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United Nations

**The Niger**

# Analysis of conflicts over transhumance in Diffa region

Summary





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# Introduction

Located in the eastern part of the Republic of the Niger, the Diffa region is a very vast semi-arid expanse whose potential is mainly strengthened by composite agrarian systems that coexist in the same area. For a long time, the effectiveness of these systems relied on exploiting the complementarity between pastoral, agropastoral and agricultural areas. The relative abundance of pastoral resources, which ensured the adequate feeding of livestock in the 1960s, was replaced in recent years by unpredictable pastoral seasons. Currently, there is an increase in the vulnerability of pastoral livestock systems due to the combined effects of two main factors: (i) the erosions of lands, which are gradually annexed by fields; and (ii) overgrazing, which leads to a decline in flora diversity and an impoverishment of pastures. Consequently, the former balances between agricultural and pastoral activities are upset by new competition over access to natural resources, which can be increasingly observed between crop and livestock farmers, but also between indigenous livestock farmers and transhumant pastoralists.

The future of pastoral farming in the region gives rise to concerns that are even more serious because production systems are undergoing profound reconfigurations in a context characterized by strong demographic growth, increasingly robust institutional and socio-economic changes, intensification of climate hazards and a growing security threat. The worsening of the vulnerability faced by pastoral farming has a negative impact on the living conditions and resilience capacities of most of the rural families who derive their livelihoods from this activity.

It should also be mentioned that since 2009, the insecurity caused by the non-state armed group Boko Haram and the expansion of its operations since 2014–2015 have had a massive and lasting impact on pastoral farming. Indeed, the pastoral communities of Diffa region are the first victims of armed violence, which has profound repercussions, specifically:

- a deterioration of security conditions in the pastoral areas, where the families of livestock farmers are also victims of physical harm and a range of violent acts;
- the abandonment of some grazing areas due to insecurity; and
- a complex modification of cross-border transhumance circuits and trade routes for livestock from Diffa region and Chad in order to bypass areas that are beset by insecurity.

# Methodology of the study

The methodological approach of this study consisted of three stages, focusing on the following activities:

- A documentary review, a scoping of the study, and preparation of an assessment in order to carry out a preliminary analysis of the issue of natural resources management and transhumance based on the relevant documentation available.
- Data collection in the field by targeting the administrative and customary authorities, local authorities, technical departments, women's groups, youth associations, producer organizations, training institutions and non-governmental organizations supporting development.
- Data processing and analysis in order to prepare the conflict analysis report.

Figure 1. Map of the Kanem–Diffa transhumance area in Chad–Niger



Source: Food Security Cluster – Chad. 2019. Map of transhumance in Chad. In: *Food Security Cluster* [online]. Rome, Italy. [Cited 1 September 2021]. <https://fscluster.org/chad/document/carte-de-transhumance-au-tchad>.



# Situation of conflicts over transhumance

The Diffa region brings together a mosaic of ethnic communities (Kanouri, Haoussa, Peuls, Boudouma, Toubous and Arabs) who settled in the area at different times. The intensity of migratory flows has varied according to circumstances and the patterns of population displacement: at times, there is a massive exodus of families seeking new areas to settle in, and at other times, a gradual and dispersed arrival of small waves of migrants (Anderson and Monimart, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

Since the 1980s and 1990s, the history of the region has been marked by a tension in the relationships between the different pastoral communities who live there, due to two essential factors: (i) the intensification of competition over access to natural resources, especially the control of water points and the pastures that polarize the communities; and (ii) the calling into question of the local regulations on access to the pastoral resources. The constraints created by this situation have exacerbated the difficulties in maintaining in the same areas different livestock systems that have specific operating methods and needs (e.g. farming of small ruminants, cattle and camels).

In this region, which contains a diverse and complex range of livestock farming systems and crop practices, cohabitation of different ethnic communities has become more tumultuous with the arrival of many groups of Mohamid Arab livestock farmers. These transhumants gained a foothold in the region following the conflicts and the socio-political crisis that prevailed in Chad at the beginning of the 1980s. Most of them settled in the plain of Manga in which there are basins where the water table is accessible at shallow depths. The settlement of the Mohamid Arabs in home grazing territories (*terroirs d'attache*) of the indigenous livestock farmers became confrontational due to differing views of the two groups of actors regarding the management of the pastoral area.

The resident communities believe that the presence of large numbers of camels belonging to the Mohamid Arab livestock farmers contributes to increasing the animal load to a level that is too high for the biomass available in their land. As a result, indigenous livestock farmers often impose measures on camel livestock farmers to restrict or even exclude their access to the pastoral resources. By adopting these decisions, regular land users seek to reduce the risk of an early depletion of the fodder stock available during the dry season. The Mohamid Arab livestock farmers reproach the indigenous livestock farmers for denying them access to the quality pastures in their territory. Many of them refuse to comply with the local rules governing water towers, that is, the system defining the order of access to the wells. They also refute the principle of negotiating social agreements for sump drilling and the choice of sites for settlement in temporary camps. In sum, these groups of transhumants prefer to impose the use of force as a mode of managing relationship with the natives.

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, S. and Monimart, M. 2009. *Recherche sur les stratégies d'adaptation des groupes pasteurs de la région de Diffa, Niger oriental*. IIED/London.

Another important trend concerns the expansion of the security threat in the region due to incursions by the armed group Boko Haram, which have become more frequent since 2013. This situation has greatly disrupted the livestock activities, in particular, the sojourn and transit of herds into the traditional fall-back areas, for example, the Komadougou Basin and the islands of Lake Chad to the east. Thus, the expansion of insecurity negatively affects the dynamics of cross-border transhumance, which is undergoing significant changes. Changing herds' routes and destinations requires the livestock farmers to integrate into new social networks in order to forge alliances that would allow them to benefit from security and access to pastoral resources.

In cross-border areas, as well as within Diffa region, the presence of armed groups push livestock farmers to choose unknown areas where relationships with resident communities are weaker over rangelands that are too risky.

# Structural causes, drivers and typology of conflicts over transhumance

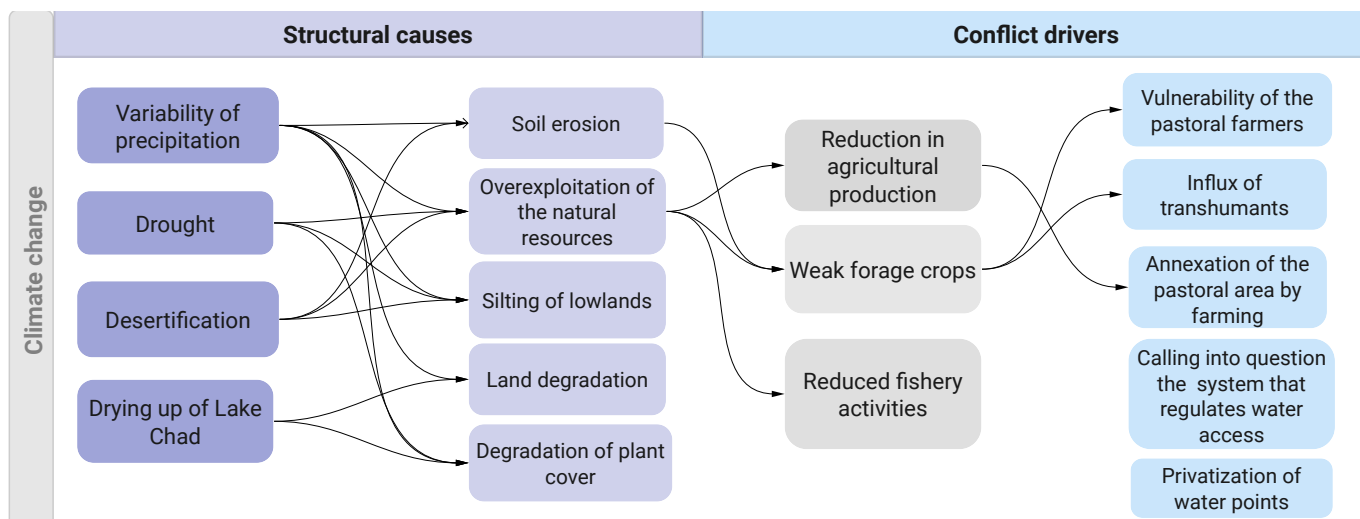
There are several structural causes for conflicts linked to transhumance movements of livestock, in particular:

- (i) the deterioration of climate conditions;
- (ii) strong demographic growth;
- (iii) erosion of natural resources governance mechanisms; and
- (iv) the security crisis due to the interventions of the Boko Haram movement.

## Climate change

The degradation of biophysical environments due to climate factors has led to several detrimental impacts, in particular, the impoverishment of croplands and pastures, the silting of basins, the drying up, or even disappearance, of water points, and the loss of biological diversity that leads to the disappearance of some plant species. These phenomena cause a deterioration in the living conditions of the populations who largely derive their livelihoods from the exploitation of the natural resources.

Figure 2. Structural causes and conflict drivers related to climate change

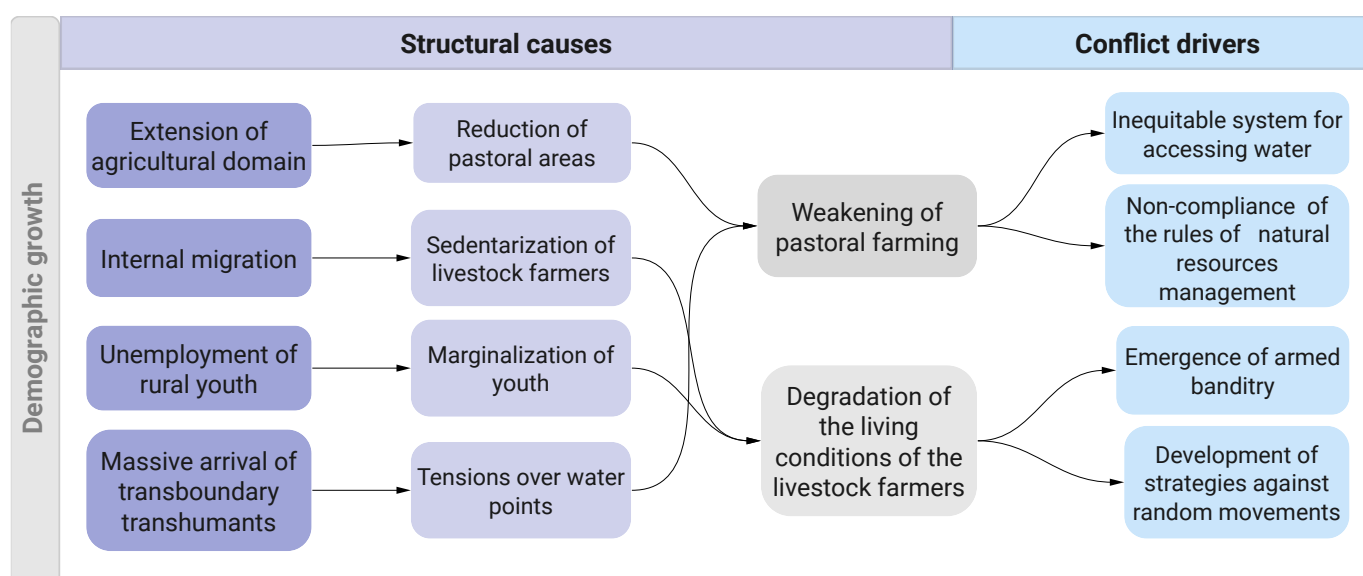


Source: FAO. 2021. Results of the analysis of conflicts over transhumance in Diffa region.

### Population growth

Population growth is high in the region, with an annual average intercensal growth rate of 4.7 percent for the 2001–2012 period (National Institute of Statistics, 2014).<sup>2</sup> In a context of climate deterioration, strong demographic growth leads to the exacerbation of competition over access to land and other renewable natural resources. Thus, conflicts between users of rural areas affect the entire agropastoral strip and even the pastoral area where the systematic occupation of lowlands and many pastoral water points can be observed. Indeed, the current developments are marked by internal migrations of crop farming families who leave their villages to create new farming hamlets in the pastoral area, which subsequently become full-fledged administrative villages. Thus, agricultural pressure is particularly aggressive, not only on the lowlands, but also on the old dune pastures.

Figure 3. Structural causes and drivers of conflicts linked to population growth



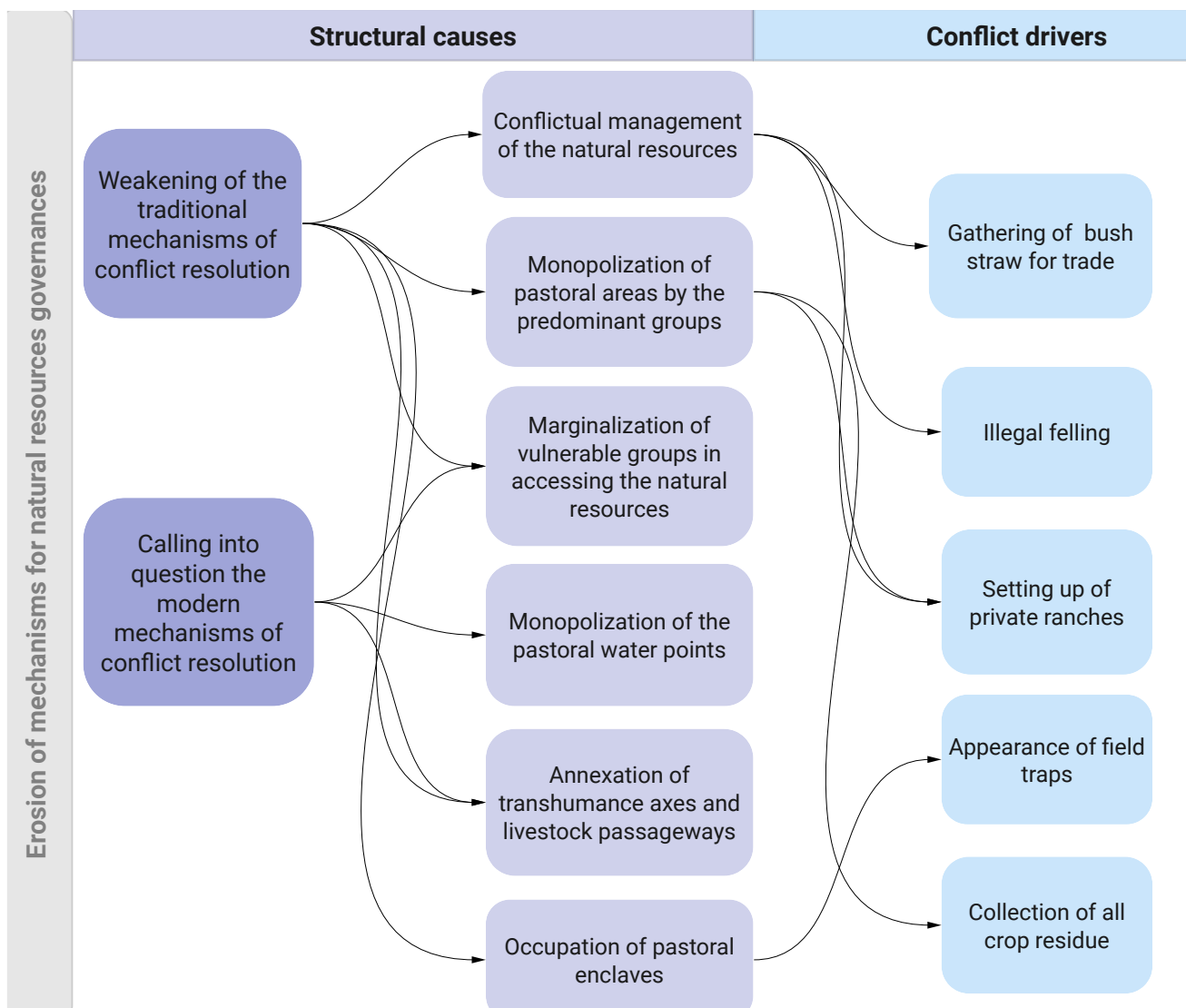
Source: FAO. 2021. Results of the analysis of conflicts over transhumance in Diffa region.

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Statistics. 2014. *Analysis report of the results of the fourth general population and housing census.*

### Erosion of natural resources governance mechanisms

The traditional methods of conflict resolution are decreasingly accepted by several groups of actors who complain that the customary bodies are partial to the locally prominent social classes. Modern mechanisms are also called into question because of the interference of some actors in their operations (politicians, rich people, etc.). Due to the weaknesses noted in natural resources governance, the social climate has deteriorated into increasingly conflictual relationships between crop farmers and livestock farmers. The former seek to maintain their land control over the rural areas, while the latter want to have the same rights to access to the natural resources as the other categories of actors.

Figure 4. Structural causes and drivers of conflicts related to the governance of natural resources



Source: FAO, 2021. Results of the analysis of conflicts over transhumance in Diffa region.

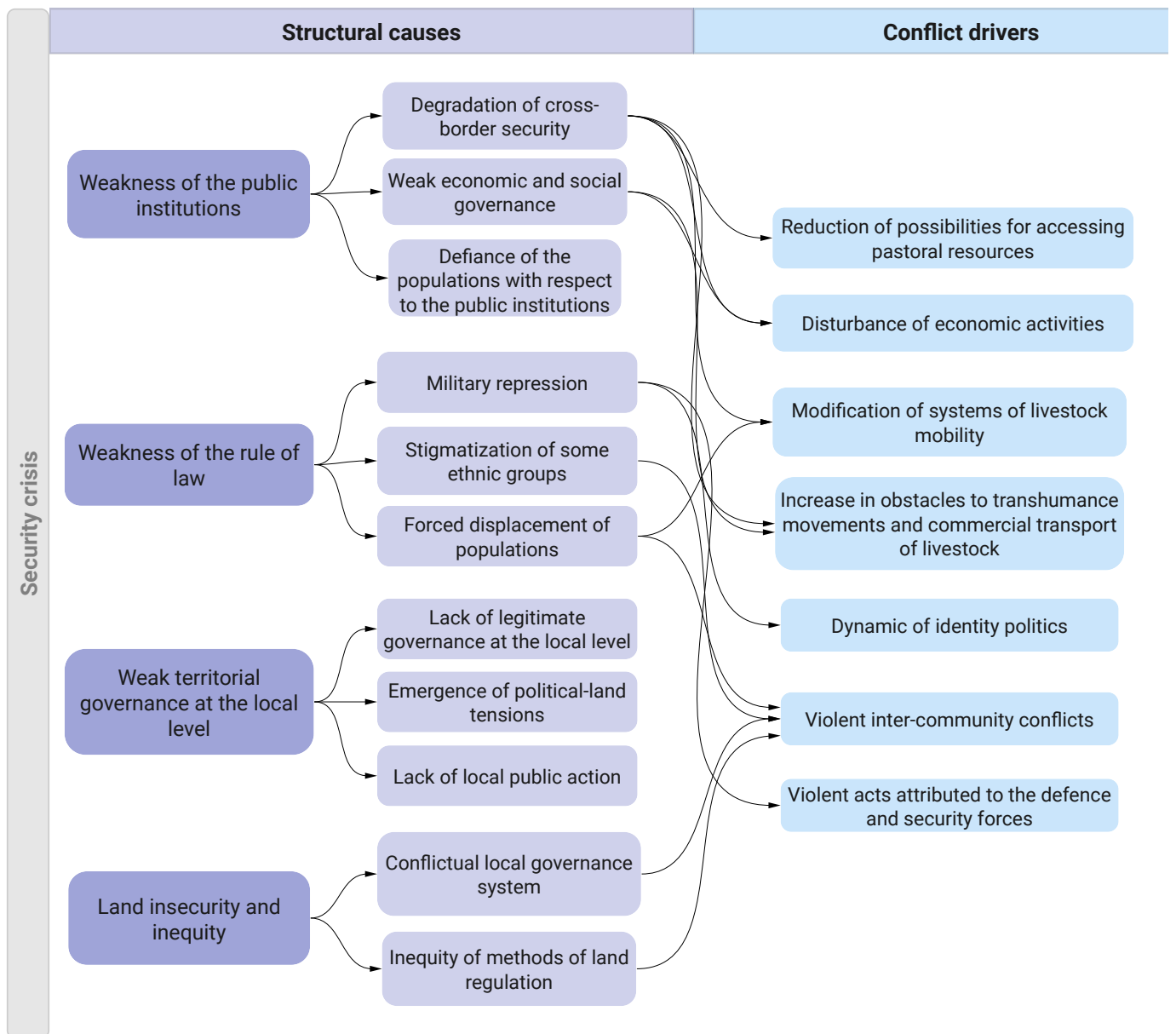
### **Security crisis due the incursions of the Boko Haram movement**

The intensification of clashes between members of the Boko Haram movement and the defence and security forces has many impacts on the pastoral communities, including the disruption of economic and social activities (e.g. the closure of livestock markets), displacement of populations, and modification to the livestock mobility systems. In addition, the climate of insecurity has increased following the use of firearms by livestock farmers who want to ensure the safety of their herds and to protect themselves against attacks by members of the non-state armed group.

Through an analysis of conflicts over access to the natural resources, it is possible to determine a typology based on a combination of three main parameters: the factors of conflicts; the lines of conflict; and the stakeholders. The conflict situations identified in the region can be grouped into four main categories:

- **Conflicts between crop and livestock farmers.** The sedentarization of some families of livestock farmers has provoked a reaction from the crop farmers who occupied the areas bordering the cross-border transhumance axes and the areas located near water points in order to grow off-season crops. This expansion of agricultural domains reduces pastures, hinders access to pastoral water points, and disrupts the mobility of livestock.
- **Conflicts between indigenous livestock farmers and transhumant livestock farmers.** The watering of animals causes tensions over the use of public water points. Indeed, many conflicts have been recorded over the cemented wells because of the competition between the indigenous livestock farmers and the transhumant livestock farmers. Local livestock farmers who exercise land control over the area where water points are located monopolize the water point management committees and set unfair rules for access to water.
- **Conflicts between livestock farmers and mining industries.** These conflicts arise from mining and oil companies grabbing large areas of land that are traditionally reserved for livestock grazing areas. The cohabitation of pastoral communities and industrialists is conflictual for several reasons, specifically the pollution of pastures and water resources by the toxic waste generated by oil extraction, which is harmful to populations and livestock.
- **Conflicts between livestock farmers and fishers.** The main causes of these conflicts are related to the deterioration of fishing equipment by animals while watering in rivers. The livestock farmers accuse the fishers of not respecting the limits of the fishing areas.

Figure 5. Structural causes and conflict drivers of the security crisis, resulting from the interventions of the Boko Haram movement

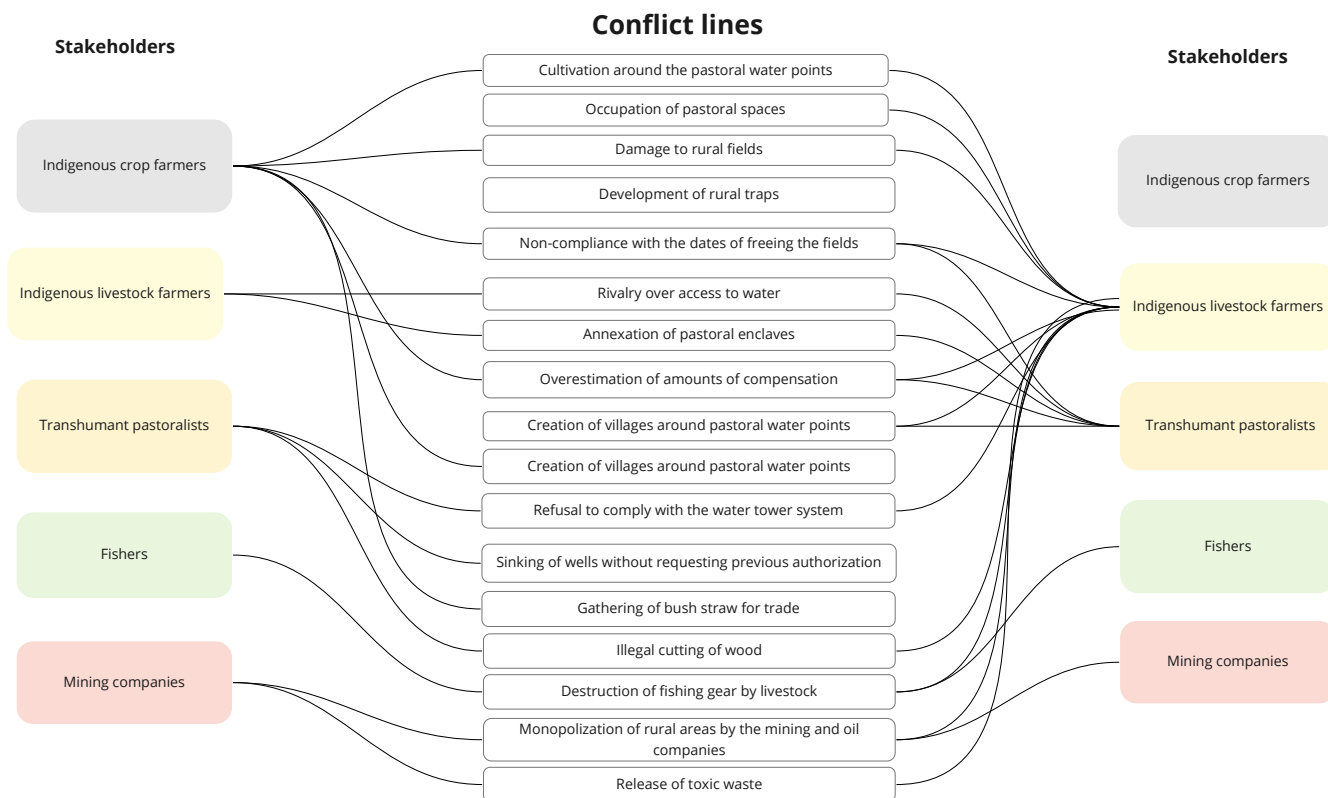


Source: FAO. 2021. Results of the analysis of conflicts over transhumance in Diffa region.

# Lines of conflicts

The dynamics of the conflict over the mobility of livestock includes various dividing lines of conflict that are often interconnected. The main lines of conflict that reflect the opposing positions or objectives adopted by the stakeholders are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Main conflict lines between the different stakeholders in the Diffa region



Source: FAO, 2021. Results of the analysis of conflicts over transhumance in Diffa region.



# Mapping of conflict stakeholders

As part of the analysis of the actors involved in conflicts over transhumance, emphasis was placed on identifying the stakeholders who play an important role in the changing dynamics of peace and conflict. There are five main groups of actors whose mobilization to safeguard their interests exerts an influence – favourable or not – on the prevailing context in the region:

- **Indigenous crop and livestock farmers.** Cohabitation has become increasingly difficult between agriculture and livestock in the agricultural area, but also in the agropastoral area. The conflicts reach a maximum intensity in September and October due to two main factors: (i) the early arrival of transhumant herds from the pastoral area; and (ii) the descent further south of animals leaving the agropastoral area where surface water points quickly dry up at the end of the rainy season. Essentially, these conflicts are due to damage caused by livestock in unharvested fields, the occupation of transhumance routes by farmers, and the multiplication of obstacles to access to water points.
- **Indigenous livestock farmers.** Following the animal deaths recorded in their herds during recurring droughts, some livestock farmers have been forced to give up transhumance to settle down. Others continue to lead their herds on transhumance while some of their family members settle down. Local livestock farmers are engaged in a competitive dynamic with crop farmers who harm their activities (continuously reducing rangelands annexed by fields), but also with transhumant livestock farmers on whom they impose restrictive conditions of access to natural resources, in particular at water points.
- **Transhumant pastoralists.** Significant transhumance movements of herds from neighbouring areas cross the Diffa region. Transhumants are extending the length of their stay in the pastoral area because the areas where animals are sheltered during the dry season are no longer accessible due to prevailing insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin and in northern Nigeria. Transhumants are often forced to modify the routes of herds movement for two reasons: (i) to prevent animals from committing damage to the countryside on the sites of off-season crops, which are not protected; and (ii) to reduce the risk of cattle theft by moving away from areas of high animal concentrations. In the reception areas, some groups of transhumants do not comply with the local rules for accessing public wells and revert to the anarchic practice of sinking the traditional wells in order to exploit the available pastures.
- **Local fishers.** Fishing is carried out on the main watercourses, in particular, the Komadougou Yobé River and Lake Chad. Also, these areas are greatly sought after by livestock farmers because of their underlying pastoral potential. The simultaneous exploitation of these areas by fishers and livestock farmers is conducive to the emergence of conflicts since the systems governing access to the resources are no longer applied.

- **The mining and petroleum industries.** The establishment of the mining and petroleum industries in the region has brought about a profound change in local practices of natural resources management. Pastoral communities are arbitrarily deprived of their rangelands and their land rights. In addition, they are not involved in the consultation process for environmental and social impact studies.

## Impact of conflicts

The conflicts have led to the awareness of all communities that natural resources are undergoing a significant process of degradation, even though they constitute the substrate for their productive activities. In a context marked by the worsening of climate risks and the development of practices of managing the mining of natural resources, there is exacerbated competition over access to areas and natural resources. This development is accompanied by a rise of conflicts and hostilities that at times degenerate into violent clashes.

The traditional methods of conflict resolution are increasingly called into question while the formal mechanisms put in place by the public authorities fail to prevent or effectively manage the pressure on the natural resources exerted by the different groups of users of the rural areas. When competition over natural resources blurs the dividing lines between communities, conflicts have often taken on a community dimension, resulting in inter-community clashes.

Considering that the conflicts also involve important economic, social and political stakes, they have galvanized the various ethnic communities, in particular, the youth segment of the population, who are at the front line in intercommunal clashes. The distancing of social ties strongly foments identity politics and encourages efforts at community-based organization for defending the groups' right of access to the natural resources.

Tension in social relationships between the different users of natural resources has several negative impacts, in particular:

- The development of new forms of conflict, such as physical harm to livestock farmers, kidnapping of livestock and a range of violent acts.
- Generalized attitudes of intolerance towards transhumant pastoralists, particularly transhumant livestock farmers with weak attachment to the land such as Mohamid Arabs and the Fulbé Wodaabé.
- The propensity of the population to carry out reprisals against transhumants settled on their land when the latter are accused of being the instigators of a conflict.
- The purchase and use of modern weapons by many livestock farmer groups to ensure the safety of their herds and resist possible attacks by armed bandits.
- The conflicts have created a situation of vulnerability of which the pastoral communities are the first victims. The increased fragility of pastoral farming is the cause for the deterioration of the living conditions of the communities concerned. Within these communities, women and youth are challenged by serious difficulties in a social and political context that is not highly conducive to their accessing natural resources, economic opportunities and decision-making bodies.

# Conflict management systems and mechanisms

In order to improve the governance of the rural sector, in 1993, the public authorities adopted the Ordinance establishing the Guiding Principles of the Rural Code (POCR). This law is based on an integrated approach that determines the legal system governing agro-sylvo-pastoral activities from a land management perspective. It is supplemented by several other laws. Thus, the 2010 Ordinance on Pastoralism, which was promulgated in 2010, is integrated into all the legislation comprising the POCR. It reaffirms certain key guiding principles, removes ambiguities identified in previous legislation and imposes new standards. Against this backdrop, the new legislation provides for: (i) the validity and immutability of the northern limit of the cropland, which aims to protect the pastoral areas against the advance of the front of agricultural colonization; (ii) the definition of the status of common land conferred to pastoral areas; and (iii) the explicit recognition of the right to mobility and the impossibility for the State to grant private concessions in pastoral areas when this is likely to hinder the mobility of livestock.

In the Diffa region, the administrative authorities intervene in the settlement of conflicts over access to the natural resources when they are likely to have serious economic, social or political repercussions. Rather than resorting to the land regulations in force, the administrative authorities prefer the method of settling conflicts amicably in order to ease social tensions. It should be emphasized that the decisions taken do not provide a sufficient guarantee of security because they are rarely officially recorded. After the departure of the administrative authority that arbitrated the conflict, the party whose claims have not been taken into account can once again revive the conflict.

Given the involvement of the customary authorities in the prevention and management of conflicts over natural resources, the presence in the region of 16 groups (Toubou, Arabs and Tuaregs) and 883 tribes constitutes an asset for managing movements by transhumants. However, the effectiveness of this mechanism is relatively limited because the customary authorities are accused of partiality or arbitrariness in the management of conflicts between indigenous populations (crop farmers, agropastoral farmers, local livestock farmers) and non-native groups (transhumant livestock farmers).

The involvement of the customary authorities in settling conflicts over cross-border transhumance creates problems for at least two reasons: (i) the tightening of the reception conditions for transhumant livestock farmers due to the weakening of the housing system, which was based on strong inter-community social ties backed by reciprocal advantages between stakeholders; and (ii) the attitude adopted by some groups of transhumants who maintain distant relationships with the customary chiefdom and the populations of the reception areas.

The study carried out in 2019 as part of the Niger–Chad cross-border project executed by FAO<sup>3</sup> identified several good practices in conflict management, specifically:

- inter-community dialogue initiatives promoted by the communal peace committees;
- social agreements aimed at ensuring inclusive and equitable access to drinking water; and
- community and inter-community dialogue initiatives focusing on the issue of natural resources governance.

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<sup>3</sup> FAO project funded by the Peacebuilding Fund "*Prevent inter-community conflicts and contribute to peacebuilding through the development of resilient pastoralism in the cross-border area of Diffa and Kanem*".

# Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the analysis of the perceptions of women and youth of their involvement in conflict management systems related to pastoral resources management, it is important to take into account three major recommendations:

- **Improve the efficiency of coordination frameworks for transhumance.**

In order to promote social cohesion and peaceful cohabitation between indigenous populations and transhumants, efforts should be focused on: (i) modifying the composition of water point management committees in order to make them more inclusive while ensuring a more efficient functioning; and (ii) establishing transhumance committees because it is at this level that most problems related to transhumance can find appropriate solutions.

- **Strengthen the inclusiveness of mechanisms for preventing and managing conflicts over access to pastoral resources.**

Improving the effectiveness of conflict prevention and management mechanisms assumes that all actors are involved, in particular, youth and women, who play a decisive role in strengthening social cohesion. To this end, the conditions should be created for the effective participation of these social classes in the development activities of the pastoral sector, as well as in natural resources management and in the prevention and management of land conflicts.

- **Consolidate the dynamics of women's and youth's ownership of the conflict prevention and management mechanisms.**

This requires building the capacities of youth and women so that they can acquire solid knowledge of the laws and regulations governing pastoralism and natural resources management. In addition to mastering the legislation, they must have skills enabling them to play an active role in applying laws and regulations (e.g. in identifying areas where they can make a contribution, defining the terms of their involvement in applying the laws).



# Saving livelihoods saves lives

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GNAFC offers a coherent coordination framework to promote collective efforts in analysis and strategic programming for a more efficient use of resources to prevent, prepare for and respond to food crises and, ultimately, support collective outcomes related to Sustainable Development Goal 2 for lasting solutions to food crises.



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