

Abstract

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) recognises transhumance pastoralism as a beneficial livestock production system that can contribute to food security together with economic and political stability. Thus, the subregional bloc put together the ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance and supporting regulations to actualise these benefits. These policies seek to regulate transhumance pastoralism by ensuring that herd movements are along defined migratory corridors among member states. This review assesses the importance of transhumance pastoralism in West Africa, local and cross-border policies, and associated challenges, with emphasis on herder–farmer conflicts. It was realised that the movement of large numbers of livestock into rangelands (1) provides employment for many, and thus improves livelihoods; (2) improves productivity through high milk production and high fertility; (3) reduces moribund and combustible forage materials in the dry season; and (4) enhances seed dispersal, soil fertility and plant diversity on rangelands. This review shows that the ECOWAS cross-border transhumance protocols have led to infrastructural developments in some member states, but the partial enforcement of protocols has led to herder–farmer conflicts. We conclude that transhumance pastoralism and the regulatory policies have several benefits. However, to ensure policy compliance and avoid herder–farmer conflicts, the policies need to be reviewed and discernible gaps eliminated.