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Note: In this document, use of the masculine is generic and applies to both women and men.

# Local milk, an emerging value chain in West Africa.

An overview of  
Vétérinaires Sans Frontières  
Belgium's experiences  
in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali.



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## 1. Context

In West Africa, **livestock keeping has been developed essentially in the Sudano-Sahelian area, where it is at the heart of the economy.** In fact, livestock keeping and its products (milk and meat) are important sources of revenue. These products, which include milk, are also a major asset in the fight against food insecurity. West African livestock keeping is also important on a larger scale. In Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, for example, livestock keeping is responsible for 11 to 18% of GDP and cow's milk production represents 20 to 40% of livestock keepers' revenue (Duteurtre G. & Corniaux C., 2013).

However, the local milk production sector struggles to respond to the demand of nations which import powdered milk to offset the structural deficit. In addition, there are difficulties with the seasonal and fragmented nature of production<sup>1</sup>, animal health and public health and socio-economic challenges in general. Despite these significant constraints, the local milk sector has strong development potential. In fact, given the circumstances, it is remarkable that cow's milk production in West Africa increased by more than 50% between 2000 and 2016, rising to 2.5 billion tons (CFSI, 2018). The development of this sector is essential to reduce West Africa's expensive dependence on imports and to fight poverty among the families of producers. Greater efforts are therefore required to support the implementation of policies intended to stimulate the local milk sector in West Africa in order to increase food sovereignty, to develop the local economy, to create jobs in rural areas and to reduce the commercial deficit.

<sup>1</sup> Production spread out around the country



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To maximise the potential of local milk production, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium and its local partners provide support by means of national and international programmes, by strengthening the capacities of stakeholders in the industry, by working to develop every step from milking to sales and by improving the quality and quantity of local milk. In order to tackle the main challenges facing local milk, we recommend that the sector develops according to the One Health approach, taking into account livestock, livestock keepers and the environment in which they are developing.

## 2.

# Local milk in West Africa: significant potential

## 2.1 Production

In West Africa, milk is produced in extensive pastoral systems, agropastoral farming systems and urban and peri-urban systems. In the countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union, **milk production is dominated by extensive, traditional pastoral models**. These models represent **70% of local milk production** (OCDE, 2008). Mali and Niger are the largest milk producers in the region, with herds numbering close to 10 million animals and cow's milk production of 309 and 486 million litres per year respectively (Duteurtre G. & Corniaux C., 2013).

**Extensive pastoral systems** are based on the mobility of herds and livestock keeper communities, driven by a search for water and quality pastures and requiring an excellent knowledge of the surroundings. This very widespread way of life provides livestock keepers with a great level of resilience, because it guarantees access to resources during difficult periods. Milk production in pastoral systems is characterised by the seasonal nature of production and consumption by the producers themselves. Pastoral producers primarily use milk to encourage calves' growth and as a nutritional resource for their families. In Burkina Faso, for example, 80% of milk production is consumed by producers (Broutin C., Levard L. & Goudiaby M.-C., 2018). The nutritional benefits of milk (which is simultaneously a source of protein, calcium, vitamins and important fats) ensure that milk production within pastoral systems contributes greatly to the food security and nutritional security of livestock keepers' families (Randolph et al., 2007).

Unlike pastoral systems, **agropastoral farming systems** have access to other sources of food for herds in the dry season. These complementary food sources may take different forms: cotton seed and cotton seed meal, groundnut hay or other crop residues (Duteurtre G., 2013). Local breeds of cattle which are not involved in transhumance during the dry season can sometimes be crossed with exotic breeds to create crossbreeds which are capable of producing more milk<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, keeping part of a herd in semi-sedentary conditions facilitates milk collection. With the use of nutritional supplements and genetic improvement, these systems are able to improve milk production and to mitigate the effects of seasonal production.

The development of this sector is essential to reduce West Africa's expensive dependence on imports and to fight poverty among the families of producers.

In addition to these two systems, there are also **urban milk farms**, representing less than 2% of local milk production (Duteurtre G. & Corniaux C., 2013). These farms are completely different, since they are generally managed by urban investors rather than actual livestock keepers. The local urban milk industry has been developed with the aim of promoting fresh local milk in cities and therefore stimulating trade in local products (Duteurtre G., 2007). In this type of business, animals are mainly fed with industrialised feed. Most of the milk produced is sold in cities (through dairies, direct sales and in shops). Since it is better quality than powdered milk, it is sold for a price which is 1.5 to 3 times higher (Duteurtre G. & Corniaux C., 2013).

## 2.2 Collection and processing

**In rural areas, only a very small quantity of the milk from pastoral and agropastoral production is collected and processed. Generally, this quantity does not exceed 10% of the region's production** (ECOWAS, 2017). This milk is mainly collected by mini-dairies, which have grown in number over the last 20 years (Doufils A., 2010). By way of an example, between 2000 and 2010, the number of mini-dairies rose from 19 to 47 in Burkina Faso, 8 to 23 in Mali and 2 to 12 in Niger (Duteurtre G. & Corniaux C., 2013). Mini-dairies are defined as "units, generally situated in peri-urban areas, which produce various dairy products and sell them locally on a small scale. They have a collection and distribution network. They generally provide the producers with technical support." (Corniaux et al., 2014). Milk collection by mini-dairies makes it possible for the products to be homogenised and their quality to be controlled. Mini-dairies generally collect and process between 50 and 300 litres of milk per day.

<sup>2</sup> However, it should be noted that improvements in productivity due to cross-breeding are not always sustainable and that crossbred animals are frequently unable to adapt to the conditions of pastoral and agropastoral livestock keeping.



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**In rural areas, only a very small quantity of the milk from pastoral and agropastoral production is collected and processed.**

In addition to mini-dairies, there are also **farmers' multi-service collection centres**, which constitute a new link in the local milk supply chain. This is primarily the case in Niger (IRAM 2, n.d.), where the first centre was set up in Hamdallaye in 2008 and the second in Kollo in 2012. These centres form a link between producers and industry. Since their establishment **in several regions in Niger, the sector's structure has improved. These centres collect between 1,000 and 2,000 litres of raw milk per day, which represents the production of several hundred livestock keepers** (IRAM 2, n.d). Unlike mini-dairies, collection centres are experiencing rapid increases in their revenues and growth levels (IRAM 2, n.d). Promoting farmers' multi-service collection centres would therefore be a unique opportunity to improve the development and structure of the local milk sector.

In urban and peri-urban settings, collection is easier because the livestock are located close to cities (agropastoral systems) or actually located there (urban dairy farms). **Industrial processing units** are mainly found in cities. These can be private or public and may be managed by cooperatives or, in some cases, by groups of livestock keepers (Broutin C., Levard L. & Goudiaby M.-C., 2018). The processing infrastructure uses local milk which generally comes from urban farms but may also come from pastoral and agropastoral herds. **However, to respond to the high demand from the urban population, these industrial collection and processing units often mix local milk with imported powdered milk (which may sometimes constitute up to 80% of their raw materials).**

## 2.3 Sales

**Very often, livestock keepers process their own products and sell them in short food supply chains** (Broutin C., Levard L. & Goudiaby M.-C., 2018). This work is usually done by women. So-called short food supply chains include raw milk sold by women in the livestock keepers' families and pasteurised milk sold by the mini-dairies which have processed it. In fact, as with collection and processing, mini-dairies are among the most important stakeholders in the sale of milk in rural areas in West Africa. **Mini-dairies buy the milk from the producers, process it and sell it to retailers or directly to customers at local markets** (Duteurtre G., 2007). There are also larger dairies, many of which are located in cities. They are usually private, work on a for-profit basis and tend not to be well connected to local milk production (Duteurtre G., 2007).

For urban farms, milk and its by-products are the main market opportunities. This is why sales of fresh milk and curd from these farms are increasing at markets in large cities (Duteurtre G., 2007). As in the rural sectors, milk may be sold directly by the producer to the consumer, door to door or at local markets. In these cases, it is often the producers themselves who process their own products (Duteurtre G., 2007). However, fresh or processed milk can also be sold by collection and processing units through distributors (supermarkets, local stores) (Broutin C., Levard L. & Goudiaby M.-C., 2018).

Following the arrival of powdered milk, which is relatively cheap and easy to use, on the West African market, many small businesses have appeared (cafés, restaurants, markets, canteens), which are developing in the informal economy. The latter are adapting very quickly to increasing demand in cities and are selling products and by-products made with powdered milk. Large supermarket chains are doing similarly.

## 2.4 Consumption

**The emergence of the milk industry in West Africa is also reflected in a growing demand for dairy products. This increase is due to high population growth, rapid urbanisation and the emergence of a middle class.** This phenomenon is likely to continue for many years to come (Duteurtre G. & Corniaux C., 2013). The boom in demand has also caused an increase in the import of powdered milk. In 15 years, the amount of imported powdered milk has risen from 0.6 to 2 million tons in WAEMU countries (FAO, 2012). **Indeed, WAEMU countries are major milk consumers: in Niger, Mali and Senegal, for example, the average annual milk consumption per inhabitant is between 40 and 70 litres.** This high consumption is linked to the level of **milk consumption by the livestock keepers themselves** and also to the importance of milk in the eating habits of the population, at every level of society (Duteurtre G. & Corniaux C., 2013). To meet this growing demand more effectively, new jobs are being created as new collection centres, new small-scale processing units and new carriers appear (Duteurtre G. & Corniaux C., 2013). We are also seeing the rapid emergence of a new middle class; it consumes more dairy products of better quality and of different kinds, several times a day (breakfast and dinner). This is also contributing to the increase in demand for dairy products (Corniaux C., 2015). This high level of consumption and increasing demand demonstrate the enormous development opportunity represented by local milk in the region.



# 3.

## Challenges facing local milk and developing the industry with the One Health approach

In West Africa, and especially in the countries of the Sahel, dairy production involves large numbers of varied livestock which are widely spread out. Demand for animal protein (including dairy products) is constantly growing in this region. However, despite this significant potential, **the population's access to locally produced milk is very limited**. This is caused by constraints linked to three fundamental aspects of dairy farming in West Africa: **herds, livestock keepers and their environment**. The main challenges lie in **production** (fragmentation and seasonality), **animal health and public health** (hygiene and quality) and **socio-economic constraints**.

Having established several initiatives over the last 20 years, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium and its local partners<sup>3</sup> are working to change this, based on the One Health approach: *healthy animals and healthy people in a healthy environment*.

### 3.1 The challenge of local milk production

#### 3.1.1 Fragmented, seasonal production

Local milk production in West Africa is primarily carried out by **pastoral and agropastoral production systems, based on the mobility of livestock keepers and their herds**. This mobility is crucial to ensure sustainable milk production, both at a socio-economic and an environmental level. The sedentism of herds would lead to losses in efficiency and economic effectiveness, particularly in the Sahel. Although mobility plays an important role, it creates constraints which limit the development of local milk, such as the distance between livestock and the urban centres where milk is consumed and the significant distances over which livestock are spread out. In Niger and Mali, for example, businesses and small producers are spread out over areas which are approximately 40 times the size of Belgium. Furthermore, pastoral and agropastoral livestock keeping systems are made up of local breeds. Although these animals are adapted to their environment, they do not produce much milk (between 1 and 4 litres per day, whereas a Belgian dairy cow produces 35 to 40 litres). In addition, their milk production is significantly affected by the seasons. In fact, wintering (in the rainy season) is the calving period; fodder is plentiful at this time. During this period, milk production reaches its peak.

<sup>3</sup> Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium's experience in supporting the local milk sector in West Africa relies on close collaborations with local partners. In Niger, Karkara and the Centre d'Etudes Economiques et Sociales de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CESAO - Centre for Economic and Social Studies in West Africa) have provided technical support for programmes such as APPLN (Appui aux Petits Producteurs de Lait de Niamey - Support for Small Dairy Farmers in Niamey), Lait sain pour le Niger (Healthy Milk for Niger) and NariinNdu. In Mali, we work with our partner Initiatives, Conseils et Développement (ICD - Initiatives, Advice and Development) and with the Association Nodde Nooto (A2N) in Burkina Faso.

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**Milk production in West Africa is very fragmented and seasonal, which complicates the collection and processing of milk.**

Conversely, production drops sharply in the dry season to reach its lowest level. The impact of this seasonality on the local milk sector is all the greater because when production decreases in the dry season, local demand for cold milk increases because of very hot weather and vice versa.

Milk production in West Africa is therefore very fragmented (small quantities which are spread out over significant distances) and seasonal, which complicates the collection and processing of milk. It is in this context that we intervene, along with our partners, to foster a connection between traditional local production and processing units. To do so, we support the organisation of milk pools and provide assistance with the collection and the sale of milk. This gives the local population access to milk in regular quantities, at a constant quality level and at a satisfactory price.

#### 3.1.2 Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium' approaches to tackling the challenges of fragmentation and seasonality in milk production

##### Organisation of milk pools

To reverse this tendency towards fragmented production, we have worked to organise **milk pools**. Their role is to **bring producers closer to the numerous consumers in urban centres**. The conceptual strategy involves turning milk production into a structuring activity for households which agree to transition from individual to collective production management. The operational approach of this strategy is built on four major key stages in the peri-urban dairy industry.

- The first stage is to **identify the dairy sites** which make up the milk pool and then to **understand how they work**. Within each dairy site, we identify *Dairy Production Units* (DPUs), defined as *"all the animals intended for dairy production which are owned*



by a family and independently managed.” During this stage, the dairy potential of each site is assessed.

- The second stage is to organise the units when it comes to milk collection. This involves replacing individual milk sales with group sales, either to a collector or to a processing unit. During this stage, we strengthen **livestock keepers’ capacities** to work together and we provide assistance to transform traditional kinds of organisations into **livestock keepers’ organisations**, known as Basic Community Organisations (BCOs). At the same time, we establish activities which aim to improve the quantity and quality of the milk.
- The third stage is to reinforce the **leadership of these livestock keepers’ organisations** within the milk value chain by creating a federation which provides opportunities for discussions and consultation.
- The final stage involves **promoting this model for organising milk pools** among the stakeholders in the milk industry and developing synergies.

### Organisation of milk collection and sales

Once the milk pools and producers’ organisations have been established, the **organisation of the collection** continues. This involves:

- structuring the role of about a hundred milk collectors<sup>4</sup> and their connections to collection centres or mini-dairies;
- promoting multi-service collection centres to organise collections (cf. 2.2).

In this way, upstream facilities for the sector are established with production pools, collectors and multi-service collection centres. Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium also helps to develop contractual relationships between livestock keepers’ organisations and collectors and with multi-service collection centres which supply the dairy industry. However, **it is important to ensure that business relationships and, in particular, the conditions for determining prices are not dictated solely by the industry but rather in consultation with livestock keepers**. It was with this in mind, for example, that we helped to develop a business relationship between collection centres and SOLANI, the local industrial dairy in Niger. In two years, these centres came to cover a third of the milk supply to SOLANI, which is responsible for the transportation of the milk between the centres and the factory (Coalition Contre La Faim, 2019).

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## Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium and the organisation of the milk pool in Niamey (Niger)

When we started organising the milk pool in and around the city of Niamey in 2001, we identified 1,562 production units, consisting of an average of 4 people and 6 cattle (or just over a third of the herd), of which there were usually 2 lactating cows, although this figure could be as low as 1 or as high as 5. In 2003, we were already working with 11 livestock keepers’ organisations with a total of 578 members, 195 of whom were women, located on 6 main roads. In 2013, our network had grown to 30 livestock keepers’ organisations, 23 of which were officially recognised.

Today, we have 5 milk collection centres in Niamey, including the centres in Kollo, Hamdallaye and Say which supply SOLANI, the industrial dairy. The Kollo centre’s milk collection is a good example of the successful organisation of a milk pool: between 2015 and 2019, the centre’s production rose from 85,327 to 101,814 litres of milk.

### Innovative techniques for strategic dietary supplements for dairy cows

To respond to the challenge of seasonal production and to guarantee a regular quantity of milk, we teach livestock keepers **innovative techniques** to provide strategic dietary supplements for dairy cows. To balance the cows’ feed rations, we highlight the value of local resources (cf. 2.1) and the use of Reinforced Multi-Nutritional Blocks<sup>5</sup>. We also subsidise the creation of “Cattle Feed Banks”,<sup>6</sup> managed by the livestock keepers’ organisations themselves.

Furthermore, to support milk collection centres, we provide refrigeration equipment to ensure better preservation (in volume and duration) of the large quantities of milk collected during wintering. We also provide other resources which are needed for processing and improving the quality of the products which come to market. Staff at the centres also benefit from training courses on the manufacturing processes for yoghurt, cheese and butter and on pasteurisation.

In addition to this technical support, we help to develop relationships between the various stakeholders, particularly by encouraging livestock keepers to remain loyal to collection centres and mini-dairies.

<sup>4</sup> The collector is the intermediary between the producer and the processing units (mini-dairies, multi-service collection centres, etc.).

<sup>5</sup> Block intended as a dietary supplement for cattle, made with shredded local fodder (stalks, leaves, pods), residues from crops (straw, foliage), agricultural by-products (meal, bran), minerals and a binding agent.

<sup>6</sup> Animal feed shop which mainly sells agricultural by-products (meal, bran), packaged in bags. The shop is generally managed by a group of livestock keepers who deal with supplies (purchasing), stocks and the sale of feed to livestock keepers. It can also be managed by a multi-service collection centre.



## 3.1 The challenges of animal health and public health

### 3.2.1 The health of dairy cattle under threat

In West Africa, **animal health problems** are a significant obstacle to milk production. They have a **direct impact on the quality of the milk**. These health problems are caused in part by poor application of health measures and by poor institutional support for livestock keepers. Parasitic and infectious diseases are rife in the herds, particularly those affecting the udders of dairy cows.

Although the systems of pastoral and agropastoral livestock keeping have many benefits,<sup>7</sup> which are recognised and supported by Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium and its local partners, the incidence of these diseases is higher within these systems for the following reasons:

- The **mobility** which characterises systems of pastoral and agropastoral livestock keeping results in the **herds living a long way from healthcare structures** for a large proportion of the year. Furthermore, basic healthcare conditions for the livestock are insufficient, particularly following the state's decision to withdraw the provision of health services (care, medicine, production).
- The mobility and grouping of animals increase the **spread of diseases** and infection hotspots.
- Mobility leads to **food poisoning**, caused by the ingestion of poisonous plants. During their transhumance, the animals encounter new regions and struggle to differentiate between the different vegetation in the pastures.
- Livestock keepers **make very little use of medicine** because they are unaware of its effectiveness and the increased productivity it offers.

Conversely, the proximity of peri-urban farms to cities makes it possible to use private vets to ensure better animal healthcare. However, health problems there are just as significant as in pastoral and agropastoral farming. Peri-urban livestock keepers actually make very little use of veterinary medicine and local care services, preferring to manage the health of their herds by traditional means.

Whatever the livestock keeping system, establishing **basic health-care conditions** is the best way to respond to these constraints. In pastoral or agropastoral livestock keeping systems which are characterised by high mobility, this involves the establishment of a **network of community animal health workers who are trained and supervised by a private vet**. However, in peri-urban livestock keeping systems, the proximity to rural or urban centres makes it possible to focus on connecting livestock keepers with private vets who are usually already working in these areas.

### 3.2.2 The hygiene of local milk: a risk to public health

Milk is an important part of the diet of West Africa's inhabitants, particularly children. However, milk is also a significant contributor to foodborne diseases. This can be explained in two ways:

- milk comes from animals with a tendency to carry diseases which can be transmitted to humans (zoonoses);
- the chemical and physical properties of milk create favourable conditions under some circumstances (weather, temperature, chemical composition, etc.) for the multiplication of pathogenic germs and infection.



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Numerous studies have revealed a high level of milk contamination (VIAS et al, 2003, BONFOH, 2003). Because of its poor quality, some of the Niamey milk pool's produce is therefore poorly valued or considered worthless. In 2000, the quantity of milk rejected by SOLANI, the industrial dairy, because of its poor quality was assessed to be between 17 and 30%. Today, there is a clear improvement in the quality of local milk, given that SOLANI has not rejected milk collected by the centres since 2013.

### 3.2.3 Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium's approaches to tackling the challenges of animal health and public health

To improve the health of dairy cattle under threat, we focus on:

- **Raising awareness among livestock keepers and providing training on the importance of animal health.** We develop annual prevention programmes, including vaccination and disinfection, and make these accessible to dairy livestock keepers. Similarly, we provide livestock keepers with training on good animal health practices, tailored to the prevalent diseases in the milk pools. Indeed, epidemiological studies of zoonoses such as brucellosis and tuberculosis have highlighted the need to raise awareness among livestock keepers of certain problematic practices.
- **Strengthening the capacities of local private veterinary services.** Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium supports the establishment of private vets, supported by a network of community animal health workers. Between 2003 and 2019, more than 62 private vets were thus established in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, creating jobs for more than 1,000 community animal health workers and dozens of veterinary assistants. This system creates a better network and ensures fair access to animal healthcare for (small) farmers.

<sup>7</sup> This way of life is adapted to the environment and is resilient. Natural resources are managed sustainably and the activity contributes to food security and nutritional security, etc.





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**Milk is an important part of the diet of West Africa's inhabitants, particularly children. However, milk is also a significant contributor to foodborne diseases.**

To improve milk quality and hygiene, our activities mainly focus on:

- **Identifying the milk's critical contamination points throughout the chain.** The first stage in our quality process is to understand how the milk became contaminated, from the farm to the dairies' reception dock. Analysis of the contamination chain reveals the main sources of contamination, namely the practices of stakeholders in the chain (dilution,<sup>8</sup> adding antibiotics, moistening teats with saliva), the equipment used, the water used for washing and the health of the dairy cows. High ambient temperatures also encourage the proliferation of germs during the milk's transportation, processing and sale, particularly if there is no cold chain and the milk is not pasteurised.
- **Concerted quality management.** Once the origin of the sources of contamination has been found, we organise **informed discussions** on quality management with all the stakeholders in the chain (producers, collectors and collection centre managers). These discussions address the health and economic consequences of contaminated milk. There is also a focus on zoonotic diseases which are transmitted by milk (brucellosis, tuberculosis) and the adverse effects of milk fraud. Once the issues causing poor quality milk are determined, it is possible to establish an overview of the situation and to identify ways to improve the situation by:
  - Training stakeholders in milk hygiene: producers (hygiene during milking and intermediate storage), collectors (hygiene during transportation) and processors (hygiene during processing).
  - These stakeholders are also provided with suitable equipment for milking and transportation, for compliance with the cold chain and for quality control.

We have also created training guides on milking hygiene (good and bad practices) which are intended to raise awareness among livestock keepers.

### 3.3 The challenge of economic viability

#### 3.3.1 A decent and fair price

It is crucial that livestock keepers get a decent and fair price for their production. However, the price of milk fluctuates seasonally and is subject to competition from powdered milk (reconstituted with vegetable fats) which is imported at a low price.

To tackle this challenge, we focus on two economic models to structure the milk value chain:

- Multi-service milk collection centres, the viability of which results from:
  - producers working to secure the milk supply,
  - an in-depth knowledge and understanding of techniques to monitor and store milk,
  - the securing of market opportunities for dairies,
  - the ability to provide livestock keepers with a service.
- The factors affecting the viability of mini-dairies are almost identical, save for a few details:
  - producers working to secure the milk supply,
  - an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the processing procedures and hygiene practices,
  - relationships with and services for livestock keepers,
  - the leadership of the manager.

#### 3.2.3 Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium's approaches to tackling the challenge of economic viability

##### **Support for governance of the sector by the stakeholders themselves.**

The organisation and the structuring of each link in the milk chain and the relationships between them have led to the establishment of consultation forums in which to discuss problems and to find solutions. Each link's involvement in these consultation forums can be explained by the added value derived from a well-functioning sector. A major advantage is the creation of services for producers which keep them in the value chain:

- Support for the creation and proper management of "Cattle Feed Banks" makes it possible to create stocks of animal feed at low prices for livestock keepers.
- Applying good animal health practices (prevention, vaccination) reduces the loss of cows and calves.
- Applying good milking hygiene practices and sanitary measures throughout the collection process improves milk quality.
- Multi-service collection centres and mini-dairies provide livestock keepers with support in terms of storage capacity, milk processing and product diversification, along with sales and marketing. Together, this makes it possible to reduce the extent of fluctuations in milk prices.

<sup>8</sup> Dilution involves adding water to the milk to increase the volume sold.



### **Advocacy to encourage institutional support for local milk in the face of imported milk powder**

Our advocacy work helps to encourage institutional support for pastoral livestock keeping systems. Our goal is to **support livestock keepers in their main activity, which is the production and the sale of local milk.**

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium is a member of **two coalitions for the defence of local milk.** In West Africa, we actively support the “Mon lait est local” (My Milk is Local) campaign, organised by Oxfam and APESS<sup>9</sup>. In Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, we support the coalition’s action plan and participate actively in campaigns to promote and to defend local milk. In Europe, we participate in the campaign “N’exportons pas nos problèmes!” (Don’t Export our Problems!), which focuses on protecting the interests of West African dairy farmers in agricultural and commercial policies and policies for cooperation with the European Union.

Along with our work on policy, we also strengthen the **advocacy capabilities of umbrella organisations of livestock keepers.** In Niger, for example, we support the Billital Maroobé Network in establishing a “milk offensive” within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Specifically, we have contributed to the production of monographs intended for the development of a detailed support programme for local milk sectors in the ECOWAS zone.

<sup>9</sup> Association pour la Promotion de l’Elevage au Sahel et en Savane (Association for the Promotion of Livestock Keeping in the Sahel and the Savanna)

## 4. Conclusion

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**The local milk industry has enormous potential for development in West Africa.**

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The local milk industry has **enormous potential for development in West Africa.** This is particularly the case in landlocked countries in the Sahel region, such as Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, both in terms of supply and demand. However, this potential is **limited** by a lack of investment and technical support and by policies which encourage the import of powdered milk. The low productivity of local breeds, the seasonal nature of milk production, the geographic spread of herds and livestock diseases only exacerbate these problems. For Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium, these difficulties are the main challenges to be tackled in order to fully develop the potential of milk in these countries.

Nevertheless, the **technical improvements** which we provide along with our local partners (such as the use of nutritional supplements, support for the development of infrastructure and support for the establishment of local private veterinary services) are promising, both in terms of improving the quality and quantity of local milk and in terms of the well-being of livestock keepers’ families.

Following these improvements, we have observed that livestock keepers are tending to invest in milk production, no longer considering it to be a secondary production. This trend is confirmed by the **development of different models supported by Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium to direct the milk from the producer to the consumer.** All these models, which include mini-dairies, collection centres and industrial dairies, demonstrate the **entrepreneurial character** of an emerging local industry based essentially on **pastoral and agropastoral (and consequently family-run) production.**

In the case of mini-dairies and collection centres, the emphasis is on the links between the various stakeholders in the value chain: producers, collectors, processing units and dairy businesses. Multi-service collection centres, for example, managed by livestock keepers and supported by Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium and its local partners, make it possible to **create jobs in the private sector while guaranteeing a constant supply** of good-quality milk to local industries.

However, when faced with massive imports of powdered milk at a low price on local markets in West Africa, it is imperative for state governments to opt for **strong policies to promote the local milk sector.** In view of this, we are committed both to working with politicians and to supporting farmers’ organisations so that they can defend and promote local milk.



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