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Pastoralism in Eastern Africa: Policy and Institutional Challenges, Opportunities and Responses

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Abstract

Pastoralism is a major livelihood, production and land-use system in nine countries of Eastern Africa (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda). It is indeed the most appropriate land-use and production system for the extensive drylands that cover nearly 75% of the region's landscape. About 90% of the livestock population in the region is found in these drylands, making them an important part of the region's food and nutrition security and economic development. Moreover, pastoralists constitute significant proportions of national populations in these countries, ranging from 10% in Kenya and Tanzania to 60% in Somalia and South Sudan.

Yet the practice of pastoralism has historically been constrained by significant policy and institutional challenges. Since colonial times, governments in this region have perceived pastoralism as backward and inimical to the dictates of modernisation and economic transformation that privilege sedentary land-use and production systems and envision a livestock sector founded on intensive commercial production. Pastoralists have historically been marginalised from and by policy processes, not least because, save for Somalia and South Sudan, they constitute minorities in the countries of the region and live on the geographical margins of their countries, away from the centres of political and commercial power. In Somalia and South Sudan where pastoralists are the majority, conflict and insecurity have undermined political processes and opportunities for them to use their numbers to craft supportive policies and institutions.

Since the turn of the century, however, there have been promising policy and institutional developments at the regional level and within the different countries. These developments hold the promise of mainstreaming pastoralism into national economic development processes and thereby securing pastoral livelihoods. Even Somalia and South Sudan are involved in the regional policy and institutional development processes.

This presentation will highlight these developments, analyse the promise they hold for pastoralism, identify challenges that have still to be overcome for pastoralists to fully benefit from them, and makes recommendations on how stakeholders can contribute to strengthening the policy and institutional context for pastoralism in Eastern Africa.

Keywords: Eastern Africa, pastoralism