



# Options for a regional policy and legal framework for the sustainable management and use of endemic ruminant livestock in West Africa

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## Introduction

The West Africa economic space has become more integrated with the work of the West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Livestock rearing and trade have benefited from increased regional integration and countries are working in concert to tackle trade-limiting issues such as road harassments, trans-boundary animal diseases, and misaligned livestock policies. This brief identifies and recommends political and legal components that could guide a regional framework for the conservation and sustainable use of endemic ruminant livestock (ERL) in West Africa.

Studies show that endemic ruminant livestock such as Ndama cattle and Djallonke sheep and goats are a genetic treasure trove that when fully understood could play a decisive role in development strategies of animal husbandry in humid and sub-humid zones where trypanosomosis due to the tsetse fly makes livestock farming very difficult.

Under the Regional Project on Sustainable Management of Endemic Ruminant Livestock (PROGEBE), studies conducted in Guinea, Mali, Senegal, and Gambia have been validated through a participatory consultation involving key stakeholders to better understand the political and legal issues affecting the conservation and sustainable use of these particular breeds of livestock. From the analysis, we identified key points on management of genetic resources, animal health, natural resource management, and trade

that could contribute in the development of an effective and more targeted regional livestock policy that takes into account the specificity of the endemic ruminant livestock.

Specific recommendations on the conservation and sustainable use of endemic ruminant breeds and their habitats are made as a contribution to the development of a plan of action for livestock.

## Managing animal genetic resources

Most countries in the region have developed some form of national action plan on biological diversity. However the focus is on the environment, wildlife and their habitats. Domestic crops and livestock are not perceived to be in danger and the conservation and improvement of local livestock breeds with a clearly defined and validated plan of action is lacking in most countries. For countries that have fully-functional national action plans, significant failures are noted in their implementation. The resulting legal vacuum does not facilitate the decision about whom to involve and how to create a synergy between intervening actors in a way that could help maintain biodiversity. This heightens the threats of certain species and breeds disappearing, including endemic ruminants.

The consequences of these breakdowns in the system are uncontrolled breeding schemes, including the introduction of germplasm from foreign stock into local herds, leading to losses of the achievements of previous programs; poor



understanding of the genetic profiles of the national herds; and genetic dilution of local herds including endemic ruminant livestock. These difficulties can be corrected at the regional level by aligning regional and national policies to incorporate all genetic resources.

## Animal health

The animal health sector is in constant mutation with the privatization of veterinary services, followed by significant changes in animal health legislation, leading to the ratification of animal health accreditation mandates in Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Niger. As a result, the roles of private veterinarians are extended to preventive activities such as conducting vaccination campaigns through contracts with their respective governments, participating in epidemiological surveillance in collaboration with public veterinary services, and, in some cases, signing and delivering sanitary certificates. Difficulties of statutory, regulatory and financial orders have

affected the results expected from the privatization of veterinary services, which was once perceived as an alternative for a more efficient provision of veterinary services to smallholders. Indeed, the lack of clarity in the regulatory texts regarding the acquisition and distribution of drugs, dysfunction of veterinary clinics, and conflicts of interest between private and public veterinarians have had adverse effects on livestock health and productivity. This is especially true for endemic ruminants which are often reared in inaccessible areas where investment programs have been historically low. Not all countries in the region are at the same stage regarding the veterinary services that should be transferred to the private sector. Regional entities such as WAEMU could lead a reflection on a tripartite partnership (public, private, and community) that can contribute to the growth of private veterinary entrepreneurship, working in conjunction with a public sector for the benefit of the communities to improve health coverage and optimize investments.





## Trade

The absence of a marketing strategy focused on endemic ruminant is a major obstacle for the promotion of these breeds. The consequences are low consideration for these breeds in national market information systems, lack of financial incentives to motivate producers, and increased risks of genetic dilution resulting from uncontrolled cross-breeding. It is our view that a market information system that disseminates information on price, quality, and volume is a better avenue to help ERL producers as they would be more informed to exploit the particularity of the area where ERL are reared and increases their ability to time their decision to put stock on the market between July and October when Sahelian breeds are generally of poor quality. The regional economic organizations could lead the reflection on how to coordinate market information system across countries that disseminates the necessary information regarding markets and trading routes.

## Natural resource management

The major issues revolve around land access and the laws that govern it, especially around the issues of recognition and registration of customary rights. Inconsistency in legal texts and lack of consensus on customary law are major hindrance. The reasons for these difficulties are manifold and include: negligence of pastoral areas by virtue of their nesting into agricultural and forest space, the limited involvement of livestock keepers in the processes leading to the development of legal texts, and the complexity of customary law that regulates land tenure in some (mostly remote) areas. This results in reductions of grazing space for endemic breeds, land insecurity and conflicts between herders and crop growers. Overcoming these limitations requires a clear definition of what represents a pastoral zone in the law.

The process of decentralization and devolution of powers to local authorities is well underway in the region. However local authorities generally experience difficulties exercising their powers. The main reason may be related to inadequate human, institutional and financial resources, for the management of natural resources at local level. This leads to not realizing the full potential that the law provides for in situ conservation of endemic ruminant livestock.

The dual legal system characterized by the coexistence of customary and state law is seen as an inclusive way to decide matters related to the management of natural resources at the local level. But the legal status and modalities of developing local agreements are unclear in the eyes of state courts and the public, which is detrimental to their legal effectiveness and sustainability. This lack of a regulatory framework clarifying the legal status of local conventions leads to reduced space for endemic ruminants, causes conflicts between players, and complicates the implementation of local agreements for the exploitation and conservation of natural resources. Recognizing local conventions as part of the legal system in the region could help strengthen the capacity of organizations to promote sustainable institutions and enable them to perform roles assigned to them in the context of the decentralization policy. An important step to harmonize countries' pursuit of local governance related

to the conservation and use of natural resource is to develop in each country a law clarifying the legal status and modalities of local agreements in consultation with regional organizations such as ECOWAS and WAEMU. The widespread misunderstanding by most people of the legal texts that regulate access and use of resources is a major constraint in the implementation of a policy that seeks an equitable management and use of natural resources at the local level, especially on animal health, pastoralism, and grazing rights. The organization of campaigns to sensitize all stakeholders on the law using texts translated into national languages can help address the challenges of natural resource management that the misunderstanding of the texts causes.

The pastoral charter developed in Mali and Senegal, for instance, recognizes livestock rearing as an economic activity. However, most of its provisions remain unimplemented due to its low diffusion in smallholder environments. Similar observations can be made with respect to transhumance, which is still unregulated, both at the national and regional levels. Positive changes are happening, especially on the development of inter communal agreements and text on land use plans. These changes have the potential to establish an effective program for in situ conservation and securing of endemic ruminant livestock. However, it requires creating the conditions for the effective dissemination of the pastoral charter, strengthening the process of development of legal texts on land acquisition and use, disseminating the texts on transhumance, and making arrangements for the implementation of regional and bilateral agreements on transhumance.



## Conclusions

A soundly designed legal and policy framework well-understood by all stakeholders is paramount to achieve a sustainable management and use of endemic ruminant livestock and their habitats. Recognizing the specificity of these breeds and overcoming their vulnerability is important for their promotion. However it is through a better organization and an improved capacity for advocacy at national and regional levels that livestock keepers in general and ERL producers in particular would be better equipped to face market uncertainties, risks posed by disease outbreaks in the context of privatized veterinary services, and recurrent conflicts over access and use of natural resources.

Mohamadou Fadiga and Abdou Fall work for ILRI in its West Africa office.

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