



Managing Pastoral Development in Kenya: Challenges for Policy and Law

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It is argued, at least until recently, that the policy environment in Kenya has never been truly supportive of pastoral development. Successive governments have either totally neglected the arid lands or imposed inappropriate development interventions. Two major factors have contributed to this situation, namely: (1) Decision-makers lack knowledge about pastoral systems (referred to here as “the knowledge gap”); and (2) inhabitants of the rangelands lack political influence (referred to here as “the power imbalance”). Despite this history, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) assumed power in 2003 and the NARC appears to be endorsing pastoral development as an important item in the development agenda. Pastoral people and their advocates thus need to seize the moment and actively engage the political process to promote arid land development. It is noted that a way forward may consist of the need for government to embrace three main needs: (1) Formal recognition of pastoralism as a viable livelihood and land-use system; (2) formal recognition of the common property tenure that prevails in pastoral areas; and (3) creation of an environment whereby pastoral people and their organizations are empowered to effect their own development.

Background

Arid lands cover over 80% of Kenya and are home to about 25% of the country’s population. The relations between occupants of arid lands and the state—right from the colonial times to the present—have, for the most part, been defined by the “land question.” The dominant paradigm informing policy and legal approaches to land management has been predicated on “actual occupation,” informed, in turn, by a cultivation mentality which sees land as undeveloped and unoccupied unless it has structures or crops placed upon it. This attitude has translated into government policies aimed at encouraging settlement in pastoral zones. Settlement of pastoralists has also been seen as a necessary condition for accessing modern social amenities like hospitals, schools, and the like. Settlements, however, have been created with little consultation, and thus with little regard, for grazing patterns and other ecological considerations, resulting in substantial disruptions to pastoral mobility and posing adverse impacts on the environment.

The problems facing pastoral development in Kenya are the same as those facing pastoral development all over the developing world. It is ironic that while pastoralists are one of the most researched societies, they remain one of the least understood. In addition to a hostile policy environment, pastoralists continue to face endemic violence caused by increasing competition over scarce resources. Pastoralism has always lacked support from the highest levels of government in Kenya, and has rarely—if ever—benefited from institutional frameworks explicitly designed to promote pastoralism as a viable form of land use and livelihoods.

The Knowledge Gap and the Power Imbalance

I believe two factors explain the situation in Kenya. First, policy makers have a poor understanding of pastoral systems, and I refer to this as the **knowledge**

gap. Second, pastoral people do not have the political leverage to ensure that policies are designed in their favor. I refer to this as a **power imbalance**.

Information alone, however, will not induce policy makers to change their policies, as policy design is essentially a political, state-driven process aimed at reconciling the divergent needs of multiple stakeholders. Thus, although policies are theoretically supposed to respond to the common needs of the nation as a whole, in practice they tend to favor the politically dominant elite whose political leverage is an intrinsic element of the policy formulation process. Thus, the lack of political leverage means that pastoralists are disadvantaged in influencing policy processes in their favor.

The power imbalance can be understood with respect to two additional phenomena. First, governments have little economic or political interest in promoting pastoral interests per se. Government tends to see pastoralists as a “minority vote” given the fact that there are relatively few pastoralists and they occupy what is considered to be marginal land with little economic potential. Second, and more importantly, there is no vibrant and effective pastoral civil society movement that is capable of engaging with the policy apparatus to represent and defend the interests of pastoral people.

An Increasing Profile for Pastoral Development

Even before the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) came to power in 2003, a number of developments had signaled a new policy orientation with promise for arid land development in Kenya. In the process leading to the drafting of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for Kenya, pastoralism was identified as a separate theme. A “Pastoral Thematic Group” was established to work on the specificities of pastoralism for the PRSP. The Pastoral Thematic Group then produced a Pastoral Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PPRSP) that was ultimately incorporated into the national PRSP, thereby ensuring that specific needs of pastoralism were identified and addressed in a manner that would not otherwise have been possible.

The same approach has been adopted in the recent Constitutional Review process, where the pastoral

lobby has been one of the most organized. This has all resulted in serious attention being given to the interests of pastoralists in Kenya.

In its first major development policy statement since taking over the government, the NARC signaled early on that they took arid land development seriously. The new Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation, 2003-07 has devoted an entire chapter to arid and semi-arid lands. This is a departure from the practice of the former KANU government, which invariably treated semi-arid lands as a section within the chapter on Agriculture and Rural Development.

The Way Forward

The NARC government has given new hope and impetus for sustainable development of arid lands in Kenya. What remains is for the inhabitants of such lands to take advantage of this turn of events to improve their lot.

For the communities to take advantage of—and benefit from—the new political dispensation, it is imperative that they are sufficiently organized and have strong, well-informed, and representative organizations. Only then can they constitute a “political force” capable of engaging the State and other interest groups on a sustained basis to advance pastoral interests. Otherwise, pastoralists will remain vulnerable to other people’s interpretation of what is best for them.

In this connection, it is important that pastoral communities should be directly involved in defining their development needs, building on what was put together within the framework of the PRSP and Economic Recovery Strategy. Among the priority areas for sustainable development of arid lands the following are proposed:

- (a) The need to ensure **recognition of pastoralism as a viable livelihood and land-use system** within the new constitutional dispensation, and commit the Government of Kenya to protect and promote pastoralism as a way of life;
- (b) The need to ensure **recognition of land-tenure systems that permit the holding of lands as common**

property in the manner proposed within the draft Constitution; and

(c) The need to design **pastoral development policy that clearly articulates the unique attributes of arid lands and promotes development interventions that empower local populations** and their institutions, and are founded on the objective reality of pastoralism.

In conclusion, it is important to appreciate that critical as it is, an appropriate national policy alone cannot deliver pastoral development. At the local level governance structures must be transformed to give greater voice and power to pastoralists and pastoral institutions.

Further Reading

This report has been edited and condensed from a public presentation now documented in the following publication:

Aboud, A.A., Gebru, G., Desta, S., and D.L. Coppock (eds). 2004. *Pastoralism in Kenya and the Policy Environment: Linking Research, Development Actors, and Decision-Makers. Summary of Proceedings*. Meeting held 8 August, 2003, at the Headquarters of the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), Nairobi. Published by the Pastoral Risk Management (PARIMA) Project of the Global Livestock Collaborative Research Support Program (GL-CRSP). Utah State University, Logan, Utah, USA. 32 pp.

Government of Kenya. 2000. *Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2000-2003*. <http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/Kenya%20IPRSP.pdf>

Government of Kenya. 2003. *Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation, 2003-07*. Ministry of Finance and Planning. Government Printing Office, Nairobi.

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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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