



Speech by Hon. Mohamed Elmi at the launch of 'Pastoralism and Development in Africa'

Jacaranda Hotel, Nairobi, 13 February 2013

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome the publication of a book which discusses pastoralism in Kenya, and in the region, in such an accurate, constructive and nuanced way. More than any other way of life, pastoralism has suffered from the easy repetition of biases and myths by policy-makers, development agencies and the media. Events such as the drought response in 2011 reinforce these myths. While driven by compassion, too much of the programming at that time used images of passive victims, and made easy assumptions that pastoralism is somehow uniquely vulnerable to climate change.

What I value about this book is the richness and diversity it portrays. It does not ignore the challenges, nor the fact that the changes we are witnessing in pastoral areas – of greater commercialisation, individualisation and integration – will have both winners and losers. But alongside these it gives us the positive examples of pastoralists adapting successfully to change, as they always have. And it captures the innovation among peoples who are too often dismissed as backward and reactionary.

The book estimates that the total value of the pastoral livestock and meat trade in the Horn of Africa in 2010 was close to one billion dollars. That is an extraordinary figure, achieved with almost no government support. Here in Kenya we have persistently undervalued our livestock producers, even though their contribution to agricultural GDP is only slightly less than that of arable farmers.

We apply double standards to different parts of the country and different production systems. I once asked a colleague from a coffee-growing part of Kenya what would happen if there were no access roads, energy, financial services or marketing infrastructure in their area. The reply was that it would take no more than a season before farmers would be forced to uproot their plants and try something else, or turn to others for support. Just like coffee farmers, pastoralists need a basic level of investment in the foundations for development – in things like roads, literacy and security – for their livelihoods to thrive.

However, there are signs of positive change. The book rightly welcomes the African Union Policy Framework for Pastoralism as a progressive step forward. Here in Kenya, and after many years of advocacy and effort, we have just launched the ASAL Policy, passed by Parliament in December as Sessional Paper No. 8 of 2012. The policy sets out a series of measures to realise the economic potential of pastoral and other dryland areas. More importantly, it commits the government to re-frame its approach to the region. It recognises that a pastoralist in Kenya has the same rights and expectations as any other citizen, which her government must meet. And it requires the government to adjust the way it operates in an environment where mobility matters for many families and their way of life, and where different forms of social organisation and cultural values apply.

In the education sector the National Council on Nomadic Education in Kenya, or NACONEK, has recently been approved by Parliament and will shortly be gazetted. The Council is referred to in Chapter 18 of this book, which was written by David Siele, Director of Human Capital Development in my Ministry, in collaboration with international researchers. NACONEK will provide a specialist base within the education sector to find innovative ways of reaching pastoralist families, for whom a system of fixed schools is impractical.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This book encourages us to start 'seeing like pastoralists'. At one point it asks whether 'the centre' now needs 'the margins' more than before. I believe this is true of Kenya, where the potential of millions of people at the margins – previously denied an education and denied the basic services from which to maximise their contribution to their communities and to society as a whole – has been ignored. Despite the risks and challenges involved, devolution will shift the focus of policy-making and development from the centre to the margins – from a single, centralised government to 48 equal governments (47 counties and the national level). In my view the promise of the Constitution, with its basis in self-determination, human dignity and social justice, provides the strongest guarantor that pastoralists will finally be understood on their own terms and able to realise their full potential.

In closing, I would like to thank all those responsible for organising this evening's event. It gives me great pleasure to be able to launch this publication, which should be required reading for every Kenyan.

Thank you.