

P a s t o r a l i s m

Progressing Policies that favour Pastoralists

4. Risk Reduction and Linking Relief with Development

The context

As victims of recurrent droughts, large-scale international food-aid continues to be a necessary response for many pastoralists, which has led to much discussion on whether pastoralism is a viable and sustainable livelihood. But the issue is not only the frequency and severity of drought, it is the social, economic and policy trends that make pastoralists more vulnerable. These include growing populations, encroachment on grazing land, armed conflict, failure to recognise collective forms of natural resource management, underdevelopment of markets and political marginalisation.

There are a number of practical approaches that can be adopted to reduce the impacts of drought, and to smooth the transition back from relief to development. Improved risk reduction and relief-development linkages must be part of the solution.

Policy implications

Donors should support:

- Safety net programmes, tailored to pastoralist livelihoods, as an alternative to emergency relief
- Improved co-ordination between relief and development programmes
- Increased awareness of pastoral development issues among humanitarian practitioners
- Improvement and better management of early warning information on drought and famine in pastoral areas
- Development and dissemination of emergency interventions specific to pastoralism.



credit: Oxfam/Jane Beesley

“ I’m no longer crawling like a baby. I’m standing up on my feet. I’m able to save some money in the bank. I’m expanding my business, and the children are going to school. I’ve got skills. I’m able to lead others. I never thought I would be able to do this. I’m now seen as someone who is able. ”

Helen Akale, Turkana shop keeper, Kenya

Drought management

Drought has a number of serious impacts, including forced sale or death of livestock, decreased purchasing power, famine, destitution, dependence on food aid, overgrazing, desertification, and conflict. Since the 1980s donors have been developing approaches that go beyond food relief, including early warning systems, safety net programmes, destocking, animal health measures, and emergency feed distribution.

In recent years, there has been an increasing realisation that helping pastoralists become more resilient to drought involves developing livestock markets, defending communal land tenure and ensuring good governance and respect for pastoral rights. Important developments include the development of Livestock Emergency Guidelines Standards (LEGS), an increased interest in livestock insurance, and a greater commitment to building capacity in livestock-specific emergency response through training and production of guidance materials.

Ways forward

- Tailor large-scale safety net programmes to pastoralist livelihoods
- Improve links between humanitarian and development programmes: mainstream risk-reduction and drought-proofing approaches in development programming; create better awareness in humanitarian staff of specific requirements of, and difficulties in working with, pastoralists; and improve co-ordination during transitions from humanitarian operations to rehabilitation
- Support the improvement and better management of early warning information
- Support disaster insurance for pastoralists
- Development and sharing of emergency interventions specific to pastoralism with accompanying capacity-building.



“When people have lost everything, all their goats and sheep, what can they do? They have lost their livelihood. At least if we have this money from the emergency destocking programme we can try and keep that money to start to restock when things improve.”

Lokale Ekulan, Turkana pastoralist, Kenya

Evidence of change

With another year of failed rains in 2009, 3.8 million people in the arid and semi-arid areas of Kenya faced a critical shortage of food and water. Already weakened by previous droughts, many pastoralist communities suffered large loss of livestock and faced destitution. In Turkana and Wajir, Oxfam’s focus is on addressing emergency needs, helping reduce long-term vulnerability to drought, and strengthening community services such as small shops. Distributing food aid through small traders and paying them for the service is one innovative approach that has been piloted in order to support small traders who might otherwise be negatively affected during the emergency response.

These distributions are carried out alongside cash-for-work programmes, which are designed to strengthen people’s ability to cope with the crisis and expand their means of making a living. Twenty thousand sheep and goats, which would not have survived the drought, were purchased from 5,000 households for a fair price as part of an emergency destocking programme. Oxfam is also helping people prepare for and cope with recurrent droughts by improving water supplies through establishing water kiosks and rehabilitating wells.

For more information: www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam_in_action/emergencies/east_africa.html



“Many of the aid beneficiaries coming to my shop to collect their food ration have also become customers. This activity has had two big benefits for me. One is the money I receive through providing the service. Another I’ve gained is how to lead people. So now I feel confidence enough to visit offices and raise issues on people’s behalf without fear.”

Rachel Muya, Turkana shop keeper, Kenya