



THE 2020 PASTORAL LEAN SEASON IN MAURITANIA AND SENEGAL

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ALERT ON PASTORAL AND AGROPASTORAL CRISIS AGGRAVATED BY COVID-19

**FOR ACTION
AGAINST HUNGER.**



GNAP



ALERT ON PASTORAL AND AGROPASTORAL CRISIS AGGRAVATED BY COVID-19

Accounting for 40% of the Sahelian countries' agricultural GDP, livestock farming is of great economic, social and cultural importance, thus an essential asset for rural household's economy (OCDE, 2008)¹.

In recent years, the pastoral sector has suffered several shocks including rainfall deficit, epidemics, heat waves, resulting in a degradation of resources and adverse impacts on food and nutrition security of pastoral households. Over the past 4 years, agropastoral areas in Senegal and Mauritania have experienced a recurrence of early pastoral lean season in connection with large deficits in pasture and surface water. The current pandemic is occurring during this already dire context, increasing uncertainty for the survival of the sector and the risk of destroying communities' livelihoods.

“Pasture stocks that were low at the end of the last rainy season are now completely depleted in many areas.”

¹ OCDE, (2008) Élevage et marché régional au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest
Potentialités et défis, Paris, France, Club du Sahel et de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, 187 p

This note describes the critical situation of agro pastoralists dependent on biomass production in northern Senegal and southern Mauritania. It also highlights how their vulnerabilities could be worsened by restriction measures taken by States to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Its aims to encourage policymakers, technical and financial partners, and response actors to mobilize quickly. But also, to include the pastoral issues in the specific response plans for COVID-19, through short, medium, and long-term recommendations.

PRE-COVID-19 SITUATION PASTURE DEFICIT EXACERBATED BY CASES OF BUSHFIRE

Biomass production in 2019 has experienced large deficits due to the late arrival of rains. Pasture stocks that were low at the end of the last rainy season are now completely depleted in many areas. In addition, pasture deficits in 2019 followed four consecutive years of recorded biomass deficits in Mauritania and Senegal. Besides, bushfires destroyed the little pasture that existed, thus aggravating the vulnerability of pastoral households.

One of the edifying findings revealed by our analysis of dry biomass coverage at the end of February 2020 is that 84% of southern Mauritanian territories and 49.63% of northern Senegalese territories are covered only by bare soil (Figure 1). A comparison of the present situation to that of 2010, a year of good forage production in Senegal and Mauritania, clearly shows the difference between the two periods in terms of availability of non-photosynthetic vegetation or dry biomass.

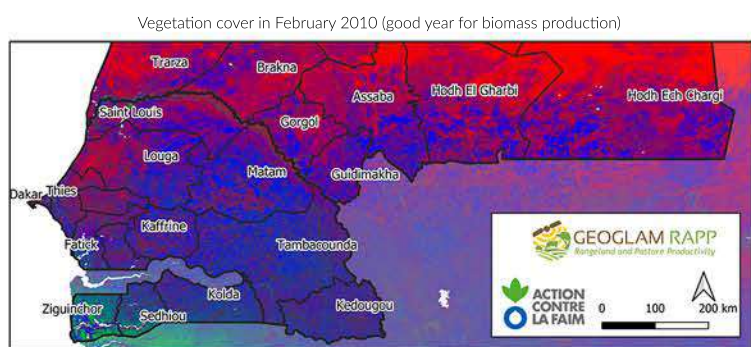
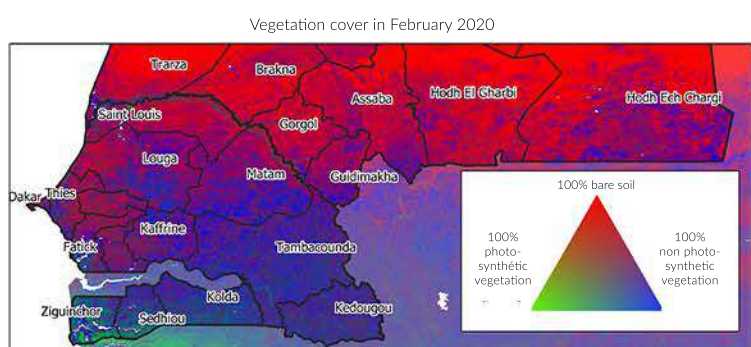
“The animals that are already becoming weakened by the lack of pasture, are at risk of losing their portly conditions.”

Data of vegetation fraction is derived from the project GEOGLAM RAPP². Ground cover types is divided into three components: photosynthetic vegetation or green vegetation (in green), non-photosynthetic vegetation or dry vegetation (in blue) and bare soil (in red). This information allows tracking vegetation availability even in the dry season.

In addition to the lack of pasture due to the poor rainy season of 2019, two factors add pressure on poor pastoral resources :

Figure 1: Vegetation coverage expressed as a percentage of bare soil, a percentage of photosynthetic vegetation and a percentage of non-photosynthetic vegetation for February 2020 and 2010.

The departments of Ranérou and Djigueni are depicted in orange as they are detailed in Figure 2



- In February and March 2020 (Figure 3), 43 bushfires were observed in pastoral surveillance sites within Senegal and Mauritania. These fires occurred mainly in the Tambacounda region and southern part of Louga region in Senegal as well as in the Guidimakha region of Mauritania. These fires are sometimes caused by charcoal producers in cattle retreat areas. In addition to the destruction of pasture resources, these fires have impacts on wildlife and biodiversity.
- Significant transhumant movements have taken place from pasture-deficient areas (Guidimakha and Gorgol in Mauritania) to areas where resources are more available (Tambacounda in Senegal). This puts additional pressure on the little remaining pasture in these areas. In addition, these high concentrations of livestock can cause health problems in the case of animal diseases that can rapidly spread.
- A new herbaceous species, *Diodia Scandens*, has appeared in Senegal on the southwestern part of Linguère and beyond the Dolli Ranch. This highly invasive herbaceous plant is not grazed by animals and its presence prevents the development of any other type of vegetation useful for the livestock.
- The embonpoint status of animals in Senegal and Mauritania is currently average to fair (ACF, 2020³). The animals that are already becoming weakened by the lack of pasture, are at risk of losing their portly conditions due to probable deterioration of animal health in the coming months.

² More information is available on : <https://www.geo-rapp.org/> and on : <http://map.geo-rapp.org/>

³ Bimensual bulletins of pastoral early warning system for Senegal and Mauritania : www.sigsahel.info

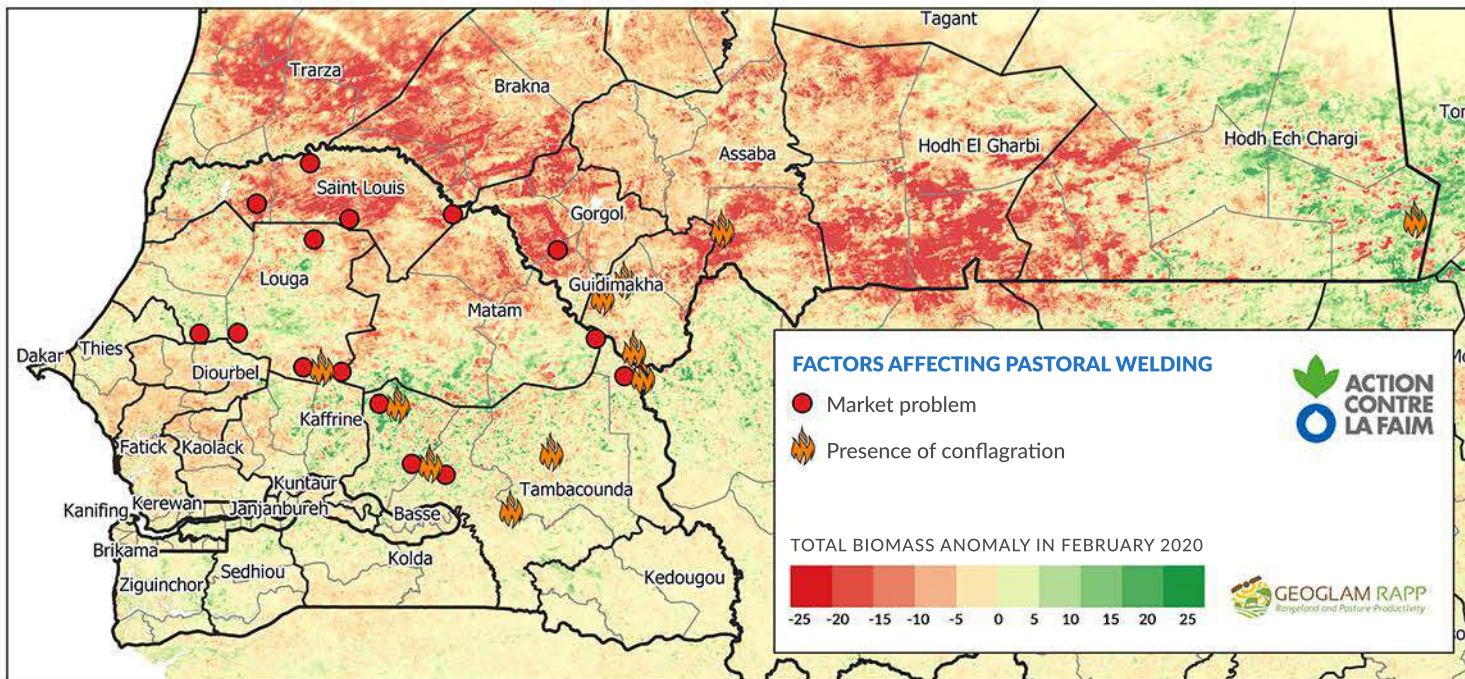


Figure 3: Total biomass anomalies (dry and green vegetation) in February 2020 from Geoglam RAPP with factors, such as markets closure and the wildfires, that are aggravating pastoral lean season

A SITUATION AGGRAVATED BY MEASURES RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 outbreak has led to the closure of rural markets in Senegal and Mauritania, making it difficult for pastoralists to sell livestock, buy livestock feed and supply basic food supplies for themselves. This pandemic also led to the closure of land borders in Mauritania and some regions, which will have a significant impact on the transhumance of Mauritanian, Senegalese, and Malian herds.

→ IMPACTS OF MARKET CLOSURES ON LIVESTOCK PRICES

Closure of all weekly rural markets has a strong impact on pastoralists' livelihoods. This has already been mentioned by many sentinel sites (Figure 3) :

- Difficulties in selling animals as buyers are no longer allowed to attend market places in the region. Breeders report that parallel sales systems are being put in place, but livestock prices are significantly lower than what was observed in the traditional markets before. If this trend continues, it could jeopardize the revenues generated during the Korité and Tabaski festivals (up to 30-50% of pastoralists annual revenues). This trend is mainly observed in pastoral regions followed by the ACF surveillance system. However, there has been an increase in livestock prices in cities (e.g. Nouackchott) and in low pastoral areas due to inter-regional transport restrictions.

- Difficulties for farmers in purchasing basic commodities since this requires sometimes travelling further to reach a point of sale. In addition, commodity prices tend to rise in some communities due to the closure of these markets. The terms of trade are therefore no longer favorable to livestock sellers.

- Difficulties in finding livestock feed that is crucial in this lean season. Since the advent of COVID-19 an increase in livestock feed prices is being observed in some regions of Mauritania, where the price of 50kg bag of the local Rakkal has increased from 500MRU to 700MRU (about 40%).

- Difficulties to pay for herd watering and households water supply due to the lack of cash. The current pressure on boreholes is significant due to the recurrence of mechanic failures that tends to increase during the dry and hot weather periods. This could lead to an increase in the price of access to water and further complicate pastoralists' situation.

→ IMPACTS OF LAND BORDER CLOSURES ON TRANSHUMANCE AND MOBILITY

On March 24th, 2020 Mauritania announced the closure of its land borders with Mali and Senegal for people to limit the spread of COVID-19. This has serious consequences for transhumance, mainly Mauritanian herds. Currently Mauritania herds can no longer cross as usually to Senegal or to Mali in search of pasture. According to the Gorgol regional delegation of animal husbandry, 162,120 cattle and 465,600 small ruminants are currently stranded in the Moughataa of Maghama (Department of Gorgol) because of the closure of the borders and are in a state of dearth. Borders closure is a strong obstacle to pastoralist mobility, which is an essential adaptation strategy to climate, security, and health driven shocks. In addition, mobility restrictions between regions lead to sharp increases in livestock prices in cities where supply no longer meets demand.

If the closure of borders were to last, the consequences would be even greater. Mauritanian herds currently in Senegal or Mali may not be able to trace back to Mauritania, resulting in a very high concentration of livestock in Senegal. This could lead to an increase in conflicts between farmers and herders and between herders in the coming months when the rainy season begins in the retreat areas of southern Senegal. Areas mostly at risk of increased conflict are the livestock retreat regions including Tambacounda and Kaffrine in Senegal including Gorgol and Guidimakha in Mauritania. Particular attention should be paid to the following areas: Dendoudy Dow, Mbam, Vélingara, Dolli Dayane, Payar, Koumpentoum, Kougheul, Bakel, Kathiary and Medina Foulbé in Senegal.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

In order to mitigate the immediate and long-term impacts of lack of pasture, border and weekly markets closures in potentially at-risk areas in Mauritania and Senegal, Action Against Hunger and the Billital Maroobé Network recommend:

TO GOVERNMENTS, WITH THE SUPPORT OF TECHNICAL PARTNERS:

1. To immediately act together to integrate a pastoral emergency plan into the state response plan that considers the needs of pastoral and agropastoral populations

This plan should include:

- Priority to the distribution of livestock feed, vaccination of animals and low-cost access to water for livestock watering (fuel and drilling maintenance) to ensure the health of the animals and thus the pastoralists' livelihoods.
- The implementation of sanitary and prophylaxis measures for herds in areas of abnormally high concentration of animals (such as near water points).
- The establishment of a supply chain to ensure the availability and access of basic commodities
- Food distributions and cash transfers to ensure food and nutrition security for affected populations, including pastoral households.
- Measures to support transhumant families that stayed in their camps. This could be towards the distribution of animal feed for small ruminants tendered by women of herders who have remained in the village.

This response plan should be implemented in priority zones, defined as highest animal's concentration areas by a dual analysis conducted by RBM and Action Against Hunger. These are the regions of: Tambacounda (municipalities of Payar, Moudery, and Goudiry), Louga (municipality of Tessekeré) and Matam (municipalities of Orkodjéré, Ranérou and Houdalahi) in Senegal, as well as Guidimakha (moughataa de Ould Yéngé) and Gorgol (Maghama Moughataa) in Mauritania.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

TO GOVERNMENTS, WITH THE SUPPORT OF TECHNICAL PARTNERS:

2. To include pastoral organizations in the design and implementation of response plans

Pastoral and local organizations, given their strong integration in the communities and their comprehensive knowledge of the real needs of pastoral households in the Sahel, are best placed to organize the response. They should therefore be consulted during the design of any plans and measures concerning pastoral households. Among them is the Billital Marobé Network (RBM), a regional confederation of almost all pastoral associations in the sub-region. It has 22 organizations in Senegal and 53 in Mauritania gathered by the National Group of Pastoral Cooperative Associations (GNAP).

3. Give a particular attention to pastoralism in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

It is essential to establish a consultation framework or a steering committee at the national level to monitor and assess the health and pastoral situations. This committee must bring together the State and NGOs actors, working on pastoral issues, to take action and make decisions regarding pastoralist populations that are directly affected by the primary and secondary effects of covid19. It is particularly recommended to:

- Ensure that COVID-19 pandemic response plans relate to the existing pastoral emergency response plan.
- Give freedom of movement to pastoralists, despite borders closure, because of the essential nature of livestock transhumance for the region and to ensure animal markets supply at reasonable prices.
- Introduce alternatives for production/sells with specific measures favorable to producers, including price support and limiting intermediate margins (either through guarantees or loss compensation measures).
- Establish conflict prevention and mitigation plan to reduce farmers and pastoralist conflicts in areas of high animals' concentration, by assessing risks in relation to the number of closed borders and the expected duration of their closure.
- Consult pastoral organizations prior to any COVID-19 specific decisions and measures that could directly impact pastoral households' lifestyles and livelihoods.

- Develop outreach community radio programs, targeting pastoral households, on COVID 19 prevention rules, pandemic status and conflict prevention and management.
- Provide circumscribed field missions to support and raise awareness on COVID-19 preventive measures including instructions from individual governments to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Make hygiene material available and distribute them to the communities.

4. Anticipating longer-term responses

The pastoral lean season crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 measures is circumstantial emergency. However, this crisis is taking place in the context of fundamental changes (ecological crisis and climate change) to which one must adapt right away with:

- The establishment of field research on (1) livestock feed production in the Senegal River catchment area, and (2) the definition of participatory management systems for agro-pastoral areas at the regional level.
- Measures to support agro-pastoralists and herders, particularly by supporting financially the development of collective organizations and the development of their activities (popularization of techniques, supply of inputs, representation, and participation in the definition of sectoral policies, etc.).
- Voluntarist policy measures to support farmers in adapting their practices in a context of profound change driven by environmental degradation and climate change.
- Increased pastoral surveillance to identify major difficulties in the sector and anticipate worsening situation.
- Strengthened pastoral surveillance to identify major challenges faced by the sector and anticipate actions to address the worsening situation
- Measures to promote the identification and registration of pastoral areas in the land register at the communal level to secure pastoral mobility

TO DONORS:

To urgently mobilize adequate funds for the response.

It is essential to mobilize funds at three levels: (1) Mauritanian and Senegalese governments, (2) regional institutions such as ECOWAS, (3) the technical and financial partners of the two States and the farmers/breeder networks. We encourage States to strengthen their crisis response plan and to make pastoral emergency funds quickly available to limit the impacts on the pastoral population as soon as possible.