FROM POVERTY TO POWER **BACKGROUND PAPER**

The Paradox of Pastoral Vulnerability

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1. The phenomenon of pastoralism

Arid and semi-arid (ASAL) areas constitute some of the harshest and remotest places on earth. In these dryland environments rainfall can be anywhere from 25mm to 600mm, often varying as much in time and place as in quantity. It is therefore striking that within such environments mobile livestock herders – pastoralists – survive at all. In fact, pastoral production systems are thought to support 100–200 million mobile pastoralists globally.[1]

Given this aridity it is hardly surprising that pastoralists are subject to higher levels of risk than those living in areas where farming is a viable option. Rain is scarce, infrastructure is almost entirely unknown (or almost entirely dilapidated), and guns are often in plentiful supply due to poor security. Nevertheless, there is a considerable body of evidence that pastoral livelihoods are well-designed risk-management and adaptation strategies.[2] Several studies have even found that pastoralism can compare favourably to commercial ranching approaches to livestock keeping.[3]

Pastoralism in the ASAL regions of Africa evolved in response to long-term climate variability. When the Sahara entered a period of prolonged desiccation approximately 7,000 years ago, pastoralism enabled people to adapt to an increasingly arid and unpredictable environment.[4] Shocks such as drought are not rare events but inevitable, and part of the reason why pastoral communities live the way that they do. As The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) concludes, 'Pastoralists have highly effective coping strategies to ensure resilience to risk...Pastoralism is a diverse and dynamic livelihood system integrating livestock husbandry with other activities', including farming, co-existence with biodiversity, raw materials, tourism, and environmental services.[5]

Mobility is the core of the pastoral livelihood system, and crucial to managing risk in these harsh and unpredictable environments. The movement of livestock according to water and pasture availability allows communities to utilise large areas of rangeland which lack permanent sources of water. Complex systems of natural resource management and negotiated access enable groups to effectively co-utilise and sustain pasture and water resources.

2. What is it that is not working?

After four decades of independence in many African countries, and billions of dollars of aid, pastoralists seem to have got poorer after all. In Kenya alone, agencies appealed for urgent assistance for between 2.4 and 3.5 million people.[6] At the height of the Niger food crisis in 2005, the UN appealed for assistance for nearly a quarter of the country's 12 million people.[7] The World Food Program (WFP) provides food aid to millions of Ethiopians every year; 7 million in a good year, and in bad years up to as many as 10 million.[8]

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[1] The International Union for Conservation of Nature.
[2] Much of this work draws on the 'new range ecology' of Scoones, Benkhe, Kerven, et al., which developed during the 1990s. Their work demonstrated that the underlying assumptions of equilibrium range ecology (such as fixed carrying capacities) and consequent solutions (such as de-stocking) were inappropriate to many parts of Africa. The spatial distribution of livestock rather than their number is what must be managed to avoid overgrazing, thus highlighting the critical importance of mobility in dryland resource management. A more opportunistic approach to ecosystem management is essential in areas with high coefficients of variation in rainfall. Drawn from Birch and Grahn (2007).
[3] Davies and Hatfield (2006).
[4] Brooks (2006).
[5] Hesse and MacGregor (2006, 1).
[6] Oxfam (2006). Some 400m shillings was paid into the Drought Contingency Fund during the 2005–2006 drought.
[7] Niger food crisis timeline, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4699643.stm.
[8] 'The path to ruin', *The Economist*, print edition, 10 August 2006.

These well-publicised disasters have led many to question the viability and rationality of the livelihood once again. But a closer look at these figures reveals that many of those struggling on the verge of catastrophe are farmers, not pastoralists. Many of the 7 million Ethiopians requiring assistance are highland farmers; likewise in Niger, agriculturalists are among those hardest hit by variation in rainfall.[9] The mean annual number of people killed and affected by drought in Eastern Africa is thought to have increased more than ten-fold in the past 30 years, from 584 per 100,000 people in 1974–78 to 6,067 per 100,000 in 1999–2003.[10]

Typically, responses to disasters come in the form of food aid at the peak of the crisis. Food aid certainly saves lives, but it has a host of other impacts too. The negative impacts of food aid are increasingly subject to critique from within and outside the aid community. The flow of food aid onto markets undercuts local traders and producers during times of crisis, and fails to tackle any of the root causes of long-term food insecurity. In slow-onset emergencies like droughts that can take several years to reach their peak, the relevance of this kind of assistance is increasingly being called into question. It does little to maintain the livestock asset-base of households, or reduce their vulnerability to future shocks, and those who are resource-poor to start with are often caught in a ratcheting effect as they lose livestock year on year, becoming less and less able to cope with drought. A recent analysis of the 2006 food-crisis response concluded that the response was typically late and appeals were launched as the window for saving livelihoods was closing.[11]

Food-aid responses to droughts in Africa are not just a failure to choose the right aid mechanism. They represent a failure of governance and of the bond between citizen and state. Some commentators accuse governments of shirking their responsibility for developing and supporting pastoral areas. In Kenya for example, humanitarian organisations such as WFP regularly provide food aid to large numbers of people in the chronically under-developed north. It is not without significance that at the height of the 2005–2006 food crisis, Kenya was enjoying a 6 per cent growth rate and a bumper harvest from the west of the country.[12] Likewise, the Ethiopian economy has continued to grow with strong agricultural yields,[13] but with no sustained political or economic commitment to marginalised regions. Reform of the aid system needs to take place, and there are already moves in this direction. Rejection of US food aid by large NGOs is a positive indication. The increased attention given to early warning, drought-cycle management, and disaster risk-reduction approaches to work in pastoral areas is also very positive.

With pastoralists, as with farmers, the phenomenon of drought and drought response does not by itself make people vulnerable. The gravity of the current situation for pastoralist communities stems more from years of neglect and misunderstanding by central government than from the unpredictability of rainfall. For example, individualisation of land tenure has encouraged settlement, localised overgrazing, and corrupt 'grabbing' of more economically valuable dryland areas. Pastoral areas have been found to contain minerals and the land expropriated. Pastoralists have continued to be excluded from the wildlife resources and associated tourist dollars that they generate. The massive expansion of food aid may have prevented children from dying, but schools are hopelessly over-subscribed, particularly in countries with free primary education, and pastoral children still fail to compete in the miniscule formal job market in capital cities. Infrastructure has continued to crumble while investment has been diverted to agricultural areas or 'white elephant' projects. The root causes of under-development have not been tackled and governments are still, by and large, getting away with the neglect in the knowledge that the international community will step in as a guarantor of last resort of the lives of the very poorest.

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[9] Sahel Working Group 2007.
[10] Guha-Sapir *et al.* (2004). The authors include several cautions about the reliability of disaster-related data.
[11] ODI Rapid Briefing, May 2006.
[12] 'Kenya drought to hit the economy', http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/business/4610368.stm 2006/01/13.
[13] The government estimated that real GDP grew by 10.6 per cent in 2005/2006, a third consecutive year of rapid expansion (Economist Intelligence Unit).

3. Pastoralists are citizens too

Protecting citizens against risk and poverty is the responsibility of the state. Yet until recent years pastoralist communities have been subject to the political and social marginalisation and inequalities common to many indigenous populations across the globe. States have been neither effective in providing services, nor accountable for the choices they made. In many pastoral settings, the modern state undermined traditional systems for managing water, pasture, and conflict.[14]

Government action in pastoral areas has often been hostile, overtly or otherwise. A dominant paradigm of rangeland management imported from the equilibrium conditions of North America reinforced the opinion of the African state and of 'experts' that pastoralism was irrational and outdated. It seemed therefore only natural that land tenure should be modernised, pastoralists should be settled, and development would follow. Pastoralism was seen to be environmentally damaging, backward, and unproductive.

Within this political environment, pastoralists lose out as multiple interests compete over the same land and resources, and policy favours the powerful, resulting in vicious circles of increasing poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation. In common with other minorities practising extensive herding livelihoods, such as the Inuit, pastoralists were subjected to deliberate attempts to undermine their lifestyle and culture, including the banning of their culture, language, or economic livelihood.

Government can therefore help or hinder pastoral development. There have been some positive shifts in the recognition of pastoralism in many countries across Africa. For example, laws or charters have been passed in several countries that formally recognise pastoralism and provide a better institutional framework for the management of the rangelands.[15] Many of these laws recognise the importance of mobility to the pastoral system: Mali's pastoral charter devotes a whole chapter to it.

But governments are all too often still guided by policies that do not fully understand the complexity and logic of pastoralism. Many approaches attempt to modernise the pastoral system in ways which are at odds with the central pillar of pastoralism: mobility. Fundamentally, pastoral civil society has very little opportunity to engage in the policy-making process. Pastoral voices are not heard; local associations or community-based organisations are often weak, and frequently co-opted by powerful elites.

Pastoralists and their representatives need to be enabled to engage with a responsive state in order to develop and to protect themselves from drought risk. Pastoral groups often lack a common language with which to communicate, even within countries. Pastoral civil society is often very weak, and supporting this work requires political and financial commitment and plenty of patience. With small population numbers as a proportion of the national whole, and living in remote areas of the country, pastoralists often lack the power or space to organise themselves effectively.

An example from Senegal in 2005 indicates what can be achieved through collective organisation. The Government of Senegal proposed to sell off the ranch of Doli for peanut production. This area was a key dry-season grazing area and drought refuge. Pastoralist groups therefore began what turned out to be a very effective media campaign. They sought to scare people living in Dakar, saying that if the government went ahead, they would boycott all livestock markets. The government subsequently

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[14] The Gad'aa system or the Boran pastoralists is a case in point.
[15] Niger (1993), Guinea (1995), Mauritania (2000), Mali (2001), and Burkina Faso (2003).

withdrew its plans, providing pastoralists with a victory in what has become known as 'l'affaire du ranche de Doli'.[16]

While specific campaigns will not necessarily change the minds of the government on the value of pastoralism, this example indicates the power that can be gained by collective action. In East Africa, the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs[17] has been working over the past five years to develop pastoralists' voice in Ethiopia and elsewhere. Traditionally inspired gatherings have been organised for pastoralist representatives across the globe, to provide a space for them to share their experiences and ideas, to learn about effective ways in which they have engaged with government, and to engage with government and donor representatives on their own terms. IIED has sought to change government perceptions of pastoralism by developing training courses on pastoralism in both West and East Africa.

At community level, the development of local associations, which provide services to local communities as well as advocating for greater responsibility from the state, represents an innovative form of development approach. The development of the Wajir Pastoral Associations is one example. These organisations help reduce the vulnerability of the local population by providing vitally important veterinary drugs, and managing and improving scarce water resources. As they have been recognised by government, the associations have engaged more powerfully with the government, advocating for better services, budgets, and a greater role in conflict management.[18] In West Africa, membership-based pastoral associations, including AREN and the sub-regional network Bilitaal, have many thousands of subscribing members, combining representative legitimacy with political clout and economic independence.

Social protection mechanisms are currently being piloted in several African countries. These systems provide a safety net in the form of a guaranteed minimum income to poor people, and offer real scope for change. The provision of a minimum cash income covers basic food needs and much of the other essentials, such as medicines. This money gives the household choice over how to invest resources, and the security of income to be able to participate in development activities such as credit schemes, the purchase of assets, or other ventures. Importantly, it also has the potential to rewrite the social contract between government and citizen, as pastoralists for the first time acquire direct benefits from government. While many of the African schemes are pilot schemes, the logic is that governments will take over this responsibility once they see the benefits.

On the global stage, the example of other indigenous groups might show a way forward for pastoral communities. Such groups adopt a human-rights-based approach to climate change. For example, in 2005, Inuit campaigners petitioned for a hearing on Arctic climate change within the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, a body of the Organisation of American States. The group will submit findings from studies including the 2004 Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, which concluded that the Arctic is extremely vulnerable to global warming and is now experiencing some of the most rapid changes on earth. The group argues that the deterioration in hunting conditions constitutes a violation of their right to practise a hunting-based lifestyle. In contrast, African pastoral societies have often been portrayed as victims of global climate change, arguably because their ability to represent themselves effectively to government and others has always been relatively weak. These examples show how the strengthening of local pastoral organisations and associations is another means to reduce the vulnerability of the population while developing the empowerment of local pastoral people. With more effective representation, it is arguable that pastoralists should be able to make much more of their low-carbon, low-impact lifestyle. Payment for environmental services, for example, is one scheme in which people, either with cash or in-kind benefits, can manage their land in

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[16] M. C. Gning, 'Trade, political influence and liberalization: Situating the Poor in the Political Economy of Livestock in Senegal', PPLPI working paper No 8., Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Facility.
[17] http://www.pastoralists.org/
[18] Birch and Shuria (2001).

ways that will secure environmental services that are valued locally or globally. Looking back at previous experience in Zimbabwe, researchers found that between 1989 and 2001, CAMPFIRE generated over $20m for the participating communities.[19] With the expansion of the global market for carbon offsets, this kind of market is thought by many to be likely to expand significantly and to include other global goods in the future.

4. Forward-looking traditionalists

> *The outside world is changing rapidly, altering production methods and exchange systems, affecting the very fabric of all societies. Bearing this in mind and the fact that pastoralists are fully capable of adjustment, we are not concerned with protecting pastoralists from these changes. This would be impossible in any case. Our concern lies with the strengthening of the pastoralists' ability to adapt as well as with the broadening of their choices and opportunities.*[20]

Despite critiques that pastoralists are static and backward, pastoralists themselves recognise the need to change and adapt, and have been doing so for the past millennia. Pastoralists are seen as spirited opportunists, exploiting every millimetre of rainfall, so this adaptability should come as no surprise. As outlined by Jeremy Swift, a positive and achievable vision is possible for pastoralists in the future.[21] A positive vision would see those pastoralists who are active in mobile livestock production being able to use modern technologies like solar-powered radios for education. Satellite and mobile phones would enable herders to check on market prices or disease outbreaks. Many households would also have a settled base where children would live for part of their schooling, and elderly people would stay. Indeed, some have even argued that pastoralists will be among the best placed to adapt to climate change,[22] since they have been adapting to climate variability for millennia and retain a fundamental mobility that other livelihood groups lack. In the end though, the ability to call on the support and resources of government to assist them to respond and adapt to climate change is likely to be fundamental to their ability to cope with the impacts of climate change.

This positive vision cannot be achieved without real changes in the relationship between pastoralists and their governments. The reasons why pastoralism is in crisis lie in the action and responses of duty bearers, not in flaws in the livelihood itself, which like any production system needs to be understood and nurtured. Like everyone else, pastoralists need governments to enable them to do what they do best, and support them when times are hard.

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[19] P.G.H. Frost and I. Bond (2006) 'CAMPFIRE and the payment for environmental services,' London: International Institute for Environment and Development.
[20] Pastoralist leaders quoted in AU/IBAR (2007).
[21] Swift (2003).
[22] Davies and Nori 2007.

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