

# The Future of Pastoralism in Ethiopia

## 4 Possible Scenarios

Over 60% of Ethiopia's territory is semi-arid lowlands, home to sophisticated societies and an active livestock-based economy. Today Ethiopia is looking for a new and deeper understanding of its pastoralist regions and an accurate appreciation of their socio-economic trajectories. These trajectories could be much more positive than many have led us to believe. Experts are now largely in agreement that pastoralism is uniquely well adapted to dryland environments. As an economic and social system, it operates effectively in the low and highly variable rainfall conditions found in the lowlands, managing the complex relationship between man and the natural environment. It is not an isolated rural activity, but is closely linked to other sectors of the economy. The millions of livestock produced from Ethiopia's drylands are a vital engine for trade, farming and urban activities.

### Future Scenarios

In many parts of the lowlands today towns are growing and pastoralist production and markets are booming. Education is in high demand and societies are changing. But conflict, poverty and disparity are still the daily reality for unacceptably large numbers of citizens. A group of Ethiopian officials and pastoralist leaders met in UK in December 2006 to consider the future of pastoralism in Ethiopia. They took into consideration the special nature of the lowlands, their natural resources, economy and governance. They noted the influences of climate and international markets; factors beyond the control of government and the people. They came up with four very real scenarios.

### Scenario 1: Expanding Export Trade

The livestock sector in non-OECD countries is growing at a rate of up to 7% per annum - much faster than the agricultural sector as a whole, and by 2020 it is predicted to be the most important sub-sector in terms of added value<sup>1</sup>. Most pastoralists rely on a markets for sale and purchase of stock. In southern Ethiopia a recent study found 87% of households accessing the livestock markets<sup>2</sup>. Markets provide jobs for the tens of thousands of market employees and traders, transporters and entrepreneurs<sup>3</sup>. As such, access to markets, which markets and under what conditions, is a primary influence on the future of pastoralism.

So the first scenario for the future of pastoralism in Ethiopia is one of **expanding export trade**. It will come about if the country gains access to a range of international markets and a generous climate allows rural productivity to thrive. It means that pastoralists and traders will enjoy immediate benefits from the rising price of livestock, while increased foreign exchange will boost the value of the Birr and increase government revenues.

Lowland traders today complain that they cannot make a living unless they conduct their trade illegally, citing the cost and inefficiencies of current systems of taxation and licensing. Thus their commodities and trucks are at risk from confiscation, government loses potential revenue and unrestrained animal movement promotes the spread of trans-boundary diseases<sup>4</sup>. In a future where these problems have been overcome, government and traders will have arrived at new ways of regulating and promoting cross-border and export trade. There will be agreements on regional integration and free movement of stock and measures to allow for the taxation and certification of livestock herded or transported to markets across borders.

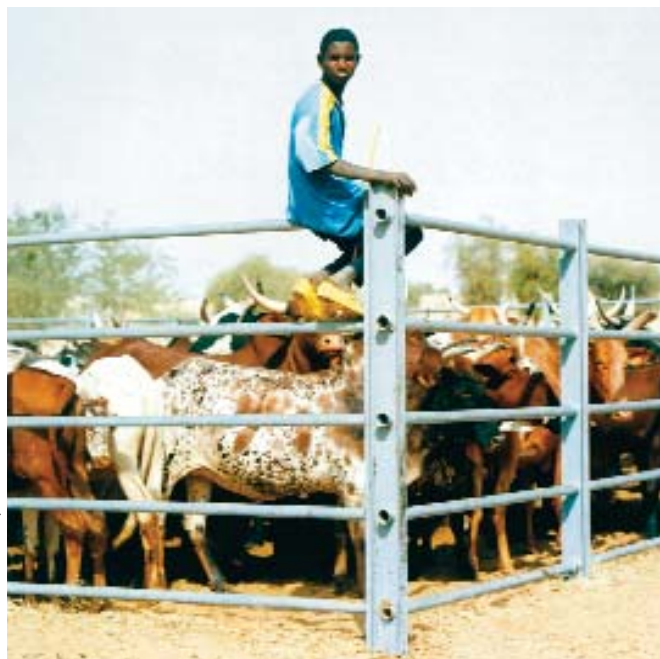


Photo: Kate Eshelby



Photo: Abdi Umar

In this future, suppliers will be using market and technical information to respond to price incentives, quickly increasing production and delivery and improving the quality of their products. They will be enjoying legal rights of access to land and other productive resources, and will carry out their responsibilities for protecting the environment. These rights and responsibilities will be administered by institutions that include both traditional and state representation.

Reliance on foreign markets will mean new risks. Elites may accumulate excessive profits leaving the poorer members of society dependent upon them for employment. Livelihoods can quickly become contingent on tariffs, quality and health requirements and other barriers to trade. Subsidies in other countries could threaten to erode the competitiveness of Ethiopian pastoralists, and with Ethiopia dependent on access to international ports through neighbouring countries, regional conflicts could disrupt trade. Making this scenario work well requires good governance and a fair society.

### Scenario 2: Added Value

In contrast to the first scenario, if the climate is *less* generous, but high-price foreign markets are still accessible, then lowlanders will **add value** to livestock production, rather than being able to increase the quantity of animals produced and sold. Successful pastoralists will need high levels of mobility in order to produce quality animals in a harsh climatic regime.

‘the Borana pastoral system has higher returns of both energy and protein per hectare than industrialised ranching systems in Australia’

There will be fewer pastoralists, and people will diversify into a range of business activities such as forage supply, fattening, food processing and high quality manufacturing from skins and hides.

Rural towns will grow and become more important, with small processing centres and factories and businesses that provide goods and services. Communications technologies will be widely accessible.

Pastoralist women will find new economic opportunities, leading them to more prominent roles in local communities. Local authorities will administer the collection of value added taxes which will be reinvested in supporting the local economy and social welfare. New roads and communication systems will help to get products to market intact and on time.

Too much reliance on rain-dependent products will add an element of risk to this scenario. High levels of conflict would also endanger success by interrupting pastoralist mobility, discouraging investment into value added industries and hampering access to markets. The success of this scenario is based on freeing up lowland capabilities to invest in new small industries and to access export markets with ease. It also relies on securing pastoralist abilities to be mobile and deliver animal products to the market despite the difficulties of a poor climate.

### Scenario 3: Sustained Pastoral Livelihoods

If a good climatic regime allows livestock production to grow, but international markets are less accessible, Ethiopia will see sustained pastoral livelihoods persisting in the lowlands. This is not necessarily a negative scenario: grazing animals will move freely across the lowland landscape, people will be eating meat and milk, agro-pastoralism will play a part and small urban centres will provide services. Social services such as education and health will be tailored to mobile lifestyles and support the growth of the rural economy.

Pastoralists will move between seasonal grazing areas, taking strategic advantage of different forage and water sources as they become available. They are experts at maximising the use of rangelands, a capability demonstrated by numerous research studies. For example, studies have shown the Borana pastoral system having higher returns of both energy and protein per hectare than industrialised ranching systems in Australia<sup>5</sup>. To achieve these high levels of productivity, pastoralists depend on access to key resources at specific times.



Photo: Andrew Heavens



## ‘to do well, pastoralists require guaranteed access to key resource zones’

Some terrains, such as parts of Afar and Somali have low rainfall and poor soil nutrients. These rangelands can only be used productively by mobile pastoralists. Other areas have higher rainfall or moisture levels but poor soil, resulting in abundant but low-quality forage for much of the year. These woodlands and wetlands, like those found in Gambella and SNNPR, are used by pastoralists for part of the year and are often improved by the setting of controlled fires. Yet other areas have low rainfall but nutrient-rich soil, such as the volcanic soils found in the Rift Valley. These are important areas for pastoralists, providing flushes of vital nutrition for livestock for short but often unpredictable wet season intervals. Finally there are key areas that have both high moisture and



Photo: Peter Moszynski

nutrient-rich soil found in pockets all over the lowlands. Where these occur, they form the 'dry season grazing reserves' that occur along watercourses and in valley floors. Pastoralists, small farmers, irrigation schemes and wildlife reserves compete for exclusive use of these resources. Yet to do well, pastoralists require guaranteed access to these zones when all the other areas fail to produce forage. Without occasional access to key resources, pastoralist systems break down.

So to make this sustained pastoral livelihoods scenario work, decentralised land-use institutions will have to guarantee pastoralist access to key resource areas, and promote cooperation between farmers, pastoralists and other land users. Collaboration between traditional and local authorities will produce collective land use agreements, legal instruments will provide clarity as to rights of land use and traditional and modern knowledge will be combined in guiding range management decisions.

What makes this scenario successful is that policy-makers come to recognise that the pastoral production system is a source of strength. They desist from wishing to turn pastoralists into farmers and support them to increase and diversify productivity.

### Scenario 4: Alternative Livelihoods

And lastly a scenario that may be the least desirable, but is entirely possible, comes about when both markets and production are poor and people seek alternative livelihoods. Reduced access to good grazing and lack of market access will prompt many pastoralists and farmers to leave a rain-dependent livelihood altogether in the search of better opportunities in rural towns and urban centres.

The increased displacement of pastoralists could lead to a temporary surge in reliance on food aid and public cash transfers, but, as long as these systems are not corrupt, new livelihood opportunities will begin to open up. With the right political will, tourism, communications, education and financial services could all see growing levels of investment and return. The pastoralists who continue to herd animals will eventually gain from the increase in alternative businesses and services and continued demand for livestock products. People who move into alternative livelihoods will invest in the pastoralist system and may rejoin it at will.

Educational and vocational skill training centres will be needed in towns across pastoral areas, providing primary and secondary education and access to tertiary education, especially for women, but also offering courses on how to establish small enterprises. Educated people will become more mobile in search of new sources of employment. Ethiopians abroad will be sending money back home to their relatives in pastoral areas, who in turn will look for productive investments. Government will offer tax incentives to encourage private investors to invest in pastoral areas, especially where investments diversify and strengthen pastoral production.



Photo: UN OCHA Ethiopia

‘Even today there is already a strong export market, rural pastoralism is thriving in many areas’

Traditional and state administrations will work together to ensure that new economic activities are successfully integrated into society and are regulated effectively.

This alternative livelihoods scenario will have perhaps the highest requirement for social welfare and this will mean collaboration between customary

institutions and the state. In Somali region, a recent study found 17 different kinds of informal transfer giving help to the poorest and 39% of pastoralists had been lent or donated milking animals<sup>6</sup>. Such systems go beyond assistance to the poor to focus attention on the distribution of the benefits of production across the population. A decline in this capability and the parallel growth in the use of food aid or state safety nets is likely to have a significant effect on the success of this scenario.

So this may be the most difficult scenario to make successful, as it promises hardship as well as opportunity. Success will rely on securing good citizen-state relations in management of scarce resources, as much as on investing in education and reducing barriers to innovation. For a positive future under difficult conditions customary institutions will need to continue to play a central role in welfare, inter-community negotiations and management of communal access to key resource areas.

### Conclusion

All of the scenarios depicted above are realistic and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Even today there is already a strong export market, rural pastoralism is thriving

in many areas, people are beginning to add real value to livestock products, and diversification into alternative livelihoods is underway.

Ethiopia's lowlands are seeing a transformation in the way life and livelihoods are governed. The future will be built on opportunities for self-administration through federalism and decentralisation and concomitant changes in the role of customary institutions. There will be growth in private sector activities and increasingly complex interconnections between a wide variety of producers, processors, traders, entrepreneurs, officials and consumers. What will be needed from government will be regulation of these relationships and stimulation of the services required to develop an educated society and an active economy.

Whether Ethiopia manages to forge a future for its lowland regions that maximises the opportunities offered depends on how the state and the citizens co-operate. It depends on giving people the security they need to take risks, make investments, contribute to governance and maintain a multitude of positive social ties. It depends on creating policies and practices that take into account the special nature and potential of the lowlands.

### Notes

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2. J.G. McPeak and P.D. Little (2006) *Pastoral Livestock Marketing in Eastern Africa: Research and Policy Challenges*, Rugby: Intermediate Technology Publications.
3. Abdi Umar (2007) *Risk Taking for a Living, Trade and Marketing in Somali Region*, Addis Ababa: UN OCHA-PCI.
4. D. K. Leonard, Editor (2000) *Africa's Changing Markets for Health and Veterinary Services: the New Institutional Issues*, London: Macmillan.
5. Ian Scoones (1995) Ed. *Living with Uncertainty: New Directions in Pastoral Development in Africa*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
6. Stephen Devereux (2005) *Vulnerable Livelihoods in Somali Region, Ethiopia*, Research Report 57, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

*This paper is a summary of the booklet, 'The Future of Pastoralism in Ethiopia', published by UN OCHA-PCI. If you would like a copy, please contact us at:*

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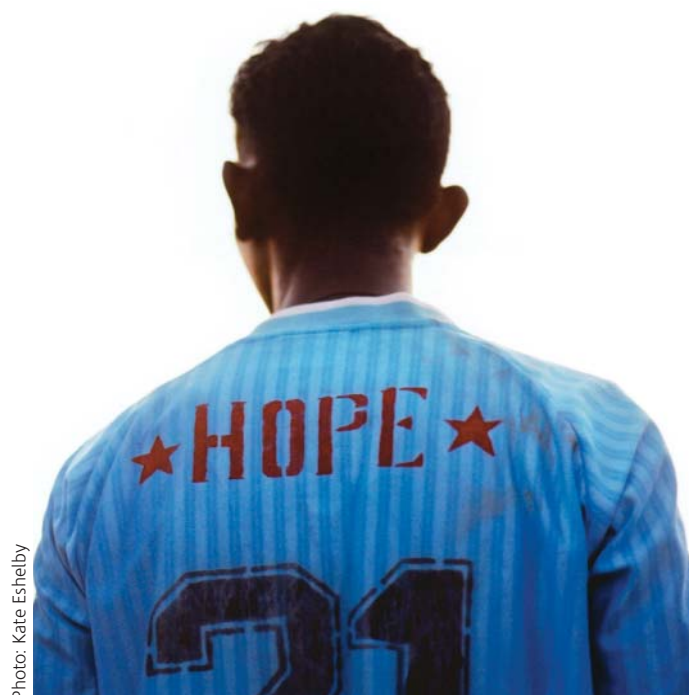


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