

# rural livelihoods

research findings for development policymakers and practitioners

## Helping pastoralists in East Africa cope with drought

**D**roughts in East Africa's drylands are becoming more frequent. This creates difficulties for many pastoralists in the region. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and donors are trying to find new ways to help pastoralists cope with drought, other than food aid and financial relief. Can these support measures complement traditional pastoralist coping strategies?

Research from the Natural Resources Institute in the UK examines emergency livestock marketing interventions (ELMIs). This approach involves donors and NGOs buying livestock from pastoralists during droughts, either directly or by providing subsidies or other incentives to commercial traders. ELMIs are popular with donors, and have had some success in Kenya and Ethiopia.

By buying livestock at the start of a drought, ELMIs relieve pressure on natural resources (such as grazing lands) and strengthen the financial power of pastoralists. They can also provide protein-rich food to drought-affected populations, because in some project designs the purchased animals are slaughtered and used as food.

Pastoralists also have their own coping strategies, which have been used for centuries. The most important strategy has always been moving livestock in times of drought, to search for better sources of food and water. Selling animals at different stages of a drought is also important, but there is no simple pattern that all pastoralists follow. Investing in veterinary treatment for livestock during droughts has become an increasingly important strategy in recent years, as has paying for water from diesel-powered boreholes.

Some ELMIs have had good results as localised projects. However, scaling them up to the level of policy interventions requires policymakers to understand how they work alongside existing pastoralist coping strategies:

- When pastoralists move their animals at the start of a drought, buying livestock through the ELMI approach may be difficult to implement. Where pastoralists are less mobile than they used to be, as

in many parts of East Africa, ELMIs are more successful and easier to manage.

- ELMIs support the new pastoralist coping strategies that require cash, such as paying for veterinary treatment.

**By buying livestock at the start of a drought, emergency livestock marketing interventions relieve pressure on natural resources and strengthen the financial power of pastoralists**

- Where ELMIs provide meat to communities, they could revive traditional mechanisms of food sharing. However, they could also remove animals that might otherwise be loaned to relatives as a coping strategy.

Policymakers should give full consideration to existing coping strategies when designing policy interventions. This is crucial if ELMIs are to be successful on a larger scale. The researcher suggests:

- ELMIs that use subsidies to add animals to existing marketing channels have lower unit costs and better prospects for expansion than those which return meat to communities.
- ELMIs must occur early in the drought cycle if they are to be successful.
- Prompt cash payments are essential to ensure the maximum benefits to pastoralists.
- Projects should be sensitive to contexts and locations, as pastoralists in



**Undernourished cattle gathered on desertified land in Ethiopia's Somali region. The region has suffered overgrazing during the drought, and the soil has become unstable. A severe drought extended across East Africa after the rainy season expected in October 2005 failed to arrive.**

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different areas use different coping strategies.

- Policymakers need a much greater understanding of how pastoralists sell livestock over the course of a drought. This is a major gap in knowledge that requires further research if ELMIs are to be successful on a larger scale.

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## Moving out of poverty in Tanzania's Kagera region

**The Kagera region in north-west Tanzania is landlocked and dependent on agriculture. Can poor farm workers in Kagera shape their own future and move out of poverty?**

Research from Economic Development Initiatives, Tanzania, examines the factors that affect people's ability to move out of poverty. The research draws on survey data from 47 rural villages in Kagera (from 1993 and 2004) as well as on in-depth qualitative information on eight of the villages.

The research shows that there are two main routes out of poverty in Kagera. For people with sufficient land and other assets, there is agriculture. Those who diversify their farming activities (for example, growing modern crops such as green peppers and vanilla) are most likely to succeed. People who grow traditional farming crops

(bananas and coffee) are more likely to remain poor.

The other main route out of poverty is trading and business. People's ability to move into this kind of work depends largely on their exposure to life outside their village. In contrast to farming, continued good health and an extensive trust network can compensate for lack of initial capital.

Poor people in Kagera are extremely vulnerable to shocks, such as illness or the death of a family member. Only the richest people have the ability to protect themselves against the negative impacts of such shocks.

Other research findings include:

- People who live in remote areas and lack land and other assets have the least freedom to move out of poverty.
- When poor people leave their villages to look for work, they often end up working and living in dangerous and alienating conditions.
- Poor people are very vulnerable to even relatively small shocks.
- Local inheritance rights in Kagera make women particularly vulnerable when their husband or father dies.

In Kagera and similar regions, farming will continue to be the mainstay of most people's livelihoods. However, given the

right conditions, people living in rural areas like Kagera can gradually move out of poverty.

The policy implications of the research include:

- Raising agricultural incomes should be a priority.
- Promoting new crops and supporting farmers in marketing them (for example, through help with information and credit) are important.
- Exposing people to new ideas and networks are also important.
- Introducing social protection measures to help people cope with unexpected events such as illness would help to reduce vulnerability.
- Ensuring local compliance to national inheritance laws would help improve the lives of women whose husband or father dies.

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'Moving out of Poverty in Tanzania's Kagera Region', Economic Development Initiatives, EDI: Bukoba, by Joachim De Weerd, 2006

## Rethinking interventions with pastoralists in Ethiopia

**Most people in the Afar region of Ethiopia live largely by livestock production, using animals for milk, meat, transport, sale and exchange. Afar pastoralists have predominantly been portrayed as poor and in many cases as mismanaging natural resources.**

Researchers from the University of Reading in the UK argue that the way pastoralists live and manage their environment and shocks (such as drought or disease) have been misunderstood. By focussing on conditions during drought periods, important systems of resilience and management are ignored. Such misunderstanding has led to unhelpful development and aid interventions, notably encouraging communities to settle and sell their livestock.

Although drought occurs regularly and livestock disease can add to losses, the benefits and returns from pastoralism are good in years when the rains come. Afar pastoralists operate a social exchange system in which everyone contributes livestock and food to those in need. This insures them against future shocks when others will reciprocate. People take part in this system even when giving animals to others will leave them short of food, because it provides status and security against future, greater need. Contributions are voluntary but not participating would bring punishment from community leaders and potential destitution through exclusion from the system.

There are several findings on ways that Afar pastoralists adapt to risk:

- Selling livestock to buy maize and other goods and services is important. However, getting livestock to market is expensive and time consuming. These cost and price variations make returns on market trips uncertain.
- The social exchange system insures people against destitution by guaranteeing that those who lose their animals will receive enough new livestock from their neighbours to rebuild their herd. This system avoids great inequalities of wealth but may also suppress trade.
- Alternatives to pastoralism are very limited. Switching to agriculture is not worthwhile economically, and waged labour opportunities are scarce.

Many pastoralists in Afar go through periods of poverty when shocks occur. However, vulnerability to destitution is their main concern, rather than relatively short-term poverty. By contributing livestock and other goods to less fortunate households, pastoralists tolerate a certain level of poverty in order to reduce vulnerability. Understanding how Afar pastoralists manage their environment can help improve development support:

- Additional income-generating opportunities should complement existing activities rather than be promoted as alternatives. For example, women produce butter for sale when extra milk is available.

Technology could support this activity.

- Markets are important for selling livestock but high associated costs and price fluctuations create risk. Providing information on prices for livestock and helping to stabilise prices for grain through improved local storage could help.
- Social exchange is the essential insurance mechanism for Afar pastoralists and interventions should avoid undermining this. Whole communities must be empowered to participate in development and aid decisions.
- The potential for alternative forms of insurance should be explored to help decrease vulnerability to shocks.

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'Livelihood Adaptation to Risk: Constraints and Opportunities for Pastoral Development in Ethiopia's Afar Region' *Journal of Development Studies*, 43.3, pages 490-511, by Jonathan Davies and Richard Bennett, 2007

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