

## Social protection in pastoral areas

The roots of social protection lie in international legal instruments and declarations spanning the last 70 years. All official mention emphasises social protection as a basic human right that strengthens the social contract between the state and its citizens. Social protection leads to social development – a cornerstone of economic advancement and political stability.

In the Horn and East Africa, social protection providers fall into two main categories: informal and formal. Informal providers are communities and external social networks such as family members, relatives and other social structures outside pastoral systems. Strong informal social protection networks based on religious, clan or family affiliations have always played a vital role in pastoral communities, and protect livelihoods against the chronic shocks inherent in the drylands. However, these informal support networks are under increasing pressure. Formal providers of social protection are governments, the private sector, humanitarian organisations and local and international donors. This group of actors primarily concentrates on providing assistance and services originally designed for sedentary populations, with little consideration for the specific needs and vulnerabilities of pastoralists. Social insurance and equity are practically non-existent.

The study on which this Synthesis Paper is based maintains that a coherent social protection framework is fundamental for pastoralists in eastern Africa. A tailored approach to social protection for pastoral communities is required – one which recognises the context of pastoral livelihoods and views social protection through a livelihoods framework. The study proposes the integration of four pillars of social protection (assistance, services, insurance and equity), where equity is paramount at every level of intervention. The study also contains a series of concrete, practical examples of existing interventions under each of these four pillars – allowing for the identification of projects that can be replicated and scaled up where necessary, and identifying ‘gaps’ under each pillar.

### Conceptualising social protection

There is no universally agreed definition of social protection. However, social protection instruments have common characteristics. These are to protect households from the effects of reduced income and poverty, prevent livelihood deterioration by reducing household vulnerability to ‘shocks’ and promote more sustainable livelihoods. There is also growing acceptance that social protection instruments should not only be available to the poorest, but also to the middle and better-off wealth groups, as a buffer against ‘shocks’ for them as well.

Current discourse on the aims of social protection sets the bar high. Often, these aims are considered beyond the economic, if not political, means of most countries. To bridge the gap between ideology and practice, a conceptual framework incorporating four ‘pillars’ of social protection is presented, which intertwines core ideas and approaches. These pillars are: social assistance, social services, social insurance and social equity.

#### *Social assistance*

These are typically transfers of necessities based on levels of vulnerability or poverty. The most vulnerable members of a community, who either lack temporary or permanent means to meet their survival needs, have a right to social assistance. Currently, however, social assistance programmes, particularly food aid and cash for work, are often irregular, unpredictable, inappropriate and therefore ineffective.

#### *Social services*

These are basic services provided by the state to citizens as a right. Every citizen has a right to services in health, education, clean water and sanitation, among other things. In pastoralist areas, the provision of livestock services such as animal health and market access could also be classed as a social service. Typically, the most vulnerable members of communities are those excluded from these services (where available) for reasons of economic, cultural, political and physical access.



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### *Social insurance*

These are instruments that enable individuals to pool their resources to provide support in case of shocks to their livelihoods. These instruments may include livestock insurance, contributory pensions, health insurance programmes or other informal group schemes. Typically, the most vulnerable often lack the resources to contribute to an adequate social insurance system.

### *Social equity*

These are instruments that aim to protect people against social risks, such as discrimination or abuse. They are usually legislative in nature and deal with a broader set of rights issues. Typically, the most vulnerable are those that do not have sufficient power or access to authority.

## **Understanding pastoral vulnerabilities and livelihoods in social protection**

Key to the development of a social protection framework for pastoralists is a thorough understanding of pastoralist-specific vulnerabilities across eastern Africa. Pastoralist livelihood strategies have a number of features fundamentally different to sedentary livelihoods. Therefore, the use of 'blueprints' for social protection instruments from sedentary areas is inappropriate in the region's pastoralist zones.

That pastoralists are in a perpetual state of humanitarian crisis, reliant on food aid, is a fallacy that has allowed governments to continue investing little in pastoral areas and applying misdirected policies. The further misconception among governments and development practitioners that drought is the problem for pastoralists hides the negative impact of historical neglect and inappropriate or unimplemented policies in pastoral areas. It also allows development practitioners to continue focusing on the consequences of drought, rather than working to reduce vulnerability to it.

The main aspects which fuel vulnerability in pastoral communities include:

*Marginalisation of pastoral communities.* Mainly due to their remoteness from positions of centralised power and a poor understanding of the rationale of pastoralism, pastoral areas have been marginalised by national governments.

*Low investment in pastoral development.* In Ethiopia, livestock contribute about 40% of agricultural GDP and more than 20% of total GDP. Yet despite this, between 1993–94 and 1998–99, the government of Ethiopia allocated only 5% of its recurrent expenditures to agriculture, and less than 0.3% to livestock. This poor investment in pastoral areas and livelihoods is manifested in human development indices that lag far behind national averages.

*Herd depletion and diminished grazing areas.* Increasingly frequent drought hastens herd depletion, undermining the economic stability of households. The short intervals between droughts are insufficient to allow for adequate accumulation of sustainable herd sizes, which typically go through periods of growth during times of favourable rainfall, followed by subsequent collapse during droughts. This is compounded by diminishing grazing areas, where pastoral rangelands are appropriated and fenced off for sedentary land uses and for agriculture.

*Decreased ability to cope with drought.* It is not drought as such that makes pastoralists vulnerable, but factors that constrain highly evolved pastoral drought response mechanisms – especially mobility of people and animals. These include policies aimed at settling and 'modernising' pastoralists. If limiting factors persist, vulnerability to drought will increase even if its incidence and severity do not.

*Deteriorating relative wealth of pastoralists.* Pastoralists classified as well-off today were considered part of the middle wealth group less than ten years ago. Shifts in wealth group status have been missed in most analyses, which only pick up on the location and percentage of food-insecure people within a given location. However, tracking the proportions of better-off, middle and poorer wealth groups is essential to adequately monitor the dynamics of any economy – because when the poor increase and the better-off decrease, the resulting decline in labour and exchange opportunities can result in a dysfunctional economy.

*Increasing dependence on markets.* Pastoralists are increasingly dependent on markets for meeting their food and other requirements such as clothes, veterinary drugs and water. In addition, as drought becomes more frequent, the ability of the rangelands to sustain livestock decreases and livestock diseases become more common. Consequently, more livestock is sold in markets. However, pastoralists' access to markets is constrained by poor security, distance to markets, poor infrastructure (especially a lack of roads) and restrictive policies on livestock marketing.

## **Informal social protection instruments in eastern Africa**

Informal social protection systems cater to specific needs and apply across wealth groups (better-off, middle and poor). Informal social protection to poor households can be provided in the form of cash or food, while in 'pure' pastoral areas the transfer is more likely to be in the form of livestock (especially lactating animals) or livestock products. These informal or community-based social protection responses are influenced by religious beliefs, community relations and kinship ties.

The most common informal social protection mechanisms are presented within the context of the four pillars framework.

*Informal social assistance.* The main informal social assistance instruments include *zakat*, *irmaansi* and *maal*. *Zakat* is a religious obligation on every Muslim to make monetary contributions to poor and destitute groups, including orphans, new converts and travellers. *Maal* and *Irmaansi* often differ according to the relationship between the recipient and donating households and their wealth status. If the recipient household is poor and closely related, or has a close friendship with a wealthy donor, the beneficiary household is entitled to both assistance and insurance – that is, both milk and offspring. When the poor beneficiary household is neither related to nor has a close friendship with the donating household, the beneficiary household is only entitled to assistance – the milk component – and must return both the offspring and the lactating animal to the owner after the lactation period is over.

### Box 1: Changes and challenges faced by pastoralists

- **Changing land tenure.** The common property regime which allows pastoralists to sustainably manage vast areas of land is being undermined by laws and policies that promote the individualisation of land tenure. As a result, dry-season grazing reserves have been lost, livestock movements have been restricted, land tenure has been rendered insecure and land degradation has increased.
- **Breakdown of traditional governance structures.** Traditional pastoral institutions enforce compliance with norms and values that dictate the sustainable use of the drylands. They also act as repositories for traditional knowledge which maximises returns from the drylands. Emphasis on formal governance structures has weakened traditional institutions and reduced their capacity to help manage crises like epidemics and drought.
- **Increasing demand for land.** Crop farming is encroaching into the drylands. There is also increasing interest in pastoral areas for biofuel production. The absence of a comprehensive land use policy is encouraging unsustainable production at odds with the pastoralist system.
- **Negative perceptions and stereotypes.** Pastoralism is widely perceived as an unsustainable, inefficient way of using land, which does little for the economy and is environmentally destructive. Policy actions, institutions and structures informed by these negative stereotypes facilitate the alienation of pastoral resources and increase pastoral vulnerabilities.
- **Inadequate investment in the drylands.** There is little private or government investment in the development of pastoral areas across the region. With limited market access, pastoral areas experience high costs in doing business, lack opportunities for income diversification and face unemployment and stagnant incomes. Those who fall out of the system find it difficult to rejoin the pastoralist mainstream and become dependent on relief aid.
- **Failure to recognise the diversity of pastoralist groups.** Not all pastoralists are at the same level of vulnerability. Some are well-off with stable livelihoods. Others, once stable in pastoral production, today find themselves in danger of losing their livelihoods. Still others have fallen out of the pastoral system altogether, own no livestock or land and live in shanties with no access to social amenities, depending almost entirely on relief agencies. Current policy and practice must accommodate these different categories of pastoralists and their particular needs.

Other informal social assistance instruments in eastern Africa are *rai*, where children from poor pastoralists herd for richer relatives and receive food and other benefits as payment, *keyd*, where poorer households adopt lactating animals and their offspring from richer households, sometimes on credit, and *dhowrto*, where surplus milk and butter are stored for distribution among poor households with no milking animals, especially during dry seasons.

*Informal social services.* Pastoral communities regularly provide a range of informal social services given the remoteness, inappro-

priateness or lack of formal services. For example, Qur'anic education and healing services in Somalia provide health and education services in place of non-existent formal services. Teachers in Qur'anic schools are drawn from local communities and travel with mobile pastoralists, providing lessons to children which fit in with their daily chores. In addition, many pastoral areas have community committees to manage and maintain water sources.

*Informal social insurance.* Many informal social protection mechanisms are effectively social insurance schemes. For example, Afar pastoralists in Ethiopia operate a voluntary social exchange system in which everyone contributes livestock, food and other items to households considered most in need in their communities.

Market systems, and particularly credit, also support vulnerable households during times of stress. Credit is the backbone of economic transactions in pastoral areas and works hand in hand with the seasonality of the pastoral system. It provides the necessary buffer for a system that is subject to the vagaries of climate. In pastoral areas of Somalia, most pastoralists from majority clans have access to credit. However, poor pastoralists are often the first to fall out of the credit 'net', and are denied access due to a lack of productive assets.

*Informal social equity.* Apart from the unwritten codification of providing social assistance, there do not seem to be any informal instruments that specifically protect poor and vulnerable households against discrimination or abuse. The scope of the informal safety-net tends to be determined by the resources available within the community in order to protect the majority. This directly opposes the ethos of most formal (external) systems.

To date, the emphasis of informal social protection mechanisms has been on material assistance to help households absorb the impact of, and recover from, natural and man-made shocks. However, informal social protection instruments are weak in the areas of social equity and social insurance. Clearly, informal social protection instruments are important, but they do not represent a coherent or comprehensive social protection package. Moreover, while informal social protection mechanisms provide safety nets in pastoral communities, not all groups have equal access, which means that some will remain vulnerable.

### Formal social protection instruments in pastoral areas

An increasing number of state and donor programmes across eastern Africa are attempting to address social protection in pastoral areas. Nonetheless, the majority of existing formal social protection mechanisms were originally designed for a sedentary population and do not recognise some of the unique elements of pastoral livelihoods, especially the importance of mobility.

Formal social assistance in pastoral areas is largely inappropriate. Excessive and poorly targeted food aid continues to be widely applied in response to the cycle of drought that is an inevitable part of livelihood patterns in pastoral areas. Food aid distribution is so prevalent and entrenched that it has contributed to pastoral communities' increasing reliance on external support. Given that any emergency livelihood response – other than responses to

rapid-onset crises – suggests a failure of actors to adequately address underlying causes of vulnerability, a different approach is called for.

Pastoral vulnerability should be tackled using longer-term interventions with a combination of state-led planning and strategic programming. Yet food aid, which should be a safety net of last resort, has become the safety net of first (and in some cases, only) resort. Formal emergency responses and development instruments must stop focusing solely on food-based social assistance packages to pastoralist communities, on the assumption that this will reduce vulnerabilities. The continued delivery of inappropriate emergency assistance does not increase pastoralists' resilience to shocks, and only works to undermine local coping strategies.

### Poor access to social services for pastoralists

Social services such as health and education are essential if pastoralists are to expand and diversify their livelihoods and enhance their ability to respond to shocks. Yet social services in pastoral areas are largely inadequate, and access to these services by pastoral communities is low. In addition, questions about the appropriateness of social services in pastoralist systems. Reviews of development projects in eastern Africa indicate that 70%–80% of social service infrastructure in pastoral areas is not useful to pastoral communities simply because they are 'roll-outs' of pilot projects in sedentary areas.

Pastoralists as a group enjoy the least coverage of social services compared with other areas within their national borders. The low availability of formal social services in pastoralist communities effectively means that they face a choice between settling in one area in order to access these services (undermining their mobility) or deliberately excluding themselves from informal social services based on their traditional livelihood patterns. It also follows that pastoralists with low incomes are the least likely to be able to send their children to school, and the most likely to have children that are malnourished. Poor households in particular do not have regular or predictable access to social services.

### Lack of formal social insurance opportunities

The protection of pastoralist assets through social insurance mechanisms can prevent a fall in pastoral productivity in the face of risks and shocks. As stated earlier, pastoralists' traditional social protection mechanisms rely heavily on better-off pastoralists 'insuring' poorer households against loss. However, there are no opportunities for pastoralists from better-off and middle wealth groups to access any form of formal insurance for their livestock assets. Evidence suggests that the protection of assets for all wealth groups is necessary to sustain existing social protection mechanisms. Evidence also indicates that increased dependency on food assistance is the immediate consequence of a lack of indemnity of pastoral livestock assets.

There are an increasing number of innovative pilots for insuring against drought or poor rainfall, although most have been tested in sedentary areas. For example, the Ethiopia drought insurance pilot project in sedentary areas showed that it is feasible to use market mechanisms to finance drought risk, and

that it is possible to develop objective, timely and accurate indicators for triggering drought assistance.

### Formalised social equity

Eastern Africa generally lacks dedicated instruments to reduce discrimination and abuse of the most vulnerable pastoralists. The formal policies of state actors in eastern Africa also rarely reflect the reality of pastoralists' needs, but rather reflect what are *perceived* as their needs. For example, the 'settlement discourse' is dominant in official Ethiopian government documents, despite a lack of evidence that settlement would help strengthen livelihoods or reduce vulnerability.

### Conclusions and recommendations

To date, pastoral communities have largely been left out of national discussions relating to social protection – and consequently are in danger of seeing inappropriate national instruments imposed on them. Social protection is not just about social assistance programmes such as food or cash handouts. Social assistance alone is not equivalent to social protection when addressing complex pastoralist livelihoods. A holistic approach based on the four pillars of social protection needs to be adopted. In addition, the social protection mechanisms put in place must be grounded in a thorough understanding of pastoral livelihoods, and the contribution of informal social protection mechanisms must be acknowledged and built upon.

Partly as a result of inadequate attention by governments, pastoralists have developed strong informal social protection networks based on religious, clan or family affiliations. These have always played a vital role in ensuring that pastoralist livelihoods have remained viable through the chronic shocks inherent to pastoral lifestyles, such as drought. However, informal social mechanisms are under severe pressure as pastoralists in the region are growing poorer (indicated by a declining asset base and a shift in the wealth status of communities), and so are increasingly unable to implement traditional social protection options to cope with changes.

In order to cope with the inevitable risks in pastoral areas and prevent the degradation of livelihoods, the key formal social protection providers – which include governments, donors, the private sector, and humanitarian organisations – should put in place *ex ante* and *ex post* strategies before and after a shock in order to decrease vulnerability. Such strategies should include risk reduction (including social assistance packages to reduce vulnerabilities), risk planning (including social assistance packages to prepare pastoralists for periods of stress), risk reaction (including social assistance packages that assist in reacting to impending hazards triggered by an early warning) and risk-related recovery (including social assistance packages to integrate risk mitigation measures into the recovery process). The objective of these strategies should be to reduce welfare losses; they should cater not only to the poor, but also to better-off groups, so that their livelihoods are also protected and buffered through times of hardship, and they should recognise the social protection responsibilities inherent within pastoral communities.