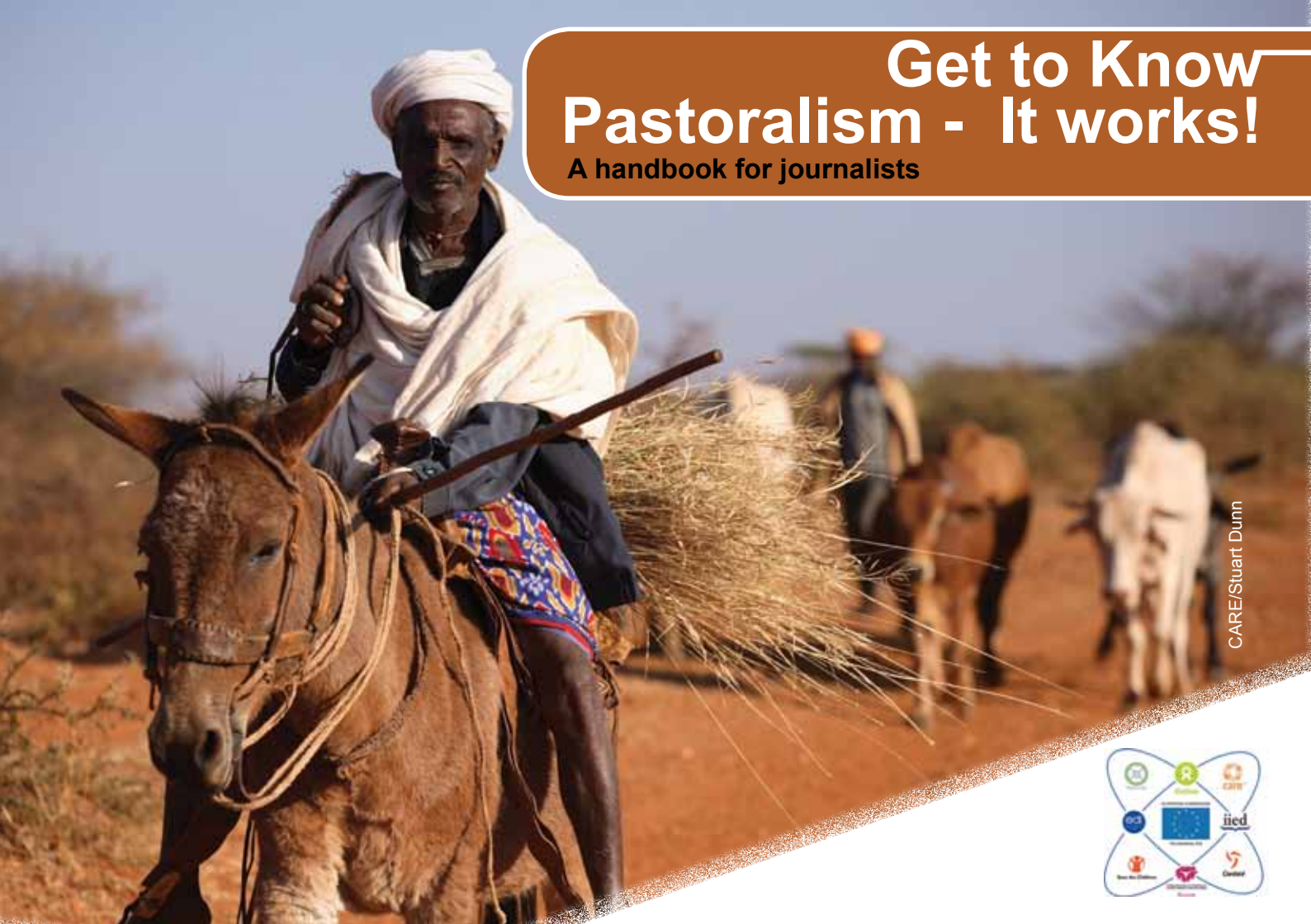


# Get to Know Pastoralism - It works!

A handbook for journalists



CARE/Stuart Dunn



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This booklet is produced under Phase II of Regional Pastoral Livelihoods Advocacy Project (REGLAP) funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO)

### Contact details

We encourage you to visit and join our growing community of practice at <http://www.epbdn.org> Go to: project/Africa/ Influencing policy and practice to support pastoral livelihoods.

You can also contact the Regional Manager for REGLAP (The Regional Pastoral Livelihoods Advocacy) at [somondi@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:somondi@oxfam.org.uk) or (+254-020) 2820116/ +254 738 230 043. Oxfam GB, P.O. Box 40680, Nairobi GPO 00100, Kenya



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## Get to Know Pastoralism – It works!

Pastoralists get a bad press: that's a fact. Almost universally portrayed either as victims or noble warriors. Pastoralists in East Africa suffer political marginalization – even though they are one of the most productive economic groups in the region. The only time governments – or journalists – seem to notice pastoralists is when they are challenged by disasters like hunger and conflict. Governments are supposed to offer protection, development and investment to all its citizens: but pastoralists, for some reason, generally just get neglected.

Maybe it's because pastoralism is not well understood. From today's viewpoint it is hard to see how pastoralism can survive – or even why it should, say some - but a little study shows that there is much more to pastoralism than meets the eye.

Pastoralism, it emerges, is a deeply sophisticated land use system that allows people to live on the harsh drylands that would otherwise provide livelihoods to no one. In fact, it is the backbone of a multi-million dollar regional livestock industry.

Across the Greater Horn of Africa, pastoralist herds provide most of the meat, milk and animal products for the region. Pastoralists not only feed their own families, they sell cattle, camels, goats and sheep to the growing towns and cities, and export in a major way to the Middle East. Many of the pastoralists cattle and goats end up on plates in “nyama choma” joints, and in Dubai, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, and even further afield.

### Estimates of the contribution of pastoralism to the Kenya and Uganda economies (2004)

Factor	Kenya	Uganda
Contribution of agriculture sector to GDP	16%	32%
Contribution of livestock to agricultural GDP	50%	19%
Significance of indigenous cattle in national herd	75%	95%
Significance of milk production from pastoralism (% of total national milk production)	24%	85%
Pastoralist population	6 million	2+ million

Source: IIED issue paper no 142.

### How did a group that is so productive get so marginalised?

Probably because pastoralists are hard to pin down by modern states built on farming and taxation. It's difficult to hear the views of populations constantly on the move; and easy to ignore them. But governments and donors alike are now realizing that it would only take a little investment - particularly in infrastructure - to tap the enormous value in the livestock of the drylands. Finding better ways of feeding and financing the nation is, after all, much more effective than constantly resorting to the emergency rescue of 'marginalized groups'.

“In Ethiopia, livestock contribute about 40% of agricultural GDP and more than 20% of total GDP... the government of Ethiopia allocated... less than 0.3% (of recurrent expenditure) to livestock” (hpg synthesis paper, April 2009: Social Protection in pastoral areas)

## In a recent Oxfam media survey on East African pastoralists, it was found that over half the articles written were about just two subjects: conflict or hunger.

- There were altogether very few articles about pastoralists, particularly in the international press – despite it being the source of a multi-million regional trade.
- Most pieces failed to address the positive aspects of pastoralism or demonstrated little understanding of it.
- Cross-border issues barely featured – even though pastoralist areas typically straddle borders.
- Pastoralists are rarely tracked down or interviewed by journalists, and are almost never quoted. Journalists seemed to prefer to use ‘expert opinion’ or generalizations.
- About a quarter of the articles referred to climate change, but didn’t mention how pastoralists have adapted, or could be helped to do so.

PASTORALISTS GRAZING THEIR HERDS



## So if pastoralism is a success story against all the odds – how does it work?

There are three essential pillars to the pastoral production system that are inter-dependently linked: Livestock, Natural resources and social institutions (family/people).

For sustainability and effective risk reduction and management, the pillars are built and reinforced by four logics:

Figure 1: journalists and pastoralists

- **Mobility:** A response to variations in climate and vegetation (pastures). Pastoralists and their herds must be able to move over enormous distances to maximise and manage their use of grazing, access medicinal minerals and plants and water. They are not just wandering around.

- **Herd Management:** Herds are diversified in sex, age and species to spread risks and maximize on the available pastures. Different species and herds at different ages feed on different levels of pasture. Large herds provide a buffer in lean times when pastoralists, rather than becoming victims, are in fact extraordinarily resilient. The herd size is balanced against the family size, and herd composition is aimed at responding to family needs. While large herds contribute to prestige there is a logical strategy behind keeping so much livestock, and it usually works. Herds are sometimes split as a coping strategy (particularly during times of drought), and to allow innovative use of available resources.

A great deal of thought and experience goes into this herd management and it allows pastoralists to absorb shocks even when exporting. A pastoralist would never put all his steers in one boat when sending livestock across the Red Sea - an incident of piracy may hurt, but will never ruin.

- **Access to markets and services:** Trade in livestock to get resources for fulfilling other family needs (education, health care for livestock and human and grains for food) is critical. It is for this reason that small ruminants (goats and sheep) are seen as “petty cash”, cattle are “capital” and camels “assets”.
- **Communal support:** by taking care of each other pastoralists can recover quickly from disaster and, rather than dropping out, return to being productive citizens. This is why you see so few pastoralist ‘dropouts’ in cities despite the extraordinary hardships they suffer. Each pastoralist group has a different way of supporting its members, including finding different ways of earning cash and diversifying livelihoods.



## So why do pastoralists have to be bailed out all the time then...

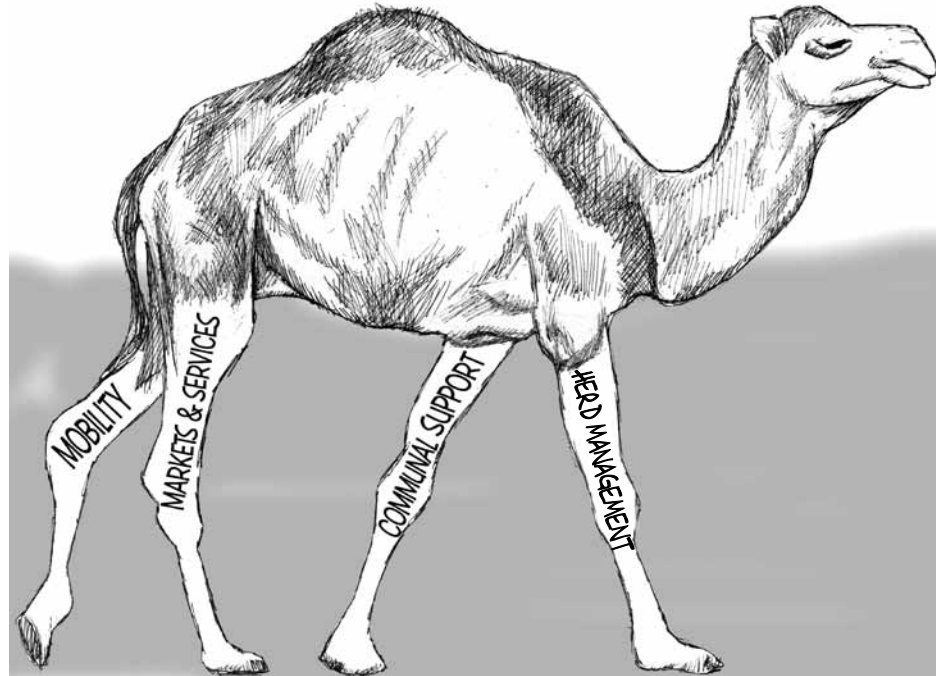
Most of them don't; you just think they do. According to Mohamed Elmi, the Kenyan Minister of State for Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands, the amount spent on bailing out the agrarian sector costs far more. Unlike pastoralism that is least supported by the government, government spends huge sums of money on underwriting loans to tea and coffee farmers and subsidizing fertilizer as a way of 'helping the economy work'.

It's true, however, that pastoralists live dangerously close to the edge. In the drylands, there is almost nothing to fall back on in times of crisis, and once struggling, pastoralists' livelihoods are likely to take a serious fall.

## To appreciate pastoralism, you need to understand how it works

**A useful way of understanding how it works is imaging the pastoral system like a camel.** The head represents the three pillars and the legs, the four logics. If one of the four pillars is shaken - or worse, removed - the whole pastoral system is put at risk and the animal will fall over.

In the Greater Horn of Africa, the most threatened legs are mobility and mutual support. Farmers fence off pastoralist rangelands; governments give away dry season grazing areas to flower farms; game reserves and National Parks are often no-go zones.





Conflicts and borders restrict mobility. The less mobility and access to resources, the more the likelihood of conflict - the stakes get higher and higher as competing groups try to secure food and water to keep herds and families alive.

Mutual support systems break down when people lose their assets due to hazards such as drought, when they are displaced, or relocated. Loss of livestock means loss of ability to be productive. In the harsh environment of the vast and isolated drylands, that usually means hitting rock bottom: dependency on food aid and handouts. This makes no economic sense for anyone, least of all the pastoralists. Fifty years of a food aid-approach has not provided a sustainable solution, and change is needed.

That's why there is need for a serious policy shift from disaster response (reactive) to preparedness (proactive) – which means putting basic resources in place before a crisis, including cash if necessary, to get communities through the tough times while focusing on the long term investment and development as a way of building communities resilience to absorb future shocks.

Protecting the legs of the camel includes helping with herd management when animals are threatened by disease or weather extremes. 'De-stocking' means pastoralists are offered decent price incentives to sell-off animals before they get weak and start dying. It's a critical way of coping with the more frequent drought cycles. Keeping animals healthy and preventing the spread of disease is also key. Mobile and cross-border veterinary services are highly valued by pastoralists, as disease leads to herds becoming too small to survive shocks. Prevention is better than panic... Foot and Mouth has led to marketing restrictions. Merely the threat of disease, in the case of Rift Valley Fever, severely restricts livestock export.

So pastoralists can quickly become very vulnerable. When the fundamental and long-established pillars of pastoralism are threatened, the entire livelihood system becomes unstable and lives are put at risk.

**Intra-regional trade in livestock in the Horn and East Africa is estimated to exceed US\$ 60 million per annum.**

**Local authorities in Ethiopia and Kenya earned US \$ 78,296.1 and US \$ 226,884.6 from taxes and fee levied on livestock traders in 2001.**

## To understand how pastoralism works, you have to understand what gets in its way – and why.

Government policy in the Greater Horn of Africa was, for much of the twentieth century, geared towards making pastoralist groups stay in one place in the interests of drawing borders, establishing nation states and “modernizing”. This, so the theory goes, would allow the provision of education, water and all those other benefits of progress. But, in fact, by encouraging pastoralists to settle and pushing them towards sedentary lifestyles, many governments in the region worsened rather than improved the lot of their constituents.

This has been made worse by climate change, which has hit the drylands hard. Increased weather extremes and shorter times to prepare between droughts puts pastoralists on the front line of climate change, worldwide. Understanding climate change – as opposed to simply responding to its’ effects – is a relatively new challenge, for everybody. But the mobility of pastoralists now appears to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Climate change requires a better understanding of the adaptability and diversification of pastoralism, and planning for the future will have to take it into account.

The good news is that studies into the pastoralist economy have shown pastoralists to be extremely independent and self-sufficient, only requiring external support when any of the four pillars are



CARE/Start Dunn

Livelihoods analyses commissioned by DFID highlight the importance of livestock as the key economic and social asset of around 25 million pastoralists in the east Africa and Horn of Africa regions.

<http://www.dfid-ahp.org.uk/index.php?section=3&subsection=19>

threatened. A better understanding of pastoralism pays off - especially when it comes to aid and development. In one area in Southern Sudan, for example, Oxfam stopped support to pastoralists because – in a situation where there was little government intervention - pastoralists were much better off than their sedentary fellows. Pastoralism proved itself more suited to the area than farming.

So there is good evidence that pastoralists are very productive, resilient, independent and adaptable – yet they are stuck with some very persistent and negative stereotypes. Look at what's written and listen to what's said: sucking up aid; victims of hunger and poverty: stuck in a worthless and inefficient lifestyle, struggling to cope in the modern world: wedded to archaic cultures, resisting change. And worse: 'bandits' and 'cattle raiders'.

Maybe it's because there are so few statistics that illustrate their contribution to the Horn economies. Yet it is considerable, and has been known to be

so for some time. Somali pastoralists have been trading across the Red Sea, throughout Ethiopia and Kenya and well into Sudan since at least the 16th Century.

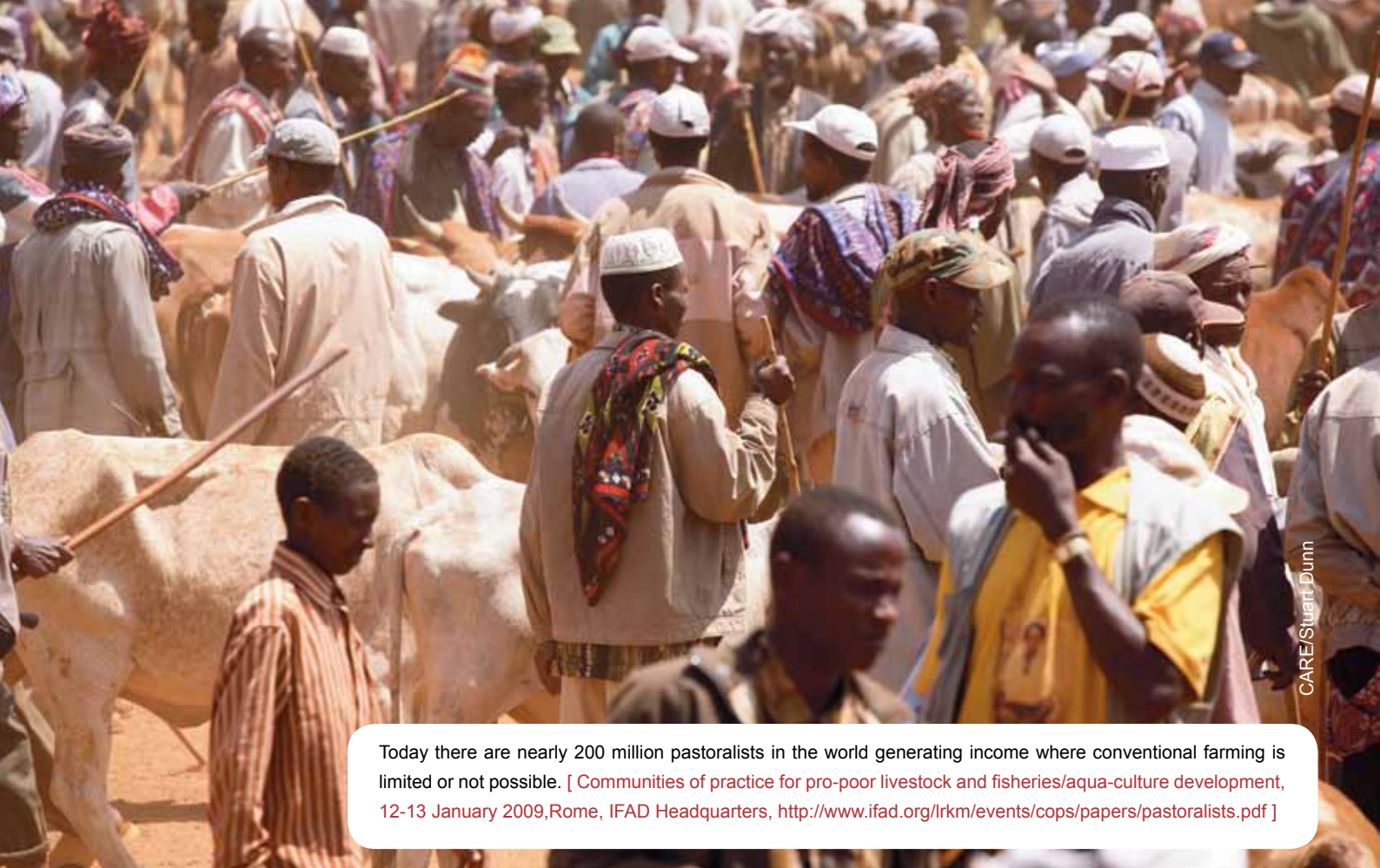
Pastoralists bring extraordinary history and culture to the region, as well as significant wealth. By encouraging and regularizing the trade they generate rather than legislating against it, regional governments would see increased revenues and smaller demands on their exchequers. Some governments – or government departments - are beginning to realize this, and encourage cross-border trade and contact on an informal basis. But navigating the isolated border areas is a challenge. Pastoralist traders are always coping with security crackdowns, fights over disputed resources, arbitrary bureaucracy, and a generally disparaging and punitive attitude to pastoralist citizenship and nationality. Keeping the lucrative cross-border trade going has been an unrecognized task, by all accounts.

***UN OCHA-PCI's researchers estimate that as many as 100,000 bulls may be leaving Ethiopia's Somali Region every year, bringing in, on average, 3,750 birr (US\$420) a head. Taking the same journey with them are up to 3 million sheep and goats, each worth around 360 birr (US\$40) to Yemeni traders across the Red Sea. (Andrew Heavens, PCI)***

***"Hides and skins are easier to export than fresh meat or milk. Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya have 60 tanneries which generate a combined income of more than \$135million." [ HPG synthesis paper, April 2009: Mobile pastoral systems and international zoosanitary standards: Devising a compatible approach ]***

***In Ethiopia pastoralist-inhabited areas cover 61% of the landmass and support the livelihoods of more than 9 million people. Ethiopian pastoralists own a large portion of the national herd - estimated at 42% of all the cattle, 75 % of goats, 25% of sheep, 20% of donkeys and all the camels. (2007 Ethiopian Population and Housing Census Report).***

***In Kenya, Central Statistic Authority estimates that Kenya's pastoralist lands provide 67% of its red meat. [ PCI quoting Republic of Kenya, 2002 ]***



Today there are nearly 200 million pastoralists in the world generating income where conventional farming is limited or not possible. [ Communities of practice for pro-poor livestock and fisheries/aqua-culture development, 12-13 January 2009, Rome, IFAD Headquarters, <http://www.ifad.org/lrkm/events/cops/papers/pastoralists.pdf> ]

Pastoralist success stories can be found – easily. Adaptability is key. In Tanzania, where rangelands have been shrunk by commercial farming and extensive game parks, Maasai pastoralists have moved into Tanzanite mining and dealing in precious stones. The wildlife based tourism industry in Ngorongoro and other pastoral areas in Tanzania are estimated to be **worth US \$ 900m to 1.2b annually**. Many pastoralists living in the area support the tourism industry through their land use system. In Kenya, the role of pastoralists in eco-tourism is significant. Pastoralists are the custodians of the dryland environment inhabited by Kenya's world famous wild life that contributes to tourism trade worth US \$ 50 billion, approximately US \$ 700 million per annum.

Modernity has been welcomed and innovatively used to cope with change and challenge in the drylands. Throughout the Greater Horn of Africa, pastoralists make great use of that ultimate pastoralist tool – the mobile phone. It helps ensure they do not have their profit margins shaved by middlemen, increases access to markets, and provides crucial information on local, regional and export prices. When Kenya introduced mobile money transfers, pastoralists were one of the first groups to use it - to improve the livestock trade and help plan for drought. It's easier to 'de-stock' weak animals affected by drought by using mobile credit, instead of

walking animals for days to distant markets. And in Somalia, despite decades of war and instability, the livestock trade remains a multi-million dollar industry and keeps the economy going. In fact, pastoralists have successfully continued business in some of the most politically repressive and inaccessible areas in the region.

### The ECHO funded **Reducing the Vulnerability of Pastoral Communities Through Policy and Practice Change**

project seeks to show that pastoralists are not only key contributors to the regional exchequer but, if only encouraged and supported, could become even more productive.

It encourages policy and practice changes that recognise the flexibility and willingness of pastoralists to adapt to different conditions. This makes pastoralists an extremely rich subject

for all sorts of forward planning and drought preparedness measures – and a good story for journalists.

**The consortium of non-governmental organisations that drives this project has great knowledge of the area, excellent contacts and welcomes interest from all journalists. Please get in touch: we can link you up with pastoralists so that you can hear it from them.**

**The majority of Kenya's pastoralists reside in the Arid and Semi Arid Lands which account for over 80% of the surface area of the country, 50% of the livestock population and over 25% of the human population [ Supporting pastoral associations in Wajir: a manual for development practitioners, Wajir Pastoral Steering Committee, April 2000 ]**

## A guide to terminology – good and bad

**Arid or Drylands:** Areas of low erratic rainfall and sparse vegetation.

**ASAL:** Abbreviation for **Arid and Semi Arid Lands**. Semi Arid lands have more rainfall and vegetation than arid lands.

**Advocacy:** Effort to influence political policy and practice.

**Agro-pastoralism:** Pastoral systems that combine or integrate extensive livestock keeping with crop production to supplement family needs.

**Bandits and Shifta:** Highly derogatory terms, implying self-enriching criminal activity and violence but used as a pejorative reference to the pastoralist culture.

**Coping Mechanisms:** Traditional – or introduced – ways of handling pressure and vulnerability.

**Desert:** Not the same as dry or arid lands, which provide a livelihood. Deserts normally don't – the rainfall is too little and the vegetation too scarce.

**EDP: Emergency Disaster Preparedness:** a very in-house way of saying, "trying to avoid a crisis"

**EWS:** Early Warning System: meaning, ways of knowing what's coming rather than just waiting for it to happen.

**FEWS:** Famine Early Warning System: a generic term that includes methods of advance forecasting of food insecurity and famine, using satellite imagery and ground-level crop, demographic and market observations.

**Food insecurity:** People are considered "food secure" when they do not live in fear of hunger or starvation.

**Livelihoods:** Way of making a living; being able to sustain yourself and your family with basic needs as well as having a sustainable household system that adequately and satisfactorily engages you with the community and nation.

**Lifestlye:** Using your own unique beliefs and customs to make a living.

**Marginalised:** Outside mainstream benefits, services and representation. And sometimes even outside mainstream national perceptions and acceptance.

**Nomad:** Not politically correct but in all dictionaries. It's seen as a simplistic label, meaning 'wanderer', without any understanding of the complex and varied pastoralist lifestyle.

**Pastoralist:** Not in most dictionaries, but the correct term for communities who make a living out of the Arid and Semi Arid Drylands using complex land and herd management systems.

**Primitive/archaic:** Outmoded, outdated, and incompatible with the modern world. Primitive is a pejorative term associated with African cultures not understood by the West.

**Preparedness:** A humanitarian catchword. It means putting basic things (systems, resources) in place to prevent or minimize disaster, rather than spending huge amounts of money picking up the pieces. Sometimes its as simple as making sure water pumps are maintained.

**Sedenterise:** To force or encourage pastoralists to stay in one place and give up their nomadic lifestyle.

**Shoat:** Shorthand for a herd of sheep and or goats

**Shocks and stresses:** External - and sometimes

internal - factors that put extraordinary pressure on livelihoods, existing services and normal coping strategies.

**Transhumance**: A seasonal movement from one area to another, over relatively short distances.

**Vulnerability**: Susceptible to certain negative social and economic consequences

**Warriors**: A term used exclusively for pastoralists in many countries, which often has pejorative political and cultural overtones.

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## Key Internet Resources - Global

**World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism** (<http://www.iucn.org/wisp>)

**Eldis - Pastoralism** (<http://www.eldis.org/pastoralism>)

**Natural Resources Institute**

(<http://www.nri.org/projects/pastoralism/pastoralism.htm>)

## Key Internet Resources - East Africa/Horn of Africa

**Pastoralist Communication Initiative** (<http://www.pastoralists.org>)

**Pastoralist Voices (East / Horn of Africa newsletter)**

(<http://ochaonline.un.org/rocea/SituationReports/tabid/3203/Default.aspx>)

**Arid Lands Information Network** (<http://www.alin.or.ke>)

**The Drylands Coordination Group** (<http://www.drylands-group.org>)

## NGOs - International

**Oxfam - Pastoralism**

(<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/pastoralism/index.html>)

**Vétérinaires Sans Frontières (Vets Without Borders) - Belgium**

(<http://www.vsf-belgium.org>)

**CARE** (<http://www.care.org>)

ELMT/RELPA ([www.elmt-relpa.org](http://www.elmt-relpa.org))

**Save the Children UK** (<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk>)

**CORDAID** (<http://www.cordaid.com>)

## Multilateral organizations

**EC ECHO** ([http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm))

**World Bank** (<http://www.worldbank.org>)

**IFAD** (<http://www.ifad.org/lrkm/theme/pastoralism.htm>)

**FAO** (<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/005/Y2647E/Y2647E00.HTM>)



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