



Development among pastoralists in Uganda

LIVELIHOOD OF PASTORAL PEOPLES IS CHALLENGED BY WRONG ASSUMPTIONS

Pastoral peoples are forced to change their livelihood strategies through security and development interventions based on mistaken assumptions about pastoralism. Such anti-pastoral policies significantly challenge their basis for livelihood.

Pastoral peoples around the world are often marginal peoples in the nation-states which they inhabit. In East Africa alone, there are several examples of pastoral peoples who have historically been viewed as difficult to administer, such as the Turkana of Kenya, the Nuer and Dinka of Sudan, the Somali of Somalia, the Nyangatom of Ethiopia and Sudan and the Karimojong of Uganda. Policies dealing with the

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The faulty assumptions about pastoralists as violent and conservative must be discontinued as basis for development programmes.
- Development measures amongst pastoralists should be based on the fact that competition over resources creates more alliance-building and cooperation between people than it creates violence and conflict.
- Development programmes should support pastoralism, which is often the most viable livelihood strategy considering the ecological condition pastoralists live under. It can then be supplemented by other livelihood strategies.

Despite official commitments to support pastoralism, government policies may overall be characterized as being ‘anti-pastoral’

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pastoral peoples are often guided by mistaken assumptions about pastoralism and pastoralists which lead to interventions ill-fitting to the realities on the ground: the assumption that pastoralism is often associated with violence, and the assumption that pastoralists are inherently conservative and unwilling to change their ways. Interventions based on these assumptions risk ending up working against the livelihood strategies of the people, leaving them with poorer options for survival and well-being.

The assumed violence of pastoralism

In the case of Karamoja, as with many other pastoral peoples, the most commonly cited reason for violence is resource scarcity. Predominant explanations of violence in pastoral areas are competition for limited water and grazing resources. This reasoning is extremely problematic since pastoralism is exactly a livelihood strategy geared to manage resource scarcity in semi-arid and arid environments. Many portrayals of pastoralists moreover fail to include that

competition over resources creates more alliance and corporation between people than it leads to violence and conflict. State interventions in pastoral regions have historically been dominated by military solutions focused on ‘pacifying’ the pastoralists rather than building on the peace mechanism in pastoral societies.

In Uganda, the British Protectorate government focused on isolating and pacifying the Karimojong. They saw little economic gain from the region and concentrated on protecting the administered neighbouring areas from Karimojong cattle raids. Subsequent governments following Ugandan independence similarly focused on security interventions while the provision of public goods and services lagged behind the rest of the country. Karamoja have the direst indices of living conditions in the country: The highest number of people living under the poverty line, lowest life expectancy rates and highest illiteracy rates. On this background, donors in 2007 withdrew their support to the government interventions arguing that they should put more emphasis on development following the broad norm of combining security and development components in policy-making across the globe today.

The simple assumption behind the donor partners’ policy demand in regards to Karamoja was that development would rectify the situation. It would enhance the well-being for the Karimojong, and development of the Karimojong would do away with cattle raiding and other forms of violence due to an assumption that violence and insecurity is caused by underdevelopment and poverty. In recent years state rhetoric and action have indeed shifted towards a focus on development rather than security efforts. The people in Karamoja appreciate the efforts

WHAT IS PASTORALISM?

Pastoralism is defined as a social and economic system based on livestock. Pastoralists usually inhabit ecological zones with scarce water resources and limited possibilities of crop cultivation.

An inherent quality of pastoralism is mobility where the cattle are herded in search of water sources and grazing areas. The Karimojong, who serve as a main example of this policy brief, have traditionally managed the semi-arid conditions of the region through transhumance pastoralism which entails seasonal movement between relatively fixed locations. Livestock herding is supplemented with agriculture and gathering around the settled areas.

towards development but the predominant anti-pastoral policies in the development efforts may lead to deterioration of the most sustainable livelihood. This is as threatening to life in Karamoja as are military operations.

Anti-pastoral policies

Despite official commitments to support (and improve) pastoralism, government policies may overall be characterized as being 'anti-pastoral' due to a general focus on agriculture and alternative livelihoods as well as failure to launch a promised Pastoral Policy in 2009. The Minister of Karamoja Affairs has even stated that the 'dangers of pastoralism outweigh its benefits'. International and national development partners often claim policy neutrality in regards to pastoralism, but their support for agriculture and alternative livelihoods and lack of

support for pastoralism question the neutrality.

It has indeed become increasingly difficult to survive solely on pastoralism. The difficulties are a result of several processes: Environmental changes causing droughts and unpredictable rainfall; state annexing of grazing areas and water resources to game reserves and agricultural settlement; loss of livestock due to disease and clashes between government soldiers and Karimojong pastoralists and between pastoral groups internally. The difficulty is strengthened by the fact that development projects rarely support the pastoral livelihood but focus on alternative livelihoods, such as education, agriculture, casual labour, and so on. The Karimojong however still see pastoralism as the most viable livelihood for them, whereas the alternatives work merely as supplements. Unfortunately, rather than build on this knowledge and change



the development programme, the lack of success for anti-pastoral development programmes are often blamed on the other assumption about pastoralists: The pastoral conservatism.

The assumed conservatism of pastoralism

Blaming pastoral people of conservatism gloss over the fact that they are pastoral exactly because pastoralism is the most viable livelihood strategy considering the ecological conditions they live under. Moreover, the Karimojong as most other pastoral peoples have engaged in livelihood diversification through time. They have supplemented their livestock herding with agriculture, casual labour, business and education whenever possible. Agriculture is not an alternative as a main livelihood strategy, because of semi-arid ecology and unpredictable rainfall; the isolation of the region and general lack of livelihood opportunities make casual labour and business at best sporadic opportunities; and many do not have resources to finish education. Even if higher level education is reached, employment opportunities are few.

The development efforts which allocate funds to alternative livelihoods rather than support pastoral livelihoods end up supporting less viable livelihood strategies at the expense of pastoralism as the most viable livelihood strategy. This leaves the pastoralists with worse conditions for survival. Due to the historic

livelihood diversification strategies of the Karimojong, support for alternative livelihoods is indeed beneficial, but it must be in tandem with support for the most viable livelihood strategy: Pastoralism.

The way forward

It is of utmost importance to get rid of the assumptions that pastoralists are inherently violent and conservative and that the way forward lies in transforming the pastoralists to become something else. First, violence-reduction can only happen by understanding the dynamics of violence and peace on the ground and the support for existing, local processes of peace. The Karimojong history of peace meetings, alliance-building and cooperation through tough times must be brought forth in the understanding as building blocks for future interventions. Second, pastoral peoples' sustainable futures lie in pastoralism supplemented by other livelihood strategies if and when possible, and this must be supported. The anti-pastoral policies must become pastoral policies. It is the assumptions about pastoralism which must be changed and not the pastoralists' knowledge and ways of surviving in difficult ecological conditions.

The data for this policy brief builds on 17 months of fieldwork in Karamoja, Uganda, from 2007 to 2012, which have also produced a MA thesis and a PhD dissertation as well as conference papers and articles.

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Cover photo: A young karimojong cattle herder from Karamoja, Uganda. Photo: Sven Torfinn © Panos Pictures

