

# **Working with the pastoralists:**

## ***a gateway to sustainable development in Ethiopia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

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Pastoralism has survived for centuries despite of great *curse*s of political, economic, and ecological pressure. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in spite of the fact that it has lost its position of the golden era, pastoralism has continued as a viable production system and a way of life for millions citizens. Arguably, pastoralism have survived and attracted the attention of different actors in different forms and intensity may not be only due to intensive advocacy and lobby works of the pastoralists and their friends but also its endowment with capacity to endure from shocks and under go amicable transformation to cope up with changes.

Given the forces ranged against pastoralism, it is perhaps surprising that pastoralism has survived at all and has jumped into 21<sup>st</sup> century. Pastoral production systems do have some features in their favor that enabled them to be feasible in the new century;

- ❑ **Flexibility:** Pastoralists have a long-term flexibility derived from their ability to exploit patchy resources. It has often been observed that the more ‘mobile’ pastoralists are, the better they are able to survive climatic catastrophes such as blizzards and droughts. They are also able to switch species like from sole cattle production to camel and goat dominated system or even entirely out of pastoralism for a period or interred to a take-a-chance crop farming.
- ❑ **Low costs:** When pastoralists come up against highly efficient modern era livestock industries, they face major price competition for their products especially as these may often be dumped, sometimes by the same nations offering pastoralists emergency assistance with another arm. However, pastoralists do not have to meet sometimes-onerous hygiene costs, packaging, transport and tariffs. Moreover, the single most important cost to all intensive systems is investment in land itself, both enclosing it and maintaining its productivity, a cost that pastoralists do not bear, except on the rare occasions when they destock to conserve forage.
- ❑ **Freedom of movement:** The problems that pastoralist faces are as much social and political as economic and resource-based. Just as medieval empires saw themselves constantly threatened by pastoralists on the frontier, so the modern nation state has the stereotype that pastoral peoples are both backward, archaic and also a political threat. The arguments advanced by researchers concerning the potential for pastoralists to contribute to national productivity and inter-relate to settled farmers are over-ridden by concerns about their constant movement and thus a failure to control them both in economic and political terms.
- ❑ **Operate in regions unsuitable for agriculture:** Pastoralists inhabit mostly areas that are not suitable for agriculture and this feature of pastoralism gives chance to survive.

Ethiopia is home for more than 12-15 million pastoralists who reside in more than 123 Woredas in six national Regional States. This number stages the nation one of pastoral populous country in Africa. The majority of pastoralists constitute the ethnic groups of the Somali, the Afar, the Oromo (Borena and Kereyu), various groups in S.omo, and the Nuer pastoral ethnic groups. The pastoral areas are estimated to comprise 42% of the national total livestock population (~78 million of the total estimated national livestock population). In addition, the pastoral areas are rich in biodiversities, mineral and water resources, energy resources, and untapped tourist attractions.

The forms and types of pastoralism differ from place to place depending on climatic factors and availability of resources, socio-politico-economic circumstances. In most cases however, mobility is an integral part of pastoral systems. Under normal conditions, mobility in any of its forms and degrees is an applied survival strategy. Mobility being galvanized by indigenous knowledge is used to optimize and regulate the interactions among the livestock, the environment, and the human components of the system leading to pastoral livelihoods security in ecologically fragile environments.

Constraint to exploit these natural resources to benefit the community is common to all the regions of the country. The fact that pastoralism as a way of life and as viable production system was not recognized by the past governments has been a major policy hurdle that led to the neglect of pastoral communities only to generate and exacerbate poverty among them. On top of that, pastoral land was unlawfully and against the consent of pastoral communities passed on to commercial farms and game-park reserves. Far from being recognized as a viable way of life, pastoralism was not even properly understood by policy makers. This has enormous impact on policy making. Ethiopia's macro-economic policy has for the last fifty years completely neglected pastoral communities, and has always seen settlement as the ultimate solution to pastoral poverty and under-development.

Since recently, the attention being given to pastoralists and pastoralism is encouraging. The Government of Ethiopia has taken encouraging steps to respect the rights of the pastoralists and to develop them. The change in development approaches and languages at the country level have witnessed the recognition of pastoralism with its distinctive features. Given the fact that pastoralists are enormous in terms of population and endowed with tremendous resources, and the fact that the country is striving for to get out of poverty cycle understanding pastoralism more and working with the pastoralists is imperative. That is, **increasing space to enable pastoralists to be situated in the center of decision-making process would contribute the country to break soon the poverty cycle and attain sustainable development.**