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Farmers’ and academia’s views”

Perception of COVID-19 and coping strategies by pastoralists in northern Benin

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Abstract

Pastoralist communities in Benin have been facing several socio-economic, political and environmental uncertainties in recent decades. COVID-19 occurrence in such a context is hypothesised to be an additional uncertainty that will further insecure and destitute pastoralist livelihoods. This study aimed at analysing pastoralists’ perceptions of the pandemic, its effects on their households and their coping strategies. To achieve this, quantitative data were collected from 126 informants from 42 pastoralist households purposively selected in two districts in northern Benin, N’Dali and Tchaourou. The data collected with a digitised questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics with SPSS software. Results showed that COVID-19 is not perceived locally as the priority issue by pastoralists. Lack of grazing (100 %), difficult access to water resources (96 %), restricted and insecure mobility (94 %) and increased land conflicts (76 %) are the most important issues for them. Most of the respondents (72 %) believe that the disease is real, causing feelings of sadness “Bisserekpinin” (97 %), fear “Koulo” (97 %) and anxiety “Dioure” (95 %). Pastoralists did not feel direct effects of COVID-19, as they did not record any COVID-related contamination cases or deaths in their neighbourhood. However, they experienced side effects mainly due to response measures by policymakers. By hindering mobility of herders and livestock, COVID-19 was perceived to have reduced income (97 %), weakened existing social relationships (95 %), brought poverty (33 %) and induced misery (14 %). Women more than men (81 % vs. 5 %) expressed difficulties in marketing animal products as they depend on dairy economy. Coping strategies by pastoralists include modifying livestock keeping practices (79 %), using formal or informal financial mechanisms (24 %) and adopting new livelihoods (17 %). This study revealed that there are local, national or regional issues of greater concern than COVID-19 to pastoralists, who experienced only side effects of response policies. An in-depth study could be useful in resituating local pastoralism in its context of change and reform in order to better learn about the dynamics of uncertainty management by pastoralists.

Keywords: Benin, Coping strategies, COVID-19, pastoralist household, Side effects