

# PASTORALISM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: SITUATION, TRENDS & OUTLOOK

SDC workshop on  
“Addressing vulnerabilities  
of pastoralist societies in  
sub-Saharan Africa”

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Ann Waters-Bayer &  
Wolfgang Bayer



Photo: Wolfgang Bayer

# Pastoralists – definitions and few figures

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**Pastoralism**: land-use system in which livestock graze primarily on natural vegetation

**Pastoralists**: people whose livelihoods depend mainly on livestock & livestock products

- **Nomadic**: highly mobile & opportunistic over large areas
- **Transhumant**: seasonal herd movements between distinct grazing areas, e.g. wet- and dry-season pastures

**Agropastoralists**: settled livestock-keepers practising mixed crop-livestock production

Estimated no. pastoralists in SSA **50–200 million**, using > 40% of land

Only *ca* **10%** of pastoralists in W & C Africa could be called **nomads**, probably lower figure in E & S Africa.

# Importance of pastoralism for SSA countries

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Pastoralism is **economically rational & ecologically sound** way of using natural resources in drylands

Pastoralists keep *ca* 30% of cattle, 50% of shoats & 90% of camels in SSA

Pastoralists supply > 60% of beef, 40% of shoat meat & 70% of milk consumed in SSA

A few statistics:

- ◆ **Mauritania:** livestock production contributes 70% of total agricultural GDP
- ◆ **Kenya:** pastoral livestock accounts for USD 800 million/year
- ◆ **Chad:** pastoral livestock contributes 1/3 of value of exports
- ◆ **W Africa:** official cross-border trade of livestock > USD 150 million/year
- ◆ **E Africa:** cross-border trade of livestock > USD 65 million/year

Livestock production a fast-growing sector in SSA & world because increase in income  increase in meat & milk consumption



Photo: Wolfgang Bayer

# Importance of pastoralism for local people

- ◆ **Basis for food security & nutritious diets for hundreds of millions of pastoralists and non-pastoralist consumers**
- ◆ **Income, plus use of animal byproducts (leather, horns)**
- ◆ **Other economic & social benefits:**
  - transportation
  - manure as fertiliser and/or fuel
  - animal traction
  - investment opportunity
  - insurance & mutual aid
  - meaningful work for men & women in processing, marketing, input supply, animal healthcare etc
  - cultural identity
- ◆ **Mode of production that offers resilience in face of climatic & other changes**



Photo: ITDG

# Trends in pastoral areas of SSA – 1 –

- ◆ Growing **inequity** in pastoralist societies, with fewer animals/person in most families
- ◆ Pastoralists becoming **less mobile** (forced & voluntary settlement) with better access to social services but challenges e.g. degraded land where people & stock concentrate
- ◆ Expansion of **agropastoralism** to diversify livelihood sources
- ◆ Increasing **dependency on food aid**: food/cash-for-work becoming regular income source for many households
- ◆ **Population growth** → higher population density  
→ increased pressure on land & water for food production



Photo: Riccardo Gangale

# Trends in pastoral areas of SSA – 2 –

- ◆ Increased **commercialisation of land**: from communally managed rangelands to privatised holdings or open access
- ◆ More **non-pastoral uses of rangelands** blocking migration routes & access to water, occupying key pastures, pushing pastoralists to more marginal land  
➔ more conflict and no-go areas
- ◆ **Weakening of customary institutions** to govern and negotiate use of resources
- ◆ More **guns**: more deadly armed confrontation & armed livestock raiding (inter-ethnic & commercial)



Photo: Siegfried Modola

# Trends in pastoral areas of SSA – 3 –

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- ◆ Greater **self-organisation** of pastoralists at national & regional level, but issues arising re: representation from grassroots
- ◆ Greater **public recognition** of pastoralism as ecologically sound and rational economic activity
- ◆ Somewhat more **public investment** in social services & infrastructure in drylands → better human health & formal education
- ◆ More pastoral youth (men & women) seek **alternative livelihoods**
- ◆ Increasing challenges of “**development**” projects:
  - often don't recognise heterogeneous resource uses & livelihood sources
  - often work in too limited sectors & territories
  - water projects often create problems of open access to pastures
  - often overlook local power games

# How pastoralists deal with challenges & opportunities

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- ◆ **Urbanisation:** new urban-rural linkages to diversify income & sell products
- ◆ **With growing pressure on resources:** innovation in production techniques
- ◆ **Using new communication tools:** cell phones to follow market prices, to verify state of pastures & waterpoints and to minimise cattle theft
- ◆ **Using new forms of transport:** motorbikes to check on distant herds or trek animals to market; trucks for marketing, emergency feeding & watering
- ◆ **Marketing innovation:** new dairy products, organising in marketing groups, accessing new markets, setting up own self-managed markets
- ◆ **To avoid conflicts:** new mobility strategies (different timing, routes, grazing areas, emigration), inter-ethnic marriages to build alliances
- ◆ **Developing new governance structures & negotiation procedures** to combine best of traditional institutions with new opportunities



Photo: Wolfgang Bayer

# Major issues needing to be addressed

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- ◆ How to increase food security of poor pastoralists by diversifying livelihood sources in ways that don't jeopardise livestock production?
- ◆ How to secure mobility of herds to access best-quality pasture & water in different seasons, to access markets, to escape risks of drought, conflict, disease, theft etc?
- ◆ How to enhance pastoral strategies to buffer risks (e.g. using various species & breeds to optimise resource use, splitting herds, investing in livestock & elsewhere, social security, peace-building)?
- ◆ How to combine knowledge of pastoral men & women with scientific knowledge systems in dryland research and development?
- ◆ How to raise voices of pastoral men & women in policy dialogue?

# Conclusions & outlook for pastoralism in SSA

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- ◆ **Unpredictability and high variability** in availability of natural resources are permanent features of dryland ecologies
- ◆ **Uncertainty in climate-change projections** but seemingly higher variability in rainfall and thus in pasture, trees & water
- ◆ **Even greater pressures from economic, social & political changes**
- ◆ **Many pastoralists show resilience** in dealing with new pressures
- ◆ **High flexibility & mobility** of pastoralists needed, keeping many options open, building innovative capacities at various levels
- ◆ **Combination of mobility & settlement** through split households, shifting between more mobile & more settled production & between more or less dependency on livestock, according to conditions & opportunities



**Thanks for listening !**



**Photos: Wolfgang Bayer**