

P a s t o r a l i s m

Progressing Policies that favour Pastoralists

1. Opportunities for Development

The context

Pastoralists across the world suffer serious problems of poverty, vulnerability and political marginality. They depend on livestock for most of their food and income, and tend to move seasonally, following the availability of water and grazing. Their animals are mainly grazed on communally-managed or open-access pastures, but with some households owning large herds of livestock and living off the proceeds, the issue of pastoralist poverty is complex.

Equally important, however, is the issue of vulnerability; disasters such as droughts, disease outbreaks and closure of markets can easily reduce large numbers of pastoralists to destitution. Living at some distance from national capitals, and often belonging to ethnic minorities, pastoralists are frequently marginalised.

Policy implications

Donors and governments need to recognise:

- the positive contribution pastoralists make to national economies, food security and environmental conservation (see C. Hesse and J. MacGregor. 2009. IIED)
- the importance of pastoralists as a significant group of people with specific needs for development assistance
- the potential for enabling policies that contribute to poverty reduction and growth, through working with pastoralists to: strengthen their rights and political voice; reduce risks; improve the links between relief and development; and create opportunities in the contexts of education, entry into world markets and livelihood diversification.



credit: WRENmedia

“ Respect to the sky, to the wind, to the earth. As with our animals we tread carefully in the footprints of our forefathers. We have walked a thousand years. And a thousand years more will we.”

Translation from a pastoralist song

Dispelling myths

Recent understanding of pastoralism, especially in Africa, has greatly improved:

- Traditional pastoralism is a very rational and efficient system of production in need of few technical innovations
- The concepts of “overgrazing” and “carrying capacity” are problematic in tropical rangeland ecosystems, which are subject to high temporal and spatial variability
- Communal management of open range resources and pastoral mobility are essentially rational responses to an arid and variable environment, responses which should be supported rather than curtailed
- Pastoralists trade livestock for cash in ways that fit with family consumption of milk and maintenance of herds during drought.

viable livelihood knowledgeable economically important
productive adaptable skilled
environmentally sustainable market suppliers resilient

Ways forward

There are several reasons for donors to intensify development efforts to pastoralists:

- Pastoralists form a significant proportion of the world's poor and vulnerable, with specific needs and constraints on their development. Without addressing pastoralists and their constraints some international pledges, including the MDGs, will not be met
- The contribution of pastoralists to economies and food security is becoming more apparent with new forms of economic valuation. With the right policies on trade and marketing this contribution can be increased
- Poverty and environmental change in pastoral areas are interrelated in complex ways with violent conflict. Pastoralism must be understood and pastoral poverty must be addressed if these sorts of conflict are to be managed or avoided.

Evidence of change

Whilst positive examples of real change remain hard to document, pastoralists are now developing their own organisations to get their voices heard and influence policy. This needs to be supported. For example, successes achieved by the Raika, India's camel-keepers, include joining with other pastoralists to win recognition of the genetic diversity in their livestock. They have written a biocultural protocol, which documents both genetic resources and traditional knowledge, and demands respect for their rights under international frameworks, such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Eliamani Laltaika, a Maasai lawyer from Tanzania, has advised in the writing of an International Declaration on Livestock Keepers' Rights, subsequently presented to FAO. In Kenya, a Maasai association of landowners, SORALO, is coordinating community-driven research to monitor rangeland resources and drought-coping strategies. The association is also hosting exchange visits with US livestock keepers, to demonstrate open rangeland management and traditional fodder conservation. In Sudan and Nigeria, relief agencies have learned better ways to help pastoralist communities recover from drought and developed alternative methods of delivering education to children in remote and mobile communities.



credit: Rev. Helmut Klaubert

“I work with lawyers representing other pastoralist communities to get legal recognition for livestock keepers' rights. I have seen how government policies have affected us. But we can bring change.”

Eliamani Laltaika, Maasai, Tanzania



credit: WRENmedia

“I come here to buy and trade. I have to pay a good price or the pastoral people will sell to other traders. When I buy I look at many things, the eyes, the legs, the skin. So many things. I don't have a gadget. I can do it with my eyes!

Cattle are good. They are adapted to the climate and the human beings are too. The herder must be adapted to be able to survive in this area, this life.”

Ole Mbun, Maasai trader, Kenya