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Analysing Pastoral Resources Use and Regional Livestock Mobility in West Africa for Improved Livelihoods: An Interdisciplinary Study of African and German Universities

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Abstract

Pastoralism is both a lifestyle and a livestock production system based on livestock mobility and on the exploitation of natural pastures. In West Africa, cross-border livestock mobility is increasingly recognised as an effective strategy for enhancing livestock productivity and ensuring the sustainability of pastoral livelihoods. Hence, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has set up regional agreements and policies and put in place frameworks to regulate this practice. However, while most policy-makers have only limited understanding of pastoral systems, many pastoralists prefer to follow informal routes. This often results in conflicts with local pastoralists and crop farmers, which are escalating in the recent past but are still poorly studied. Moreover, herders' utilisation of different pastoral resources including grassland, browse, water and animal genetic resources along the transhumance routes require more scientific attention in view of elaborating economically and ecologically sound herd and pasture management strategies. This contribution presents the structure and progress of a collaborative research project between scientists from the universities of Abomey-Calavi and Parakou and livestock farmers' associations in Benin, and the German universities of Kassel, Goettingen, and Giessen. The project, supported by Volkswagen Foundation Hannover through its funding initiative “Knowledge for Tomorrow - Cooperative Research Projects in sub-Saharan Africa”, seeks to (i) analyse pastoralists' uses and management of natural resources (animals, rangelands and water) along the transhumance routes from the Sahel to the West African coast, (ii) quantify the effects of mobility on the productivity of both livestock and rangelands, and (iii) derive recommendations for increased herd productivity, conservation of biodiversity and animal genetic resources towards improved livelihoods of pastoralists in the region. The interdisciplinary project hereby integrates methods from the social and natural sciences and generates comprehensive knowledge to inform supportive policies that prevent over-exploitation and degradation of the pastoral resources.

Keywords: Animal genetic resources, livelihoods, pastoralism, rangelands