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Joint field report CRS/DRC/FAO on the situation of transhumance following the 2013–2014 crisis in the Central African Republic

In the Central African Republic, joint field surveys on the situation of transhumance and a socioanthropological study of pastoral populations following the 2013–2014 crisis in the country have been carried out by the Catholic Relief Service, the Danish Refugee Council and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (17 November 2014 – 23 January 2015). The results show heterogeneity among farmers living in the Central African Republic and those crossing the country. The Fulani pastoralists constitute 90 percent of livestock breeders, the rest are the sedentary populations of agropastoralists, Arab traders or non-Peul Muslim and new farmers¹. As cattle is the Fulani's main source of food, their cattle's food needs influences their representation of space and justifies their permanent mobility. Compliance with a basic principle of respect for the rights of the community (Pulaaku) has previously allowed the Peul (Fulani) to avoid issues related to coexistence with other communities.

Since a few years, especially with the outbreak of the 2013–2014 crisis, relations between farmers and other indigenous communities, which were overall quite good until 2012 despite the traditional antagonism between farmers and pastoralists, have largely deteriorated resulting in various communal conflicts increasingly violent.

Initially scattered throughout the country, three-quarters of farmers currently in Central Africa are concentrated in the eastern part of the Central African Republic under the control of the ex-Séléka armed group. Farmers who once lived in the western and central parts of the country have fled towards the eastern and northeastern parts of the country as well as to neighboring countries. Given the persistent insecurity and threats from armed groups for transboundary transhumance, resuming transhumance movement is linked to the restoration of security in the Central African Republic.

Conflicts related to transhumance have become increasingly more violent. Strengthening prevention mechanisms, existing resolution methods and actions promoting intercommunity dialogue and social cohesion are necessary to contribute to reduce the risks of transhumance-related conflicts. The factors linked to the 2013–2014 crisis that has also affected indigenous and foreign nomadic herds are security, socio-economic, nutritional, animal health and access to pastoral resources.

This requires the urgent action of the Government of the Central African Republic and international partners in the short, medium and long term to curb these risks and encourage the return to normal life for farmers and other communities. It is therefore vital to promote intercommunity dialogue by creating local transhumance management committees and promoting awareness campaigns. Regarding the support to resilience, and the recovery of institutions and affected communities, there is an urgent need to set up vaccination campaigns, help farmers rebuild their herds and develop income generating activities for women and youth to restore their livelihoods and teach them to live together.

At the national level, there's an urgent need to improve the security situation for the movement of goods and people in order to support internal and cross-border movements of cattle through the implementation of the national platform of pastoralism and transhumance. At the regional level, structures should be put in place – or existing ones should be revitalized – to support or take over actions carried out at the local level. Finally, at the supranational level, a sub-regional network of farmers' organizations should be established to facilitate the circulation of information on transhumance, and restore joint commissions with neighboring countries to discuss the issues and their impact at regional level and develop cooperation between the various authorities.

¹ This new category of breeders mainly consists of managers from the public and private sectors, diamond collectors and traders that are capitalizing part of the revenues on livestock.