

P a s t o r a l i s m

Progressing Policies that favour Pastoralists

2. Challenges to Pastoral Development

The context

Despite improved understanding of pastoralism as a livelihood and a form of land-use, pastoral development still faces major challenges: continued vulnerability to drought, dependency on food-aid and exposure to armed conflict. They may be exacerbated by demography or environmental pressures, but equally, or more importantly, by the persistence of inappropriate policies.

Unfavourable policy

The importance of supportive policy - on land tenure, markets, mobility, and conflict - has long been recognised. But pastoral rangelands continue to be encroached upon, and the importance of collective management and flexibility, which are features of traditional tenure, is not recognised in law.

There is also a failure to invest in the public infrastructure needed to encourage marketing of livestock and, at an international level, a failure to develop international trade regulations to facilitate trade from pastoral areas. Some governments have failed to manage armed conflicts within their borders and have come dangerously close to making pastoralists scapegoats in the “war on terror”, or worse have incited pastoralists to become involved in conflicts within and across borders.

In debates on the sustainability of pastoralism, these failures of policy have been highlighted at least as much as by demographic, environmental or climatic factors. But why do governments persist in poor policy? Lack of pastoralist involvement in the processes of making and implementing policy must be part of the answer; in essence, it is a matter of governance and rights (see pastoralist brief 3).



credit: WRENmedia

“We feel pushed to the edge. See how we are treated in times of drought: there’s a famine code when government supplies dry fodder for cows, but there’s nothing for our camels. Even if the government could provide dry fodder at cost we would pay. But in drought the government only supplies the cows. Not the pastoralists’ camels, sheep and goats.”

Mulsingh Soda Ghaba, Pastoralist, India

Drought, food-aid dependency and conflict

The most striking evidence that pastoral development has not succeeded is the recurrent collapse of pastoralist livelihoods brought about by drought and other climate disasters. Droughts appear to be happening more frequently and with greater severity, and pastoralists seem to be increasingly vulnerable. This is leading to a greater need for food aid during droughts and the destitution of some pastoralists.

Droughts also have links with conflict: drought and collapsing livelihoods fuel conflict, but conflict puts rangelands, livestock, markets and other resources beyond the reach of pastoralists. Many pastoralist communities have been forced to settle and enter sedentary agricultural economies, but this seldom happens on their own terms and often has negative consequences for their livelihoods and dignity.

Ways forward

Despite the challenges, the value of pastoralism and pastoralists is being increasingly recognised:

- Pastoralism is a rational livelihood option, providing milk, meat. Herds also act as a form of insurance, savings and risk management
- Pastoralists are highly specialised livestock herders and breeders and have skills and indigenous knowledge of direct national value
- Sharing and managing grazing resources through constant negotiation builds huge social capital - vital for communities living in high-risk environments - and helps prevent conflict
- Pastoral mobility and communal management of rangeland resources are rational responses to arid and variable environments. In these areas, traditional pastoralism is an efficient system of production that has little need of technical innovation
- Pastoralists make a very significant contribution to national and regional economies. The economic value of pastoral goods in the formal market, such as milk, livestock, hides and leather, is substantial. Over 90 per cent of meat consumed in East Africa originates from pastoral herds
- When livestock mobility is assured, pastoralism supports rangeland management and maintains pasture productivity and biodiversity
- Pastoralism has immense potential for reducing poverty, managing the environment, promoting sustainable development and building climate resilience.

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Coping with climate change is an ongoing challenge for many pastoralists.

Climate Change

Increased awareness of future climate change is now becoming a key issue in pastoralist development (see pastoralist brief 5). This awareness is double-edged: whilst it can focus attention on the potential catastrophes facing pastoral areas, this may distract attention from the fact that much of what is stopping pastoralists adapting to climate change are the same problems of policy and governance that have blocked pastoral development up till now.

Population

The claim has been made that rangelands cannot support the livestock numbers needed to sustain the growing pastoralist population at a subsistence level, resulting in widespread poverty. Such claims have generated forceful counter-arguments, but also serve to highlight the need for investment in livelihood diversification, through pastoral education, and improvement in the policy environment (see pastoralist briefs 8, 6 and 3).



“Every animal sold represents years of work: walking, grazing, caring. This is what pastoralism is and what it does for society. It's not just about meat or about money, it's a system, a way of life.”

Bande Amadou, traditional monitor of cattle trade, Burkina Faso