

# **TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORNS: NGOS AND PASTORALISTS IN COALITION**

**Adrian Cullis**

## **BACKGROUND**

Some 20 million African pastoralists commit the majority of their time to and derive most of their income from domestic livestock-keeping. In response to the arid environments they inhabit, pastoral communities have adopted a mobile system of livestock-keeping, based on mixed herds of sheep, goats, cattle, camels and donkeys. Of necessity they move when pasture in an area becomes depleted or soiled. Only in this way can animal production be maintained and pastoral households sustain themselves. Extensive livestock production systems of this type are frequently the best way much of this land can be fully utilised.

Such is the vagary of rainfall throughout Africa's rangelands that almost all pastoral communities face cycles of good and hardship years. During good years herders increase and diversify their herds, whilst consecutive hardship years or 'pastoral drought,' human and livestock disease, or livestock theft may result in large livestock losses and the consequent temporary collapse of household food production. Seldom, however, do environmental factors alone conspire to overwhelm the pastoral production of entire ethnic groups, since pastoralists have 'drought responses,' including mobile and adaptive grazing strategies, livestock and cereal exchanges, the establishment of diverse herds, herd splitting, and non-pastoral activities (agriculture, wage labour etc.).

Underpinning these systems is often a network of affinal and 'stock-friendships,' in which each herding family is involved in the reciprocal giving and receiving of livestock. In these ways, pastoral households are able to minimise the impact of crisis years, rebuild and maintain viable herds. Thus, pastoralists through the centuries have maintained effective control of vast tracts of rangelands, currently estimated at more than 500 million hectares in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank 1989).

The 20th century has resulted in dramatic changes for pastoralists, particularly in the last two decades. Clare Oxby (1989) lists some of these as follows:

### **A. *The constraints of government policies and political action:***

- constraints imposed by some national government policies towards pastoralists, policies including sedentarisation and 'modernisation' of indigenous animal production strategies;

*This paper was originally produced for the **Dryland Networks Programme**, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).*

- increasing vulnerability of livestock-keepers to political action and insecurity in the pastoral areas, the result of pastoralists living in remote and isolated areas prone to insurrection and destabilisation; and
- the transfer of livestock from subsistence to more commercial owners (fostered by the state). This transfer is commonly accelerated in times of drought.

***B. Changes in the pastoral economy:***

- the breakdown between traditional farmer/herder exchanges and the development of mixed farming;
- increasing vulnerability to drought due to the erosion of indigenous barter systems and decline in pastoralists' purchasing power in local markets; and
- urban drift.

***C. Problems of access to pasture land:***

- diminishing size of community-managed rangelands and increasing competition over access to them, through the lack of recognition of customary land-law, facilitates encroachment by agricultural settlers, ranchers, government-financed game parks and irrigation schemes.

The constraints imposed by increasing government control of the rangelands, changes in indigenous pastoral productions systems, and competition from 'outsiders' for access to and control over the higher potential rangelands, have resulted in pasture shortages, land degradation and socio-economic disintegration amongst some pastoral groupings. Land pressure poses possibly the greatest strategic threat to the long-term viability of the pastoral life-style, as vast tracts of grazing land have been appropriated by government, private ranchers, conservationists, sedentary farmers (for commercial farms and irrigation schemes) or lost to encroachment by small-scale farmers (many of whom are themselves squeezed off higher potential land elsewhere through population pressure and land-grabbing).

Some analysts suggest the root cause of most, if not all, change lies in greater state control of pastoral affairs through legal and administrative frameworks introduced during colonial times. IIED usefully makes the point in

its *Pastoral Land Tenure in East Africa* paper that ‘as pastoralists struggle to retain their lands, they find themselves pitted not only against intruders but also find themselves challenging their own governments’ (IIED 1991). Such conflict has led to widespread disaffection in pastoral communities and heightened ethnic tension. It is worthwhile noting, perhaps, that a number of the recent and on-going civil wars in the Horn of Africa involve pastoral communities.

## **NORTHERN RESPONSES TO AFRICAN PASTORALISM**

The colonial response to pastoral production systems is typified by the following assertions:

the failure to control stock numbers in the pastoral areas and to preserve the land against denudation, represents the greatest failure that has occurred in the field of agriculture since the advent of British administration .... except in so far as disease control is concerned and this has, of necessity, aggravated the problem (Lord Hailey in Bridges 1991).

and again

for sociological reasons African peasant farmers [read pastoralists] desire to keep very large numbers of stock, irrespective of their productivity ... (M.H. French in Bridges 1991).

Perhaps not surprisingly, a legacy of the colonial era was that new independence governments were alerted to the need to assert strong administrative rule over all regions under state control and more effectively manage indigenous livestock production systems. Certainly, the ‘insulation of vast areas of land and huge numbers of livestock within a self-sufficient pastoralist economy was regarded as an obstacle [to development]’ (Doornbos and Markakais 1991).

Colonial and new independence administrators were not alone in their pledge to bring about the demise of subsistence pastoralism. International development agencies have also devoted considerable effort and resources, through irrigation, agricultural and sedentarisation programmes, to the suppression of pastoral techniques of land and livestock management. Such initiatives ‘were undertaken on the presumption that pastoralism was inherently unproductive and ecologically destructive and, hence, required radical reform’ (Behnke and Scoones, 1992). There is increasing evidence that such programmes have further impoverished local communities by failing to be economically viable and through undermining indigenous pastoral coping strategies (Cullis and Pacey 1992).

Pastoral representatives also raise the problem of conventional approaches to wildlife conservation. Ironically, when East Africa's game parks were first gazetted, the authorities defended pastoralists' rights to live alongside wildlife. Only later were pastoral movements restricted and exclusive 'game parks' ushered in, as state control was increased. The channelling of large amounts of capital to state wildlife authorities by northern conservation agencies could be said to implicate them in human-rights abuses, as pastoralists are excluded from their traditional grazing land. Pastoral representatives rightly point out that 'the fate of indigenous peoples is often ignored in the face of wildlife conservation efforts' (Parkipuny 1991). Interestingly, pastoralists and wildlife continue to co-exist peacefully in dispersion zones, which lie outside the boundaries of many of the national parks.

## **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

At the eleventh hour, recent research findings challenge the 'old orthodoxy' and lay the basis for an alternative management theory for Africa's sub-Saharan communal rangelands. Overstocking, hitherto regarded as the pre-eminent range management problem, was based on 'concepts of rangeland carrying capacity, defined and measured according to assumptions about the impact of herbivores on plant succession' (Behnke and Scoones 1992). The task of the range manager was therefore to maintain an equilibrium which enabled the offtake of a steady flow of animal products.

New thinking challenges the concept of a single optimum livestock carrying capacity and suggests instead that livestock/plant relationships need to be defined within the context of specific management systems. Thus the optimum carrying capacity for ranchers will differ from conservationists and again from pastoralists. User rights are increasingly recognised. Pastoralists, unlike other users, seek to maximise production in the form of live-animal products such as milk and blood. Subsistence pastoralism is now thought to be most efficient when a larger standing crop of animals is maintained at the expense of the health, viability and output of individual animals (Payne in Behnke and Scoones 1992).

New range management strategies are being developed at the same time that northern NGOs are seeking to right the wrongs of the past and enter into genuine partnership arrangements with pastoral communities. Financial support is now becoming available for community groups seeking to strengthen indigenous livestock production systems, establish locally-managed cereal banks, market livestock and livestock by-products, develop mobile health facilities, undertake drought contingency research/planning, and restock after crises. Conservation agencies, too, appear more aware of pastoral land rights and are beginning to work more closely with pastoral communities.

Clare Oxby (1989), rightly makes the point, however, that an essential prerequisite for NGO support to pastoral regions must be 'to accompany or even better to precede these with initiatives to preserve pasture land and pastoral water resources for the (long-term) use of local livestock-keepers.' Failure to address such concerns exposes NGOs to charges of the negligent use of funds, particularly where assets ultimately become concentrated in the hands of wealthy, non-pastoral elites.

In recognition of the increasing plight of pastoralists in East Africa, activists convened a land tenure workshop with pastoral representatives in Arusha, Tanzania in 1988. The recommendations include, amongst others, calls for progress on the following:

- the documentation and explanation of customary land-rights, in particular with regard to women;
- the registration of pastoral land-rights;
- the summarisation of national statutory laws affecting pastoral land-tenure;
- the exploration of ways of reconciling and integrating customary and statutory tenure;
- the provision of legal aid to fight test cases and the support of legal aid camps or clinics in pastoral areas; and
- the incorporation of legal themes into adult education and literacy programmes for pastoralists.

(Lane and Swift 1989)

Since the workshop, progress has been made on a number of these fronts. Ringo Tenga has recently documented pastoral land rights in Tanzania and copies will soon be available in Kiswahili (Tenga 1992). Support has also been made available to pastoral groups involved in legal test cases. At the grass-roots level, northern NGOs have supported exchange visits, training workshops and research. Unfortunately, not all NGOs are as involved, some steadfastly refusing to recognise that unless continued access to grazing land can be assured, it will be impossible to sustain short-term gains in living standards.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite all the problems, both past and present, many herding families know that pastoralism has a viable future, 'because their forbears managed very well in the drylands..... Given only half a chance they believe that they can wrest a bearable and independent life' (Baxter 1991). Isolated from administrators and policy makers for so long, pastoral communities are now offered support from the research community, which is developing a body of empirical data on alternative rangeland management systems. The NGO community is itself increasingly open to new and more informed ways of working, resulting in embryonic 'partnership' relations with pastoral communities.

Much more has to be done to inform policy makers, administrators and lawyers if the 'old orthodoxy' is to be laid to rest and the further impoverishment of pastoral peoples, through the continued alienation of essential grazing land, brought to a halt. Pastoralists, poorly organised as they currently are, are unable to represent themselves effectively at the international level and are in need therefore of support and encouragement, in the short-term. If northern NGOs refuse to take a more active position on this, then who will? The time has come for NGOs to 'take the bull by the horns.'

Clare Oxby (1989) usefully makes the point that internal NGO practice needs to be tightened up, in particular:

- a greater equity to be achieved between the funding of development support to pastoral communities, vis-a-vis relief and rehabilitation work; and
- all pastoral programmes to be preceded with initiatives to preserve rights to and control over pasture, water and woody browse.

Similar guidelines need to be developed for NGOs active in conservation. A suggestion could be that:

- sustainable wildlife conservation programmes address conservation interests from the perspective of local pastoral attitudes and aspirations, recognising the need for wildlife and pastoralists to co-exist.

Once NGOs' field projects make the transfer from pastoral development to assisting pastoral peoples, the challenge is to find ways to strengthen indigenous pastoral organisations and develop a sensitive advocacy role in the north. It maybe, for example, that, with support, pastoral communities could represent themselves in the forthcoming International Year for the World's Indigenous People and other fora of this type.

In order to develop an advocacy role, Northern NGOs could usefully learn from pastoral survival strategies. Co-operation with other herding families is now understood to be one of the cornerstones of drought-coping and recovery. In sharp contrast, NGOs have an appalling record of non-co-operation and collaboration, preferring to override the interests of the poor to retain and develop their own spheres of influence. Change will only occur if individuals learn to network more effectively.

For this reason, it has been suggested to call an informal meeting of NGO representatives to explore ways in which NGOs can more effectively assist pastoralists to manage their own futures. It is anticipated that the meeting, to be called in January 1993, will address the need to:

- share experience and lessons learned from programmes which seek to assist pastoral peoples in sub-Saharan Africa;
- prepare awareness raising/training and resource packages for use by NGO desk and communications officers (North and South);
- identify and monitor selected pastoral development initiatives (government, bi/multi-lateral or NGO) which are known to impoverish pastoralists and damage the environment;
- monitor, verify and make available material on human and land-abuses to reputable journalists/journals;
- encourage increased recognition of and support for researchers working on sensitive land tenure and pastoral advancement issues (in particular conflict resolution/indigenous pastoral production and drought response);
- establish more effective influence roles with the international donor community;
- make tangible support available to emerging pastoral organisations and networks struggling to organise and defend their livelihoods and grazing lands;
- link pastoral communities with other indigenous communities worldwide, which are effectively resisting land alienation.

## REFERENCES

- Baxter, P.T.W. (1991), *When the Grass is Gone: Development Intervention in Africa Arid Lands*. Seminar Proceedings No. 25, The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden.
- Behnke, R.H. and Scoones, I. (1992) Rethinking Range Ecology: Implications for Rangeland Management in Africa, *Issues Paper* No. 33, March, 1992. IIED London.
- Cullis, A.D. and Pacey, A. (1992) *A Development Dialogue: Rainwater harvesting in Turkana*. IT Publications, London.
- Doornbos, M. and Markakais, J. (1991) 'The Crisis of Pastoralism and the Role of the State,' in *Pastoral Economies in Africa and Long Term Responses to Drought*, Proceedings of a Colloquium at the University of Aberdeen edited by Jeffery C. Stone, Aberdeen, Scotland.
- French, M.H. in the Dow Commission, East African Royal Commission 1953-55 Cmd 9475, London in Bridges, R.C. (1991), *Official Perceptions during the Colonial Period of Problems Facing Pastoral Societies in Kenya*. Ibid pp141-153.
- Lord Hailey, Revised ed. (1956) *An African Survey*, London in Bridges, R.C. (1991). Ibid pp141-153.
- IIED, (1991) *Pastoral Land Tenure in Africa: Programme for research support and institutional collaboration*. IIED, London.
- Lane, C. and Swift, J. (1989) 'East African Pastoralism: Common land, common problem,' *Issues Paper* No. 8, IIED, London.
- Niamir, M. (1991) 'Traditional African Range Management Techniques: Implications for Rangeland Management,' *Pastoral Development Network Paper* 31d, ODI, London.
- Oxby, C. (1989) *African Livestock Keepers in Recurrent Crisis: Policy Issues Arising from the NGO Response*. Report prepared for ACORD. IIED, London.
- Parkipuny, M.S. (1991) Pastoralism, Conservation and Development in the Greater Serengeti Region, Paper No. 26, *Dryland Networks Programme Issues Paper*, IIED, London.
- Sandford, S. (1983) *Management of Pastoral Development in the Third World*, Overseas Development Institute, London.
- Tenga, R. (1992) Pastoral Land Rights in Tanzania: A review. *Drylands Programme: Pastoral Land Tenure Series*, IIED, London.
- World Bank. (1989) *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*. The World Bank, Washington DC, USA.