and sub-groupings like Mbororo raise cattle and small ruminants and traverse southern prefectures. Fulani are often settled or semi-settled and live in one place for most of the year. These settlements are found throughout the southwest; the pastoralists are commonly referred to as “Central African Fulani citizens.” These pastoralists contrast with the long-distance herders referred to as “transhumant pastoralists,” those who herd their livestock over vast spaces from the north to the south and back in search of pastures and water.

Until the 1920s, cattle raising was largely unknown in what was at the time the French territory of Oubangui Chari (Suchal, 1967, pp. 137-149). However, the vast grasslands and dense networks of rivers in CAR have long attracted pastoralist people from across the Sahel. Migratory routes reaching back to at least the early colonial period continue to this day, but are now being renegotiated between pastoralists and sedentary farming communities. Unequal power relations between pastoralist and sedentary communities contribute to violent confrontations, a process also associated with increasingly widespread criminality and extortion.

The Fulani are an ethnic population found throughout West and Central Africa numbering in the tens of millions and with hundreds of sub-clans. The first Mbororo Fulani arrived in the French colony in the early 1920s (Butrais, 1994; Chauvin & Seignobos, 2013; INRAM, 2017). Colonial authorities encouraged the development of the livestock sector by investing in veterinary services and milk processing facilities, like those of the Sarki company. The post-independence government continued this policy by instituting territorial land use plans, called *Plans d'Exploitation et d'Aménagement* (Exploitation and Organization Plans [PEA]) that divided the country into protected areas, mining zones, and hunting areas. Despite the good intention of these territorial plans, they were difficult to enforce. Over the years, Fulani progressively expanded toward the Oubangui river and the plateau of the northwest, and by the 1970s,

¹ These events are much more deeply covered in other key publications like: Dukhan (2018); Glawion & de Vries (2018); Schouten & Kalessopo (2019); and International Crisis Group (2021b).

² See USAID Quarterly Reports and other project documentation on USAID Landlinks website: <https://landlinks.org/project/property-rights-and-artisanal-diamond-development-central-african-republic/>

they were further disbursed throughout the country in small encampments recognized officially by the government. These communities are Central African citizens even though they are often treated as a minority population and suffer from a lack of access to services. The pastoralist groups moved further southward following the great Sahelian droughts of the 1980s (Chauvin & Seignobos, 2013). Tsetse fly eradication further facilitated pastoral livestock penetration into sub-humid parts of the country (Vircoulon 2021).

During the dry season, herds move south along well-established transhumance livestock corridors and then with the return of the rains, move back north to more abundant pasture and less disease. The *Ardo*, or male representative of clan and family units, negotiate with villages along the transhumant routes for access to pasture, water points, and trading opportunities for hides, meat and milk. The territorial negotiation process continues to this day and leads to oral agreements that spell out sanctions and compensation linked to livestock damage to field crops of sedentary agricultural communities..

Field research carried out by the World Wide Fund for Nature (then the World Wildlife Fund) in the late 1990s near the Special Reserve of Dzanga Sangha illustrated the symbiotic relationships between pastoralist and agrarian communities (Freudenberger & Mogba, 1998). The farming communities held the upper hand in determining where the Fulani encampments would be located so as not to damage field crop production or diamond mining. Pastoralist encampments were located on the outskirts of farming villages. Despite the separation, cultural and economic exchanges linked the communities, including inter-marriage. Tensions surfaced from time to time. Fulani complained that prime lowland grazing areas near the SCED-Ndéléngue mining camp were being damaged by diamond diggers and that open pits created a hazard for Fulani and their cattle.

By the early 1990s, the transhumant pastoralist economy began to change dramatically. Pastoralists from the neighboring countries of Chad and Sudan pushed further into the country. Transhumant pastoralists were increasingly armed and equipped with the latest weapons, vehicles, and communication devices (International Crisis Group, 2014). The end of Chad's civil war and the rise of President Idriss Déby opened the door for his military entourage to invest in large herds of thousands of heads of cattle and small ruminants (Chauvin, 2015). High-ranking officers and other elite began hiring Fulani to manage their herds (International Crisis Group, 2021, pp. 18-21). Armed individuals associated with the Chadian regime began periodically intervening in disputes related to livestock, which increased suspicion of pastoralists in local communities (Vircoulon 2021).

“Push” factors of drought and environmental degradation and “pull” factors of a lightly populated CAR with rich pastures and water points contribute to the expansion of transhumant pastoralism into the northwest and southwest of the country. The meat markets of Bangui and other urban centers also incentivize the commercialization of the sector. Up until the conflict of 2013-2014, transhumant pastoralists from Chad, known as “Ouada” and “Akou,” as well as those from Sudan, directed livestock to these urban meat markets but insecurity in both rural and urban areas has greatly disrupted marketing (Arditi, 2009, pp. 37-51).

The rise of Seleka in 2013 profoundly transformed the pastoralist economy in southwest CAR. Seleka and other armed groups such as 3R (Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation) and allied groups like the *Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique* (Union for Peace in Central African Republic, [UPC]) and Siriri emerged during the recent turbulent years. Some like the 3R held that they were defending herders from attacks from anti-Balaka self-defense groups. While the struggles and outbreaks of violence of that period were

often framed as pitting Muslims against Christians, this oversimplified the situation. When Seleka took over the country, commanders engaged the Fulani to help them carry out incursions, lead patrols, and man roadblocks. More generally, pastoral livestock movements and commerce became intertwined with rebel activities and other forms of insecurity and black-market activities across the country (Vircoulon 2021).

Certainly, the 3R and UPC are Fulani-dominated armed groups that are undeniably involved in trafficking and illegal taxation related to minerals, but mainly involve transhumance pastoralists and pastoralist herders working for elites in CAR and neighboring countries (International Crisis Group, 2021, pp. 18-21). The Sango-speaking Fulani who have built up longstanding ties with local communities through trade relations and marriages became interpreters and informants. From the perspective of the farming communities, the Fulani were seen as complicit in the abuses by the occupying Seleka (Schouten & Kalessopo, 2019). The collective memory of these predations remains vivid due to the significant loss of life and property at the hands of Seleka during that period (USAID, 2016). The opposition of the pastoralist-allied rebel groups, 3R and MPC, to the Khartoum Peace Agreement of 2019 further entrenched public hostility towards members of the Fulani ethnic group (Vircoulon 2021).

Reprisals by the anti-Balaka self-defense forces against the Seleka and associated groups led to attacks on sedentary and transhumant pastoralist. For this reason, resident pastoralists from the southwest fled with their livestock to neighboring Cameroon where they also faced harassment from the authorities and local communities (USAID, 2016). When they returned after the cessation of hostilities, they sometimes found that the livestock corridors and grazing reserves once set aside for them had been occupied by farmers. The breakdown of previous norms and rules was compounded by extortion from government officials and farmers, which the returnees viewed as opportunistic and unjustified (Schouten & Kalessopo, 2017). The principal strategy of the 3R rebel group from 2015 to 2019 was to retake control of the municipalities historically administered for livestock production (FR: *commune d'élevage*) from anti-Balaka forces (Vircoulon 2021). The group's actions secured parts of western CAR for pastoral livestock but they also set the stage for ongoing power struggles between the rebel group and Fulani customary authorities (ibid). These struggles have further complicated efforts to clarify resource rights and modes of shared resource access.

The relationship between armed groups and pastoralists in the southwest has been the subject of much speculation and debate, fueled in part by the lack of strong empirical evidence. Field research carried out by the PRADD II and AMPR projects shows that pastoralist, farming, and artisanal mining communities face predation from many quarters through informal taxation and extortion (Jaillon & de Brier, 2019; Moens-Lecumberri & Marsden, 2021; USAID, 2016). Pastoralists are in a particularly vulnerable situation because their herds represent walking wealth. Since livestock herds are difficult to protect, pastoralists seek whatever protection they can find from banditry, cattle rustling, and other predations because the state cannot ensure their own security. This longstanding inability of the Central African government to provide even the most basic security and services to rural populations has been well presented elsewhere (Glawion & DeVrioes, 2018). For this reason, some contend that Fulani pastoralists rely upon armed groups like the 3R and UPC to provide protection. However, this could be a narrative created by the armed groups themselves to justify their illegal activities of forcibly taking rents in exchange for this "protection." Indeed, recent UN reporting documents report the opposite by citing more cases of pastoralists fleeing Fulani-dominated armed groups than those working in concert with them (U.N. Security Council, 2020). This was well documented by the PRADD II team during meetings with

pastoralist and diamond traders in Cameroon in 2016 (USAID, 2016). Led by warlords, these armed militias are known to be linked in complex ways to regional criminal enterprises (Agger, 2015; Dukhan, 2018), including illegal gold and diamond mining and trafficking (Jaillon & de Brier, 2019).

Field research carried out in 2020 by Concordis International with USAID funding documented in considerable depth how the 2013-2014 crisis displaced semi-settled pastoralists who had long been in CAR. Traditional cycles of north-south transhumance were also disrupted. Farmers took advantage of the fleeing Central African pastoralists to neighboring Cameroon to encroach upon livestock corridors and lands reserved for pastures. The Concordis study focus group discussions and interviews led to the same conclusion - the root cause of many contemporary conflicts in the southwest is the growing occupation of these pasture zones by other user groups. To compound this growing competition over resources, “new” transhumants—herders from other parts of the country, Chad, and Cameroon—are also keen to graze their livestock in these areas and often they are heavily armed and equipped with the latest communication technologies.

The Concordis study showed that at least 50 percent of the herder respondents reported having been attacked by 3R, 15 percent by anti-Balaka groups, and 5 percent by unnamed armed groups in the 12 months prior to the research. This showed that groups perceived as “protecting” pastoralists are in fact their biggest predators. At least 50 percent have been victims of cattle rustling and at least 25 percent have been taxed illegally by either an armed group or by the authorities (Moens-Lecumberri & Marsden, 2021, pp. 37). As the local authorities in Carnot said, “When 3R arrive in the village, they tell communities, ‘Don’t be scared, we won’t hurt you; we’ve only come for the herders’” (Moens-Lecumberri & Marsden, 2021, pp. 2-3). Pastoralist groups living in the southwest are caught in the middle of a difficult situation; they are preyed upon by 3R militias and allied armed groups while also facing suspicion from artisanal miners and sedentary agricultural communities for colluding with the militias. Confronted by abuses from all sides, they feel forced to take matters into their own hands, which has led to increasingly armed cattle herders.

While sedentary Fulani Central African merchants and traders are major players in the minerals trade, Fulani pastoralists are not generally involved in the minerals trade and have limited personal or commercial engagement with artisanal miners beyond the limited sale of milk and meat. It should not be forgotten that Central African Fulani ethnic groups have long been present in the country with many now settling down in urban centers and becoming successful traders, often linked in some fashion with the artisanal mining sector. Among the approximately 800 interviews carried out by Concordis International, only three Fulani respondents admitted first-hand knowledge of herders engaging in the diamond trade with Cameroon (Moens-Lecumberri & Marsden, 2021, pp. 2-3). Still, some speculate that herders may transport stones. As one focus group admitted in Nassolé, “some [herders] are involved in mining and buy diamonds illegally, taking advantage of the movement of their livestock to transport it to neighboring Cameroon, where they sell it at a higher price...this enforces the climate of mistrust between financiers and artisanal miners” (Moens-Lecumberri & Marsden, 2021, pp. 31). Like many merchants, some Fulani mineral traders, both legal and illegal, are certainly livestock owners, though there is no evidence of them using the movement of herds to smuggle, given how easy it is to move minerals across the country’s porous borders without resorting to high-risk movements of livestock.

The unstable security situation faced by the most vulnerable of the Fulani peoples, the herders themselves, hurts all. For farming communities and urban consumers in the southwest, butchers who

once bought cattle and small livestock from Fulani herders living nearby cannot be assured of regular supplies. Even Fulani women fear trading milk in local markets or with their neighbors. The Fulani ethnic group, whether herders or merchants and traders, collectively face suspicions and predations of those with little understanding or sympathy for their situation. These are just some of the many consequences of the breakdown of resource governance and community relationships during the CAR crisis.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Deep-seated political and economic instability is linked in part to shifting dynamics around pastoralism and the evolving relationships between pastoralists with armed groups and sedentary communities engaged in other livelihoods like mining and farming. Traditional and statutory land management institutions have collapsed over the decades, thereby rendering large parts of the country as de facto open-access resource tenure regimes. Yet within this complex situation, new land governance arrangements are being negotiated among various actors struggling to control access to surface and sub-surface resources.

USAID-funded research suggests that a nuanced approach to conflict management in southwestern CAR is needed to respond to these complex social dynamics (Moens-Lecumberri & Marsden, 2021). Unfortunately, the issue is politicized and polemical which makes policy dialogue difficult. While there is much scope to kindle or renew mutually beneficial collaboration built on generations of interdependence by pastoralists, solutions must be locally owned and accompanied by dialogue and peacebuilding to break through the hostilities and tit-for-tat attacks. Outsiders, government, and donor agencies must promote local solutions for strengthening land governance systems for vulnerable peoples like pastoralist Fulani in a bid to reestablish intercommunity trust and undermine the current spiral of violence and marginalization that now characterizes the southwest of the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CENTRAL AFRICAN GOVERNMENT POLICYMAKERS

Facilitate Renegotiation of Livestock Routes: The Central African government with the support of the international donor community should monitor livestock migration to improve knowledge of cattle movements (itinerary, size of herds, concentration areas, etc.). This supports measures taken to strengthen bilateral cooperation, following the 2012 CAR-Chad Commission, to regulate Chadian transhumance to CAR. Political engagement is needed between both countries to negotiate a charter demarcating livestock migration corridors from the north of the country to the southwest, vaccination points, and cattle markets, the roles of local conflict management and prevention committees, and provision of security for transhumance movements. This would entail supporting conflict management entities like the *Comités de Paix et de la Réconciliation* (Peace and Reconciliation Committees [CLPRs]) to facilitate dialogue to resolve disputes related to violations of the charter, and provide financial and logistical means to the FNEC in CAR and the Confederation of Livestock in Chad so that both organizations inform Chadian pastoralists about recommended itineraries and cultivated areas to avoid. Those organizations should be considered as a means through which pastoralists and CAR local authorities can interface (OCHA Services, 2014).

Support CLPRs: The CAR government has established CLPRs in five communes in the Berberati region of the southwest and with technical support from the AMPR project. The CLPR have become a safe space for local communities, devastated by the recent civil strife, to negotiate a roadmap for improving inter-ethnic cooperation and mutually beneficial synergies. With the support of United

Nations peacekeeping forces, the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and National Reconciliation negotiated conventions, called Local Pacts, which spell out clearly a range of pragmatic responses to what local stakeholders view as the triggers of violent conflict in their localities. The signed conventions also note what all members of the community view as ways to bring about redistributive justice and reconciliation. The intense negotiation of three initial Local Pacts have helped to rebuild trust and confidence in local government (Freudenberger & Mogba, 2018). These local pacts will be continuously monitored by the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and National Reconciliation through documentation of conflicts recorded by Peace and Reconciliation Committees. An independent evaluation of the efficacy of Local Pacts should be carried out at some point, perhaps through an initiative supported by the ministry but financed by an international donor.

Provide Clear Public Policy Guidance on Contentious Matters of Interest to Pastoralists:

Fulani interviewed as part of the Concordis International study suggested that government should provide policy guidance on an agreed tariff of damages awardable in case of damage to crops, livestock, or other property; schedule of fees chargeable by the authorities for arbitrating disputes; policies for dealing with different criminal and civil grievances, including theft of cattle, damage to crops, injury or death following an altercation, sexual violence, criminal damage by arson, and theft, among others and; a mechanism to report corruption and other abuses of power, whether from the local authorities, at checkpoints, or by the Mining Brigade, a para-military force with the authority to combat fraud and smuggling in the mining sector and currently under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CAR PEACEKEEPING AND SECURITY FORCES

Guarantee Basic Security for Rural Populations: The security of pastoralists and farming/mining communities needs to be assured before negotiations can commence with CLPRs to put in place Local Pacts. Indeed, discussions around Local Pacts often include calls for increased security and less abuse by public security forces. During public forums, the communities encouraged military forces to remain neutral in local conflicts, but they recognized that training is needed for the military if there is to be any hope of creating the security needed to foster social dialogue and new agreements. State actors can and must play a role in maintaining security while also supporting public and transparent negotiations.

Protect Pastoralist Transhumance Routes: Once Local Pacts are in place, pastoralist groups have suggested that security forces like the gendarmerie should patrol livestock migration routes, particularly at well-known flashpoints and international border crossings. Security is also needed to protect technical services, like veterinary staff so needed for livestock vaccination programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO LOCAL AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES

Negotiate Restitution for Pastoralist Community Members: During the Concordis International focus group interviews and forums with pastoralists, a common theme emerged about the importance of swiftly resolving outstanding cases of restitution of homes of pastoralists occupied by others during the civil disturbances. This discussion led to suggestions that improved community engagement is needed in the management of the Dzanga-Sangha National Park, including compensation for farmers whose crops are destroyed by wild animals. Others noted the importance of supporting the Kimberley Process Monitoring Committees known as the *Comité Local de Suivie* (CLS) charged with reporting on whether Kimberley Process Certification Operational Framework requirements meet security and free trade conditionalities from conflict-free diamond compliant zones (Kimberley Process, 2015).

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FNEC

Inclusive Dialogue Platforms: The forums organized for the Concordis International study led to a series of recommendations to the pastoralist federation that stressed the importance of their engagement in putting in place formalized dialogues between livestock herders and others to negotiate access to pastures and livestock migration corridors. The federation was asked to take a more public stance in advocating for low-cost access to veterinarian services along livestock migration corridors, particularly at border crossings. Recommendations were made to promote security-marking of cattle, whether by branding or by Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) chips to establish ownership. This led to recommendations for abattoirs to verify ownership of livestock before purchase.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO DONOR DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

Devolve Peace Building and Reconciliation to Local Structures: Unfortunately, in situations like the CAR where the state is cash-strapped and weakened by years of conflict and predatory behavior, champions for peace and justice within the state may be able to do little more than communicate national policies encouraging resolution of local conflicts by local peoples, through resolutions based on traditional African concepts of justice, fairness, and flexibility. Ultimately, this rather hands-off approach requires national and international policymakers to step back and respect the decisions of local communities emerging out of conflict and crisis. Faith in the capacity of local communities, divided and weakened as they might currently be, to devise creative responses to the long-standing crises reported in this issue brief, must be accorded. Otherwise, the only thing financially strapped state authorities and donors can do is to try to create safe spaces for local negotiations and respect for locally negotiated frameworks to negotiate new rules of access to resources, and culturally appropriated sanctions for deviant behavior.

Support training in mediation and arbitration techniques for traditional and local authorities, women, and young people: The international donor community can contribute much by providing training and support for livelihood diversification, including inland fisheries to generate alternative sources of animal protein while improving the access to markets of livestock producers. The international donor community ought to provide training to military and security services on mediation and arbitration techniques, including the importance of maintaining neutrality on issues around pastoralism to help local communities resolve disputes impartially. By doing this, the international community can help build public trust and confidence in the facilitation role of government. Training for women as mediators and arbiters to ensure women are included in peacebuilding and justice efforts is critically important, though until now, women have not played a highly visible role in community conflict resolution and negotiation of Local Pacts and other conventions. The international donor community ought to continue to support programs for young people to participate in conflict management mechanisms at the local level, and through this, demonstrate the effectiveness of alternative dispute resolution.

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