

Brief for GSDR 2015

Pastoral Development Pathways in Ethiopia; the Policy Environment and Critical Constraints

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Introduction

Pastoralism is a specialised form of natural resource management, adapted to ecosystems defined as marginal, characterised by a limited, variable and unpredictable agro-ecological resource endowment. These can vary from African dry lands to central Asian steppes to European mountains, to Andean plateaux. In order to make use of these territories, pastoralists critically rely on mobile livestock rearing; this is the factor that distinguishes them from other rural communities. Pastoralism is thus not only an economic activity aimed at animal production, but a whole livelihood systems and a lifestyle in its own.

While in the past herders were considered the wealthiest amongst rural people, nowadays the situation has reversed, with groups subsisting on extensive livestock rearing ranking amongst the most vulnerable and insecure. This is the outcome of important changes that have taken place in recent decades in the environmental/climate as well as in the socio-political spheres. As a result of such process pastoral regions are often and increasingly associated to trends of desertification, famine, food and social insecurity, migration, conflict and now insurgency. As things stand most development 'nightmares' seem to inhabit pastoral rangelands. And yet these communities rarely appear on the international development agenda.

Pastoralism developed out of the need to constantly adapt to the extreme climatic uncertainty and marginal landscapes of the dry lands, and has been practiced for centuries. Pastoralists have sophisticated methods to optimize water and land, moving and selling

animals to deal with the effects of drought. Yet, in recent years, the dry lands of the Horn have become some of the most vulnerable areas in the world. This is due in part to decades of political and economic marginalization, which has led to an erosion of the pastoral asset base. These structural forces disrupt migration routes and access to dry season grazing areas, severely curtailing pastoralists' abilities to move animals to different pasture, a key mechanisms for coping with drought. This is particularly true for poorer pastoralists, with smaller herd sizes. Rather than address this marginalization and reinforce adaptive capacities, there has instead been a focus on providing emergency assistance, which has often been either too late or inappropriate, and which has further undermined sustainable development in these areas.

Pastoral livelihood vulnerability: What is the problem?

The dry lands cannot support sustained and reliable agriculture because of low and variable rainfall and high temperatures. Pastoralism, however, is extremely well suited to this type of environment. Pastoralists make optimum use of the dry lands by practicing a mobile and extensive livestock keeping system. They move according to where and when fodder becomes available, and use different herd management strategies such as herd splitting, herd diversification and herd maximization to ensure that they spread the risk of livestock loss from droughts, diseases and theft. All the while, they make maximum use of the available vegetation without degrading the environment.

These traditional strategies are underpinned by mobility and are thus only effective in a context that permits the practice of mobile

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pastoralism. Thus, to the extent that development policies promoted by governments and donors restrict mobility, they effectively increase the vulnerability of pastoralists to natural and man-made shocks.

The Policy Environment

The 1995 constitution is the first in incorporated the issues of pastoralists for the first time in the country. It also formed a department in the ministry of federal affairs which coordinates and facilitates development in pastoral areas and set up Pastoralist Affairs Standing Committee in the parliament which oversees pastoral development activities in the country. Regional offices in charge of pastoral development have been established in regions where pastoralism is an important production system. Different from the previous two regimes the current government has attempted to incorporate pastoral development in its national development plans (2000-2004 and 2005-2009 five year plans).

Despite lack of clarity as to what will be the future of pastoralism, the government set a national policy and strategies to direct development efforts in the pastoral areas of Ethiopia. It has made a stride in considering the need to develop the pastoral area and to give some development direction that triggers improvement of the livelihood of pastoralists. It also has made certain shift in the thinking of pastoral development from its predecessors (Desta, 2002). It looks like it has made a departure from its predecessors in a sense that it is focusing more on the poor livestock holders (i.e., pastoralists) and poverty reduction than the livestock themselves. However there is still a need to do more to bring pastoralists themselves to participate in the policy making processes that affect their livelihoods.

The 1995 Ethiopian Constitution provided for pastoralists the right to free land grazing and not to be displaced from their own lands without their wish. The constitution also provides pastoralists to receive fair prices for their

products that would lead to improvement in their conditions of life. These are some of the articles in the constitution which specifically reflect the position of the government regarding pastoralist interest. In its short-medium development policy the government admits the importance of investing in pastoralism to improve the food security situation of pastoralists. It also acknowledges the usefulness of the traditional pastoral knowledge to manage pastoral resources. However in its long term policy it advocates for settlement of pastoralists based on development of irrigation. There is a need for more and open dialogue among the policy makers, development facilitators, researchers, pastoral advocacy groups and the pastoral community to bring to the surface implications and appropriateness of the government long term policy of pastoral settlement.

Critical Constraints

The research world has challenged previous misconceived assumptions, demonstrating the consistency of pastoral resource management. Furthermore a better organised and more active pastoral civil society exists today, and a number of activities at field, as well as at policy, levels provide an important reference framework in terms of best practices and lessons learnt.

Main challenges pertaining to sustainable development patterns amongst the estimated 15 million pastoral communities in the country include:

- Issues of governance – relationships with governmental as well as regional institutions (political representation, making devolution effective),
- Resource access – land rights, livelihood diversification options;
- Climate change – trends of desertification, risks and opportunities defined by the diverse regional scenarios and by the development of carbon-related finance mechanisms;
- Enabling Environment - investing in basic infrastructure, services and facilities – also utilising innovative ICT and microfinance options;

- Fair Market Remuneration - pastoral-friendly food and trade policies, rural-urban links, investments to enhance compliance with SPS standards.

Conclusion

Pastoralism is a rational use of the dry lands. Pastoralists respond to and use, even choose and profit from, variability. This allows for a vibrant and productive livelihood system in some of the harshest landscapes in the in the horn of Africa. Pastoralists use mobility to respond quickly to fluctuations in resource availability, dictated by the dry lands' scarce and unpredictable rainfall. They also employ a number of highly specialized risk spreading strategies to safeguard their herds against drought, floods, disease and social unrest.

However, the long years marginalization of pastoralist has resulted in lack of access to productive assets and basic services, dependence on aid, food crises and conflict. Moreover,

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significant shifts in natural, socio-economic and institutional conditions have resulted in high levels of vulnerability, and as a result pastoralists are heavily impacted by drought. In addition, there are also significant of bottlenecks which possibly hindered the pastoral development at large. Among other things, environmental challenges, infrastructural challenges and recurrent conflict and threat to livelihood are to mention just a few. To end such vulnerability of pastoral population, the government put settlement policies in place as an alternative.

The question here is that it is the only specialized livelihood system that is suited to the management of the vast areas of the low lands which tend to cover about 60% of the total land mass of the country. If the future of pastoralism is in danger, how can the country tend to exploit such climatically harsh areas? Which any other system is in place that can be appropriate to the management of the dry land ecosystems?

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