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Transhumance and conflicts management on Agonlin plateau in Zou department (Benin)

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Abstract

For thirty years, Agonlin region in Zou department has been subject to extensive movements of national and cross-border transhumance every year: it is a seasonal movement of flocks and their shepherds in search of water and pastures. The absence or weakness of structures and hospitality infrastructure, especially transhumance corridors lead transhumant animals to cause enormous damage to farmers with immeasurable drawbacks (destruction of crop fields and fallows, cattle raiding crops, raping women, slaughtering animals, etc. .). The use of tools such as the ECRIS method (Collective Rapid Identification Survey of Strategic groups) and PRA (Participatory and Fast analysis Method) were referred to in order to identify, through a combination of rational choice and random 750 actors, issues and the various conflicts related to transhumance and their management mechanisms. Transhumant Fulani come in their majority from Niger (32.14%), followed by those from Nigeria (30%), northern Benin (24%), Burkina Faso (9.30%), Mali (4, 28%) and Mauritania (0.28%) to a lesser extent. Management of transhumance is governed by legislation at national, regional and international levels. Several instances in the areas carry the responsibility for the management of transhumance: management committees of transhumance, the municipality, the municipal Sectors for Agricultural Development, the constabulary offices, the court and the Associations of breeders and farmers.

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Introduction

Transhumance is a pastoral farming method that refers to a practice of seasonal, pendular moving of herds, according to precise routes, repeated every year. Transhumance comes from Latin *trans* and *humus* "beyond land» (Dongmo, 2009). It is a rural activity that characterizes Agonlin plateau. For about three decades, the Agonlin region has received successive waves of migratory herds which numbers grow every year in search of water, pasture and favorable breeding conditions on the one hand and the protection of the health of the herd on the other hand. Transhumance phenomenon exists everywhere to some extent in the world, but West Africa appears as a typical field event of transhumance on the African continent. Poor organization of transhumance campaigns and non controlling flows cause bloody conflicts between herders and farmers (Diallo, 2003) with immeasurable socio-economic and environmental consequences. Indeed, it is the environmental and social damages that are often at the root of many conflicts recorded in the region between transhumant and farmers.

Transhumance which is the alternative and seasonal movement of animals (Diallo *et al.*, 1985) is an animal production system adapted to the context of grassland savannah and steppe zones . This type of animal husbandry is usually practiced in the dry season in West Africa, from Sahelian countries to the coastal countries (Sournia *et al.* ,1998) following rangelands. This movement is noticeable in some parts of Benin, including Agonlin region which receives each year for three (03) or four (04) months, thousands of herds of cattle from national and cross-border transhumance. During this period, relationships between the main actors (farmers and herders) are essentially characterized by conflicts around specific, divergent and conflicting interests. First, this study is to present the history and origins of the phenomenon of transhumance, then identify and analyze the causes and consequences of farmers / herders and finally, identify and analyze the mechanisms used to manage these conflicts.

Materials and methods

Area selected to carry out this study

Located in the Zou Department in the central part of Benin (Fig.1), the Agonlin region consists of a block of three municipalities (Ouinhi, Covè and Zangnanado). It is bordered in the north by the department of Collines and in the South by Ouémé department between 7 ° and 7 ° 30 ' latitude. It is bordered in the east by the department of Plateau and in the west by the municipalities of Djidja, Za- Kpota, and Zogbodomey between 2 ° 15 ' and 2 ° 30 ' longitude. The Agonlin region covers a total area of 1327 square kilometers. The area has a landscape largely dominated by alluvial plains, especially in its southern part. The northern part consists of highlands with altitudes ranging between 150 and 210 meters.

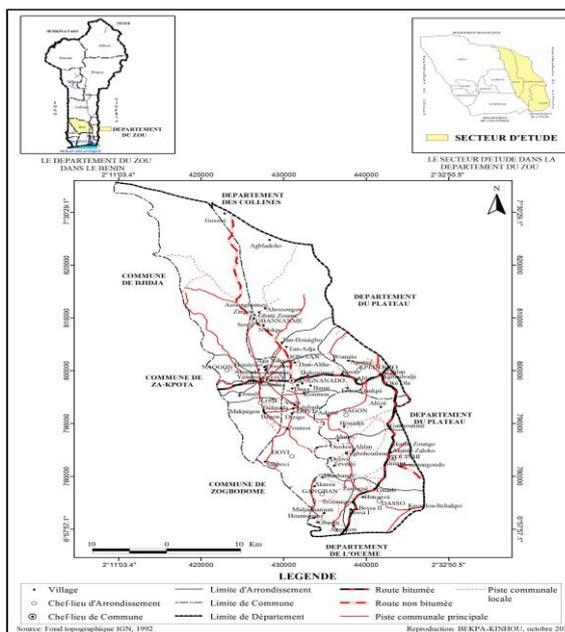


Fig. 1. Geographical localization of the Agonlin area.

The climate is intermediate between the maritime sub-equatorial climate and Sudano- Guinean climate. It is characterized by a long rainy season from March to July and a short dry season in August; a short rainy season from September to October and a long dry season from November to March. According to data from ASECNA, the average annual rainfall is 985 mm of water spread over an average of 74 days. The hydrographic network is composed of Ouémé River

and its tributary called Zou . This area is watered by many minor rivers, lakes and many other water bodies.

Soils in this area are of three major types

- The leached tropical ferruginous soils formed on the crystalline rocks with armor in some places and widespread in the northern part of the area;
- The lateritic soils over sandstone and sandy clay or colluvial sediments of the continental terminal which are more or less red deep soils and are observable in the center of Agonlin region, especially in the municipality of Zangnanado;
- The hydromorphic soils with pseudo - gley sand, then pseudo- gley alluvial material on clay valleys and clay plains characterized by congestion are found along streams , mainly in southeastern, West and east of the center of Agonlin area. Vegetation is characterized by dense forests; woodland, trees and shrub importantly in the north side of the area. In the center and south, there exist swamps. This natural Vegetation is combined with crops and fallow, crops under palm trees and other fruit plantations.

Data collection method

Choice of investigation and sampling areas

The identification and selection of areas of investigation are due to the severity of the phenomenon of transhumance (places affected by transhumance). To do this, a survey was conducted among the people involved, including Fulani, farmers, specialists of the District Sector of Agricultural Development (DSAD) in all the areas affected by the effects of transhumance in Agonlin region.

Identifying areas of investigation and sampling

8 out of 13 administrative subdivisions which include a large number of target groups were selected through the combination technique of random and purposive choice. The criteria that have underpinned this sample are as follows: (i) areas in migration corridors of transhumant and thereby constituting their areas

of influence (seasonal invasion, food supply, stay and transit) , (ii) areas sharing a common life history and images of the period on the issue of transhumance (plundering granaries , hostage taking , various humiliation , rape and murder). The surveys were conducted on the basis of appropriate tools and methods especially those of Fast Analysis Method of Participatory Planning (FAMP) and the Rapid Collective Survey of Strategic Groups Identification (ECRIS) through questionnaire, interview guides and observation grid that served as technical support for data collection . 750 people were interviewed in 449 individual interviews and 27 focus groups. Data processing was done with the Sphinx Plus software and has established the typology of conflicts and their magnitude, settlement methods and their limitations.

Conflict analysis was made with the use of Glasl's conflict escalation scale which includes nine levels of degradation on the escalation of conflicts according to Table I

Table I. Conflict escalation analysis tool.

Stage	Eléments caractéristiques
1. Hardening	Confrontation of viewpoints, but parties involved still believe to find solutions through discussion
2. Debates and polemics	Polarization of thoughts, feelings and will, expression extreme, verbal abuse, formation of groups
3. Actions, not words	dialogue appears useless, dominance nonverbal behaviors, dichotomy between verbal and nonverbal behaviors, danger of misinterpretation, lack of confidence
4. Images and coalitions	images and coalitions (stereotypes, clichés, spreading rumors, demonizing enemies, manoeuvring each other into negative roles, Wooing of supporters to his cause

Stage	Éléments caractéristiques
5. Loss of face	Defamation, Public and direct personal attacks, attempts to isolate opponents, the emergence of ideological principles
6. Strategies of threats	Spiral of threats and counter-threats, Stress increased through ultimatums and counter-ultimatums
7. Limited destructive blows	Opponents are dehumanized, relatively small damage is considered a 'benefit, Limited destruction as 'appropriate response
8. Fragmentation of the enemy	Bringing about total breakdown of the enemy system, Destroying vital system factors to make the system unmanageable
9. Together into the abyss	No way back , Destruction of the enemy even at the price of self-destruction, Enjoyment of self-destruction – provided the enemy will not survive

Source: A stage model of conflict escalation, adapted from F. Glasl, 2013

Data processing

Data processing was performed with the Sphinx Plus software which yielded results matrices on the basis of statistical data.

Results

History of transhumance in Agonlin region

The Agonlin region has experienced transhumance on its territory for the first time in the mid 1990s. As a matter of fact, the first waves of national and cross-border transhumance entered the region from neighboring countries such as Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania in October-November 1997.

Transhumant animals destroyed systematically everything on their way: crop fields, fallow, plantations and natural vegetation, etc. At the level of their escorts, cases of theft of crops and rape were

recorded. Consequently, people involved reacted. Clashes that followed caused enormous material damage and loss of human and animal lives on both sides.

As a reaction to this unexpected incursion of transhumant Fulani and their animals , a local organization was created with the support of some local executives who have established a local armed militia called " Minagan " which means in local language , "We shall be saved "in order to fight the attackers. The purpose of the militia is to kill systematically any transhumant animal and its owners who undertake to cross or stay in any part of the territory of the Agonlin area.

Therefore, transhumance is rooted in the mentality of " Agonlinnou " as a memento of sad memory and this explains why even today the district of Ouinhi remains hostile to transhumance . With the exception of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Togo, this carnage of rare violence ever known in Benin and the Agonlin region was referred to as "diplomatic incident " with the neighboring countries of Benin.

At the same time, some dwellers of the area created another group favorable to transhumance. The traditional opposition farmer / herder was duplicated to give rise to disagreement between the Mahi brothers living at Agonlin who do not share the same ideas of the phenomenon of transhumance. While was prevailing this contradictory atmosphere, an influential member of the group in favor of transhumance was elected municipal councilor and most importantly, chairman of the "field and Environmental Affairs ' Committee. The latter then worked for the vote of a law by the municipality elected members that regulates transhumance management. So, local committees were established in several villages and administrative subdivisions to work for efficient management of transhumance. Then, from 2002, the municipality of Zangnanado began with CARDER specialists an extensive awareness campaign at the level of the population.

This Zangnanado born initiative was followed by the municipality of Covè. Only the municipality of Ouinhi has remained hostile to transhumance. So, after various awareness sessions, another form of transhumance management has emerged in the region which has reduced significantly the clashes between pastoralists and farmers throughout the Agonlin region.

Place of origin of transhumant animals

Transhumant Fulani who invade the area of the Agonlin territory come from the departments of the northern part of Benin (National transhumance) and countries of the sub region (border transhumance) (Fig.2).

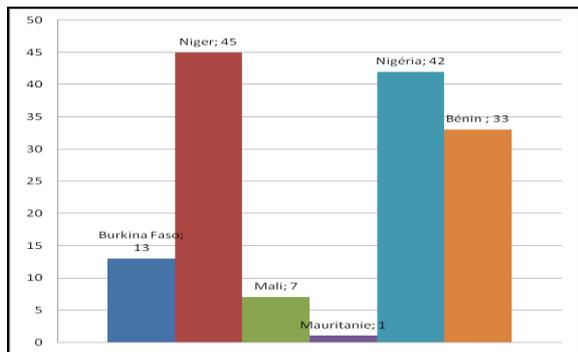


Fig. 2. Home origin of the transhumant herds.

Fig. 2 shows that the migratory herds across the territory of the Agonlin region appear in varying proportions. They come mostly from Niger (32.14%), followed those from Nigeria (30%) , northern Benin (24%) , Burkina Faso (9.30%) , Mali (4.28%) and to a lesser extent Mauritania (0.28%) . In total, the herds from the border transhumance (TTF) represent 76% against 30% of the herds from the northern part of Benin . Several factors determine the start of transhumance.

Causes of the Conflicts

The causes of these conflicts are multiple and of variable types. They are numerous and interwoven to the point that it is often difficult to identify the elements that have actually caused the conflict. Like icebergs, you can identify the elements that trigger

the conflict, but actually exist many other unseen causes. As to pastoral activities such as transhumance, the first evident causes that create the emergence of disputes between farmers and herders in the Agonlin area is related to wandering animals in crop fields . Fig. 3 and 4 illustrate the causes in the study area according to farmers (left) and by herders (right) area. They reveal in order of importance herder / farmer: destruction of crop fields (48% against 42%); overflow grazing areas (20% against 18%) destruction of defended areas (14% against 6%) , rape of women (8% against 17%) theft (10% against 17%). Other subjacent and significant causes may also be mentioned: untrue blame, wildfire, obstruction of corridors (routes) by farmers, etc.

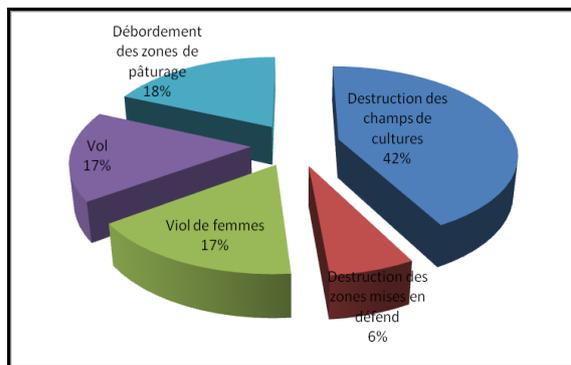


Fig. 3. Causes of the conflicts according to the farmers .

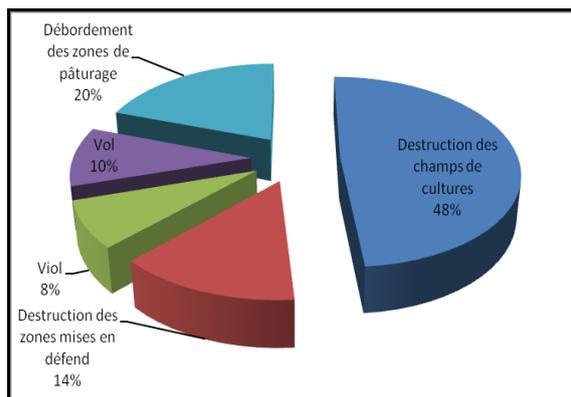


Fig. 4. Causes of the conflicts according to the herders.

These are the factors which are originally identified with regard to the conflicts in the area. They occur from the contradictions and discrepancies between protagonists about specific and strategic interests.

Conflicts and tensions of this type have always existed between pastoral peoples and farmers (Lesse , 2010). Everywhere in West Africa, transhumance campaigns are regularly marked by violent conflicts in which farmers are challenged. Various factors may explain the frequency of conflicts in the area.

Consequences deriving from the conflicts

Several drawbacks derive from the conflicts. After all the steps during which tensions reach their peak, conflicts are generated and then follow series of violence difficult to control. Damages are both material (destruction of wildlife habitats, destruction of fields by animals, etc..) and human (rape, death of people or serious injury), destruction of crops and death of animals, etc.. 95% of the foreign transhumant never accepts to have offended their victims. Any anger shown by the victims (farmers) generally ends badly. It is often reported that direct confrontations result in grievous bodily harm with men and animals killed. (Fig.5) shows the extent of different types of effects recorded in the area related to breeders / farmers conflicts. During the clashes, various weapons are used: guns, arrows, machetes, clubs and traps for animals. The most commonly used weapons in the clashes are presented in (Fig.6) Indeed, each category of actors involved act according to its personal interests, with specific strategies which are in accordance with its capacities to take action as well as the links (alliance or opposition) it develops with other actors. In addition, another risky factor favoring the rise of conflicts in the area is the detention without worry of firearms by herders.

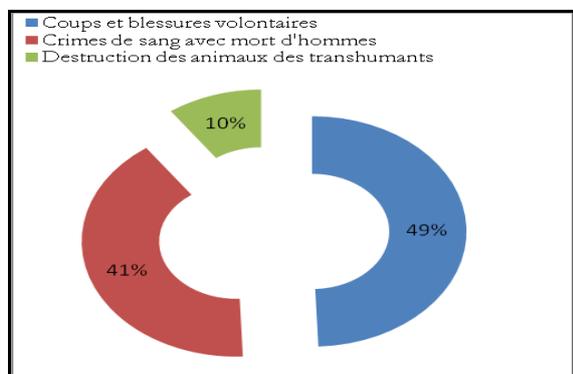


Fig. 5. percentage of the types of the drawbacks of the conflicts.

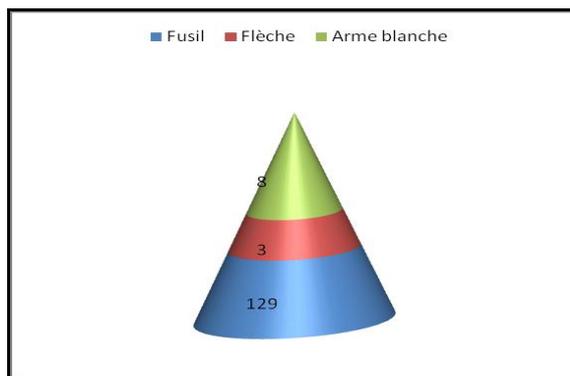


Fig. 6. weapons used during conflicts between herders and farmers.

Patterns of transhumance

Starting area

Motivational factors vary from an actor to another. For the transhumant Fulani, long period of drought in their own areas, the risk of poor health of the herd and especially the drastic lack of water and pasture (Fig.7) are the very motives for transhumance., (Fig.7) reveals that three important factors encourage the Fulani to take the decision to undertake transhumance. These elements, from the most important, are: lack of pasture and water (43%), long period of drought (39%) and the animals' risky health (18%). Mobility is for the herders a solution to the critical issues that hinder the development of their pastoral activities. Faced with these difficulties, transhumants define objectives that guide their decision to go to transhumance. (Fig. 8) presents the objectives followed by the herders from their country of origin in search of water and pasture (respectively 40%), protection of animal health (16%) and finally economic activities (4%).

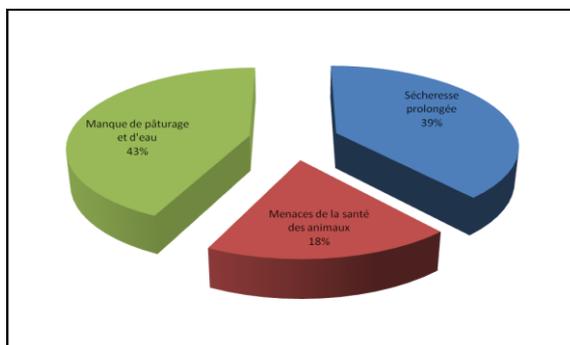


Fig. 7. Factors motivating herders to about transhumance.

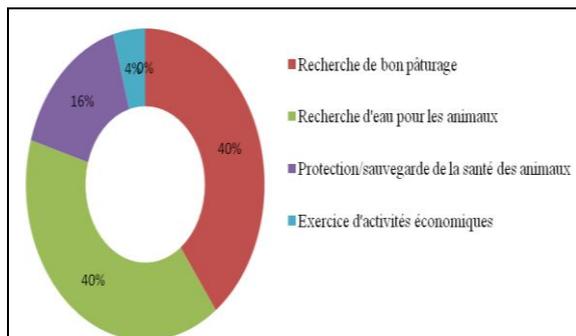


Fig. 8. Objectives of Fulani transhumant in the country.

Reception area

The Agonlin region has large areas of natural pastures in the lowlands and water points, many of them are permanent in any season. Moreover, the region is an agricultural area which provides transhumant livestock crop residues in addition to plant species palatable by animals. Indeed, Agonlin dwellers (90% of respondents) are aware that herders arrive for reasons related mainly to search for water and pasture and to a lesser extent in search of market to sell livestock products, including cattle and dairy products (fresh milk, cheese, etc.). (Fig. 9) states according to population, the elements that push transhumants on the road to the adventure of transhumance in Agonlin localities. These are the reasons for the arrival of transhumance in the area according to the Agonlin dwellers. They insist that transhumant Fulani invade their area for two basic reasons: water quest (77%) and grazing (23%). As long as these resources exist in this region, annual mass arrivals of domestic and cross-border transhumance will persist.

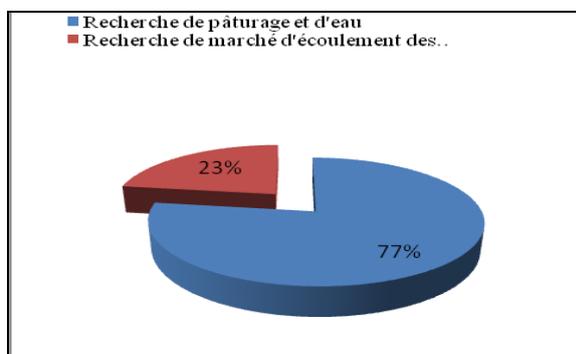


Fig. 9. Factors attracting transhumant according to the populations of the grazing area.

Conflicts and conflict management mechanisms related to transhumance Characteristics of the conflicts

Conflicts coming from transhumance do not affect in the same way the three municipalities that form the region of Agonlin. It is obvious that since no municipality can avoid the outburst of conflicts and the subsequent human and material damages since the birth of this phenomenon. This study has revealed that the extent of damage and the subsequent drawbacks illustrate the violent aspect of the conflict. Furthermore, classification shows that the municipality of Zangnanado comes first with 50%; Ouinhi: 40% and Covè: 10%

Persistence and consequences of the conflicts

Persistence of the conflicts

In the very context of Agonlin region, it is noticeable that the most common conflicts are consecutive to damage caused by herds in crop fields regardless of regulations that govern the activities of transhumance in force in the area. It is also noticeable that farmers plough along the traditional routes of transhumant animals. With farms scattered in the bush, farmers create real "traps plots" purposely exposed to wandering livestock and offer them opportunities to receive compensation. Some breeders adopt similar behavior. They head the animals to the edge of fields for grazing (Oussouby Touré, 2004). Finally, the non-compliance with the national legislation governing transhumance and local measures taken by the various municipalities of the region is an important part of the persistence of conflicts in the area. As a matter of fact, the failure to observe good practices and legal regulations are supported by some intermediaries that encourage transhumance in such disobedience. They consider that the regulations and provisions in force are not their own and therefore do not find themselves involved. From that moment, competition is intensifying and turns into conflict quickly. As such, dialogue among people involved for joint solutions and operating the creation and control of common rules becomes more and more difficult. Experience shows that before the outbreak of conflict

in the region Agonlin, especially following a pseudo settlement of certain malicious acts, actors take time to watch one another for a moment according to the scale of Glasl which has nine (9) levels of degradation on rising of conflicts: i) hardening (Confrontation of viewpoints, but parties involved still believe to find solutions through discussion), ii) debates and polemics (Polarization of thoughts, feelings and will, expression extreme, verbal abuse, formation of groups) iii) actions, not words (dialogue appears useless, dominance nonverbal behaviors, dichotomy between verbal and nonverbal behaviors, danger of misinterpretation, lack of confidence), iv) images and coalitions (stereotypes, clichés, spreading rumors, demonizing enemies, manoeuvring each other into negative roles, Wooing of supporters to his cause) v) Loss of face (Defamation, Public and direct personal attacks, attempts to isolate opponents, the emergence of ideological principles) vi) 6.Strategies of Threat (Spiral of threats and counter-threats, Stress increased through ultimatums and counter-ultimatums), vii) Limited destructive blows (Opponents are dehumanized, relatively small damage is considered a 'benefit, Limited destruction as 'appropriate response); viii) Fragmentation of the enemy (Bringing about total breakdown of the enemy system, Destroying vital system factors to make the system unmanageable); ix) together into the abyss (No way back , Destruction of the enemy even at the price of self-destruction, Enjoyment of self-destruction – provided the enemy will not survive).

The study of transhumance conflicts in the region of Agonlin has revealed several areas of conflicts: Lanta and Lanta Coghé (municipality of Covè); Dovi Dove (Sagbovi) and Samiondji at Zangnanado; and Tévèdji, Houédja and Tohouès in the municipality of Ouinhi. These areas have experienced manifestations of violence characterized by clashes following the various damage caused by transhumance, and crystallization of tensions that follow. Reactions recorded at the level of different actors involved reflect the concern of everyone to preserve and defend its strategic interests and physical integrity.

Mechanisms of conflict management

With the conflicts of all kinds recorded annually in the region because of transhumance, local initiatives exist to prevent them, to work for non-violent management of conflicts and try to limit their drawbacks. They come from all actors involved at all levels. Several instruments have been set up to manage conflicts at national, regional, and local levels. These include:

- The Act 87-073 of 27 September 1987 regulating the vain grazing animals and transhumance;
- The Interministerial Order No. 010/MISAT/MDR/DCAB of 20 January 1992 on the establishment, organization, powers and functions of transhumance committees;
- municipality orders organizing, running and monitoring of transhumance;
- Local periodic consultation frames before the beginning of transhumance;
- local structures;
- Decision A/DEC.5/10/98 ECOWAS of 31 October 1998

These legal instruments have been designed for the management of the problem and reach a peaceful transhumance with total elimination of subsequent conflicts, or their significant reduction if they are not eliminated.

Discussion

Determinants of transhumance

Transhumant Fulani needs access to two types of basic resources for the proper conduct of his flock: water as drink for the animals and vegetation as their food. The qualitative and quantitative distribution of vegetation depend largely on the precipitated water (Loireaux M, 1980). If mobility is possible in the territory of Agonlin is primarily because access to

both strategic resources (water and pasture) is allowed to both communities (nomadic herders and farmers), despite the many problems that it generates. Transhumance has a social aspect because the Fulani, after transhumance, can notice that his animals are in very good shape, this grants him a social prestige. It is also cultural because it fits into the customs of some peoples specialized in herding in the West African sub-region and beyond.

Conflict issues

In order to have a clear idea about the conflicts in the area it is necessary to analyze the interest that guides each actor because the perceptions and representations of the phenomenon of transhumance are not the same. The representation of the pastoral heritage varies from one actor to another in the defense and protection of his own interests, the type of his relationship with others, his perceptions of the pastoral resources, his power to use resources and strategies developed by actors are not alike. Conflicts therefore appear in a social and human environment characterized by divergent interests, perceptions and strategies that each actor develops to meet his individual interests. Antagonisms are much more striking between the Fulani (pastoralists) and Agonlin people (farmers).

For Fulani herders, transhumance is intended to maintain the productive power of their flock and therefore to find the best pastures (forage and water in quality and quantity) each season, trying to ensure secure access to these pastoral resources, seeking social status, in addition, transhumance helps them to develop competence and courage, the ability to manage a herd, but also the search of social relationship, or escaping a control and social problem in the country of origin.

Thus, they develop in their movements, reciprocal relationships, services with indigenous people (farmers). But more often than their relationships with settled communities are mingled with feeling of ethnicity or racist sentiments. They have very little, or

no agreement with administration officials and when they exist, they are often for corruption purpose. According to transhumant Fulani, natural resources are a "gift from God, a gift of nature and therefore belong to all." They cannot understand that they can be prevented or be subject to payment, especially when they have always used them free of charge. They often have the feeling of being marginalized and being victims of all other actors who abuse to take some of their riches, their livestock.

In fact, 87% of nomadic herders are not well organized and the remoteness of their camp and especially the lawlessness situation where they lived while Benin suspended cross-border transhumance had made them very vulnerable when they need to defend themselves or to influence decisions about the management of natural resources. However, they have the economic capacity (on the market, power of corruption), the ability to intimidate, to cause damage to take more importance in relations with other actors.

But all these pitfalls are not likely to dampen the ardor of transhumant seeking by all means to continue transhumance by working individually. So this strategy involves taking the risk of violating the rules consciously and consistently as well as current requirements. In this respect, transhumant animals are abandoned free in crop fields, causing massive damage. Once the crimes committed, they refer to intimidation and succeed in some cases to escape with the help of some indigenous people to avoid penalties. Also, they refer to corruption when they feel the threat of imprisonment or payment of large fines.

Farmers have no other purpose than protect their crops and maintain control over land and political power. In addition, they better take large profit of the presence of breeders (taxes, fines, incidentals, various rights, fields traps, etc ...).

Their relations with farmers are part of a system of termination or marginalization of past complementarities (manure contracts ...). More often, the problems of communication channel, but also ethnic prejudices make dialogue difficult with the transhumant Fulani. Their link with the administration as son of the soil, so as parents in an ascending and descending pattern strengthens their political power.

Their pride appears in their talk: "we are sedentary people, we are the owners and managers of the land", "We are in our home! The Fulani owns no land, he is a foreigner, he lives in the bush. He must adapt and accept our rules." Farmers regard the Fulani as wealthy people, "they need to sell but a cow and they have enough money to eat a whole year." This allows them to corrupt the administration against our interests, they said. Finally, farmers also see the Fulani as drug addicts, dangerous, capable of thefts, rape, scandalous crimes, damage of all kinds and all other acts of violence. Thus, people living in the municipalities of Covè Zangnanado and Ouinhi experience transhumance as a very dangerous phenomenon.

Also, farmers generally hold the local authority (traditional or municipal). They are sufficiently well represented in the administration, but very often with a low economic power. This economic weakness makes the Fulani more successful in ambiguous situations. The strategy of herders in case of difficulty is to refer to police or local authorities because they know they can use corruption tool to get out of trouble. They use old ties with the local authorities and make an offensive use of the area.

Local authorities in the three municipalities (Covè, Zangnanado, Ouinhi) play the role of pacification and strive in every way to avoid problems that may create conflicts. They are constantly concerned with the search for a balance between the different communities (farmers and herders). They have no interest that conflicts arise because they are the very

actors to guarantee peace and security in the area and should strive to protect the interests of the main actors involved. These local authorities are well aware that a well organized transhumance provides enormous economic and social benefits for local development. It is a source of financial support that local authorities must protect as well local people who constitute an electoral pool and local wealth creators they should protect.

The analysis of issues related to transhumance reveals that: i) the different people involved identified have different interests they defend ii) they have very mixed relationships with one another. These relationships are made of mistrust and susceptibility iii) their perceptions of pastoral resources or other activities related to transhumance are drawn according to their specific interests and not as what may concern everyone collectively iv) finally, each actor holds a particular power in its position that differs him from others. He makes use of this power very often to the detriment of the others. Overall, these events and the positions of each stakeholder group carry within them the seeds of inevitable conflicts.

Indeed, transhumant breeding is a major space consuming activity. Forests, savannahs, fallow fields, do not all have the same interests, but are all welcome for grazing animals (Oussouby Touré, 2004). In fact, virtually all spaces are usable for herders but they do not all have the same value. At the same time, the cultivated spaces are under high extension.

Agriculture, due to population growth and the expansion of crops such as cassava and those of water decline, is also increasingly consuming areas. Both systems traditionally developing reciprocity are more often in competition.

Persistence of conflicts

The history of mankind is marked by conflicts and they are inevitable in society (Akpaki, 2002). The arrogance that characterizes human being and his

instinct to protect his interests often complicates conflicts resolution and cannot prevent their outburst. In the north and center of Benin, this situation is present between Fulbé considered as "actual" mobile herders are permanently in conflict with the various sedentary groups and administration officials since the 1980s (Lombard, 1965, Bierschenk 1987; Onibon 1990 ATCHADE, 1995). In fact, as history witnesses it, conflicts have opposed the different peoples of West Africa all the time. The 19th century was marked among many others by conflicts with the Fulani Empire of Ousman Dan Fodio. From Dori to Kano, this regional empire provoked sometimes bloody conflicts between Fulani and different sedentary groups (Hausa, Songhai, Mossi) (Ded, 2006). This is the result of the existence of differences or inequality that are often used to assert rights or particular features. Among these groups of pastoral traditions and farmers, cultural differences exist. As a result, one can believe that conflicts and inequalities are inevitable in their groups. Conflicts are the result of some conflicting requirements among the members of a group or between two or more groups about the lack of resources, about prestige or position with power (Akpaki, 2002). The persistent conflicts between farmers and Fulani transhumance in the study area are analyzed in the perspective of the defense of the contradictory interests of the different strategic groups. Conflict begins when at least one person feels he/she is losing something because of another person (DED 2006). Conflicts arise within the community as follows: they begin with a latent phase in which the people involved feel anxiety among themselves. This tension will intensify over time. At one point, the atmosphere leads to action. This reaction can be constructive (attempt to solve the problem) or destructive (threats, violence). Conflicts recorded in the region of Agonlin, like any other conflict, highlight the symptoms of malaise and issues awaiting settlement. Conflicts can be managed at any time in a constructive manner with the aim of using them for a positive transformation of relations between actors. To

prevent violence and crisis, conflict must be managed constructively (Oussouby Touré, 2004).

Analysis of strengths and weaknesses in the management of conflicts

In order to avoid or prevent the conflicts that arise between farmers and herders, an important part the Beninese legislation has put a key accent upon them by identifying several dispositions related to the category of the most recurrent conflicts. Indeed, the various laws and regulations governing transhumance in Benin have already provided all the mechanisms of conflict management, although there exist some weaknesses nowadays. In addition, internal provisions in the various municipalities are likely to prevent and set conflicts too, they are used to organize transhumance campaigns without violence. The different people involved met during this study agree to end the conflicts that characterize the periods of transhumance. However, the resolution of a conflict when born becomes very complex since it carries both financial and strategic issues. The representativeness of the protagonists, the applicability and fair resolutions are factors influencing sustainable conflict negotiation. Despite the inadequacies of current provisions, they are experiences to support, improve and capitalize:

In most situations of conflict, protagonists, according to the locality they depend upon, refer to different local structures regulating transhumance (Municipal Transhumance Committee, Administrative sub divisional Transhumance Committee, local Transhumance Committee) for mediation. When they fail to find a solution, they refer to the courts of Zou department. Sanctions are taken at each level in accordance with the extent of damage after an audit whose members belong to the Municipal Committee of transhumance, involving the Municipality, the Municipal Council, the state police station and the Municipal sectors for Agricultural Development (SCDA).

The establishment of committees is based on the

assumption that farmers and herders clearly understand the issues of a negotiated use of the area they jointly exploit and the interest for them to adopt a system of access to resources which can be subject to consensus to all people involved.

The field experience has shown that each of these groups supports his strategies, more depending on its specific interests to the detriment of the common interests of the main actors. Even within each of these groups, strategies are of different types and sometimes opposed. The importance of the issue for each group, led to efforts to circumvent the committees or distract them from their goals in order to serve the specific interests. It is a reality that the status of the members of the committees gives these structures legitimacy both social and political, but it must be emphasized that this does not give them sufficient authority to accept and implement their decisions when they are challenged by one of the parties in conflict.

When you consider the interests of each group in the process of mediation, impartiality is difficult to respect due to the influence of the different strategic groups and their prior relationship with the various local bodies responsible for mediation. But in the current context of decentralization, significant progress has been achieved. As a matter of fact, after the creation of local structures followed by numerous campaigns and training provided by the local authorities of the municipalities of Covè and Zangnanado to the benefit of herders and farmers, tensions during transhumance campaigns experienced a remarkable regression except some rare smudges.

In the process of the current settlement, the strategy of the farmers in their advocacy is to raise the stakes to try to get financial compensation equal to the damage recorded. Similarly, after report and damage assessment, the Fulani accept the result in most cases, and pay damages. Another remark is system of settlement by negotiation (65%) that has become

common in the area. It is a negotiation or a direct agreement between the two protagonists (farmer and breeder) with the help of secret intermediaries in the vicinity of the damaged fields.

Most of the time, in this settlement process, damage is overstated to the benefit of farmers and Fulani pay unchallenged. The second mode settlement by negotiation is one that occurs when the Fulani must cross a field with his flock. At the periphery of the field, intermediaries arrange the meeting between the Fulani and the farmer to negotiate directly the cost of potential damage. The advantage of the farmer in this case is often twofold: first he pockets the overstated costs of the potential damages in most cases. If the entire crop is not destroyed by the herd, he comes later to harvest 50 % or even 75%, depending on what is still undestroyed in the field. The easy ways to settle these disputes by transhumant Fulani that make people assume that "the Fulani are the best payers."

In fact, the settlement of conflicts in pastoral areas is a difficult task that requires a lot of expertise in the knowledge and understanding of the issues at the level of the different people involved. Indeed, the assessment of the strategies of the different groups of people involved in relation to their perception of what they earn or what they lose through the creation of committees reveals the importance of the place of each groups of people involved in this process. During investigations, local governments have argued that local structures have almost or completely divested the local administration of a portion of its prerogatives since their creation.

According to the local administration, transhumance committees carry out properly their mission of livestock movement control and conflicts management. But it believes that these structures have been efficient simply because they have benefited not only logistical support from local authorities, but also their political support, especially when faced with conflicts of extreme severity.

In fact, the support of the administration results in a guardianship of the management committees of transhumance and conflicts. This strategy which is more and more referred to in Agonlin area is actually implemented but in Covè and Zangnanado, Ouinhi is still in the logic of repression of transhumance. In Covè and Zangnanado for instance, administrative authorities urge the committee to design the report of the damages and fix the amount of compensation. But these decisions can not be enforceable unless they are approved by the administration itself, which reserves the right to make appropriate corrections (revised upward or downward of the amount of compensation). The involvement of local government in the management of conflicts about the access to natural resources between farmers and herders is indicative of the importance of financial issues related to the control of settlement procedures of the conflicts.

In fact, at the institutional level, with the effectiveness of decentralization in Benin 2003 and especially in view of the transfer of powers, relationships between local authorities and citizens have basically changed. That is why appear a new method and a new approach to natural resource management in the three municipalities under the laws on decentralization. So, people elected in the county have a closer look at local issues, particularly those concerning the sources of conflict between the two communities (farmers and herders). However, pastoral management is still difficult because of mobility, lack of integration of herders in management structures and the unproductivity of the systems of sanctions in spite of rules and operating taxes (for wood as for animal husbandry). However, all arrangements have been made since 1993 with the Law on the forest regime in Benin.

Reduction or eradication of conflicts between the two communities to facilitate the movement of transhumant animals and their inclusion in reception areas must obey certain rules or cardinal principles such as: i) agreement over a transhumance Calendar, ii) identification of routes to follow, iii) awareness of

key people involved on the respect of good practice during transhumance, iv) negotiation of access rights in host areas and v) arbitrage, if necessary, to transhumance committees (municipality - county - village) that are in a position to solve all the problems related to the movement of livestock.

Conclusion

Transhumance, though seasonal, is one of the most important activities in the area. Its presence in the local community is remarkable because, like other African regions, it is an integral part of the traditional herding methods. It is an activity which is quite complex and difficult to accept by the traditional farming communities at the beginning. Indeed, the important damage recorded during the passage of transhumant animals is not likely to bring peace and cement social cohesion between the two communities. The current situation of conflicts connected to transhumance and the many drawbacks it generates are certainly related to the weakness of the mechanisms put in place in spite of their helpfulness. In sum, it worth recognizing that all the current legislation and other local or national regulations contain weaknesses and ambiguities that can, to some extent, perpetuate the marginalization of pastoralists on the one hand and the frustration of farmers, on the other and contribute accordingly to the exacerbation of conflicts between different user groups of the area. But what is noticeable is the fact that the management of natural resources, including land area is profoundly politicized as a whole. Many local leaders (including traditional chiefs) based their power on the control of natural resources.

The fact of the involvement political aspects in local conflicts coming from natural resources control takes the direct protagonists (farmers, herders) to lose control on the evolution of these conflicts most of the time. Political leaders handle conflicts for their own profit. But in the current context of decentralization, none of the people involved should perpetuate conflicts because when the further conflicts go, the deeper down they reach on the scale of Glas; the

harder the post-conflict reconstruction is, the longer and costly it is in term of energy it deserves (Oussouby Touré, 2004). The main solution is rooted probably in the increase of frameworks for dialogue, creation of new pacts and the will of the Government together with the local administration to work for the involvement of all the communities for the management of the issue in the area.

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