

P a s t o r a l i s m

Progressing Policies that favour Pastoralists

8. Livelihood Diversification

The context

Promoting alternative livelihood opportunities for pastoralists, either to replace or complement livestock production, must be central to pastoralist development. But new opportunities will often be highly specific, whether to women or men, to poorer or better-off pastoralists, or to different locations, market opportunities and institutional contexts.

Population growth and the weakening of traditional pastoralism by adverse policies make it essential to find other income sources for pastoralists, either in rangelands or in more distant areas. Such a view acknowledges the pressures on pastoralism, but does not imply a belief that pastoral livestock production is in itself unsustainable.

The search for livelihood diversification should go hand in hand with strengthening pastoralism through improved markets, governance and better links between relief and development.

Policy implications

- Livelihood diversification should be piloted at the local level based on participatory research of what livelihood opportunities pastoralists want, and what opportunities are economically feasible
- The experience of such pilot programmes should be documented, disseminated and collated
- Research is also needed to understand diversification processes and how governments and donors can best assist them.



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“These days we have to look for new things to trade apart from livestock, milk and our beadwork. We now have new incomes but we are still working with shared resources. We have a common purpose. All of us are tied together by that. The moment we pastoralists start splitting and everybody gets a different share then of course behaviour changes and that would break the societal tie of pastoralism.”

Agnes Molo, Maasai trader, Kenya

Understanding diversification

Pastoralists have always diversified. Many combine livestock production with cultivation of crops. But other ways include migration, employment in small towns, working for other pastoralists as herders, collection of natural resource products, and fishing. And for a few, better-off pastoralists, investment in profitable enterprises like trade, transport or real estate is possible.

The current poverty of pastoralists in the Horn of Africa suggests that the number pushed into diversification is considerably greater than those pulled into it, but systematic research is lacking. Key issues which require further research include the roles of the above push and pull factors, the impacts of diversification on well-being, which pastoralists diversify, and how diversification can be supported.

Ways forward

- Education is the most important long-term route to diversification (see pastoralist brief 6) but more immediate strategies are needed in the short-term
- Solutions are likely to be very locally-specific so participatory study of supply and local market chains and hard-headed analysis of end-market demand, are needed. In some countries, cooperatives, vocational training, or micro-finance may be appropriate, but elsewhere new instruments may be required
- Because of the specificity, diversification may be best promoted through small projects
- It will be important to document and disseminate good practice and lessons learned from pilot projects in order to design larger programmes and policies that promote livelihood diversification
- There remains an urgent need for research with the aim of identifying opportunities that allow sustainable and dignified livelihoods.



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Agnes Molo supplements income from livestock by selling vegetables.

Evidence of change

Diversification is key to the survival and prosperity of the pastoralist community of Olkirimatian in the South Rift Valley, Kenya, close to the border with Tanzania. Still managing their resources - land, water and economic opportunities - as a community, they have allocated land to different uses: grazing, wildlife conservation (with a tourism lodge but open to livestock in times of great need), research (a camp area where visiting scientists pay to stay and study) and, where springs flow from the escarpment, agriculture.

Permission to hold a new weekly livestock market was obtained from the authorities in 2008. Formerly livestock had to be walked to other areas to be sold but now livestock dealers come to buy at Olkirimatian and a parallel market in fresh vegetables and other goods has sprung up alongside. Loss of some livestock to attack by wild animals is tolerated, as fees earned from the conservation area support schooling for local children. Every family in the community derives income from each of the enterprises, so galvanising support and participation for all the ventures and the ongoing community solidarity and management of the whole land area titled to them.

For more information: www.tourisme-solidaire.org/projet/pdf/C3KenyaSORALO.pdf



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“ This ice cream made with camel milk is very good. It is a new product. Before, even selling camel milk was illegal because it was not mentioned in India's Dairy Act. We have helped to change that policy. Now we can try to develop the market for this new product. It used to be hard to go anywhere and raise our voice. But now we are getting more confident and showing people that as Raika we are economically productive. We ” have a place in this world.

Dali Bai, Pastoralist and community representative, Rajasthan, India