

Is there a future for pastoralism?

Position of VSF Germany on pastoral animal husbandry in East Africa

I. Introduction: Pastoralism without future?

The current drought catastrophe in East Africa has triggered a new discussion about the future viability of pastoralism. At the moment, 13.5 million people in East Africa are depending on international help. 800,000 people are threatened by death from starvation, and more than 50,000 children have already died in consequence of malnutrition. Millions of people have fled from their traditional residences in order to ensure their survival. But is this the result of a "maladjusted" lifestyle?

In the context of the current famine, voices are being raised blaming pastoralism for the crisis in East Africa and calling to abandon this way of life, so that the same should not happen again. Now the crisis in East Africa is neither a global crisis of pastoralism, nor is it restricted to livestock owners alone. The crop growers in the vicinity of the rivers Shabelle and Juba in Central and South Somalia are equally- if not even more- affected by the drought.

Above all, it is grain which is missing. Experts realise that a significant easing of the situation is not to be expected before the cereal harvest after the long rainy season in August 2012.

II. VSF Germany's work in East Africa

For more than ten years, VSF Germany has been working in the countries Sudan (1998), Kenya (2001), Somalia (2005) and Ethiopia (2008), mainly with pastoral organizations. In this region- and only for the regions where we work can we form our own opinion- we have experienced the diversity of the problems. Therefore, our statements refer to East Africa. For many people, pastoralism is synonymous with poverty and retrogression. Pastoralists are considered to greatly add to desertification by overgrazing pasture grounds in semi-arid areas. They are perceived as population groups who stand in the way of an increasing agricultural use of arable land, and thus fail to contribute to the essential improvement of food security. Pastoralists are also seen as the ones who are most likely affected by climate change and drought catastrophes due to lacking preparation.

Against the background of our practical experience, but also in view of latest research results, we would like to counter this negative point of view. We say: there certainly is a future for pastoralism.

III. How does VSF Germany define pastoralism in East Africa?

We define pastoral animal keeping as grazing on natural grass- and bush land in nomadic shepherding. Mostly, these areas are community-owned; in many cases transhumance, in other words movement according to arid and rainy seasons, is included. It is often the marginal areas which are used in this manner: an alternative utilisation of these areas often doesn't seem reasonable, either because of the lack of rain, the composition of the soil, or the isolation and missing connection to markets and traffic networks. In other words: we find pastoralism in those places where it has economic advantages compared with alternative modes of use (for example crop growing or ranching).

Pastoralism is a **globally represented lifestyle and economic system**. It is practiced on 25% of land area worldwide, and generates 10% of meat production. There are around 200 million pastoral households worldwide, owning around 1 billion camels, cattle and small ruminants. In East Africa, 80% of land area is used in pastoral manner, 90% of meat consumed comes from pastoral animal keeping. 70 million people live in these arid and semi-arid regions.²

Furthermore, the export of animals from pastoral livestock keeping is an important source of currency, as is the case in Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia.

IV. Which challenges does pastoralism in East Africa have to face?

- Pastoralists use areas with extreme **climatic variations**. They are therefore exposed to risks which are enhanced by global climate change. A current example: the LaNiña- phenomenon and the **drought catastrophe in the Horn of Africa**.
- The lack of development and limited opportunities to store supplies make vulnerable to **critical factors: malnutrition and insufficient water supply for humans and animals** are the results.
- Conflicts over threatened and limited **resources- pasture grounds and water-** are increasing and are being argued out in a more and more violent manner. Recent and current wars in the area have promoted the distribution of automatic small arms (Kalashnikov); this decisively adds to the fact that conflicts are dealt with in a violent way.
- **State services of general interest and development measures** are difficult to organise for pastoral population groups in contexts already lacking resources, and are frequently not facilitated enough by the state and development cooperation organizations: education, health, water supply, infrastructure and in particular **veterinary services**.
- **Insufficient market accessibility and lack of infrastructure** are responsible for low returns for livestock owners: they receive 30- 40% of sales revenues in end markets, whereas producers which are close to the market get 70% of these.
- For a long time, governments and international advisors considered pastoral regions as „Low Potential Areas“ or „Marginal Profit Areas“ and were therefore hardly included in development planning. However, a change in thinking has set in.
- **Population growth** increases the animal population and reduces herd size per family. In the past 50 years the population has increased fivefold, the herd size per family has halved. **Conflicts** between pastoralists and crop growers are increasing. Furthermore, pastoralists can be affected by „**land grabbing**“, because extensive pasture farming can also be performed by agricultural corporations.
- At the same time, pastoralists easily come into conflict with larger infrastructural measures (current example: the Omo river dam in Ethiopia).
- In arid areas of East Africa, animal husbandry is frequently the sole source of income. **Lack of diversification** increases dependency on volatile external factors.
- For reasons of **risk minimisation, specialisation** on single products is not possible; on the other hand, missing specialisation reduces sales possibilities at the market.
- Export related **animal health requirements** (in view of „transboundary diseases“) can frequently not be met; this results in trade restrictions. The absence of a functioning state (Somalia, Sudan) makes governmentally organised animal epidemic control very difficult.
- The Border management between the national states in East Africa interferes with pastoral nomadic migration. Fines and hindrances are frequent. Governmental regulations are often impracticable (border checks concerning permissions/ passenger certificates or health certificates; prohibition of para-vets etc.)
- **Cultural traditions** restrict marketability of pastoralists: often, the herd is often more of a status symbol than an economic factor.
- The **EU and USA´s trade policies**, whose measures prevent imports and encourage their own exports, complicate market access. The „second market“- the Arabic and Asian countries- as well as international trade regulations are being directed more and more towards these standards.

V. What chances are there for pastoralism in East Africa?

- 70 million people living on 80% of the area in the Horn of Africa represent a respectable economic factor. For instance, pastoral livestock owners of Ethiopia contribute 20% of the gross domestic product, whereas the government incurs 0.5% of its expenditures in this area. This is not reasonable in terms of economy.
- Over the past century, the demand for meat in Africa has risen in such a manner that Africa has become an import market for meat. There is still an increase in this trend. Pastoral livestock covers 90% of the meat demand in the region. It is of national interest to meet the nutritional demands of the nation mainly with native production in order to become more independent from the developments on the global market.

- Pastoralism allows the **utilisation of an otherwise fallow „ecological niche“**. „Marginal resources“ are used in an ideal and sustainable manner. In view of a further increase in the demand for foodstuff, this is of general interest.
- Suitable breeds which allow for a **versatile product utilisation** per animal are kept/ bred (not only milk and meat, also skin, horn, hair etc.). The marketing of milk as the main product of pastoral livestock keeping has been barely promoted until now.
- Pastoralism is a **form of life with cultural originalities**. These should be respected and protected, in compliance with the wishes of its representatives. This form of life adds to cultural diversity, which however does not exclude change and adaption to given external factors.
- **Livestock keeping as a social security system** for pastoralists is an element which initially enables the utilisation of marginal resources.
- Pastoralism strongly contributes to land conservation and **biodiversity**.
- The value of pastoral livestock keeping should be re-evaluated by the international community, since grazing adds to carbon capture in the soil and therefore to carbon dioxide reduction in the atmosphere.

VI. Which demands should be made to (international) politics, if the pastoral way of life is to have a future?

- Pastoral animal owners deserve acknowledgement as the leading producers of animal protein in arid and semi- arid areas. They make a decisive contribution to food security and to national income. At the same time they are insufficiently promoted and supported by national governments, relief organisations, international organisations and research institutions.
- Major investments in infrastructure (roads, schools, health facilities, veterinary services, communication, marketing structures, water management, storage, security) are necessary if pastoral areas are to reach a degree of development equivalent to that of other regions. Financial resources generated in pastoral areas must be reinvested.
- It should be acknowledged that pastoralists can make a sustainable contribution to the preservation of our environment, for instance by keeping up a high degree of biodiversity, influencing climate change positively or in the fight against desertification.
- It must be ensured that pastoralists have access to vital resources, particularly to (communal) rangeland and water. This is absolutely essential, especially with regard to the increasing tendency towards “land grabbing”.
- The pastoralists´ right to their mobile way of life should be respected. Existing laws should be improved, so that the differences between nomadic and transhumant modes of production can be taken account of. Nation states in the Horn of Africa and in other areas of the world should recognise that pastoral rangeland knows no borders. They should pay respect to traditional migration. First steps in this direction have been taken (for instance within the scope of the Intergovernmental Agency on Development – IGAD).
- Nation states and the international community should increasingly develop innovative programs which can grant pastoralists access to health services and education and pay respect to their mobile way of life. Here, the use of new means of communication can be of great importance.

VII. How can VSF Germany support of the sustainability of pastoral structures?

So far, emergency relief has outweighed development aid. Emergency relief saves the lives of humans and animals (asset protection), but offers little approach to sustainable development.

For some years now, VSF Germany has been trying to implement an orientation toward development in its projects. Among other things, this includes:

- Emergency provisions, mapping of resources, drought risk minimisation, holistic management, management of water resources, support of microcredits, forage production and rangeland reserves, economically profitable herd size reduction, early warning systems.
- Offering of veterinary services, thus improved **self-provision, market access and export possibilities**. Here, self-responsibility of the people has priority (erection of community-based veterinary health services; support of village pharmacies etc.)
- Help with quality improvement in animal production.

- Better market access due to **better means of transportation** (loading ramp, animal collecting points).
- Help with processing/ refinement of animal products: hygiene in milk marketing, preservation of products so they can be brought to markets.
- Improved keeping conditions for the animals, which have not received much attention in the past (**milk goats, poultry**). This can enhance **protein supply** and present an additional income, particularly for **women and youths**.
- Support of people who have decided to **give up the pastoral way of life**, for instance with the help of income generating measures such as the promotion of small trade. Survivability of the pastoral system is significantly dependent on the fact that the number of people living from this economy does not become too large.
- Promotion of education and training for the young generation.
- Help with **solving conflicts** between different groups of pastoralists or pastoralists and crop growers in a **peaceful** manner.
- Support of pastoralists in negotiating their interests with communal governments and authorities.
- Support of information and advocacy campaigns in Germany and Europe.

VIII. Final remarks

Just like any community in the world, pastoralism is subject to changes and renewals of time. VSF Germany does not strive to preserve and protect the existing conditions, but rather aims to provide help with the search for improvement and adjustment. Such solutions are always to be seen in geographic and social context and cannot be globally uniform. The agro-pastoral cultures in **South Sudan** are currently subject to major changes. The peace agreement has made the development of a road network and the opening of schools possible. The degree of urbanisation is increasing. But along with the changes in infrastructure, agricultural production is also changing: the introduction of a monetary economy allows for the vending of agricultural products. Therefore, the growing of "cash crops" is becoming increasingly important. A change from subsistence economy towards market access is taking place. This change is supported by the use of draught animals, which facilitates the expansion of cultivated areas. Society is changing, albeit attempts to save the pastoral culture are being made. But this also will finally be exposed to change, and new forms will develop.

The situation in Somalia is a different one: here, the civil war has led to a high degree of urbanisation. The urban population lives on funds from the Somali Diaspora and from aid shipments from the UN. Local products (here: camel milk) have a high market value if they are hygienic and genuine (not diluted with water). Promotion of pastoral milk production and quality management are promising approaches to supporting pastoralism by making use of market chances. Other than in South Sudan, there is no alternative to pastoral use of the land here.

In **Kenya**, tourism is one of the supporting pillars of economy, aside from the cultivation of cut flowers, vegetables, tea and coffee. The Massai in the Mara and Kajiado are involved in economic and ethnic tourism- with increasing success. In spite of their traditional lifestyle, the manner in which they profitably merchandise their ecological niche serves as proof of their enormous economic skills.

Since this is part of their tradition, keeping cattle remains important to them.

For marketing purposes they make use of the mobile network. Livestock prices are communicated via sms, even money can be transferred via "M-PESA" (a mobile-network based banking system). In this respect, Kenya is a good example of how modern technologies can find their way into traditional structures, and how people utilise these innovations for their benefit.

This development also demonstrates the pastoralists' striving to use modern technologies, while also preserving their lifestyle.

Pastoralism will persist where it offers a comparative advantage compared with other types of land utilisation. Often, pastoral use of the land is the best alternative. The number of people pursuing this profession is particularly dependent on employment opportunities beyond this sector.

Pastoralists have fewer opportunities in this regard than people in densely populated regions: the latter have better access to schools and often grow up multilingually. Therefore, more should be done to enable pastoralists' children to take up the profession they dream of.

This would serve everyone: firstly the pastoralists, because the ecological loading capacity has long been exceeded in many areas. Therefore, people carry on their parents' work only out of a lack of perspective, supported by casual employment and food aid from the donors.

People find themselves in a waiting position: they would move away if only there was a chance to do so. If they did move away, this would in fact significantly improve the situation for the remaining livestock owners, as restricted rangeland and the number of animals having to live from it are limiting factors. At the moment, many pastoralists lead a life on the breadline.

Therefore, more has to be done to prevent the remaining "cake" from having to be divided into even more pieces. Consequently, it is not pastoralism as an economic form which is at an end. Instead, the relative overpopulation of these arid and semi-arid areas, which is brought about by lack of perspective, is a main reason for the recurring need. It is the aim of VSF Germany to implement appropriate (tailored to the respective situation) measures which can improve the social and economical situation for pastoralists, and thus create perspectives. This would not only help them to a livable existence in their culture but also facilitate the future agricultural use of the areas they live in.

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1 Information from various UN organisations from press releases in September 2011

2 ILRI. Jan de Leuw.2011