

Land crisis and identity withdrawal in the Sub-Prefecture of Koumogo, Moyen-Chari Province in Chad

Professor Jean-Emet Nodem^{1*}, Mr. ALLARABAYE Joël², Mr. Francis DJIADINGAR DJIMOGUINA³

¹Lecturer-Researcher, Coordinator of the Doctoral Program in Sociology, University of Dschang/Cameroon.

²Lecturer-Researcher. University of Sarh

³Lecturer and researcher at the University of Moundou.

*Corresponding Author

Professor Jean-Emet Nodem

Lecturer-Researcher, Coordinator of the Doctoral Program in Sociology, University of Dschang/Cameroon.

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Abstract: *The subject of our research is: the land crisis and identity withdrawal in the sub-prefecture of Koumogo, Moyen-Chari province, Chad. The sub-prefecture of Koumogo is one of the administrative units of the department of Bragoto, Moyen-Chari province, Chad. Recurring conflicts related to natural resource management are causing tensions between different communities in this locality. The problem posed by this question is to what extent the land crisis contributes to reinforcing community identity in the Moyen-Chari Province in general and, more specifically, in the Koumogo Sub-Prefecture. The objective of this research is to analyze how land conflicts, exacerbated by population growth, agricultural expansion and land management, are accelerating the retreat into community identity. To obtain relevant data, we conducted semi-structured interviews, questionnaire surveys, observations and documentary analysis. The results of this research reveal the exclusion of traditional methods of regulation in our state institutions, thus accentuating the difficulties of collaboration between rural actors: indigenous, non-indigenous and foreign, leading to an ethnicization of misunderstandings related to land management. This reflection highlights the importance of rethinking inclusive land management, emphasizing the recognition of land ownership, including community participation, to prevent inter-community conflicts.*

Keywords: *land, identity, governance, conflicts, Koumogo, Moyen-Chari, Chad.*

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Introduction

Land issues play a significant role in understanding the social, economic, and political transformations of rural African communities, particularly in Chad, and especially in the Moyen-Chari province, but above all in the Koumogo sub-prefecture. In Africa, as in Chad, land is not only a factor of production, but also a symbolic and identity-defining asset, a vector of belonging and social legitimacy (Chauveau, 2006; Lavigne Delville, 2019).

In Chad, where more than 80% of the population depends directly on agriculture and livestock farming for their livelihoods, tensions surrounding access to and control of land have increased considerably in recent decades (Mahamat, 2018). In the Moyen-Chari province, this land pressure is explained by population

growth, the increasing sedentarization of herders, the expansion of cultivated land, and ecological degradation linked to climate change (Bissou, 2011).

The context of dwindling natural resources has led to an intensification of land-use conflicts between farmers and settled and transhumant herders. These often localized and recurring confrontations, which call upon allies, reveal that the land crisis goes beyond a simple economic issue; it strikes at the very foundations of collective identities and territorial belonging (Marty, 1993; Lund, 2008). Land thus becomes a stake in the struggle for recognition and power, where historical memories, ethnic rivalries, and battles for legitimacy crystallize.

Despite successive reforms¹ The Chadian legal framework remains characterized by a weak link between modern law, inspired by the colonial model, and local customary systems (Bamba and Lavigne Delville, 2019). The land code, poorly adapted to the realities of rural life, tends to marginalize community land management institutions, exacerbating feelings of exclusion and mistrust among groups. In the villages surveyed, this situation translates into a growing retreat into identity politics, where each community group seeks to secure its vital and symbolic space in the face of land insecurity and the weakness of the state.

Therefore, a major question arises: To what extent does the land crisis contribute to strengthening community identity dynamics in the Moyen-Chari province in general, and particularly in the Koumogo canton, Bragoto Department? This article seeks to understand how land transformations and public policies redefine the relationships between local social groups and influence contemporary forms of social withdrawal.

To answer this question, the analysis relies on socio-anthropological approaches, combining field observations, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, conducted in villages of the Koumogo sub-prefecture. The objective is to demonstrate that land tensions are not merely crises of access to land, but also crises of social and political recognition. Finally, the article proposes avenues for more inclusive land governance, capable of integrating customary rights, local practices, and national legal frameworks.

¹Law No. 25 of July 22, 1967, and its implementing decrees concerning the limitation of land rights to Titles 1, 2, and 3 constitute the legal basis for the management of both private and public lands. The Official Gazette of the Republic of Chad, dated August 15, 1967, through Article 1 of the Land Code; and the Constitution of the Fifth Republic of Chad of 2023.

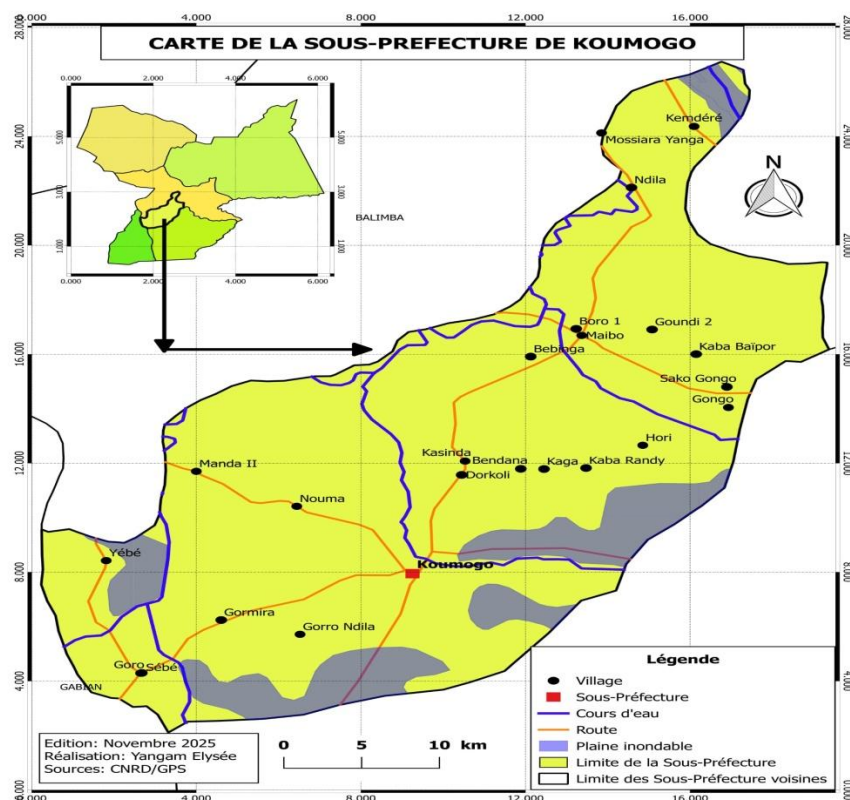
I. Presentation of the study areas: the Sub-Prefecture of Koumogo

The sub-prefecture of Koumogo is one of the five sub-prefectures recently created in the Department of Bragoto, alongside those of Goro, Boro, Sandana, and Magoumbo. However, it is the oldest administrative unit in this new territorial configuration, which gives it a certain institutional precedence and a structuring role in the local administrative organization.

Geographically, the Koumogo Sub-Prefecture is bordered to the northwest by the Balimba Sub-Prefecture, to the southeast by the Gabian Sub-Prefecture, and to the east by the Maro Sub-Prefecture. The territory is crossed by numerous seasonal streams, fed primarily by rainfall. These flows contribute to periodic flooding, which shapes the agro-ecological landscape and strongly influences local production methods, particularly lowland agriculture and the seasonal movement of livestock herders.

The area is characterized by a high population density, comprised of groups with diverse socio-economic profiles. It includes local farmers, as well as migrants from other provinces of Chad, drawn by the fertile land and agricultural opportunities. In addition to these populations, there are transhumant herders, moving seasonally in search of pasture, and settled herders with herds permanently established in the area. This multitude of actors, combined with increasing pressure on natural resources, explains the recurring conflicts between farmers and herders, which are often violent and sometimes fatal.

From a socio-institutional perspective, the Koumogo Sub-Prefecture is a space where customary norms, administrative regulations, and pastoral practices intersect, making governance particularly complex. The coexistence of multiple actors, with sometimes divergent interests, makes Koumogo an emblematic case of the contemporary challenges related to land and pastoral management in southern Chad.



II. Literature review and conceptual framework

a. Theoretical approaches to land and identity

Various studies on land issues in Africa have long emphasized the central role of land as an economic resource, but also as a symbol of social belonging and political power. According to Jean-Pierre Chauveau² Land constitutes a space where rights of use, access, and control are constantly negotiated between social actors with multiple claims to legitimacy. Land is therefore not a purely economic good, but a socially constructed good, at the intersection of the political and the symbolic.

Elinor Ostrom³ In his theory of common-pool resource governance, he demonstrated that natural resources can be sustainably managed by local institutions if these institutions are based on shared rules and a system of collective control. This approach contrasts with the centralizing vision of the state and values community-based self-regulation mechanisms.

Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu (1980) emphasizes that the relationship to the land is embedded in a collective habitus, where it becomes a form of symbolic capital, an instrument of distinction and social reproduction. In rural Chad, the land thus remains linked to memory, lineage identity, and the feeling of belonging to a territorial community. This identity-based link, when weakened by inappropriate policies or demographic pressure, can transform into communal withdrawal (Bayart, 1996).

These theoretical perspectives therefore invite us to analyze land not only as an economic object, but also as a social and identity space, where power relations, political legitimacy and logics of exclusion are played.

b. Previous research on identity withdrawal linked to land management in Chad and Central Africa

In Chad, several authors have documented land dynamics and the resulting tensions. Mahamat (2018) shows that the scarcity of arable land in the south of the country, particularly in the Moyen-Chari and Logone Oriental regions, is leading to an increase in conflicts between farmers and transhumant herders. These conflicts, often presented as economic, actually reflect a territorial identity crisis and growing mistrust between ethnic groups.

Ngaressem (2021) emphasizes that the weakness of local institutions and the politicization of traditional chieftaincies undermine land regulation. Land thus becomes an instrument of political patronage and social domination. These observations echo those of Doka (2010), who argues that land insecurity in the Sahel stems from the coexistence of several legal regimes—customary, Islamic, and state—which are often contradictory.

In the sub-region, the work of Lund (2008) and Lavigne Delville (2019) has shown that land reforms, inspired by Western models, struggle to take root in African contexts, where land legitimacy rests on social ties and customary rights. These authors

emphasize the normative plurality of African land regimes and the need for legal recognition of local institutions.

Thus, the literature highlights the existence of a mismatch between the law and social practices, a mismatch that fuels land tensions and, consequently, identity-based withdrawal. However, few studies have specifically examined the case of the Middle Chari region, where land issues take on a particularly pronounced dimension.

c. The Chadian legal and political framework: between modernization and disarticulation

Since the 1990s, Chad has been engaged in a process of modernizing its land tenure system. The adoption of the land code (law no. 24/PR/2014) and the pastoral code (law no. 14/PR/2014) aimed to harmonize existing land regimes and secure the rights of different users.

The land code aims to clarify the legal status of land and strengthen formal ownership through registration and land titles. It recognizes, to some extent, the legitimacy of customary practices, but makes their validity contingent upon their compatibility with the law. This provision, far from easing tensions, creates a normative hierarchy that marginalizes customary authorities and weakens the recognition of collective rights (Republic of Chad, 2014a).

The pastoral code, for its part, represents a major step forward in that it recognizes pastoral mobility as a legitimate way of life and advocates for the delimitation of transhumance corridors and grazing areas. However, its implementation remains uncertain due to the potential for offending the sensibilities of the agricultural community, a lack of political will, resistance from local elites and religious leaders, and insufficient consultation with local agricultural stakeholders. The tensions it has generated within the current political class reflect a fear of jeopardizing certain land privileges and local control over land (Ngaressem, 2021).

These texts, while ambitious in their content, remain largely ineffective. Their implementation is often hampered by a lack of resources, corruption, the incompetence of officials in charge of land matters, and the influence of unrecognized customary practices. Furthermore, they fail to address the complex realities of southern regions, such as the Moyen-Chari, where land dynamics are inextricably linked to ethnic identities and territorial memory.

d. Limitations, contributions and positioning of research

Existing literature and official texts offer several contributions:

- ✓ Recognition of the diversity of land tenure systems (customary, Islamic and state);
- ✓ The desire to secure the rights of livestock farmers and agricultural producers;
- ✓ Highlighting the role of local institutions in land regulation;

However, their limitations are obvious:

- ✓ Weak implementation of legal reforms;
- ✓ Marginalization of customary and community actors
- ✓ Lack of a real framework for consultation between farmers and livestock breeders;

²Jean-Pierre Chauveau. "Land issues, institutions for accessing resources and resource use". Les cahiers du pole foncier n° 15(2016).

³Elinor Ostrom: "The Governance of the Commons: Towards a New Approach to Natural Resources." Scientific review by Laurent Bachler, De Boeck edition, Planète en JEU series, French translation 2010, 31 pp. 24/10/2025. 09:49

- ✓ The injustice observed during the management of land conflicts;
- ✓ Lack of coordination between local authorities and decentralized state services.

Furthermore, most previous studies address land issues from an economic and legal perspective, without sufficient analysis of the identity-related and social consequences of land crises. This scientific gap justifies the relevance of a socio-anthropological approach, articulating land, governance, and identity within the specific context of the Middle Chari region.

III. Research Methodology

a. Methodological choice

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, to better understand the complexities of land and identity dynamics in the sub-prefecture of Koumogo, Moyen-Chari province. According to Creswel (2014), the mixed-methods approach allows for the comparison of strategic findings from discursive and contextual surveys with those from qualitative interviews, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the social phenomena under study.

This methodological choice is justified by the multidimensional nature of the land crisis in Chad, which combines legal, political, economic, and cultural aspects. The mixed-methods approach thus facilitates the analysis of local actors' perceptions, while also allowing for the quantification of trends within communities.

b. Field of study

The research area covers the Sub-Prefecture of Koumogo, located in the Province of Moyen-Chari in Southern Chad. This area constitutes a space of historical coexistence between farmers and transhumant herders, where land pressures have intensified over the last two decades, due to population growth, the scarcity of natural resources and the politicization of land (Mahamat, 2018; Ngaressem, 2021).

c. Population and sampling

Two categories of actors were targeted:

- ✓ Local authorities and institutional representatives, due to their roles in land and social regulation;
- ✓ Local populations are directly affected by land changes and their corollaries.

The qualitative sample consists of:

- ✓ 57 village chiefs from the Koumogo Sub-Prefecture;
- ✓ The province's religious leaders;
- ✓ The provincial delegate for agriculture;
- ✓ The provincial delegate for livestock and rural development;
- ✓ Heads of land registry services;
- ✓ The public prosecutor at the Sarh court
- ✓ As well as representatives from the Livestock Breeders Association and the Farmers Association of Moyen-Chari.

On the quantitative side, 257 individuals aged 18 and over, both men and women, were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire administered via Android tablet. The sampling was stratified to ensure balanced representation of the different social and professional categories (farmers, livestock breeders, traders, traditional authorities, young people, women).

d. Data collection techniques and tools

Two main instruments were used:

- ✓ The semi-structured interview, conducted in French and local languages (Sara, Chadian Arabic), was used to gather the discourses, representations, and experiences of key actors. These interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the causes, forms, and proliferation of identity-based withdrawal in land conflicts;
- ✓ The structured questionnaire, administered using an Android tablet, made it possible to collect quantitative data on land practices and inter-community relations.

The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, then transcribed and translated for analysis.

e. Data processing and analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires were processed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS (Package For the Social Sciences) software to identify major trends related to land distribution, types of conflict and identity perceptions.

The qualitative data, meanwhile, were processed through a thematic content analysis (Badin, 2013), making it possible to identify discursive regularities around three dimensions:

- ✓ The perception of the land as an identity and symbolic resource;
- ✓ The logics of power and land legitimization;
- ✓ The mechanisms of mediation and local resistance.

The combination of these two types of data made it possible to triangulate the results and strengthen the internal validity of the research (Jick, 1979).

f. Ethical considerations

In accordance with the main ethical principles of social science research, confidentiality and informed consent were guaranteed to all participants. Respondents were informed of the research objectives and the exclusively scientific use of the data collected.

g. Limitations of the methodology

Although the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches has allowed for a holistic view of the land crisis, some challenges remain, notably the reluctance of certain political actors to speak freely on land issues, as well as logistical constraints related to the accessibility of certain transhumance areas. These limitations, however, do not detract from the relevance of the findings.

IV. Results and discussion

a. Community perceptions of land and land rights

The results of the questionnaire show that nearly 72% of respondents consider land not only as a means of subsistence, but also as a symbol of community belonging. For a majority of those surveyed, land is not just an economic asset, but an ancestral heritage guaranteeing lineage continuity and social recognition. These perceptions are particularly strong among Indigenous farmers (83%), while among transhumant herders, land is seen more as a space for passage and mobility (Mahamat, 2018).

Interviews conducted with village chiefs in the Koumogo sub-prefecture reveal the profound symbolic link between the land and community identity. One of the village chiefs, questioned on this subject, strongly emphasized this ancestral and memorial dimension.

"The land belongs to our ancestors, it is ours. Several groups now want to claim it, especially ranchers who rely on political privileges. Some officials talk about environmental rights or say, the land belongs to the State. But how can they say that, when we live on the cemeteries of our ancestors? Who would dare go to their homes to claim their land?"

These words reflect the symbolic resistance of a community attached to its land as to a collective memory. Here, the land is perceived not only as a means of subsistence, but as a sacred entity, the repository of lineage and intangible heritage. This discourse, deeply rooted in local cosmology, challenges the modern legal view of land as belonging to the State (Republic of Chad, 2014 Land Code) and highlights a clash of legitimacy: between the historical legitimacy of the first occupant and the administrative legitimacy derived from the law.

This tension echoes Bourdieu's (1980) analysis of the "symbolic nature of space" and Chauveau's (2006) analysis of "customary rationality": possession is not merely a legal act, but a total social fact.⁴, engaging the memory, dignity and continuity of the group. In the case of the Sub-Prefecture of Koumogo, the reference to ancestors and tombs expresses an identity-based appropriation of the territory, opposed to the modern logic of individual and state property.

b. Multiple land tenure systems and conflicts of use

One of the dominant features of the Chadian land system is the coexistence of several normative regimes: customary law, Islamic law, modern state law, and more recently, the 2014 pastoral land code, which is the subject of this study. This plurality, instead of guaranteeing legal certainty, has often contributed to increasing tensions between the various users of land and natural resources.

The results of our investigations show that this overlapping of systems creates uncertainty in the definition of access and usage rights. Farmers generally refer to customary lineage rights, according to which the land belongs to the descendants of the first occupants, while herders rely on recent legislation (2014) recognizing pastoral mobility and the existence of transhumance corridors as areas of collective use. This opposition between deeply

rooted customary property rights and pastoral usage rights fosters recurring conflicts over land and livestock grazing areas.

According to data collected from 257 respondents, the destruction of fields by animals is the most frequent form of conflict (80%). This is followed by livestock theft by farmers (11%), disputes over access to pastures (6%), and finally, boundary disputes (3%). These figures reflect the intensity of conflictual interactions between sedentary and nomadic groups, in a context where the boundaries between agricultural and pastoral areas remain blurred.

One of the authorities, encountered in the city of Sarh, confirms this situation.

"The texts recognize both agricultural land and transhumance corridors, but on the ground, these boundaries do not exist. Everyone claims to be acting within their rights. This is what fuels the tensions" (interview, Sarh March 18, 2025).

Thus, the multiplicity of land tenure systems, lacking genuine institutional coordination, generates a conflictual legal pluralism. Actors mobilize the normative framework that best serves their immediate interests, a phenomenon Christian Lund (2011) describes as land law politics, where the law becomes an instrument of social strategy. This normative competition, in the absence of a coherent regulatory framework, weakens community cohesion and fuels mistrust among rural actors.

c. Identity withdrawal as a political consequence

One of the major findings of this article is the highlighting of identity-based withdrawal as a social response to the land crisis. Qualitative data shows that nearly 68% of participants now associate land conflicts with an opposition between ethnic and religious communities, whereas initially, they were more related to economic competition.

The collected testimonies reveal that rural communities perceive the loss of access to land as an attack on their collective dignity. Thus, farming groups invoke the legitimacy of the "first occupant," while herders assert their right to mobility and citizenship, enshrined respectively in the pastoral code (2014) and the constitution (2025). This confrontation, when exploited by local elites, leads to an identity-based discourse of closure: "the land belongs to us," reflecting a recomposition of social bonds around the land (Bayart, 1996; Ngaressem, 2021).

In a speech given by a religious leader on the ground: "When you touch the land, you touch the faith and the honor of the group. People withdraw because they are afraid of being erased."

These remarks illustrate how the land crisis becomes a vector of identity polarization, weakening inter-community coexistence. Land, once a common space, becomes a marker of social boundary (Bourdieu, 1980; Chauveau, 2006).

d. Land governance and the challenge of combination

According to Land Equitz, land governance⁵ This falls under the responsibility of state services, but also of municipal bodies and local authorities. The analysis highlights that land governance in the Moyen-Chari Province, particularly in the Koumogo Sub-Prefecture, reveals a profound asymmetry between pastoral and agricultural communities. While traditional chieftaincies seek to

⁴Marcel Mauss, *Essay on the Gift: Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, in *L'Année sociologique*, 1923-1924. Paris, PUF, 1950. P.274

⁵<http://www.foncier-develop.org>. August 9, 2024, 9:23 PM

preserve a framework for mediation based on historical legitimacy and territorial belonging, pastoral groups, often linked to political and administrative networks, exert increasing influence on conflict resolution.

In several documented cases, particularly during deadly conflicts involving livestock crossing fields, the dispute is resolved through the imposition of Dia (compensation in livestock or cash). However, contrary to its traditional meaning of symbolic and freely given reparation, Dia is increasingly becoming a coercion imposed on village communities. It is often initiated or demanded by representatives of pastoral communities, with the implicit support of certain local authorities (sub-prefects, prefects, law enforcement, local elected officials), to the detriment of the victims or their families.

Thus, the Dia is no longer merely an instrument of reconciliation, but a means of social and political domination, allowing for the neutralization of farmers' demands and the maintenance of a status quo favorable to nomadic groups. This practice reinforces the perception, widely shared among agricultural populations, of a two-tiered injustice: one customary, imposed by the power of alliances, and the other legal but inaccessible to marginalized rural populations. One of the canton chiefs clearly expresses this frustration:

"Where we come from, when someone dies, we are forced to remain silent. We are told to keep quiet to avoid problems. But we are always the ones who lose. The land belongs to our ancestors, but those who come from elsewhere are protected." (Interview, March 27, 2025)

The results suggest that land governance in Moyen-Chari needs to be rethought in a participatory logic, truly involving local actors in defining the rules of use and the mechanisms for preventing and resolving conflicts, for peaceful coexistence and benefit for all.

e. General discussion

The results of this research confirm the analyses of Chauveau and Ostrom (2006; 1990) according to which land management requires the recognition of local institutions and community arrangements. In the case of Moyen-Chari, the land crisis is less the product of a legal vacuum than of a clash between normative systems, where the State, chieftaincies, and communities defend different logics of legitimacy.

Identity withdrawal appears here as a defensive strategy in the face of loss of control over territory and normative uncertainty. This dynamic aligns with Bourdieu's work (198) on social space and the symbolic reproduction of power; control of land equates to control of social and identity capital.

Ultimately, the land crisis in Moyen-Chari reveals the need for a reconciliation between law and custom, through inclusive governance, recognizing both the cultural value of land and the modern requirements of modern security measures.

General Conclusion

The analysis of the land crisis in the sub-prefecture of Koumogo, in the heart of the Moyen-Chari province, highlights the deep tensions between legal systems, social actors, and community identities. The coexistence of customary law, the modern land code, and the pastoral code has generated a multiplicity of

competing norms, a source of ambiguity and conflicts over land use. This plurality, far from guaranteeing territorial cohesion, has instead weakened local balances by opening the door to selective appropriation of the law according to political and community power dynamics.

Field investigations reveal that the destruction of fields (80% of cases) and livestock theft from farmers (11%) are the most visible manifestations of this crisis, reflecting increasing competition for access to resources. Customary land management, traditionally based on mediation and redress, is being instrumentalized: the Dia, once a symbol of reconciliation between Arabs and other communities, is becoming a mechanism imposed by pastoral groups with political support. This shift reveals a politicization of land, where symbolic and material domination is exercised through the legitimization of unequal local practices.

Behind the land issue lies a crisis of territorial governance: the State, unable to arbitrate fairly, is losing its legitimacy in rural areas. This situation fuels identity-based withdrawal, community mistrust, and the erosion of rural solidarity. As Bourdieu (1981) points out, the social sphere becomes an arena of struggle where actors mobilize their symbolic and political capital to impose their legitimate vision of the rural world.

Policy and practical recommendations

- ✓ Strengthening land governance to enhance the complementarity between customary law and modern law, by clarifying local competencies (chiefdoms, courts, administrative delegations);
- ✓ To legally regulate transhumance, through participatory mapping of passage corridors, validated by agricultural and pastoral communities;
- ✓ Create local mixed land mediation committees (farmers, herders, customary and administrative authorities), endowed with legal authority recognized by the land code;
- ✓ Strengthening the State's presence in rural areas through local justice and legal training for traditional leaders, in order to avoid the political instrumentalization of practices like Dia;
- ✓ Promote civic education and community awareness to encourage peaceful coexistence and mutual recognition of usage rights.

Opening for future research

This study opens up several avenues for reflection. First, an interprovincial comparative analysis could be conducted to assess whether the land situation in the Moyen-Chari region reflects a national pattern of land politicization. Second, the relationship between pastoral migration, climate change, and identity shifts warrants further investigation. Finally, future research could focus on the gendered dimension of land conflicts, particularly the role of women in securing agricultural land and in social mediation.

In short, the land crisis in the Moyen-Chari Province is not merely a matter of legal disorder, but a crisis of legitimacy for the government. Resolving it requires an integrated approach that recognizes both local regulatory mechanisms and the need for an impartial and inclusive state. Only then can land, instead of being a source of division, once again become a lever for social cohesion and sustainable development.

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