

The Democracy, Growth and Peace for Pastoralists Project
ADVISORY GROUP
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1. Introduction

Eight pastoralist leaders and experts on African pastoralism came to a meeting at Masai Mara in May 2008 to advise on the Democracy Growth and Peace for Pastoralists project. The following question was posed to the advisors: what is the place of the concept within the pastoralist world? This short report is a briefing on how the question was answered and what it suggests for the DGPP team and others in moving forward in the pastoralist arena. The report considers the role of understanding as an objective and advises on criteria for effective pastoralist institutions that can take a lead on building understandings in the pastoralist world. It gives details of the DGPP project and notes our discussions of current opportunities in East and West Africa.

The pastoralist advisors that gathered at this small meeting pointed out that there are very few resources and policies issued in the name of pastoralists that actually bring any beneficial change to pastoralists. They are looking for accountability from those who make these decisions. But they also accept criticism of themselves: not all pastoralist leaders are accountable. They agree that it is not enough to call politicians to account or to complain about the government. The ordinary pastoralist has a right to expect responsibility from his or her own community leaders as well as from the state. They feel that community leaders should be accountable to their people while also being involved in national and local policy and governance decisions. They feel very strongly that divisions between pastoralist groups, sustained and deepened by politics and patronage, are creating a crisis in the pastoralist world. They suggest that by giving respect to the knowledge, opinions and strategic interests of all pastoralists these problems can be solved.

2. The Role of Communication

Pastoralists feel disrespected and misunderstood. Many have lost confidence in themselves. The conclusion of one advisor was that '*governments have imposed on us a disrespect of ourselves.*' To pastoralists, it seems that external pressures are

undermining their societies faster than an effective response can be mounted. The result is unprecedented levels of poverty and powerlessness. These ancient livestock-keeping societies are finding it difficult to deal with alien laws and bureaucracies that seem corrupt and impermeable to influence. Access to technology and finance is severely limited by pastoralists' remoteness and marginal political position. Inside their societies people are disagreeing about how to move forward—they say that their political will has been fragmented by the pressures of resource competition and the games of national and international politics.

Pastoralists wish to communicate with one another and with centres of power in order to change the conditions of disrespect and mistreatment that they so often face. Individual pastoralists and pastoralist societies have substantial knowledge and capabilities that can be usefully shared and mobilised. Their oral cultures and sophisticated systems of communication foster expertise in dialogue which can take a large part in resolving complex conflicts, increasing productivity, developing education and sorting out social problems, if given due recognition and support. But this capability has been eroded with the imposition of state bureaucracies, aid programmes and new political processes.

The advisors are not suggesting that we try to increase understanding of pastoralists, but *understandings with* pastoralists. Information about pastoralists, in the wrong hands, has led to exploitation of pastoralist resources and manipulation of weak communities. They want to see investment into pastoralists' own knowledge and powers. *'We are really talking about knowledge as understanding. What people understand and where they take that is what is important,'* said one advisor. The objective is not so much technical knowledge as an overall capacity to engage with changing times and to hold institutions accountable for this.

'What will make the difference to disrespect and exploitation of pastoralists is the improvement of everyone's understanding of what they have been through. Shared understanding and a diversity of checks and balances is the best guarantee for accountability.'

3. The Democracy, Growth and Peace for Pastoralists Project (Pastoralist Communication Initiative)

It was to help counteract disrespect and misunderstanding that the Pastoralist Communication Initiative was born in Ethiopia in 2002. It involved a combination of visionary people from pastoralist groups and international organisations from different parts of East Africa. These people were interested in trying out a new approach. They were not interested in compromise or in repeating failed approaches.

DGPP, a DFID-funded project¹, offers opportunities for pastoralists to meet, analyse, debate and negotiate with one another and with authorities. It contributes to efforts to generate new knowledge and leadership; change attitudes and understandings in and about pastoralist societies; and develop cooperative initiatives with governments and other bodies. The focus is on coming to understandings between different groups with a view to negotiating a better deal for pastoralists. The initiative differs from most other externally initiated development activities in that it is focused on

¹ The first phases were called Pastoralist Communication Initiative I and II and the current phase is called the "Democracy, Growth and Peace for Pastoralists Project."

generating dialogue and developing accountable relationships of benefit to ordinary pastoralists.

Activities include pastoralist gatherings, debates, exchange visits, seminars and research. Project decisions are made in response to requests and ideas coming from pastoralist leaders and members of government and other key bodies. The project undertakes a mix of direct work with pastoralists, and indirect work with institutions that affect pastoralists, notably ministries, parliaments, international donor organisations and universities. The project's current geographical centre is Ethiopia, and other countries are included as part of linking Ethiopian pastoralists to their peers and giving opportunities for Ethiopian pastoralists and government leaders to debate across a broad spectrum of experience and political-economic conditions.

The project is run by Pastoralist Consultants International, a non-profit company registered in UK. The board of directors consists of four people. Currently there are two non-executive directors and two executive directors. The pastoralists and non-pastoralists that work on the project operate as consultants.

Until very recently, UN OCHA Ethiopia hosted the project in Ethiopia. The agreement, which has been in operation for six years, came to an end in early May 2008. The project had been criticised for not having a clear institutional base that pastoralists, governments and others could do business with. The move away from the UN has made the organisation and its projects more accessible and straightforward.

The seven advisors gave ideas to the DGPP team about continuing the programme and extending the idea to new countries. They also gave insights on pastoralist priorities. In their opinion, it is essential for pastoralist leaders to come together to be involved in national and international debates and negotiations, while making sure that communities are linked in with what their leaders are doing. They said that DGPP is a useful and, in many ways, unique project. By aligning itself with the discussions that are already taking place in the pastoralist world about recognition, rights, knowledge and change, the project has been helping to raise influence at several levels. The advisors suggest that the project should not cease operations too soon as it will take time for pastoralists to develop experience and maturity in the new approaches that we are trying together. They call these new approaches 'the PCI concept'.

4. Extending the Concept

According to the advisors, there should be more groups and more countries involved in the initiative. An alliance of organisations working on pastoralist communication in different countries and regions would extend the concept, broadening the contribution. Pastoralists and their supporters in Mali, Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya, for example, have all expressed an interest in similar activities. Sharing between the pastoralist leaders taking on this task from one country to another would help to widen the strategic scope and improve pastoralist solidarity, voice and profile.

The advisors suggest that not only should pastoralist groups in different countries take up the concept, but the programme itself should be broadened and deepened. Pastoralist Consultants International is an international organisation and is useful to pastoralist organisations that are building their own national capabilities. It should have a clear institutional home and strong pastoralist involvement. It should work with pastoralist leaders to promote community links and it should also assist pastoralists

to speak and be heard at high levels. There is a need, for example, for DGPP to assist pastoralist leaders to connect directly with key strategists in northern countries as well as in southern ones. Doing research and feeding it back to the people in their own languages is also an important contribution that DGPP has made and should continue to make, even though in some situations it can cause problems with entrenched powers who would rather keep such knowledge from the general public.

Pastoralists will not change overnight, say the advisors, and time is needed for pastoralist leadership to become experienced with the new agenda of understanding and communication. While progress is being made in some countries on developing representative organisations focused on understanding and communication, pastoralists in other countries have yet to do this. And all these organisations will continue to need the services of an organisation that links from one country to another, sharing knowledge and generating new collaborations across borders and regions. The DGPP should continue to offer services until such a time as they are all taken up by pastoralists themselves.

(i) Ethiopia

A process of building pastoralist institutions is underway in Ethiopia. Pastoralists of Oromia Region have registered the Pastoralist Elders Council. In Somali region the Somali Pastoralist Council was established at the end of 2007. It is in infant stage and needs support. The Afar pastoralists are discussing how to establish a council and there are moves towards some kind of council in the Southern Nations Region as well. These institutions can do a great deal, especially on the issue of conflict between pastoralist groups. Once consolidated, the new pastoralist associations aim to come together in a formal way at the national level. Even as they take it to this level, the councils need to be accountable to their constituencies and they need DGPP support to do this.

Land is a particularly important issue at present in Ethiopia. For example the area in Borana called Did Liban was recently ploughed. The name means plain of prosperity, and it was very important ritual land and pasture. Afars have lost 90,000 hectares to sugar and the Kereyu have lost 38,000 hectares just in the last year. Engaging pastoralist councils in the land law is very important. NGOs are already engaged, but they need links to pastoralists. This needs support from DGPP.

Translating research into local languages is crucial. Young generations in Ethiopia learn in their mother tongue and they do not understand English. In Ethiopia's Somali Region everyone carries around the Somali translation of the Vulnerable Livelihoods research, because it is so important. DGPP should do more of this. DGPP also provides a good link to those at the top, such as UN and bilateral donors. The research and outcomes of pastoralist meetings need to reach these places.

(ii) Kenya

There are 12 main pastoralist communities in Kenya. Kenyan pastoralists would like to work together and in collaboration with their Ethiopian neighbours. They want to start a process of linking groups together to learn from each other. They suggest that the first stage would be to bring the leadership of these groups together so they can understand how DGPP works and debate their own ways forward. Pastoralists came together and spoke as one at the 2007 constitutional debates, but subsequently returned to their local concerns. A DGPP-type process in Kenya would be led by the customary leadership and would have a long term view. There are also immediate

opportunities that require pastoralist voice in the next few months, including a constitutional review, a commission on historic injustices and a new Ministry for Northern Kenya and other Arid and Semi Arid Lands, which is in search of a strategy. Kenyan pastoralists would like DGPP to support a gathering in Kenya, involving Ethiopian elders and members of government from both Kenya and Ethiopia.

(iii) West Africa

In many ways a similar situation prevails here as in East Africa. Pastoralists are not understood by those who govern them. There are rebellions in Mali and Niger pitting Touareg against their governments. Decentralisation in Mali has been more beneficial to the non-pastoralist southerners than to the pastoralist north because the southerners are more educated, more organised and better prepared for it.

There is a need for help to pastoralists to find the kind of decentralised governance that is adapted to pastoralist communities, resolves conflicts and provides for education, while making maximum use of pastoralist knowledge. These matters cannot be worked on without mobilising the entire pastoralist culture. Pastoralist leaders would be interested to work on a process that took its lessons from DGPP's seven years in East Africa. West African pastoralists could come and work with East African pastoralists and learn from what DGPP has been doing. Then there would be a need for some resources and a small meeting, in Niger for example, bringing pastoralist leaders from several West African countries to discuss replicating the DGPP concept.

5. Pastoralist organisations and institutions

i) The Ethiopian Pastoralist Councils

'The communities have their organisations and basically, for me, the challenge is bringing back the power and the decision-making within the society, so that it isn't someone else deciding but the pastoralists. This will start a whole process of negotiations. If the leaders are appointed from outside, there is nothing that can be done.'

Only a small proportion of pastoralist organisations are interested in being directly engaged with the agenda of generating new understandings of the sort outlined above. The advisory group define these organisations as *'having accountability to pastoralist people and abilities to operate within difficult political environments'*. One example is the new pastoralist councils in Ethiopia whose stated purpose is to generate understanding.

'The purpose of councils is to make pastoralists aware of their own affairs and to let them know that they have to help themselves. No-one is going to help them.'

These growing organisations describe rising recognition of pastoralists and pastoralism within Ethiopia's difficult political environment. They work on valuing and extending pastoralist knowledge, linking pastoralists with other pastoralists and pastoralists with government, as well as advocating for better policies and practices. Their plans include organising large gatherings, speaking on national and international platforms, and using research. The councils have worked extensively on the issue of conflict between and among pastoralist groups, bringing people together under binding customary rules. Ethiopian pastoralists believe that they can solve most conflicts in their areas through these initiatives.

The pastoralist councils want to call NGOs working on pastoralism in their regions and ask them to be aware of and accountable to pastoralists. The councils are also engaging with and calling to account politicians and members of parliament.

(ii) Customary and other institutions

While the Ethiopian pastoralist councils have their roots in customary institutions, they are not in themselves customary. The customary institutions in pastoral Africa still perform extraordinary tasks in areas such as natural resource management, justice, and religion. They constitute the embedded knowledge of pastoralist societies. There are three characteristics of these institutions that are important as regards this discussion. They are accountable by traditional law. They are generally transparent to and understood by their members. Most of them are mandated to resolve conflicts. These three characteristics are not often true of formal-sector NGOs. Customary bodies are very different from NGOs, however formed, and it is important to keep that difference in mind. Customary institutions are not universal development structures that can easily adapt to the demands of building understanding between large numbers of different pastoralist groups or between pastoralists and governments. Few have capabilities for managing externally derived finances or for operating within the political scenarios that characterise the modern African state. New organisations rooted in custom but modern in outlook and capability are needed.

While the new Ethiopian pastoralist councils have developed in conditions where customary institutions retain fairly high levels of trust from pastoralist communities, the conditions in other countries are often quite different. In Nigeria and Kenya elite pastoralists have created and used pastoralist organisations to exploit other pastoralists within a growing economy. Organisations are often formed solely to provide employment and compete for development resources. In Kenya the political ambitions of pastoralist leaders and heads of pastoralist organisations have caused deep divisions between pastoralist communities. It is with these troubles in mind that pastoralists are looking at new forms of association that build on the embedded knowledge and accountability of the customary institutions.

Pastoralists have been asking what kind of national or even international structure pastoralist associations might develop that would be respected by pastoralist people and also be appropriate to the task at hand. This is often one of the first issues that is debated between pastoralists in the gatherings that DGPP and others organise. In many countries, the answer may be that interacting networks of associations built along traditional lines could be more appropriate than a single centralised organisation.

(iii) National and international influence

While political parties, trading co-operatives or NGOs created in capital cities are not usually accountable to pastoralists, they are still important players in pastoralist futures. They have resources and political powers, modern education and strong opinions. Umbrella organisations are not uncommon. They are often ineffective. They may become the target of suspicion and repression when the political situation gets difficult. In Kenya, for example, small organisations came together under tribal lines and formed an elders' council at national level, but the government disbanded it because of legal and political statements made in its name. The elders represented a

political challenge so the government banned the council and all of its small member organisations.

This raises an important question for pastoralists as to how to act to influence at a national and international level, even when suspicions are running high. National bodies, such as the Nomadic Commission in Nigeria, play a role, mediating between pastoralist groups and the state and the international system. In a number of international organisations and bilateral offices there are research groups that are looking for understanding which is fed into political processes. Communication technologies have already spread deep into the most remote areas and revolutionised the way the information is moved around. While the mechanism for transmission of influence from pastoralists to the international level exists, the receiving end is not organised to use the information, nor is it receptive to it. The technology is easy, but the acting on it is difficult. Pastoralists want to create strategic alliances directly with people in northern countries who influence foreign policy.

One way is to use effective research to provide systematic analysis to national and international bodies, as well as to pastoralists themselves. Going more deeply into the otherwise simplistic understandings generated from media coverage of conflict, is just one example of how pastoralist associations that are interested in knowledge and communication can extend their reach.

(iv) Accountability & representation

In general pastoralists want to be able to engage with what is happening in their name. Accountability and involvement applies as much between pastoralists and government, as between one pastoralist group and another and within each pastoralist group. There is often concern, for example, about accountability to and involvement of women in decisions. Pastoralist elders usually claim that in most pastoral societies women have a status that is not at all inferior and that it is only when it comes to relations with the outside, a role historically taken by men, that distortions of status and treatment begin to occur. Power is conferred from outside, it has been taken out of the society. The same thing is true of the chief appointed by a government who realises that he owes his power to that appointment and no longer to the game played within his society. Where power has been externalised in this way, women have lost their power and their authority has been weakened.

Pastoralists are still discussing what this means for them. The advisors suggest that to put the situation to rights would require two changes. First is encouraging women to have access to the world where decisions are being taken, by sending girls to school. Second is bringing the decision-making power back into the society so that women can play the traditional decision-making role that they have always had.

One thing striking about pastoralist cultures is that they often make a distinction between moral authority and power. Moral authority is something every person carries with them wherever they go and whatever their role. Women have, they say, always been expected to carry that moral authority. Pastoralists are interested in strengthening not power but moral authority. Keeping this perspective in mind suggests that pastoralists should build accountability and involvement in ways that are fitting to sustaining the moral authority that is their ultimate objective.

5. Current opportunities and issues for pastoralists

Changing global conditions are going to affect pastoralists in the coming years, offering opportunities for improving the pastoralist situation, but also posing threats. Listed below are a number of such openings, considered by the meeting as being of particular importance at present.

- i) Climate change will affect different parts of Africa in a variety of ways. It is predicted that it may actually be positive for pastoralists in West Africa, and negative in southern Africa, but the picture for East Africa is confused. Pastoralists who are organised within and between themselves are most likely to be able to respond effectively to these changes.
- ii) There is likely to be a high increase in demand for pastoralist products from urban markets. Urbanisation is currently moving very fast and it is likely to accelerate. Demand for milk and meat will increase faster than other commodities. If pastoralists can respond to this, their economy will flourish and grow faster than in other sectors. The structures of the pastoralist economy need to be right to ensure an adequate response. If pastoralists don't develop these mechanisms, ranches and peri-urban structures that can respond will develop at the expense of pastoralists. For pastoralists the ideal is that a system is developed by which their communities as a whole benefit, not just a few entrepreneurs. There has been a tendency, in West Africa for example, for incomers to exploit the new opportunities leaving local pastoralists watching from the sidelines.
- iii) There is now recognition of the economic contribution of pastoralists to national economies. There are a few studies underway which show that pastoralism makes a much bigger contribution to national economies than previously thought. This means that it is likely that national governments and international agreements will come to take greater account of the economic potential of investments in pastoral areas, for better or worse.
- iv) Education is an increasingly important influence on pastoralist lives. It is becoming available to pastoralists faster than people expected. As a result of previous education policies pastoralists are now beginning to get high positions in governments. There is a possibility of 100% primary education for pastoralists very soon. However if the education is not of the appropriate kind and if it contains negative attitudes towards the pastoralist way of life, then it will have a detrimental effect on social cohesion *and* economic potential. *'Each of us knows the burden of education and struggle to keep working for the community. "When God wants to destroy ants, it gives them wings" (Mali saying).*
- v) Because of international commitments to the Millenium Development Goals and because of fears about the rise of terrorism there is heightened donor interest in pastoralist peoples and their access to education and economic development.
- vi) There are specific governance and security crises that affect pastoralists in different countries, for example the war on terrorism, the war in Darfur, or the constitutional crisis in Kenya. That pastoralist conflict is now wrapped up in the war on terrorism, as well as in proxy cross-border wars and in national political struggles gives more urgency to the involvement of intelligent dialogue and influence from the pastoralist side.
- vii) Land continues to be a divisive issue. Enclosure of pastoralist land is a problem everywhere and it is increasing. Pastoralists are taking up the issue at a constitutional, legal and environmental level.

6. Conclusion

Most African pastoralists have suffered a deep decline in influence which has allowed governments and external agencies to act in ways that are ill-informed and unaccountable. Numerous threats and opportunities are pressing the pastoralist leadership into action. The group of advisors that met at Masai Mara confirmed the DGPP belief that it is pastoralists themselves who have to meet, debate, federate, inform, advocate and negotiate a way out of this negative situation. Any organisation working on such a process has to be truly accountable within pastoralist societies if it is going to have any success with external bodies. It needs to draw strength from the foundations of pastoralist knowledge and solidarity. Building what the pastoralists have called moral authority is perhaps as important as being well organised. For DGPP, the advice is clear. Keep on supporting pastoralists to do both.

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“I imagine that the world is shaped the way it is because of lack of understanding; they of us and us of them. They do not understand the choices we make or the way we use our wealth. We cannot learn the world when there is no peace. There is insecurity, poverty and ignorance. I want peace and I want a new situation of where our minds will be.” Oromo Pastoralist, Ethiopia, 2007