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Why USAid supports pastoralism in the Horn

There are more than 19 million pastoralists in the Horn of Africa, people whose existence centres on the raising of livestock and moving seasonally from one place to another in search of water and pasture.

Living mainly in arid and semi-arid areas, pastoralists are often socially and politically marginalised, have poor access to services and basic infrastructure and are increasingly affected by frequent cycles of drought and the impacts of climate change.

Their remote geography, distinctive lifestyles and social, political and economic marginalisation have also often precluded them from shaping policies that affect their lives. This has resulted in further impoverishment, continued marginalisation of millions of people and inadequate and inappropriate emergency responses to recurrent cycles of drought and flooding.

For example, a recent inter-agency assessment of livelihood and vulnerabilities in four areas of North Eastern Province in Kenya has revealed that despite almost continual emergency assistance to the province since the drought of 1997-98, there has been an increase in poverty in the region.

In an era where not having a fast Internet connection is considered a major hindrance, the pastoralist lifestyle may seem anachronistic and outdated.

Yet some would argue that the growing poverty among pastoralists is not just an unfortunate trend, but a missed opportunity, both for the pastoralists and for the countries where they live.

PASTORALISTS LIVE IN FRAGILE and often challenging dryland environments that are suitable for very limited livelihood pursuits, and as a result they have become one of the most adaptive populations in the world, with sophisticated ways of adjusting to change and of promoting sustainable use of scarce resources.

Research not only reveals that pastoralism is one of the most productive uses of dryland environments, but also that livestock production is vital to the sustainable



A Samburu herdsboy watches over the family sheep. Picture: Anthony Kamau

manage the fluid, cross-border nature of pastoral livelihoods and as such takes a regional approach to working in the dryland environments of northern Kenya, southern Ethiopia and southwest Somalia.

ELMT aims to support and strengthen pastoral livelihoods by taking into account their unique

In Ethiopia, livestock makes up 40 per cent of agricultural gross domestic product and 20 per cent of the total gross domestic product

needs while concurrently addressing critical issues such as early warning and early response planning, livestock health and marketing, natural resource management, livelihood diversification, peace building and pastoralist advocacy.

SIX SPECIFIC RESULTS ARE EXPECTED at the end of this first implementation phase. These are better protection of pastoral livelihoods during emergencies, improvement of livestock production, health and marketing and improved management of natural resources.

Others are establishment of alternative and complementary livelihood strategies, strengthening of traditional institutions in peace building and local governance and input from pastoralists into the formulation of national and regional dryland policies.

25 agencies with long-standing experience working with pastoral communities in the Horn of Africa, the Mandera Triangle initiative reflects renewed commitment on the part of donors, governments and the affected populations to change the paradigm of how emergency and development challenges in arid and semi-arid areas are addressed.

In a continent that contributes least to climate change but whose people are the most vulnerable to it, this initiative is a welcome breakthrough in support of the adaptation strategies of a population that is critical to the regional economy and to the protection of the environment.

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