

Strengthening pastoralists' voice in shaping policies for sustainable poverty reduction in ASAL regions of East Africa

Ced Hesse and Michael Ochieng Odhiambo

Pastoralists Marginalized

The absence of a representative and effective pastoral civil society movement capable of articulating the development concerns of its members is one of the key factors that explains the continued marginalization of pastoral communities. Despite decades of empirical research providing evidence of the value and resilience of the pastoral livelihood, many policy makers, government staff, and NGO personnel continue to view pastoralism as a backward, environmentally destructive and unsustainable production system. In the eyes of the State, pastoralists often represent a minority vote, occupy vast areas of relatively invaluable land, and produce livestock products inefficiently. It is thus not surprising that pastoralists and their interests are not very high on national policy agendas.

For their part, pastoralists often lack the knowledge, capacity and resources with which to lobby their cause. A considerable constraint to organizing a collective effort lies in the significant heterogeneity that exists among pastoralists. High levels of differentiation according to ethnicity, gender, wealth or political affiliation affects their readiness and capacity to act in solidarity with each other. Historical inter-ethnic animosities arising from recurrent conflicts of land rights and livestock raids poses an additional challenge. Moreover, poverty and frequently recurring droughts limit the capacity of pastoral communities to invest time and resources on a long-term and intangible process of empowerment.

Reinforcing Pastoral Civil Society

Despite these problems (or perhaps in reaction to them), a pastoral civil society movement is gradually emerging in East Africa (particularly in Kenya and Tanzania) as community-based groups and national level associations are galvanized by the increasing support and attention that pastoralist issues are attracting from international organizations. Supporting these organizations to develop the capacity and political leverage to effect substantive policy changes is critical, especially in the face of prevailing prejudices against pastoralists and the constraints to organizing that pastoralists themselves face.

One such initiative, spearheaded by the Drylands program of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), has been supporting a process to build the capacity of pastoral groups in East and West Africa to understand, engage with and ultimately influence the overall policy framework regulating their livelihood systems. This process is focused on the design and implementation of a training course on pastoralism and policy. Initially designed in the Sahel, the course has subsequently been adapted for East Africa within the context of the regional program on *Reinforcement of pastoral civil society in East Africa*.

The paper summarized in this brief champions the training course as one important factor for addressing the challenges of poverty and marginalization among pastoralists of East Africa. The authors delineate the core hypotheses underpinning the design and implementation of the training course, describe the training content and its pedagogic approach, and analyses the practical relevance of the training to on-going policy debates and reform processes touching on pastoralism and poverty reduction in East Africa.

Pastoralism and Policy in East Africa

The course, *Pastoralism and Poverty in East Africa*, targets key stakeholders, seeking both to empower pastoralists to effectively articulate their concerns and to demonstrate the viability of the pastoral livelihood to policy makers. Currently, the course is delivered in English at the Danish Training Center for Development Cooperation based in Arusha, Tanzania. It targets pastoral civil society leaders, policy decision-makers including government personnel from key ministries, project staff of development organizations, sector specific donor advisors and university students. Plans are in place to widen its scope and invite local leaders from affected communities and senior policy members such as Members of Parliament.

The course is delivered as two modules that run for a total of three weeks with a six to eight week break between modules. Module 1 presents and analyses the *dynamics of pastoral systems in East Africa*. It demonstrates how pastoralism is a “system” regulated by ecology and complex modes of social, political and economic organization well adapted to dryland environments. Since the perception of pastoralism is often that it is unstructured, backward and inefficient, the objective of this module is to help participants discover the dynamics and internal logic underpinning the key components of different pastoral and agro-pastoral systems in East Africa.

Module 2 analyses the *policy challenges and options for pastoralism in East Africa*. The module focuses on how successive policies have sought to either alienate pastoral land for other uses and/or to modernize pastoral systems, nearly all with disastrous effects. The module looks specifically at current reforms with respect to land and natural resource management within the context of national poverty reduction strategies, decentralization and increasing privatization and foreign investment particularly in land and natural resources, and the constraints and opportunities these present for pastoral communities. The module enables participants to identify and analyse the key premises underpinning these policies and to generate alternative policy options based on what was learnt from Module 1.

Designing the Training Course

In order to assure that the material and method of presentation was relevant and optimally suited to equipping key stakeholders to understand and effectively engage and influence policy relating to pastoralist issues, great care was taken to design and develop the course. As the course is adapted from a similar course designed in the Sahel, it was necessary to assure that the materials were relevant for the East African context. A highly participatory process was adopted, and a core group of partners in East Africa were selected to take the original course and adapt it for the East African context.

Although much of the content needed to be changed to reflect the nature and challenges facing pastoral communities in East Africa, the internal structure and innovative pedagogic approach characteristic of the Sahel training was considered highly relevant. In collaboration with leading pastoral experts from within the region, a detailed template for the training course was subsequently developed. On the basis of the template, pastoral and other experts were commissioned to provide the most pertinent data and scientific evidence in their specific disciplines to support the arguments developed within the training. Finally, a series of tests were conducted over eighteen months with representatives of the training's different target groups to evaluate the logic of the arguments presented in the training, the pertinence and accessibility of the evidence provided in support of the arguments and the effectiveness of the pedagogic approach.

Challenging the Policy Environment for Pastoral Development in East Africa.

The successive waves of policy reform sweeping East Africa in the form of donor initiated poverty reduction strategy processes (PRSP) provide a policy discourse framework that can be used by the pastoral community to leverage resources and influence policy. Indeed, in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, pastoral communities have taken advantage of these provisions to assert their rights and articulate their specific needs in poverty reduction.

In Kenya these efforts have led the government to devote an entire chapter in its *Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation* to strategies for the development of arid and semi-arid lands. In Tanzania, active advocacy and engagement by pastoral NGOs resulted in the *National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty* recognizing pastoralism as a legitimate livelihood system. In Uganda, the *2004 Poverty Eradication Action Plan* articulates the interests of pastoralists for the first time with a commitment that “pastoralists and their farming systems will be a key component in the new (livestock) policy”.

While this is a notable step, a gap exists between policy and legislative stipulations on the one hand, and practice on the other. This is partly a function of the failure by key policy makers to adequately understand the pastoral livelihood and the key issues their practitioners face. It is also a function of the absence of a well-organized, informed and effective pastoral civil society with both strong political legitimacy and the capacity to articulate the value of pastoralism as a land use and livelihood system. The course, *Pastoralism and Poverty in East Africa*, provides a practical tool to strengthen the voice and capacity of the pastoral civil society, equipping them to build policy support for the pastoral agenda and help bridge the gap between policy rhetoric and practice.

[Full paper](#)