

Pastoralism

Vijverberg session, The Hague, 9 June 2011

Central to this Vijverberg session is the question of how pastoralism can be part of the solution for the food crisis. There are many misunderstandings around pastoralism; it is often considered to be an archaic way of life with no future. Pastoralism also has a long history of recurrent wrong approaches: after some time, older mistakes re-appear in policies.

However, pastoralism is not something from the past that is strangely enough still around. It is essential for the livelihood and food security of millions of people in the African arid lands. And because its mobility, it can be an important part of a solution for the food crisis. In Sub-Saharan Africa 70 million people live from livestock keeping in (semi-)arid rangelands, of which 20 million in East Africa. They include age old cultures such as the Masai and the Turkana. They are closely integrated in the national and regional economies through input, output and processing value chains.

We have to understand pastoralism in the context in which it is practised. Pastoralism is a logical and functional system that works. It is a rational and efficient system of land use, suited to preserve the natural resource base, and to cope with environmental variability and climate change, while adding value from marginal lands. It is adaptable, with pastoralists willing and able to adapt and adopt innovations that are responsive to their needs and functionality. It has large potential value for contributing to food security, poverty reduction, and sustainable economic development, particularly in a world with increasing climate constraints. It is a sound way of environmental management; by moving livestock between different grazing areas, it helps to maintain the land, and not damaging it or depleting resources.¹

Pastoralism is inherently connected to the process of globalisation. Pastoralists make use of ICT for getting quick updates on market prices and pasture conditions; some move their herds with trucks. Pastoralism makes a considerable contribution to food production. For Ethiopia, pastoralism is second after coffee in generating foreign exchange and it amounts to 8% to the GDP. In Kenya, pastoralism has a total value of US\$820 million. In East Africa, 90% of the meat consumed comes from pastoralist herds.

In discussions, the Miseria in North Sudan for example, state their ambitions that they would like to become like Holland: a small country that exports meat and dairy products all over the world. The Miseria have much more land than Holland has and they see this opportunity. Thus, the pastoralists' ideals and aspirations are different from common perceptions in Europe.

The actual reality of this way of raising livestock faces us with the following policy issues

- » Securing access to pastures and water, to provide an enabling land tenure policy at local, national, and regional levels.
- » Legally regulating and supporting seasonal livestock mobility, and temporary access to key natural resources within and between countries.

¹ Jeroen de Lange, Head of Strategy of Cordaid, told in his introduction at the Vijverberg session that Cordaid has cooperated since the '90s with community-based organisations and NGOs in supporting pastoralist development. Cordaid helps pastoralist organisations to form links with other strategic organisations and to exert influence on policy formulation. Cordaid regards pastoralism as a viable approach for the arid regions in Africa.

- » Improving rural infrastructure and market access, to enable pastoralists to benefit from regional and international commodity-based trade.
- » Improving response to food emergency crises, including protection of a core breeding stock, and early market-based interventions such as commercial destocking, and credit provision.
- » Providing complementary and alternative livelihoods, in processing, marketing, production, and sale of fodder and other natural products, and community-based tourism.
- » Connecting to the pastoralists' own organizing and innovating capacities.
- » Essential to sustainable pastoralism is a right to mobility.

International policy issues

The Dutch debate on food security and agriculture has changed completely since a report from the World Bank on these issues in 2008. Before that, international cooperation in the Netherlands focussed mainly on the social sector. Now, food production is back on the Dutch agenda for international cooperation. The Netherlands is home to some high-tech food companies, such as Unilever. The danger is that we might make the same mistakes as were made in the '60s, putting our trust in technology, without looking at institutions and sustainability. What is needed is joint action by the public and private sector.²

Policies towards pastoralism are changing. The Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa that was approved at the 18th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union in January 2011 is a historical landmark that represents the unprecedented political will of African leaders to address pastoralist issues. It is an important entry point for investment in pastoral development.

This will need to be transformed into relevant regional and national policies appropriate for different areas. Europe should support this African Union policy framework on pastoralism and a bottom-up process of pastoral policy formulation in different African countries. This will protect and secure the livelihoods of about 200 million pastoralists in Africa and provide nutritious food for millions more people living in African towns and cities.

There are mobility issues across borders. Countries should therefore address the mobility problems jointly and not individually. Looking at livestock movements in North Sudan among the Arab Miseria pastoralists, they traditionally use a main north-south corridor for movement. One can see how the civil war in the '80s disturbed this movement, and with the recent split into Northern and Southern Sudan movement along this corridor has become problematic because of the different political settings in which people now live.

Sustainability

The Future of Pastoralism in Africa was the title of a conference in March 2011. As a question, it is a strange question: it is like asking about the future of fishery, for example. There are many futures for pastoralism; the policy framework adopted by the African Union is based on the premise that pastoralism is here to stay. Sustaining pastoralists is also securing the identity of the different pastoralist communities.

Are there limits to how many (pastoralist) people can be sustained by the land? That is difficult to determine in a non-equilibrium situation. There must be a limit somewhere, but climate variations limit what can be viable.

Are interventions to support pastoralists' activities sustainable? Are they broad enough? Many investment interventions have failed (a.o. from the World Bank), leading to increased

² From the introduction by the chairman, Ton Dietz

impoverishment in some regions. Are we thus making the wrong assumptions? One has to realize how models develop in a specific context. The Western model of agriculture was developed over a period of 200 years, in relation to its geographic and other unique contexts and the needs of the people there. It cannot be transposed to Africa, to a different context. It makes more sense to weave elements of traditional systems and modern systems into each other, so that they are responsive to the functionality and needs of pastoralists. Currently, the formal healthcare services across Africa are being reviewed to incorporate traditional healthcare providers such as traditional birth attendants, who are more accessible to the majority of the rural population. Government investment includes basic training in sanitation practices, improvement in their service techniques and provision of equipment.

Mobile economy

The delivery of state services is based on sedentary models which are unable to meet the needs of mobile pastoralists. Access to credit and other financial services is important for stimulating investment, diversification and growth of income-generating activities, and for supporting trade and market integration of pastoralists. There are now innovations within the banking sector attempting to address access to financial services in remote areas by mobile populations. A remarkable example is the M-PESA (mobile money) money transfer facility championed by Vodafone and Safaricom in Kenya, which has enabled pastoralists to transfer money for livestock trade without using traditional banking services. Innovative banks such as Equity Bank in Kenya are now partnering with this service to broaden the range of accessible products, including index-based livestock insurance.

The informal economic sector across Africa is growing faster than the formal sector: most pastoralists function within the informal sector. For example, informal cross-border livestock trade is a multimillion dollar enterprise across the Horn and East Africa region, supplying livestock to meet regional and export demands. It is organized and run by complex pastoralist networks, and has implications for pastoralist food security. Government collects taxes from this trade, even while failing to recognise its arrangements and institutions. This informal trade also links up with and supplies the formal meat and livestock trade. Government insistence on support to the formal sector only locks out substantial pastoral populations within the informal sector. The informal trade works well, but would benefit greatly from appropriate government regulation and intervention that would enhance distribution of wealth along the chain. A critical review is needed of the business models that function across the region.

The informal sector is growing and is an important business model for pastoralists and the Horn and East Africa: the efficiency and functionality of this sector would benefit from appropriate government intervention and investment. Pastoralism functions on a regional basis; therefore, regional integration efforts are important. Mobility is part of the way of life and a core strategy of pastoralism, and services should reflect this functionality. One can learn from the evolution of the telephone: it took the USA 60 years to have everyone connected via landlines. It took three years for mobile telephony, which is better aligned to how people live and manage their lives, to spread in the USA and across the world – including among pastoralist peoples. They need timely and relevant information on markets, prices, drought situation etc. Cell phones are the critical means of communication, as they overcome the problem of distance: people inform each other within minutes, and so pastoralists can make decisions within minutes.

Land issues and demography

The issue of land is critical: demographic pressures lead people to move to urban areas. Those who must move to the urban centres also need food. Pastoralism has been and will remain a critical source of protein and cash for the urban populations through the provision of beef, mutton, milk, and other forms of income from livestock sales. Countries have to address the issue of land use and the control of land for the future of pastoral herds.

Youth is a big issue.³ There is demographic evidence of an exit of youth from pastoral populations across the Horn and East Africa region. On the one hand, young people leaving pastoralist communities and moving to urban areas is, in itself, not a problem; after moving to the city, many pastoralist children buy themselves livestock as soon as they can afford it. Even for those who do not buy livestock, they remain linked to their rural families and support them through remittances. If some people move out of the rangelands, the lower demographic pressure will be good in the short and long run, as more land is available for grazing.

On the other hand, the exit of youth also presents the problems of marginalisation and impoverishment. The increasing population problems and other stresses have led to mass exits of young men from pastoral populations. Many youth move to urban centres within the region and even beyond into the Middle East. Many are prone to join militia such as *al-Shabaab* in Somalia due to disillusionment (Shabaab means youth).

Youth exit has other ramifications: critical aspects of pastoral strategy depend on the youth, such as daily herding, utilisation of dry-season pasture, and conflict management and resolution. The exit of youth has left women to take over their roles without the requisite skills and decision-making power. There is evidence of an emerging feminization of pastoralism.

Many of the youth working in wage jobs in urban centres remit money to their families to enable them to re-build their livestock assets. The youth, however, have limited job options due to their low skills base – the jobs they do reflect their pastoral skills base. Much of the diversification in pastoral areas comes from immigrating people who have a different set of skills, i.e. business and farming skills. Many pastoralists, on the other hand, are migrating to other less-populated areas where they can find pasture for their livestock.

The exit of youth presents both challenges and opportunities: it should be seen as a complementary strategy, and managed explicitly with strategic youth policies to avoid insecurity problems, and to broaden the pastoral economic base. There should also be complementary management of women's issues to avoid the growing environmental problems, as women herders are only able to utilise grazing over shorter distances. Pastoral emigration and immigration by other people also needs to be managed.

Since 1980, one can see a growing gap between successful pastoralist families and groups and a larger group that is getting poorer, which has less access to water and land, partly because successful pastoralists are fencing off land. Pastoralists are becoming more settled, but the herds still have to be moved. There is an increasing number of non-traditional pastoralist organisations that try to influence policies beyond their community, especially regarding land issues.

Pastoralists rely on social networks where the stronger and the weaker team up when on the move. These connections will remain for a long time and should, as much as possible, be reinforced as a social safety-net that reduces vulnerability, especially for the very poor. Poor families still herd cattle for richer families, but more poor also get their own livestock and improve their livelihoods.

³ The main focus of the latest AU Summit held on 16 June 2011 was Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development

Opportunities and challenges

Around issues of sustainability, and women and education, insiders are getting aware of problems and opportunities of pastoralism and are pushing policymakers into other directions. However, more needs to be done to encourage more women to take up positions of leadership and higher level decision-making.

A new opportunity for pastoralism is the upcoming middle class in the cities whose demands for milk and meat will rise with time. Pastoralists can provide these and support both their households and the general citizenry.

Pastoralists are good observers of climate change. Observations and lessons, however, are passed on orally. Maybe short films should document these for wider sharing.

Pastoralism is not mentioned in development programmes but a lot of money goes to the arid areas in the form of emergency support, which leads to lower food prices on the local market. How to get out of the down spiral, so that investments do not disturb development and production, but work to climate mitigation?

Presently, governments in the region receive early warning information from ICPAC (IGAC Climate Predictions and Applications Centre) but are unable to respond. They remain reactive and, therefore, food aid is a major path of intervention. It is cheap, easier to get funded and to deliver, but does not support pastoral livelihood assets, and undermines markets. It does not address the root causes of pastoral vulnerability, and has resulted in increased dependency and impoverishment. There must be more timely responses to early warning signals, and interventions that support protection of pastoral assets.

Long-term interventions need to be put in place, among which the strengthening of civil society, higher education, natural resource management, hay harvesting, and strategic development of water resources.

Some conclusions

The African Union should stimulate to link initiatives beyond country borders; focussing on individual countries is only solving part of the problem.

In light of the demographic challenges, developing other opportunities and investments elsewhere is important. Do not look at pastoralist communities in isolation, keeping them in the area and sending food aid. Other opportunities must, and can be developed.

Banks should rethink their funding strategy. One thing that is sure is that there are cycles of drought every 10–15 years, more often even shorter, especially in East African drylands: once every 5–10 years. Funding management by banks should accommodate for that cycle.

The right to mobility, open borders and access to water for pastoralists are central to a viable policy framework that honours the actual contribution of pastoralism for food security.