



## **UNDP-led high-level methodology workshop for envisioning an alternative narrative on Farmers-Herders' Dynamics in Africa.**

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*“Shifting from the tragedy of the commons to the virtue of the commons”*

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### ***Colleagues and friends***

1. The subject we are reviewing during this workshop is certainly one of the most complex political and developmental issues the Sahel region and other parts in Africa , including the Horn & Central Africa, are facing today.
2. When one observes the various trends in the region one would see that the herders – farmers tension is one of the most exploding trends ; recent statistics of ACLED (*The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*) shows a rate of increase of registered tensions by 7 % per year since 2012, in the Sahel countries.
3. It is out of frustration of “no-effective global & durable solution in sight” that UN Senior Management has called for a critical strategic review of the way we are addressing the issue, using multiple & collective expertise, to pause, take stock, reflect, and guide, all actors, towards a sustainable exit out of the “tensions” we are seeing in the Africa region on the Herders – Farmers’ dynamics.
4. Very often when effective policy measures are difficult to design and implement, it is that our frame of analysis of the issue is inadequate or that there are blind spots in our frame of analysis. I would submit that on this very issue we are experiencing both shortcomings
5. The excellent sampling & review of the literature, submitted by UNDP for his workshop, illustrates that the various approaches on the issue have been disturbingly dichotomic; and yet we all know, especially those of us who are from and have been raised, nurtured, and bred in the Sahel communities, that the binary look at the herders - farmers conflict (I prefer dynamics) is disturbingly mystifying. My maternal grandmother is from a Fulani herders’ community and my maternal grandfather is from a Wolof farmers’ lineage; and I have, like many Sahelians, seen that fusional symbiosis as a wonderful mix; a mix that epitomizes the Sahel society of the future.

6. Hence for me, and for many observers, this means that we got our model of analysis utterly wrong; and then, no wonder our policy responses are inadequate.
7. The policy responses so far tend to follow an unilinear mode focusing singularly on addressing in a silo approach the so-called triggers of the tensions, i.e., climate dynamics, demographic dynamics, economic dynamics, governance dynamics, security dynamics. The literature rarely analyses the interplay of those dynamics; hence the policy responses tend to be framed from the very reductionist view of the “*tragedy of the commons*” which stipulates that when common resources are under stress, then actors tend to behave in a conflictual zero sum game; yet, as 2009 Nobel Economic Prize Elinor Ostrom eloquently put it, there is virtue in the Commons, even when the resources shrink, and we can optimally “*Govern the Commons*” (the title of his seminal book) through collective action and the right institutions especially institutions that give primacy to people’s agency and priority to local contexts.
8. I think that we must get out of the intellectual and policy frame of mind and trap of only seeing conflict wherever & whenever there is tension; and to also get the reflex of looking for the hidden solutions that a tension is often pregnant of.
9. Our usual template of analysis is then inherently ineffective; indeed, the so-called Occam Rule, i.e., the law of the simplest approach, does not work for such a complex phenomenon, as the herders and farmers dynamics
10. I also see a few blind spots in the way we have been reviewing and responding to the issue of herders and farmers dynamics.
  - i. First, the perspectives from local communities have been rarely sought in the various experts’ research as well as in the policy designs and responses. I am glad that the UN Executive Committee noticed that disturbing gap and requested that this be adjusted. I then salute the presence of knowledgeable actors from local communities, in this workshop, and who can help us close that blind spot.
  - ii. Second, and this is a terrible and frequent intellectual bias, not only on the Sahel and on the very issue we are reviewing, but also in general, when dealing with development and political related issues. We tend to focus our analysis just on evolving past trends, and we are not proactive enough to anticipate and build our policy responses on predictive and prospective analytics. In this particular situation, we may need to be more futuristic and look at a generational & and future evolution of the herders and farmers dynamics. For example, we may need to factor in the views of the young generations on how they see evolving those dynamics; and then adapt our responses proactively.
11. Hence, as suggested in our agenda, it is an absolute imperative to come with a *New Research Agenda*, through a whole of society lenses and a longer-term perspective. A *Research Agenda that is Action Oriented* and done with a *Sense of Urgency*. As time is of the essence.

12. Let's also build on the good work done so far. I would like in particular, to refer to the outcomes of the interregional workshop on good practices on farmers-herders dynamics in West and Central Africa, organized with the support of the Government of Cameroon, the Office of the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations system in Cameroon, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCDS); a workshop which took place last year on 29-30 September 2022 in Yaoundé and which highlighted good practices on prevention and management of conflicts, especially mechanisms for dialogue and early warning and supervision, as well as alternatives to traditional transhumance.
13. In that workshop, participants stressed the importance of inclusiveness of these mechanisms, including the involvement of women and young people, as well as adaptation to the local context.
14. The workshop also recommended the change of narrative around transhumance to fight against the stigmatization of certain communities; and stressed the importance of focusing the narrative on the economic potential of this activity instead of only highlighting the security challenges.
15. In conclusion, it is my conviction that reframing our approaches on this issue, by building on good practices, by looking at it from a whole of society angle by being guided by the context and through people's agency, by infusing a developmental perspective with a forward looking mind, we can optimally manage the herders – farmers dynamics; and show that we can turn what is often seen as a *“tragedy of the commons”* to the *“virtue of the commons”*.

I wish us a successful two-day meeting.

I Thank you!

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