

Effects of sedentarisation policies

In many African and Asian countries, traditional systems of transhumance are viewed as backward, and partly, the governments pursue very strict sedentarisation policies. Describing the example of Benin, our authors demonstrate what this can lead to.

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Sedentarisation refers to transitioning from nomadic or transhumant mobility to a more settled lifestyle. This has been a topic of interest in West Africa due to its impact on agricultural production, food security and poverty. Recently, West African governments have promoted several policies of livestock herd sedentarisation for several reasons. One of the underlying justifications is that both the colonial administration and the African governments regarded the pastoralist way of life as conflicting with farming and incompatible with the standard of civilised society. In a sadly recurring story, national governments often perceive the lifestyle of small foraging populations as impoverished, with cultural values detrimental to their welfare, leading to resettlement in new communities. However, it's essential to recognise that this process can have significant consequences, including the privatisation of resources and soil fertility decline in certain regions. The disappearance of specialised single agricultural activity farms and the emergence of integrated farms are also associated with sedentarisation. Overall, the motivations behind these policies are complex and multifaceted, involving economic, social and cultural considerations.

The case of Benin

In northern Benin, cattle farms face feed scarcity and conflicts in the management of pastoral resources, including land. This led to the adoption of the new pastoral code (Law n° 2018-20 of April 23rd, 2019) regulating this activity and opting for the sedentarisation of livestock. In 2021, Benin's Office of the High Commissioner for the Sedentarisation of Livestock Breeders began implementing a sedentarisation policy to "modernise" traditional transhumance practices among herders.

The policy aims to provide a "unique model of alternatives to transhumance" while gradually implementing sedentarisation. Transhumant pastoralists have settled in Benin, partly due to droughts in the 1970s and as a coping mechanism in response to changing political

A Dinka child with a zebu cow. Loss of traditional livelihoods and social identity is one of the negative aspects of sedentarisation policies.

Photo: Jörg Böhling



economy. The government explicitly supports this sedentarisation agenda, which is largely embraced by pastoralist Fulani communities. In Benin, sedentarisation policies have been implemented to address farmer-herder con-

flicts. Farmer-herder conflict and transhumance in Northern Benin are deep-rooted in tensions between communities because of agricultural and animal breeding activities practised in the same areas. Historically,