

***In Search of a Vision for the future of Pastoralism in East Africa:  
Developing an Alliance and Strategy in support of Pastoral Self-determination***

**Discussion Paper**

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**1. Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the process of reflection and debate among pastoralists and pastoral organizations as well as other organizations and individuals working in pastoral areas of East Africa on how, collectively better to work with and support the emergence of a pastoral civil society movement capable of driving its own development agenda. This discussion has become more urgent and necessary in the light of the many reforms going on in East Africa, many of which have serious implications for the livelihoods of pastoralists. The need for pastoralists to organize an effective voice to take part in the reforms if they have to ensure that their interests are taken into account cannot be denied.

IIED and RECONCILE have both jointly and individually been involved in discussions about this matter for some time now, and have developed a joint programme on reinforcement of pastoral civil society in East Africa, which is due to take off shortly. The programme has been developed through a process that included engagement with a wide array of stakeholders in the pastoral sector over the last few years<sup>2</sup> in East Africa and abroad.<sup>3</sup>

The premise underlying the proposed programme is that although substantial money and resources continue to be invested in pastoral areas of East Africa with the objective of building the capacity of pastoral people to drive their own development agenda, relatively little attention is paid to the political and social dimensions of pastoral civil society empowerment. A concept note developed by the two organizations in the process of developing this programme outlines the constitutive elements of the political and social dimensions and explains why they are important.<sup>4</sup>

In consultations with actors in pastoral development both in East Africa and abroad following the preparation of the concept paper, it has become clear that while the ideas expressed in the concept note are readily subscribed to by many, it is necessary to place them within a broader strategy in support of the empowerment of pastoral civil society, that builds on the comparative advantages of the various players.

This discussion paper is the first step in this process. It is motivated by the belief that there are a number of pragmatic reasons justifying the need to develop a shared vision

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<sup>1</sup>This discussion is based on a Concept Note entitled *Reinforcement of pastoral civil society in East Africa. A programme of capacity building and participatory action research* by Ced Hesse and Michael Ochieng Odhiambo, November 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Staff from Action Aid, ITDG, Oxfam and SOS Sahel attended a regional workshop on *Development Policy and Pastoralism in Eastern Africa* in Arusha in March 2001 at which IIED and RECONCILE were mandated to draft a concept note based on the proceeding of the workshop. The concept note was shared with workshop participants and other organisations, and, on the basis of comments received, a programme document was developed.

<sup>3</sup> In April 2002, a meeting was held at the offices of FARM AFRICA in London at which the programme was presented to and discussed by senior representatives from Action Aid, CIIR, FARM Africa, IIED, ITDG, PANOS, SOS Sahel International/GB and VET AID. The meeting was called to broaden the debate to key actors in the pastoral sector in the region who are based in the UK. Participants at the meeting confirmed that the proposed programme would fill a much-needed gap and add value to their ongoing programmes in East Africa.

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 1.

of how collectively to work together to support pastoral self-determination in East Africa. Some of these reasons are:

- organisations working with pastoralists share a common goal that is variously expressed as poverty reduction, social, economic and political justice, working for sustainable livelihoods, etc.
- although institutionally and organisationally different, these organizations generally share broadly similar approaches and activities based on a mixture of participatory action-research, capacity building, advocacy and service delivery.
- The organizations are all competing for funds from the same donors.

The potential benefits of working towards a common vision would include delivering a more coherent (and possibly more integrated) programme of support to local pastoral groups, the chance to make better use of existing resources, and the ability to lobby more effectively for donors and policy makers to change their policies, and funding priorities and mechanisms.

### **1.1. Scope of the discussion paper**

This paper is aimed, in the first place, at organisations with ongoing programmes in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas of East Africa. However, the debate also needs to be extended to donors and other development actors actively involved in pastoral areas, a process which is already under way, and which this programme seeks to animate both in East Africa and abroad.

The discussion paper does not purport to be a thorough analysis of pastoralism in East Africa. It assumes that this topic is broadly understood by the representatives of those organisations working in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas of Africa, and that additional information is readily available elsewhere. A summary of the issues, particularly as they relate to East Africa, is, however, presented in order to put the proposed elements of a long-term strategy into perspective.

While terms such as “pastoralist”, “capacity building”, “empowerment”, “civil society”, “participatory”, etc. are the common currency of the development community, different people and organisations do not necessarily share the same view of what they mean. It is therefore important that common definitions for such jargon are agreed before embarking on defining a shared vision for supporting pastoral self-determination. The term “pastoralist” is particularly problematic, as the difficulty of defining who is a pastoralist is compounded by the fact that, for many people, the word has political connotations denoting marginalised people from various ethnic groups (such as the Maasai, Karimojong, Barabaig).

It is also worth noting that while this paper focuses on the issue of pastoralism in East Africa, many of the ideas proposed are potentially applicable to the broader debate on civil society empowerment, and may therefore be relevant to other marginalised groups, such as the urban poor, female-headed households, people living with disabilities or HIV/AIDS, etc.

### **2. The problem: continuing marginalisation of pastoralists**

Pastoralism is a complex issue not only in East Africa but also globally, with enormous variations within and between countries and social groups. A huge body of literature examining various facets of pastoral life in Africa (and elsewhere) has been

produced over the last century or so, but while African pastoralists are one of the most researched societies in the world, they remain one of its least understood groups. This section discusses some of the reasons for this paradox.

## **2.1. Inappropriate policies for pastoral development**

Despite decades of pastoral development programmes and a plethora of policies designed to improve their livelihoods, the majority of pastoral people still face a degree of marginalisation and poverty that is disproportionate to that experienced by other groups in Africa.<sup>5</sup> Three factors broadly contribute to this situation.

Firstly, because many pastoralists live in drought-prone areas where resources are scarce and unstable, their production systems are inherently vulnerable. They have developed complex strategies to mitigate the effects of environmental uncertainty.

Secondly, since colonial times their vulnerability and poverty has been exacerbated by inappropriate policies and development interventions that have systematically undermined their institutions and strategies for responding to environmental adversity. In most African countries pastoralism has always lacked support from the highest levels of government, and has rarely, if ever, benefited from institutional frameworks explicitly designed to promote it as a viable land use and livelihood system. This in our view is the main cause of pastoralists' marginalisation in Africa.

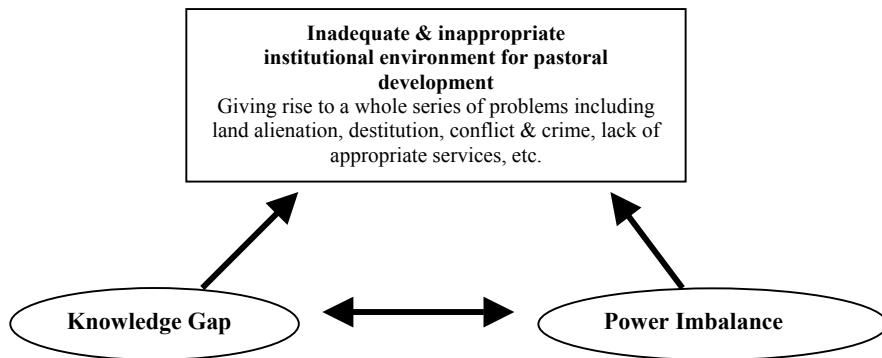
In addition to this hostile policy environment, pastoralists continue to face endemic violence caused by increasing competition over scarce resources and other external influences.

Two interrelated factors explain this situation (see Figure 1 below): the poor understanding of pastoral systems by policy makers, and the fact that pastoral people do not have the political leverage to ensure that policies are designed in their favour.

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, relatively little disaggregated data on poverty and livelihood indexes is routinely collected by governments in Africa to track whether or not pastoral people suffer disproportionately from other groups. The recent and still on-going Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper processes particularly in Ethiopia and Kenya are, however, the exception to the rule.

**Figure 1: Schematic representation of the key causes of inappropriate pastoral policy in Africa**



### **2.1.1. The knowledge gap**

Despite the fact that information on pastoralism is available, many policy makers, government staff, NGO personnel, etc. do not fully understand the dynamics of the system and are therefore unable to design and implement policies that are supportive of the sector.

This lack of knowledge about pastoralism can be attributed to three main factors:

- Little of the research on pastoralism filters down to those who most need it. This is partly because it is published in books and articles that are not readily available or accessible in Africa, and partly because universities and technical colleges in Africa and the North do not incorporate it into the courses taught to future policy makers and development workers;
- Northern cultural values and ideologies, which are widely shared by Southern policy makers, continue to shape environmental policy in dryland Africa. Within this analysis, pastoralists are singled out as the main culprits of environmental degradation;
- Pastoral groups themselves lack the knowledge, capacity and resources with which to fight their own cause. Pastoralists are frequently unaware of the stakes at play in the policy arena, and are unable to challenge the perceptions that the rest of the world have of them and their way of life. This is partly because they lack the skills to articulate the rationale underpinning their livelihood system, and partly because they are poorly organised politically.

### **2.1.2 Imbalance of power**

Information alone 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. As with all processes involving conflicting and diverging interests, it is those interests that are backed by political power that prevail. Thus, although policies are theoretically supposed to respond to the common needs of the nation as a whole, in practice they tend to favour politically dominant elites whose political leverage is an intrinsic element of the process of policy formulation.

The political marginalisation of pastoralists means that their interests are equally marginalised in the competition for resources at national levels. In many countries pastoralists are notably lacking in the political weight required to influence policy decisions at the national level.

We have identified two major reasons for this marginalisation of pastoralists from political processes.

- Firstly, governments have little economic or political interest in promoting pastoral interests *per se*, as they tend to see pastoralists as a “minority vote”, given the fact that there are relatively few of them occupying what is considered to be marginal land with little economic potential. And the situation is not much better in countries where pastoralists are in the majority, such as Mauritania, Somalia and Somaliland, where political power is concentrated in the hands of the few, who tend to use it to pursue their own short-term political agendas rather than for the common good.
- Second, and more importantly, there is no vibrant and effective pastoral civil society movement capable of engaging with the policy apparatus to represent and defend the interests of pastoral people. Although pastoral civil society groups are beginning to occupy a prominent place in the African development scene, and are commanding an increasing proportion of development aid, they remain relatively weak.<sup>6</sup> In many cases they are unrepresentative and unaccountable, ill-equipped to articulate and defend the interests of their members, have difficulty in establishing a common front with each other or strong institutional links with other groups, and have limited financial resources and poor management skills. Furthermore, many of these groups have been set up by a well-educated urban elite that does not necessarily represent or defend the interests of the pastoral community, and there is concern that as they proliferate these associations are used to secure funding for individuals rather than to serve the needs of those they are supposed to represent. To a certain extent, Northern donors and development NGOs are contributing to this process by funding such organisations.

Yet, in the longer term, it is only when pastoral communities are sufficiently organised, and have strong, well-informed and representative organisations that they will constitute a "political force" capable of engaging on a permanent basis with the State and other interests groups in advancement of the interests of pastoralists. Until then they will remain vulnerable to other people's interpretation of what is best for them.

### **3. Long-term vision and challenges**

The process of supporting self-determination is long and complex in any community, and it is particularly difficult among pastoral people in Africa, given the specificities

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<sup>6</sup> The few notable exceptions only confirm the rule. In East Africa there are a number of pastoral groups that have emerged in response to assaults on their land by State and commercial interests and are thus the product of an endogenous process of self-determination. There are also examples of pastoralists setting up associations as a result of external project support. However, none of these groups constitute a sufficiently strong force able to engage positively and with effect with the State and other major interests.

of their situation and the context of their marginalisation. Such support therefore requires a long-term vision that aims to work incrementally over 15-20 years if not more. The RECONCILE/IIED programme has been designed with this time frame in mind.

One of the major constraints faced by pastoral communities in Africa is the widespread ignorance, and even hostility, of many policy makers, government staff and development workers with respect to pastoralism as a livelihood and land use system. Until there is broader understanding and acceptance of the rationale behind pastoralism, it is unlikely that policy makers will provide an enabling environment for pastoral self-determination. Yet, as has already been noted, the highly political process of policy formulation is unlikely to be substantially changed simply by improving policy makers' understanding of pastoralism.

Pastoral citizens themselves need to be able to make the economic, social and environmental arguments for pastoralism through their organisations, and to combine this with sufficient political leverage to ensure that their interests are recognised and supported by the State. However, despite the fact that the political arena in many African countries is becoming increasingly open, government support for the empowerment of pastoralists cannot be taken for granted. The political and economic implications of empowering pastoral civil society may trigger opposition and resistance from governments and other powerful interest groups, including certain elements within pastoral society.<sup>7</sup>

A second major hurdle is the fact that pastoralists are not a homogenous group. High levels of differentiation according to ethnicity, gender, wealth or political affiliation affect their readiness and capacity to act in solidarity with each other and create the kind of political leverage needed to influence policy effectively. There is no broad consensus on what constitutes the "interests of pastoralists", let alone what needs to be done to protect those interests, and this has a significant impact on whose interests and priorities are heard and addressed. For example, the needs and concerns of women may not necessarily be supported or articulated by men from the same community. For their part, the wealthy and powerful pastoral elite may be more inclined to support the status quo, and since their voice is more likely to be heard by the national political elite, their perspective may prevail in the corridors of power. Furthermore, pastoral political leaders may view initiatives to empower civil society within pastoral communities as a challenge to their power and influence, and seek to frustrate such efforts.

The poverty, conflict and periodic droughts endemic in many pastoral areas require immediate and constant attention if local people, particularly the more disadvantaged among them, are to be able to subscribe to long-term and intangible processes of empowerment. This is an enormous task that requires significant levels of investment, given the remote areas in which many pastoralists live and the fact that over the past fifty or so years there has been little appropriate investment in these areas. An essential prerequisite for self-determination is ensuring that local people are able to guarantee a minimum level of food and personal security for themselves and their families, and weather the effects of periodic droughts without losing their capital base.

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<sup>7</sup> Such as those with an economic stake in the potentially profitable conservation areas that have been carved out of pastoral land in East Africa (e.g. Ngorongoro in Tanzania), or who are involved in the privatisation of group ranches in Kenya.

The process of supporting pastoral people in driving an internal process of empowerment is further complicated by the fact that the tools and approaches used to do so are not readily available. Most participatory tools (PRA, PLA) are designed and used by external agents to solicit greater local participation, and are not specifically developed to enable local people to analyse their own situation outside the context of a pre-determined project. Furthermore, the majority of these tools have been designed with sedentary rather than pastoral people in mind.<sup>8</sup>

#### **4. Elements of a strategy for attaining this vision and addressing the challenges**

In view of the foregoing, the programme envisaged herein takes a two-pronged approach that will work with pastoralists and pastoral groups to tackle the everyday problems faced by most pastoral people, while simultaneously addressing the issues of the “knowledge gap” and “power imbalance”. The overall objective of the strategy is to create the conditions that will enable pastoral people to overcome the challenges outlined above, begin to take charge of their own destiny and engage with the State and other interest groups on a more equal footing. The key components of such an “enabling environment” will include:

##### ***1. Responding to the immediate needs of pastoralists and building local organisational and managerial capacity***

Until pastoral people achieve a minimum standard of living they will not have the time or inclination to invest in longer-term processes of empowerment. There are several elements to this component, such as ensuring a minimum level of food security, improved livelihoods through economic opportunity, better marketing, and the provision of basic water, health and education services, drought preparedness and contingency planning, and peace and reconciliation work. In the short- to medium term, depending on whether or not there has been a sustained level of external support for an area or a particular group, activities should focus on building local organisational capacity to respond (directly or indirectly) to these needs.

Many organisations are working to improve the short- and medium-term living conditions of pastoral groups throughout Africa through a broad range of activities that include service delivery, and training in organisational and managerial skills. Less attention, however, is being paid to drought monitoring and contingency planning than was the case in the 1980s and 1990s. This is a matter that needs to be redressed given that periodic drought is a normal event in many pastoral regions of Africa.

##### ***2. Addressing the "knowledge gap"***

There are several interrelated aspects to this component that need to be tackled in the short-to medium term.

- **External ignorance and prejudice** This must be addressed as a matter of urgency. Policy makers, government staff, NGO workers, the press, etc. are unlikely to support an endogenous process of self-determination until they better understand the dynamics and rationale behind pastoral livelihood systems and their interaction with the broader policy environment. There will always be a

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<sup>8</sup> There are a few exceptions to this rule, such as the REFLECT approach developed by Action Aid and the work done by ARED, a Senegalese NGO, on linking adult education and literacy training to issues of self-determination, good governance and capacity building among pastoral communities. There is also an excellent book written by A. Waters-Bayer & W.Bayer (1994) *Planning with pastoralists: PRA and more*, GTZ.

tendency to want to “educate” pastoralists out of their “irrational” and “environmentally destructive” behaviour.

In the short-term, the wealth of information that exists on pastoralism has to be made more readily available, in a variety of formats, to policy makers, government workers, NGOs, and other development workers. In the medium- to long-term, however, this knowledge has to be institutionalised within national primary, secondary and tertiary educational policies in Africa, in order to reach future generations of policy makers and the broader public. A similar process should also be introduced in a number of key Northern seats of learning (such as IDS, Wye College, Wageningen University, etc.) that are widely used to train African government staff and policy makers.

□ **Improving the capacity of pastoralists to articulate and defend their vision of development.** In the short- to medium term, pastoral groups need to develop their own capacity to articulate the rationale behind their livelihood and land use systems, and to understand, analyse and ultimately contest the dominant paradigm driving development policy for pastoral areas, which keeps them in poverty and on the margins of society. This way they will identify their own solutions to current problems, according to their values and interests, and speak in an informed and authoritative manner on policy issues that concern them.<sup>9</sup> The ability to use the language of policy makers will give them a more equal footing in discussions with government and the development community, as well as the confidence to challenge outsiders' perceptions of pastoralism.

In the short-term, it is critical that the leaders of pastoral society, particularly representatives of pastoral associations and NGOs, acquire this knowledge and skill. As the “gate-keepers” of pastoral civil society, they play a pivotal role in defending pastoral interests and presenting them to the rest of society on the one hand, while informing their members of the broader issues at stake on the other hand. In the medium- to longer term, it is critical that as many local people as possible acquire the capacity for informed thinking and analysis, in order to build the critical mass to trigger internal processes of accountability and democratic control within pastoral groups (see below).

Over the past five to ten years there has been a significant increase in “rights-based” work by development NGOs operating in Africa. Much of this work consists in providing communities with training and written/audio-visual support materials in local languages, covering a range of topics such as civic and constitutional rights, land legislation, advocacy and lobbying, etc. These activities are essential in enabling local people better to understand their rights within the existing institutional and legal system, and as such need to be continued and expanded. However, they also need to be accompanied by a broader educational process that allows all categories of pastoral society to analyse and contest the existing institutional and legal framework in which current policy is defined. Pastoralists should be able to assess the ways in which existing policies and laws impact on their lives, and use this analysis to identify alternative frameworks that reflect their own values and interests. They need to identify their own solutions to their problems in a context that is not bounded or controlled by a particular organisation or development project. Building the capacity of pastoralists and

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<sup>9</sup> Such solutions may also extend to “non-pastoral” options to complement or substitute their livelihood strategies.

pastoral civil society to do this will be a complex, long-term process, which has so far barely been addressed.<sup>10</sup>

□ **Improving capacity for informed debate and learning.** Pastoral livelihood systems in Africa are highly dynamic, as pastoralists seek to adapt to evolving social, economic, environmental and political conditions at local, national and regional levels. These changes bring in new actors and impact on pastoral society in different ways, creating internal conditions for further change and requiring the constant adaptation and updating of the definition of the “pastoral problem” and its solutions. In the short-term it will be necessary to ensure that the development community has the skills to do this, so that their ongoing support programmes remain pertinent, while in the medium term, these skills will need to be passed on to pastoral people. One indicator of a strong pastoral civil society movement will be its ability to monitor and adapt to change and position itself appropriately.

Although several development organizations that work with and support pastoral communities are involved in participatory policy-oriented research, relatively few are actively involved in designing a process whereby these skills can ultimately be acquired by pastoral people.

### ***3. Addressing the power imbalance***

There are two elements to this issue, as outlined above: power struggles within pastoral society, particularly at the local level, and those between pastoralists and other interest groups such as the State, farmers, the tourist and conservation lobby, etc. In both cases, responsibility for redressing the balance of power ultimately resides with pastoral citizens, working through their institutions. External organisations cannot become directly involved, for in doing so they run the risk of imposing quick but unsustainable fixes, or worse, further aggravating the situation. Their role should be to facilitate access by all concerned to quality information and training on the issues outlined above, in order to promote a process of informed debate and negotiation.

Within pastoral groups this information should serve to build internal capacity to improve processes of governance, accountability and representation. Many organisations are addressing this through activities such as awareness raising on gender issues and training in participatory institutional analysis. As such aptitudes can only be built from within over time, these activities need to be continued and reinforced by a broader educational programme on pastoralism and policy as outlined above.

This paper has already argued that pastoralists have the potential to engage with other actors on a more equal footing, but that to do so they will need to develop strong, well informed and well connected organisations capable of presenting a united front on key issues. In the short term, it is crucial that support is provided in advocacy-related activities such as training in advocacy techniques, and funding to allow pastoral groups to meet and build strategic alliances. A number of organisations currently provide such support, but this work needs to be extended. In the medium term, it is also critical to build the capacity of pastoral leaders and local people so that they can better understand and monitor the policy environment and formulate economic and political arguments in support of pastoralism. They also need to be able to deal with

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<sup>10</sup> Notable exceptions include the work of ARED in Senegal and the REFLECT approach developed by Action Aid mentioned above.

the dynamic quality of the policy environment and the shifting nature of power relations and alliances.

While such “technical” aptitudes can always be supported by external organisations, pastoralists also require other, more political skills that are beyond the scope and mandate of external development organisations. Political leverage is not established through a linear process, but is the result of volatile and iterative steps taken on the basis of opportunity and political expedience.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper presents several preliminary ideas for a strategy that seeks to reconcile the more immediate problems facing pastoralists with the much longer-term process of capacity building for empowerment, which builds on and adds value to existing initiatives in East Africa. It has not attempted to identify how such a strategy might be implemented, partly because many aspects of it are already being put into action, and partly because such an exercise would require a far more detailed consultative process.

It has, however, sought to highlight three key issues. The first is that pastoral development policy is not defined by pastoralists, but formulated by people outside the system who either have little understanding of pastoral livelihood strategies or are hostile to pastoralism itself. Furthermore, the overall institutional framework driving pastoral development policy, particularly as it relates to land use and tenure, is largely driven by a set of values reflecting Northern and Western concepts of social and economic development. Thirdly, that such assumptions have in the longer term to be challenged by pastoral people themselves if they are to find a sustainable solution to their problems.

The process of fostering internal dynamics of empowerment are necessarily complex and susceptible to being corrupted through political, economic or humanitarian expediency. It is thus critical to adopt a long-term vision which focuses simultaneously on a range of activities that at once respond to immediate needs while building local capacity in the social, economic and political dimensions of pastoral institutional development.