

Regional
Pastoral
Livelihoods
Advocacy
Project

Photograph by UNICEF Esaro/Brandon Bannion

Pastoralists Get a Bad Press Why?

Find out what's really going on! PASTORALISTS HAVE RIGHTS TOO!

Nobody seems to take much notice of pastoralists unless they are said to be 'starving' or 'fighting'. Yet pastoralists are the backbone of a multi-million dollar regional livestock trade, and significant contributors to national economies.

So when journalists - or anybody else - paint pastoralists as war-like, hungry, backward, aid-dependents, they really are missing the point. Pastoralists receive virtually no services or investment, so productivity in ratio to investment is high - higher than other sectors. Until disaster strikes.

Intra-regional trade in livestock in East Africa exceeds \$60 million per annum. [COMESA policy brief No 2 February 2009]

"The most productive people in Kenya, in terms of output per head, are pastoralists." Economist David Ndii in It's Our Turn to Eat, Michela Wrong, 2009

It's now dawning on governments and donors that it would only take a little investment, especially in infrastructure, to tap the enormous value of the drylands and cope with drought. After all, if governments don't do something now, what happens when it gets worse? Climate change will increase weather extremes, and pastoralists are out there on their own on the front line. Being prepared is essential.

A recent **Media Survey** found that overall, mainstream press across the board showed shockingly little interest in pastoralism; rarely ever quoted a pastoralist; and lacked normal standards of professional rigor in trying to find out more about pastoralist livelihood systems and positive contributions¹.

The survey found there are very few articles about pastoralists at all, particularly in the international press. 600 articles were selected and 161 reviewed to look for key themes affecting pastoralists - Climate change and adaptation; Demographic trends, settlement and service provision; Social protection; Preparedness planning, and; Cross border issues including mobility, trade, conflict management and veterinary services. Out of the 161 articles selected, 89 concentrated strongly on conflict and hunger, while the others covered at least one of the focus themes. Most of these appeared in publications for specialized audiences; otherwise, the key themes were rarely touched on.

39 articles referred to service provision, often as an explanation for conflict or poverty. Very few articles covered social protection.

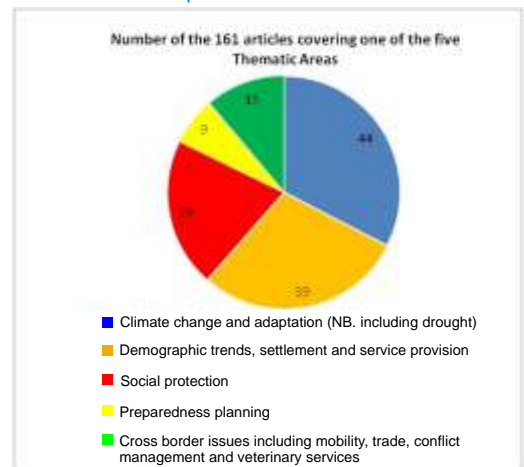
News coverage of pastoralists: Google News Search

Results 1 - 10 of about 71,806 for Manchester United (0.18 secs) Results 1 - 10 of about 41 for pastoralist (0.10 secs)

It also found that pastoralists are often treated as 'semi-citizens' in the national press, for whom different rules and standards apply than do for their sedentary fellows.

* When general issues that apply to the majority of citizens are discussed, pastoralists were not mentioned.

* Government neglect, abuse and armament policies were often ignored in order to focus on the 'warlike nature' of pastoralists.



Nation editorial

Posted Friday, August 22 2008 at 20:11

A deadly war is being fought in northern Kenya pitting rival pastoralist communities.

The number of fatalities is rising to unacceptable levels, but the Government appears to be unwilling or unable to intervene. Communities in remote parts of the country are Kenyan, and their lives are just as valuable as those of anyone in any other part of the country.

Successive governments have marginalised large swathes of the country, with skewed economic policies that favour the allocation of resources to areas that are already well endowed. Such policies must be discarded immediately.

The establishment of the grand coalition government a few months ago came with renewed promises of fresh attention to the marginalised lands, complete with the appointment of a Cabinet minister dedicated to driving development in those areas. Sadly, however, the budgetary allocation to the Ministry for Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands was hardly enough to run the head office...The Government must stop paying lip-service to the development needs of Kenya's neglected peoples.

For as long as some communities in the country are still stuck in an age in which cattle raids and fighting over pasture and water is a way of life, the killings will continue.

This editorial shows that while journalists at the Nation Media Group understand pastoralists are discriminated against, and points to the failures of government policy, the 'semi-citizen view' holds: "For as long as some communities in the country are still stuck in an age in which cattle raids and fighting over pasture and water is a way of life, the killings will continue" and "The number of fatalities is rising to unacceptable levels". What is an acceptable level?

Other findings were:

* About a quarter of the articles reviewed in the survey referred to how pastoralists are among the worst hit by climate change; but didn't mention how they were adapting or could be helped to do so.

* Journalists demonstrated little understanding of positive aspects like the role of pastoralists as guardians of drylands and tourist areas.

Getting to the point:

"The government isn't focused on the dry areas where pastoralists live," said Joseph Lepariyo of Maralal. "Our problems don't get any attention." Lindsey Hilsum, Channel 4 News UK, shocked on returning to Samburu after 20 years, to cover drought: "And what has the Kenyan government done in that time? It hasn't even built a decent road from Baragoi to Maralal..." <http://blogs.channel4.com/snowblog/blogs/world-news-blog/>

This article and the accompanying prime time television report showed how to hit the headlines with fair facts. It prioritized the opinion of pastoralists, and pointed to government neglect and climate extreme as key to understanding disaster.

Maybe journalists get stuck because there are so few statistics readily available that illustrate pastoralists' contribution to GDP and the Horn economies? Or, it's easier to get dramatic figures on disaster and emergency aid than on productivity and adaptation? And it certainly takes effort and resources to hear the views of populations often on the move; easier still to ignore them. But pastoralists deserve better.

¹The survey was commissioned by the REGLAP (Regional Pastoral Livelihoods Advocacy Project) with funding support from the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department. REGLAP brings together six NGO's and two research bodies to address issues of drought risk management in the drylands of Eastern Africa. Contact Shadrack Omondi, Project Manager, Somondi@oxfam.org.uk, tel +254 738230043