

## Policy pointers

**The Mali government** needs to prioritise policies for national reconciliation to unite south and north if the country is to have a future.

**Policies for building a** stronger, more resilient pastoral economy in the north of Mali could contribute to reconciliation and serve as a buffer to the threat of jihadists.

**Now that some level of** security has been achieved, the first priority should be policies to support a recapitalisation of pastoral areas, plus work on risk management and safety nets.

**Strict conditionality to** resumed aid flows will be needed, accompanied by close monitoring. A key condition should be progress in shifting investment in infrastructure and services across the country, to people and regions in need, and especially support to the pastoral economy.

## Ungovernable spaces? Rebuilding a resilient pastoral economy in Northern Mali

Much has been made of the 'ungoverned spaces' of the Sahara, impossible for government to police. While it is true that parts of the Sahara are difficult to patrol and manage, it is not all uninhabitable or uninhabited: some areas are home to pastoral nomads. But these areas also provide shelter for a growing band of jihadists. They share the mountains and Sahelian fringes and are a major cause of concern for the Mali government. To limit jihadist influence will require immediate strategies: concerted effort to reconcile southern Mali with the north, and new policies to rebuild the northern pastoral economy. This should be a regional approach, to include rebuilding links to southern Mali and to neighbouring countries. A stronger pastoral society, supported by a border force could control the potential jihadist threat and contribute to national reconciliation.

In the short term it is difficult to imagine that it will be easy to restore trust and mutual confidence between ethnic groups in the north, and between southern Mali and parts of the north. Even before the rebellion of early 2012 there was considerable scepticism among northerners about the intentions and reliability of the south, and many southerners were angry about perceived favouritism towards the north. In the long term, however, this reconciliation will have to take place if Mali is to have a future as one nation.

The work done in 2012 and 2013 by Humanitarian Dialogue, which brings selected people from different backgrounds together in neutral places and lets them discuss a range of difficult issues, is promising. In the context of this strategy, where people on both sides have committed crimes, there are mechanisms (such as the new National Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission launched in April 2013) to

address them, although the remit is difficult and highly sensitive.

### Rebuilding the northern pastoral economy

A viable, extensive and prosperous pastoral economy, spread to cover all the inhabitable spaces around the Sahara/Sahel edge, is the way forward. Long-standing connections to towns and villages across the north, and to irrigated and dryland farming communities along the River Niger, should be rebuilt. This needs commitment by government to invest in institutions, infrastructure and services, as has been done for example in northern Kenya. Governance of a new sort must be developed, appropriate to such a border area.

Building an economy that is adapted to the harsh and variable conditions of the Saharan edge will require a major effort. If nothing is done, an

## *A viable, extensive and prosperous pastoral economy is the way forward*

ad hoc pastoral economy will develop, diversifying into a variety of survival strategies such as smuggling. But it is unimaginable, that the Malian government could adequately defend its 3,000

kms of Saharan borders, to guard against this, even with foreign help. To do nothing would be to support the jihadists. One of the reasons the north fell so quickly to the initial assault in 2012 was because people felt

abandoned by the government in Bamako, services were deficient, and there was little investment compared with the rest of the country. This mistake must not be repeated.<sup>1</sup>

The alternative is to re-establish pastoralism on a more resilient basis, not only to respond to what pastoralists want, but also to create an economy that can cope better with risk and the vulnerabilities of life on the edge of the desert. Such an economy would be politically more stable, and thus provide a more effective barrier to jihadist intentions. It would not be, as in the past, the default activity, but a modern, efficient, productive Saharan livelihood system, contributing to the development of a successful modern Malian state. Because pastoral production in frontier areas of Mali is partly directed towards exports, a flourishing pastoral economy would also link livestock systems better to the markets and trade routes in southern Mali, as well as the economies of neighbouring countries, promoting further regional integration.

### **Who and where are the pastoralists of the Sahara and Northern Sahel?**

The pastoralists of the desert edge belong to several ethnic groups — Tuareg, Maures, Arabs, Fulani, Kunta, Rgaybat, Berabich and others — each with its own livelihood system, and customary governance rules and institutions. These form the network of primary users of the desert edge ecosystem.

The landscapes in question are the mountains and plains of the central Sahara and the Sahelian fringes: including the Adrar n lforas in northern Mali, the Ahaggar and Ajjer in Algeria, the Ayr in Niger and the Tibesti in Chad. These pastoral societies have been extensively researched (see for example the case of the Kel Adrar Tuareg in northern Mali the subjects of two substantial recent studies<sup>4,5</sup>).

The pastoralists share this space with other mainly urban and transient people, including oasis dwellers, traders, drivers, soldiers, customs officials, motor mechanics, smugglers, would-be illegal immigrants to Europe, holy men, money lenders, wildlife conservationists, local government officials, tour operators and tourists.<sup>6</sup>

### **Creating a resilience strategy**

DFID defines disaster resilience as “the ability of countries, communities and households to manage change, by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses ... without compromising their long-term prospects”.<sup>2</sup> There are two important points about this definition.

The first is that unpredictable variability is not only negative. We use resilience here to include systems that also respond positively to high variability. In the face of threats and opportunities, pastoral livelihood systems develop complex strategies that help to dampen bad years and make the most of good ones. These strategies need to be understood and supported by government policies and institutions. The thread running through the discourse around ‘resilience’ — the ability of ecosystems and individuals to recover from shocks — needs much more investigation to understand the mechanisms at work.<sup>3</sup>

The second point is to recognise that shocks affect members of the community differently. Communities are divided by many internal and external fracture lines, and shocks and stresses act on communities often already highly stratified, in which some are more vulnerable than others. Shocks are indeed among the most important forces dividing communities. So the outcome, in which cohesive communities bounce back from a threat because of their inherent resilience, is a simplistic picture of what actually happens.

This does not mean that the concept of resilience is redundant. Household reactions to stress such as drought or conflict are informed by the resources available and the strategies each household can adopt. There are winners and losers from resilience. The aim of policy should be to develop interventions appropriate to the resources and strategies available, creating a more level playing field between richer and poorer households, and providing resources to enable poorer or less skilled households to leave the pastoral economy and move to farming or urban centres, should they wish to do so.

Without resilience, it would be impossible for anybody to live in the Sahara/Sahel border area, and the situation is not likely to improve. Climate change will become an ever more important influence in the desert edge regions in the next two or three decades, bringing an increase in extremes, with more rain in wet years and less in dry. With resilience, new environments will open up, containing extensive natural resources not

available to others. The strategic mobility of livestock can maximise exploitation by enabling timely and selective access to ephemeral concentrations of nutrients. These characteristics of a pastoral economy equip it well to play a key economic role in a more resilient economy in the Sahara/Sahel area, offering a stronger basis for post-conflict reconstruction.

The main actions to achieve a resilience strategy can be taken from a well-known array of measures, appropriately sequenced.

**Recapitalise pastoral areas.** The capital endowment of pastoral areas was poor before the fighting and will be worse now. There needs to be investment in infrastructure, including roads, water sources, abattoirs, mobile phone masts, broadband, and health services for people and livestock. Markets are critical to the success of pastoral enterprises, and reconstruction of markets is necessary. Regional market strategies need to be explored, going both north to the Maghreb and south to the Sahel.

**Risk taking and risk management.** Herd mobility to make use of ephemeral concentrations of nutrients should be encouraged and the customary knowledge that makes such strategies feasible should be promoted and nurtured among herders. At the same time, there need to be institutions and safety nets to guarantee a minimum income in bad years. Policy should support creation of risk management strategies by herders and early warning systems.

**Safety nets.** There is now good experience of setting up safety nets in pastoral areas. An example is Oxfam's 2008 hunger safety nets programme in the four poorest, largely pastoral, districts in northern Kenya. Safety nets, via cash transfers, could play a key role in any highly variable area.

A second group of activities would include:

**Encourage diversification of household income streams.** This includes subsidies for public goods management and border force employment.

**Services.** Suitable services are needed, especially health and education. There is now good experience of how to deliver services to mobile people, and an appropriate strategy needs to be developed for northern Mali. Such a service will most likely be based on a combination of fixed and mobile units, with extensive use of trained local people.

### New ways to understand pastoralism

In the last 20 years, pastoral development theory and the understanding of pastoral ecosystems have been transformed. It is now understood that the unpredictable variability of the dry rangelands can actually be turned into a valuable resource for food production.<sup>7-10</sup>

This simple shift in perspective has placed these environments in an altogether different league. Past interventions that aimed to 'return' the ecosystem to some form of steady state misunderstood both the problem and the solution. The characteristic variability of the rangelands that had been fought at great cost as an obstacle, could, by following an alternative approach, be seen as a strength. Pastoral systems and strategies are now understood to harness unpredictable variability rather than struggle against it.<sup>11</sup>

Moving livestock strategically over the range in order to make the highest returns from ephemeral pockets of abundance enhances both productivity and resilience. The Saharan edge provides a place where this grazing strategy can be used for large-scale production, on condition that bad years are successfully managed. This is the task of building resilient land, markets and institutions.

**Microfinance.** Examples of delivering micro-finance products to pastoral households include risk insurance based on the state of vegetation, rainfall or animal mortality in Mongolia and Kenya. These would be relevant to northern Mali.

**Grazing management.** Policy should support mobility, strengthen access and use rights to natural resources, and support tracking strategies by herd managers.

**Build social capital.** Social capital becomes more important as environmental risk and uncertainty increase. A general requirement for operating a successful pastoral economy is the existence of social capital within the herding population and for the restoration of confidence between herders and government. Social capital is hard to create and easy to lose. Rebuilding this trust needs time, patience and resources on all sides.

### Strategies for benefiting from the good years and surviving the bad

The ability to make the most of good years and survive the bad year or series of years is the most important part of any strategy, and many of the individual components to achieve this are known. Pastoral strategies, for instance, include highly selective grazing, storing the high production of good years in rebuilding herd numbers and animal condition, smoothing out income highs and lows, extensive mobility and diversification of income and assets. All this can be achieved by a combination of actions: surface and underground

water retention works to store the surplus from good years, for instance, livestock insurance, and strengthening links with small and medium towns. There is an urgent research task to clarify the details of such a strategy, building on local knowledge and priorities.

Economic diversification provides one set of possibilities, although the options are restricted in the very dry areas. There are new kinds of diversification however. The full occupation of the inhabitable areas of the Saharo-Sahelian belt by pastoral households would create a new type of security in those areas. At present, adequate surveillance of Mali's 3,000 km Saharan frontier cannot be done by the Malian armed forces. The presence of herders in small numbers throughout the area would in itself ensure that jihadists would be unable to travel through or visit the zone without being recorded. This active participation in border security could be recognised by a new type of state payment to herders. This could be a subsidy, modelled on payments for ecosystem services, or the European Union landscape conservation subsidies, but paid to communities operating in the border lands, for observing and reporting on jihadist presence or movements with the border area.

One step further would be to form a border guard from northern areas, including ex-combatants, who would be employed in a new, national uniformed and armed military formation, whose relationship to the national army needs to be clearly defined (as envisaged in the Peace Agreement of 1992, the Pacte national, but never fully implemented). Based on their daily contacts with pastoral groups they would provide early warning of attempts by jihadists to cross the border or to occupy places in the north.

## Conclusions

Events in Mali in 2012 and 2013 revealed the shallow foundations of Malian democracy and the far reach of the corrupt shadow economy. A resumption of aid flows at a level similar to that

before the events of 2012 would simply resurrect channels of corrupt power and influence that have been withering for lack of funds. On the other hand, northern refugees in camps in neighbouring countries are anxious to return home. It seems inevitable that aid will start to flow again before new systems of governance have been identified and implemented, let alone put in place.

Strict conditionality to any resumed aid flows needs to be applied, accompanied by close monitoring. A key condition for continued aid disbursement should be progress in shifting investment in infrastructure and services across the country, to people and regions in need, north and south, and especially progress in rebuilding the pastoral economy.

It is important to get the pastoral economy back onto its feet as soon as possible, because of the leading place it occupies in the rural economy throughout the country and especially in the north. Re-establishing connections, mobility and trade between the different communities will help contribute to peace and prosperity across the region. It will be essential to pursue a strategy that builds resilience at the heart of pastoral development.

The problem of jihadist incursions into Mali can best be controlled by ensuring that a prosperous pastoral economy is firmly based in all the areas that jihadists use as bases, especially the Sahara/Sahel mountain areas. In the end, the rebuilding of Mali as a single functioning political entity will depend on effective reconciliation, the interests of different groups in building a common future, and the resources mobilised by all Malians to achieve this.

## Jeremy Swift and Saverio Krätli

Jeremy Swift, is an independent researcher and retired fellow from the Institute of Development Studies Saverio Krätli is an independent researcher and honorary editor of the journal *Nomadic Peoples*.

This briefing forms part of IIED's wider work on Mali.



## Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. We support some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making.

Contact:  
annabelle.powell@iied.org

80–86 Gray's Inn Road  
London, WC1X 8NH  
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399  
Fax: +44 (0)20 3514 9055  
www.iied.org

IIED welcome feedback via:  
@IIED and www.facebook.com/theiied

This research was part-funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the UK Government



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ag Youssef, I., Bouhlef, F., Marty, A., Swift, J. 2012. *Etude sur les Stratégies de Développement Economique et Social des Régions Nord du Mali (Tombouctou, Gao, Kidal)*. Présidence de la République, PSPSDN, Bamako / <sup>2</sup> DFID. 2011. *Defining Disaster Resilience: A DFID Approach Paper*. DFID, London / <sup>3</sup> Davies, J. 2007. *Total Economic Valuation of Kenyan Pastoralism*. WISP-IUCN, Nairobi. / <sup>4</sup> Boilley, P. 1999. *Les Tuaregs Kel Adagh. Dépendances et révoltes: du Soudan français au Mali contemporain*. Karthala, Paris. / <sup>5</sup> Lecocq, B. 2010. *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, competing nationalisms and Tuareg rebellions in northern Mali*. Brill, Leiden / <sup>6</sup> Scheele, J. 2012. *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional collectivity in the twentieth century*. Cambridge University Press. / <sup>7</sup> Behnke, R., I Scoones, C. Kerven (eds). 1993. *Range Ecology at Disequilibrium: New models of natural variability and pastoral adaptation in African savannahs*. Overseas Development Institute, London. / <sup>8</sup> Ellis J.E., Swift, D.M. 1988. Stability of African ecosystems: alternate paradigms and implications for development. *Journal of Range Management* 41(6), 450-459. / <sup>9</sup> Scoones, I. (ed.). 1994. *Living with Uncertainty: New directions in pastoral development in Africa*. Intermediate Technology, London. / <sup>10</sup> Westoby, M., Walker, B., Noy-Mir, I. 1989. Opportunistic Management of rangelands not at equilibrium. *Journal of Range Management* 42, 266-274 / <sup>11</sup> Krätli, S., Schareika, N. 2010. Living Off Uncertainty: The intelligent animal production of dryland pastoralists. *European Journal of Development Research* 22(5), 605-622.