



## Improving Pastoral Welfare in Ethiopia and the Role of the Pastoral Affairs Standing Committee (PASC)

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*Pastoral people have traditionally been ill-served by decision-makers. In recent years the Government of Ethiopia has become more decentralized. Pastoral rights are now protected in the Constitution and pastoral issues are debated in Parliament. The Pastoral Affairs Standing Committee (PASC) of Parliament has been recently formed. The PASC has responsibilities for legislation, governmental oversight, and representation. Decentralization will help improve public service delivery and democratization in Ethiopia. Momentum towards a more comprehensive pastoral development process will be founded on many things. The uniqueness of pastoral systems needs to be better understood by decision makers, including the requirement that pastoralists be opportunistic and mobile. The rights of pastoralists for critical grazing and water resources need to be better appreciated and protected. Pastoral livestock production needs to be better supported by early warning, animal health, and marketing systems. Decision makers need to embrace a greater human focus. Bottom-up processes will help empower the poor. Pastoral development will require creativity and collaboration at local, national, and international levels. One example of international cooperation in West Africa has been to open borders to pastoralists to restore mobility. A similar system should be implemented among member states of the Greater Horn of Africa.*

### Background

African pastoralists have been ill-served by development policies and actions. In the narrow view of many policy makers, planners, academicians, and researchers, pastoralism has been seen as an out-dated and destructive form of land use. Thanks, however, to emerging work of researchers and others, and thanks to efforts and awareness-raising from pastoralists themselves, the world at-large is now seeing and understanding pastoralism in a more positive light than ever before. However, this does not mean that the way forward for pastoral development is without problems or challenges.

In Ethiopia, the major constraints facing pastoral people include: (1) Lack of access to information; (2) lack of skills afforded by formal education; (3) lack of access to basic public services; (4) increasingly restricted access to critical natural resources (perhaps the single most important challenge); and (5) lack of participation by pastoral communities in the decision-making processes that profoundly affect their lives.

Outdated pastoral policies, however, are still in effect for Ethiopia. Development problems are compounded by drought-related crises. The core problem of drought mitigation is to secure sustainable livelihoods for pastoralists, which means reducing vulnerability by increasing the capacity of communities to cope with

crisis. Improved risk management is central to reducing the vulnerability of pastoral people.

### The PASC

For the first time in the long history of Ethiopia, through new initiatives and the political will of the current government, the rights of pastoralists are now formally protected by the Constitution. Pastoral problems have been hotly debated in the Federal Parliament. A Pastoralist Affairs Standing Committee (PASC) has been recently established as one of 12 standing committees in the Parliament of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). The standing committees, each with 13 members, were established by proclamation. The PASC has been born as a result of relentless efforts from pastoralists, intellectuals, and civic society organizations.

The broad mission of the PASC is to promote sustainable pastoral development through partnerships with stakeholders. Responsibilities of the PASC include legislation, oversight, and representation. Here we briefly describe each:

Legislation. The primary role of the PASC in legislation

is to make a critical assessment of issues that require policy decisions and to ensure that these decisions reflect the objective conditions of pastoral communities. Drafts of bills and other legislation are critically reviewed by the PASC prior to presentation to the House for final deliberation.

**Oversight.** The PASC helps supervise capacity-building activities housed within governmental organizations and others. This includes follow-up on various aspects of governance, infrastructure development, public service delivery, marketing, rural finance, peace making, food security, and early warning systems.

**Representation** includes advocacy by the PASC. The guiding principles are to promote pastoralist-centered representation that recognizes pastoral skills, attitudes, values, knowledge, and rights concerning participation. The PASC seeks to help establish advisory councils of elders as well as pastoral producer cooperatives and unions. The PASC will foster international cooperation to better deal with cross-border issues that affect pastoralists.

## Role of Government Decentralization

Generally, it is agreed that decentralization of government is an essential element in the progress of increasing the profile of pastoralists in the nation. Decentralization can help redistribute resources in favor of the poor, deliver public services more effectively, enhance accountability, and foster democratic participation of local people in decision-making processes. Good governance should be based on decentralization. This will help create an enabling political and legal environment for more equitable economic growth and assist in the mobilization of civil society. There is also a need to aid the efficient development of the private sector to generate jobs and income. Therefore, processes of decentralization and democratization are moving to the pastoral areas. This will help pastoral people become more involved in decisions that affect their lives.

## A Way Forward

Below we give some thoughts with respect to how pastoral development could further proceed in Ethiopia.

The first step for decision makers is to thoroughly understand the uniqueness and distinctiveness of pastoral production systems—it's resource requirements and capabilities, the way it promotes the harvest of scarce resources, and the customary basis of its operations. The main challenge for all is to better understand that the issues facing pastoralists are strategic. Current trends in pastoral systems need to be identified and form the basis for development interventions.

Traditional land rights and resource uses of pastoralists need to be identified and documented. Policies must be worked out for protecting and maintaining the rights of pastoralists to grazing. Pastoral mobility must be maintained. Conflicts among pastoral people must be resolved and henceforth prevented.

An early warning system for pastoral areas needs to be developed along with the means to allow agencies to better respond to crises. A security strategy for food and fodder needs to be developed that allows a timely response to minimize death, suffering, and the undermining of pastoral livelihoods during and after droughts and other disasters.

Disease prevention and treatment mechanisms for livestock must be put in place for timely intervention. Strengthening the scope of livestock marketing systems have to be worked out in such a way that benefits all stakeholders (i.e., the producers, traders, relevant agencies, and exporters). The successful pastoral systems of the future will depend on markets.

There needs to be a shift among decision-makers from “paradigms of things” to “paradigms of people.” This process makes “top-down become bottom-up.” In addition, the “uniform becomes diverse, the complex becomes more simple, the static becomes dynamic, and the uncontrollable can become a bit more controllable.” Moving to a “paradigm of people” corresponds to an empowering process, with a shift of power from national elites to those who are local and poor.

Pastoral development depends on win-win situations forged through cooperation, collaboration, and sharing. This is true at the local, national, and international levels. Let us share with you an example recently observed in West Africa. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has created a system whereby pastoralists from one nation can now easily cross the border of another nation for grazing purposes without experiencing legal problems. In the ECOWAS system pastoralists have received a “livestock passport,” “international transhumance certificate,” and a “handbook of travel.” This promotes mobility, an essential attribute of pastoral societies. We believe that neighboring states in the Greater Horn of Africa could embark on a similar plan, perhaps fostered by IGAD (Inter-Governmental Authority on Development).

## Concluding Remarks

The Federal Government of Ethiopia understands very well the magnitude, seriousness, and difficulty of challenges facing pastoralists in the country. As a result, the Ministry of Federal Affairs has been mandated, in collaboration with regional state governments and pastoral communities, to help create appropriate institutions with the necessary attributes to meet the pastoral development challenge.

Overall, it can be concluded that the institutional framework has recently been set in place to better support pastoral development in Ethiopia. There is, however, a need for human capacity development and dissemination of information from research and development experiences to help fill knowledge gaps and broaden perceptions. This prominently includes policy makers. Policy makers also need capacity building with partners, whether through formal or informal channels.

## Further Reading

*This report has been edited and condensed from two public presentations now documented in the following publication:*

Gebru, G., Desta, S., and D.L. Coppock (eds). 2004. *Pastoralism in Ethiopia and the Policy Environment: Linking Research, Development Actors, and Decision-Makers. Summary of Proceedings*. Meeting Held 15 August, 2003, at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Addis Ababa. Published by the Pastoral Risk Management (PARIMA) Project of the Global Livestock Collaborative Research support Program (GL-CRSP). Utah State University, Logan, Utah, USA. 30 pp.

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The GL-CRSP Pastoral Risk Management Project (PARIMA) was established in 1997 and conducts research, training, and outreach in an effort to improve welfare of pastoral and agro-pastoral peoples with a focus on northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia. The project is led by Dr. D. Layne Coppock, Utah State University, Email contact: lcoppock@cc.usu.edu.



The Global Livestock CRSP is comprised of multidisciplinary, collaborative projects focused on human nutrition, economic growth, environment and policy related to animal agriculture and linked by a global theme of risk in a changing environment. The program is active in East Africa, Central Asia and Latin America.

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