

Pastoralism, policies and practice in the Horn and East Africa

A review of current trends

Pastoral communities in the drylands of Eastern Africa are increasingly vulnerable to food and livelihood crises. Many reasons have been cited for this, including climate change and increased climatic shocks such as droughts and floods, man-made forces such as the ban on meat exports to the Gulf region and rapid population expansion overtaxing a finite natural resource base. However, no other reason is more central to the problem than the persistent cycle of inappropriate policy and practice in the region. Policies that are neither consistent with needs nor responsive to the uniqueness of the pastoral system are primarily to blame for pastoral vulnerability.

The study on which this Synthesis Paper is based reviews current policies and practice towards pastoralism of governments, development agents and pastoral communities in the Horn and East Africa. It also analyses the impact of current policies and practice on pastoralism and pastoral livelihood vulnerability, and how policies influence investment in and the development of pastoral areas. The study also presents the considerable economic contribution of traditional pastoralism, as well as recommendations on how to secure a vibrant pastoral economy through positive policy approaches which would open up opportunities for diversification and alternative livelihoods.

Pastoral livelihood vulnerability: what is the problem?

The drylands cannot support sustained and reliable agriculture because of low and variable rainfall and high temperatures. Pastoralism, however, is extremely well suited to this type of environment.

Pastoralists make optimum use of the drylands by practicing a mobile and extensive livestock-keeping system. They move according to where and when fodder becomes available, and use different herd management strategies such as herd splitting, herd diversification and herd maximisation to ensure that they spread the risk of livestock loss from droughts, diseases and theft. All the while, they make maximum use of the available vegetation without degrading the environment.

These traditional strategies are underpinned by mobility and are thus only effective in a context that permits the practice of mobile pastoralism. Thus, to the extent that development policies promoted by governments and donors restrict mobility, they effectively increase the vulnerability of pastoralists to natural and man-made shocks.

Many factors undermine the resilience of pastoralists to climatic shocks and other drivers of change and increase their vulnerability. It is no wonder that, although diverse initiatives are being implemented to help pastoralists cope and prosper, more and more of them find themselves unable to remain within the pastoral production system. Instead, growing numbers of pastoralists are falling out of pastoralism every year, and more and more are having to depend on emergency relief food provision for survival.

Different explanations have been advanced for the increasing vulnerability of pastoralists. Population growth in pastoral areas has created pressure on land. Climate change has increased the frequency of droughts, floods and livestock diseases. However, these natural factors only exacerbate the effects of a harsh policy and legal



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environment that is focused on ‘modernising’ and settling pastoralists. The increased vulnerability of pastoral livelihoods to shocks and other drivers of change is in many ways a function of the cumulative effect of these policies.

The inappropriate policy environment is a result of two critical and interrelated factors – a knowledge gap and a power imbalance. Unable to sufficiently articulate the rationale of their livelihood and to organise themselves to influence policy, pastoralists have been absent from national, regional and international policy processes. The result has been inappropriate policies which undermine pastoralism. Driven by their misperceptions of pastoralism and their disapproval of a way of life that is not their own, policy-makers have persisted in inappropriate policies and interventions. Many do not understand and appreciate the rationale of pastoralism – why pastoralists do what they do – or their significant contribution to national economies. As a result, they see critical aspects of pastoralism, such as mobility and reliance on indigenous knowledge, as backward and inconsistent with the imperatives of a modern state and economy.

There is also a power imbalance between pastoralists and other livelihood groups in the countries of the Horn and East Africa. This manifests itself in the absence of pastoralists in key policy-making frameworks and their limited influence on policy processes and policy institutions. The power imbalance is explained in part by the fact that pastoralists tend to be minorities in most of these countries, often living in geographically remote areas away from the capital cities and the centres of political and economic activity, with few representatives in national politics or the civil service. The knowledge gap and power imbalance combined contribute to inappropriate policies.

Responses to addressing increasing pastoral vulnerability have been equally inappropriate, with most actors focusing their attention on the provision of emergency relief. Unfortunately, without proper investment in the development of pastoral areas – to expand and create opportunities within the pastoral production system – relief keeps pastoralists hanging on the edge of a cliff from which many fall off, into destitution and dependency. Without adequate focus and strategies for comprehensive development in pastoral areas, humanitarian efforts to help pastoralists are akin to trying to clean up downstream pollution without addressing the root source upstream.

To reduce pastoral vulnerabilities, programmes and projects in pastoral areas should focus on development twinned with relief aid. This calls for a change in practice and policies, with policies and laws geared towards promoting investment in pastoral areas.

The strategic and economic importance of pastoralism

Pastoralists make optimal use of the drylands without degrading the environment. At the policy level, this fact is generally not acknowledged. Also overlooked is the economic contribution of pastoralism, even though evidence shows that it adds billions to national economies, and that the majority of the region’s animal wealth is kept by pastoralists in the drylands. Pastoralists also produce all the milk and meat that they consume, contributing to their own food security even as they support the rest of the

country. This, coupled with direct employment in the pastoral production system and the employment of other nationals in pastoralism-related activities – such as trade in livestock, transport services, leather industries, slaughter houses, butcheries and restaurants – constitutes an important contribution to the national economy that is not captured in the economic statistics of the countries of the region.

Not only does pastoralism contribute significantly to national economies, but the absence of the pastoralist system would burden the governments of the Horn and East Africa with considerable costs. In the absence of pastoral beef/meat production, pastoralists would be forced to look for alternative sources of food, including relief food, cattle raiding/rustling or rural–urban migration. Governments would have to find the money to purchase relief food from their already constrained budgets and would have to divert resources from productive uses to promoting security. In the absence of traditional mobile pastoralism, pastoralists will be forced to concentrate their livestock within limited parts of the rangelands, leading to degradation, loss of livestock, deprivation and poverty.

The changes and challenges faced by pastoralists

Pastoralists are experiencing a period of intense change. Whether these changes are driven by climatic shocks or inappropriate policies, they contribute directly or indirectly to increased vulnerability. Box 1 outlines some of the critical challenges facing pastoralists.

Laws and policies on pastoralism in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia

Governance is at the centre of societal development. Policy plays a critical role in guiding the choice-making process, identifying the problems to be addressed, establishing parameters and putting in place structures and institutions. Policy should be designed in close consultation with all stakeholders. Where policies are designed without the informed participation of the target groups, and without taking into account their unique realities, their impact is usually negative.

The following four categories of policies and laws that impact on pastoral livelihoods have been identified.

Policies on governance

These include constitutions and policies on decentralisation. The constitutions of Kenya and Uganda do not have specific provisions on pastoralism and pastoralists, but the Ethiopian constitution guarantees the right to grazing land for pastoralists and the right not to be displaced from their lands. However, experience has shown that, even where there are positive policy and legal stipulations, there is always a challenge with regards to actual implementation and enforcement. In the case of Ethiopia, statutes have been enacted which appear to derogate from the guarantees contained in the constitution.

Decentralisation policies in Uganda and Ethiopia provide opportunities for pastoralists to influence decisions at the local level. In Kenya, the management of devolved funds such as the

Box 1: Changes and challenges faced by pastoralists

- **Changing land tenure.** The common property regime which allows pastoralists to sustainably manage vast areas of land is being undermined by laws and policies that promote the individualisation of land tenure. As a result, dry-season grazing reserves have been lost, livestock movements have been restricted, land tenure has been rendered insecure and land degradation has increased.
- **Breakdown of traditional governance structures.** Traditional pastoral institutions enforce compliance with norms and values that dictate the sustainable use of the drylands. They also act as repositories for traditional knowledge which maximises returns from the drylands. Emphasis on formal governance structures has weakened traditional institutions and reduced their capacity to help manage crises like epidemics and drought.
- **Increasing demand for land.** Crop farming is encroaching into the drylands. There is also increasing interest in pastoral areas for biofuel production. The absence of a comprehensive land use policy is encouraging unsustainable production at odds with the pastoralist system.
- **Negative perceptions and stereotypes.** Pastoralism is widely perceived as an unsustainable, inefficient way of using land, which does little for the economy and is environmentally destructive. Policy actions, institutions and structures informed by these negative stereotypes facilitate the alienation of pastoral resources and increase pastoral vulnerabilities.
- **Inadequate investment in the drylands.** There is little private or government investment in the development of pastoral areas across the region. With limited market access, pastoral areas experience high costs in doing business, lack opportunities for income diversification and face unemployment and stagnant incomes. Those who fall out of the system find it difficult to rejoin the pastoralist mainstream and become dependent on relief aid.
- **Failure to recognise the diversity of pastoralist groups.** Not all pastoralists are at the same level of vulnerability. Some are well-off with stable livelihoods. Others, once stable in pastoral production, today find themselves in danger of losing their livelihoods. Still others have fallen out of the pastoral system altogether, own no livestock or land and live in shanties with no access to social amenities, depending almost entirely on relief agencies. Current policy and practice must accommodate these different categories of pastoralists and their particular needs.

Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and the Local Authorities Transfer Funds (LATF) are an opportunity for pastoralists to direct development funds to areas that are of relevance to their livelihoods. The extent to which pastoralists are able to take advantage of these opportunities ultimately depends on their capacity for self-organisation and mobilisation and their ability to make local governance institutions accountable.

Policies on land and natural resource management

Productive and sustainable pastoralism requires access to and security of land tenure. Failure to recognise communal and

pastoral land tenure in laws and policies, and the little regard in which customary land laws are held within the judicial system and in land administration and management, have led to governmental abuse of the land rights of pastoralists. Pastoral lands continue to be appropriated for other uses.

However, positive steps are being taken in recognition of pastoral land rights, though the application of these positive developments has been very slow. Uganda has recognised the issues of land tenure security through the provisions on community land in the 1998 Land Act and in the Land Sector Strategic Plan of 2002, which identifies pastoralists as a group with insecure land rights. As has been stated, Ethiopia has recognised pastoral land rights in the constitution at federal government level, although statutory provisions such as the Rural Land Administration and Land Use Proclamation seem to undermine opportunities for communal land-holding. In Kenya, the Draft National Land Policy (DNLP) offers new hope for pastoralists if adopted. The DNLP recognises pastoral land tenure as a separate tenure category and enjoins the government to enact legislation for it. It also provides for community land rights to be secured through a devolved land administration system that ensures communities have a say in decisions about land allocation and use at the local level.

Pastoralists and pastoral livelihoods are also affected by policies and laws on natural resources such as water, forests, wildlife, wetlands and environmental conservation. Often, the operation of these policies constrains pastoralist migration and access to resources such as dry-season grazing grounds and water.

Policies on economic development

These are focused on the commercialisation and general modernisation of agricultural and livestock production, and are largely unhelpful for pastoralists. However, economic development policies have begun to recognise the need to support pastoralism as the basis for economic development in the drylands. Kenya's Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation 2003–2008 (ERS) devoted an entire chapter to the development challenges in the drylands. Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) acknowledges the need to support pastoralism, as does Ethiopia's Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to Eradicate Poverty (PASDEP). However, the positive statements in these policy documents are rarely translated into actions and strategies that deliver on their promises.

Policies on peace-building, disaster management and security

These increasingly touch on the interests of pastoralists. The endemic conflict that characterises pastoral areas has focused the attention of governments and other actors on these regions. In the post-9/11 era and the global 'war on terror', the Horn of Africa has become the focus of interventions, especially by the US government, aimed at checking the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. These interventions are bringing resources and opportunities into pastoral areas that, if harnessed, could help address key challenges to livelihoods and development. The increasing recognition of the potential role of traditional institutions in peace-building and conflict management is also focusing attention on pastoral communities and their institutions as vehicles for promoting sustainable peace and development.

Policies and practices of the international community with respect to pastoralism

Pastoral issues are being discussed at regional and international levels. The African Union Commission (AUC) is developing a policy framework on pastoralism for Africa. This is expected to provide a continent-wide policy that will protect lives, secure pastoralist livelihoods and build sustainable communities. Also, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is implementing a Livestock Policy Initiative to ensure that livestock potential is understood, articulated and strategically built into poverty reduction processes.

Donors and development partners, including multilateral and bilateral donors, and UN bodies play a critical role in development processes. Through resource mobilisation, material and intellectual support, conditionalities and their political leverage over governments, they influence the agenda and determine thematic areas for developmental purposes.

Donors, humanitarians and development agencies need to realise that the current emphasis on humanitarian assistance, without accompanying development and livelihood programmes, is creating a cycle of dependency and has the potential to destroy pastoral economies. Notwithstanding donor support to pastoral areas, existing practice and policies are neither comprehensive nor strong enough to bring about the much-needed paradigm shift from relief-oriented support to integrated pastoral development. The current support system is not sufficient to get pastoralists onto the path of economic transformation based on access to markets, opportunities for livelihood diversification and human resource and capacity development.

Development agencies need to reflect upon their engagement with pastoralists and to invest in systems and structures backed by programmatic support to offer diverse livelihood opportunities to all pastoralists, as the linear approach to development based on aspects of drought preparedness and livestock development overlooks education and complementary livelihood activities which would spread risk and maximise opportunities.

Some donors and development agents are adopting a programmatic livelihood support approach to pastoral development, integrating humanitarian assistance and policy and infrastructural work to promote the holistic development of pastoral areas and to reduce vulnerability. These include ECHO/EU, USAID, the World Bank and DFID. By adapting a holistic approach to pastoral development, and by including pastoralists in planning and priority-setting, governments and other actors can develop a com-

prehensive, systematic and focused action plan to turn pastoral areas into vibrant and self-sufficient economies. Failure to do this will leave unmanageable numbers of people dependent on food aid.

Conclusion and recommendations

Severe restrictions on the traditional mobile pastoral production system resulting from inappropriate policies results in an increased number of pastoralists unable to cope with and recover from drought and other shocks (see Figure 1). In this setting, pastoralists increasingly face poverty and hardship, especially given the lack of alternative livelihood options. Emergency relief on its own will not reduce pastoral vulnerability. A different approach is needed to build capacity for drought preparedness in pastoral areas, which focuses on wealth and opportunity creation by investing in and promoting the development of pastoral areas.

Pastoral livelihood vulnerability can be reduced through policy and practice change intended to reduce risks within the pastoral system while expanding options for economic mobility. To secure livelihoods and restore resilience, drought management, relief and humanitarian assistance must be combined with interventions aimed at enhancing opportunities for economic production and integrating pastoral economies into national economies. Appropriate policies for pastoral areas must incorporate the need to address the unique challenges of these regions with the provision of resources and incentives for upward economic mobility for individual pastoralists.

Figure 1: Root causes of pastoral problems and recommendations

