Wildlife Conservation Society

Connected Landscapes: Building a Resilient Sudano-Sahel Together with Pastoral Communities



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SECTION 01

Executive Summary

Our vision is a resilient Sudano-Sahel where biodiversity thrives in connected landscapes, supporting peaceful, healthy, resilient pastoralist systems, sedentary communities, and coexistence with protected areas, in respect of pastoralist traditions and rights.

This strategy is grounded in a single purpose: that the long-term integrity of vast, complex savannah mosaic landscapes is inseparable from the rights, resilience, and active partnership of the pastoralist and farming communities who depend upon them.

Pastoralism is a multi-dimensional livelihood and cultural way of life for millions of people across Africa — yet it is one of the continent's most misunderstood and undervalued systems. Today, climate change, insecurity, and the rapid expansion of agriculture are placing the whole system under strain, squeezing pastoralists and intact rangelands alike. As traditional grazing lands close off, herders are pushed into protected areas, putting them in direct conflict with conservation managers.

A newer force compounds this. In the absence of formal banking systems, cattle have become a primary store of value. Economic, political, and military elites now purchase large herds as an investment vehicle, hiring herders — often armed — to move them. This is not traditional pastoralism. It requires vast pasture, drives overgrazing, and marginalizes the traditional pastoralists who are frequently absorbed as hired help, maintaining their lifeways through other people's cattle. Because of the political connections of the owners, these herds enter protected areas with impunity. Elite herding demands a political economy response, not a livelihoods response — a distinction this strategy is built around.

The stakes are not abstract. The western black rhinoceros has been declared extinct in this region. The northern lion has suffered substantial range reductions. The savanna elephant has faced dramatic declines, with poaching driving local extinctions in parts of the Central African Republic and Chad. Livestock disease over the past decades is believed to be a main driver for the loss of hundreds of thousands of ungulates — which is why animal health is treated here as a conservation intervention, not a co-benefit.

The Wildlife Conservation Society operates in 139,121 km² across four countries — Nigeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and Chad — home to approximately 371,000 people. Nearly half of that land, some 44%, sits outside national parks: hunting concessions, reserves, buffer zones, and corridors. This is the contested space where pastoralism and conservation must find practical accommodation, and it is where this strategy concentrates. Our role is to connect the many actors already working across it — on peaceful transhumance, conflict mediation, livestock health — into a single landscape-scale system that secures both biodiversity and pastoral livelihoods.

The strategy works through five interdependent pillars, as a system. The corridor only works if communities trust the governance of the park. That trust depends on conflict resolution and livelihood alternatives. Both require a policy environment that recognizes pastoralist rights. Implementing this will require patience, flexibility, and sustained investment in building trust.

Without a robust, interdisciplinary framework to manage these movements and the expansion of economic investment in the livestock sector, the region faces a series of irreversible tipping points. We risk the permanent defaunation of Africa's last great wildernesses and the extinction of keystone species that cannot be recovered. Simultaneously, the unchecked degradation of rangelands and the expansion of agriculture will lead to the permanent displacement of Indigenous and local communities, as the ecological foundations of their livelihoods vanish. Once the connectivity between these protected areas is severed, the resulting fragmentation will represent a terminal loss for both the Sudano-Sahel's biodiversity and its traditional pastoralist cultures.

Across this vast landscape, home to northern lions, forest and savannah elephants, Kordofan giraffe, and hundreds of thousands of people, the question is no longer whether conservation and pastoralism can coexist. It is how.



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• SECTION 02

Landscapes of Uncertainty

The Sudano-Sahel is where the western black rhinoceros was declared extinct. It is where the northern lion has suffered substantial range reductions and continues to dwindle. It is where savanna elephant populations have faced dramatic declines, with habitat destruction and poaching driving local extinctions in parts of CAR, Nigeria, and Chad.

The Sudano-Sahel ecoregion forms a vast transitional landscape between the Sahara and the Guinean savannas — a mosaic of habitats from sparse, drought-adapted Acacia scrub to denser Sudanian woodlands and perennial grasslands, punctuated by seasonal wetlands. Preserving connectivity across it is vital for maintaining its ecological integrity. The wildlife, the pastoral livelihoods, and the 371,000 people who depend on these landscapes cannot thrive without that connectivity.

The communities who live here have done so alongside its wildlife for four centuries. Pastoralism and transhumance in this region have a documented history stretching from the 1600s, originating in West Africa, moving eastward to Nigeria and Chad, southward into CAR and Cameroon, and now pressing toward the Democratic Republic of Congo. Every movement was an adaptation. In the last 50 years, the landscape has changed faster than any adaptation can absorb.

Traditional pastoral lands have been captured, privatized, and sold to farmers and ranchers. Elite herders — investors deploying large herds as a form of capital investment, often through complex and influential ownership structures — have begun occupying the same shrinking territory. Climate change has made dry seasons longer and wet seasons more violent. And the protected areas meant to preserve what remained were drawn, in most cases, without the consent of the communities whose traditional lands they enclosed.

The result: herders pushed into parks that were designed to exclude them, by a system that offers them no legitimate alternative.

Flexibility is a cornerstone adaptation for pastoralists and will likely need to become one for conservation agencies too, particularly during droughts when the only available water sources are inside protected areas.

Recovery is possible

Despite immense pressures, critical wildlife hotspots persist. Kordofan giraffe have seen slow population increases through targeted conservation and habitat restoration. African wild dog populations have shown recovery in areas with active anti-poaching and monitoring. Certain lion populations have stabilized. These results demonstrate that wildlife recovery is possible with sustained conservation action.

Protected areas such as Bouba Ndjidda, alongside Chinko, Zakouma, and Idongo, anchor these recovery efforts as some of the last hotspots for rewilding the entire region. Bouba remains one of the last strongholds for the Derby eland, the world's largest antelope. Idongo-Ngassa is next in line, holding much of the wildlife needed to rewild the broader northern CAR landscape. These refuges, nestled within expansive and intact landscapes, remain essential for the large-scale ecological connectivity required in these dynamic ecosystems. The potential for recovery exists. It requires the right conditions.

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Core Landscapes



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Bamingui-Manovo

• 114,722 KM²

Bamingui-Bangoran and Manovo Gounda Saint Floris National Parks, the future Idongo-Ngassa Special Reserve, and the vast Northern CAR Corridor, together forming the largest landscape in which WCS operates. It is where the northern lion holds on in fragments. A 25-year management partnership between WCS and the CAR government provides WCS with strong operational control, but insecurity from armed groups and displacement shapes daily reality. Transhumants have moved into this landscape over the past 50 years, and the woody savanna mosaic connecting its parks are the critical arteries for both wildlife movement and pastoral livelihoods.

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CAMEROON | CHAD

Bénoué-Bouba Ndjidda-Sena Oura

• 25,257 KM² across multiple PAs

A transboundary complex spanning two countries: Bénoué and Bouba Ndjidda National Parks in Cameroon, Sena Oura National Park in Chad, and the hunting concessions and protected zones that connect them. This is the landscape where the strategy's transboundary architecture is most visible: the same transhumants cross these parks seasonally. Pastoral corridor development is already underway. The pressure of elite herding is most acute here, where an increasing number of investors place unprecedented demands on critical rangelands and agricultural expansion alter historic grazing pathways outside of the protected areas.

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NIGERIA

Yankari

• 2,244 KM²

One of the last viable populations of savanna elephants in West Africa. A single reserve surrounded by expanding agriculture and growing human populations. A management partnership with the Bauchi State government gives WCS a direct governance role. The strategy here focuses on securing the park while building community partnerships that extend conservation influence beyond its boundaries.

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CAMEROON

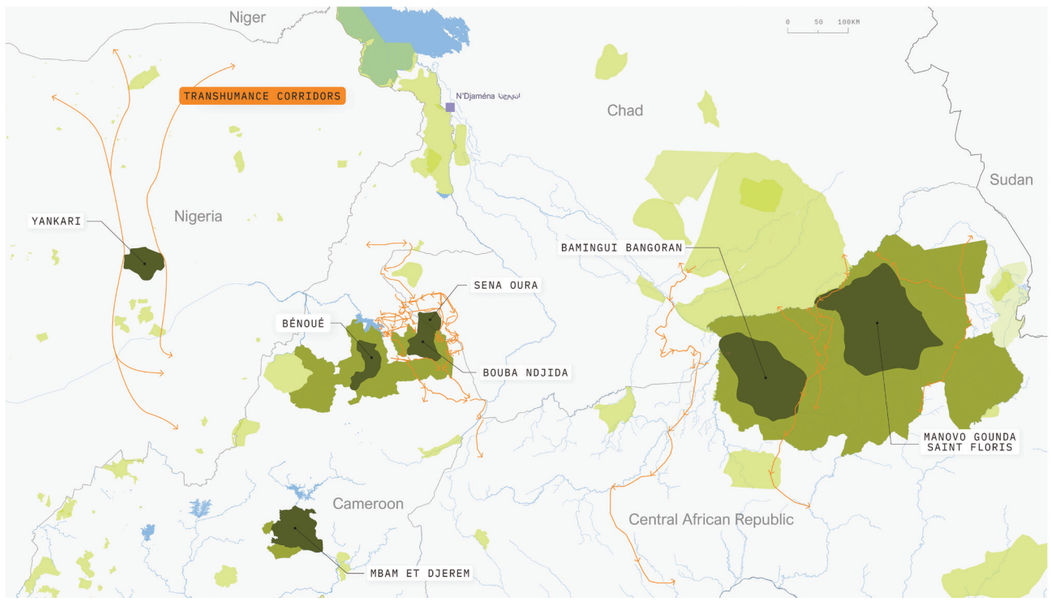
Mbam et Djerem

• 4,165 KM²

At the southern edge of the Sudano-Sahel, where the savanna gives way to forest. Home to forest elephants, the only landscape in the strategy where this critically endangered species is present. Transhumant pressure is growing as herders move further south. Mbam et Djerem provides critical lessons for WCS programs in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo, where transhumant movements are now arriving at the forest frontier.

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Where We Work



LOCATION

- Capital
- Transhumance Corridor
- Water Body

CATEGORY

- Anchor Park
- Multiple-use Area
- Partner-managed Landscape
- International Border

Data source: AP | Cameroon, RCA, Chad: WCS and WDPA

Coordinate system: Geographic | WGS 84

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The boundaries and names used on this map are not exempt from possible errors and do not in any way imply the official approval or acceptance of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

WCS's strategy covers four landscapes in Nigeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, and Chad. The total area across which WCS operates is 139,121 km² — roughly five times the size of Rwanda, bigger than England — and home to approximately 371,000 people.

This strategy centers on the Bamingui-Manovo and Bénoué-Bouba Ndjidda-Sena Oura landscapes as primary priorities, with secondary focus on Yankari Game Reserve and Mbam et Djerem National Park. As transhumant populations move further south, the framework also provides critical technical guidance for WCS programs in DRC and the Republic of Congo.

Some transhumants passing through WCS landscapes also pass through neighboring landscapes operating under similar management partnerships between governments and other NGOs, including African Parks Network, Noé, African Wildlife Foundation, and Africa Nature Investors at other times of year. Others come from Sudan, other parts of Chad, and further afield. Engaging these conservation partners through new platforms and collaborations is an explicit part of the strategy.

The People in the Landscape

Importance of pastoralism as lifestyles and livelihoods

For millions of people across the Sudano-Sahel, pastoralism is a cornerstone of the socio-economic fabric. It provides vital food security, primarily meat and milk, for pastoralist communities and often contributes to national and regional food supplies.

It is deeply intertwined with the cultural identity of many communities, shaping their social structures, traditions, and values. Cattle hold significant cultural value, representing wealth and status, and play a crucial role in social ceremonies and transactions. Any loss of animals is deeply felt by households.

That same store-of-value function is what makes cattle attractive to outside investors, and it is why the pastoral system is now under pressure from two directions at once — from agriculture closing land off, and from capital moving in.

When practiced sustainably, pastoralism can promote biodiversity and maintain healthy ecosystems by preventing overgrazing and allowing vegetation to regenerate. In protected areas where herbivore populations have been decimated, cattle can play a temporary functional ecological role as parks are rewilded. However, overstocking and poorly managed grazing can lead to habitat degradation and biodiversity loss.

WCS respects the self-identification of Indigenous Peoples, including the Mbororo-Fulani (Peul) and Wodaabe-Fulani (Peul) groups in our program areas. "Local Communities" refers to the diverse ethnic groups, primarily farmers or sedentary agropastoralists holding some livestock, living adjacent to protected areas.

Four Segments, Four Responses

The Sudano-Sahel is not home to a single pastoral community. It is home to at least four distinct segments, each with different histories, economic logics, and relationships to the land. The strategy succeeds or fails on whether it recognizes this stratification — because the engagement approach for each is fundamentally different.

Agropastoralists	Settled communities who cultivate crops and keep limited livestock close to home. Strong local base, little movement, living in and immediately adjacent to our protected areas. The communities with the deepest, most continuous stake in the landscape — and the most to gain from co-designed governance.
Transhumants	Semi-nomadic pastoralists whose regular, cyclical movements cross climatic zones and often national borders. Originating in West Africa, they moved eastward over centuries to Nigeria and Chad; in the past 50 years south into Sena Oura and Bamingui-Manovo; in the past 20, further south into DRC, reaching the northern edges of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. The most mobile and often the most politically marginalized. Securing corridors and formal recognition for transhumant movement is central to the strategy.
Neo-eleveurs (elite herders)	Large herds owned by various influential elites as secondary investments. In the absence of formal banking systems, cattle function as a primary store of value: investors purchase livestock through profits from cotton, civil service earnings, other enterprises, and ill-gotten gains, then engage family members or hire herders to manage them, often under the direction of influential and well-connected owners. The herders themselves are frequently poor pastoralists or Indigenous community members with few alternatives. The practice requires vast pasture, drives overgrazing, and marginalizes traditional pastoralists, who are absorbed as hired help and maintain their traditional lifestyles through other people's cattle. Because of the influential connections of owners, these herds present significant regulatory and enforcement challenges when entering protected areas. Elite herd expansion frequently maps onto sensitive historic regional fault lines. This is the most disruptive segment and the one that most often escapes the interventions of traditional community conservation. It requires a political economy response, not a livelihoods response.
Fringe pastoralism	The extreme manifestation — heavy arms, kidnapping, extreme violence. This is not pastoralism. It is organized criminality that exploits pastoral systems as cover, distinct from the pastoral communities described above. It requires a security-first response and must be clearly named as distinct from the three pastoral segments above, so that legitimate communities are not criminalized by association.



WHY THE DISTINCTION MATTERS

Treating these four groups as a single "pastoralist community" has been one of the most consequential errors of conservation practice in the region — it has driven both the criminalization of legitimate transhumants and the under-recognition of elite herding as an investor-driven phenomenon. The strategy's five pillars are designed to engage each segment through the mechanism appropriate to it: agropastoralists through co-designed governance and livelihoods; transhumants through corridor recognition and rights-based mobility; elite herders through policy, political economy analysis, and enforcement; fringe actors through security coordination.

Operating Reality
Five Converging Forces

This is a landscape of uncertainty shaped by five converging forces. No single one can be addressed in isolation.

FORCE 01

Agricultural expansion and land capture

Major agricultural expansion over recent decades in Nigeria and Cameroon, and to a lesser extent Chad, is driven by growing farming populations, government policies, and international investment in cash crops such as cotton. Pastoralist lands, communal rangelands and historical seasonal pastures are being captured, privatized, and sold, pushing pastoralists to seek land inside protected areas. The lack of secure year-round land tenure for mobile pastoralists is a major source of both inter-communal and park-people conflict: their tenure is at risk when they are not physically present, and government policies designate rangelands as publicly owned. Sedentary farming communities also face land losses from urbanisation, cash cropping, and corruption in the allocation of titles. Ranching is expanding across Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria; fencing restricts pastoralist mobility and disrupts traditional grazing patterns.

FORCE 02

Elite herding

Elite herding is a modern disruption that has changed the equation. Characterized by absentee-owned herds — large livestock holdings owned by various influential connections as a secondary investment — it is driven in part by the absence of formal banking systems, which makes cattle a primary store of value. Investors engage family members or employ herders, often armed and acting under the protection of powerful patrons, to manage livestock purchased through profits from cotton, civil service earnings, other enterprises, and ill-gotten gains. The practice requires vast areas of pasture, leads to overgrazing and resource depletion, and marginalizes traditional pastoralists who lack the resources to compete. Despite this it is often tolerated, and disenfranchized pastoralists become hired help, maintaining their traditional lifestyles through other people's cattle. Elite herding causes major conflict with conservationists: incursions into protected areas frequently involve herding groups operating under complex, influential livestock ownership structures, presenting significant regulatory and enforcement challenges for local authorities.

FORCE 03

Insecurity

Insecurity across the four countries is complex and multifaceted. Shared drivers include political instability with ethnic tensions and armed rebel groups, climate-driven resource scarcity intensifying conflicts over land and water, mineral wealth attracting local and international actors, the spread of jihadism, and porous borders facilitating weapons and criminal networks. The consequences for conservation are direct: displacement of people internally and across borders, particularly in Cameroon and CAR; social trauma and gender-based violence; increased poaching from armed actors; and general regional instability that destabilizes governance and hampers both conservation and development.

FORCE 04

Climate change and disease risk

Climate change is having a fundamental impact on farmers and pastoralists across the ecoregion. Changing rainfall patterns have led to severe flooding in Chad and water insecurity elsewhere. The variability in water and rangelands, coupled with insecurity, forces pastoralists into difficult choices. Often, it is safer and more productive to take livestock into protected areas, and where lands around parks are surrounded by sedentary farmers, grazing in parks becomes the only option.

FORCE 05

Disease Emergence

Land conversion, the creation of new habitat edges, wildlife trade and consumption, and agricultural intensification are all drivers of infectious disease emergence. When contact rates between humans, their domestic animals, and free-ranging wildlife increase, so too does the risk of pathogen transmission between them. Ecosystem degradation creates complex health feedback loops: increased prevalence of endemic epizootic diseases, vector-borne and waterborne infections, nutritional challenges, and broader health effects linked to climate change. Pathogen transmission between livestock and wildlife populations can have devastating population-level consequences — livestock disease is believed to be a main driver of the loss of hundreds of thousands of ungulates in this region over recent decades.

SECTION 03

Our Vision and Approach

Vision and Values

Our vision is a resilient Sudano-Sahel where biodiversity thrives in connected landscapes, supporting peaceful, healthy, resilient pastoralist systems, sedentary communities, and coexistence with protected areas, in respect of pastoralist traditions and rights.

This vision marks a deliberate departure from longstanding combative relationships in the region between conservation agencies and pastoralists, where pastoralists have historically been treated as criminals by authorities and subordinate or marginalized by mainstream society. WCS will work with partners and government agencies to change mindsets, minimize bias, develop human rights-based approaches that recognize Indigenous Peoples' rights to land and to maintain their way of life, and build partnerships with pastoralist peoples.

Approach

Protect the anchors

National parks function as the ecological anchors of the landscape — the cores where integrity is non-negotiable and where wildlife populations can stabilize and recover. These are Bamingui, Manovo, Bénoué, Bouba Ndjidda, Sena Oura, Yankari, and Mbam et Djerem.

Scale into the multiple-use mosaic

Anchor parks alone cannot sustain wildlife or resolve the pastoralism question. We extend protection and co-management into the corridors, hunting concessions, Category V/VI reserves, and rangelands that surround them — the ~44%. This is where coexistence is brokered.

Sustain through partnership and policy

The outer ring — neighboring landscapes, regional policy frameworks including the Ndjamena Declaration and ECCAS, and cross-border coordination — is what keeps the anchor-to-multiple-use model durable over time.

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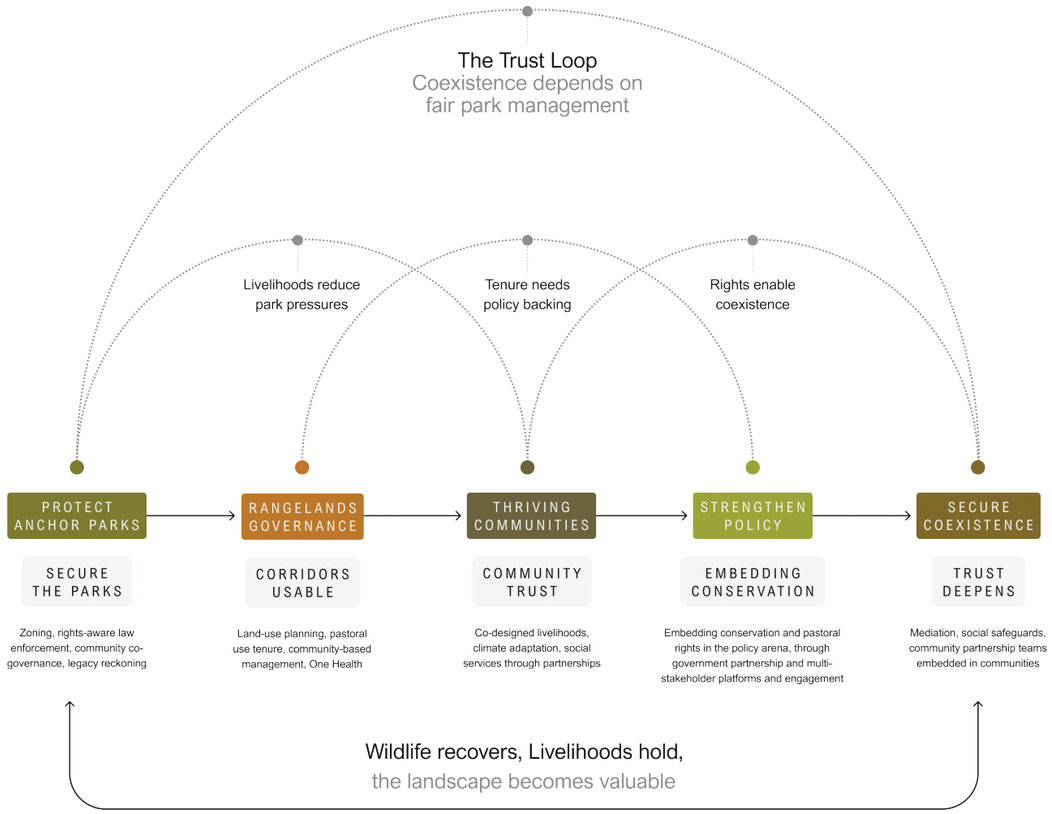


SECTION 04

The Pillars: How We Deliver

While the region benefits from stakeholders with specialized site-based management, pastoralist programming, and localized mediation, WCS provides the transboundary architecture necessary to link these efforts across our anchored landscapes. By leveraging simultaneous management partnerships across Nigeria, Cameroon, CAR, and Chad, WCS acts as a strategic convener to secure rangeland integrity and ecological health within specific transboundary clusters — such as the Bénoué-Bouba Ndjidda-Sena Oura complex. Our distinctive contribution lies in integrating One Health, technical expertise, and rights-based programming into a framework that manages the spaces between our anchored parks, protecting the remaining migration arteries and intact grasslands essential for both wildlife and livestock health.

The five pillars are a system. The corridor only works if communities trust the governance of the park. That trust depends on conflict resolution and livelihood alternatives. Both require a policy environment that recognizes pastoralists' rights. Every investment in one pillar increases the return on the others.



PILLAR 01

Protecting the Anchor Parks

The anchor parks are the foundation of everything else in this strategy. If they are not effectively managed, the corridors, the rangelands, and the community partnerships that depend on them cannot function.

Many protected areas in the region were created during an era when the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities were insufficiently considered and, in many cases, violated. Free, Prior and Informed Consent was not a formally recognized practice; agencies often drew boundaries unilaterally. The result is vast areas of land overlapping traditional territories and cattle migration routes, communities that do not recognize the legitimacy of the parks, and a lack of support for conservation. Many of these parks have not been managed for decades and exist only on paper.

Meanwhile, most transhumants and agropastoralists are unaware of park boundaries and rules and have not been consulted on changes affecting their access to grazing. Rangers enforce boundaries and exclude illegal access, but the absence of state protection for pastoralist rights outside the parks, combined with insufficient legitimate access to land held by sedentary communities, often provokes intercommunal violence.

Impact

MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

- Lion occupancy in integrally protected zones stabilized within five years, with net increase in spatial distribution over ten years
- Large mammal populations in integrally protected zones stable or increasing within five years
- 50% reduction in unauthorized grazing in core protected zones
- Ecological integrity indicators — ungulates, elephants, vultures, large carnivores — holding or improving across all anchor parks
- Governance arrangements that make recovery durable rather than dependent on any single administration

PILLAR 02

Resilient rangelands
Managing the Space Between the Parks

Nearly half — 44% — of the conservation lands WCS supports are not national parks. They are hunting concessions, reserves, buffer zones, and corridors: the contested space where pastoralism and conservation must find practical accommodation.

Large, contiguous networks of protected areas do not account for transhumant movement. The result is poor knowledge and coordination of grazing patterns, and no secure route through. As conflict, climate, and population growth reshape cattle movements, directing those movements into safe areas is urgent — to reduce armed conflict, support transhumant security, and manage rangelands for both wildlife and cattle.

These rangelands are critical for the culture and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people. Ensuring they remain productive and well managed is critical for the integrity of the protected areas and the sustainable use of natural resources. Current corridor delineation is interim; formal tenure systems are needed to prevent rangeland conversion to farmland.

Impact

MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Land-use plans developed for connective rangelands in at least three landscapes

Transhumant corridors secured through formal recognition around at least four national parks

Pastoralist and community-managed lands outside anchor parks functioning ecologically and economically

The ~44% of multiple-use area brought into a coherent management frame

PILLAR 03

Thriving Communities

Communities whose basic needs are not met cannot be effective stewards of the lands they live on. Community resilience and conservation success are not competing priorities. They are the same outcome.

Health and educational infrastructure are insufficient in most of these landscapes, due to weak government investment and insecurity. Households face intensifying climate shocks such as drought and floods, with few buffers.

The pastoral system is also stratified in ways conservation programming has historically ignored. Transhumant women hold independent capital and refined zootechnical knowledge but lack market access. Young men bear the burden of herd movement and, facing high operational barriers, increasingly exit the system altogether. And livestock disease, over recent decades, is believed to be a main driver of the loss of hundreds of thousands of ungulates — animal health here is not a co-benefit of conservation. It is conservation.

Impact

MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Targeted pastoral programming supporting livelihood activities for women and youth in at least five landscapes

Human Wellbeing Index scores across sites with 50% of targeted pastoralists reporting improved wellbeing

Pastoralist traditions, mobility, and identity actively supported rather than eroded

Communities share in the value generated by the landscape, through revenue sharing, sustainable resource use, and access restriction mitigation

Human rights respected and embedded in ranger operations, governance, and programming

PILLAR 04

Changing the Policy Environment

Sustainable rangeland management and wildlife conservation are typically absent from pastoral policy dialogues. Conservation is perceived as a barrier to economic growth and pastoralist rights, a view reinforced by livestock policies that ignore conservation land use. Conservation laws are frequently seen as illegitimate and are difficult to enforce.

The challenges facing pastoralism, conservation, and land use cut across multiple sectors and require alignment between policy frameworks that currently do not speak to one another.

Elite herding compounds this. As a relatively new economic force, it presents a profound structural threat to protected areas: a heavy environmental and social footprint, and a complex, often armed network of actors operating with relative impunity. Because it is driven by remote capital rather than local need, it does not respond to livelihoods programming, community conservation, or park-level enforcement. It requires a political economy response.

Impact

MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Conservation, ecological connectivity, and wildlife management formally recognized as essential pillars — rather than constraints — within national pastoral and land-use policy frameworks across all four countries

National and regional pastoral associations successfully using multi-stakeholder platforms to secure formal legal standing for transhumance corridors and open rangelands

Cross-border transhumance agreements and regional coalitions, including the N'Djamena Declaration frameworks, advanced directly by state and regional pastoral actors, with ecological connectivity fully integrated into their design

PILLAR 05

Coexistence

Conflict is not a side-effect of working in the Sudano-Sahel. It is the operating environment. Pastoral-conservation, agriculture-pastoral, and inter-pastoral tensions are permanent features, compounded by a larger web of systemic fragility: livestock banditry, destabilizing political actors, and weak state apparatus that challenge local governance and the baseline stability coexistence depends on.

Coexistence is not the absence of conflict. It is the presence of systems to manage it — approaches that address root causes such as competition over resources, predation, and differing land-use practices among different communities.

Local conflict between community actors is itself a major source of insecurity, distinct from park-people conflict. And young herders who are the frontline actors physically navigating changing corridors and park borders, carry social pressures that neither enforcement nor community conservation has historically recognized.

Impact

MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Mobile and sedentary communities carry out economic and social activities free from armed conflict

Social cohesion between agropastoralist, transhumant, elite herder, and farming communities strengthened across the landscape

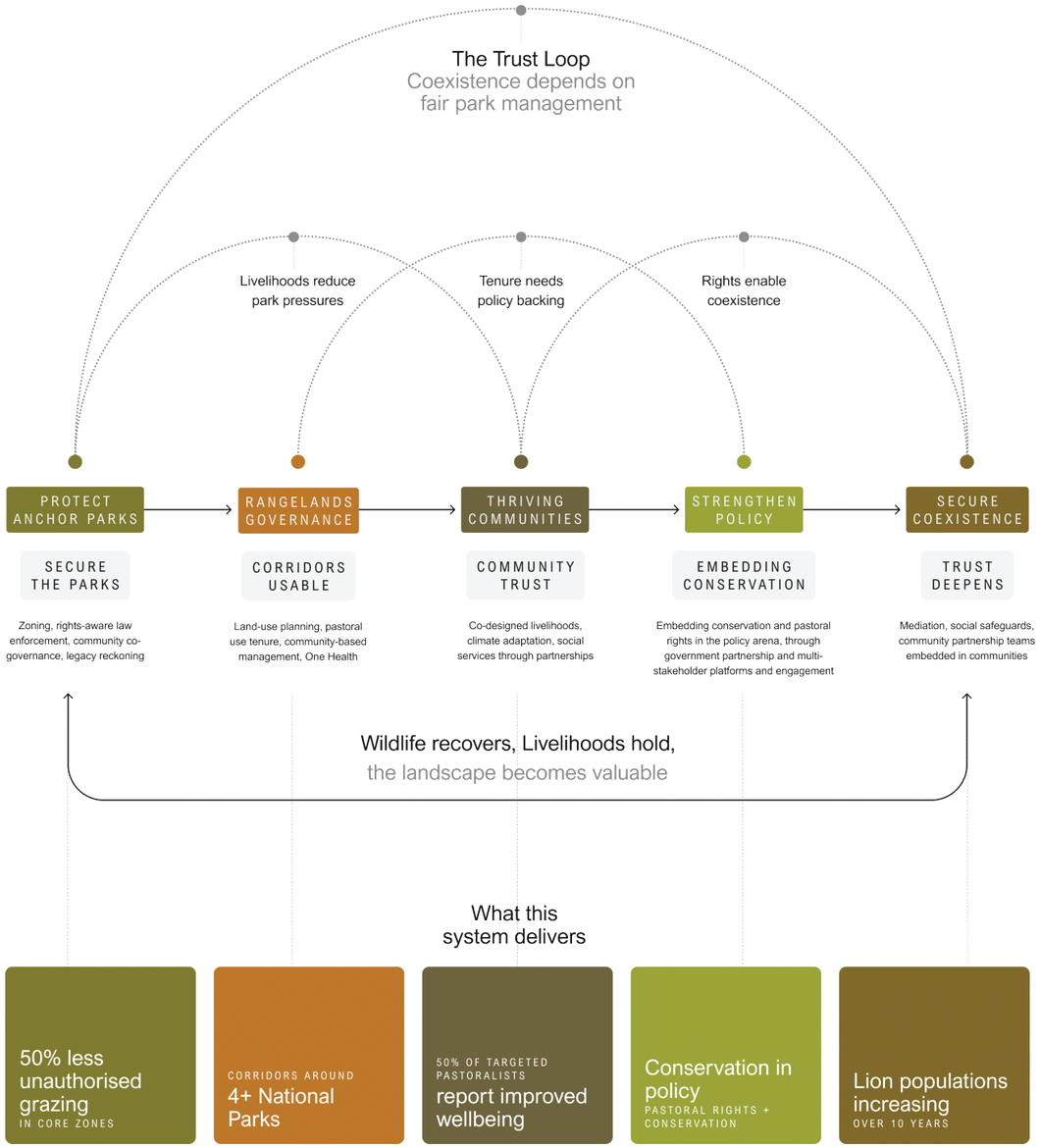
One Health programming established in at least three landscapes, reducing disease transmission risk at the pastoralist–livestock–wildlife interface and creating a connective tissue of shared benefit

Reduced incidence of violent human–wildlife and human–human conflict in and around anchor parks

SECTION 05

Impact

Each pillar delivers a specific set of ecological and wellbeing outcomes, and because the pillars are interdependent, so are the outcomes — wildlife recovery depends on community partnership, community resilience depends on secure corridors, secure corridors depend on policy recognition, and all of it depends on conflict being managed as the operating environment.



The pillars, taken together, produce three reinforcing outcomes:

1	Thriving biodiversity	Anchor parks secure and recovering. Wildlife populations stable or increasing. Ecological integrity holding across the landscape mosaic, not just inside park boundaries.
2	Thriving communities	Pastoralist and farming communities with recognized rights, secure livelihoods, cultural continuity, and genuine partnership in the governance of the landscape they depend on.
3	A durable system	Policy frameworks, cross-border coordination, conflict mediation, and One Health infrastructure that together allow the first two outcomes to survive climate shocks, political instability, and demographic pressure.

This is what we mean by a resilient Sudano-Sahel. A landscape able to absorb shock without losing either its biodiversity or its pastoralist cultures, because the mechanism for delivery is designed around both.

SECTION 06

Closing

Wildlife Conservation Society

This Connected Landscapes Strategy marks a deliberate evolution in our approach to conservation in the Sudano-Sahel. It is grounded in the conviction that the long-term integrity of these vast, complex landscapes is inseparable from the rights, resilience, and active partnership of the pastoralist and farming communities who depend upon them. Moving beyond a singular focus on enforcement, the integrated pillars of this framework — from co-designing land use plans to enhancing community health and mitigating conflict represent a comprehensive commitment to shared stewardship.

If we are successful, the northern lion, the savanna elephant, and the large ungulates that define the Sudano-Sahel will be recovering rather than disappearing. Pastoralist communities will be partners in that recovery rather than adversaries to it. Livestock corridors will be formally recognized, rangelands planned, rights respected. The anchor parks will be secure, and the ~44% of land between them will be functional, governed, and shared.

The Sudano-Sahel will not be a region defined by its losses — extinctions, displacement, conflict — but by its recovery: a landscape where healthy ecosystems secure local lifeways and thriving wildlife populations and pastoral communities are mutually reinforcing.

That is resilience in the Sudano-Sahel. That is the ambition of this strategy. The question is no longer whether conservation and pastoralism can coexist. It is how. This strategy is our answer.

Funded by the European Union