

# Pathways to Resilience in Pastoralist Areas

A FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL CENTER BRIEF 

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Across the Horn Africa, pastoralist areas have been one of the most persistent and difficult challenges for governments, and development and humanitarian agencies. Although often viewed as physically remote, universally poor, and subject to droughts and conflicts, in reality these areas can also be dynamic regional economic hubs, with substantial livestock trade networks to local markets, and, crossing borders, to neighboring countries. Ethiopia, Somalia, Somaliland, and Sudan are all major exporters of livestock, with most of these animals sourced from pastoralist areas or from producers who use mobile livestock production systems. This Briefing Paper draws on a synthesis of research by the Feinstein International Center at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University,<sup>i</sup> and focuses on increasing socioeconomic differentiation in selected pastoralist areas, and the implications for pathways to resilience.

In 2009, research by Feinstein explained the increasing domestic and international livestock trade from some pastoralist areas, and yet at the same time, the increasing destitution and levels of humanitarian assistance. The findings showed that although most pastoralists were engaged in livestock markets, commercialization was associated mainly with wealthier pastoralists and herd owners. Over time, and as human populations grew, commercialization was also linked to a gradual shift of livestock from poorer to wealthier producers, and related trends such as increasing privatization of rangelands, and declining social capital related to livestock transactions and support. These changes were evident in parts of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia despite diverse central political ideologies and policies over several decades, and within a context of multiple conflicts and frequent droughts. This research became known as the “Moving Up, Moving Out” analysis, and notably, the findings were consistent with other studies on poverty and livestock development, the economics of pastoralism, and frameworks for understanding future trends.<sup>ii</sup> Although not widely recognized at the time, Moving Up, Moving Out also concluded that for many poorer households, future livelihoods were not only a matter of moving out of pastoralism, but also of moving out of pastoralist areas.

## Moving economies

Revisiting the Moving Up, Moving Out analysis in 2017, the pathways to resilience for poorer pastoralist households can be viewed against the basic economics of pastoralism. From this perspective, a minimum number and type of livestock are needed to produce enough food, especially milk, for household consumption. The herd also needs to produce enough offspring, some of which have to be sold; the income is then used to buy cereals for food. In general, a household of

two adults and four children would need about 20 cattle and 70 sheep or goats to meet their basic food and income needs; this equates to about 4.5 Tropical Livestock Units per person. In contrast, a report from Afar and Somali Regions of Ethiopia in 2015 indicated that 80% and 90% of households respectively lacked a minimum herd,<sup>iii</sup> and research in northern Kenya published in 2017 concluded that over 70% of households in Marsabit District were livestock and income poor.

In line with these figures are reports of increasing numbers of people diversifying their livelihoods, and engaging in a wide range of income-generating, wage labor and agricultural activities, including various forms of temporary and permanent migration.<sup>iv</sup> However, the level of income produced from these activities tends to be low and is often insufficient to enable households to save cash, invest, or rebuild herds. The specific activities are also often categorized as “negative diversification” because of the resulting social or environmental consequences. For example, there are reports of laborers in Karamoja, Uganda being paid with alcohol instead of cash, and activities such as the cutting of trees for firewood or charcoal have environmental impacts. For those trying to grow crops, rainfall is a key determinant of success, but pastoralist areas are characterized by highly variable rainfall. Another

potential pathway to better income is education, with educated family members finding higher-paid employment and contributing to household economies. However, one outcome of decades of government neglect of pastoralist areas is very poorly developed education services. Even when new schools become available, poorer households can struggle to meet the costs of education, especially if they cannot draw on support from relatives. Overall, the mix of small herds, negative and risky diversification with low incomes, and the limited accessibility or affordability of education results in poverty traps. Furthermore, these traps exist in a context of continuing population growth, exposure to shocks, and persistent marginalization in terms of basic services and infrastructure.

## Mobility and land

For pastoralists and other people who rear livestock using mobility, access to rangeland is one of the main factors that influence pathways to resilience. Feinstein’s work on pastoralism and mobility has been heavily influenced by earlier research that explained the ecological and economic rationale for moving livestock in dryland areas, which are characterized by high rainfall variability, and therefore uncertainties in the availability of pasture and water, both spatially and temporally.<sup>v</sup> In common with many other studies, our research demonstrates the fundamental importance of mobility to pastoralist livestock production but at the same time, the changing nature of mobility, the increasing array of barriers to movement, and the responses by pastoralists as they continue to adapt to declining land access. From a Moving Up, Moving Out perspective, the commercialization of pastoralist livestock production is clearly associated with wealthier livestock owners taking private control of hitherto communal rangeland. This supports the production of these larger herds but can hinder production for smaller/poorer herds.

were dominant themes at the international Futures of Pastoralism conference in Addis Ababa in 2011. Contributors to the conference associated land fragmentation and private ownership with livestock commercialization, and increasing socioeconomic differentiation, with case studies from Tana River, Kenya, southern Ethiopia, and Gedaref State, Sudan. Other contributors focused on the limitations of a new pastoralist land proclamation to secure communal land against private takeover in the Afar Region of Ethiopia, and in Kenya, the blatant “legal theft” of Maasai land. In contrast, there are examples of new, mutually beneficial agreements between pastoralists and farmers over land access, as well as examples of customary institutions “banning” rangeland enclosures. This raises the question of how rapidly these types of arrangements can be scaled up, adapted, and formalized where needed, in the face of the commercialization trends and the reality that in some areas, key seasonal rangeland resources are already in the hands of private individuals. In some areas, land appropriation by wealthier pastoralists started in the 1960s.

Pastoralist land tenure and rights, land grabs, and constraints and innovations around land access

# Changing Social Capital

Historically, pastoralism has required collective action to manage livestock herds, including the daily tasks of moving herds to pasture, watering, and providing security. At the same time, social capital in pastoralist areas is reinforced by complex exchanges of livestock and livestock products between households and individuals in the form of loans and gifts, and key social events such as marriage use bridewealth or dowry payments in the form of livestock. Social support systems have also been central to drought recovery and rebuilding herds after disease outbreaks or raids.

A key aspect of the Moving Up, Moving Out scenario is that social capital changes over time, and that these changes contribute to the widening gap in livestock assets between richer and poorer households, and the capacity of the poor to recover from crises such as drought. Livestock commercialization and related trends such as the private control of rangeland reflect more individualistic behaviors, and less reliance on shared arrangements for livestock management. In terms of

traditional social support after shocks, this support often involves donations of livestock from wealthier herd owners to those affected by shocks to assist recovery. However, there is a growing mismatch between the numbers of people needing support and the capacity or inclination of wealthier households to provide it. These changes can also be viewed from the perspective of reciprocal arrangements versus obligatory support. The former assumes that support to kinsfolk is provided at least in part to ensure that the giver will also receive support in the future, if needed. Obligatory support relates more to religious or social beliefs and the ethics around supporting those in need. With commercialization, wealthier herders reduce their investment in reciprocal social capital because of the harsh reality that they are unlikely to receive anything in return. In other words, there is a changing moral economy associated with Moving Up, Moving Out. As experiences during the famine in Somalia in 2011 clearly show, social capital can still be critical to survival during drought but often takes the form of assistance from distant relatives.<sup>vi</sup>



# Uncertain pathways to resilience

For pastoralists with sufficient numbers of animals, and the right kind of access to rangeland and markets, there is a clear pathway to resilience based on pastoralism. For these people, pastoralism works well, and will continue to adapt to market demands and other trends. However, as commercialization advances, the number of households following this pathway to resilience declines relative to the population as a whole. Even for those with large herds, this pathway also carries risks, because even large herds can be decimated by drought. In part, these risks can be offset by positive types of diversification, including investment in businesses in urban centers, and better-quality education. Livestock commercialization also allows positive diversification for others, with new jobs related to marketing, processing of livestock products, or other activities. But in general, there is a substantial gap between the slow growth in work opportunities and the substantial numbers of people who need to find work.

A far greater number of pastoralists appear to be living on the edge of pastoralism, surviving off small numbers of animals, and increasingly reliant on a range of diversified activities. Whether located in rural areas or near to towns, for these households the pathways to resilience are far less clear. A full

return to pastoralism can be difficult as land becomes more fragmented and privately controlled; and diversification often involves low-paid or exploitative wage labor, or activities with negative environmental or social consequences. The net result is a poverty trap. Although often viewed by policy makers as the best alternative to pastoralism, agriculture can be far more risky than livestock production in areas with highly variable rainfall and few permanent water sources. The emergence of large-scale social protection programs in pastoralist areas of Ethiopia and Kenya is symptomatic of the problems. The policy message is that for many people, Moving Up, Moving Out is not only about moving away from pastoralism but also about moving out of pastoralist areas. In theory, education is critical, but education services are still very poorly developed in pastoralist areas, or for some, unaffordable.

For women and girls in poorer pastoralist households, the situation is particularly dire, with consistently lower levels of education and health relative to men and boys, and higher risks of negative diversification, and exposure to violence and sexual abuse. Again, although livestock commercialization provides some opportunities, such as trading in small ruminants and milk processing, women have far fewer pathways to resilience relative to men.

<sup>i</sup> Catley, A. 2017. Pathways to resilience in pastoralist areas: A synthesis of research in the Horn of Africa. Feinstein International Center, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, Boston.

<sup>ii</sup> For example, the “Hanging In, Stepping Up and Stepping Out” analysis by Andrew Dorwood and colleagues, research on the economics of pastoralism in Ethiopia and Kenya by John McPeak and Peter Little, and in Somalia by Ahmed Abdullahi, and the four-quadrant framework for understanding pathways of change from subsistence pastoralism, developed by the Institute for Development Studies in 2007.

<sup>iii</sup> In the Ethiopia case, the figures relate to the period before the severe droughts in these regions from 2015.

<sup>iv</sup> Little, P. D., ed. 2016. Resilience and risk in pastoralist areas: Recent trends in diversified and alternative livelihoods. USAID/East Africa Resilience Learning Project, Nairobi. [http://www.agri-learning-ethiopia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TUFTS\\_1610\\_Risk\\_Pastoralist\\_V3\\_online1-2.pdf](http://www.agri-learning-ethiopia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TUFTS_1610_Risk_Pastoralist_V3_online1-2.pdf).

<sup>v</sup> Scoones, I., ed. 1994. *Living with uncertainty: New directions in pastoral development in Africa*. Intermediate Technology Publications, London.

<sup>vi</sup> Maxwell, D., N. Majid, G. Adan, K. Abdirahman, and J. Kim. 2016. Facing famine: Somali experiences in the famine of 2011. *Food Policy* 65 (December): 63-73.

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