

Pastoral Dynamics in the Sahel: Gender, Inclusion, and Tailored Responses

Summary of the main conclusions and recommendations from the roundtable held on July 2nd, 2026, in Brussels.

Panel 1: Understanding Current Pastoral Dynamics in the Sahel - Insights from the Perspectives of Gender and Inclusion

- **Ms. Sandra Melone**, Co-President, Elles du Sahel Network, **Moderator**
- **Ms. Ornella Moderan**, Senior Advisor for the Sahel and West Africa, Geneva Center for Security Sector Governance (DCAF)
- **Ms. Sidpawalemde Sabine Bouda Sawadogo**, Sociologist, Gender Advisor, member of the Elles du Sahel Network
- **Mr. Koba Tchegoun**, Technical Advisor in Agri-food Systems, SNV
- **Ms. Régine Debrabandere**, Regional Manager for West Africa, ENABEL
- **Dr. Abdou Mahamat**, Deputy Director of Pasture and Livestock Infrastructure, Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries (Cameroon), Focal Point for the GIZ-PETRADEP Project

Panel 2: Inclusive operational and practical responses

- **Mr. Claudio Ferrante**, Advisor, Sahel Cooperation Platform, **Moderator**
- **Dr. Mamane Tahirou**, Head of Legal Affairs and Litigation, Liptako Gourma Integrated Development Authority (ALG)
- **Ms. Habibata Adigoun**, Regional Expert in Gender and GBV, Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS)
- **Mr. Erwann Fillol**, Regional Advisor for Monitoring and Data Analysis, Action Against Hunger
- **Mr. Koffy Kouacou**, Interim Country Representative in Mali, Food and Agriculture Organization
- **Mr. M'Bara Adiawiakoye**, Country Director, Sahel Benin, Search for Common Ground

Thematic introduction and summary of discussions: Ms. Nana Touré, Director of the Secretariat of the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC/OECD)

Executive Summary

Pastoralism is an essential economic, social, and environmental pillar for the Sahel and West Africa. Beyond its contribution to food security, it plays a vital role in rural economies, the sustainable management of natural resources, and territorial resilience in the face of climate change. Yet public policies often continue to approach it through the lens of vulnerability or via sectoral interventions, without fully addressing the governance, inclusion and territorial cooperation issues that determine its sustainability.

The insights from the two panels of the roundtable "Pastoral Dynamics in the Sahel: Gender, Inclusion, and Tailored Responses" underscored the need for a paradigm shift toward more inclusive governance, greater recognition of women's roles in pastoral systems, stronger cross-border cooperation, and the strategic use of data to inform public decision-making. The discussions emphasized that women and youth should be treated as active participants in pastoral governance, not merely beneficiaries of programs. Finally, participants called for moving beyond a project-based approach to invest in sustainable systems built on national ownership, institutional strengthening, and an integrated territorial vision for pastoral areas, including through alignment with the Global Gateway multimodal corridors.

Conclusion 1: Reposition pastoralism as a driver of development, resilience and stability.

Discussions converged on a shared observation: pastoralism continues to be viewed primarily through the lens of vulnerability, crisis management, or security concerns, even though it is a major economic and social system in the Sahel and West Africa. This shift in perspective is now essential to design public policies to commensurate with the scale of the challenges. Beyond its role in food security, pastoralism contributes to income generation, employment, trade, sustainable management of natural resources, social cohesion, and territorial stability. Recognizing it as a strategic sector means moving beyond sectoral or exclusively humanitarian approaches toward a long-term development vision.

This shift requires broadening pastoral policies beyond the sole management of natural resources. Investments in infrastructure, veterinary services and animal health, access to water, markets, and basic social services are essential to strengthening the economic resilience of communities and creating sustainable opportunities. Pastoral areas, especially corridors linking the Sahel to coastal countries, should be considered territories of regional integration, where appropriate mobility governance helps reduce tensions over resources, strengthen trust between communities, and support regional stability. The declining attractiveness of pastoralism, fueled by negative perceptions of livestock-related occupations and a lack of economic prospects, encourages out-migration, particularly among youth, towards urban centers and undermines the renewal of pastoral activities. Reversing this trend requires recognizing pastoralism as a sector of innovation, entrepreneurship, and employment by facilitating young people's and women's access to training, information, financing, and markets, and by restoring and securing pastoral areas. Investing in younger generations is therefore a strategic lever to ensure the sustainability of pastoral systems and strengthen territorial resilience.

Recommendation: *Reposition pastoralism at the heart of national and regional policies, as a strategic sector for economic development, job creation, and territorial stability. Public policies should go beyond crisis management to invest in pastoral mobility, value chains (milk, livestock and meat, fodder), animal health, infrastructure, and territorial governance, as well as the development of pastoral areas, while creating opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and training for young people and women.*

Conclusion 2: Strengthen inclusive pastoral governance by promoting the effective participation, representation, and leadership of women and youth.

The inclusion of women and youth is a key factor in improving the governance of pastoral systems and strengthening their resilience. Beyond being a matter of equity, their participation in decision-making promotes policies that are more inclusive, better adapted to local realities, and more sustainable. The discussions also highlighted the need to move beyond a logic in which women and youth are considered beneficiaries of programs and to recognize them as key stakeholders in pastoral governance, involved from the assessment stage through the implementation and monitoring of interventions.

The formalization of consultation frameworks can inadvertently reinforce the exclusion of women and youth if no specific mechanisms are provided. Support for consultation processes and governance improvement must include a gender-responsive approach to community engagement: inclusive social diagnostics, explicit representation, pre-consultations, suitable conditions and schedules, support to strengthen participants' confidence and ability to speak in public, and monitoring of effective participation.

Consultation mechanisms receiving programme support must ensure the effective representation of women, youth, and pastoral organizations in decision-making processes. Opportunities for pastoral entrepreneurship should be promoted and supported, including opportunities in animal health services, digital technology, milk collection, fodder production, livestock markets, and territorial mediation.

The experiences presented, notably those of PRAPS-2 (Regional Project to Support Pastoralism in the Sahel) and the cross-border MOPSS-2 (Pastoral Mobility and Social Stability in the Sahel), show that strengthening women's leadership within pastoral infrastructure governance bodies yields benefits that extend far beyond representation alone. By promoting women's access to decision-making spaces, these approaches improve the management of collective resources, strengthen their economic autonomy, and produce positive outcomes for entire communities, especially in education, social cohesion, and local development. They also contribute to the gradual evolution of social norms by opening spaces for dialogue and the renegotiation of power relations within pastoral communities.

Recommendation: *Institutionalize inclusive pastoral governance by guaranteeing the effective participation of women, youth, and pastoral organizations at all stages of public policy development, as well as by strengthening their access to decision-making bodies, productive resources, financing mechanisms and opportunities for training and entrepreneurship. This governance should also better recognize their rights and duties, notably by facilitating the issuance of identity and citizenship documents to pastoralist groups who lack them, and by officially recognizing herding as a profession. Interventions should systematically rely on contextualized gender analyses to adapt responses to local realities and encourage the lasting transformation of social norms.*

Conclusion 3: Develop an integrated territorial approach to pastoral mobility.

Mobility remains the foundation of Sahelian pastoral systems and cannot be understood solely through the lens of administrative borders. The tensions observed in cross-border areas stem not only from competition for access to natural resources but also from challenges in territorial governance, cooperation between states, and coordination of public policies. The experiences presented show that local conventions for natural resource management are effective mechanisms for establishing lasting dialogue, preventing conflicts, and jointly organizing access to pastures, water points, and farmland.

These experiences underscore the need to move beyond a fragmented approach focused on stand-alone projects or an understanding of borders driven primarily by security considerations, in favor of an integrated territorial vision. Pastoral corridors linking the Sahel to coastal countries should be treated as strategic spaces for cooperation, economic development, and regional stability. Coordinated, inclusive governance of these territories—combining pastoral mobility, land-use planning, access to essential services, and cross-border cooperation—is essential to strengthen the resilience of pastoral communities and prevent tensions over the use of natural resources.

Recommendation: *Promote integrated territorial governance in pastoral areas by institutionalizing local cross-border cooperation mechanisms and strengthening collaboration among local governments, states, and regional organizations along transhumance corridors. In this context, addressing the challenges of pastoral mobility requires integrated territorial governance grounded in multidimensional cooperation that reconciles security concerns, sustainable natural resource management, and herders' mobility needs. Public policies should prioritize investments in essential services and integrated territorial planning to make cross-border areas drivers of development, cooperation, and regional stability.*

Conclusion 4: Strengthen pastoral governance through data, digital technology, and innovation.

Discussions highlighted the growing role of data and digital tools in strengthening the governance of pastoral systems. By combining community observations, satellite data, and information on natural resources, markets, security conditions, or transhumance movements, pastoral monitoring and early warning systems help anticipate risks, guide investments and improve intervention planning. These

tools should no longer be seen as mere technical monitoring devices but as strategic decision-support instruments for states, local authorities, and pastoral communities.

However, the value of these innovations depends on their accessibility, ownership and use by all stakeholders, and integration into public policies. Information systems must be designed as public goods, accessible to both decision-makers and communities, and built on data disaggregated by sex and age to better address the specific needs of women, youth, and other groups. Developing integrated regional mapping and considering territorial dynamics also remain essential levers for strengthening regional coordination and supporting more effective and inclusive governance.

Recommendation: *Pastoral information systems should systematically integrate sex- and age-disaggregated data so that public policies are grounded in a more nuanced understanding of the distinct roles, needs, and vulnerabilities of women, men, and youth. States and their partners should strengthen the capacity of national institutions to produce, share, and use harmonized data to improve planning, regional coordination, and the sustainable management of pastoral areas.*

Conclusion 5: Move from a project-based approach to sustainable systems.

Discussions highlighted the limitations of a short-term, project-based approach to pastoral challenges that unfold over the long term. Pastoral systems are shaped by territorial, seasonal, and cross-border dynamics that require structural responses, sustained coordination among stakeholders, and a long-term vision. While many initiatives have demonstrated effectiveness in governance, inclusion, cross-border cooperation, or innovation, their impact often remains limited because they are not institutionalized or integrated into public and regional policies.

The sustainability of actions depends primarily on the ownership of these innovations by national institutions, local authorities, and pastoral organizations. This transition requires strengthening the capacities of public administration, gradually transferring skills developed within projects, consolidating coordination mechanisms among partners, and building a lasting relationship of trust between institutions and communities. Shifting from a project-based approach to a systems-based approach remains essential to preserve and build on gains achieved, strengthen the resilience of pastoral territories, and maximize the long-term impact of investments.

Recommendation: *Make the institutionalization of pastoral approaches a public policy priority by integrating proven mechanisms into national and regional strategies. Partners should focus on strengthening the capacities of public institutions, local authorities, and pastoral organizations to foster national ownership, stakeholder coordination, and the sustainability of results beyond project cycles. In addition, investments in pastoralism should be part of a nexus approach (Humanitarian-Development-Peace) to better align crisis responses, territorial development, and peacebuilding.*