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Concept Note for the video-conference on the

Implications of Covid-19 on pastoralism Practices: challenges and opportunities

I- Background

Since the beginning of year 2020, the whole planet 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 that is a pathogenic virus in animals or humans. Recently discovered (in December 2019), the Covid-2019 virus is characterized by its very fast spread across the world given that no continent was spared. As of 10th May, 2020, over 4,000,000 confirmed Covid-19 cases were recorded at the global level; the number of deaths is nearly 280, 000¹. Numerous forecasts indicated an uncontrollable outbreak on the African continent. However, unlike other parts of the world (Asia, Europe, America), the pandemic has remained at a relatively low level on the African continent. According to the African Union Center for Disease Prevention and Control, the continent as a whole has today 61,165 confirmed Covid-19 cases including 2,239 deaths². However, the continent is not safe from a future outbreak of the disease.

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: It is in fact the continent with the highest undernourishment prevalence rate (20%)³ 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. A massive Covid-19

¹ See John Hopkins University Data Center in the United States of America: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

² <https://africacdc.org/covid-19/>

³ FAO, State of food security and nutrition in the world (2019 Report).

infection among the rural populations would prevent them from producing adequate food crops for themselves and for the urban dwellers. Measures to respond to the pandemic which were notably based on movement restrictions would more particularly affect pastoralists whose activity lies on strategic mobility to access pastoral resources.

The present concept note aims at tabling some preliminary reflections to feed into the debates of a videoconference dedicated to the implications of Covid-19 on pastoralism development. The concept note reviews the risks arising from the main measures to respond to the pandemic on pastoralism, and indicatively raises some issues that should be debated.

II- Covid-19 and pastoral communities: a crisis within a crisis

2.1- Pastoral systems in crisis

Pastoral communities are today made deeply fragile in their productive activities due to the crisis situation relating to many factors including the following most significant ones:

- The usual marginalization of pastoral lands in development processes which leads to low access for pastoral communities to public basic services, notably education, water, electricity, health ... ;
- Cyclical climate and environmental disasters such as droughts, floods, locust invasions⁴ ;
- Persistent endemic diseases that affect the rural populations in general such as malaria and dengue fever
- Rapid changes occurring in the continent (population growth, urban development, exacerbated competition over land tenure ...) that disrupt the ancestral practice of pastoralism.

The last decade has witnessed an asserted gradual divide between Sahel countries and coastal countries in the area of pastoral management; because of the recurrent conflicts coming with the seasonal transhumance movements, coastal countries have openly become hostile to pastoralism and have established barriers to transborder cattle movements.

One cannot disregard the recent degradation of the security situation, particularly in the Sahel countries: terrorism, banditry (notably cattle rustling) and intercommunity conflicts have deeply destabilized pastoral economies and led to the impoverishment of pastoral communities, as reflected in Internally Displaced People (IDPs) that are massively leaving pastoral zones under attacks to seek refuge in more secure urban zones.

⁴ In East Africa, Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda are currently undergoing devastating locust attacks. Certain Sahel countries (Senegal, Mauritania, Mali and Niger) have reported a decrease in forage availability due to drought.

2.2- Covid-19, an aggravating factor of the pastoral crisis

The Covid-19-related health crisis is indeed worsening an already alarming crisis situation for pastoralism. It is important to review some of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic management on pastoral economies and pastoral societies.

Starting from the first signs of Covid-19 presence in the continent, most States have reacted through information and awareness raising campaigns on the disease. It is not sure that such campaigns have effectively reached the pastoral populations for several reasons:

- First, pastoral populations are the inhabitants of pastoral lands which are made up of arid and even desert zones. These zones are most often far from urban centers and are of difficult access due to the lack of road infrastructure. Under such conditions, it is difficult to get outreach information campaign messages across to this part of the population, all the more so that radio and TV broadcast coverage is generally at random;
- Second, because of the fact that part of the pastoral population is mobile, it is not sure that Covid-19 preventive messages effectively reach the pastoral populations.

Among the preventive measures taken against the spread of the disease, restrictions to the movements of populations have been given a central place. Thus, the locations where Covid-19 cases have been confirmed have generally been placed under quarantine. Quarantining such places means that nobody can get in or out of them. Small and large scale transhumance movements are thus disrupted or even hindered. Similarly, milk collection, processing and distribution chains are disrupted.

Another significant response measure against Covid-19 consists of closing markets including cattle markets. While the disastrous losses for women producers and traders in fresh vegetables supplied to urban centers have been mentioned, attention should also be paid to the situation of pastoralists who have been barred from selling their livestock and most often compelled to sell them cheap through informal transactions. As for the municipalities that have cattle markets, their tax revenue has melted down due to the closing of cattle markets including markets that have a regional scope.

Finally, one can predict a low adoption of the barrier measures recommended by the States (frequent hand washing notably) specifically because of poor availability of safe drinking water.

2.3. Some pending issues

In the absence of disaggregated data and specific studies on the impact of Covid-19, it is important to raise a certain number of pending issues including the following ones:

- What is the real status of the Covid-19 infection among pastoral communities?
- Do the low population density and scattered habitat in pastoral land play a positive role in restricting the spread of the disease?

- Do internal and transborder transhumance constitutes a major risk of spreading the disease?
- What adjustments can be made in the current management system of Covid-19 in order to better take account of the peculiarity of pastoral practices?
- In the post - Covid-19 perspective, what lessons can be fed into the formulation and implementation of new policies on sustainable and peaceful pastoral development.

III- A video-conference to debate on the impact of Covid-19 on pastoralism

3.1- Objectives of the video-conference

The overall objective of the video-conference is to bring together around the same table the main actors of pastoral development in view of reflecting on the impact of Covid-19 on pastoral development at the short and longer term.

More particularly, the video-conference will address the following topics:

- i. Discuss the unintentional negative effects of Covid-19 control measures (lockdown; diverse movement restrictions ...) on the pastoralist practice and on pastoral communities.
- ii. Debate the potential opportunities resulting from this situation for the future of pastoral development.
- iii. Anticipate on and discuss the possible conflicting implications of the pandemic for pastoral activities.

3.2- Expected outcomes

- i. Measures to curtail the unwanted negative effects of Covid-19 on pastoralism and pastoral communities are identified and discussed.
- ii. Opportunities for pastoral development are identified and used

3.3- Dates: Wednesday 20 May, 2020, 10:00 -12:00 H GMT

Simultaneous distance French – English interpretation will be provided.