



IPAR

# How Public Policy can improve the Situation of Kenyan Pastoralists

## 1. Introduction

Over 70 percent of Kenya's land is unsuitable for arable farming. This land, which is generally referred to as arid and semi-arid land (ASAL), is predominantly inhabited by migratory pastoralists who solely depend on livestock for their livelihood. All life, culture and spiritual needs of pastoralists derive mainly from livestock.

Success of pastoralism stems from well-adapted strategies designed to overcome the harsh and variable conditions dominant in arid areas. The ASALs host about 70 percent of the national livestock herd with an annual slaughter of about 1.6 million tropical livestock units<sup>1</sup>, which is equivalent to about 14 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Indeed, pastoralism supports 30 percent of Kenya's population. Given that the demand for livestock and livestock products is rising with increasing population, and that, the size and number of ranches continue to diminish because of subdivision, mismanagement and insolvency, then pastoral livestock will continue to be the main source of livestock and livestock products in Kenya for a long time to come.

It is imperative, therefore, to develop the pastoral sector not only to alleviate poverty in ASALs, but also to guarantee continued supply of livestock and livestock products. Research has shown that pastoralism is the most efficient means of production in arid areas, and if enhanced, can meet the growing demand for livestock and livestock products.

## 2. Causes of Economic Stagnation in Pastoral areas

Various factors have contributed to economic stagnation in the ASALs. Some of these factors are discussed below.

### 2.1 Economic and political marginalisation

Economic and political marginalisation of pastoral communities has been very detrimental to their

development. Both the colonial and post-colonial governments viewed pastoral areas as net consumers of national resources without commensurate contribution to the "national cake". Thus, successive governments deliberately ignored investing in ASALs ostensibly because of their lower rate of return on investment relative to the high and medium potential areas.

### 2.2 Land issues

The land law inherited from the British at independence does not clearly define property rights with respect to communal land. All pastoral land is classified under communal ownership whose use is governed by customary law. Under this law, every member of the community has an equal right of access and utilisation of land governed by social factors including kinship, ethnicity, status and residence. Because of the difficulties of enforcing customary law, parties outside the pastoral sector have expropriated pastoral land for private use.

The communal land tenure also allows people to extract private benefits from public goods, leading to land degradation and desertification or sometimes described as "tragedy of the commons". Although this situation may change after the implementation of recommendations of the ongoing land commission, the land reform in pastoral areas is likely to have far-reaching implications given the current hue and cry about land and poverty.

### 2.3 Policy environment

The development policies and programmes adopted by government over the years have, in most cases, been biased against pastoralism. After independence, Kenya pursued an "industrialisation-first" development policy as the engine of economic growth. Consequently, development policy was aimed to promote industry over agriculture. Specifically, the pastoral livestock sector was sidelined in favour of crop farming in high and medium potential areas. In addition, most development programmes in pastoral areas were designed and implemented in a "top-down" fashion, hardly involving the participation of majority of the beneficiaries.

In the 1980s, however, the government deliberately invoked policies to address the needs of pastoralists. In this regard, programmes such as the School Milk Feeding

<sup>1</sup> One Tropical Livestock Unit is equivalent to 250kg

Programme, the quota system in schools and college admission and the District Focus for Rural Development programme were introduced. While these policies were meant to allocate resources more equitably to less developed districts, they have since collapsed because of poor implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

#### **2.4 Food insecurity**

Kenya's national food policy emphasises broad self-sufficiency to meet basic domestic needs of key food items. It generally ignores the food security needs of smallholders and pastoralists. Although the policy recognises the need to promote drought-tolerant food crops such as millet, sorghum and pulses in ASALs, it emphasises on reliance on food relief to alleviate hunger and malnutrition in food-deficit areas. Whereas international food aid helps fight hunger, it compromises the ability to mobilise internal resources towards food security, which entrenches and worsens poverty.

#### **2.5 Institutional and economic reforms**

Introduced in the 1980s under structural adjustment programmes of the Bretton Woods institutions, economic reforms took the form of market liberalisation, privatisation of some public functions, civil service reform, cost-sharing and the removal of subsidies. The aim of these policies was to spur economic growth and macro-economic stability through reduced government support and its direct participation in various sectors.

Liberalisation emphasised permitting the forces of demand and supply to determine the market prices. Liberalisation in the livestock industry in 1988 led to the improvement of milk and meat prices because of the increased entry of more players and the removal of institutional bottlenecks that had hitherto constrained operations in the industry.

With a narrow private sector, the animal health service in ASALs was somewhat thrown into disarray. For instance, there has been an increased supply of drugs of questionable quality and the involvement of unqualified veterinary practitioners, including livestock owners, in the management of livestock pests and diseases. Increased cases of drug failure are now being reported as a result of drug misuse, thus increasing the possibility of parasite and vector resistance to available drugs. On the other hand, notifiable diseases, which had hitherto been brought under control, are now being widely reported. Some diseases such as tuberculosis and brucellosis are also increasing following the liberalisation of the livestock sector.

Privatisation involved the opening up of state monopolies to competition and the divestiture of government from public services. Due to institutional and financial problems, Kenya Meat Commission (KMC) collapsed in 1992. KMC was the major marketing outlet for pastoral livestock especially during drought periods. Cost-sharing required beneficiaries to pay part of the cost of public services

especially in medical, veterinary and education sectors. Characterised by inadequate facilities and a population with low purchasing power, cost-sharing in ASALs has greatly reduced access to many essential services.

Reforms in the civil service aimed to enhance the cost-effectiveness in delivery of public services through improved ratio of Operations and Maintenance over Public Expenditure. In the ASALs, however, the civil service reform affected the pastoralists negatively in that retrenchment in the Veterinary Department seriously affected the delivery of animal health due to reduced staff. Furthermore, although theoretically staff from marginalised groups were not to be retrenched, in practice, the programme targeted low cadre civil servants (drivers, mechanics, cleaners and office messengers), most of whom come from ASALs where lack of facilities limits their access to higher education and consequently higher cadre jobs. Their low-paying jobs also meant that their little compensation could not sustain any worthwhile investments.

#### **2.6 Trade barriers**

Tariff and non-tariff trade barriers such as the '*Office Internationale des Epizooties*' (OIE, Paris) sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards have made it difficult for developing countries to export livestock and livestock products to the European Union (EU). Given the problems plaguing the delivery of animal health services in Kenya following liberalisation, the standards pose a big challenge to the meat sector. Kenya has lost its entire export market share for livestock and livestock products because of its inability to control various animal diseases and maintain high health standards. This directly affects pastoralism.

The regional trade agreements, such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the East African Community (EAC), of which Kenya is a signatory, require that member countries open up their borders to regional competition. Reports show that Kenyan traders import large quantities of livestock products from regional markets, suppressing domestic production. This situation is likely to worsen, considering that over 400,000 head of cattle are estimated to enter the Kenyan livestock market illegally each year. There are no firm agreements on these quantities. As the regional markets continue to develop, cheap imports of livestock and livestock products might further depress the local producers' competitive edge.

#### **2.7 Weak institutions**

Lack of strong institutional support such as provision of credit facilities, research and policy, legal and regulatory frameworks has exacerbated agricultural woes. More often than not, agricultural credit is disproportionately channelled to arable crop production where it is assumed to be most needed and also perceived to yield relatively higher returns. Because pastoralism is practised under risky and uncertain socio-economic and climatic environments, it is not stable enough to provide a relative

high return on credit, which inadvertently limits pastoralists' access to credit. In addition, little research has been directed towards improving pastoral livestock partly because of limited funds. Besides the development of thermostable vaccines and the characterisation of trypanotolerant cattle breeds, there have been fewer breakthroughs in the livestock sector than in crop research.

### **2.8 Vulnerability/Weather irregularities**

Periodic droughts considerably reduce pasture and water resources leading to death of both animals and people. To mitigate drought consequences, pastoralists sometimes move their livestock to high rainfall areas and this results in the spread of livestock diseases and conflicts along migration routes. Some of those who lose their herds to drought, resort to livestock rustling leading to more animosities and loss of human life. Persistent droughts in ASALs increase the vulnerability of pastoralists to food insecurity, often forcing them to frequently rely on famine relief aid. Poor famine relief strategies and a narrow national food policy that particularly over-emphasises maize production, worsen their condition. In addition, the failure of the public to respond decisively and expeditiously to drought-induced distress has increased pastoralists' vulnerability to the vagaries of the weather. The result of frequent droughts, compounded by conflict, has been the creation of 'drop-out' pastoralists who end up becoming more destitute or vulnerable in local urban areas.

### **2.9 Civil strife**

Regional instability in neighbouring countries has negatively impacted on the Kenyan pastoral economy. First, these conflicts have spilled into the country, leading to loss of human life and property. Second, the conflicts have increased the supply of illegal firearms, particularly amongst the pastoralists, who use the guns in livestock rustling. Third, regional conflicts have increased the influx of refugees whose animals compete with those of the Kenyan pastoralists for pasture and water resources. Such competition has ended up in violent and fatal skirmishes. Fourth, regional conflicts have increased the entry and exit of illegal and untaxed merchandise including drugs, stolen livestock and consumer goods.

## **3. Recommendations**

In order to remedy the situation, the following development options are suggested. Any development effort must focus on livestock improvement, the production of which the ASALs have a considerable comparative advantage. Most critical ones are water, pasture, livestock market and animal health.

### **3.1 Water provision**

The government and its partners have for a long time prioritised water provision in pastoral development.

Consequently, many earth dams, water pans, wells and boreholes have been constructed in ASALs. However, the maintenance of these facilities has often been lacking or inadequate. The management of water resources should be placed under pastoral associations whose role should be backed up by clear legislation.

### **3.2 Pasture improvement**

This can be done through re-seeding programmes, where possible, of fodder through irrigation and making hay during the wet season. Agro-forestry programmes can also be initiated to provide fodder, timber and fuel wood, besides enhancing soil fertility.

### **3.3 Marketing strategies**

Policies to improve the marketing of pastoral livestock will include: (i) Establishment of an effective livestock marketing infrastructure by both the government and the local councils, e.g., market days, transport routes, holding grounds, stock routes, and watering points, (ii) Implementation of appropriate regulations to reduce transaction costs e.g. the government should get rid of corrupt civil servants along the marketing chain, (iii) Regularisation of the legal status of pastoral groups to ensure the protection of property and contract rights. This may require some lobbying and advocacy especially by the Pastoralist Parliament Group (PPG), (iv) Provision of credit schemes to livestock traders by the government with the help of other development partners, (v) Development of regional abattoirs and re-structuring of KMC (or an equivalent facility) to improve livestock marketing. (vi) Exploration of possibilities of exporting Kenyan livestock and livestock products to international markets. This will require the creation of disease free zones and livestock movement corridors to control, *inter alia*, disease and vector spread.

### **3.4 Provision of animal health care**

This can be achieved by strengthening the Department of Veterinary Services. Owing to the low participation of the private sector in pastoral areas, the government should re-examine its stand on the current economic policies to promote pastoral livestock production. Specific policies required in this area include:

- (a) Establishment of an effective control of major animal diseases such as contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, foot and mouth, and rinderpest. The government and its development partners should strengthen the Kenya Veterinary Vaccines Production Institute (KEVEVAPI) and the Vet Labs in order to, respectively, produce quality vaccines and offer prompt and appropriate diagnostics on livestock diseases.
- (b) Encouraging strategies to increase the number of extension workers in pastoral areas.
- (c) Speeding up of legislation to integrate ethnovets and other paraprofessionals into mainstream veterinary practice.

### **3.5 Pastoralists to diversify their economy**

Pastoralists could exploit products such as hides, skins, honey, ghee, and game meat through value-adding processes, e.g. curing and storage of hides and skins, processing honey and ghee etc. In addition, they can also invest, where possible, in dry land farming. Engaging in eco-tourism, curios, *jua kali* and game cropping can provide alternative sources of employment and off-farm income.

### **3.6 Improve rural infrastructure**

The government should improve the rural infrastructure, e.g. rural access roads and bridges, rehabilitation of markets and handling facilities as well as telecommunications. Encouraging private sector participation would yield substantial pay-offs.

### **3.7 Review national food policy**

The current national food policy is supply-sided, mainly oriented to meeting food needs of the consumer, who is often the urban dweller or those with economic ability to buy, while ignoring smallholders and pastoralists. Even though the policy recognises the need to promote drought tolerant food crops (millet, sorghum, pulses) in the ASALs, it emphasises reliance on relief food to alleviate hunger and malnutrition in affected areas. However, it has been noted that food aid compromises the ability to mobilise internal resources towards food security, thus entrenching poverty. It is important, therefore, to review the food policy so as to enhance pastoral food security.

### **3.8 Empower pastoral communities**

If empowered, pastoral communities will be able to take part in decision-making on issues that affect them through strengthening pastoralist associations, community-based organisations, the local authorities etc. More public-private sector partnerships, including dialogue, participation and ownership of development initiatives are required. Mechanisms of encouraging such devolution and ownership of development initiatives need to be explored without undue politicisation.

### **3.9 Reinforce security services**

In order to stem out insecurity, and particularly livestock rustling in pastoral areas, traditional structures of governance need to be strengthened and integrated into the formal structures of governance. If this is done, these structures could act as early warning systems of conflicts at the local level. There are various initiatives going on in various parts of the country. The financial support for these traditional structures could come from the government and its development partners. At the same time, disarmament programme in pastoral areas should be organised slowly and consistently. At the regional level, the government, in cahoots with international organisations such as Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN), should urge for the re-establishment of social and political order in neighbouring countries to reduce the influx of firearms, refugees and

illegal merchandise.

### **3.10 Provide information**

Government and other players should provide information to stakeholders, including pastoralists, on matters of pastoral development. This will involve establishment or expansion of radio frequencies broadcasting in local languages. To start with, stakeholders such as NGOs and churches could sponsor radio programmes in local dialects on the existing radio frequencies. To actualise this, the pastoralists themselves will need to purchase and maintain radio receivers.

### **3.11 Train pastoralists**

The local capacity of pastoralists will need to be enhanced through training to enable them to manage their resources as well as to take up a more active role in decision-making and advocacy. Pastoralists' understanding of the country's overall development strategy is necessary in order to enhance synergies between all actors in pastoral development, with regard to inter-sectoral linkages.

### **3.12 Review existing legal frameworks**

To promote development in the ASALs, there is need to create an enabling environment to facilitate the efficient operation of different stakeholders including the pastoralists themselves. This can only be achieved by reviewing the existing legal and policy frameworks such as the land laws, veterinary statutes and marketing issues.

## **4. Conclusions**

There is need to bear in mind certain issues that might undermine the effective implementation of the proposed strategies. How can the government and other partners promote development of pastoral sector? Who will pay for these strategies at a time that Kenya, like many other developing countries, is going through hard economic times? Finally, are pastoralists themselves genuinely interested in improving their lot? If they are, what roles will they play? If they are not, what incentives are needed to bring them on board?

For detailed discussion of the issues contained in this Brief, refer to IPAR Discussion Paper No. 031/2002: *Institutional and Policy Issues Relevant to Pastoral Development in Kenya* by John Omiti and Patrick Irungu. ISBN 9966-948-14-7

A copy can be obtained from:

**Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR)**  
P. O. Box 45843, 00100 GPO Nairobi, Kenya.  
Tel: (+254 2) 251179/252885/331767  
Fax: 251162  
Email: [info@ipar.or.ke](mailto:info@ipar.or.ke)  
Website: <http://www.ipar.or.ke>  
Visiting address:  
15<sup>th</sup> Floor Ambank House, University Way