Future Agricultures

Policy Brief

Innovation works: pastoralists building secure livelihoods in the Horn of Africa

Introduction

Pastoralist areas of the Horn of Africa are experiencing rapid change. Markets are opening up, helping to improve livelihoods and generate substantial new wealth for local and national economies. Political and constitutional changes are creating opportunities for pastoralists to influence decision-making around the allocation of public resources as well as laws and practices affecting their rights. New technologies such as mobile phones as well as improvements in roads are opening up pastoral areas to greater movements of people, goods, and ideas. And new ways of delivering services to mobile and remote pastoralist populations have improved their access to healthcare, veterinary services and education.

Despite these opportunities, pastoralist livelihoods remain highly insecure. Many struggle to cope with routine drought - let alone extreme events - and widening restrictions on access to key resources. In spite of positive developments in some parts of the region, the benefits of new prosperity and access to markets and services are shared unevenly. The need for fresh thinking and policies that strengthen the livelihoods of the majority of the region's pastoralists remains urgent.

Innovations by pastoralists themselves provide new ideas and practical experience to learn from. Alongside formal scientific and technological advancements, pastoralists are developing and testing new knowledge and practices to manage longstanding challenges and more recent pressures as well as take advantage of emerging opportunities to participate in

Photograph: Abdirizak A. Nunow

A bus carrying milk from pastoralists in the Tana Delta

national and regional politics and markets.

This policy brief summarises lessons from innovations by pastoralists in Ethiopia and Kenya in three critical areas that are shaping the future of pastoralism in the Horn of Africa: land deals and access to high value fodder; commercialisation and markets; and peace-building.

Land and capital

The penetration of domestic and foreign capital into pastoralist areas is intensifying. Inhabiting some of the prime environments in the Horn of Africa for commercial agricultural development, ranching and tourism, pastoralists have formed new institutions to protect and extend their access to high value fodder in the face of old restrictions as well as recent land deals involving a range of investors.

On the Laikipia Plateau in central Kenya, where more than two-thirds of the land is carved into large privately-held commercial ranches, Maa-speaking herders initiated dialogue with ranch owners and managers to access grazing inside ranches against the backdrop of the severe drought crisis in 2009. The negotiations were a marked departure from the tensions and conflict that have long characterised the relationship between the Maasai and ranch owners. In years past, herd owners resorted to 'night grazing', whereby livestock were taken into ranches without permission under the cover of darkness. As a result of the negotiations in 2009, limited numbers of livestock-keepers moved their herds onto ranches during the onset of severe drought conditions. The longer-term impact of the negotiations remains to be seen but for now, these agreements provide a model for how pastoralists might build connections across social and political divides to support their livelihoods.

In the Tana Delta region of eastern Kenya, a proliferation of large land deals is threatening access to one of the region's critical drought grazing reserves used by pastoralists from across eastern Kenya and southern Somalia. In parts of the Delta, where land has been allocated to outside investors as medium-sized farms, indigenous Orma pastoralists are fencing livestock corridors to protect access to water and fodder and Orma leaders are looking to the courts to protect their rights and learning the intricacies of the legal system. Leaders are also mobilising community members to seek redress for alienated land through the courts – one way that Orma are taking the lead in responding to the threat of an unfolding rush for land.

Significantly, innovation by pastoralists does not always advance the broader public interest. Wealthier Boran herders in southern Ethiopia have started crop cultivation inside enclosures as a way to claim resources in an increasingly fragmented landscape. While Boran have traditionally created enclosures to conserve fodder for dry season grazing, the cultivation of crops inside enclosures is one way that individuals have been able to claim exclusive use of enclosures. The trend of establishing exclusive enclosures has intensified as better-off herders seek to fatten livestock to supply the booming market for cattle in Ethiopia.

Commercialisation and markets

As markets expand, so do opportunities for pastoralists to sell livestock and add value to products from herds. Pastoralists are generating significant new income from these linkages, feeding into processes of commercialisation in the region. There is a need for policies to support the participation of pastoralists in markets to strengthen their livelihoods alongside targeted measures to support those who are being left behind (e.g. safety nets, provision of skills and training to make new sustainable livelihoods outside of livestock-keeping for drop-outs).

In the northern Kenya/southern Ethiopia borderlands, a vibrant and lucrative camel market is on the rise - herders, traders, brokers, and other market actors stand to gain. Though

the benefits from these emerging commercial channels are potentially enormous, market actors will certainly profit differently along the trade chain. Pastoralists are already market actors but their gains depend on a variety of conditions. While the role of market brokers is crucial in linking herders with traders, some take advantage of the complex trading chain to exploit herders excessively. Generally, the camel trade in this border area is seen as one of the most beneficial to most market participants, including herders.

Pastoralism in the Somali region of Ethiopia has been transforming for some time and the rapid growth of economic activity around small towns is one manifestation of how the region is changing. One innovation spreading widely is the sale of camel milk in towns at scale. Herds of camels are becoming commonplace around towns as herders tap into town markets. And as towns become more important in pastoralist production systems, some herders and townspeople are also producing fodder on enclosures on the outskirts of towns to sustain 'town camels' as well as livestock brought for sale. This is another example of how poorer pastoralists residing in towns are responding to processes of livestock commercialisation by exploiting a market niche for livestock products.

Peace-building

Building peace is another area in which pastoralists are taking the lead. The nature of conflict in pastoral areas is complex and changing. First, the closer integration of pastoralist areas into national and regional markets is leading to resource grabbing as well as opening up new outlets for stolen livestock. Second, political devolution and uncertainties concerning the changing dispensation of power are reigniting old rivalries and new struggles for supremacy. Third, the dynamics of insurgency in parts of the region have been tied to global security concerns, leading to the involvement of foreign militaries and security personnel in intelligence gathering and delivering development in some pastoral areas.

Against this backdrop, pastoralists have been at the forefront of efforts to cultivate better relations. After conflict flared in 2004 between the traditionally allied Gabra and Boran, leaders from both societies initiated a dialogue building on customary law to spread a message of peace within both societies. The dialogue culminated in the Maikona Declaration (2009), an agreement that enshrined the rules of keeping peaceful relations between the Gabra and Boran. Although hailed as a pastoralist innovation, the dialogue was successful because it built on traditions of peace-building recognised by leaders from both societies and worked in collaboration with state law and institutions. Innovation, in this instance, is less about radical transformation than it is about gradual change and adapting existing institutions and relations to changing pressures and opportunities.

Notably, pastoralists have prevented conflict from breaking out during times of severe stress. During the severe drought of 2009-2010, Maa-speaking herders in Laikipia negotiated with Meru and Kikuyu small-holder farmers living adjacent to Mt. Kenya to graze their livestock on farms. The agreements were carefully negotiated between individual herd owners and farmers and built on traditions of cooperation between these neighbouring societies. The arrangement permitted herders to move their livestock during the day into the Mt. Kenya forest (where they were prevented from residing) and to be kraaled at night on farms near the forest perimeter. The agreements worked because they helped the livelihoods of farmers and herders alike. Herders were able to access critically needed fodder in the Mt Kenya forest during the drought while farmers were able to keep the manure of livestock kept on farms.

Learning from innovation

Many of the policies and measures that are required to strengthen pastoralist livelihoods are already well-known. These include legal and administrative protection of mobility and pastoralists' access to key resources, a supportive policy framework for livestock trade and marketing, the reduction of armed violence, and improvements in the provision of basic services for pastoralists.

Yet pastoralist innovations in Ethiopia and Kenya provide new insights into how such policies and measures might be crafted. Better-off and poorer pastoralists alike are innovating but for very different reasons and with different consequences for the future of pastoralism in the region. Innovation is happening both because of new wealth creation linked to processes of commercialisation as well as distress and the search for new ways of minimising losses.

Wealthier herders in pastoral areas who are often the focus of innovation policies are reaping the benefits of intensified linkages with national and regional markets. Successful commercialised livestock-keepers are able to pay for labour to move herds in increasingly monetised pastoral economies; purchase hay and pay for water tankering during drought; and negotiate individual agreements with land owners to access high value fodder. Poorer herders are innovating because of necessity but their innovations do not guarantee better livelihood outcomes. For example, in Laikipia, wealthier herders who could afford to buy fodder came off Mt. Kenya earlier and generally fared much better than did poorer herders who stayed on the mountain longer during the drought and lost livestock to rain and cold. Ultimately, innovation works when it delivers tangible improvements in people's livelihoods.

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