The adaptability of stake-holders’ strategies in Mali’s meat-sector in relation to climate change and policies

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Livestock producers of the Malian Sahel are used to climate variability. They are impacted by climate change but at the same time the mobility of their herds allows them to seek other strategies in the search for watering holes and sufficient pasture to feed their livestock. During the long droughts which have hit the Sahel, a notable adaptive strategy has been to change the composition of the herds. However, nowadays livestock producers are not only having to deal with climate variability, but also a duel process that limits their mobility capability, and therefore increases their vulnerability. On the one hand, the areas cultivated are increasing at the expense of the natural vegetation available, causing the grazing areas to become restricted and fragmented. On the other hand, decentralization has led again to restricting access and the use of communal lands. Launched in 1996 in Mali, this process has not yet achieved its goals. Nevertheless, tools are available to help resolve the conflicts between agricultural and pastoral activities. A pastoral charter is available, and local agreements between users are possible. If implemented by the inhabitants of a given community, these tools focus especially on creating transit corridors for allowing transhumance. However, the political process in operation reinforces the vulnerability of the livestock producers in the context of marked climatic variability; they cannot fight against this variability as they did in the past. Also, it is not only the access conditions and the use of grazing lands which are changing. At the same time, urban markets are growing, especially those in the large towns nationwide, as well as outside of Mali on the coast. The livestock producers are thus aware of a market opening which can potentially improve their living conditions. Unfortunately, there appear to be two major stumbling blocks. If the opportunities for mobility are shrinking, the livestock producers must also try to lead their livestock into the reduced areas available for grazing. Fattening up then becomes a possible route for intensification. Livestock producers must also try to get the most from the increased urban demand for meat. The social construction of market access is one of the promising routes for allowing the poorest livestock producers to sell their animals under the best conditions, i.e. at the best price and right time. Our paper analyses the adaptability and the pro-activity of the stakeholders in the meat sector, as a response to the growing vulnerability of the livestock producers in the context of climate change and policies. Our paper is based on the research results obtained in the regions of Ségou and Niono in Mali, and then at a regional level, in terms of the links with the Senegalese markets.