

Media perceptions and portrayals of pastoralists in Kenya, India and China

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The Gatekeeper series of the Natural Resources Group at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is produced by the Agroecology Team. The series aims to highlight key topics in the field of sustainable natural resource management. Each paper reviews a selected issue of contemporary importance and draws preliminary conclusions for development that are particularly relevant for policymakers, researchers and planners. References are provided to important sources and background material.

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Executive Summary

Resilient food systems depend on appropriate policies that enable people to take advantage of their own adaptive capacity. Pastoralists use their mobility to take advantage of resources – pasture and water – that are patchily distributed in space and time. Pastoralism can make major contributions to food security, livelihoods and economic prosperity. However, these benefits often go unacknowledged – by policy makers, donors and the public at large. This is in part because of development and media narratives that paint pastoralism as something bad that needs to change. This paper explores how the media portrays pastoralism. To do so, we analysed the content of newspaper articles about pastoralists in Kenya, China and India, and also invited journalists in these countries to complete an online survey and telephone interview. We identified significant gaps – and inter-country differences – in the media’s portrayal of pastoralists.

In Kenya, pastoralists feature mostly in ‘bad news’ stories of conflict and drought. They appear vulnerable and lacking in agency. Stories make almost no mention of the benefits that pastoralists bring. In China, the media presented pastoralists as the cause of environmental degradation and as (generally happy) beneficiaries of government investment and settlement projects. In India, newspapers tended to portray pastoralists with more pity, as people whose rights to grazing land had been taken away and whose livelihoods were at risk as pastures dwindle and locally resilient livestock breeds disappear. Overall coverage of pastoralism in India was rare however, and journalists there stated that pastoralists are ‘invisible’ to editors of national newspapers. In all three countries, important topics such as climate change, the economic importance of pastoralism and the links between mobility and resilience, were under-reported. The majority of articles about pastoralists failed to include their voices, and stories that focused on women and children were uncommon.

We discuss these patterns and suggest ways to ensure more accurate media coverage of pastoralism and its potential to contribute to sustainable development in a changing climate. We show that improved media coverage of pastoralism is part of the institutional capacity that is needed to ensure resilient food systems can be made real. Improved eco-literacy among journalists and editors can help strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities and national food systems alike, and will become more important as climate change takes hold.

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Introduction

Mobile pastoralism – in which herders move livestock across landscapes so they can exploit resources such as pasture and water that are variable in space and time – is an ancient livelihood that contributes to food security, plays a vital role in the ecology of drylands, and provides pastoralists with flexible strategies for dealing with uncertainties, such as a variable climate. But development narratives have tended to disagree. Development narratives are strategic simplifications that help in the face of situations whose complexity can paralyse policy making (Roe, 1991). They generate consensus around major policies and make political action possible. But they can also be problematic. As simplifications, narratives are fundamentally different from scientific theories. While scientific facts are falsifiable, narratives are not. They escape the checks and balances of science – such as publication of evidence, peer review and replication. Narratives need the support of scientific authority but at the same time they need to avoid the complexity and conditional nature of scientific knowledge and this is why they exist. Narratives can be fairly relevant representations of the situation they are designed to address. But like wide-angle camera lenses that capture a huge range of variety, the scenarios they produce are increasingly distorted at the edges. One area of public policy where narratives have been contentious is in relation to pastoralism and other forms of food production in the world's drylands. The nature of such narratives – and whether they can be modified or improved – will only grow in importance with climate change. This is not only because climate models predict more extreme and more variable climatic patterns, but also because knee-jerk policy responses to the threats posed by climate change can create new problems for food production in the drylands, such as investments in large-scale irrigated agriculture that are not well suited to a more variable climate.

Krätli and Enson (forthcoming) have reviewed current and recent public policy narratives on the drylands, promoted by various global institutions. Their review provided the basis for discussion among researchers working in Kenya, China and India who met in Septem-

ber 2012 at a workshop in Kenya (Shanahan, 2012). Participants at the workshop agreed that dominant policy narratives cast pastoralism as a backward, wasteful and irrational livelihood that takes place in fragile, degraded and unproductive ecosystems and creates a catalogue of problems for non-pastoralists. The narratives frame pastoralism as something that should be replaced, because it is uneconomic, archaic and ungovernable. They frame pastoralists as lazy, poor and at times criminal and dangerous. And they portray the mobility that makes pastoralism possible as problematic, random, unproductive and a cause of conflict and disease. There is more nuance to these narratives at a national and subnational level. In China, for instance, the dominant policy narrative frames nomadic herding as a livelihood that damages grasslands, and says that when herders settle in towns they will have a better, more economically productive life.

Pastoralists themselves might of course disagree. And a growing body of recent research shows that the dominant narratives are far from accurate, that mobility is an asset (see de Jode, 2009) and that pastoralism is an economic powerhouse. In the Horn of Africa alone, the informal livestock trade is estimated to be worth more than US\$1 billion each year (Catley *et al.*, 2012). A modified narrative could show that pastoralism has inbuilt adaptability and can harness environmental variability in a positive way – something that will be critical as our climate changes. It could enable pastoralism to meet its potential to increase equity, environmental sustainability and economic output in the drylands. As part of a larger project that aims to identify ways to influence policy narratives around pastoralism, IIED has examined the role of the media in reinforcing dominant narratives and asked how journalistic coverage of the sector could improve. To assess media perspectives on pastoralism we analysed media reports from Kenya, China and India -- and asked dozens of journalists in those countries to complete an online survey.

Media content analysis

We wanted to understand how journalists portray pastoralists and pastoralism, who speaks for and about pastoralists in the media, and in what contexts the media reports on pastoralism. We used the LexisNexis database and the websites of individual newspapers to find articles that mentioned any of the following terms: pastoralist, pastoralists, pastoralism, herding, herder, herders. For China, we searched the *China Daily* and *People's Daily* websites. For India, we searched the *Times of India*, *Hindu* and *Hindustan Times* websites. We scored each article for the presence or absence of around 100 content types (e.g. "Article refers to meat or milk"; "Article refers to drought"; "Article quotes government official"). For this, we used a binary coding system that we based on the one used by Billett (2010) in his study of Indian newspaper coverage of climate change. We had already tested our coding system on a sample of articles from *The Guardian* (UK) newspaper and refined it accordingly before using it in this study.

Readers should note that the study covered only English language media. In the case of India, this meant missing vernacular language press in pastoral regions in favour of articles in the national media. In the case of China, this meant that the study largely focused on articles in state-owned media that are aimed at English-speaking (i.e. foreign and urban elite) audiences. We analysed 100 media articles from Kenya, 50 from China

and 20 from India (Tables 1 and 2). These numbers reflect the relative abundance of stories about pastoralism in the media sources we searched in each country. Tables 3-9 present some of the main trends and inter-country differences in media coverage that our content analysis revealed. This showed how the media in each country portrayed pastoralism in a very different way, and that in each case, the portrayal was close to that of the dominant policy narratives.

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF MEDIA ARTICLES ON PASTORALISM OVER TIME

	1982	1985	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	TOTAL
Kenya					5	2		4	6	7	17	3	5	15	8	24	4	100
China	3	1	2					1			1	1	7	6	10	5	13	50
India									1			5	1	1	4	2	6	20

TABLE 2. SOURCES OF MEDIA ARTICLES FROM EACH COUNTRY

Kenya		China		India	
The Nation	65	People's Daily	21	The Times of India	7
Nairobi Star	15	Xinhua News Agency	12	The Hindu	6
The East African Standard	13	China Daily	11	DNA (Daily News + Analysis)	2
The Star	3	Global Times	5	The Indian Express	2
The East African	2	Shanghai Daily	1	Indo-Asian News Service	1
East African Business Week	1			Press Trust of India	1
Business Daily	1			Tehelka	1
				Hindustan Times	1
TOTAL	100		50		20

What's the story in Kenya?



Credit: Victor Orindi

Pastoralists and their livestock at a watering point in Kinna, Isiolo county in 2010

In Kenya, pastoralists tend to star only in bad-news stories – 93% of those analysed here referred to conflict or drought. Otherwise, the media tends to ignore pastoralists. This sentence, from a 2006 article in *The Nation*, encapsulates the overall narrative: '*Banditry, robberies, infiltration of small arms, poaching in the region's game reserves and national parks and frequent outbreak of livestock diseases are now being attributed to the uncontrolled movement of pastoralists and their animals.*' While 51% of stories that mention conflict presented pastoralists as a cause of problems, only 5.7% suggested that pastoralists might be the victims of the actions (or inactions) of others (e.g. farmers or government policies). While 28% of articles reported efforts to evict or move pastoralists, in only one-fifth of them did the journalist describe where the pastoralists might go – and in every case it was back to where they had come from, back to the problems they left behind. An astonishing 22% of all articles referred to pastoralists as 'invaders' or as having 'invaded' land. Pastoralists clearly have an image problem in the Kenyan media. Stories of pastoralists achieving, contributing or leading are extremely rare.

Isiolo North MP Dr Mohamed Kuti yesterday called on the security agents to mobilize all its resources in its disposal to ensure that the raiders were arrested and prosecuted for the offence. He regretted that pastoralists have continued to embrace outfashioned culture of cattle rustling and banditry and reminded that cattle raids are a thing of the past and that they must grow and change with the changing world. (Salesa, 2011)

Mr Warfa urged pastoralists to discard retrogressive cultural practices like cattle raids. (Kipsang, 2012)

'It's very hard to convince uneducated person to stop cattle rustling. To them, it is like a hobby. They participate in the raid to achieve respect and dignity in their communities,' explains Mr Joseph Lekolua, a local politician. (Letiwa, 2008).

Half of all stories depicted pastoralists as poor and vulnerable. For Kenyan newspaper readers, this persistent narrative must seem depressingly familiar. And while it illustrates a failure of government to tackle the causes of conflict, it also reveals a failure of journalism to explore why this is the case. Kenyan media stories make virtually no mention at all of specific government policies and only a small proportion report on initiatives that could improve the lives of pastoralists, reduce conflict and promote sustainable development.

What's the story in China?



Credit: Gongbuzeren

Drolma milking her family yaks. She is from a village which practices community-based rangeland management system in the Tibetan pastoral regions of Sichuan province, China

In China, by contrast, pastoralists tend to feature in 'good news' stories in the English language publications. The media narrative is made up largely of stories about herders who have settled in towns and are largely happy with the change. These stories highlight government investments in housing and infrastructure to improve the wellbeing of poor communities. They often quote pastoralists who tell how they have gained materially since abandoning their nomadic lifestyle.

Practices have shown that settlement of local herders helps develop animal husbandry in a large scale and promote cultural, technological and educational undertakings in the pastoral areas,' Qi Jingfa said. The way of settling down is also the best option for herders in need to become better off or become affluent, he noted. (Xinhua News Agency, 1998)

'I have never dreamed of living in such a nice place. The water and electricity are so convenient. I even can watch television,' Nyima, a 70-year-old herder in Yushu prefecture of northwest China's Qinghai province, said Thursday. (Xinhua News Agency, 2012a)

In his cozy, furnished home, Dorjie recalled the nomadic lifestyle he lived just two years ago. At that time, he lived with his family in a shabby adobe structure on the pasture about 9 km away from his new home. 'Raising 100 sheep and 30 heads of cattle, I earned only half of what I do now,' Dorjie said. (Xinhua News Agency, 2012b)

Although some articles describe support for pastoralism, they don't explain much about why nomads move in the first place. Many (36%) articles blamed pastoralists for degrading grasslands.

Over the years, nearly 1 million herders across the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau have settled or relocated to prevent the ecological degradation of the grassland. (Xinhua News Agency, 2012c)

Decades of global warming combined with over-grazing have degraded 90 percent of the grassland, forcing the government to push forward a series of environmental protection measures, including a massive human migration to preserve the region's delicate ecological balance. (Zou, 2010)

Long-term overgrazing has caused severe degradation of the grassland and a marked decline in its herd-carrying capacity. (Wei, 2011)

What's the story in India?



Credit: Ilse Kohler-Rollefson

Raika leading his sheep and goats to grazing

In India, the media narrative is quite different. It tends to present the pastoralist communities as victims (60% of articles) who have lost access to grazing land because of the growth of industrial agriculture, the dominance of more powerful social groups, and limits to grazing in forested land, among others. Examples include a 2007 story in *The Hindu*, which stated that:

'The changing pattern of land use, rapid expansion of the irrigation area and privatisation of tenancy in the rain-fed areas are some of the factors responsible for erosion of livelihood security of pastoral people, whose way of life has come under threat from the mainstream development paradigm. Experts called upon the policy planners to recognise the potential of pastoralists to contribute to the growth process and look beyond the "rigid development model" which they said was only promoting the sedentary life.' (Anon, 2007).

...and a 2010 article in *Tehelka*, a weekly political magazine, which included this quotation from a herder:

"In Mehsana district our grazing lands were encroached by upper castes. When we migrate, we are forced to live in cremation grounds outside village boundaries. Schools do not want to enrol our children. They think if we move, it will reflect in their school's dropout rates",' says Hirabhai Bharwad, a Bharwad community leader.' (Yadav, 2010).

The concept of pastoralist rights appears often in the Indian articles (45% of those analysed), as in this *Indian Express* story about the pastoral Gujjar people in Jammu and Kashmir, which included this quotation from Dr Javaid Rahi, Secretary of the Tribal Foundation:

'We have already written to the Prime Minister to intervene into the matter as forest rights were available to Gujjars even before independence. In erstwhile Dogra rule, Gujjars were enjoying forest rights, which were later snatched from them through legislations after the establishment of forest department in 1950s,' (Anon 2010).

A relatively common theme in the Indian coverage, featuring in 35% of articles, was about threats to local breeds of livestock and efforts to conserve genetic diversity. An example is an article published in 2012 in *The Hindu*, which included the following paragraph:

'Globalisation has led to a situation where the traditional role of pastoralists as custodians of animal genetic resources is on the wane. These indigenous breeds, which were maintained after a meticulous process of selection and breeding, could withstand local environment conditions. They are disease-resistant and culturally and religiously are part of our social imagination as property resource. The traditional herdsmen followed this process over centuries but they are all fading into memory, says Mr. Vivekanandan.' (Karthikeyan, 2012)

Indian articles were more likely (compared to Kenya and China) to describe how pastoralism can be a source of resilience to environmental change, and said more than those from the other countries about the value of pastoralism – to both the environment and the economy. As Sudha Passi wrote in a story for the Press Trust of India:

'Pastoralists or herders have traditionally never owned land, but have utilised forest resources judiciously and have significantly contributed to economy, ecology and preserving biodiversity.' (Passi, 2004).

But such framing was still relatively rare overall (see below).

Missing voices

TABLE 3. THE MOST COMMON THEMES IN EACH COUNTRY, AND THE PERCENTAGE OF ARTICLES ON PASTORALISM IN WHICH THEY APPEAR	
Kenya	%
Conflict/disputes over resources	70
Drought (in general)	51
Specific drought	47
Violence (or threat of violence)	43
Portrays pastoralists as vulnerable/needing help	43
Quotes pastoralist	41
Conflict between pastoralists and non-pastoralists	38
Portrays pastoralists as source of problems	37
Describes pastoralists as trespassing/encroaching	35
Dead livestock linked to climatic extreme (drought)	35
China	%
Government acting to help pastoralists	86
Quotes government official	82
Refers to resettlement/sedenterisation	52
Refers to land/soil degradation or to desertification	44
Implies pastoralism contributes to degradation	36
Refers to grassland restoration/conservation	36
Quotes pastoralist	36
Describes government investment in grassland areas	32
Puts currency value on government investment	30
Describes houses built for pastoralists to live in	30
India	%
Portrays pastoralists as victims of external problems	60
Quotes Indian civil society organisation	50
Refers to pastoralist rights or empowerment	45
Describes threats to the survival of livestock breeds	35
Refers to the mobility of pastoralists	35
Refers to scientific assistance to pastoralists (e.g. veterinary/improved grass or livestock)	30
Pastoralists portrayed as vulnerable / needing help	30
Quotes Indian scientists	30
Portrays pastoralism as having been marginalised by government	25
Refers to dwindling pasture	25
Quotes pastoralist	25

The voices of pastoralists feature in less than half of the articles about them (41% of articles in Kenya, 36% in China and 25% in India; Table 3). If pastoralists as a whole are missing, the perspectives of pastoralist women and children are even more so (Table 6). Government representatives dominate the articles in China (quoted in 82% of articles) and Kenya (71%), but in India only 15% of the articles included a quotation from an official. There, civil society organisations had the biggest say (quoted in half of the stories, compared to 21% in Kenya and just 2% in China). Scientists had a quote in few Kenyan stories (7%) compared to China (26%) and India (30%). While there is no ideal mix of voices in a story, there are marked differences between each country and this will influence the overall narrative that emerges from media coverage.

**TABLE 4: COMPARISON OF THEMES IN EACH COUNTRY
(% OF ARTICLES INCLUDING EACH THEME)**

	Kenya	China	India
Conflict	70	4	2
Climatic extremes	51	20	5
Climate change	3	8	10
Overgrazing / degradation	16	36	0
Pastoralists cause problems	37	12	5
Pastoralists are victims of problems	23	10	60
Food security	1	4	10
Pastoralist rights	2	6	45

Missing money

In both Kenya and India, the reports made rare mention of what government investment in pastoralist communities could mean. By contrast, one-third of the Chinese articles mentioned investment and in 94% of these, there was a hard currency value attached. Very few articles in any of the three countries referred to the economic importance of pastoralism (4% in Kenya, 12% in China and 15% in India).

TABLE 5: SOURCES QUOTED (% OF ARTICLES)

	Kenya	China	India
Government / officials	70	82	15
Pastoralists	41	36	25
Scientists	7	26	30
National NGO/CSO staff	13	2	50
International NGO/CSO	9	0	10
Private sector	4	0	0
UN agency	5	0	15

	Kenya	China	India
Women	6	0	15
Children	16	8	5

Missing mobility

Mobility is the key that pastoralists use to unlock the scattered riches of arid lands. The landscape may appear barren, extreme and risky to city-based journalists but the pastoralists have the knowledge and skills to take advantage of the land's variability and diversity. Stories that presented mobility in a positive light were rare. Just 6% of Kenyan stories included a statement that explicitly supported mobility as a way pastoralists can access resources that vary in space in time. None of the articles in either China or India did. This is despite mobility itself being a common theme in the articles (Table 7). Indeed, in Kenya, nearly half of all the stories linked mobility to problems. This contributes to a false narrative, one that is blind to the true nature of the lands the pastoralists move across, and to the knowledge they draw upon to take advantage of resources that are distributed there in an unpredictable way.

Content type	Kenya	China	India
Refers to mobility of pastoralists	67	12	35
States that problems arose or are anticipated after movement of pastoralists	47	0	5
Includes statement that explicitly supports (or calls for support to) mobility as a way pastoralists can overcome resource scarcity	6	0	0

Missing climate change

The media also fail to cover climate change in the context of pastoralism and the extreme climatic conditions that pastoralists face, and which their mobility can help overcome. In Kenya, although 51% of stories mentioned drought, only 3% referred to climate change. The topic got slightly more coverage in China (8%) and India (15%) (Table 8). When the media did mention climate change, it was to highlight the vulnerability of pastoralists, as in this example.

'The pastoralists are running out of ideas. They have exhausted every known coping mechanism.[...] The current situation gives urgency to the question of whether nomadic pastoralism is viable in an overpopulated environment and with worsening climate change.' (The East African, 2009).

Content type	Kenya	China	India
Refers to extreme climatic event (drought or flood)	51	20	5
Refers to climate change	3	8	15

Missing meat and milk

Very few articles mentioned how pastoralism contributes to food security outside of pastoralist communities (Kenya: 1%; China 4%; India: 10%, see Table 9).

Content type	Kenya	China	India
Mentions meat/milk	17	14	15
Refers to ways pastoralism contributes to food security beyond pastoralists	1	4	10

Surveys of journalists

To complement the content analysis, we invited several hundred of IIED's media contacts in Kenya, India and China to complete a short survey using the online SurveyMonkey platform. The questions asked what journalists think and know about pastoralists and pastoralism, and about how the media covers this subject.

In Kenya, 42 out of 250 invited journalists responded (response rate 17%). They work for media outlets that include print (e.g. *The Nation*, *The East African*, *The Standard*, *The Star*), broadcast (Baraka FM radio, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, BBC World Service) and both domestic and international news agencies (Kenya News Agency and China's Xinhua news agency). Three of the journalists who responded were themselves from pastoralist communities (including Turkana and Borana) and two more had married pastoralists. These journalists had a combined 477 years of experience of journalism (average 11.4).

In India, 61 out of 207 invited journalists responded (response rate 29%). Their media outlets include print (e.g. *The Economic Times*, *Times of India*, *The Hindu*, *Hindustan Times*, *India Today*, *Deccan Chronicle*), broadcast (UTV Bloomberg, ABP Majha) and both domestic and international news agencies (Press Trust of India, Inter Press Service). These journalists had a combined 790 years of experience of journalism (average 12.9).

In China, 16 out of 130 invited journalists responded (response rate 12%). Their media outlets include print (e.g. South China Morning Post, NewsChina Magazine, Environmental Protection magazine, Private Economy News, China Daily, Southern Weekly), broadcast (China Central Television) and both domestic and international websites (Caixin Online, chinadialogue.net, SciDev.Net). These journalists had a combined 173 years of experience of journalism (average 10.8).

Figure 1 shows word-clouds created from what the journalists wrote when asked which five words or phrases they associated with nomadic herders or herding in general. In each figure, the most commonly mentioned words appear largest. The commonest words described environmental and social dangers in Kenya, poverty in India and a somewhat more romantic vision of nature in China.

In the online survey, journalists were given an opportunity to say anything they would like to about media coverage of pastoralism. In India, 33 (67%) of the 49 journalists who answered this question chose to say that the media has '*neglected*', '*ignored*', '*forgot-ten*' or otherwise under-reported the issues that affect pastoralist communities. They explained that this was because urban media consumers (and editors) are not interested in rural affairs. '*They do not get the attention they deserve,*' said one journalist. '*The media highlights only negative news like nomads selling girl children*'. Another commented: '*rather little coverage and mostly as "the other" or "the untrustworthy"*'.

Likewise in China, 55% of the journalists who answered this question said that the media should report more on pastoralism. One noted that they could hardly recall a single Chinese media article on the subject. Another commented that '*This is not a quite hot topic in media coverage in China. However, sporadic reports on climate change or nature reserves have indicated that desertification invades many parts of the grassland regions — including in Qinghai Tibetan Plateau and the Inner Mongolia regions — which affected the lives of herders in those regions.*'

Journalists in Kenya confirmed the way their media outlets connect pastoralism with conflict and woe. '*The media only gives special attention to pastoralists or pastoralism when there is a crisis, like a major drought or famine where large numbers of people and animals have died,*' commented one. Another said: '*Pastoralism is generally ignored. It only makes headlines when there is cattle rustling and scores of people are killed.*' Journalists pointed to neglect as a critical factor. '*Pastoralism is misunderstood. Government and media have neglected pastoralist communities over the years,*' said one, while another stated: '*The media has neglected pastoralism since it takes place in far flung areas of northern Kenya which the government has neglected for years.*'

Another Kenyan journalist put it bluntly: '*Pastoralism is seen as a less glamorous beat. Very few journalists cover it.*'

When asked more specific questions, the journalists in all three countries revealed knowledge and opinions (Tables 10-11) that seem to contradict the dominant narrative presented in the national media.

Most (91%) Kenyan journalists acknowledged, for instance, the importance of pastoralism to the national economy, with more than half of them stating that this is major. This is surprising given that this theme was invisible in the stories analysed. Only 4% of the Kenyan articles mentioned it, and not one published a figure such as a shilling, dollar or GDP value. Other things the journalists said suggest that there is an opportunity for a new narrative to emerge in the Kenyan media, one that does not ignore the social, economic and environmental benefits pastoralists provide:

- *'There's a lot that the media can do to better the lives of the pastoral communities and integrating them in the modern economy without losing the essence of pastoral lives.'*
- *'Pastoralism has a chance to become a key growth sector for Kenya's economy if supported by media and policy makers alike.'*
- *'Pastoralists, if well harnessed, can play a bigger role in Kenya.'*
- *'Livestock can contribute in a big way to the economy if properly nurtured. Kenyan media are not giving adequate coverage.'*

In China, most journalists (71.5%) felt that herding did not cause damage to the environment, and more than two-thirds (67.8%) even felt that herding had a positive effect on the environment. Among these journalists 71.4% disagreed that herders need to settle instead of herding livestock, and 42.8% felt that the government had neglected herders. As one journalist commented: *'Their lives are strongly impacted by the policy to make them settle down for reason of keeping stability, [and this] damages already-vulnerable ecology (herders could no longer graze in areas rich in grass).'* Another said *'In my heart, I know nomadic herders are good for the environment.'* These views contrast with the dominant narrative in the English-language stories analysed here.

The answers from Indian journalists diverged from the media narrative most in the cases of a minority of respondents who expressed doubts about the value of a nomadic lifestyle.

- *'Media often looks at them as a public nuisance. The idea that people have to migrate because of poverty is not something that often gets attention. On pastoralism itself, I think most people who are nomads here are not doing it by choice.'*
- *'Media give no attention to these people because they are lesser and don't contribute to society.'*
- *'They need to be made part of a respectable living system.'*
- *'Pastoralism cannot go on forever. It's simply too archaic to make economic sense.'*

Such strong viewpoints were absent in the Indian articles analysed, which in general portrayed pastoralists in a more sympathetic light.

		Disagree strongly	Disagree somewhat	Don't know	Agree somewhat	Agree strongly
Pastoralists are to blame for conflict over resources such as land and water	Kenya	41.5	22.0	0.0	24.4	12.2
	China	20.0	40.0	6.7	26.7	6.7
	India	54.1	24.6	4.9	6.6	9.8
Pastoralists are poor, vulnerable and need help	Kenya	12.5	30.0	0.0	17.5	40.0
	China	0.0	6.7	20.0	46.7	26.7
	India	6.6	4.9	1.6	34.4	52.5
Pastoralism is backward and not suited to the modern world	Kenya	57.1	21.4	0.0	11.9	9.5
	China	40.0	40.0	0.0	20.0	0.0
	India	39.3	39.3	4.9	11.5	4.9
The government has neglected pastoralists	Kenya	10.3	15.4	0.0	23.1	51.3
	China	7.1	35.7	21.4	35.7	0.0
	India	4.9	8.2	4.9	37.7	44.3
Pastoralists need to settle and farm land instead of herding livestock	Kenya	46.3	22.0	2.4	22.0	7.3
	China	14.3	57.1	14.3	14.3	0.0
	India	16.7	16.7	8.3	35.0	23.3
Pastoralism helps to maintain a healthy environment	Kenya	19.5	31.7	4.9	31.7	12.2
	China	7.1	21.4	14.3	42.9	14.3
	India	6.7	6.7	26.7	43.3	16.7
Pastoralists cause environmental harm, e.g. overgrazing, land degradation, threats to species	Kenya	15.0	22.5	7.5	42.5	12.5
	China	28.6	42.9	7.1	14.3	7.1
	India	41.7	31.7	5.0	16.7	5.0

The survey also asked journalists to identify their main sources of information about nomadic pastoralists and their lifestyle. In each country, the media was the most frequent answer and few journalists counted researchers among their sources (Table 12).

	Kenya	China	India
Pastoralism is highly vulnerable to climate change	81.0	64.3	44.1
Pastoralism is somewhat vulnerable to climate change	9.5	14.3	28.8
Pastoralism is no more or less vulnerable to climate change than other sectors	4.8	14.3	18.6
Pastoralism is somewhat resilient to climate change	4.8	7.1	3.4
Pastoralism is highly resilient to climate change	0.0	0.0	5.1
Pastoralism creates a major barrier to food security	4.8	0.0	3.4
Pastoralism creates a partial barrier to food security	4.8	7.1	10.2
Pastoralism has no overall effect on food security	7.1	57.1	39.0
Pastoralism makes a partial contribution to food security	45.2	35.7	35.6
Pastoralism makes a major contribution to food security	38.1	0.0	11.9
Pastoralism is a major burden to the economy	2.4	0.0	5.1
Pastoralism is a minor burden to the economy	0.0	21.4	1.7
Pastoralism is neither a burden nor a contributor to the economy	7.1	50.0	33.9
Pastoralism is a minor contributor to the economy	38.1	28.6	40.7
Pastoralism is a major contributor to the economy	52.4	0.0	20.3

	Kenya	India	China
Media	47.5	36.8	69.2
Pastoralists	35	29.8	53.8
NGOs	20	7.0	15.4
Internet	15	14.0	7.7
Government	17.5	7.0	0
Journals	10	7.0	0
Researchers	7.5	1.8	0
Books	2.5	1.8	0
UN reports	2.5	0	0
Policy brief	2.5	0	0
Aid agencies	2.5	0	0

Towards new narratives

A modified policy narrative around pastoralism might show how governments can make sensible decisions in the face of climate change and population growth by investing in pastoralism and, critically, in pastoralists on their own terms. The analysis of media articles presented here suggests that a modified media narrative would have a role to play, while the comments from surveyed journalists suggest that great potential for change exists. But there is still much work to be done.

In 1999, Saverio Krätli and Jeremy Swift wrote a report on pastoralism in Kenya in which they said:

'The way pastoral conflict is reported [by the media...] – as a relatively unimportant, backward, tribal activity – is part of the problem. There is a need to improve press reporting [...]. This should include working with the editors of major newspapers in order to promote better coverage and more accurate and up-to date reporting about the logic of pastoral system. Positive images [...] must be circulated to combat the widespread view that pastoralism is backward and must change into sedentary, more agriculture-based, activities. Journalists who understand about pastoral districts must be identified and supported.' (Krätli and Swift, 1999).

A decade and a half later these recommendations still apply, not only in Kenya, but also in India and China. In each country, the media present pastoralism through a very narrow lens, one that is likely to create barriers to sustainable development. Opportunities to reframe pastoralism abound. In Kenya, for instance, an alternative narrative could show how the new constitution could work best for the drylands and their communities. In India, an alternative narrative could show how herding is part of the wider dryland agriculture system that can increase food security in the context of climate change. In China, an alternative narrative can relate how support for pastoralism can increase food security and better manage rangelands for economic benefits.

This analysis highlights what is missing. It points to areas that journalists and editors can pursue in creating a more balanced, more nuanced and more accurate narrative around pastoralism. That will involve reporting on the economics of pastoralism, as well as on the other values of pastoralism that are harder to price. It will involve a better understanding of mobility and markets, of resilience and vulnerability. It will require journalists and researchers to communicate better together and it will require the media to give more voice to the pastoralists themselves. Donors and development agencies can act to encourage more accurate, relevant and useful media coverage of pastoralism by supporting training programmes, opportunities for journalists to travel to areas where pastoralists live, and initiatives that bring together journalists, pastoralists, dryland researchers and policy makers. Ultimately, though, it is editors – not reporters – who decide how a media outlet will cover an issue. Any effort to improve the media narratives around pastoralism will need to engage these gatekeepers as well as the journalists with stories to tell. If media narratives fail to improve, pastoralists and their advocates will need to take advantage of new media tools and other communication tactics to bypass these intermediaries and speak more directly with policy makers, fellow citizens and other audiences.

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