

Remarks by UNOWAS/DSRSG Ruby Sandhu-Rojon

Joint ECOSOC-PBC Meeting on “The impact of cross-border transhumance on sustainable peace and development in West Africa and the Sahel”

(VTC - 3 December 2019)

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this meeting.

1. I will say a few words about crossborder transhumance and farmer-herder conflicts in West Africa and the Sahel
2. Then I will mention what UNOWAS is doing to promote sustainable peace in this regard

Crossborder transhumance/farmer-herder conflicts

It has been frequently quoted that last year (2018) saw more deaths associated with farmer-herder conflicts in West Africa than the death toll from Boko Haram.

This year, we have seen a spike in farmer-herder conflicts in the Liptako-Gourma region, especially in Mali and Burkina. But other countries like Nigeria, Niger, Chad, northern Ghana and Benin continue to be affected.

Farmer-herder conflicts have existed for centuries. They are not new. *What is new today, however, is the deadly nature of these conflicts and their frequency.*

We know that there is growing competition between herders and farmers over access to grazing land and water. Tensions escalate when herders move their animals on transhumance.

Three dynamics that greatly intensify such clashes are: the proliferation of small arms, the breakdown of local dispute resolution mechanisms, and the continued widespread impunity of farmer-herder conflicts.

Yet, the situation is much more complex than that.

Multiple context-specific factors intensify farmer-herder conflicts: lack of resource governance, political manipulation, economic interests, the instrumentalization of ethno-religious tensions and population growth.

In some places it is also difficult to differentiate farmer-herder conflicts from other community conflicts. Cattle rustling, local banditry and terrorist activity have also increased in the region.

Given this complex situation, any response to addressing farmer-herder conflicts in West Africa must involve a crossborder integrated approach that focuses both on security, development and human rights.

What does such an approach look like?

UNOWAS' response to promote sustainable peace

For the past three years, UNOWAS has been working with FAO, the whole UN family, with ECOWAS, the World Bank, USAID and multiple other partners to address farmer-herder challenges from a conflict prevention perspective.

In Dakar, UNOWAS chairs a UN Working Group to coordinate action to address farmer-herder's challenges in the region. FAO, the WFP, IOM, UNODC and other entities participate in these meetings.

In October 2018, UNOWAS launched a study on Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel. The study's 20 recommendations focus on both immediate and long-term action to resolving farmer-herder conflicts.

The Working Group has been reviewing these recommendations to promote synergy in approach, messaging and partnerships. **For example:**

- FAO, the WFP and UNOWAS worked together to finalize the PBF crossborder project to address transhumance challenges in the Chad/Niger crossborder area. We encourage more of these crossborder projects given the regional crossborder nature of transhumance.

- UNOWAS and UNOCA convened a joint strategy session in Libreville to analyze farmer-herder tensions in the context of the Central African Republic.
- IOM and UNOWAS have discussed ways to complement IOM's country support with UNOWAS' advocacy role and cooperation with ECOWAS.
- Search for Common Ground has been participating in some Working Group meetings to explore links between its dispute resolution work at the community level with the UN's national and regional approaches.
- Humanitarian Dialogue, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and the International Crisis Group (ICG) has been engaged on various occasions to examine gaps in existing approaches.

UNOWAS has also formed a strong partnership with ECOWAS to address challenges related to transhumance in the region.

On 26 April 2018, ECOWAS produced a Ministerial Report on addressing herder-farmer conflicts in the region.

UNOWAS and ECOWAS are now implementing some of the recommendations of ECOWAS' Ministerial Report AND UNOWAS' Study on Pastoralism and Security. **For example:**

- UNOWAS and ECOWAS convened a joint workshop with regional think tanks in November 2018 to propose elements for a regional communications strategy on farmer-herder conflicts.
- In February 2020, ECOWAS and UNOWAS will convene a best practice workshop on dispute resolution of farmer-herder conflicts.
- A training for journalists in ECOWAS Member States on fair reporting of farmer-herder conflicts has also been proposed.
- UNOWAS is also working with the UNCT/Nigeria to examine the Nigerian Government's approach to addressing farmer-herder conflicts.

Some observations:

Transhumance in West Africa is regulated by two main documents: the 1998 ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance and the 2013 Nouakchott Declaration on Pastoralism.

However, during the 26 April 2018 meeting of ECOWAS' Ministers of agriculture, livestock and security there was a heated debate about whether the Protocol needed to be revised to limit transhumance because of farmer-herder conflicts. This debate is ongoing and sensitive. Some Member States see transhumance as a cultural way of living; other Member States are promoting modernization. Supporting the latter, Nigeria is currently exploring ways to limit transhumance by introducing ranching.

Among the recommendations of UNOWAS' Study on Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, a few could be highlighted: Recommendation 3 (communications strategy); Recommendation 7 (human rights); Recommendation 8 (women and youth); Recommendation 12 (climate change); Recommendation 16 (UN Country Teams).

Overall, addressing farmer-herder conflicts in West Africa and the Sahel shows the importance of an integrated and coherent UN approach. UNOWAS role in this regard has been to provide strategic direction, regional analysis, coordination and awareness.

###