



AUGUST 2021

'Of Cattle and Conflict' – Rethinking responses to pastoralism-related conflicts

Disputes over natural resources such as water and land among pastoralist groups and between mobile pastoralists and sedentary farmers have a long history and are turning increasingly violent. Competition over scarce natural resources is often put forward as the key driver of farmer-herder conflicts, disregarding the significant role governance is playing in conflict dynamics. Oversimplifications of the pastoralist-conflict equation and a lack of understanding of pastoralist systems and the way they are governed has led to inappropriate interventions further undermining pastoralism. Policies and interventions in response to pastoralism-related conflicts often do not take an integrated approach but are based on sectoral policies and are not conflict sensitive as they fail to take into account the political economy driving farmer-herder conflicts. Comparing the cases of Burkina Faso, Somalia and South Sudan, this paper analyses how pastoralist resource governance in combination with its specific underlying political economy differentially affects the dynamics of conflict around pastoral resources. Reflecting upon three agendas that inform the thinking about pastoralism as well as donor interventions – climate change, food security and governance – this paper provides some recommendations on how to take underlying political economy into account for sensible and effective programming.

Introduction

Contributing to the livelihoods of an estimated 50 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, pastoralism is an economic activity with high significance to the region.¹ Powered by a growing demand for meat and dairy products driven by an ever-increasing population in urban centres, the livestock market is rapidly expanding. Despite its economic importance, however,

pastoralism is under threat. While disputes over natural resources such as water and land among pastoralist groups and between mobile pastoralists and sedentary farmers have a long history, pastoralism-related conflicts have escalated in the last few years in the broader Sudano-Sahelian zone. Pastoralist groups are increasingly viewed as entangled or trapped in widespread and increasingly violent conflict. These conflicts often play out along clan and/or ethnic divisions, reinforced by a persistent negative discourse surrounding pastoralism, against a backdrop of unequal representation of groups in governance and

¹ De Haan et al. (2014) *Pastoralism Development in the Sahel. A road to Stability?*. Washington DC: World Bank Group.

development policy.² Competition over scarce natural resources is often put forward as the key driver of the farmer-herder conflict, without taking into account broader political economic dynamics.

Relying on a simplified conflict frame, interventions blind to specific underlying power imbalances may be implemented, thereby undermining pastoral livelihoods and potentially aggravating existing conflict dynamics. When unpacking the relationship between pastoralism, conflict and stability it becomes evident that interventions addressing pastoralism-related conflict often suffer from a lack of understanding of pastoralist systems and the way they are governed.³ For example, in the late 20th century in Burkina Faso policies that aimed to promote the (forced) sedentarization of livestock production failed to develop a sedentary livestock economy that could replace traditional and mobile systems to provide enough livestock, meat and milk for the growing urban and international markets.⁴ Research shows that the exclusion of pastoralist communities from political decision-making processes regarding sedentarization has led to an uneven playing field in natural resource management, which often disadvantages pastoralists. The under-representation of pastoralists in both customary authorities related to land

governance as well as most (formal) village development councils has led to farming communities governing the conditions under which resource competition plays out. Such governance structures have been proven to aggravate existing tensions.

Similar misconceptions about pastoralist production systems, pastoral economies and pastoralists' grievances are evident in several countries' policies – such as land policies and (re)settlement schemes aiming to intensify sedentary production – as well as in the allocation of development support and services. This paper problematizes the simplified conflict frames reflected in various policies, and explicates the political economic links between pastoralism and conflict. By comparing the links between pastoralism and conflict in the cases of Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Somalia, this paper analyses the role of pastoralist resource governance and its associated political economy in driving conflict around pastoral resources. Specifically, the paper problematizes the conflict frame in three policy agendas driving interventions in pastoralist systems: climate change, food security and governance. We argue that interventions based on these agendas often do not take an integrated approach but are based on sectoral policies, and hence are not conflict sensitive as they fail to take into account the local political economy dynamics driving farmer-herder conflict. By explicating the role of different resource governance arrangements in pastoralism-related conflicts, the paper highlights potential points of improvement, as well as new entry points, for conflict-sensitive policy geared towards pastoralism.

The paper commences with the presentation of the three case studies, highlighting how these conflicts require different approaches and responses that take into account the underlying political economy rather than rely on ingrained heuristics. It subsequently reflects on three debates that inform the thinking about pastoralism as well as donor interventions, the environmental debate, the food security (economic) debate and the governance debate. Finally, we present our main conclusions and recommendations framed around these three main debates to

-
- 2 Fratkin, E. (2001) 'East African pastoralism in transition: Maasai, Boran, and Rendille cases', *African Studies Review* 44(3), pp. 1-25.; Homewood, K., Coast, E. and Thompson, M. (2004) 'In-migrants and exclusion in east African rangelands: access, tenure and conflict', *Africa* 74(4), pp.567-610; McCabe, J., Leslie, P. and DeLuca, L. (2010) 'Adopting Cultivation to Remain Pastoralists: The Diversification of Maasai Livelihoods in Northern Tanzania', *Human Ecology* 38(3), pp. 321-334.
 - 3 Bisson, L., Cottyn, I., de Bruijne, K. and F. Molenaar (2021) *Between hope and despair. Pastoralist adaptation in Burkina Faso*. The Hague: Clingendael.
 - 4 Bisson, L., Cottyn, I., de Bruijne, K. and F. Molenaar (2021) *Between hope and despair. Pastoralist adaptation in Burkina Faso*. The Hague: Clingendael. IPAR (2015) *Etat des lieux et analyse de la prise en compte du foncier pastoral dans les politiques et les cadres réglementaires en Afrique de l'Ouest*. Dakar: IPAR.

inspire governments and donors on the way towards for sustainable and conflict-sensitive programming on pastoralism.

Pastoralism in a fragile environment: three case studies

In Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Somalia pastoralism forms a substantial part of the economy, but also finds itself entangled in violent conflicts.⁵ At the root of these conflicts are power relations that shape control and distribution of resources, exposing state policy biases, issues of resource governance and management, and the politicization of the issues at stake. In each of the case studies, pastoralism plays a specific role in local as well as national power distribution and associated conflicts. These countries share a few common traits but are characterised by highly diverging socioeconomic and political backgrounds. In all three countries pastoralism is an important contributor to the economy as well as to the livelihoods of many citizens. Pastoralists live and work in extreme conditions in a fragile political and security context. The different ways pastoralism and access to crucial resources is governed is leading to conflicts between pastoralists and other resource users. At the same time, Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Somalia face different challenges related to pastoralism and conflict, underpinned by their specific resource governance systems and underlying political economy. While access to resources lies at the heart of the conflicts in these three countries, the cases point out how pastoral conflict is to a large extent a product of the design of governance and political economic power differences, rather than simply a matter of farmers and pastoralists coping with drought or resource scarcity. While in Burkina Faso farmers dominate the field of resource governance and pastoralists face

economic and political marginalisation, in Somalia pastoralist clans are the dominant actors. By contrast, in South Sudan the representation of farmers and pastoralists is more equal, yet conflicts between them form a significant function in the broader political power game.

Burkina Faso: the pastoral trap

Pastoralism is an important economic activity in Burkina Faso, with pastoralists representing 40 percent of the workforce and livestock production representing over 30 percent of agricultural GDP.⁶ Live animals make up the third largest export product, making Burkina Faso one of few net exporters in the region.⁷ Pastoralism and agro-pastoralism are not limited to one ethnic group, as different ethnic groups benefit from this sector. However, the Fulani have historically been the biggest cattle owners. Today, they still herd about 70 percent of the total cattle population, although they own only about half of it.⁸ Transhumant pastoralism is practised mainly by the Fulani.⁹ Although some of them have settled and practise crop-livestock mixed production systems – or agro-pastoralism – within society they are generally seen as pastoralists and as such are contrasted to other groups considered to be farmers.

5 Pastoralism is considered the main livelihood activity of an estimated 268 million people across Africa, and indirectly contributes to the income of many more (FAO (2018) *Pastoralism in Africa's drylands. Reducing risks, addressing vulnerability and enhancing resilience*. Rome: FAO.

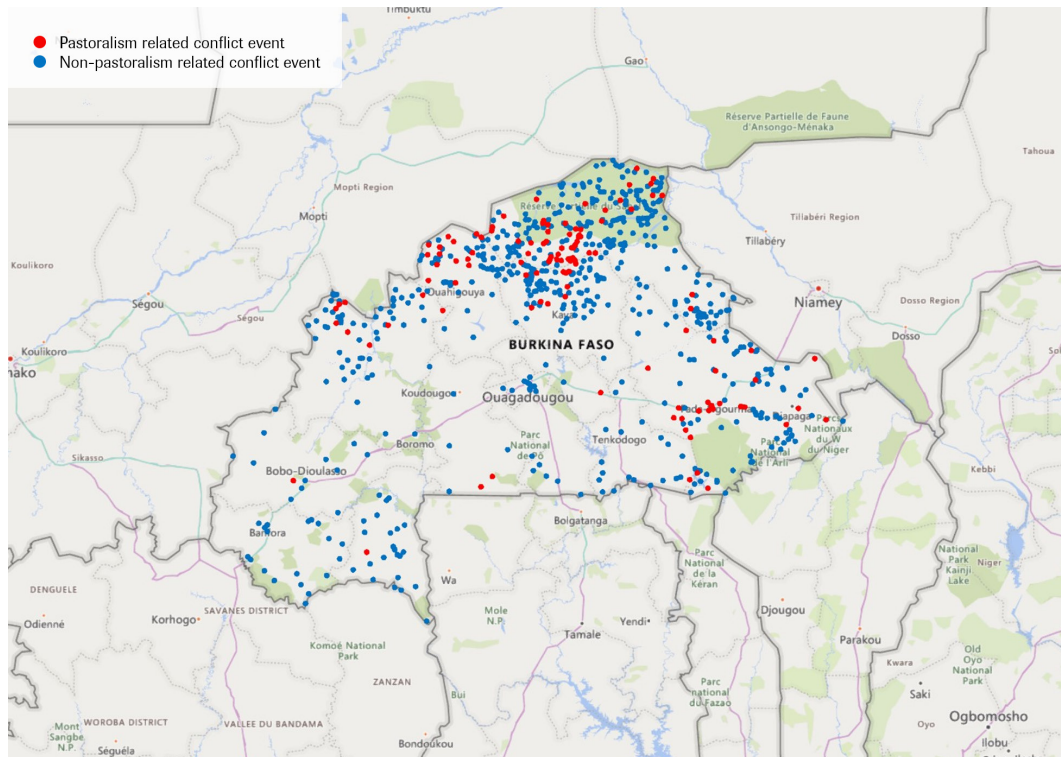
6 Ouédraogo, Moussa (2020) [Land tenure and rural development in Burkina Faso: Issues and Strategies](#), FAO, Issue paper 112.

7 Chand, A. (2020) 'Livestock trade maps in West Africa', *Nat Food* 1: pp. 326.

8 Gonin, A. and D. Gautier (2015) 'Shift in herders' territorialities from regional to local scale: the political ecology of pastoral herding in western Burkina Faso', *Pastoralism* 5(7).

9 It represents a livelihood system whereby more than half of the income is derived from livestock production, characterised by an extensive livestock production system that relies on spatial and temporal mobility to access land and resources. Transhumance refers specifically to regular seasonal livestock movements that typically correspond to the region's rainy and dry seasons. Turner, M.D. and Schlecht, E. (2019) 'Livestock mobility in sub-Saharan Africa: A critical review', *Pastoralism* 9(13). De Haan et al. (2016) *Pastoralism Development in the Sahel: A Road to Stability?* Washington DC: World Bank.

Figure 1 Pastoralism and non-pastoralism related conflict in Burkina Faso since 2015¹⁰



An expanding market

Bordering six other member countries of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), Burkina Faso has become a major hub for increasing flows of trade, including livestock. Markets in the Sahel are becoming more integrated at both national and regional levels, and the Burkinabè livestock sector has become an important exporter to the coastal states. Even though the market is growing significantly, powered by a growing demand for meat and milk in expanding urban areas in the region, pastoralists have so far not been the ones to benefit from regional integration efforts. It is intermediaries who are increasingly earning from the developing market. In the exchange between informal pastoral economies and high-value export markets, traders enforce a dominant position in the value chain. Middlemen like brokers and traders are organised in associations – structures that

have benefited from several organisational support programmes and financial partners such as the Swiss Cooperation and USAID, while pastoralists are poorly represented on livestock market management committees and are hardly organised at local level.¹¹ This newly developing market has changed the economic reality in which pastoralists are making a living, facing several barriers hampering their market integration:

11 Bisson, L., Cottyn, I., de Bruijne, K. and F. Molenaar (2021) *Between hope and despair. Pastoralist adaptation in Burkina Faso*. The Hague: Clingendael, p. 50; USAID (2018) 'Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE) II: Technical Approach Working Paper', https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/RISE_II_Technical_Approach_Working_Paper_May_20181.pdf; Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland (2021) Programme d'Appui à la Promotion de l'Entreprenariat Agricole (PAPEA), <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/projekte/projekte.filterResults.html/content/dezaprojects/SDC/en/2017/7F09781/phase1.html?oldPagePath=/content/deza/en/home/projekte/projekte.html>.

10 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com.

their remoteness confines pastoralists to selling mainly at smaller markets, their poor organisation and representation limits bargaining power in an increasingly commercial value chain, and growing instability along routes and markets leads to significant costs and risks predominantly on pastoralists.

Domestically, a push towards the commercialisation of the sector is introducing new dynamics and disruptions to the value chain, including new actors and competing production systems. This is supported by livestock policies that favour agriculture and sedentary livestock production. Among many – largely Mossi – leaders, there is a persistent perception that pastoralism is an archaic way of life that at best should become sedentary (for example through intensive ranching systems) in order to meet market demands. Livestock has become an investment opportunity for farmers – a major strategy for diversifying their livelihoods. Local elites and authorities are now increasingly competing in the marketplace through cattle trading, for instance by buying from pastoralists and reselling within days. The changing stakeholder structure hence gives new actors a direct interest in the cattle value chain, resulting in the dissolution of long-standing mutually beneficial governance relationships (e.g. the exchange of fertilizer against crop residue).¹² This has shaken up long-standing socio-political and economic relations at micro and macro levels. The breakdown of intercommunal trust and social cohesion between pastoralists and farmers at local level is allowing various violent extremist organisations to tap into increasing grievances in order to boost recruitment.

Natural resource governance

Competition over water and pasture – typically between herders or between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers – and the resulting conflicts and resolutions go back centuries. Generally, these conflicts

can be classified as conflicts over damaged crops, conflicts over the use of watering points, conflicts over cattle rustling, land disputes and conflicts over blocked transhumance corridors.¹³ The effects of climate change, demographic growth, processes of farmland expansion at the expense of pasturelands and the privatisation of land for large-scale monocropping have all degraded pastureland and increased the general pressure on natural resources. However, rather than scarcity, it is an increasingly failing and exclusive (local) governance system that stands at the heart of the problem.

When it comes to accessing the land and water resources they need, pastoralists in Burkina Faso compete with farmers on an uneven playing field and face structural marginalisation. Colonial-era laws and policies have been inimical to pastoralist livelihoods and set up land tenure regimes that excluded pastoralists.¹⁴ That trend continued throughout the post-colonial era with no explicit mention of pastureland in legislation until the pastoral law of 2002, '*Loi d'orientation relative au pastoralisme 2009-034*' (LORP). While these national laws recognise pastoral zones and the importance of pastoral mobility, they are rarely enforced at local level, which has led to the steady expansion of the agricultural frontier into pasturelands. The discrepancy between national law and local implementation and enforcement to protect pastoralists' access rights translates into customary systems that are similarly to the detriment of pastoralists.

12 Bisson, L., Cottyn, I., de Bruijne, K. and F. Molenaar (2021) *Between hope and despair. Pastoralist adaptation in Burkina Faso*. The Hague: Clingendael.

13 Diop, A.T. (2012) *La transhumance transfrontalière en Afrique de l'Ouest Proposition de plan d'action*, Accra: FAO.

14 Davies, J., Ogali, C., Slobodian, L., Roba, G. and Ouedraogo, R. (2018) *Crossing boundaries: legal and policy arrangements for cross-border pastoralism*, Rome: FAO; Maïga, B. (2005) 'L'accès aux pâturages dans le delta intérieur du Niger', In *Le droit en Afrique: expériences locales et droit étatique au Mali*, ed. G. Hesseling, M. Djiré, Paris: Karthala.; Saïbou, I. 2010. *Les coupeurs de route: histoire du banditisme rural et transfrontalier dans le bassin du lac Tchad*. Paris: Karthala.; Schmid, U. (2001) 'Legal Pluralism as a Source of Conflict in Multi-Ethnic Societies', *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 33(46): p. 1-47.

Farmers control local governing bodies – such as the village development councils responsible for devising formal policies regarding land use planning – and turn land planning and conflict resolution to their advantage.¹⁵

Neglecting pastoral grievances

Mounting grievances over current arrangements and poorly functioning dispute-settling mechanisms that suffer from corruption, impunity and politicization are exacerbating instability. These conflicts have escalated in the Sahel in the last few years as the rhetoric of violent extremist organisations capitalizes on intercommunal tensions between pastoralists and farmers. Using the states' absence or weakness, extremist groups such as Katiba Macina exploit the stigmatisation of pastoralists to spur recruitment and are deliberately targeting local chiefs, taking out local sources of authority and governance in an attempt to further stoke intercommunal violence.¹⁶ Similarly, self-defence groups – such as the Koglweogo – step in to fill the emerging power vacuum left by the state in protecting the people, animals and natural resources of their local community.¹⁷ By taking on police and security prerogatives, several self-defence groups became accomplices in settling scores, often concerning land

disputes; this has particularly been to the detriment of Fulani community whom they perceive as extremists and who have become their primary target.¹⁸ An understanding of the escalation of conflicts around pastoralist resources that point to mobile pastoralism and ethnic Fulani as objective and homogeneous security threats – relating them to violent extremism – is a practice in dire need of correction.

In Burkina Faso, pastoralist communities have either been neglected by the government and international development agencies or suffered inappropriate interventions.¹⁹ Policies and interventions tend to be targeted at intensification of cattle production to meet the increasing demand for meat in growing urban areas, focused on technical solutions to increase production or access to veterinary services. The promotion of sedentarization and modernisation of the sector has been a long-standing feature of programming on pastoralism. But the political context of these programmes is crucial, as the distribution of power at local and national levels provides opportunities for local leaders and communities to alter good project designs to the detriment of pastoralist communities. The effects of policies focusing on increasing pastoral productivity on the status quo in many communities where farmers and pastoralists share resources are often not considered, and policies that have focused on strengthening farming livelihoods have paid little attention to pastoralist dynamics within the targeted landscapes. For example, an increase in local livestock ownership has changed the prevalent political economic settlement in certain areas as communities become caught between two fires: increasing cultivated land and increasing livestock.²⁰

Pastoralists face different challenges to their livelihoods, driven by exclusionary governance practices and a structural

15 Herders' territorialities and social differentiation in western Burkina; Alexis Gonin and Denis Gautier (2016) *Nomadic Peoples*; Vol. 20, No. 1 pp. 62-87.

16 On 3 November 2019, for example, the deputy-mayor of Djibou was murdered. Katiba Macina, the Macina Liberation Front (FLM), is one of the brigades that forms part of JNIM (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin), a group mainly operational in Mali. Katiba Macina draws on narratives of the historical Macina empire and alludes to the reinstalment of the Islamic Macina Republic, dominated by Fulani pastoralists. International Crisis Group (2020) 'Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence', *Africa report 287*, Brussels: ICG, p. 12.; Le Roux. ['Responding to the Rise in Violent Extremism in the Sahel'](#), *Africa Centre for strategic Studies*. December 2, 2019.

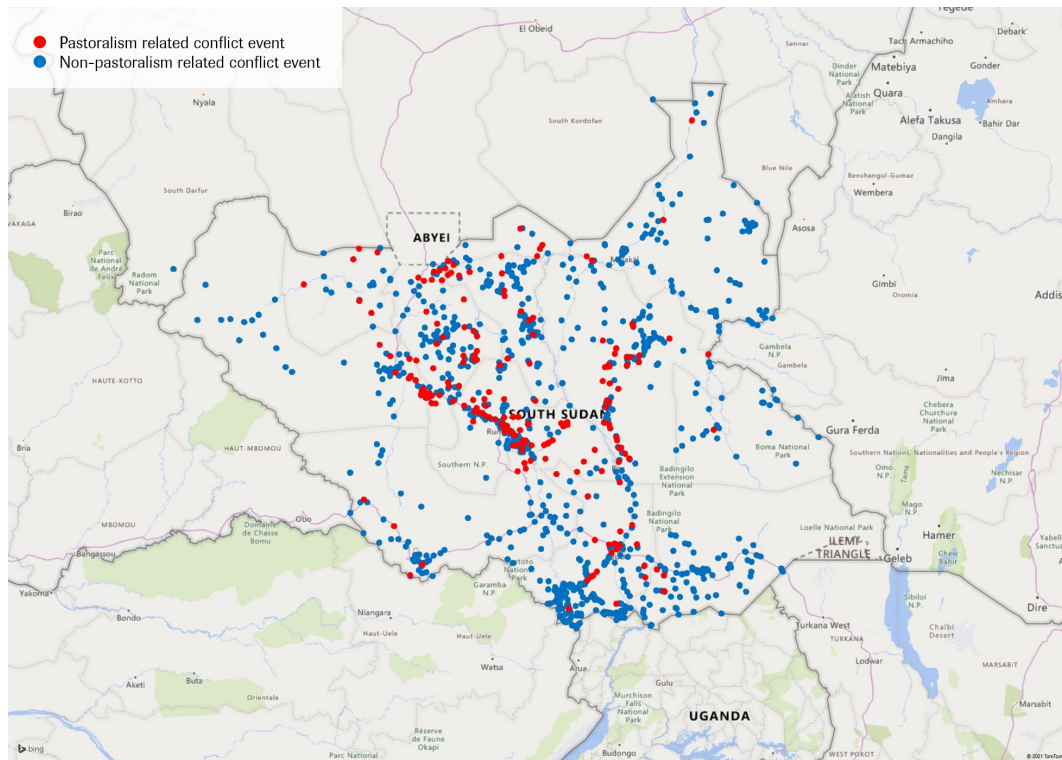
17 Leclercq, S. and Matagne, G. (2020) "'With or Without You': The Governance of (Local) Security and the Koglweogo Movement in Burkina Faso', *International Journal of Security & Development* 9(1): p. 1-22.

18 International Crisis Group (2020) [Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence](#). *Africa report 287*, Brussels: ICG.

19 De Haan et al. (2016) [Pastoralism Development in the Sahel A Road to Stability?](#) World Bank Group.

20 Ibid.

Figure 2 Pastoralism and non-pastoralism related conflict in South Sudan since 2015²¹



change to the mode of production. Already in a disadvantaged position, pastoralists find themselves in a vulnerable place within an expanding market as their profit margins are negatively affected by the effects of mounting insecurity and violence. In Burkina Faso, pastoralist-related conflicts find their roots in unequal access to pastoralist resources, government policies and biased local governance systems that have at times been supported by non-governmental organisations and private sector programming. In preventing the escalation of pastoralist-related conflicts, policy and programme design must take place through a participatory process underpinned by a more inclusive and conflict-sensitive mindset.

South Sudan: politicizing pastoralist conflicts

In South Sudan, pastoralism is the main livelihood system in rural areas, and livestock is the main form of capital for many rural

households. Approximately 78 percent of all households earn their livelihood from farming, pastoralism or a mix of both. Livestock population data for South Sudan is highly unreliable, making it hard to make a calculation of its share of GDP. However, an IGAD study in 2013 estimated the contribution of livestock to the country’s GDP at 3.015 billion USD (this equals about 25 percent of GDP).²² Suppliers deliver to formal and informal domestic, regional and international markets and move along dynamic and flexible trade routes in response to market opportunities (highest prices).

21 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com.

22 ICPALD (2016) *The Contribution of Livestock to the South Sudan Economy*. ICPALD9/CLE/1/2016; Catley, A. (2018) *Livestock and livelihoods in South Sudan*. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton: DFID. Because of the upsurge of oil production and exports in the 1990s, the relative contribution of livestock to national GDP declined. The shut down of oil production and exportation by South Sudan in 2013 might have also affected the contribution of livestock to national GDP. The numbers presented are from before this shutdown.

A pastoralist economy marked by conflict

The South Sudanese livestock market is strongly influenced by the years of conflict and war the country has faced. After the peace agreement in 2005 the livestock market experienced a boost in activity which was associated with oil revenues, increasing government employment and a large influx of returnees. To meet demands in the growing city of Juba, South Sudan became both an importer and an exporter of cattle. In 2013, new outbreaks of violence affected the market again, mainly because of the intensity of livestock raiding that affected mainly wealthy and middle-class owners with large herds.²³ This meant a change in livestock distribution and squeezed out the middle class in favour of political and military elites who used resources gained during the war and post-independence to acquire massive herds, and saw the occurrence of commercial and politically driven raiding. Transfers of cattle herds, either as sales or through a raids, between people (intra-ethnic group) or between ethnic groups are a big part of the resource game underpinning national politics. It affects who is influential within an ethnic group, and the power balance between groups. Therefore, from a livelihood perspective understanding who owns the cows and to what groups do they belong is more relevant than estimating the total livestock population.²⁴ As is the case in Burkina Faso, many elite and rich cow owners entrust their herd to shepherds – often impoverished or young pastoralists – to guide them into greener pastures.

Pastoralist' conflict as political tool

In understanding the conflicts related to pastoralism in South Sudan, there are some issues to unpack. A first is the way in which prolonged conflict has affected the livestock sector. Limitations on pastoral mobility due to security concerns has forced herders to take routes driven by the need to protect their livestock, rather than making the best use of

natural resources. Subsequent large-scale and long-distance displacement of livestock from the conflict-affected states into agricultural zones outside their traditional pastoral domains increased disputes over land between agriculturalists and farmers. Despite efforts to regulate land access through the development of land policies and legislation, implementation was hampered by politicization at national level by governing elites and a lack of capacity to interpret and carry them out at local level. Customary practice continues to govern access to, and use and allocation of, land and other natural resources, which translates into varying systems according to region, and consequently had fuelled conflicts between large numbers of internally displaced pastoralists and host communities.²⁵ The accumulation of large herds by elites has also affected customary mediation practices such as cattle payments. Because of their increasing wealth and the size of their herds, such compensations do not affect them in the same way as they do poorer pastoralists.²⁶

Second, cattle herds are not only a big economic factor, they also have a social function as pastoralist communities traditionally use systems of social support such as bridewealth, loans or gifts of livestock. This is considered a central aspect of pastoralist resilience, sustaining social relations and reducing vulnerability.²⁷ These practices, however, have become increasingly politicized and are being used as a tool for political power struggles. Cattle raiding, a long-standing practice governed by cultural authorities and ritual constraints, is a particular practice that has become a tool for national political power struggles.²⁸ The transformation of this practice into a tool

23 Gebreyesus, Y. A., Lemma, G. B., Deng, L. B. and Abdullahi, S. (2016) *The Impact of Conflict on the Livestock Sector in South Sudan*. FAO.

24 Ifad, I. (2018) *Livestock and conflict in South Sudan*. K4D Helpdesk Report 484. Brighton: DFID.

25 USAID (2010) *Property Rights and Resource Governance*, Sudan Country Profile.

26 N. Pendle, "The dead are just to drink from": recycling ideas of revenge among the western Dinka, South Sudan', *Africa* 88, 1 (2018): 99-121.

27 Ibid.

28 This is traditionally a practice among different pastoral tribes (Nuer, Dinka and Muri), and in the past generally occurred on a small scale involving minimal violence. See LandLinks. 'South Sudan'. Available at: <https://land-links.org/country-profile/south-sudan/>.

for political conflict – and its increasingly violent character – has been informed by the successful erosion of traditional norms and authorities by political elites at local, regional and national levels.²⁹ Raids function to transform political conflicts by distracting from other issues at hand, affecting political opponents' financial ability to finance conflict elsewhere, are used as a means of pressure and have become militarised by the mobilisation of armed herders for different political ambitions. This has created a complex relationship between pastoralist militias and national political entities (such as the Sudanese Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement-in-Opposition). While pastoralist informal armed groups fight on behalf of political elites, they are also motivated by inter-communal grievances and sometimes incentives in the form of material or financial rewards, and therefore only weakly integrated into formal militias. The professionalisation of cattle raids, however, has intensified intercommunal conflicts between and among pastoralists and led to substantial herd losses.³⁰

Technical solutions to a more complex problem

Overall, donor interventions in response to the problems facing the livestock sector in South Sudan have had limited effect.³¹ Some international donors strongly associate cattle with conflict – because of the practice of cattle raids – and view pastoralists as a threat to peace and security; such views have influenced interventions in the past. Livestock interventions have largely taken place in the context of humanitarian programming focused on food security. Interventions have been limited to technical solutions such as vaccination programmes,

ignoring broader political dynamics instigating a range of small and larger cattle raids. Those conflicts might be incited purposely for larger political considerations, rather than happening by accident. Therefore it is crucial that any livestock intervention is conflict sensitive, as it can serve either as an alternative or as a reinforcing resource for local and national-level politics and conflict.³²

The way political elites co-opted the traditional practice of cattle raiding to further their interests is enforcing the image of pastoralism as a driver of conflict. However, it disregards pastoralists' grievances caused by years of neglect by the government in favour of agricultural development and the negative effects of protracted conflict and instability on pastoralist livelihoods. At the same time, peace efforts and development solutions focusing on resource management, food security, and security and rule of law have largely neglected the ways such local cattle conflicts are linked with wider (non-cattle) tensions.³³

Somalia: autonomy in a stateless environment

With over 90 percent of its agricultural land being pasture and the importance of the sector in terms of international trade, Somalia is a pastoral country.³⁴ The pastoralist production system is mainly oriented towards the commercial export of live animals to countries like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, in addition to the significant cross-border trade with Kenya and Ethiopia.³⁵ Because of

29 Wild, H., Jok, J. and Patel, R. (2018) 'The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence', *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3(2).

30 Jobbins, M. and A. McDonnell (2021) *Pastoralism and Conflict: Tools for Prevention and Response in the Sudano-Sahel*. Washington DC: Search for Common Ground

31 Ibid.

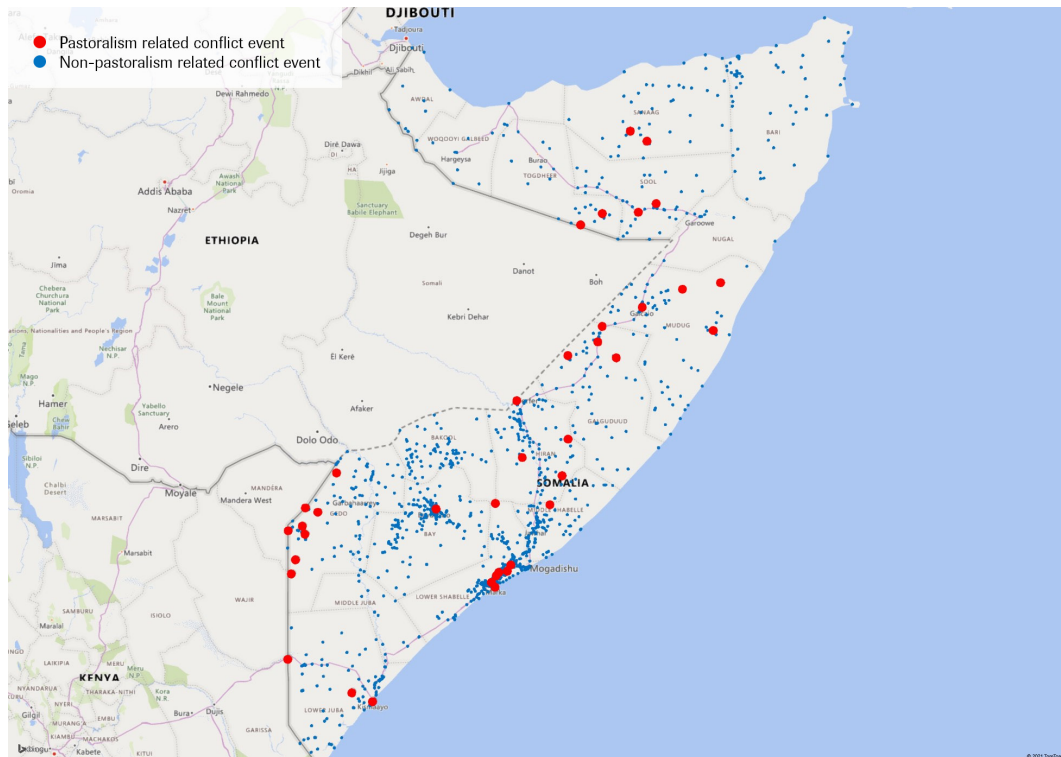
32 CSRF (2017) *Food Security, Access and Conflict Sensitivity: What opportunities do livestock offer in South Sudan?*, CSRF Briefing Note

33 Ibid.

34 Behnke, R. H. (2008) 'The Economic Contribution of Pastoralism: Case Studies from the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa', *Nomadic Peoples* 12(1): pp. 45-79.

35 In the north of the country, camels are the main livestock that is traded with countries like Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf, and represent the largest part of export and revenue streaming to governmental bodies. The most powerful pastoral clans are involved in this trade. In the south at the border with Kenya and Ethiopia there is a more informal trade in cows and small ruminants and involve smaller and less powerful pastoralist clans.

Figure 3 Pastoralism and non-pastoralism related conflict in Somalia since 2015³⁶



a lack of central state governing the sector, there are no reliable statistics on the value of pastoralism to overall GDP. However, the FAO estimates that livestock accounts for around 40 percent of the country’s GDP and employs roughly 60 percent of the population, both directly and indirectly.³⁷ Since export taxes are the main income stream for government bodies, livestock represents a large share of government revenues.³⁸

Transborder trade

The livestock sector has suffered less from Somali’s history of conflict, the breakdown of the centralised institutional structure, and the collapse of the Somali state. In particular, due

to its historical autonomy from government services, the sector was able to survive and even expand into new territories.³⁹ After the fall of Barre’s regime in 1991, pastoralists were forced to organise themselves within a stateless environment and began to redefine norms, practices and power relations within the spaces they controlled. As a consequence, different parallel systems of governance at national and local levels evolved, including those along clan lines.⁴⁰ Booming transborder trade played an important role in supporting the development of their livelihoods, leading to an emerging elite commercial class within pastoralist societies and clans who are well connected, thus widening the gap between those who profit from livestock-based commerce and

36 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); acleddata.com.

37 FAO. *Protecting livestock and pastoral livelihoods in Somalia during COVID-19 amid floods and insecurity*. 19 June 2020. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/fao-in-action/stories/stories-detail/en/c/1294633/>.

38 Meester, J., von Lossow, T. and Bisson, L. (2020) *Is the Dutch Security & Rule of Law Theory of Change ‘climate proof’?*, The Hague: Clingendael.

39 Little, P.D. (2005) ‘Pastoralism in a Stateless Environment: The Case of the Southern Somalia Borderlands’, *Geography Research Forum* 25.

40 Baldaro, E. and M. Nori (2017). *Cooling Up the Drylands: Disentangling the pastoralism-security nexus*. Florence: European University Institute.

those who do not.⁴¹ As livestock export is a major source of government revenue and significant in keeping the financial system going, influential political groups are closely related to influential pastoralists clans.

Clan power dynamics

While pastoralism and livestock have a relation to the dynamics of conflict in Somalia, they are not the root cause of the problem. Since the fall of Siad Barre in 1991, Somalia has been in a constant state of instability. Conflicts that emerged after 1991 have revolved around access to and control over resources and land, and have been structured by (sub)clan power dynamics rather than issues of resource scarcity.⁴² Conflicts have been most severe in resource-rich regions of the country, rather than resource-poor areas. Control over land and resources is an important factor in power bargains, influencing control over the reconstruction and statebuilding process, and is acquired by both violent and non-violent means. Pastoral clans have proven to be dominant, which means they also dominate control over land and governance arrangements, often to the detriment of farmer communities who are marginalised, displaced and/or facing poor working conditions.

Internal displacement caused by conflict, drought, lack of livelihood opportunities, and evictions by powerful (pastoral) clans has disproportionately affected minority clans

traditionally more engaged in agriculture. Continued displacements have benefitted some conflict actors, including aid-related organisations, businessmen and government – and possibly Al-Shabaab – as a business opportunity and a political tool.⁴³ Some large businesses have at times profited by purchasing the lands of destitute and displaced farmers following droughts, while pastoral clans have sought to displace farming communities in order to claim their lands in the competition to influence governance. In contrast to the statebuilding process, Al Shabaab has frequently sought to recruit from internally displaced persons and marginalised agricultural clans. This illustrates how resilience programming focusing on the individual needs of certain groups can effectively bypass more structural patterns of exclusion that are the root cause of such needs as well as conflict.

Enforcing structural inequalities

Pastoralism in Somalia is also facing threats posed by a protracted conflict in the country – with insecurity disrupting certain trade routes, and it has become increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather events as the country is witnessing a heightened frequency of droughts.⁴⁴ Donor perceptions of the problem revolve mainly around the lack of a functioning state, and donors have focused on humanitarian relief interventions to address the large prevalence of food insecurity and climate-related displacements. But such interventions have been challenged and superseded by security concerns in the fight against Al Shabaab and militia violence. Both donor and government approaches have thus far focused on the resilience of marginalised groups, without engaging

41 Little, P.D. (2005) "Pastoralism in a Stateless Environment: The Case of the Southern Somalia Borderlands." *Geography Research Forum* 25; Jaspar, S.; Guhad, M. A. and Nisar Majid (2020). *Food and Power in Somalia: Business as Usual? A scoping study on the political economy of food following shifts in food assistance and in governance*. London: LES.

42 Webersik, C. 2008. 'War Over Resources? Evidence from Somalia', *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, 50(3), p. 57; Eklöv, K. and Krampe, F. 2019. *Climate-Related Security Risks and Peacebuilding in Somalia*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Solna, Sweden; Meester, J.; von Lossow, T. and L. Bisson. 'Is the Dutch Security & Rule of Law Theory of Change 'climate proof'? The Hague: Clingendael, p.

43 See Jaspar, S.; Guhad, M. A. and Nisar Majid (2020). *Food and Power in Somalia: Business as Usual? A scoping study on the political economy of food following shifts in food assistance and in governance*. London: LES for a more in depth analysis of how the displaced have become a key part of the political economy of food in Somalia.

44 Unruh, J. 1995. 'Pastoralist resource use and access in Somalia: a changing context of development, environmental stress, and conflict', in *Disaster and Development on the Horn of Africa*, Sorenson, J. (ed.). London: Macmillan.

with the underlying political economy dynamics creating state weakness and marginalisation.⁴⁵ The pastoral sector has, however, been largely left alone and the exploitation of agricultural clans ignored. Interventions are frequently informed by climate change concerns, seen as an aggravating factor to food security and negatively affecting stability in the country. This leads to conflict frames focusing on competition over increasingly scarce resources. In practice, however, conflicts in agricultural areas are largely driven by struggles over control of land and resources, which can be leveraged into influence at national level and in the statebuilding process.

Conclusion

In all three cases the conflicts in which pastoralists are involved reveal diverging underlying political economy and power dynamics. The relationship of these conflicts with pastoralism is different in each country, and rarely straightforward. In Burkina Faso, a new economic reality entails changes to the local political economy which are increasingly detrimental to pastoralists. Furthermore, a strong policy bias to agriculture and sedentarization makes pastoralists compete in an uneven playing field regarding access to land and resources. The case uncovers some structural causes and driving forces behind conflicts involving pastoralists, namely the under-representation of pastoralists, access to pastoral resources, pressure on pastoral livelihoods as they face new economic realities and increasing security challenges. In South Sudan the playing field is more level with no clear dominance of one or another group of resource users. Pastoralists are involved in a range of (non-cattle) tensions

by the political co-option of traditional cattle raiding to further their interests and transform political conflicts. This reinforces the image of pastoralism as a driver of conflict. While in these two cases the state and political groups have strong roles to play in the dynamics of conflict(s); in Somalia pastoralists have been organising themselves in a largely stateless environment. Conflicts that have emerged are mostly structured along clan lines, and these clans struggle for political power in the rebuilding process. Pastoral clans are dominant and as such they dominate control over land and governance arrangements, usually to the disadvantage of (minor) farming clans who are marginalised, displaced and/or facing poor labour conditions. Pastoralism and livestock have a relationship to the dynamics of conflict in all three countries, but are not the root causes of the problem. Control over land and (pastoral) resources, how this is governed, by whom it is governed, and the power dynamics that lie behind it are key issues to understand and consider in order that programming or interventions to be effective rather than exacerbate the problem.

Three programming responses to pastoralism-related conflicts

From the cases, we discerned three debates that currently inform dominant conflict frames and policy interventions by donors and international actors in relation to pastoralism-related conflicts.

The environmental (climate change) agenda

Pastoralism-related conflicts (related to natural resources) across Africa have frequently been attributed to environmental and climate change impacts and the resulting resource scarcity, enforcing the environmental scarcity/security nexus hypothesis. Global and national policy narratives present drylands – in which pastoralists live and work – as ecologically fragile areas with scarce resources, portraying their dry environment and variable climate as major constraints to productivity that compel communities to over-farm or over-graze the land. This interpretation often

45 Federal Republic of Somalia. Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development. 2019. *National Development Policy 2020 to 2024: The Path to a Just, Stable and Prosperous Somalia*; consolidated draft National Development Policy 9 2020-2024; Meester, J., van Steenberg, F. and Steinhauer, I. (2021) *NCEA Advice on Sustainable programme development in Somalia*, Utrecht: Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment.

informs technical interventions focusing on availability of fodder, medication, water, and information systems on droughts, or the promotion of livelihoods-based responses to adverse weather conditions and soil depletion. Climate change can exacerbate or worsen existing political, economic and ecological vulnerabilities, which could increase the risk of conflict and fuel violent escalation in some contexts. However, the case studies have illustrated that drought and resource scarcity as consequences of climate change may raise tensions, but that does not explain conflict itself. Conflicts occur along existing fault lines and patterns of exclusion, mainly where existing resource governance fails. Climate change interventions that ignore these can potentially increase the risk of conflict or aggravate existing conflicts. As the Somali case study has shown, resilience-focused interventions based on the needs of specific groups may reinforce structural patterns of inequality or render underlying political economy invisible. In Somalia, although livelihoods may be under pressure, conflict over arable land is in large part driven by concerns of clan power dynamics rather than food scarcity (and notably, large areas of farmland are converted for use for export crops rather than domestic consumption). It is crucial to base interventions on a deep understanding of the way access to natural resources is negotiated between multiple users.

The economic/food security agenda

Food security concerns guide interventions in all three case studies. But while interventions might recognise the importance of livestock for national food security and nutrition, they often see traditional and mobile pastoralist production systems as 'inefficient' and in need of modernisation or intensification. Solutions to food insecurity often aim to increase pastoralist production through technical measures and policy interventions with a technocratic approach as their basis (e.g. technical solutions to increase production) with insufficient consideration given to the political and economic consequences for the livelihoods of small pastoralist

communities.⁴⁶ Modernisation programmes are often inappropriate for the more flexible and informal market system in which pastoralists engage.⁴⁷ Thus, the production-oriented approaches focusing mainly on quantity of production that lie behind the industrialisation of agriculture and the expansion of intensive monoculture for export, are inherently opposed to the practices and values of pastoralism.⁴⁸ When pastoral and agricultural policy-making function in separate spheres, the effects of policies focusing on increasing pastoral productivity on the political status quo in many communities where farmers and pastoralists share resources is often not considered. For example, in Burkina Faso an increase in local livestock ownership has changed the political economic settlement as communities become caught between two fires: increasing cultivated land and increasing livestock.⁴⁹ Moreover, subsequent increases in resource rents do not necessarily lead to a more stable security situation. As Burkina Faso shows, a growing livestock market may still leave herders marginalised because other groups (middlemen) reap the additional profits. In addition, it may affect and destabilise governance systems at local level and reinforce structural patterns of pastoralist marginalisation. Therefore, livelihood improvements should go hand in hand with some efforts on resource governance.

The governance agenda

Good governance and strengthening of state institutions is a central concern informing the discourse on all three countries. Interventions are often framed as part of decentralisation projects that are assumed to result in inclusive (resource) governance. However, this is not necessarily conducted

46 Bisson, L., Cottyn, I., de Bruijne, K. and F. Molenaar (2021) *Between hope and despair. Pastoralist adaptation in Burkina Faso*. The Hague: Clingendael.

47 Dyer, K.W. (2012). *Pastoralism in the Horn of Africa: Diverse livelihood pathways*. Brighton: CAADP.

48 Hesse, C., Misconceptions on drylands and pastoralism, available at <https://www.iied.org/misconceptions-drylands-pastoralism>.

49 Soeters, S. 2018. *How a 'Landscape' approach could be the key to securing the Sahel*.

on the basis of a deep understanding of current power arrangements. While fair policy frameworks for natural resource management may be in place, they might be ignored or perverted in their implementation at local level due to power imbalances. Similarly, conflicts can become a tool in political power games, as is the case in South Sudan. Traditional authorities are often the main actors governing access to, and use and allocation of, land and natural resources. On the one hand, this translates into different systems in different regions based on the different power balances in place. Implementation is, however, hampered by politicization at all levels because, on the other hand, political entities have co-opted pastoral conflicts and overturned or eroded traditional authorities and conflict mediation mechanisms. Without an understanding of the links between wider cattle and non-cattle tensions, pastoralists risk being viewed as the main threat to security.

Conclusions and recommendations

The relationships between mobile pastoralists and sedentary communities who have historically shared landscapes and resources, are deteriorating in ways that affect the conditions for violent conflict. In part, these relationships are stressed as individuals and communities adapt to new economic realities by diversifying their livelihoods, settling down or increasing private ownership of land. However, this deterioration can also be seen as the result of a lack of credible actors or institutions to mediate and manage competition over resources. Disputes over pastoral land are exploited by non-pastoralists to obtain support in regional or international conflicts, linking local conflicts involving pastoralists to wider political, ideological or commercial agendas. It is important to understand local power structures and how they will interact with an intervention.

Interventions often do not take an integrated approach but are based on sectoral policies. They may not be conflict sensitive if they fail to take into account the political economy

driving farmer-herder conflict, because they: a) are framed against simplified climate change concerns – e.g. a production-oriented approach with a focus on increasing resilience against droughts and resource scarcity often favouring sedentary farming; b) aim to increase pastoralist production through technical measures without considering who the additional rents will accrue to and how these rents may or may not already be fuelling conflict; and c) are framed as part of decentralisation efforts assumed to be inclusive rather than based on an understanding of the underlying power dynamics that shape resource governance. An understanding of pastoral resource governance is essential to help safeguard against unintended adverse impacts of any programming or intervention.

As the cases set out above demonstrate, the conflicts surrounding pastoralists' livelihoods are highly diverse. As such, efforts to resolve pastoral conflict grounded in a simplified narrative of the drivers of such conflicts are unlikely to be effective. The key to effective engagement is to ensure that programming is underpinned by a more inclusive and conflict-sensitive mindset that takes into account location-specific resource governance arrangements. The three case studies illustrate that a different and context-specific approach is needed depending on local governance arrangements and the underlying political economy. This entails a fundamental change in the way problems are framed and solutions envisaged. The problem to be solved is not always the pastoral mode of production or lifestyle, but rather might be the underlying imbalance in political economy. Based on this core insight, this paper concludes with three policy recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Ensure climate change adaptation efforts take into consideration local conflict dynamics

Climate adaptation efforts may be required in a range of fragile situations, but intervening in resource governance and the distribution of resources among groups has a direct bearing on conflict dynamics. For climate adaptation efforts to be socially sustainable, and to avoid exacerbating existing conflict dynamics, climate adaptation programming

in fragile areas should take into account how its interventions relate to local governance and tensions. As such, it is important to reconsider preconceptions of traditional pastoral livelihoods and land use systems as economically inefficient and environmentally destructive. Mobility has proven to be an essential part of the pastoral production system; it has been effective in responding to a growing demand for meat and livestock related products as well as a means of adapting to climate variability. Additionally, it is key that any intervention is informed by a political economy analysis of the underlying dynamics of multiple resource users within targeted landscapes, in order to assess how climate change impacts and adaptation efforts affect conflict dynamics.

Recommendation 2: Ensure sectoral and needs-based food security interventions consider the equitable distribution of gains realised

Current needs based programming and sectoral development policies may be effective at improving individuals' livelihoods and thereby reducing populations' vulnerability to shocks. Neither an individual focussed needs-based approach nor sectoral policies seeking to increase yields are likely to address the structural patterns of marginalisation from which beneficiaries' vulnerability stems in the first place. As such, food security programmes should

consider the extent to which the proposed intervention is conflict sensitive or whether it reproduces and entrenches current conflict dynamics. Programmes focusing on improving sectoral productivity should consider to whom the additional benefits generated will be allocated, and how the programme will affect other resource users within targeted landscapes.

Recommendation 3: Ensure representation of marginalised resource users in efforts to decentralise resource governance

Decentralisation efforts are not by definition inclusive and may risk reproducing structural inequalities that form an important driver of conflict. For decentralisation efforts to effectively promote inclusive governance, a substantial effort needs to be made to improve the systematic representation and inclusion of all resource users and their concerns in decision-making processes as well as in development programmes. This will likely require: substantial efforts to include marginalised groups in governance arrangements; the provision of support for capacity development at local level to ensure the implementation and enforcement of balanced pastoral and/or land laws; and consideration of how decentralisation efforts relate to traditional and customary authorities in local resource management.

About the Clingendael Institute

Clingendael – the Netherlands Institute of International Relations – is a leading think tank and academy on international affairs. Through our analyses, training and public debate we aim to inspire and equip governments, businesses, and civil society in order to contribute to a secure, sustainable and just world.

www.clingendael.org/cru
cru@clingendael.org
+31 70 324 53 84

 @clingendaelorg
 The Clingendael Institute
 The Clingendael Institute
 clingendael_institute
 Clingendael Institute
 Newsletter

About the authors

Ine Cottyn is a former Research Fellow at the Clingendael Institute's Conflict Research Unit. She has worked on assessing the relation between conflict and fragility, private sector development and migration in the Sahel region. Prior to becoming a research fellow at Clingendael, she worked as an academic researcher at Utrecht University. Ine has worked on a range of issues related to sustainable developments, with a regional focus on sub-Saharan Africa. Previous research experience includes land governance, gender, small town development, CSR, second home tourism, rural transformation, migration and mobility. Ine has field experience from Senegal, South-Africa, Rwanda, Cameroon, Kenya and Burkina Faso and she holds a BA in anthropology, an MA in international development studies (human geography) and a PhD in Development Studies (Human Geography) from Utrecht University.

Jos Meester is Senior Research Fellow at the Clingendael Institute's Conflict Research Unit. Jos' work focuses on the functioning of the private sector in conflict-affected environments. In particular, he is interested in supply chains spanning across political divisions, as well as the close relationship of political and private-sector elites and its consequences for the stability of political power structures. Jos previously worked as a management consultant on supply chain management and market assessments in developed and developing economies.