

PASTORALISM IN EASTERN CENTRAL AFRICA

Implications for State, Society and the Environment



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PASTORALISM IN EASTERN CENTRAL AFRICA

Implications for State, Society and the Environment.

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Cover picture: Two Uda herders guide cattle through the Ali Plains along the south-eastern border of the Chinko Conservation Area in the Mbomou prefecture, Central African Republic.

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Résumé exécutif

Dans la zone Est de l’Afrique centrale, le pastoralisme est en train de traverser une période de transformation rapide caractérisée par une plus forte tendance des groupes pastoraux à se déplacer dans de nouvelles zones sur de plus longues distances. Grâce aux progrès de la médecine vétérinaire, il est désormais possible pour les éleveurs de déplacer leur bétail de plus en plus loin au sud comme jamais auparavant. Pourtant, en République centrafricaine et en République démocratique du Congo, l’expansion de ces zones de déplacement alimente des conflits croissants avec les communautés autochtones et les aires protégées. Non seulement le pastoralisme joue désormais un rôle central dans la myriade de conflits armés de la région, mais il devient rapidement une menace intrinsèque pour la conservation de la biodiversité dans toute la région. Ces tendances sont particulièrement prononcées au sein de la communauté Fulani/Mbororo de la région.

De plus en plus victime de - et impliquée dans - les conflits armés, la violence est de plus en plus le déterminant clé de la dynamique pastorale. Ce changement de dynamique, autrefois guidée par les facteurs environnementaux, certes instables, engendre une incertitude croissante auprès de toutes les parties impliquées, et crée de nouveaux défis pour les gouvernements, les communautés et les défenseurs de l’environnement.

Bien que le niveau d’implication délibérée des groupes pastoraux dans les crimes contre la faune sauvage reste floue, les incursions des éleveurs dans les aires protégées sont une cause majeure de la dégradation de l’environnement et du déclin des populations de faune sauvage. Non seulement le bétail est porteur de maladies transmissibles, mais les éleveurs exterminent activement les grands prédateurs et créent de nouvelles voies permettant aux braconniers de pénétrer dans des environnements auparavant inaccessibles.

Ce rapport se concentre sur le paysage transfrontalier de Mbomou-Uélé, lequel inclut l’aire de conservation de Chinko (République centrafricaine), le Domaine de Chasse de Bili-Uere et le Parc National de la Garamba (République démocratique du Congo). Il propose un nouveau cadre d’analyse centré sur cinq groupes pastoraux distincts, mais interconnectés. Les groupes dominants, ayant un impact important sur le paysage protégé de Chinko-Bili-Garamba, sont le groupe du Darfour (centré sur le Sud-Darfour, Soudan) et le groupe de Mbomou-Uélé (centré entre Zemio, Mboki, Ango et Niangara).

Au cours des dix dernières années, on a assisté à une augmentation exponentielle du nombre d’éleveurs Mbororo lourdement armés se déplaçant du Darfour vers l’est de la RCA. Désorganisés par les conflits, ces éleveurs déplacent des troupeaux de plus en plus importants à travers un réseau instable de corridors non réglementés. La pression croissante de ces groupes du nord a un effet considérable sur la dynamique au sein du Groupe Mbomou-Uélé, imposant de nouveaux schémas de transhumance saisonnière poussant tous les éleveurs du Haut-Mbomou vers la RDC. Cela crée de nouveaux schémas d’interaction avec la population

Mbororo résidente du Congo, qui a abandonné la transhumance au cours des deux dernières décennies en faveur de nouvelles formes localisées de déplacement.

En l'absence de politiques gouvernementales cohérentes et, dans de nombreux cas, en raison du manque de présence de l'État sur le terrain, les organisations de protection de l'environnement doivent intégrer le pastoralisme dans leur plan de gestion pour des raisons à la fois pratiques et éthiques. Ce rapport fournit une analyse technique de la dynamique pastorale dans la région afin de soutenir le développement d'approches de gestion adaptative. Fondé sur un engagement authentique, il présente une série de recommandations pour les acteurs régionaux et les ONG impliquées dans le pastoralisme.

Principales leçons apprises

Le pastoralisme et la conservation en Afrique centrale sont à un carrefour critique qui déterminera l'avenir social, économique et environnemental de la région. Alors que les aires de conservation sont de mieux en mieux financées et gérées, elles doivent surmonter plusieurs défis majeurs afin de gérer efficacement le pastoralisme.

Il est de plus en plus évident que les systèmes de gestion réactifs basés sur la force sont incapables d'atténuer les menaces que le pastoralisme fait peser sur les aires protégées. Poussés par de puissants facteurs socio-environnementaux, les pasteurs sont trop nombreux, motivés et bien équipés pour être contraints de se conformer à des systèmes de gestion qui ne respectent pas leurs besoins fondamentaux. Au contraire, les aires protégées doivent établir des relations de travail durables et authentiques, fondées sur la compréhension mutuelle.

Le principal défi reste donc de développer une compréhension approfondie de la dynamique pastorale. En comprenant où les pasteurs se déplacent et pourquoi, les défenseurs de l'environnement pourront élaborer des stratégies de gestion proactives qui conviennent aux deux parties. Cependant, cette compréhension reste limitée par les contraintes d'accès, la méfiance et l'opposition du gouvernement.

L'accès à l'ensemble de l'Afrique centrale orientale reste exceptionnellement difficile, en particulier dans les zones fréquentées par les pasteurs. Non seulement l'accès physique reste un défi, mais le conflit rend souvent de vastes zones temporairement inaccessibles. L'échelle régionale et la grande dispersion des éléments importants rendent impérative une meilleure coopération entre les gouvernements, les ONG et les acteurs communautaires. Les aires protégées ne peuvent plus fermer les yeux sur les changements qui se produisent au-delà de leurs zones tampons, et toutes les parties prenantes doivent continuellement tenir compte des développements qui peuvent se produire à plusieurs milliers de kilomètres. Pour faire face de manière adéquate à un phénomène aussi complexe, il faut des ressources substantielles et un solide réseau régional de partage de l'information.

Après des décennies d'abus de part et d'autre, la méfiance reste omniprésente. L'instauration de la confiance sera particulièrement cruciale pour comprendre des questions sensibles telles que le nombre de bovins. Il sera crucial pour toutes les parties de fixer des attentes claires et de faciliter un dialogue ouvert dans un environnement sûr.

Il est important de noter que cela nécessitera également que les gouvernements facilitent la recherche et le débat sur le pastoralisme. Bien qu'il reste dans les prérogatives de chaque gouvernement de la région de prendre des décisions indépendantes concernant la réglementation du pastoralisme, la neutralité de la recherche devrait être le fondement de l'élaboration des politiques.

Il est essentiel de noter que toutes les recherches suggèrent que les risques décrits ci-dessus peuvent être atténués. La plupart des groupes pastoraux actifs dans la région restent très réceptifs aux efforts de sensibilisation, et la plupart des entrées illégales dans les aires protégées sont involontaires. L'amélioration des activités de sensibilisation sera cruciale pour une gestion efficace du pastoralisme.

Executive Summary

Pastoralism in eastern Central Africa is undergoing a period of rapid transformation characterised by a far greater propensity to move into new areas across greater distances. Enabled by advances in veterinary medicine, it is now feasible for herders to move their livestock farther south than ever before. Yet across emerging settlement frontiers in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, this expansion fuels intensifying conflicts with indigenous communities and protected areas. Not only does pastoralism now play a central role in the region's myriad of armed conflicts, but it is quickly developing as an intrinsic threat to biodiversity conservation throughout the region. These trends are particularly pronounced amongst the region's Fulani/Mbororo community.

Increasingly victimised by – and implicated in – armed conflict, violence is increasingly the key determinant in pastoral dynamics. This shift away from predictable, albeit unstable environmental factors has created growing uncertainty on sides, creating new challenges for governments, communities and conservationists.

Although the extent of deliberate pastoral involvement in wildlife crime remains unclear, incursions by herders into protected areas is a leading cause of environmental degradation and declining wildlife populations. Not only do livestock carry transmissible diseases, but pastoralists actively exterminate large predators and create new pathways for poachers to enter previously inaccessible environments.

Focusing on the Chinko Conservation Area (Central African Republic), the Bili-Uere *Domaine de Chasse*, and Garamba National Park (Democratic Republic of Congo) this report proposes a new analytical framework centred on five distinct, but interconnected, pastoral clusters. The dominant clusters impacting the Chinko-Bili-Garamba protected landscape are the Darfur Cluster (centred on South Darfur, Sudan) and the Mbomou-Uélé cluster (centred between Zemio, Mboki, Ango and Niangara).

The past ten years have seen an exponential increase in the number of heavily armed Mbororo herders moving from Darfur into eastern CAR. Disrupted by conflict, these pastoralists move ever larger herds across an unstable network of completely unregulated corridors. Increasing pressure from these northern groups has had a profound effect on dynamics within the Mbomou-Uélé Cluster. Overwhelmed, this pressure has forced new patterns of seasonal transhumance pushing all Haut-Mbomou's herders into the DRC. This is creating new patterns of interaction with Congo's resident Mbororo population, who have in the past two decades abandoned transhumance in favour of new localised forms of displacement.

In the absence of coherent government policies and in many cases the lack of state presence creates a practical and ethical imperative for conservation groups to manage pastoralism. This report provides a technical analysis of pastoral dynamics in the region to support the

development of adaptive management approaches. Rooted in genuine engagement, it presents a series of recommendations for regional actors and NGOs involved in pastoralism.

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List of acronyms

Central African Republic – **CAR**

Democratic Republic of Congo – **DRC**

Eastern Central Africa – **ECA**

Bovine Tuberculosis – **BTB**

Non-Governmental Organisation – **NGO**

Zones d'Intérêts Cygnetique (Designated hunting areas – CAR/Cameroon) – **ZIC**

Retour, Reclamation et Réhabilitation (Return, Reclamation and Rehabilitation) – **3R**

Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (Union for Peace in Central Africa) – **UPC**

Sudan People's Liberation Army – **SPLA**

Economic Community of Central African States – **ECCAS**

Chinko Protected Area – **ACC**

African Parks – **AP**

Public Private Partnership – **PPP**

Garamba National Park – **GNP**

Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature) – **ICCN**

Lord's Resistance Army – **LRA**

African Wildlife Foundation – **AWF**

Domaine de Chasse (Hunting area – DRC) – **DC**

Rapid Support Forces – **RSF**

Sudan Liberation Movement/Army – **SLM/A**

Le Mouvement des Libérateurs Centrafricains pour la Justice (The movement of Central African Liberators for Justice) – **MLCJ**

Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique (Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central Africa) – **FPRC**

Lutte anti-Braconnage (Law Enforcement Operations) – **LAB**

Forces Armées Zaïroises (Zairean Armed Forces) – **FAZ**

Movement de Libération du Congo (Movement for the Liberation of the Congo) – **MLC**

1. Introduction

Dominated by vast tracts of Sudano-Sahelian Savannah, the remote borderlands of the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Chad, Sudan, and South Sudan are defined by chronic instability and the gaping absence of state authority. While sparse populations and limited access have historically safeguarded some of Africa's largest intact wilderness areas, this vacuum is increasingly occupied by a shifting mosaic of highly mobile pastoralist groups (Fig 1).

Pastoralism – an ancient way of life rooted in livestock husbandry and herding – is a relatively recent arrival in the contested landscapes of eastern Central Africa (ECA). Characterised by an extreme degree of flexibility, the livelihood is currently undergoing a period of profound turbulence and transformation. This is particularly true amongst the loose confederation of ethnic Fulani Clans collectively known as *Mbororo*. This is typified by an increased propensity to colonise new territory and move across greater distances than ever before.



Figure 1: Overview of Eastern Central Africa.

Enabled by ground-breaking advances in veterinary medicine, initial tentative pastoral advances into ECA were gradual, and generally peaceful (de Vries, 2020). Although new arrivals struggled to integrate into the region's indigenous power structures, resources were plentiful, and herders quickly developed symbiotic trading relationships with agrarian

communities (Kintz, 1989). Fixed corridors were established, and throughout much of the 20th century pastoralism was limited and effectively managed by both customary and legislative authorities (ibid).

This began to change as overgrazing, agricultural expansion, and political turmoil dramatically decreased the availability – and degraded the quality – of “open” landscapes available for pasture. Beginning in the 1980s, burgeoning birth rates and massive displacement from successive devastating Sahel droughts caused an explosion in Central Africa’s pastoral population (Fio-Ngaindiro, 1987). Compounded by the simultaneous proliferation of small arms, and a series of crippling animal disease outbreaks, nascent management regimes were overwhelmed and established pastoral systems plunged into chaos.

Recognised corridors became ecologically untenable or simply too dangerous, and as herders became increasingly victimised and implicated in armed violence, the entire livelihood became associated with generalised disorder (Seignobos, 2011). In the absence of effective dispute resolution mechanisms, minor conflicts quickly escalate and take on virulent ethno-religious dimensions making pastoralism a dominant dimension in regional conflicts. In CAR armed groups recruit from pastoral communities and use the taxation of livestock as a key source of funding. Meanwhile pastoralist conflict is now the leading cause of civilian casualties in Darfur (Behnke et al. 2020) and is quickly becoming a major cause of violence in northern DRC. While environmental factors remain the fundamental force behind pastoral mobility, violence and disease have created a new political geography that governs where, when, and how herders move.

Largely void of permanent population, ecologically intact, and historically beyond government reach, ECA’s protected landscapes make attractive targets for pastoralists on the run. Yet unregulated pastoralism presents a critical threat to the continued survival of these protected areas. Overgrazing can permanently damage fragile ecosystems, while fires set by herders as they navigate the landscape can have far reaching consequences (Aebischer et al. 2020). To protect their herds, groups routinely exterminate threatened large predators, while cattle spread destructive pathogens like anthrax and Bovine Tuberculosis (BTB) into previously pristine territory. While the extent of pastoral involvement in wildlife trafficking remains subject to debate, herders routinely cooperate with the organised bands of commercial poachers responsible for the localised extinction of Northern white rhinos and the decimation of elephant populations (ibid).

Amid a growing recognition that sustainable land use and conservation are critical to long-term social stability (Roulin et al. 2017), this creates both a practical and ethical imperative for protected areas to manage pastoralism. However, this multifaceted phenomenon and its ecological dimensions remain poorly understood. Like pastoralism, conservation in Central Africa is undergoing a period of rapid transformation. Stepping in to fill a knowledge and resource gap, protected areas are increasingly managed by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Yet in the absence of coherent government policy, this creates a complex network of widely divergent approaches to an understudied and rapidly evolving threat. Whereas some use

aggressive, militaristic tactics to repel herders, others pursue conciliatory strategies rooted in communal sensitisation. While this can be a significant source of confusion (for herders and managers alike), it offers opportunities to apply lessons learned and improve regional coordination.

Focusing on the Chinko-Bili-Garamba protected landscape this report draws on extensive fieldwork conducted in the CAR, DRC, and Sudan to provide an overview of contemporary pastoral dynamics and provide insight into emerging trends. Building on this empirical base it presents several practical recommendations for the management of this increasingly significant phenomenon in the context of protected area management.

1.1 Methodology and structure

This report primarily presents the findings of extensive field work carried out in the CAR, DRC, and Sudan (see Figure 2 for a detailed overview of primary fieldwork locations). Following an initial desk review, this field work sought to develop a holistic understanding of pastoralist dynamics in the region. In each location, focus groups, individual interviews were conducted with members of both pastoral and sedentary communities. Participative cartography was carried out to map current movements and identify drivers of change. In addition, this was complemented by interviews with field agents active in the Chinko, Bili-Uere, and Garamba protected areas, as well as aerial surveillance.

Livestock and human population figures were determined by developing unique formulas based on average household size and household to livestock ratios in each location. For the Darfur cluster, this also incorporated published livestock estimations for South Darfur.

This report will first provide a brief contextual overview, before introducing the eastern Central Africa’s pastoralists and the conservation areas that form the focus of this report. This is followed by an exploration of the proposed clusters, and an evaluation of the Darfur and Mbomou-Uélé clusters.

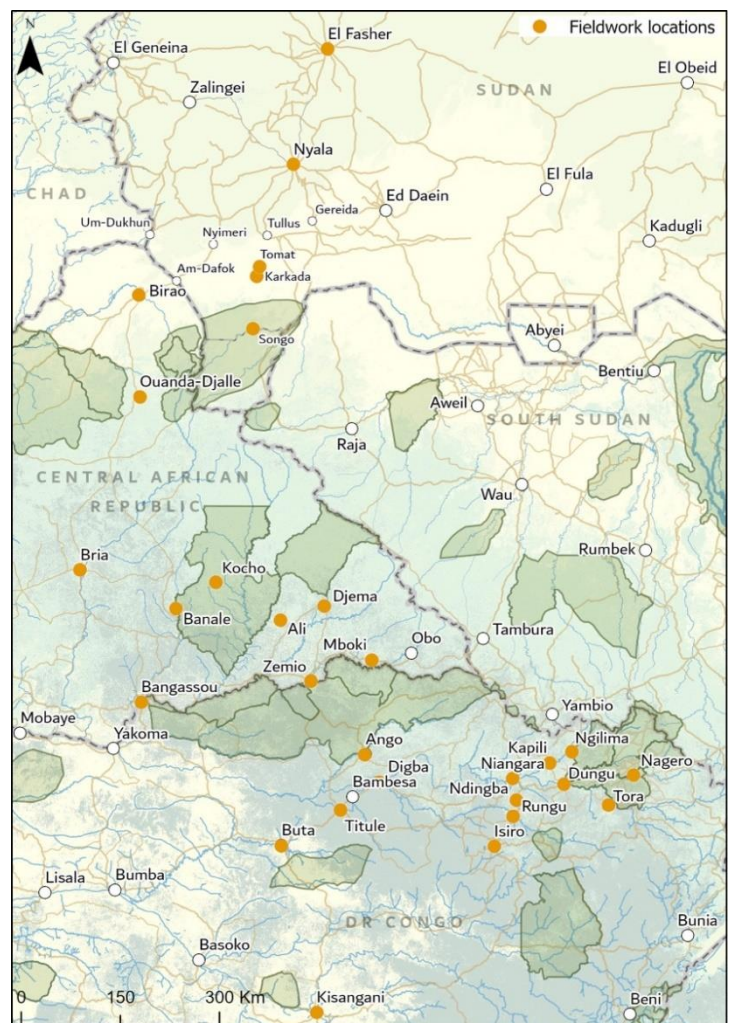


Figure 2: Primary locations of field work carried out between November 2020 and October 2021

2. Context – A landscape in transition

Characterised by an extreme form of strategic mobility, transhumant pastoralism has a long history in the Sudano-Sahelian ecoregion. Spanning the transition from Congolian rainforest to the arid Sahel, the ecotone's characteristic forest-savannah mosaic spurred the development – and expansion – of highly sophisticated pastoral societies.

Yet unlike in areas farther west, transhumance has only recently become a significant phenomenon in eastern Central Africa. Although the region's vast and largely ungoverned spaces may at first seem ideal for pastoral livelihoods, they conceal a profoundly turbulent past. To understand the contemporary dynamics and future of pastoralism in Central Africa, one must first explore the subtleties of its history.

Practiced throughout Africa, pastoralism is as diverse as the continent itself. An ancient genre of livestock husbandry, pastoralism is classified by degrees of mobility. As land tenure regimes rigidify in southern and eastern Africa, sedentary pastoralism is becoming increasingly dominant (Smith, 2021). Often complimented by agriculture, this involves grazing in defined areas (ranches) on privately held or leased land (Scharaika et al. 2021). In loosely governed but relatively fertile areas like the highlands of South Kivu¹ in eastern DRC, mobile pastoralism involves the localised movement of herds in search of fresh forage and water (Mugumaarhahama et al. 2021). Meanwhile in arid, sparsely inhabited areas across the Horn of Africa and Sahara, nomadic pastoralism uses irregular long-distance movement to effectively utilise scarce resources (Unruh, 1991). Between these areas, the pronounced seasonal and spatial resource variability of the Sudano-Sahel lends itself to the development of regular, long-distance patterns of movement known as transhumance. Unlike other forms of nomadism, transhumance involves displacement between relatively fixed points along well-defined routes and is generally seasonal (Stenning, 1957).

While Arabic-speaking pastoralists from the Misseriya, Ta'isha and Rizeigat tribal confederations (collectively known as *Baggara*² Arabs) began making early incursions into north-eastern Central Africa during the 17th century, these remained relatively peripheral³ – limited to far northern CAR and South Sudan (Fio-Ngaindiro, 1987). In areas farther south, traditionally dominated by the Banda and Nzakara/Zande people, the prevalence of Animal *Trypanosomiasis*⁴ precluded widespread livestock rearing and acted as a natural barrier to southward *Baggara* expansion (ibid).

¹ Similar land use patterns are also found in Masisi North Kivu and southern Ituri Province.

² “Cattle herding”

³ Although eastern CAR effectively fell under Arab control during the second half of the 19th and early 20th century, this presence was essentially limited to slave and ivory trading. Rather than settlement, this instead resulted in catastrophic depopulation.

⁴ Caused by protozoan parasites of the *Trypanosoma* genus, the disease causes progressive wastage and eventually death of unvaccinated livestock.



Figure 3: Distribution of trypanosomiasis in Central Africa.

This began to change in the late 19th and early/mid 20th century when a series of political and technological upheavals fundamentally changed the landscape of pastoralism in Central Africa. In 1903 the fall of the Sokoto Caliphate⁵ to German and British colonial forces triggered a massive exodus of ethnic Fulani pastoralists into western CAR, Chad, and as far east as Darfur. Fearing increased regulation, Sultan Attahiru I enacted a customary Fulani form of non-violent rebellion and declared *Hijra*⁶, urging his followers to emigrate en-masse (Masud, 1990). A common practice among Fulani pastoralists, the intent was not just to regain freedom but rather to actively subvert their new overlords by depriving them of valuable tax revenue (ibid).

⁵ The most powerful of the so called “Jihad States”, the Sokoto Caliphate was a major Fulani state spanning much of what is now Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, and northern Cameroon.

⁶ Literally “departure”, has profound Islamic overtones as an act of the faithful and righteous in reference to Prophet Mohammad’s migration from Mecca to Yathrib.

Relatively spontaneous and with limited strategic direction, these early waves of migration were primarily guided by ecological barriers (Delmet, 1994). While European powers were actively entrenching their foothold on Central Africa, the borders so hotly contested in Berlin and Versailles had not yet obtained any practical relevance and posed little impediment to pastoral movements (ibid). Instead, groups split along pre-existing clan lines, and literally “followed the clouds”⁷ in search of greener pastures.



Figure 4: Highly productive, able to carry vast loads and trypano-tolerant, *Bo'dedji* and *Borroro* cattle shown here were crucial to the ability of early Fulani pioneers to establish a foothold in Central Africa.

Yet a shortage of greener pastures was not Central Africa's problem. As for earlier attempts by Arab pastoralists, the dominant constraint for these early Fulani pioneers was the ever-present threat of *trypanosomiasis* which remained a forbidding barrier (see Figure 3). However, unlike their Arab predecessors, Fulani herders moved with relatively trypano-tolerant *Borroro*, *Bo'dedji*, *Danedji*, and *Gudaali* cattle. Despite not offering full protection, this allowed them to settle in where the incidence of *trypanosomiasis* is lower (Seignobos, 2011). Here, initially around the Adamawa and Dourbali areas of Cameroon and Chad respectively, they found virgin pastures and local populations willing to trade. Abundant rainfall and reduced competition allowed these populations to thrive, becoming a springboard for later migration throughout eastern Central Africa (Fig 5).

⁷ A widespread Fulfulde euphemism for transhumance.

It was expansion from both Adamawa and Dourbali in the early 1900s that eventually populated much of eastern Central Africa with pastoralists. Moving first into the area around Bouar and the Kaga-Bandoro in what was then the French colony of Oubangui-Chari (present day CAR), increasingly favourable conditions facilitated the development of new pastoral dynamics. Encouraged by colonial authorities keen to facilitate commerce in growing colonial outposts like Bangui and enabled by year-round availability of quality fodder, herders quickly abandoned established patterns of long-range transhumance (Fio-Ngaindiro, 1987). This was instead replaced by the localised, yet nonetheless highly seasonal, “*petite transhumance*” that characterises modern pastoralism across most of eastern Central Africa. Although cross border movements still took place, these were mainly commercial or conducted by Arab pastoralists based in Chad. Central Africa’s new Fulani herders however, increasingly remained inside the respective country (ibid).

While these pastoral dynamics remained stable through the middle of the 20th century, compounding technical and socio-ecological changes in the 1970s sparked a period of massive upheaval. Beginning in 1968, the Sahel was wracked by successive, extremely severe droughts. Agricultural and pastoral production systems collapsed, plunging much of the region and its millions of inhabitants into famine. At the same time Cameroon expanded its network of designated hunting areas (*Zones d’Intérêts Cynégétique -ZICs*) from which herders were “ruthlessly expelled” (Seignobos, 2011), forcing a rapidly growing population to live off shrinking and increasingly degraded pastureland. While Central Africa was spared the worst of this socio-ecological devastation, it was subject to massive waves of immigration from Cameroon and Chad.

Overcome by this influx, animal health protocols were unable to cope, leading to a series of devastating outbreaks of rinderpest and other diseases. In an attempt to save their herds, the Mbororo began to disperse farther to the south and west than ever before. While this secondary migration was fundamentally a threat mitigation response, it was only made possible by the development and increasing availability of trypanocides. Used to effectively inoculate livestock against *trypanosomiasis*, these revolutionary drugs transformed Central Africa’s pastoral landscape. For the first time, herders were able to break the biological barrier that had kept pastoralism out of the equatorial belt since time immemorial.

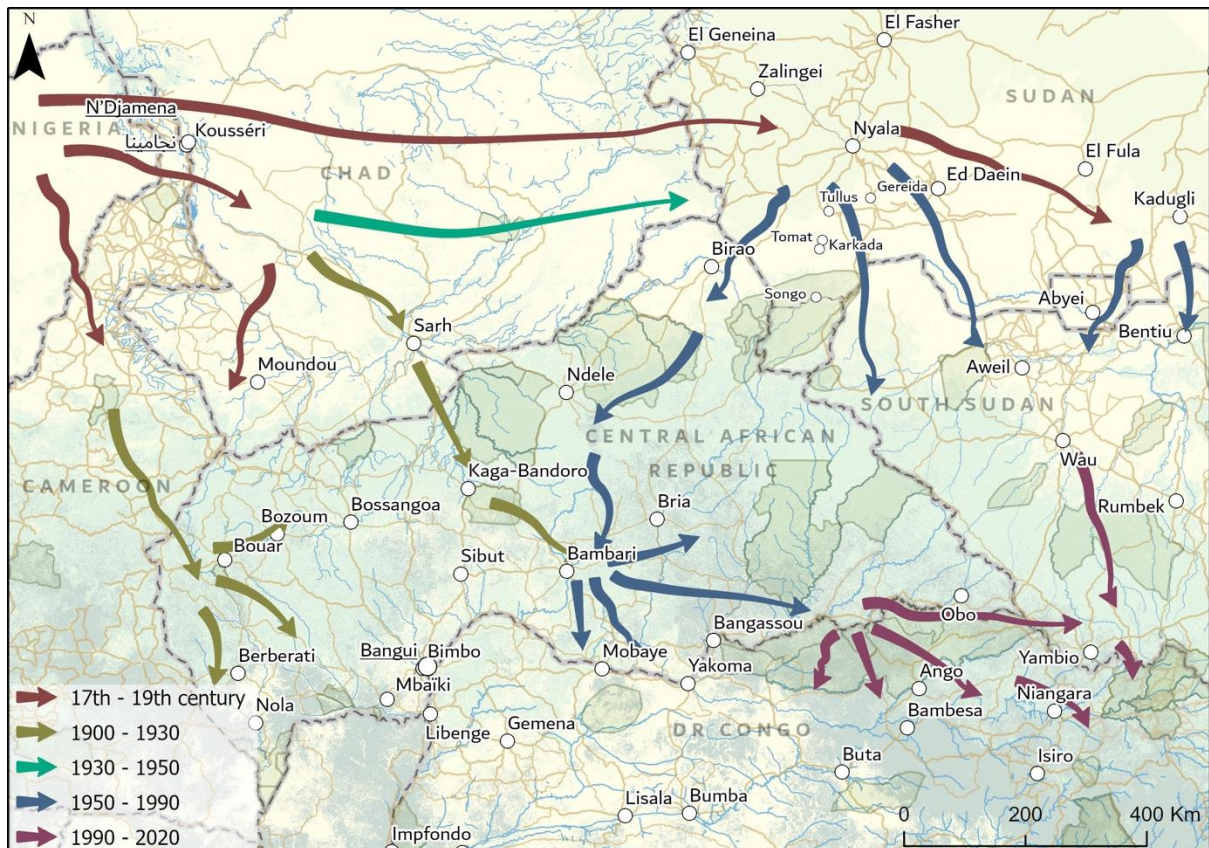


Figure 5: Chronology of Fulani expansion throughout Central Africa.

While environmental factors still play a major role determining where, when and why pastoralists move through Central Africa’s contested landscapes, dynamics are increasingly defined by violence. While Fulani pastoralists historically played a limited role in the region’s armed conflicts, this abruptly changed in the 1980s (ibid). Driven by violence further afield, herders first became the target and implicated in armed violence.

Overwhelmed by new arrivals fleeing the Sahel droughts, inter-communal relations in Central Africa’s once peaceful pastoral zones worsened. As pastureland grew crowded, compliance with established pastoral corridors declined and damage to agricultural land increased. In response, local communities in CAR’s northwest began raising taxes and carrying out punitive raids on cattle camps. However, local authorities struggled to distinguish between established pastoralists (who largely remained in continued compliance with regulations) and the newcomers. Not only did this raise tensions, but it actually increased non-compliance as herders began to avoid corridors for fear of taxation (Seignobos, 2011).

This period of social turmoil coincided with the spread of the *Zaranguina*⁸ phenomenon. Now endemic across eastern Central Africa, this pattern of rural crime first emerged in the turbulent pastures of north-western CAR and remains intricately linked with pastoralism (ibid). Fuelled

⁸ Initially most closely associated with the Uda clan, the phenomenon now has few to no clan connotations. Early Uda arrivals into eastern Central Africa from Chad were infamous for their reputed brutality and earning them the nickname *Hoo'dabe* “bad ones” amongst other Mbororo clans.

by the spill-over of small arms from the First Chadian Civil war, roving bands of so called *Zaranguinas* began by rustling cows and ambushing herders on their way to and from markets. In comparison to the region's agrarian population, pastoralists made uniquely vulnerable and lucrative targets. In a pervasively cash poor economy, cattle are a lucrative commodity that unlike gold or diamonds can easily be converted into cash with limited investment or skills.



Figure 6: While armed groups heavily recruit from pastoral communities, genuine herding communities increasingly arm themselves in self-defence. Two underaged UPC fighters monitor pastoral movements east of Mboki, while a Uda herder rests at camp in the Ali Plains.

While cattle rustling was not a new phenomenon, the *Zaranguina* carried out attacks of unprecedented frequency and severity (de Vries, 2020). Until this point Mbororo herders scarcely carried more than bows and arrows for self-defence and were not associated with criminality (Siegnobos, 2011). However, as whole communities were impoverished, many began to establish self-defence militias and acquire automatic weapons of their own. This reached a climax in 2013 when following the Séléka⁹ takeover, conflict took virulent ethno-religious overtones and pastoral groups were pervasively targeted by Christian anti-Balaka militias. Not only did this cause massive displacement on both sides, but it contributed to the

⁹ A coalition of Muslim majority rebel groups from CAR's north and east.

rise of two armed groups purportedly established to protect pastoral interests – 3R¹⁰ and the UPC, entrenching real and perceived involvement by pastoral groups in organised armed conflict.

At the same time two thousand kilometres away, this shift was being echoed amongst the *Goz*¹¹ of Darfur. Like in CAR, Sudan's Mbororo pastoralists increasingly found themselves confronted by spiralling violence. Straddling the contested boundary that tore across Sudan, pastures occupied by Fulani herders became the frontline in an increasingly bloody civil war. Although the country's largely *Wodaabe* and *Danedji* Mbororo had never played an important social role on either side of the divide, they were victimised by both (Vaughan, 2014). In the south they were targeted by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) who associated their Islamic faith with the northern regime¹². Meanwhile to the north Arab militias exploited their new state funded arsenal to seize prized pastureland. With nowhere to run (trypanocides were not readily available in Darfur at the time), the Mbororo again were forced to arm themselves (Abu-Jalil, 2008). However, it is important to note that although from Texas to Turkana the image of armed "cowboys" is well entrenched in western perceptions, it is still a relatively recent – and by no means inevitable – phenomenon amongst Central Africa's pastoralists.

3. Navigating the margins – Central Africa's pastoralists

Numbering between 55 and 70 million people, the Fulani or Fula (also *Fulbe*, *Peulh*, *Fellata*¹³) are Africa's most widely dispersed ethnic group (Sangare, 2019). Although their origins are obscure, the Fulani broadly occupy a band from the Atlantic coast in Senegal across to the Red Sea in Eritrea roughly corresponding to the Sahel, Sudano-Sahel and southern Sahara. Despite their large population, this wide dispersal means they are a minority in all countries except for Guinea. Traditionally a nomadic or semi-nomadic people, most Fulani have now settled, playing an important role in socio-economic life across West Africa. However, roughly 15 million still practice transhumance, making them the largest nomadic pastoral group on earth (ibid). Although the Fulani are almost without exception Sunni Muslims, follow a common cultural code (*pulaaku*¹⁴) and generally share a common language – Fulfulde¹⁵, the community

¹⁰ *Retour, Reclamation et Réhabilitation* (3R) and *Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique* (UPC) recruit almost exclusively from the Fulani ethnic group.

¹¹ Translated as 'Sandy soils'.

¹² Dominated by Dinka pastoralists, there is significant evidence that individual SPLA factions saw expelling the Mbororo eliminate competition over pastoral resources.

¹³ From Fulfulde, French and Arabic respectively. It is important to note that in common Sudanese usage *Fellata* is used as an exonym for all west African ethnic groups (e.g., Hausa, Kanuri etc.).

¹⁴ A comprehensive set of guidelines governing appropriate behaviour, virtues and values. Most importantly it emphasises: *Semteede* "Shamefulness" – the quality of being shy or reserved, *Munyaal* – perseverance, *Ena'am* – compassion, *Ngorgu* – bravery and *Neaa'ako* – dignity (Leger and Mohammed, 2000).

¹⁵ Although Fulfulde is generally mutually intelligible, some dialects (most notably Maasina Fulfulde, Pular, Pulaar and Adamawa Fulfulde) are occasionally considered separate languages in their own right. Usually written

is highly diverse. The most common distinction is between settled (*Ful'be*), and nomadic (*Mbororo*) Fulani.

Although all Fulani in Eastern Central Africa are commonly called Mbororo, this potentially derogatory demonym only accurately describes groups actively engaged in transhumance. Rather than a singular tribal entity, the term Mbororo denotes the loose confederation of clans most closely associated with a fully transhumant livelihood. These include the *Uda*, *Wodaabe*, *Danedji*, *Jaafun* and *Afedjam*¹⁶ clans who constitute the majority of Central Africa's pastoralists. However, a testament to the fundamental changes undergoing the region's pastoral community, a growing number of individuals from traditionally Mbororo clans refuse to be associated with the term. This reflects a growing discontentment amongst young Fulani, who although belonging to traditionally Mbororo clans attempt to escape a livelihood associated with "backwardness" and poor Islamic practice¹⁷.



in the Latin or a modified Latin alphabet, Fulfulde is also commonly written in the Ajami Arabic script, and increasingly the Adlam script which was specifically developed for the language.

¹⁶ For a full list of known Mbororo clans in Eastern Central Africa, see Annex 1.

¹⁷ These perceptions are generally held internally within Fulani culture.

Figure 7: A Ful'be elder in Zemio (Haut-Mbomou) and Wodaabe woman in her camp in Banalé (Haut-Kotto), Central African Republic.

Unlike the Mbororo, Ful'be traditionally occupy positions and livelihoods associated with higher status including land ownership, and scholarly activity (Stenning, 1957). Instrumental in the spread and propagation of Islam across Africa, most of Central Africa's Ful'be are highly integrated within the region's other Islamic cultures. Ful'be clans like the *Ika* in South Darfur have been present in the region for centuries, playing key socio-political roles in pre-colonial systems of governance (Abu-Manga, 1999). Despite high degrees of ethno-cultural kinship, the Ful'be have few practical ties to most Mbororo groups and play a limited role in Central Africa's pastoral dynamics (ibid). For this reason, this report primarily focuses on Mbororo dynamics. The term Mbororo is only used to denote specific pastoral clans known to associate with the term, while Ful'be and Fulani are used to traditionally settled communities and the entire ethnic group respectively¹⁸.

Broadly speaking, Fulani society is organised along clan (*Legnol*) and sub-clan lines. Although leadership is generally held by sedentary groups, inter-clan relationships are often obscure and generally lack clan-based hierarchies. Regions (*Lamidat*) are governed by a *Lamido* (plural: *Lamibe*), paramount chiefs with status equivalent to that of an Arab Sultan. Although a *Lamido*'s authority transcends clan boundaries, interactions between a given clan or sub-clan and the *Lamido* are managed by *Ardo'en* (singular: *Ardo*). Literally "those who walk in front", the *Ardo'en* traditionally derive their authority from a specific clan, rather than territorial claim. Clans typically have multiple *Ardo'en*, with varying degrees of authority determined by personal prestige. While powerful families routinely establish "dynasties", the titles of *Lamido* and *Ardo* are not automatically conferred through inheritance. Instead, potentates must be approved by the community and are selected based on criteria including intelligence, wisdom and charisma. Importantly, the *Ardo'en* also act as the primary liaisons between Fulani groups and external communities. Below the *Ardo'en*, individual family groups in this highly patriarchal society are led by the eldest male (*Kachalago*).

Traditional Fulani leadership structures are highly fluid, and in practice neither *Lamibe* nor *Ardo'en* have any coercive control over the movement or conduct of specific pastoral groups. Without prescriptive powers, influence is highly personalised and rooted in individual charisma, and ability to extract voluntary loyalty. Submission is signalled through the payment of customary taxes (*Zakat*), which form the basis of a highly flexible social contract. In exchange leaders liaise with other communities, mediate conflicts, and administer traditional justice. However, this flexibility leaves leadership structures vulnerable to social change. When communities are dissatisfied, *Ardo'en* can be replaced by popular demand, or (more commonly) individual groups can simply withdraw their allegiance and pledge *Zakat* to a more promising candidate.

¹⁸ When referring to individuals belonging to traditionally Mbororo clans who no longer practice pastoralism or associate with the term Mbororo, Fulani will be used.



Figure 8: The Mbororo Majlis of Zemio (Haut-Mbomou) convenes for a participative cartography exercise.

Adapting to an unfamiliar socio-political landscape, these leadership structures are currently undergoing a period of rapid change and diversification throughout Eastern Central Africa. As will be analysed in subsequent sections this notably includes a shift among the Ardo'en of the Mbomou-Uélé Cluster towards roles more closely associated with Lamibe rooted in territorial claims rather than clan identity alone.

A note on identity

By virtue of complex local nationality laws, deliberate repression and a cultural reticence towards state-based identities, most pastoralists in the ECA region are legally or effectively stateless. This not only creates difficulties for the effective management of pastoralism, but also makes it challenging to accurately determine the national origin of individual groups.

This report will thus adopt the Mbororo convention of assigning “nationality” based on the concept of *terroir attaché*. In this sense “nationality” is determined not by place of birth or legal citizenship but rather the habitual place of rainy season inhabitation. Accordingly, “Darfuri” Fulani are Fulani who typically spend the rainy season in Darfur, regardless of what (if any) legal citizenships they hold.

4. Conservation areas

This report will focus on the interactions between three key protected areas and pastoralism. The following section will introduce the Chinko Conservation Area, the Garamba Protected Area Complex and the Bili-Uere Domaine de Chasse in order to provide context and background information.



Figure 9: Protected areas of eastern Central Africa.

4.1 Chinko Conservation Area

Spanning more than 55,000 km² in eastern Central African Republic, the Chinko Conservation Area (CCA) and the adjacent Yata-Ngaya and Zémongo Faunal Reserves along with André-Felix National Park forms Africa's largest tract of protected wilderness. Established out of a series of formal hunting reserves, Chinko was founded in 2014 and is managed by the international NGO African Parks (AP).

Chinko is notable for its extremely high level of biodiversity and is one of the only protected areas on earth home to both savannah and rainforest species. Home to two of Africa's most pristine perennial river systems, the CCA protects Central-West Africa's stronghold population of African Wild Dogs (*Lycaon pictus*). In addition, it remains CAR's stronghold for Eastern chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii*), all four species of African pangolins, giant

eland (*Taurotragus derbianus*), and 24 species of carnivores including Northern lions (*Panthera leo leo*) and golden cats (*Caracal aurata*).

Although like most of eastern CAR the area now protected as part of the CCA was devastated by organised poaching and pastoralism (with large mammal losses of up to 95%), the landscape remains remarkably intact. This has allowed the rapid recovery of key species in areas kept free of unregulated cattle grazing. While poaching remains an issue, pastoralism and particularly transhumance from Sudan is now the greatest threat to the continued survival of Chinko's unique natural heritage.

The park is currently managed by African Parks under a 25-year Public Private Partnership (PPP) signed with the Central African Government in 2020. This mandate is carried out in partnership with the Central African *Ministère des Eaux, Forêts, Chasse et Pêche* (Ministry of Water, Forests, Hunting and Fishing).

4.2 Garamba National Park

Established in 1938 and declared a World Heritage Site in 1980, Garamba National Park (GNP) is one of Africa's oldest and most significant protected areas. Measuring nearly 15,000 km² and situated entirely within the DRC's Haut-Uélé Province, it straddles the boundary between the Guinea-Congolian and Sudano-Guinean bioregions.

Defined by a unique landscapes of open rolling savannahs, Garamba was devastated by organised poaching and armed conflict in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Home to as many as 20,000 African elephants as recently as 1970, it became known as "ground-zero" in Africa's ivory wars. While the world's last known population of wild Northern white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*) went locally extinct here in the early 2000s, Garamba protects the last populations of several key species in the DRC including the Kordofan Giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis antiquorum*).

Garamba National Park and the three contiguous hunting zones that together make up the Garamba Complex have been managed by African Parks since 2005. In conjunction with the *Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature* (Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature – ICCN), a new law enforcement strategy was implemented to effectively stop the destruction of the park and bring stability to the area. Notably this included a successful push to drive the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)¹⁹ from the park, who had previously been major actors in militarised poaching. However, despite these gains poaching gangs working in conjunction with specific pastoral groups remain a major threat.

¹⁹ A major Christian-nationalist Ugandan armed group that terrorised areas in and around Garamba National Park until 2017. While the group remains a threat in both Bas- and Haut-Uélé its presence has been functionally reduced to armed banditry.

4.3 Bili-Uere Domaine de Chasse

Straddling the DRC's northern border with CAR in the Province of Bas-Uélé, Bili-Uere was established as a conservation area by the Government of Zaïre in 1970. Covering an area of 60,000 km², it is the largest protected area complex in the DRC. However, limited resources and the extreme remoteness of the park left it effectively unmanaged and unstudied until the early 2000s.

Following initial research in 2012, Bili-Uere was found to hold Africa's largest population of Eastern chimpanzees and important elephant numbers. To protect this heritage, the ICCN began joint management of Bili-Uere in conjunction with the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) in 2015. Focusing on a 10,000 km² core protected area, this initially involves increasing law enforcement and surveillance capacity. The greatest threats to Bili-Uere are currently illegal mining, organised poaching, and illegal grazing from DRC- and CAR-based Mbororo groups.

5. Towards a cluster-based approach

A critical challenge to understanding pastoralism and addressing its impacts on conservation, is defining a scope that is both meaningful, and practicable. While literature on the subject unanimously stresses the importance of regional dynamics, analysis remains limited by arbitrary boundaries. In a landscape defined by fluid identities, mobility, and overlapping governance the basic assumptions that support state-based analysis offer limited empirical value. Although this rings true for the myriad of challenges facing eastern Central Africa, it is especially important when addressing pastoralism. The nature of pastoralism, especially transhumance means transborder issues take on a new dimension of importance.

However, pastoralism is not a single amorphous phenomenon. Instead, under closer examination, distinct sub-regional dynamics emerge; pastoral movements are not random. Any movement – but particularly those that cross borders or enter unfamiliar territory – is a deliberate decision driven by careful socio-environmental considerations. Yet the nuances that govern these decisions (especially environmental factors) are poorly captured by prevailing frameworks used to consider regional phenomenon in Central Africa.

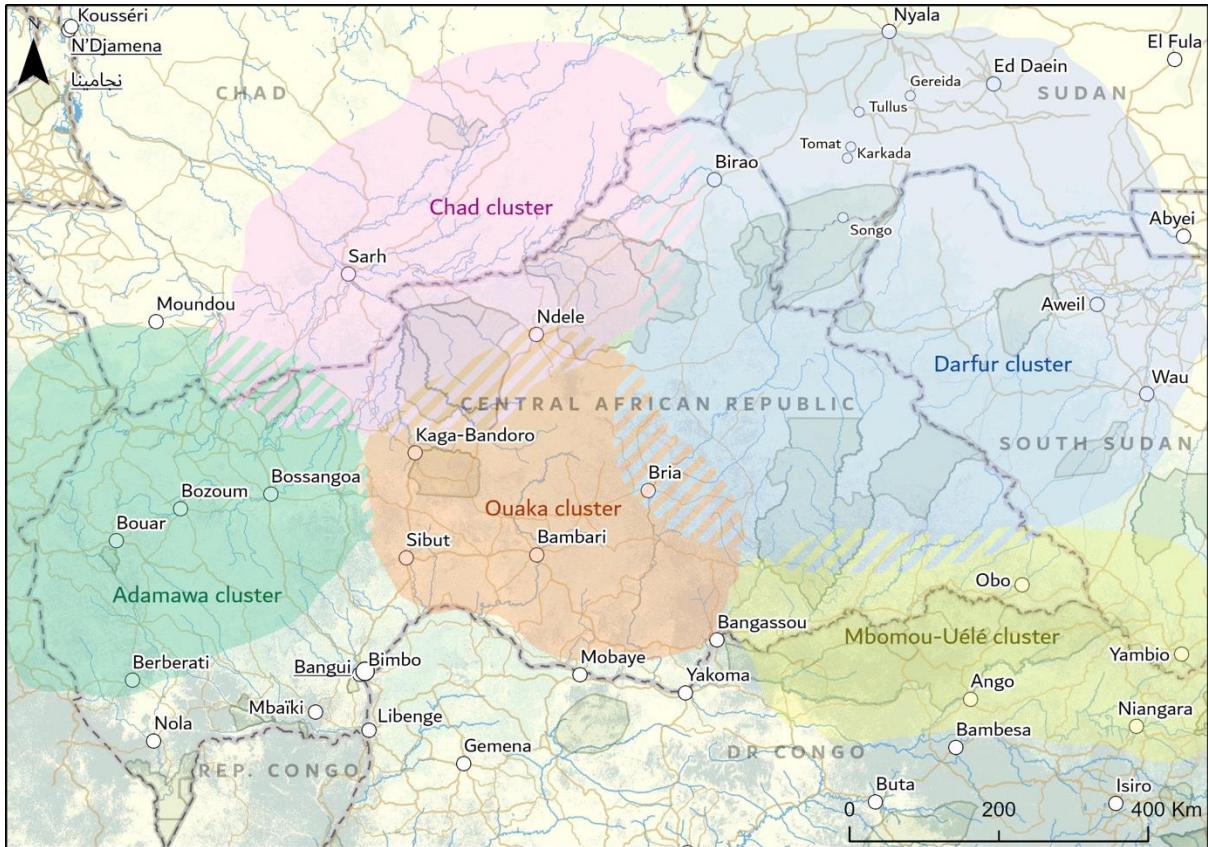


Figure 10: Proposed pastoral clusters in eastern Central Africa.

Regional analysis is typically bounded by existing blocks such as ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States). While this grouping rooted in a shared socio-political history is a useful platform for multilateral cooperation, it poorly reflects the realities relevant to eastern Central Africa and pastoralism. This excludes Sudan and South Sudan, which are instead considered part of North and East Africa respectively. While Khartoum may indeed relate to Cairo more than Libreville²⁰, this implies that states effectively exert control over the entirety of their territory, and capitals hold relevance to peripheral communities. Yet although Bangui is politically removed from Juba, the same cannot be said for pastoralists in Haute-Kotto province who are geographically and socio-economically closer to Raja than “their” capital. However, proximity alone is a poor proxy for significance.

Despite linkages on a continental scale, the impact of specific developments on local dynamics are moderated by a series of unique, identifiable pastoral systems. Defined by social, environmental and political details, these “clusters” rather than proximity alone, determine if and how change ripples across Central Africa’s pastoral landscape. For example, while outbreaks of Bovine Tuberculosis in Kaga-Bandoro have limited effects on pastoralists in Bakouma 400 km away; a 2021 outbreak in South Darfur had within six months caused significant displacements 900 km (and two borders away) in the DRC. Furthermore, these

²⁰ The headquarters of the Arab League and ECCAS respectively.

cause effect cascades are often remarkably unidirectional. Similar outbreaks in the DRC are barely perceptible in CAR, let alone Sudan.

In order to understand transhumance, this creates an imperative to redraw conceptions of regionality based on meaningful nuances beyond political boundaries. Drawing on IGAD's (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) approach in East Africa, field research suggests the existence of five distinct "clusters" (see figure 10) in Eastern Central Africa: the Adamawa, Chad, Ouaka, Darfur and Mbomou-Uélé clusters. With common identities, hierarchies, and livelihoods each cluster is characterised by a high degree of internal interaction. For example, within the Darfur Cluster shared patterns of transhumance and leadership structures create relatively unified responses to defined inputs amongst a vast array of otherwise highly independent pastoral actors. Similarly, in Mbomou-Uélé socio-political ties that span the border create a distinct dynamic that effectively spans both sides of the DRC/CAR border. Unlike political regions or state boundaries this analytical framework is directly tailored to the unique socio-ecological landscape of eastern Central Africa. Importantly these clusters are not rigid and can account for continued evolution.

6. Darfur Cluster

Centred on South Darfur and stretching south across eastern CAR and Western Bahr al-Ghazal (South Sudan), the Darfur cluster is the largest and most significant pastoral cluster in Eastern Central Africa. Although pastoralism has a long history in Darfur, it has only recently become the launching point for Africa's for an extreme form of long-range transhumance characterised by seasonal trajectories routinely exceeding 2000 km. Contemporary dynamics in the cluster are defined by three distinct shocks – substantial Mbororo immigration in the 20th century, the Darfur conflict and the independence of South Sudan. Together these factors have produced a dynamic that has a profound influence on all three protected areas that form the basis of this report.

At the junction between Arab and Mbororo transhumance networks, the Darfur cluster is remarkably diverse. While the Fulani presence in Darfur dates to the 17th century, early Ful'be settlers from West Africa were quickly integrated into relatively sedentary Arab and Fur societies. Here they quickly established

themselves as the backbone of the theological class, playing a limited role in local transhumance for the next 200 years. Throughout this period pastoral dynamics were relatively stable, and tightly regulated by well-defined systems of customary governance.

Early Darfuri pastoralism primarily took the form of medium distance transhumance predominantly practiced by the Ta'isha, Rizeigat, and Misseriya tribes of Baggara Arabs. From rainy season camps in northern Darfur, groups would move camels and cattle up to 300-400 km south along a series of recognised *Masarat*²¹ during the dry season. Administered by a network of Sultans, transhumance was tightly interwoven into local land management regimes. *Sinyya* and *Manzila*²² were established along each *Masar*, creating defined areas where livestock from other areas could graze in exchange for Zakat. Trade was primarily conducted within Sudan and with neighbouring Chad, and herds rarely ventured further south than northern Vakaga in CAR.

This stable system began to change in the mid 20th century when large numbers of Wodaabe, Danedji, Afedjam, and Uda Mbororo began to arrive from Chad and eastern Sudan. Driven out of their ancestral homeland by drought and conflict, these groups remained attached to a pastoral livelihood unlike their Ful'be predecessors. Integrating into the Arab transhumance system, they eventually established their own *Dar*²³ (Dar Fallata) and Sultanate around Tullus. Finding most key Sudanese pastureland and Masarat already occupied, they developed new patterns of transhumance. During the rainy season they occupy pastures still used by powerful Arab clans during the dry season. Outnumbered and outgunned this forced them to move further south before Arab herders begin arriving in December. Initially, most began moving into Western Bahr al-Ghazal and as far as Wau in South Sudan. However, this pattern of movement

²¹ Customary Darfuri transhumance corridor, administered by a Sultan (singular: *Masar*)

²² Temporary pastures established for short- and long-term pastoral grazing respectively.

²³ Traditional ethnic homeland or parcel of land under sultanic administration.

was fundamentally disrupted by the Darfur War (2003-present) and South Sudanese Independence (2011).

The Darfur War had a devastating effect on pastoralism. Violence caused massive displacement, and as whole communities were razed most Masarat were blocked or became too dangerous. Previously a sign of wealth and status large herds became a liability, making pastoralists a target for violence. Armed guards became a necessity, and the cost of bringing cattle to market in Khartoum increased by up to 900%. In response, many Arab pastoralists began liquidating their herds.

Yet this turmoil had starkly different impacts on the Mbororo community. Relatively unaffected by fighting²⁴, their southern pastures and routes began to thrive. Benefitting from a market surplus, many Mbororo were able to dramatically grow their herds. Primarily trading into South Sudan and CAR they were also insulated from the worst of the market instability that wracked Sudan. Real change for the Mbororo came, with South Sudanese independence in 2011.

As Arabic speaking Muslims, the Mbororo were widely classified as Baggara Arabs by many southern communities, and many feared persecutions by the newly independent regime. In response the Fulani leadership in Tullus and Wau issued strong interdictions against transhumance across the newly delineated border. While many still crossed into Western Bahr al-Ghazal, this resulted in a massive shift into CAR.

Moving along old slave trading routes, the simultaneously increasing availability of cheap trypanocides allowed the Mbororo to penetrate deeper into eastern CAR than ever before. Weakened by the Central African Bush War (2004-2007), local institutions were unable to regulate these new arrivals, who quickly

²⁴ The Mbororo were generally not targeted during the campaigns of ethnic cleansing that characterised the Darfur conflicts, and played little role in fighting on either side.

overran CAR's eastern protected landscapes. Manovo-Gounda St. Floris, Bamingui-Bangoran, and André Felix National Parks and the landscape now managed as the Chinko Conservation Area were ravaged as herders set fires, spread disease, poisoned predators and opportunistically hunted. Bush tracks opened by the herders were quickly exploited by organised Darfuri poachers, creating new export pathways for illegal wildlife products and conflict minerals. Poaching increased exponentially, and within a few years the cluster was effectively emptied of its large mammal populations. Inundated, this influx also caused the all but complete collapse of eastern CAR's once thriving big-game hunting industry. As private operators and conservationists progressively abandoned the landscape, this effectively left most of the region without any form of organised land management regime, depriving local communities of conservation driven development opportunities.



Figure 11: Shifting patterns of transhumance have created new export routes for illegal products from protected areas in CAR to pastoral centres in Darfur. A truck carrying unregulated goods from CAR is unloaded in Tomat (South Darfur).

Facing an ecological disaster, and unable to control new patterns of transhumance by force, the CAR government increasingly turned to conservation NGOs to manage transhumance. Without the capacity or internal legitimacy needed to govern vast, remote protected areas NGOs increasingly fill a critical technical and financial gap. First with African Parks, and later with Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), PPPs were signed granting these NGOs management responsibilities for vast tracts of land in and around the Chinko Conservation Area and Bamingui-Bangoran respectively. With expanded rights and increased funding, these conservationists increasingly take a conciliatory approach rooted in aerial surveillance, and active efforts to engage and sensitise herders. While this has successfully helped wildlife recover in areas now kept cattle free, significant challenges remain. At a regional level transhumance remains unregulated, and as long as pastoral patterns are poorly understood conservation areas remain vulnerable to changing dynamics.

6.1 Key Statistics

- **Population:** The pastoral population in the Darfur cluster is roughly **20,000** Mbororo and **500,000** Arab herders. On the CAR side there are an additional **30,000** Yulu, Kara, Sara and Gulu pastoralists that generally do not take part in annual transhumance.
- Number of livestock:
 - In excess of **2 million** cattle, **3 million** small ruminants (sheep and goats), **50,000** camels, **300,000** donkeys and **100,000** horses.
- **Pastoral identities:** Amongst the Mbororo the most significant clans are **Wodaabe**, **Danedji**, **Uda**, **Dankoi**, **Afedjam**, **Hontorbe** and **Weila**. The most significant Arab tribes are **Ta'isha**, **Rizeigat**, **Misseriya**, and **Beni-Halba**. Non transhumant pastoralists are mainly **Yulu**, **Sara**, **Kara**, **Gula** and **Rungu**.
- **Languages:** **Chadian (Shuwa) Arabic** is universally used by all groups for inter-ethnic communication. Most Mbororo use **Fulfulde** for intra-ethnic communication, but some groups are now entirely Arabic speaking. **Sango** is rarely spoken amongst the Mbororo in the Darfur Cluster. In addition to

Arabic, Sango is the main language spoken by non-transhumant pastoral communities followed by Gula, Yulu and Rungu

- **Origin:** While the Arab and non-transhumant communities are largely indigenous to the cluster, most Mbororo trace their ancestral homeland to Chari-Baguirmi in Chad.
- **Legal status:** Most herders based in Sudan are legally Sudanese citizens. However, unlike most Arab groups, the Mbororo rarely possess valid identity documents. This is largely due to limited access to government services in Dar Fallata which has largely remained out of government control since 2003. Unlike in areas further, this does not pose major challenges for herders in the Darfur cluster as cross border movements are not regulated, and internal movements are generally governed by customary institutions. Very few if any Mbororo in the cluster hold Central African citizenship, while all Gula, Yulu, Kara, Sara and Rungu are recognised citizens of CAR. While Fulani initially were unable to obtain South Sudanese nationality, an unknown number have now been legalised.

6.2 Geographic overview and dynamics:

While the defining feature of the Darfur Cluster is an extremely pronounced form of long-distance transhumance, dynamics are shaped by three competing – yet highly interconnected – pastoral systems.

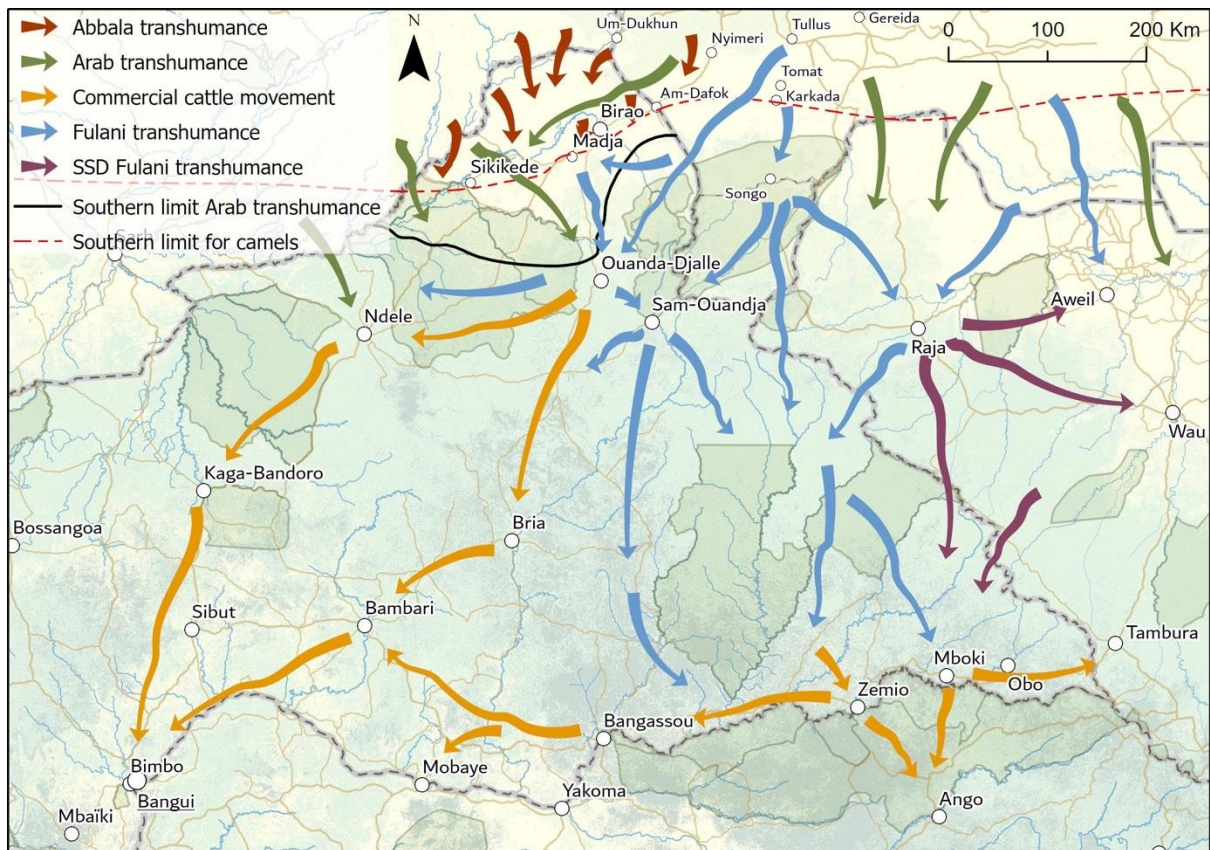


Figure 12: Current pastoral dynamics in the Darfur cluster.

6.2.1 Arab transhumance

The oldest pastoral sub-dynamic in the Darfur cluster is Arab transhumance. With seasonal movements that are generally mid-distance (300-500 km per year), it can be divided into two broad categories – *Baggara* and *Abbala* pastoralism.

Within the cluster, Arab transhumance is organised around four main zones of rainy season concentration that roughly correspond to the traditional *Dar* of each tribe (Figure 12). Centred on northern Vakaga and Rehad el-Birdi the Ta'isha practice the shortest annual displacements. While some remain in CAR year-round, most spend the rainy season around Rehad el-Birdi – the seat of the Ta'isha Sultanate. Those based permanently in CAR practice a localised form of nomadic agro-pastoralism²⁵ in the *Goz* north of Birao. During the dry season the move south and are joined Rehad el-Birdi based groups around Sikikede and Tiringoulou.

Based further north during the rainy season, the Misseriya and Bani-Halba practice short range transhumance, moving south as far as Tiringoulou between December and May. The southern Rizeigat are based further to the northwest during the rainy season but use similar dry season pastures in CAR as the Ta'isha, Bani-Halba and Misseriya. From their homeland around Ed-Daein, they move east passing through the market cities of Gereida and Tullus before regrouping south of Birao and um-Dafuq. A substantial number of southern Rizeigat also move into South Sudan during the dry season, venturing into areas around Aweil. The primary *Abbala* group in the Darfur cluster are the northern Rizeigat. From their rainy season pastures in West and North Darfur, they pass through the Misseriya and Bani-Halba *Dars* before entering northern Vakaga from um-Dukhun. However, unsuitable environmental conditions means that these herders are only able to bring their camels as far south as Mamoun in CAR.

²⁵ A livelihood revolving around a seasonally oriented shift between cultivation and herding. While many pastoralist groups also practice some agriculture, rainy season settlement patterns are primarily determined by agricultural rather than pastoral needs amongst these groups.

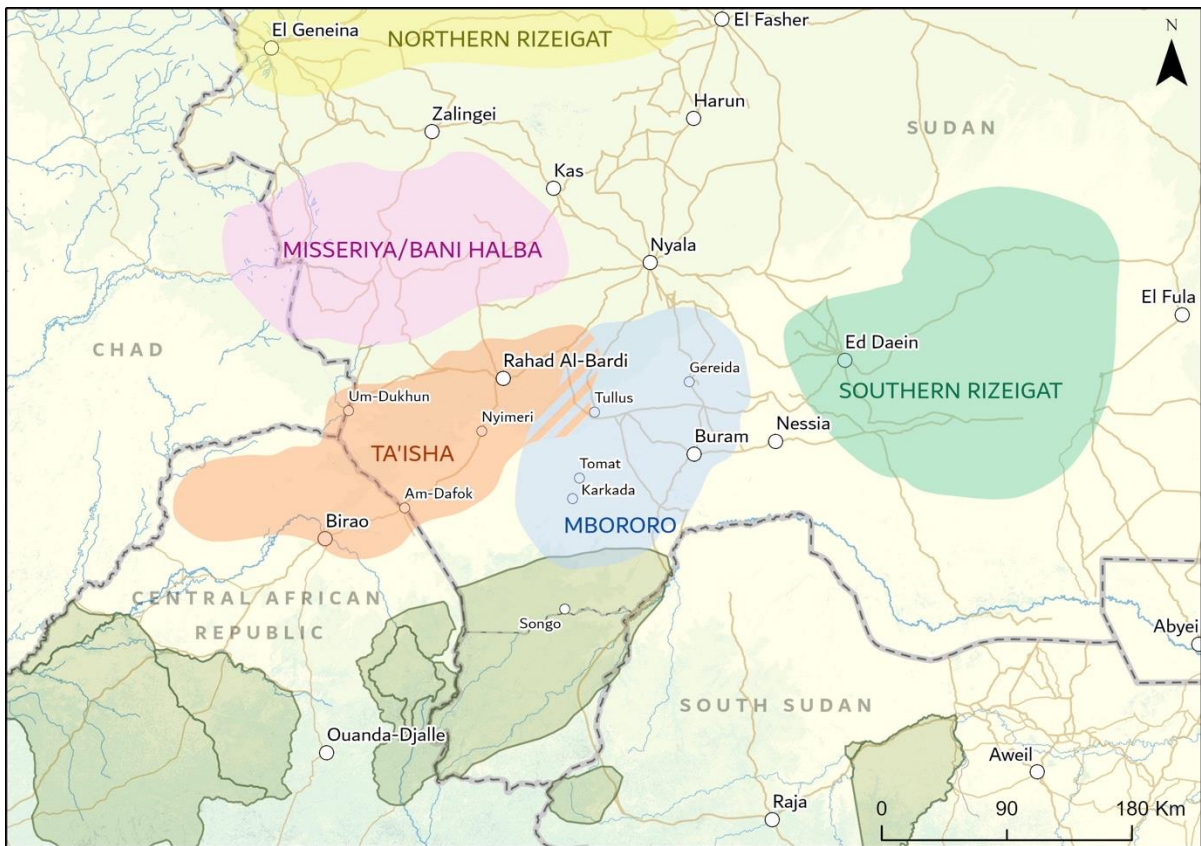


Figure 13: Primary wet season concentrations of key pastoral groups, roughly corresponding to Dar Rizeigat, Misseriya, Ta'isha and Fallata respectively

The two main reasons Arab pastoral groups are unable to spread further into CAR and South Sudan are their lack of *trypanosomiasis* resistant cattle and fierce opposition from armed Mbororo groups that occupy all suitable areas farther south. In addition to being more vulnerable to *trypanosomiasis*, the Arab cattle are less able to tolerate the sustained rapid marches needed to reach distant pastures like Filerie than the Mbororo *Bodedji* and *Danedji* cattle. Conflict is not currently a defining factor for Arab transhumance in Vakaga and South Darfur. Well-armed, organised and with substantial support from the Sudanese Government and associated militias (including the Janjaweed/RSF²⁶), Arab

²⁶ “Rapid Support Forces” a pro-government Sudanese militia largely composed of Janjaweed fighters.

herders usually prevail in inter-ethnic conflict here. For example, during intense episodes of conflict with the Mbororo around um-Dafuq and Gereida during the 2020/21 dry season the Ta'isha and Rizeigat were able to prevail respectively by displacing Mbororo herders with RSF support. However, farther south and beyond the reach of state support conflict with the Mbororo becomes a risk tribal leadership is unwilling to support.



Figure 14: Rizeigat militiamen pictured in Tomat, South Darfur. With a high level of political support, and access to superior weapons Arab pastoral groups significantly disrupt Mbororo transhumance throughout the Darfur Cluster during periodic bouts of conflict.

Although trade throughout the Darfur Cluster is dominated by Arab merchants (most from key pastoral tribes), Arab commercial networks are largely independent from core tribal movements.

6.2.2 Mbororo transhumance

In contrast to Arab transhumance, Mbororo dynamics are far more flexible and vulnerable to conflict. Concentrated around their core pastures in *Dar Fallata* south of Tullus, very few if any Mbororo²⁷ remain in CAR or South Sudan during the rainy season. Being the only time and place where Mbororo from the Darfur Cluster are ever gathered, this seasonal congregation serves a vital socio-economic function. As outlined above, prior to 2012 most Mbororo would then move into Western Bahr al-Ghazal during the dry season. Departing in mid-October, they would move south through Tomat and Songo through to Raja and as far as Wau in South Sudan. A second contingent moved south east through el-Fifi to pastures west of Aweil. At the end of both routes, they would engage in extensive trade with settled Ful'be and Indigenous populations.

Prior to South Sudanese independence this pattern was already coming under increasing pressure by expansion by locally dominant Dinka pastoral groups that are actively expanding around Wau and Aweil. In 2012 the South Sudanese Government denied ethnic Fulani people the right to South Sudanese citizenship and began taking concerted actions against this Muslim population widely perceived²⁸ to harbour loyalties with Khartoum. In response, the Sultan of Dar Fallata/Tullus issued a strong directive to avoid any transhumance across the newly established border. Despite this lack of coercive authority, this order was

²⁷ From the Darfur Cluster.

²⁸ There is little if any evidence of systematic cooperation between Mbororo groups and the Sudanese Government following the 2005 Naivasha Agreement.

widely headed by pastoral groups and the cluster shifted its focus towards CAR *en-masse*²⁹.

From *Dar Fallata* four informal corridors were entrenched (Figure 12). The first joined existing Arab routes moving through um-Dafuq and Birao towards Bamingui-Bangoran and N'délé in the east. While this route was initially popular for its easy access to re-supply points, it was effectively interrupted in 2020 by intense conflict with the Ta'isha around um-Dafuq. Despite attempts at mediation and intervention by the Sultans of Tullus and Rehad el-Birdi, Mbororo groups are no longer able to freely move along corridors used by Arab herders.

The majority of South Darfur's Mbororo currently use the three primary southern corridors branching off from Tomat and Songo. A significant number (including those who previously frequented um-Dafuq), enter CAR in the Yata-Ngaya protected area in mid-October. From here herders travel directly towards Ouanda-Djalle. From Ouanda-Djalle roughly half (mainly Dankoi) depart directly towards the Bamingui-Bangoran and Manovo-Gounda St Floris National Parks, while the rest continue to Sam-Ouandja bound for Filerie and Mboki.

However, the most significant route used by herders bound for south-eastern CAR passes from Songo through Kafia-Kingi reaching the mining town of Sam-Ouandja in early November. The last major market before a vast stretch of wilderness, herders commonly congregate here for some time. From Sam-

²⁹There are no credible reports of other actions taken by either the northern or southern governments to actively prevent transhumance across the new border between South Darfur and Western Bahr al-Ghazal.

Ouandja, most Wodaabe groups head west towards Yalinga, Nzacko and Bria while the Danedji, Uda and Afedjam largely push directly south towards Derbissaka. Although it is known that a significant number of Mbororo still cut through Western Bahr al-Ghazal to reach Sam-Ouandja, current routes on the South Sudanese side remain poorly understood. Similarly, while clans usually group together the relationship between individual clans and specific routes is not understood.

Herders travelling east from Ouanda-Djalle are joined by Chadian Mbororo groups, and generally spend the entire dry-season in and around Bamingui-Bangoran and Manovo-Gounda St. Floris National Parks trading primarily with N'délé. The relationship with Chadian Mbororo groups is generally cohesive. Despite significant efforts by WCS in keeping Bamingui-Bangoran cattle free, these have not substantially disrupted transhumance networks at a regional level. Similarly, while all Mbororo groups operating in the Darfur Cluster note a serious threat from armed groups, predation by groups such as the FPRC, MLCJ and RPRC does not substantially impact transhumance routes in the prefectures of Vakaga and Bamingui. In these areas conflict with Arab pastoral militias is a far more disruptive factor.

This is in stark contrast to the situation further south in Haute-Kotto and the Mbomou prefectures where conservation and armed groups are profoundly changing transhumance routes. In the absence of stable income from conflict minerals, armed groups (most notably the UPC and the FPRC faction led by Mahamat Salleh) in south eastern CAR rely almost exclusively on revenue from cattle rustling and the taxation of pastoralists. In response to worsening conflict surrounding CAR's 2020 presidential election, these groups both dramatically

increased the tax (from 2-3 cattle to 10-15)³⁰ and the intensity of roving patrols targeting herders in remote pastureland. Particularly around Yalinga, Nzacko and Mboki this results in sudden displacement as herders attempt to flee this threat. Not only does this heighten conflict with agricultural communities – fleeing herders show remarkably little regard for crop land – but it increases pressure on the Chinko Conservation Area. While Chinko management has effectively been able to keep its core conservation area free of cattle throughout the dry season, fleeing herders routinely attempt to make peripheral incursions in the southern sector.

The exclusion of cattle from Chinko's core conservation area has also had significant impacts on regular transhumant movements. Herders are forced to divert around the CCA and are denied access to sought after pastureland around the Ali Plains. Importantly, Chinko has also invertedly blocked the eastern extent of the so-called *Marche Bangui*. This major commercial artery used to be the primary pathway for commercial traders to bring cattle from Haut-Mbomou to Bria and the capital. In order to protect the park's key elephant zone Chinko management has diverted the corridor to the south through the peripheries of Rafai. However, due to ethno-religious conflict with local Anti-Balaka groups here, the southern route is largely untenable. As a result, opportunities to sell cattle in Haut-Mbomou are dramatically reduced, and trade now increasingly passes into and through the DRC.

³⁰ The final taxation amount was determined both by the size of each herd and their existing relationship with armed groups. Young herders with small herds (sub 50 heads of cattle) are often exempt of any tax.

6.3 Leadership structures:

6.3.1 Arab leadership structures

The leadership that underpins Arab transhumance in the Darfur cluster remain relatively unclear. Clan structures function similarly to the Mbororo with each being run by designated elders (*Sheikhs* rather than Ardo'en), although unlike amongst the Mbororo these are generally inherited positions. The most influential authorities relevant to Arab transhumance in the Darfur clusters are Ta'isha, Rizeigat and Misseriya Sultans located in Rehad el-Birdi, Dar Masalit and ed-Daein respectively. Although the Sultan of Rehad el-Birdi is Ta'isha, he appears to hold primary influence over all Arab transhumant groups operating in CAR and southern South Darfur. Smaller pastoral sub-groupings are led by lower ranking Sheikhs who together with the Sultans appear to exercise a higher degree of coercive force than Mbororo leaders.

In addition, the current Sultan of Birao Ahmat Mustafa plays a key leadership role. Although from the Kara community, the Sultan commands significant respect from all communities in Vakaga and plays a key role in land allocation and conflict resolution. All parties acknowledge that decrees handed down by the Sultan are widely respected, and that he carries significant coercive power throughout the entirety of Vakaga. This is credited by both agricultural and pastoral communities as the reason there is relatively little agro-pastoral conflict in the prefecture. When land use claims are brought before the Sultan, both Sharia and local customary law are used to deliver judgements. These judgments are binding, and it is rare for either party to break compliance. This is likely the result of direct communication and a series of agreements between the Sultanates of Birao, N'délé, Rehad el-Birdi and Tullus, which mean decisions

made by any of these parties are enforceable on both sides of the CAR-Sudan border. This is seen as a direct cause for why Sudanese Mbororo and Arab transhumants more closely follow directions issued by the Sultan, than those issued by leaders from within their own ethnic group, but whose authority has tighter geographic bounds.

Importantly for conservation groups, the Sultan also plays a major role in allocating land use for pastoralists. In accordance with Darfuri customary law, the Sultan can grant temporary land rights known as *Takol Goom* (“use and go”) to visiting transhumant groups. Notably, this was recently invoked to protect Wodaabe groups displaced by conflict with the Ta’isha around um-Dafuq in mid-2021. Unable to return to Darfur for fear of violence, the Sultan granted them protection and temporary pasture south east of Birao around Madja in exchange for *Zakat*. While Sultan Issa of Tullus (Dar Fallata) holds similar influence, his authority is generally only respected by the Mbororo. The role of Rizeigat and Masalit Sultans further afield is poorly understood, and the extent of their influence over pastoralism in the Darfur cluster is unknown.

6.3.2 Mbororo leadership

The Mbororo leadership structure in Vakaga and throughout the Darfur cluster is highly complex and remarkably different from the structures observed amongst the Central African and Congolese Fulani. Unlike in the DRC or Zemio/Mboki, leadership in the Darfur Cluster remains highly clan-based. The sole authority figure to supersede clan lines is Sultan Issa of Tullus. Although bearing the title “Sultan”, this position functions essentially like the traditional *Lamibe* more commonly seen in northern Cameroon, and Nigeria. The Sultan of

Tullus is the highest Fulani authority in western Sudan and liaises directly with the other relevant sultanates located in N'délé, Birao and Rehad el-Birdi. While much of Darfur's feudal land administration system was dismantled during the British colonial period, and the Sultan no longer possess the formal right to distribute long term land allocations (*Hakura*), the Sultan plays a major role in delineating transhumance and negotiating coexistence with neighbouring peoples as well as the government. Not only is the Sultan broadly aware of all localised movements, but he also directs where groups can graze during the wet season and establish more permanent routes³¹.

Below the Sultan are a network of Ardo'en as found elsewhere in Eastern Central Africa. However, these Ardo'en only exercise influence over a given clan and do not have clearly defined geographic zones of influence. Instead, in order to manage vast networks of highly dispersed family groups during the transhumance season, each clan will choose a senior Ardo to remain near key regional centres used by that clan. Upon the commencement of the transhumance season, this Ardo presents himself to the Mayor, FNEC president and other communal leaders. In this way he occupies a formal position as known interlink between the Mbororo and sedentary communities. His main function is the resolution of disputes, and although he is likely aware of the general location of his constituent/tributary herds (as determined by the payment of *Zakat*), he is unlikely to exert significant coercive force regarding the movement of individual groups. This phenomenon appears to be organised along loose geographic lines with one paramount Ardo for each clan located in Ouanda-Djalle, um-Dafuq, Birao, Madja and Sam-Ouandja (similar systems are possibly in place in Derbissaka, Filerie, Yalinga and Bria but this needs confirmation).

³¹ The extent to which the Sultan actively manages transhumance outside of Sudan requires further investigation, and direct communication.

There is no permanent Mbororo representative located in any of these cities during the dry season³².

6.4 Relationships with non-pastoral communities and authorities

Although conflict remains significant, the relationship between pastoral and agricultural groups is relatively positive throughout the Darfur Cluster, and is not characterised by the violence common in the DRC or central/western areas of CAR. Conflict between transhumant groups (most commonly along Arab-Fulani lines) is a far more significant influence on pastoral dynamics. This is likely caused by the ability of customary institutions to effectively regulate agro-pastoral conflict, and closer cultural ties between sedentary and pastoral groups.

The highest dispute settlement authorities in the cluster are the Sultans of Birao, Rehad el-Birdi and Tullus. As is the case throughout Eastern Central Africa, the dominant causes of tension between pastoral and sedentary communities are crop damage, land access, and criminality. Drawing on local tradition, customary dispute resolution frameworks are heavily influenced by Sharia³³. When cases involving crop damage are brought in front of the Sultan, damages are assessed by the *Majlis*³⁴, who in conjunction with the Sultan determine culpability and any applicable compensation. Issues involving land access are adjudicated in the same manner, and in both cases the Sultan will generally receive a portion of any restitution paid. A key factor underpinning the success of this system are

³² With the exception of Madja, but that is due to the current presence of a large number of displaced Wodaabe.

³³ Islamic law.

³⁴ Council of elders or parliament.

strong informal relations between each Sultan. This ensures that culprits cannot evade justice by simply moving across prefectural or national borders.

As a result, most common disputes are quickly and effectively resolved and particularly in northern Vakaga pastoralists maintain very close socio-economic ties with sedentary groups. Intermarriage between the two groups is common (particularly between the Kara, Sara and Ta'isha). Permanent villages often form symbiotic relationships with specific transhumant groups and establish stable commercial bonds that often last decades. Furthermore, the arrival of pastoralists is associated with improved market activity. Across the northern Darfur Cluster pastoralism thus is seen positively and the source of significant economic potential.

However, this customary dispute settlement system has several severe limitations. Under Central African and Sudanese law, serious offences committed in relation to pastoralism must be handled by the formal court system. Notable crimes that fall under this category are murder, cattle rustling and poaching. However, formal judicial systems remain exceptionally weak throughout the Darfur Cluster. Most market towns frequented by herders including Tomat, Ouanda-Djalle, Sam-Ouandja, and Derbissaka are completely beyond government control and lack police or any semblance of an organised court system. Instead, rebel movements like the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A), MLCJ³⁵, FPRC³⁶ and UPC respectively operate ad-hoc "courts" susceptible to abuse.

³⁵ Le Mouvement des Libérateurs Centrafricains pour la Justice

³⁶ Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique

In practice, this means that while routine disputes are quickly diffused, major incidents generally go unaddressed – leading to repeated, unpredictable outbreaks of violence. For example, while the Sultan's of Birao, Rehad al-Birdi and Tullus successfully resolve general land access problems between Arab and Mbororo herders, the suspected murder of a Ta'isha Sheikh in late 2020 by Mbororo herders caused escalating violence that within days had disrupted pastoral movements and left more than 150 dead.

It is also important to note that enforcement of customary judgements is mainly rooted in a cultural honour system. This means that it is largely unable to enforce decisions on groups that deliberately remain beyond the purview of justice, most notably the *Zaranguinas* and organised poachers. As a result, pastoralism is still widely considered a major source of generalised insecurity – particularly since most herders in the cluster are heavily armed.

Nevertheless, customary authority remains a significant source of stability, and inter-communal relations dramatically deteriorate where transhumance moves beyond the scope of any Sultanic authority. In the southern reaches of the Darfur cluster, particularly in Haute-Kotto and Haut-Mbomou no formal or customary institutions effectively mediate between transhumant groups and Indigenous sedentary communities. Unlike farther north, the two locally dominant armed groups (UPC and FPRC) show limited interest in regulating pastoralism. Their influence is almost exclusively limited to the aggressive exploitation of cattle as a source of untraceable conflict financing. Rather than

pacifying relationships, this increases tensions as herders are more likely to damage crops when fleeing heavy handed rebel “tax collectors”.

With a limited history of cross-cultural interaction, local communities struggle to differentiate between genuine pastoralists and armed groups. Not only are both groups armed, but rebel movements like the UPC recruit almost exclusively from the Fulani community. Intercommunal violence thus remains a significant disrupting factor in local pastoral dynamics. Most dramatically, these tensions resulted in the complete expulsion of Fulani from Obo and Rafai between 2017 and 2020.

6.5 Regional impacts

6.5.1 Mbomou-Uélé Cluster

Dynamics within the Darfur Cluster not only have a significant impact on Indigenous sedentary communities, but also on dynamics within the Mbomou-Uélé Cluster. The southern reaches of the Darfur Cluster overlap with key dry season pastures (particularly around Filerie and the Ali Plains) used by Central African Mbororo from Zemio and Mboki. While a shared cultural heritage and way of life mean conflict is rare between both groups of Fulani herders, increasing arrivals from Sudan have fundamentally disrupted pastoral routes throughout the Mbomou-Uélé Cluster.

Relatively more numerous, and better armed, Darfuri Mbororo rarely respect directions issued by the Central African Fulani leadership. Northern herders routinely disregard local limits set to preserve the ecological integrity of key pastures, and routinely occupy land allocated to local herders. In response, most Central African pastoralists began moving north 1-2 months earlier in the dry season, in an attempt to reach Filerie ahead of the Sudanese who usually begin arriving in December.

However, the most significant disruptive effects of the Darfur Cluster are rooted in animal health. *Trypanosomiasis* aside, better pastures, shorter seasonal displacements and remoteness had largely protected herders in the Mbomou-Uélé Cluster from most veterinary epidemics. Yet, beginning in 2018 arrivals from the north dramatically increased the incidence of devastating Bovine Tuberculosis (*Samo'ré*) and Anthrax outbreaks. Moving from densely populated rainy season pastures in Darfur where these diseases are far more common, northern herders invertedly brought large numbers of infected cattle into areas with limited resistance and access to veterinary treatment. Here outbreaks wracked havoc as they spread through densely stocked dry season pastures.

With limited mitigation options other than evacuation, this was the dominant factor in the development of new transhumance routes that now seasonally bring huge numbers of livestock into the DRC. Although herders based in Zemio and Mboki maintain close ties with Mbororo permanently located in the DRC, there was historically little transhumance across the Mbomou River and where cattle did cross the border this was almost exclusively for commercial reasons. Rather than grazing their cattle in Filerie and the Ali Plains for the duration of the dry season, these herders now move north (to Ali Plains/Filerie) one to two

months earlier (in early October), before moving south into the DRC from late December to May.

In addition to causing substantial livestock losses, this means that Haut-Mbomou's Mbororo have dramatically increased the complexity and distance of their seasonal movements. Not only has this worsened pastoral conflict in the DRC, but it dramatically increased pressure on the Bili-Uere *Domaine de Chasse*.

6.5.2 Protected Areas

Pastoral pressure from the Darfur Cluster is now the dominant threat to conservation in South Darfur and Eastern Central African Republic. Although transhumance is not a new phenomenon in much of the cluster, dramatic increases in the number of transhumant groups active in the cluster and changing pastoral routes are causing unprecedented damage to the region's natural landscapes. Pressure from the Darfur cluster has caused the complete collapse of eastern CAR's big-game hunting industry, and herders completely occupy critical protected areas including the UNESCO World Heritage Site - Manovo-Gounda St. Floris National Park.

The primary threat caused by transhumance from the Darfur Cluster is the physical intrusion of herders into protected areas. Darfuri Mbororo actively seek to enter protected areas for three reasons: to access relatively untouched pasture, escape violence and/or engage in the illegal wildlife trade. The landscapes favoured by herders for their reliable supply of water and fresh

fodder during the dry season, are also the most likely areas to hold substantial wildlife concentrations and thus fall within conservation areas. This creates a substantial inherent incentive for herders to seek out and occupy both protected areas and areas that otherwise hold key conservation interest. While this “pull factor” accounts for most illegal entries into conservation areas, violence is a significant secondary factor.

Conservation areas in Eastern Central Africa often occupy exceptionally remote parcels in a wider environment already characterised by difficult access. Away from civilisation, they offer a welcome respite from intercommunal conflict and predation from armed groups who are relatively less likely to move deep into the bush. Paradoxically, this effect is even stronger where reserves are well managed. It is widely acknowledged that effectively managed protected areas can become islands of peace in an otherwise restive context. For example, in Garamba National Park, effective ranger patrols and improved law enforcement not only reduced wildlife crime within the park, but also improved security in peripheral areas. Fear of rangers and LAB (*Lutte Anti-Braconage*)³⁷ enforcement mean armed groups generally avoid protected areas when not actively engaging in poaching. While overall this is immensely positive for both conservation and community development objectives, it can periodically incentivise illegal entry by herders. Around Chinko, numerous pastoral groups admit to following park boundaries as it gives them an increased sense of security. Similarly, illegal incursions increase whenever armed groups intensify “tax collection” and cattle rustling. This is both due to accidental incursions (pastoral groups rarely have a precise understanding of park boundaries and often enter accidentally while

³⁷ Anti-poaching activities.

regrouping near park borders), and deliberate attempts to hide within conservation areas.

Finally, the least common – but nonetheless significant – factor is entering a protected area with the primary intent to engage in illegal wildlife trafficking. Although genuine pastoral groups rarely make major changes to seasonal trajectories in order to poach, it is not uncommon for groups to spontaneously follow fresh tracks into a conservation area in order to make a spontaneous kill. While related, this phenomenon is distinct from professional poaching groups that cooperate with certain transhumant groups as outlined below. Importantly, even where herders are not directly engaged with poachers, their tracks facilitate access for professional poaching gangs, and provide them with opportunities to secure supplies in otherwise highly inaccessible locations.

Once within a protected area, substantial scientific evidence demonstrates a strong, direct correlation between the arrival of transhumant pastoralists and massive ecological damage. The largest impact is on large mammal populations. To protect their herds, Mbororo herders seek out and kill large predators using automatic firearms, poison and traditional weapons. In Chinko, increasing Mbororo intrusion from Darfur thus caused 95% and 80% declines in the population of Northern lions (*Panthera leo leo*) and African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) between 2012 and 2017. Although they are rarely targeted by herders, large herbivores face a range of indirect threats. The presence of cattle disrupts natural behaviour and increases competition for water and fodder during the dry season. While not intentional, the transmission of diseases from livestock to endangered mammal populations is of serious concern. With no veterinary controls, livestock entering protected areas from Darfur are significant vectors

of pathogens including Anthrax and BTB that can easily devastate wild animal³⁸ populations.

Another important way pastoral presence threatens conservation is through physical degradation caused to the environment. Although most of Eastern Central Africa's Sudano-Sahel remains remarkably intact, there are worrying signs that pastoralism is already having a negative impact. Heavy cattle traffic along well-defined routes leaves near-permanent scars on the landscape, as native plants are unable to thrive in compacted soils. Water points and sensitive riverways are impacted by erosion, and overgrazing can rapidly deplete large tracts of land. Herders continually set fires as they move through the landscape, both to clear pastures and to protect their herds from noxious insects. While the cumulative impacts of these fires and other pressures are poorly understood, areas affected by transhumance have degraded ecologies and a dramatically reduced ability to capture carbon, reducing their effectiveness against climate change.

While all these impacts are based on the effects of Darfuri transhumance on protected areas in CAR, similar effects are likely at play in parks like Boro, Cheikou and Numantina which fall within the South Sudanese extent of the Darfur Cluster. All the impacts outlined above are at play in South Darfur's sole conservation area, Radom National Park, albeit at a far higher intensity.

³⁸ Both diseases also present a major potential risk to human health throughout Eastern Central Africa.

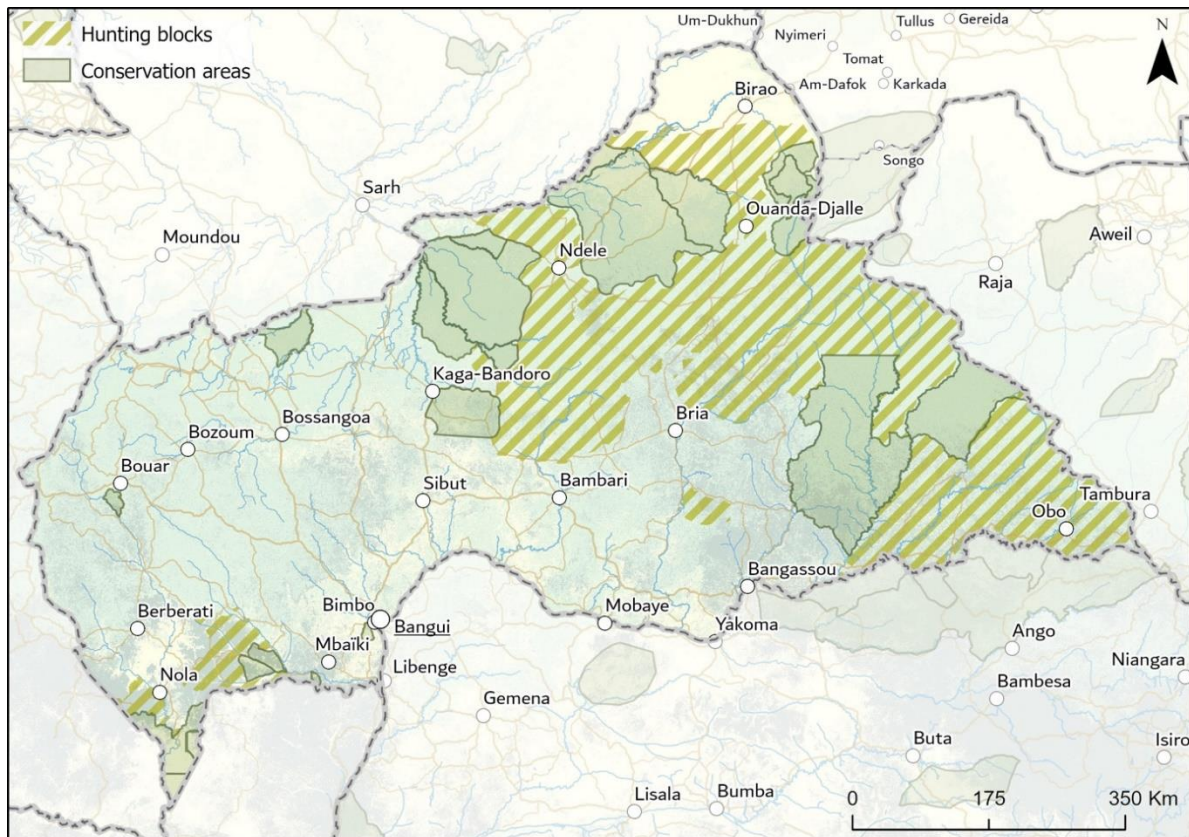


Figure 15: Protected areas and hunting areas in the Central African Republic.

In response to these threats, conservationists and other land managers (notably private big-game hunting outfits) historically relied on force. Until the late 1990s, armed patrols by rangers (or even individual hunters) alongside active surveillance by locally hired *pisteurs*³⁹ was successfully able to shield most of Sudan, and eastern CAR's protected areas from the worst impacts of transhumance. However, as the number of transhumant Mbororo herders in the southern reaches of the Darfur Cluster increased exponentially into the early 2010s, this quickly became untenable. Outnumbered and outgunned, land managers progressively abandoned the landscape in favour of the pastoralists.

³⁹ Trackers.

Nevertheless, the past five years have seen remarkable successes as conservationists began to trial new strategies to managed transhumance. Bolstered by the involvement of large international NGOs like African Parks and the WCS, these strategies are rooted in direct engagement with pastoral leaders and aerial surveillance. While sensitisation – the act of informing peripheral communities on the laws and penalties relevant to conservation areas – is not new, Chinko was the first park in the region to directly adapt methodologies to suit the unique challenge of transhumance. By recruiting unarmed sensitisation (“TANGO”) agents directly from the Fulani community and deploying them in the field throughout the dry season, park management was able to establish and expand a core cattle free area. In coordination with aerial surveillance, the TANGO teams intercept individual groups of pastoralists and guide them out of the park. Without abandoning the option of force (if herders repeatedly ignore or threaten the TANGO teams) this strategy is rooted in trust and genuine engagement. For example, when herders are encountered within park boundaries they are given active support to facilitate their movement into areas legally cleared for grazing. Rather than immediately responding with force, this has established a clear system of escalating responses culminating in the destruction of camps by helicopter or the deployment of armed rangers. In most cases, this clear warning system is respected and action beyond initial sensitisation is not needed. However, during periods where operational constraint preclude escalation, park management consistently notes spikes in non-compliance. While all respondents indicated severe dissatisfaction when camps were disrupted in this manner, they universally acknowledged that guidelines had been made clear. By providing herders multiple chances to correct their course, this system is widely perceived as fair under the assumption that immediate armed response remains an option legally available to park management.



While this strategy is remarkably effective and is also now being successfully employed in Bamingui-Bangoran, it is highly inefficient. Moving on foot through dense brush, TANGO teams can generally only sensitise pastoral groups one at a time, and struggle to cope when large multiple groups fan out over large areas. While aerial surveillance is critical to ensure patrols can rapidly intercept groups, the amount of flying needed to patrol large areas like Chinko is expensive, and an immense logistical challenge. With tens of thousands of herders active in the cluster, it is impossible to sensitise all groups individually.

Figure 16: Aerial capacity is the cornerstone of current pastoral management programs in eastern CAR.

Although intense efforts are made to collect information from herders, this strategy is crucially limited by its reactive nature. By intercepting herders at the terminus of their transhumant groups, conservationists are left to continually

play catch-up. Reluctant to speak on behalf of communities as a whole, non-Ardo herders rarely share detailed insight into routes and changing dynamics further afield. Without effective information collection systems further north, it is all but impossible for park management to anticipate developments and proactively respond before they begin to negatively affect protected areas.

6.6 Analysis and projections:

The impact of transhumance in the Darfur Cluster is likely to increase in the medium term. Driven by natural population growth and continued immigration, the number of Mbororo transhumant groups will continue to increase in the foreseeable future. Despite improved medical care in both CAR and Sudan, the birth rate amongst Darfur's Mbororo population remains extremely high⁴⁰. Based on similar developments amongst the Mbororo in West Africa, this trend is unlikely to abate in the short-term without extensive action to improve capacity and desires for family planning. In addition, the continued entrenchment of major pastoral routes and the ample availability of "open" land will continue to make CAR an attractive prospect for Mbororo immigration from other areas.

Although there is no reliable quantitative data on Mbororo population dynamics in Darfur, there is evidence of significant ongoing migration from both Chad and eastern Sudan. Population growth amongst agricultural communities and worsening tensions between Ethiopia and Sudan have dramatically reduced the per capita availability of pasture for the substantial Mbororo population based

⁴⁰ Due to high infant mortality the Fulani community traditionally valued high birth rates as a survival strategy to ensure the survival of family lineages and to ensure elders were well looked after.

in Blue Nile State. Although the extent and nature of ties between the communities there and South Darfur are unclear, border restrictions further east make Darfur the most feasible target for any eventual exodus.

Simultaneously, worsening environmental degradation and the increasing availability of trypanocides will incentivise Arab transhumant groups to move further south into CAR. Significant data suggests that overgrazing and climate change will progressively render much of Darfur unsuitable for pasture. Exacerbated by continued growth in total livestock numbers, this will put more pressure on Arab groups to move to the south. Degradation is a dominant factor in extending transhumance routes. However, with desert to the north the only option is to move south. Transhumance across the border with Chad and South Sudan remains dangerous, leaving CAR the easiest option. While *trypanosomiasis* was long the primary obstacle to southern Arab expansion, trypanocides are cheaper and more available than ever before. Although any southern march would extract a toll on their herds, that is likely a favourable option than the alternative. While it is difficult to predict the impact this will have on Mbororo transhumance, it will likely cause increased conflict and incentivise earlier movements to the south as they are generally less well-armed and willing to fight over pasture than Arab herders.

An additional potential source of worsening insecurity is the growing presence of Misseriya and Fulani armed groups. Beginning in early 2021, northern Vakaga saw a growing influx of Misseriya militiamen. Primarily destined for the gold mining areas around Sikikede, these poorly understood militias are likely composed of former or current Janjaweed groups. With no apparent political aspirations, this shift seems to have purely financial motivations. It is likely

correlated with the ongoing nationalisation and sale of important gold mines previously used as the key source of funding for Arab militias in Darfur. Although they have not directly begun targeting herders, it is unclear if this will change. If they begin seizing illegal gold and diamond mines around Sam-Ouandja, this will however have a significant impact on southern Mbororo transhumance routes.

A similar potential factor is the changing political geography of CAR. Increased pressure from the Central African Army and Russian forces in Ouaka and Haute-Kotto has pushed many UPC fighters north to areas around Sam-Ouandja. Unlike the FPRC, RPRC and MLCJ fighters that historically played a limited role in transhumance, the UPC are known to extensively target and disrupt pastoral dynamics further south. If similar activities are carried out in this area, it will likely make transhumance increasingly erratic. If Russian/FACA forces move to clear the remaining UPC strongholds between Zemio and Mboki this will likely cause substantial disruption. Not only would this lead increased tax pressure in the short run, but there is also a substantial risk that UPC fighters will follow clan ties and flee into the DRC. Furthermore, this would create a heightened likelihood of generalised violence against herders perceived by the FACA and Russian forces to harbour rebel loyalties. For example, in June 2021 Russian/FACA forces burned down the main pastoral/Fulani camp in Bambari displacing more than 8,500 people.

These factors will be exacerbated as neo-pastoralism becomes increasingly prevalent in the cluster. Characterised by large herds escorted by heavily armed pastoralists-for-hire, neo-pastoralism is associated with an increased willingness to violently oppose local authorities and conservation groups.

In conclusion, it appears likely that transhumance will not only remain the primary threat to conservation in eastern CAR, but that its impact will increase.

7. Mbomou-Uélé Cluster

Spanning the heavily forested borderlands lands of south-eastern CAR, northern DRC and western South Sudan, the Mbomou-Uélé cluster is the newest and southernmost pastoral settlement frontier. Pastoralists in the cluster are almost entirely Mbororo from the Uda clan, and effectively form a single population that spans both sides of the CAR/DRC border. With starkly different environmental and social constraints than areas further north, the cluster is rapidly developing a highly unique pastoral dynamic. Most strikingly, this includes the complete abandonment of seasonal transhumance by Mbororo groups permanently based in the DRC. With abundant fodder and water available year-round, transhumance has been replaced by frequent, highly localised displacements. Instead of resource availability the primary determinants of long-distance movement are inter-communal conflict, access to veterinary medicine and disease.

Pastoralists first gained a foothold in the cluster during the 1980s when the first groups of Uda herders from the *Kabidji*, *Aderadji*, *Acholi*, *Balinkoi*, and *Mamurudji* clans moved into the area around Zemio and Mboki from Ouaka and Basse-Kotto (Central African Republic). As immigration from Chad began to crowd and degrade Ouaka's pastures; authorities progressively encouraged the Mbororo to move into the country's relatively empty eastern *Zone d'Intérêt Cynégétique (ZIC)*⁴¹.

While this period already saw early pastoral attempts to enter DRC (then Zaïre), these were brutally repelled by Mobutu's *Forces Armées Zaïroises (FAZ)*. The first pioneering Mbororo groups to become permanently established in the DRC began to trickle across the border in the early 2000's when the Uélé provinces fell under the control of Jean Pierre Bemba's *Movement de Libération du Congo (MLC)* and Ugandan troops. As part of his deepening cooperation with CAR's then President Ange-Félix Patassé, Mbororo herders were for the first time allowed to enter the DRC in exchange for the payment of taxes⁴². Entering through Zemio, most initially settled in and around Ango before increasingly moving into Haut-Uélé and Tshopo over the

⁴¹ In the 1960s most of CAR's east was divided into a series of large hunting concessions collectively known as the ZIC.

⁴² The fact that taxes were paid is used by some of the DRC's earliest Mbororo settlers to support the claim that their presence in the country is legal.

coming decades. From their initial Congolese stronghold in Ango, conflict has recently shifted the pastoral centre of gravity to Niangara in Haut-Uélé.

The origin and composition of Fulani/Mbororo communities in Western Equatoria (South Sudan) remains far less clear. While some groups arrived in the area directly from CAR (travelling through Obo and Tambura), others are believed to have entered the area from the DRC around 2015. Although it is unknown how closely this community is linked to larger South Sudanese Fulani populations in Western and Northern Bahr al-Ghazal, ongoing socio-economic ties make it likely that some groups hold Darfuri rather than Chadian lineages. This is further supported by the fact that Fulani communities in Western Equatoria cooperate more closely with the Janjaweed and other Arab armed groups that use the Yambio area as a base for commercial poaching. However, these groups are known to fall under the political authority of Congolese Mbororo leaders based in Ango and Niangara. Although Arab trading communities play an important role in Mbomou-Uélé's pastoral dynamics, all pastoralists in the cluster are Mbororo.

While the Central African portion of the cluster was incorporated into the existing *Commune de l'Élevage* of Pombolo, no pastoral management system was ever formalised in the DRC. Trapped in a perpetual cycle of institutionalised repression, the lack of coherent policy and episodic inter-communal conflict is the dominant source of pastoral disorder in the Mbomou-Uélé Cluster.

The Mbomou-Uélé Cluster directly affects all three of the conservation areas that define the focus of this report – the Bili-Uere *Domaine de Chasse* (DC)⁴³ and Garamba National Park (GNP) in the DRC and the Chinko Conservation Area (CCA) in CAR. However, strikingly different environmental and social conditions have so far limited the direct impacts of Mbomou-Uélé pastoralism on conservation. Apart from Bili-Uere which remains largely unmanaged, local pastoralists have been unable or unwilling to make significant incursions into protected areas⁴⁴. However, pastoralism nevertheless remains a substantial potential threat to conservation in north eastern DRC and south eastern CAR.

7.1 Key statistics

- Population:
 - **CAR:** The Fulani/Mbororo population in Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou is **10,000-15,000** not including seasonal arrivals from Sudan. Most are based in Zemio, and Mboki.
 - **DRC:** Best estimates for the total Fulani/Mbororo population in the DRC place their numbers at roughly **5,000-10,000**. The majority are

⁴³ Hunting area

⁴⁴ In early 2021 there were also initial reports of incursions in the Maika Penge *Domaine de Chasse*.

based in and around Niangara Territory (Haute-Uélé) and Ango and Poko Territories (Bas-Uélé). Population is relatively stable, with core population slowly growing mainly driven by births rather than migration.

- **South Sudan:** There are likely less than 500-800 Fulani pastoralists in Western Equatoria. Most are concentrated south of Yambio just north of the Congolese border.
- Number of livestock:
 - **CAR:** While total livestock numbers are unknown estimations suggest 100,000-200,000 cattle, 50,000-80,000 sheep goats and donkeys, and <50 horses in Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou.
 - **DRC:** While total livestock numbers remain unknown, best estimates place the number somewhere around 50,000-100,000 cattle in Bas- and Haut-Uele. This is accompanied by an estimated 30,000-50,000 small livestock and <20 horses.
 - **South Sudan:** 5,000 – 10,000 cattle, approximately 2,000 small livestock
- Pastoral identities:
 - **CAR:** Mostly Uda, Danedji, Afedjam and Jaafun. Limited seasonal Wodaabe presence.
 - **DRC:** The vast majority (approx.85%+) of the Fulani present in the DRC belong to the Uda clan, with the remainder (in order of population size) being Wodaabe, Danedji, and Jaafun.
 - **South Sudan:** Fulani in southwestern South Sudan are almost exclusively Uda and Wodaabe Mbororo.

- **Language:** All Fulani in the region speak **Fulfulde** (mainly the Adamawa dialect), which is used for intra-ethnic communication. All in CAR, and older generations in the DRC speak **Sango**, while **Lingala** is spoken by all in the DRC. **Chadian Arabic** is widely used (particularly around Mboki). Younger generations in Bas-Uélé speak **PaZande**.
- **Origin:** Most Fulani in Congo (especially their *Uda* leadership) originate from the Dourbali in the region of Chari-Baguirmi, Chad. A large proportion spent significant periods of time in central and eastern CAR prior to entering the DRC, and often identify as Central African despite being of Chadian origin. Smaller numbers originate in CAR, Sudan, South Sudan, Cameroon and Nigeria (in descending order of precedence).
- **Legal status:**
 - **CAR:** Most Fulani/Mbororo based in the two Mbomou provinces are citizens of the Central African Republic and hold valid identity documents. While the status of Chadian/Arab pastoralists and related traders is unclear, they are not subject to persecution over the legality of their stay. Lack of state control in the region means there is limited relevance to legality of stay.
 - **DRC:** The overwhelming majority do not hold valid Congolese visas or identity documents. While some settled in cities like Kisangani may be here legally⁴⁵, most have no identification or proof of citizenships whatsoever. Small numbers maintain valid Chadian and Central African identity cards. Although some Fulani carry refugee documents purportedly issued by the UNHCR, there are generally fraudulent. Mbororo originating in Sudan and South Sudan rarely possess any state issued documents.
 - **South Sudan:** The status of Western Equatoria's Mbororo is unclear, but likely illegal. While some Fulani in South Sudan have obtained South Sudanese nationality, this is more prevalent in urban centres in the Darfur Cluster (notably Wau).

⁴⁵ While this was insinuated by local authorities, the legality of Kisangani's Fulani population was impossible to verify.

While all the above statistics are based on best estimates, the lack of reliable data remains a key impediment to the effective management of pastoralism in the Mbomou-Uélé Cluster. While several attempts have been made to survey the region's pastoral population in CAR and the DRC, none have been able to produce reliable results. In the CAR prolonged insecurity control by Armed groups⁴⁶ have made it impossible for national institutions like FNEC or ANDE and NGOs to conduct a census in the area. In the DRC attempts are not only hindered by physical access constraints, but also vehement opposition to any attempts to quantify populations or livestock numbers. While this is in part due to cultural reticence⁴⁷, it also stems from fears that these figures will be used to support the extortion or expulsion of the Fulani community. Although accurate information is a critical baseline for mutually beneficial management, these fears are at least partially validated by botched census attempts (such as the 2018 *Mbororo Jeton* scheme⁴⁸) which in fact were used against the community. In response Mbororo in the DRC make actively evade or undermine survey attempts. While this is usually non-violent, several members of census teams were killed in Ango Territory between 2018 and 2020. No known attempts have ever been made to survey the Fulani population in Western Equatoria in South Sudan.

In the absence of official data, the preceding figures are based on extensive fieldwork, assessments of the livestock market, and discussions with both local Indigenous and Fulani leaders.

7.2 Dynamics

Pastoral dynamics in the Mbomou-Uélé cluster can roughly be analysed as two distinct phases. During the initial establishment of pastoralism in the cluster, dynamics were primarily driven by internal conditions. However, since 2012 dynamics are substantially influenced by impacts from the Darfur Cluster.

As shown in Figure 6 there are four main types of routes used by pastoralists in the Mbomou-Uélé cluster: perennial, seasonal, commercial and illicit. Perennial routes are used year-round by family groups for both social and commercial reasons. They link population centres across the tri-border region with the remote pastures in the DRC that permanently host camps.

⁴⁶ Most notably the UPC.

⁴⁷ Livestock numbers are considered highly personal information by many Mbororo, who often in the superstition that sharing these figures causes misfortune and cattle deaths.

⁴⁸ In 2018 the provincial government of Haut-Uélé tasked the *Direction Generale des Migrations* (DGM) with conducting a census in exchange for which Fulani were given a form of ID card. Not only they routinely charged 20-30 times the official cost for these cards, but Fulani found not to be in possession of a *Jeton* were fined upwards of 100,000 CDF. Conversely, those in possession of a *Jeton* were fined an equivalent amount for the detention of a "fraudulent identity document". While the Haut-Uélé government denies provincial involvement, this is verified by significant evidence.

Seasonal routes on the other hand are only used during defined periods (usually October-May) to link dry- and wet-season pastures according to defined schedules of transhumance.

Unlike the first two categories, commercial and “illicit” routes are rarely used by family groups. Commercial routes are almost exclusively for the cattle trade, connecting local markets with major trading centres like Kisangani, Isiro and Bangui. In the CAR these routes are largely managed by Arab traders based in Bria and Birao, while ethnic Hema merchants play a leading role in the DRC. Livestock are escorted along these arteries by small groups of young Mbororo men. While illegal trade proliferates throughout the cluster, “illicit” routes are trails used primarily to move illegal commodities (e.g., weapons, diamonds, gold, wildlife products etc.) and fighters rather than genuine pastoral traffic.

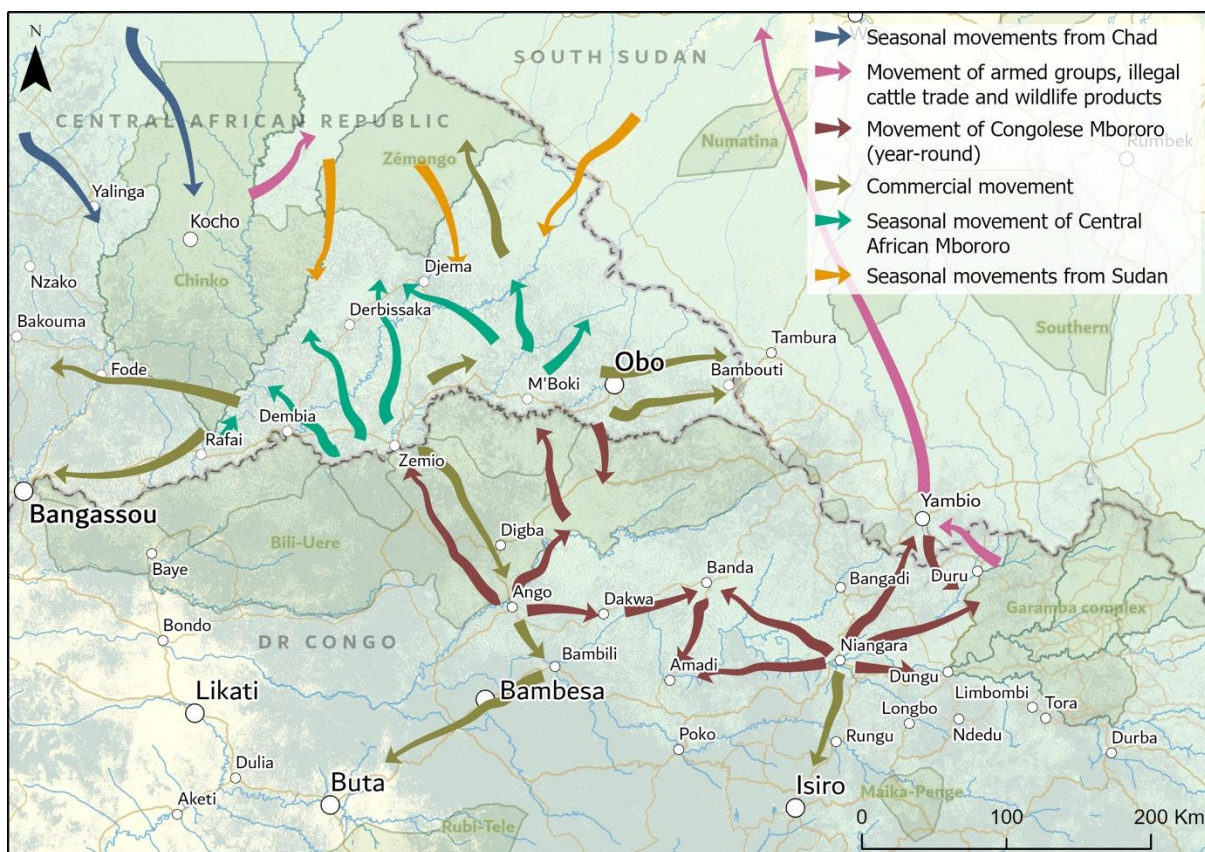


Figure 17: Pastoral dynamics in the Mbomou-Uélé cluster 1990-2012

While the Mbororo are renowned for traditionally practicing extreme forms of long-range transhumance, arrival in the Mbomou-Uélé landscape precipitated the development of localised seasonal migrations in CAR and the complete abandonment of seasonal transhumance in the DRC. The primary factor in this shift is environmental. Although long-range transhumance is deeply intertwined in Mbororo culture and was crucial to the establishment of pastoral communities in the Mbomou-Uélé landscape, it is only practiced out of necessity rather than inherent proclivity. While moving further and faster than rival pastoralists effectively reduces conflict during the lean dry months, it comes at a substantial financial and

social cost. Moving across vast stretches of poorly governed territory exposes herders to increased predation by armed groups and roving bandits. Even when groups can evade “taxation” and rustling, long marches extract a sombre toll. Compounded by fatigue, limited access to medication consistently causes substantial losses of human and animal life en-route. Although more and more young Mbororo are unsatisfied with the harshness of bush life, long distance transhumance remains a necessary evil in areas to the north. Move or face the desiccation of your herds and violence over dwindling resources. However, Mbomou-Uélé is home to a dramatically different set of environmental constraints than the Sahel.

In south-eastern CAR ample rainfall, and minimal resource competition meant newly arrived herders could dramatically cut the distance of their seasonal displacements, and between the 1980’s and 2012 movements were defined by a relatively stable cycle of *Petite Transhumance*. Central African Mbororo would spend much of the year grazing around Zemio, Mboki and Obo before moving north to an area of exceptional pasture known as *Filerie*⁴⁹ near Derbissaka (Figure 12). The stability of this system led to the establishment of sedentary Mbororo communities in each of these three key cities, and the development of a well-developed hierarchical structure. Mbororo also became highly integrated into local society, securing important elected positions in local administration.

From Zemio and Mboki the commercial trade of cattle followed three main routes. The *Marche Bangui* was the most significant, moving west from Zemio through what is now the southern extent of the Chinko Conservation Area and on towards Bria and the capital. Secondary routes move cattle into the DRC and South Sudan. While this period saw little to no transhumance across the Mbomou river and into the DRC, individual family groups entered Congo seeking new economic opportunities.

Surrounded by rainforest, the quality of pastureland in Congo’s Uélé provinces is so high and consistent, that it eliminates the need for any seasonal movement at all. With favourable environmental conditions across Bas- and Haut-Uélé, access to open markets and in particular veterinary medicines was the major determinant in early Mbororo settlement patterns. Most Congolese Mbororo permanently remain within a day’s walk from important market centres like Ango, Banda, Longbo and Niangara (see figure 7).

While most Mbororo in the area still move camp every 3-5 days⁵⁰, this is usually in search of clean water rather than grazing. These movements remain highly localised, with many never moving outside areas as small as 15 km² for more than 10 years. This unique form of highly restricted nomadism remains poorly understood, but the ability to eliminate the need for long seasonal movements is commonly cited as the key reason many Mbororo choose to remain in the DRC despite substantial governmental repression. Although there is limited information on

⁴⁹ Literally “excellent pasture”, Fillerie is considered by most Mbororo to be the best dry season pasture in all of CAR.

⁵⁰ The most southern populations around Longbo and Tora only move every 10-15 days.

the sustainability of prolonged grazing in restricted areas, Mbororo groups report that cows grow larger and give birth up to twice as often than in central CAR.

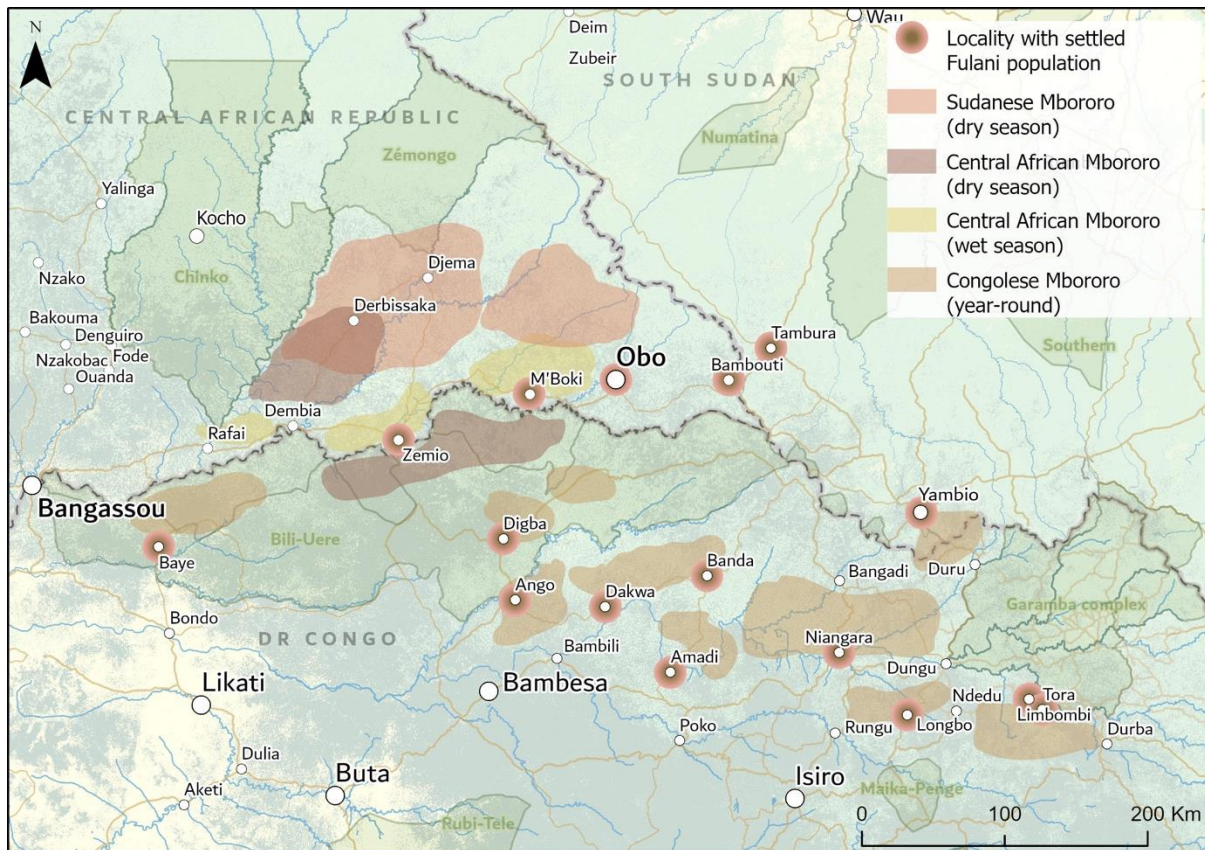


Figure 18: Geographic distribution of pastoralists throughout the Mbomou-Uélé cluster.

Rather than transhumance, this means long-distance pastoral movements in the DRC are almost exclusively caused by intercommunal conflict. In the absence of any dispute regulation mechanisms minor conflicts between pastoral and agricultural groups quickly and frequently escalate into violence. For example, the aftermath of 2015 anti-Mbororo riots in Ango forced many pastoralists to leave Bas-Uélé for Niangara. These erupted following the murder of a local Zande chief that was blamed on Mbororo bandits. Civil societies in both Ango and Dungu rallied around the case, calling on the general population to expel the Mbororo community back to CAR. When most Mbororo were either able to flee into the bush or seek protection from the FARDC, rioters turned on the Arab merchant community that supplied herders – killing their *Uema* or spiritual leader. This pattern is regularly repeated across the DRC, and in 2020-21 alone anti-Mbororo riots struck Banda, Niangara, Longbo and Amadi. In addition, the direct impact of violence, another significant cause of displacement is changing access to veterinary medicines. Deep within the *trypanosomiasis* zone, herders are unable to go more than a few months without key inoculations. While poor infrastructure causes generalised availability issues, veterinary and other products are increasingly weaponised by Indigenous communities and Civil Society groups. Particularly in Dungu, local leaders have been able to effectively

enforce a ban on the sale of any products to the Mbororo community, forcing further displacements.

As shown in Figure 8, this dynamic began to change dramatically in the face of increasing pressure from the Darfur Cluster to the north. Using the routes discussed (Darfur Cluster) Sudanese Mbororo now fully occupy the dry season pastureland around Derbissaka and Filerie between December and May. This massive arrival not only increases competition for water and fodder, but invariably leads to devastating outbreaks animal and human disease notably BTB, anthrax, *trypanosomiasis*, typhoid, and malaria.

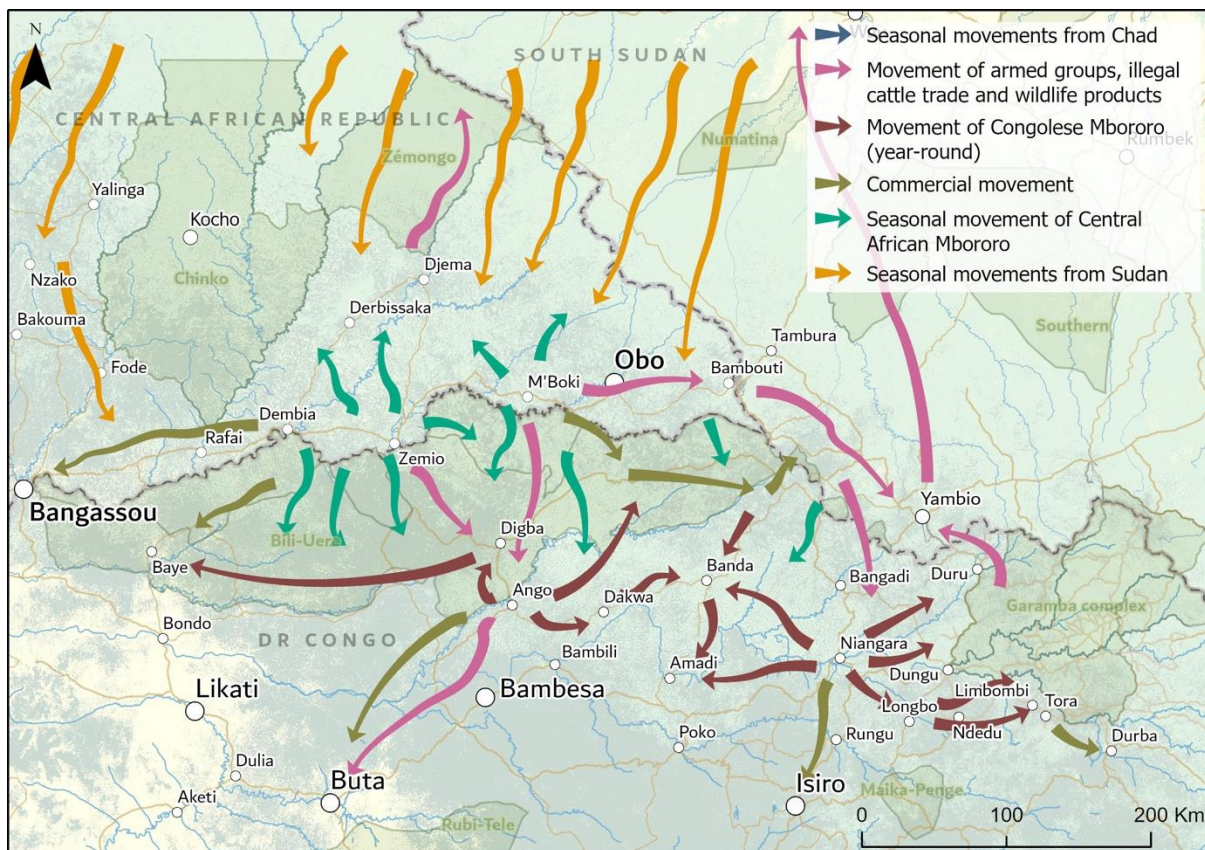


Figure 19: Current dynamics in the Mbomou-Uele cluster post 2012

These outbreaks usually peak when the cows are at maximum concentration between January and March and have a profound impact on dynamics within the Mbomou-Uélé Cluster. Desperate to protect their herds from these outbreaks, this pressure from Darfur has forced the development of new transhumance patterns. Overwhelmed, many herders based around Zémio and Mboki no longer move north during the dry season. Instead, they push south into the DRC occupying the entirety of Bili-Uere from October to June. While some herders Central African Mbororo still graze in Filerie, they depart one to two months earlier in attempt to beat the Sudanese arrival in December. Once the Sudanese arrive, they then join the rest of Zémio's pastoralists in Bas-Uélé in January. With very limited access to veterinary medicine, disease outbreaks appear to be a greater driving force in this exodus than direct competition over pastureland and water. For example, in 2021 unusually severe disease outbreaks forced

Zemio's pastoral population to stay in Congo for up to four months longer than anticipated (until the commencement of the following dry season). As a purely seasonal phenomenon, the presence of Central African Mbororo in the DRC must be analysed separately from the permanent presence of Congolese Mbororo, despite extensive interaction.

Additional factors affecting Mbomou-Uélé are changes in regional trade routes. Due to changing socioeconomic conditions, Sudanese traders have stopped buying cows in Haut-Mbomou, preferring to return with XAF franc which are then manipulated for profit on the black-market currency exchange. Furthermore, effective management in the CCA has largely disrupted the direct cattle trade along the *Marche Bangui*.

Inter-CAR trade routes were further disrupted by ethnic violence in Rafai, Bangassou and Obo – all of which are now avoided by the Mbororo in recent times. The main trade route now goes south into the DRC feeding the markets of Baye, Buta, Kisangani, Durba and Isiro. A large percentage of this trade is driven by the tax-collection efforts by Mboki based UPC, who collect large numbers of livestock which are rapidly sold on. With better market conditions, and easier access to hard currency (USD) this trade is almost entirely with the DRC. Cattle are collected in Zemio and Mboki and at the two major cattle crossing points along the Mbomou River at Tambourah and Kitessa. Efforts to evade UPC taxation are a further incentive for Mbororo herders to move their cows through the DRC even when transiting between two cities within CAR (e.g., Mboki and Bambouti).

Unlike in CAR, pressure from Darfur did not fundamentally change the character of pastoral movements in the DRC, although it has begun to shift the general geography. Fleeing 2020 outbreaks in Filerie, Central African herders invertedly brought infected cattle into the DRC. This caused secondary BTB outbreaks in Bas-Uélé and Niangara. In response, Congolese herders actively avoid areas of Bili-Uere frequented by new seasonal arrivals from CAR. Moving south-east this increased crowding around Niangara and is a dominant factor in rapid emigration towards more scarcely populated pastures along the south-western fringe of the Garamba National Park.

7.3 Leadership structure

Pastoral leadership structures in the Mbomou-Uélé cluster are remarkably different from both the Darfur Cluster, and traditional hierarchies found west of Bria. Unlike in clusters to the north, the Ardo'en constitute the highest authority. However, in the absence of a Sultan or Lamido the role of the Ardo'en has become more influential. Increasingly, powerful Ardo'en exercise influence rooted in territorial rather than clan-based authority.

Senior Fulani leadership positions throughout the cluster are exclusively held by members of the Uda clan. Leadership in CAR is highly centralised, and the highest ranking Ardo'en are based in Zemio and Mboki. Although nominally under the authority of the Pombolo *Commune de l'Élevage*, in practice they remain all but totally autonomous. The limit of their authority stretches from Rafaï to the South Sudanese border, and north from the Mbomou River past Derbissaka. Furthermore, their relative seniority gives Central Ardo'en substantial influence over pastoral dynamics in Bas-Uélé. While this mostly concerns new patterns of cross border transhumance post-2012, they also frequently mediate between the two increasingly competitive centres of Congolese Mbororo leadership.

The most influential Congolese Ardo is based in Ango and nominally exercises influence over Mbororo communities throughout the entire DRC. However, this is increasingly challenged by newer Ardo'en in Niangara. Mbororo leaders exercise no coercive authority and instead derive their influence from charisma, and voluntary loyalty signified through the payment of *Zakat*. As pastoral populations in Bas-Uélé – and particularly Ango – have declined in relation to those in Niangara, younger leaders in Haut-Uélé have rapidly increased their prestige and socio-economic influence. As Niangara continues to grow in precedence this trend is likely to continue. While, this tension is a source of instability, this rift has not yet caused significant disruptions to local pastoral dynamics.

Notably neither Central African nor Congolese Ardo'en have been able to effectively exercise authority over the Sudanese Mbororo who seasonally present in cluster. These Sudanese groups neither recognize nor pay *Zakat* to the Fulani leadership in Zemio or Mboki. Owing them no loyalty, they therefore routinely disobey directions including those aimed at minimising the incidence of disease.

7.4 Relationship with local authorities and communities

Despite intense periods of ethno-religious violence between 2012 and 2017, the relationship between the Mbororo and other local communities in the Central African portion of the Mbomou-Uélé Cluster are currently calm, and notably more positive than in the DRC. The Mbororo are very well integrated across Haut-Mbomou, with members of the pastoral community playing leading roles in Zemio and Mboki.

A strong connection exists between the Mbororo community and the large number of Sudanese/Chadian residents in both localities. While commerce in Zemio is heavily influenced by Sudanese traders, Mboki has to a large degree been fully subsumed by Sudanese and Chadian traders who dominate most aspects of socio-economic life. The Sudanese/Chadian population in Mboki is roughly 30% of the total, and Arabic rather than Sango has become the de-facto trade language even amongst local Zande communities.

In contrast, the relationship between Fulani and Indigenous Congolese communities are strained at best, and frequently result in localised violence. Local communities in both Uélé provinces commonly report that cattle destroy crops, and that individual Mbororo threaten and extort farmers. Mbororo groups are frequently heavily armed, and many communities accuse them of collaborating with armed groups (especially the LRA, and Central African ex-Seleka armed groups).

While there is limited evidence of genuine cooperation between pastoral groups and the LRA, the wide circulation of military weapons and the high value of cattle has caused an increased in banditry in areas frequented by the Mbororo. However, it is important to note that while Mbororo herders are doubtlessly implicated in several acts of violence, consistently more Fulani than local Congolese are killed. Mbororo herds are extensively targeted by well-armed bandits and cattle rustlers. Due to their legal status, Mbororo civilians have little recourse and most cases of anti-Mbororo violence go un-investigated.

The Fulani community is also frequently abused and extorted by rogue members of DRC state authorities including the Congolese Army (FARDC), Police (PNC) and Direction General de la Migration (DGM). This exacerbates tensions and raises the risk of organised reprisals. Another important point is that the Mbororo presence significantly benefits local traders. The relative wealth of Fulani pastoralists and the absence of Fulani subsistence agriculture has dramatically improved local market activity, especially in Niangara. Many communities, particularly in Isiro, Buta and Kisangani also benefit from the reduction in meat prices and the improved availability of affordable protein.

An important emerging relationship is with the Hema community. The most substantial Indigenous pastoral community in north-eastern DRC, the Hema have increasingly spread into Haut and Bas-Uélé from their homeland in Ituri. Historically the relationship between the Hema and Fulani was defined by conflict. A dominant political force in Ituri, lobbying on behalf of powerful Hema groups was a key factor in violent resistance to initial Mbororo settlement attempts in Ituri. However, while localised conflict remains an issue⁵¹ the two communities increasingly are forming a symbiotic relationship. In communities like Niangara and Ango, most Mbororo cattle is brought to market by Hema traders. As the Hema can access markets like Dungu that are closed to Mbororo traders, this increases market opportunities for the Fulani community. Similarly, the Hema are able to benefit by accessing larger cattle at lower prices. This mutually beneficial relationship is largely informal but is crucial for the ongoing entrenchment of the Fulani community by effectively allowing them to evade what practically amounts to a sanction's regime by local Congolese civil society groups.

7.5 Impact on other clusters

⁵¹ Notably in early 2021 conflict with a local Hema group lead to the near complete expulsion of Fulani communities from in and around the mining community of Longbo in Haut-Uélé.

The smallest, youngest and least significant of Eastern Central Africa's pastoral clusters, the Mbomou-Uélé Cluster currently has little impact on pastoralism in other areas. Although it is heavily influenced by the Darfur Cluster, these cause effect chains are remarkably unidirectional. A secondary impact that warrants further study are effects of Mbomou-Uélé dynamics on other potential pastoral clusters in the DRC, notably amongst the Hema of Ituri.

7.6 Impact on protected areas

Although pastoralism within the Mbomou-Uélé constitutes a significant potential threat to protected areas, effective management has so far been able to mitigate key impacts in parks with the exception of Bili-Uere. While the ways pastoralism can damage a landscape are the same here as discussed above, several specific causal mechanisms are unique to the Mbomou-Uélé cluster.



Figure 20: Heavy pastoral traffic can leave permanent scars on the landscape.

Notable Mbororo groups based within this cluster appear to have a higher propensity to cooperate directly with organised poaching. This is likely due both to general socio-economic pressures and closer ties to armed groups. Due to intense levels of government repression, youth unemployment amongst young males from pastoral communities is far higher in the DRC. Often without herds of their own, this leaves individuals vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups, primarily by the Fulani dominated UPC. While excessive taxation has made the UPC very unpopular amongst pastoralists in Haut-Mbomou, the same is not true in the DRC and South Sudan. Groups affiliated with the UPC are heavily engaged in elephant poaching

and the bushmeat trade in both Bili-Uere and the Garamba Complex. Lured by the prospect of income and a sense of belonging, the UPC recruits heavily from the disaffected Mbororo youth. Even in cases where the actual poaching is carried out by professional Arab hunters, the Mbororo play important roles as guides, and most illegal wildlife products including Ivory are exported along trade routes established by pastoralists and associated traders. As genuine pastoral camps are often used as launching pads for hunting expeditions, this makes and pastoral presence near protected areas a potential threat.

7.7 Analysis and projections

As outlined above in the previous chapter, pastoral activity in the southern extent of the Darfur is likely to increase in the short term, exacerbating its impact on dynamics in the Mbomou-Uélé landscape. This could mean the complete shift towards cross border transhumance by Central African Mbororo, if traditional routes north are deemed to pose an intolerable animal health risk. This will entrench pastoral presence in Bili-Uere. Associated poaching here will pose an existential threat to remanent elephant populations, which run the risk of local extinction. Similarly, several groups of commercial with known ties to pastoral groups are highly active in and around Garamba National Park targeting elephants and other large mammals.

While secondary movements by Sudanese herders in response to disease outbreaks around Filerie will continue to threaten it the south-eastern boundary of the ACC, it would also raise pressure on the rainy season pastures surround Zemio and Mboki. If these are unable to lay fallow during the dry season, this could quickly cause rapid degradation. In conjunction a worsening animal health situation this would incentivise permanent immigration into the DRC.

If the Fulani population were to dramatically increase, this would probably trigger a strong response from local authorities. This would likely include increased repressive measures triggering erratic movements through both Uélé provinces. Not only would this lead to worsening generalised violence and insecurity, but it would increase impacts on protected areas further afield like Garamba. It is important to note that due higher population densities, the risk of livestock-wildlife disease transmission is higher in the DRC than CAR.

Armed groups will continue to be a significant source of both instability and pressure on protected areas. A critical factor will be if the Mboki based UPC are directly challenged by the Central African Army and associated Russian factions. If the UPC are repulsed from their bases in Haut-Mbomou it is likely many will seek refuge in the DRC. This could result in increased cattle theft on Congolese territory, or further incentivise organised poaching. This could be avoided if the UPC were implicated in a genuine, effective disbarment process.

8. Conclusion

Pastoralism and conservation in Eastern Central Africa are at a critical junction set to determine the region's social, economic and environmental future. While conservation areas are increasingly well funded and managed, they must overcome several key challenges in order to effectively manage pastoralism.

It is increasingly clear that reactive management regimes rooted in force are unable to mitigate the threats posed by pastoralism to protected areas. Driven by powerful socio-environmental factors, pastoralists are too numerous, motivated and well-equipped to be coerced into compliance with management regimes that do not respect their basic needs. Instead, protected areas must establish sustainable, genuine working relationships rooted in mutual understanding.

The primary challenge thus remains developing a thorough understanding of pastoral dynamics. By understanding not just where pastoralists move, but why, conservationists can develop proactive management strategies that work for both sides. However, this understanding remains limited by access constraints, mistrust, and government opposition.

Access throughout eastern Central Africa remains exceptionally challenging, especially in areas frequented by pastoralists. Not only does physical access remain a challenge, but conflict often renders large areas temporarily off-limits. Compounded by regional scale and wide dispersal of important elements, this creates an imperative for improved cooperation between governments, NGO's and community actors. Conservation areas can no longer turn a blind eye to changes beyond their buffer zones, and all sides must continually consider developments that may occur thousands of kilometres away. To adequately address any phenomenon of this complexity requires substantial resources and a robust regional information sharing network.

After decades of abuses on all sides, mistrust remains pervasive. Building trust will be especially crucial to understanding sensitive issues like cattle numbers. It will be crucial for all sides to set clear expectations and facilitate open dialogue in a safe environment.

Importantly, this will also require governments to facilitate research and discourse surrounding pastoralism. While it remains within the prerogative of each regional government to make independent decisions regarding the regulation of pastoralism, neutral research should be the bedrock for policy development.

Crucially, all research suggests that the risks outlined above can be mitigated. Most pastoral groups active in the region remain highly receptive to sensitisation efforts, and most illegal entries into conservation areas are inadvertent. Improving sensitisation efforts will be crucial to the effective future management of pastoralism.

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Appendix 1: List of Mbororo clans and sub-clans found in eastern Central Africa

1. **Wodaabe:** Hadali, Da'amkoi, Geza'ida (Geza), Mandjari, Baberu, Tanira, Welankoi, Lo'ossi, Ngaduwa, Ngadji

2. **Danedji:** Parenkoi, Yayankoi, Garkwakoi, Maigarankoi, Birnankoi, Jonkankoi

3. **Afedjam:** Ika, Isso, Gadi'é, Yereruo

4. **Hontorbe:** Sankara, Ngedjankoi,

5. Weila

6. Dankoi

7. Ngarra

8. Uda: Kerdafali, Kissdi (Ti'isti), Soli, Yirlabi, Bobi, Bofolodi, Kabidji, Kadaradji, Nowrodji, Fere'be, Dahabado, Aderadji, Acholi, Balinkoi, Mamurudji

9. Wewebe

10. Jaafun

11. Ngadjawa (potentially Wodaabe sub-clan but poorly understood)

12. Jaroomanku'en (potentially a sub-clan)

13. Siwalbe (potentially a sub-clan)