

PASTORALIST FORUM ETHIOPIA (PFE)

A National conference on MDGs and Pastoral Development: *Opportunities and Challenges in the New Ethiopian Millennium*

Introduction

Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia (PFE), a local umbrella NGO, is working with the pastoralists and partners to advance the right of pastoralists, and represents collective voice of its member CSOs/NGOs. The Forum envisions that concerns of the pastoralists would receive the proper attention of policy-makers and addressed. The priority focus areas are I) Policy Research, Advocacy and Lobby; II) Networking and Coordination; III) Promotion of Good Governance and Practices; IV) Partnership and Coalition Building; and, V) Capacity Building. The Forum is a legally registered organization at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) with Certificate No. 1125 and has currently 27 member CSOs/NGOs.

As part of its advocacy and networking, PFE conducts various conferences on pastoral policy and development issues. The Forum has organized so far three national conferences, and a roundtable, which have brought the main challenges and opportunities of pastoral development in Ethiopia in to the attention of many. They also shed light on what issues poverty reduction strategy and sustainable development should involve as far as pastoralism and pastoral development are concerned. These conferences are meant to continue and facilitate the culture of debate and discussion among those working on development, particularly on pastoralism and pastoral development.

Objectives of the Conference

The main objectives of the conference are to explore and understand the status of the Ethiopian pastoralists vis-à-vis realities of MDGs, and contribute towards achieving MDGs in the pastoral context.

The specific objectives are to:

-  understand the development status of the Ethiopian pastoralists vis-à-vis the realities of MDGs through presentation of seven papers, discussion, and debate on the key findings;
-  add values to efforts being exerted to achieve the MDGs in the pastoral context; and,
-  promote shared vision among partners and stakeholders and develop strategy/plan to leverage benchmarks for pastoral development in the Third Ethiopian Millennium.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

In September 2000, the historic adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has given the global fight against poverty a much needed focus and commitment. The MDGs is the policy framework¹ for global fight against poverty while the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is a policy instrument to achieve these goals. The MDGs has mainstreamed a set of inter-connected and mutually reinforcing development goals and targets into a global agenda. Subsequent to the momentum created at the global level and followed at the country level, national authorities are expected to prepare MDG reports (MDGRs), which primarily focus on engaging political leaders and high level decision-makers, as well as mobilizing CSOs, communities, the public and the media. In keeping with the monitoring and campaigning on the MDGs at the country level, the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) and the UN Country Team in Ethiopia have initiated a process of translating the MDGs into the local Ethiopian context.

¹ Here, policy Framework indicates or spells out national development objectives and/or priorities. In other words, it is a vision statement. Eg. MDGS, NEPAD etc. Whereas, Policy Instrument indicates or provides the strategy for achieving development priorities as spelled out in national development documents. Eg. PRSP, HIPC etc.

With a view towards meeting the MDGs by 2015, the GoE has committed itself to the realization of the MDGs. The first generation PRSP, Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), was an indispensable development policy to reduce poverty across the country from September 2002 to 2005. In view of the magnitude and extent of poverty in Ethiopia, which is widespread, deep and severe, the target was to reduce poverty by 10% at the end of the program period while maintaining an average real GDP growth rate of 7%. In September 2005, the final report on the SDPRP was submitted to the World Bank. The Government of Ethiopia with consultation of partners has prepared the second generation PRSP, Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) and the plan is under implementation.

Although Ethiopia is striving to achieve MDGs, clear understanding of the status of social groups like pastoralist vis-à-vis MDGs is becoming paramount. This can be viewed from two perspectives; first, pastoralists are significant in number but still in the margin of development so that need special attention in the process of MDGs; second, experience has shown that relying on national aggregated average data to track on the progress and achievement of MDGs may be misleading when it comes to pastoral context. For instance², drinking water coverage for the Afar and Somali states is 30% and 25% in 2003/2004, respectively, while general participation in primary education is 37% and 26% in the same order. However, the national average for drinking water and primary school coverage has recently been reported more than 45% and 79%, respectively.

Given MDGs is the policy framework for global fight against poverty and Ethiopia is striving to meet the sets of inter-connected and mutually reinforcing development goals and targets in the MDGs, their content, level of integration and synergy with national/local pastoral development plans, and status of pastoral development in achieving them have never been discussed and debated. Thus, it is important to deal with these timely issues in the fourth annual national conference on pastoral development. The MDGs has 8 goals, 18 targets, and 45 indicators. Although the country is striving towards achieving MDGs, the status of pastoral development from economic and/or social aspect in relation to the realities of MDGs has not been yet adequately discussed, debated, and documented. Even if most of the pastoral issues that the Forum has surfaced out for debate and discussion have paramount significance, the need to understand how far or closer are the pastoralists in achieving the MDGs and act accordingly is crucial. If the pastoralists are far away from achieving the envisaged goals in comparison to the national progress, alternative plan should be sought to tackle the problems. Therefore it goes without saying that the fourth national conference should advance on the last conferences, but with a better focus and depth on policy frameworks and instruments like MDGs.

The Setting of Conference

This year, the Forum is organizing its 4th National Conference from 29th-30th August 2007 in UN ECA Conference Room in the presence of representatives of a wide range of pastoral actors. The conference will allow pastoral leaders, government officials, representatives of CSOs/NGOs, donors, specialists, and academics to discuss and share their knowledge and experiences. More than 150 participants are expected in the conference. Seven topics focusing on MDGs and pastoralism and related issues are selected for the conference. A well-versed professional will produce a paper on a given subject matter/topic and present it for discussion and debate. Many complex issues of pastoralism are involved and undoubtedly there are other hard questions to elaborate on while those that remain will offer us an excellent opportunity for discussion. The proceedings of the conference will be published and circulated to a wide range of pastoral actors and decision-makers.

² Ethiopian News Agency website referring to Parliament Report, March 2006.