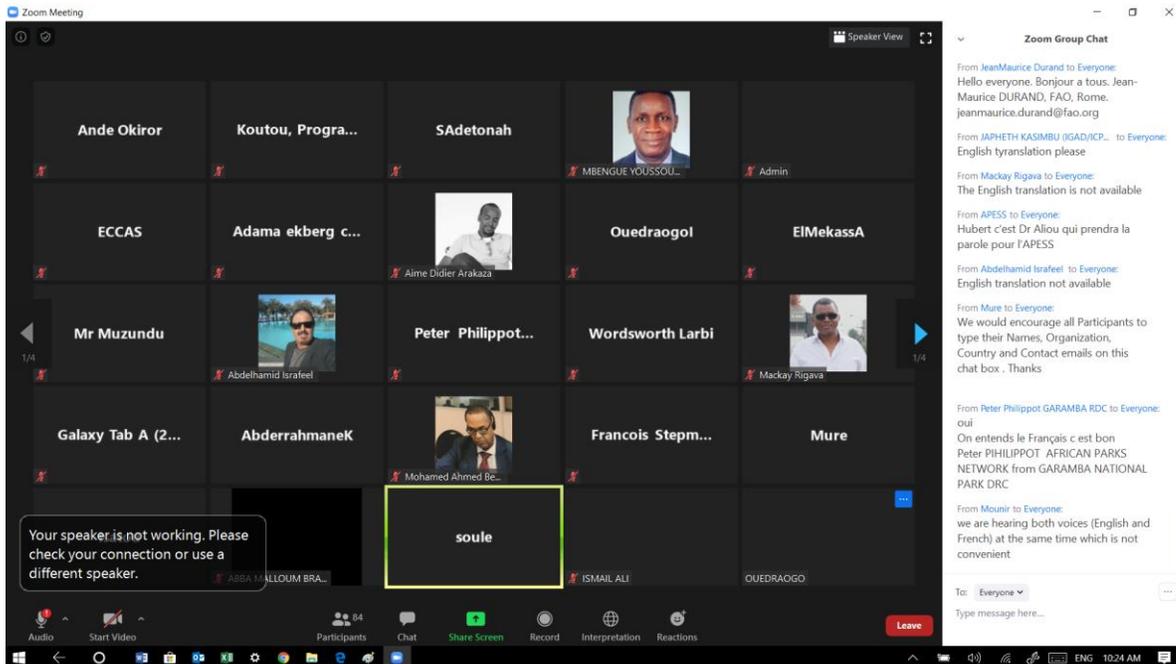




AU-SAFGRAD

Report of the Video Conference on COVID19 Implications on Pastoralism Practices in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities



Wednesday, 20 May 2020
From 10-12H GMT

1. Introduction

The world is facing an unprecedented health challenge as a result of the covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 is an infectious respiratory disease caused by a Coronavirus, a pathogenic virus infecting both animal and human. Recently discovered in December 2019, the COVID-19 is characterized by its very fast spread across the world given that no continent is left safe.

Behind the current health crisis, many signs of a profound economic crisis and severe food crisis risk are visible. Africa is the region in the world that is most vulnerable to a foreseeable food shock: Africa is the continent with the highest undernourishment prevalence rate (20%) in the world. The most vulnerable African populations in the face of the COVID-19 danger are the rural populations that highly depend on agriculture, pastoralism and fisheries. If the pandemic gets worse in these zones, people will have less access to appropriate care because of the fact that rural areas have a very low coverage in terms of health facilities and staff.

It is under these specific circumstances that AU-SAFGRAD organised a Video Conference that aimed at tabling reflections on the implications of Covid-19 on pastoralism development in Africa. The video conference took place on May 20 from 10-12H GMT and brought together more than hundred participants including representatives from RECs, international organisations, pastoralism practitioners/associations and livestock experts

2. Course of the Conference

The meeting was structured around the following specific thematic areas:

- The crisis of pastoral development
- A crisis in the crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic in pastoral areas/ communities
- Policy responses in support of pastoral development: lessons from the covid-19 pandemic each thematic area was developed by key speakers and was followed by a general discussion involving all participants.

1-Opening

Dr. Hubert Ouedraogo, moderator of the video-conference launched the meeting and presented the programme including the thematic areas for discussion. Then he gave the floor to Dr. Ahmed Elmekass, Coordinator, AU-SAFGRAD for official opening.

Dr. Elmekass welcomed and thanked the participants for attending the video-conference. He highlighted the main challenges facing the pastoralists in Africa as well as the relation between herders and farmers communities and its impact on 'Silencing the Guns in Africa'. Mr. Abderrahmane Khecha, senior Policy Officer from Rural Economy Division of the African Union also thanked the participants for responding positively to the invitation for the video-conference.

2- Introductory comments around key intervention areas

- **The crisis of pastoral development by ECOWAS and ECCAS**

This topic was introduced by Mr. Ernest Aubee, Head of Agriculture Division at the ECOWAS commission. Mr Aubee discussed the impact of COVID 19 on pastoralism highlighting the disruption in the livestock value chain, the restriction of movements of animal herds across national borders, restriction of livestock trade He also discussed the disruption of lives and livelihood of pastoral communities. As possible response to the identified issues, he suggested the reopening of borders in a systematic and coordinated manner. This is to be done while implementing precautionary measures aiming at containing the spread of COVID-19, and saving the lives of citizens in the region. This will also contribute to gradually opening up national economies in order to reduce the negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Abakar Mohamed, Head of Agriculture and Rural Development Division at ECCAS also commented on the same topic. He recognised the critical challenges facing pastoral communities in the Central Africa region. Transboundary transhumance was described as a very ancient practice of pastoral communities within the one hand movements across Chad, Cameroon and Central African Republic borders and in the other hand, movements across Burundi, Rwanda and DRC borders. The economic impact of the security crisis is obvious as the closing of borders by different countries prevent pastoralists from convoying their cattle to regional markets. He advocated for urgent reopening of borders to allow functioning of pastoral economy and recommended the financing of solid pastoral infrastructure in support of pastoral development.

- **A crisis in the crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic in pastoral areas/ communities by IGAD and RBM**

Mr. Japheth Kasimbu of ICPALD/IGAD focused on the implications of the pandemic on the seasonal cross-border mobility of pastoralists in IGAD Region. The main challenges and also opportunities were highlighted. The main covid19 negative effects on pastoralism in IGAD region include: increased conflicts

over natural resource, disrupted input supply chains and service provision through, restricted movements and border crossing, market closure and declining slaughter in major urban areas. Nevertheless, some positive impact of covid19 could be seen as livestock demand to Middle East countries increased approximately 4 times compared to 2019 and so these countries (KSA, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Egypt, Libya Kuwait, etc) have placed enhanced orders of livestock from Somalia and Sudan. Boureima Dodo, Permanent Secretary of the Réseau Billital Maroobe (RBM) brought the perspective of pastoral organisations on the effects of the pandemic on pastoral communities. He highlighted that pastoral communities were already deeply affected by the context of terrorism in the Sahel region. The sudden surge of the pandemic made things worse for pastoral activities. The policy responses by governments focused on lockdown measures and affected mainly the internal and transboundary mobility of pastoralists, while conflicts between local communities over access to natural resources continued being an issue of major concern.

RBM developed a tool to monitor the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 in pastoral areas. The than more than 300 local points spread in 10 countries underlined the negative effect of closing of markets including livestock markets.

- **Policy responses in support of pastoral development: lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic by FAO and APESS**

Mr. Velasco Gil Gregorio, Coordinator of the Pastoralist Knowledge Hub at considered that it is too early to have clear evidence on impact of this crisis in pastoral areas as the data collection is still in process by different initiatives. From the information collected and seen in different documents and communication made by stakeholders, the impacts are very context specific depending on the measures taken by different governments and administrations. These include reduced access to animal feed and natural resources, reduced access to inputs and services, reduced access to markets both for food provision of pastoral communities, processing capacities can be reduced, and storage and conservation of products can be affected as well as internal and international transport.

In term of policy response, they are country specific and in Ghana for instance they are ranging from: i) exempted food production, distribution and marketing from movement restrictions to ensure food availability; ii) prepared a joint plan to keep the nation food secure as the coronavirus spreads; iii) established the Coronavirus Alleviation Programme to protect households and livelihoods, support small- and medium-sized businesses, minimize job losses and boost industrial output to cover consumption and export. In Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco, national authorities have planned one-off payments for informal workers, including sellers at local markets. In addition, Morocco: i) established a logistics and e-

marketing platform for local products affected by the cancellation of this year's International Agriculture Fair; and ii) enabled mobile cash transfers to informal workers.

Dr Ibrahima Aliou, General Secretary of APESS took the floor to discuss possible responses to the pandemic from the perspective of pastoral organizations. From his point of view, if the COVID-19 crisis goes beyond end of May with borders being closed, the crisis will have a major impact on the lives of pastoralists and their families. The effects will intensify even more and will impact the lives of pastoralists for a long time. The followings implications foreseen are:

- A very significant loss of livestock due to lack of pasture, water and the development of zoo-sanitary diseases in cross-border areas;
- The increase of vulnerability of herders and their families, leading to a food and nutritional crisis within the community;
- The collapse of cross-border livestock markets due to their prolonged closings or lack of animals and the reduction in the supply of animal protein for local populations;
- A sustained socio-economic crisis could lead to the erosion of social cohesion;

The enrolment of certain pastoralists in armed groups due to the loss of their productive capital

In view of the situation, a promising strategy should have a double objective:

- i) to save lives by initiating urgent actions to fight against COVID-19 and to face the economic impacts of the measures taken by the States and;
- ii) to prepare for the post-crisis by enhancing the resilience of pastoralists by supporting them in the resumption of their activities

3. General discussion

The discussions went around different points of interest:

- ✓ The persistence of conflicts in the pastoral areas despite the pandemic and therefore putting the pastoralist communities at higher risk of contracting the virus especially the displaced population.
- ✓ Most of the animal markets are closed within the region and there is a need to design a contextualized marketing strategy in this context of COVID19.
- ✓ There is a strong appeal to reopen the borders in a coordinated manner and the Regional Economic Communities are called to advocate on that.
- ✓ Pastoral related infrastructures and services including dam and local market constructions and other veterinary services are blocked due to COVID-19. There is a need to quickly overcome those constraints in order to ease the lives of pastoral people.

- ✓ Strong monitoring systems need to be encouraged, APESS and RBM initiatives and others stakeholders need to be supported for updated data on the situation on ground.
- ✓ Covid19 should be seen as great opportunity for exchange among African countries particularly in the context of implementation Africa Free Trade Area. Animal products are among the top exchange products between countries in Africa.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Actions and recommendations should be taken in term of policies and responses contextualized to fit into national frameworks, while assuring compatibility with public health measures to suppress COVID-19 transmission. Implementing these actions will require international coordination and resources. Number of these measures are as follow:

- Governments to roll out social safety nets targeting needy families in densely populated urban areas. It is proposed that pastoralists and agro-pastoralists be classified as vulnerable and be targeted with public funded social safety nets including cash transfers, cash for public works and later livestock insurance.
- Livestock production including pastoralism and marketing are key elements of food and nutrition security in ASAL areas. Members States that have not categorized veterinary services as essential do so and all efforts be made to keep markets and supply chains operational while adhering to the COVID-19 management guidelines
- There is need to put in place an infrastructure for monitoring, researching and preventing reverse zoonosis of COVID-19 pandemic.
- Ring-fencing livestock sector through Panel of Experts Forum for Reverse zoonosis of COVID-19 comprising of animal health experts from Academia, Research Institutions and Experts in the field of Epidemiology who will link up through video conferencing and E-Conferencing and regularly share research on this issue and provide advice to the forum of policy makers;
- Ensure that food security policies be based on consumption models giving priority to locally produced products, in particular milk.
- Ensure that the Governments set up at their level an Emergency Fund for the revival of livestock farming in order to provide material support to breeders to rebuild their herd and resume breeding. This Emergency Fund will also make it possible to come to the aid of the internally displaced pastoralists following the insecurity

- That the projects and programs in progress be reoriented and adapted to the context of COVID 19 and new projects / programs designed to support and strengthen the adaptation of breeders and actors in the agro-pastoral sector to the harmful effects of COVID-19

In view of the above, three specific sets of immediate measures are currently needed to mitigate the impact of COVID19 on pastoralism. These include measures to protect pastoralism and its market, measures to maintain processing and retail operations and financial measures.

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