

# More Recognition more Value – The ASALs of today

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The Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) make up more than 40% of the world's land mass and are home to 35% of its population<sup>2</sup>. Most countries in Africa with ASALs have the lowest development indicators and the highest incidence of poverty. This is partly as a result of conscious public-policy choices by governments but is largely defined by the historical construct of the ASALs and the people who occupy these areas. The ASALs constitute the rangelands, which are appropriate for extensive and mobile forms of livestock-keeping, i.e. pastoralism. However, because the importance of the ASALs is seldom recognised on a national or global level, the potential of the resources and the people in these areas continues to be neglected and undermined. Inadequate understanding by many perhaps well-meaning interventionists about management of this fragile ecosystem has worsened the situation, as local knowledge and skills are not being valued and strengthened. Africa's rangeland resources have not been able to support the rapidly growing and increasingly sedentary pastoral population; this has led to environmental degradation. In Eastern Africa, huge infrastructural development transport corridor is underway to link four countries; Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and South Sudan through the Lamu Port South Sudan and Ethiopia Transport LAPSET corridor which is expected to open up the region and establish linkages. However, it has direct implication on the livelihoods and people living in these areas. Most of the oil and gas discoveries in East Africa have been in the ASALs. This has attracted huge local and international attention to invest in land-use planning, tenure security and strengthening human capital to ensure that these interventions bring returns to and benefit the local people.

The African Union's policy framework on pastoralism is a good document but is not being adequately implemented at national level. The very existence of a continent-oriented vision through this policy framework is an important opportunity to have a conversation with AU Member States to define national engagement to operationalize it at national level. This is critical because there are no ASAL or rangelands-oriented policies, legal and institutional frameworks that guide national initiatives to stop and reverse the current trends in the ASALs and to ensure sustainable use, management and conservation of the environment and natural resources, as well as ensure the equitable sharing of the accruing benefits. This lack of national policy frameworks has led to increased outbreaks of resource-based conflicts and, as a result, pastoralists are becoming less able to cope with the deteriorating environmental conditions where they live. Rapid urbanization in the ASAL centres has addressed one problem of the rural–urban migration. This has been localized, with more people moving to the “local urban” towns as opposed to the “real” urban centres far from the villages. The danger created with this is more breakdown in the social cultures and inability to adapt to the fast-moving urban lifestyle. There is an increase of land sales in the ASALs, which are traditionally communal, to usher in private-tenure regimes. As a result, more pastoral communities have lost their livelihoods due to lack of adequate land for pastoralism.

Mind-sets are changing. ASALs are becoming increasingly interesting for private investors, mainly due to the discovery of exploitable resources such as water, energy sources, minerals and land for other non-pastoral uses. The global debate around the condition and productivity of the world's rangelands

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Mortimore, 2009. 'Dryland Opportunities: A New Paradigm for People, Ecosystems and Development'

is being recognized as critical to a sustainable future for people everywhere. While these areas host natural resources that can support the economy of a country, the degradation of rangelands can destabilize countries, endanger national security, compromise economic productivity, and rob our youngest generation of opportunities for a prosperous future.

The opening up of a new investment frontier in the ASALs brings many challenges that, if not quickly addressed, could put livelihood opportunities at even greater risk. Insecure land-tenure regimes in a fast-expanding space for exploiting oil and natural gas, wind power, coal, etc. using large infrastructure attracts uncontrolled large-scale investments in these areas. Guidelines for commercial engagement are urgently needed. Especially private investment in ASALs requires a clear framework, since the people living in these areas – mainly pastoralists, who move their cattle to make best use of water and pasture – are affected heavily by these investments. Several important questions need to be addressed: How sustainable are these investments? What are their economic, social and environmental impacts? How are the needs of the local people being taken into account?

The starting point in securing livelihoods in the ASALs is protecting the right to grazing land for pastoralists and the right not to be displaced from their lands. These have been recognized only by the Ethiopian constitution, although certain provisions in other sectoral policies and laws undermine these guarantees. The protection of communal lands and customary pastoral land-use practices are recognized within the policy and legal frameworks of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Common to all countries is the failure to ensure adequate implementation and the existence of contradictory legislation leading to substantial alienation of pastoral lands.

Even though the provisions to protect the pastoral lands and resources are anchored in both law and constitutions of some countries, the evictions of pastoralists from their customary lands are increasing, as governments pursue policies promoting foreign investment in commercial agriculture or wildlife-based tourism. The ASALs in Africa are increasingly becoming the new development frontier. Most governments in Eastern Africa are drawing up huge plans to put the ASALs into use in their efforts to improve food security. Such investments revolve around the ASALs' rich natural resources, e.g. wildlife, where there are a growing number of private conservancies, wind and solar energy and oil operations, amongst others. These can be harnessed to provide diversified livelihoods to the local people and thus improve food security.

Decades of social, political, economic and cultural marginalization and exclusion, and exposure to pervasive armed conflicts trigger vulnerability to innumerable hazards and disasters (both natural and man-made). The livelihoods of the people in these communities have become synonymous with perpetual food insecurity and a dependence on annual food aid from both government and national and international humanitarian agencies.. The cross-border policies in the ASALs are not yet sufficiently addressing the interests and issues of pastoralists. There has been more focus on humanitarian interventions in response to periodic disasters such as drought, flood, displacements resulting from clashes etc.

Government intervention in pastoral areas has often led to failed projects informed by imperatives that are totally inconsistent with the reality of the ASALs. However, there are also positive developments in the policy and legislative environment. Most countries in Eastern Africa have reviewed their policies and enacted laws that recognize the unique needs of the ASALs and the dominant livelihoods therein. Kenya and Ethiopia have taken important steps in recognizing

pastoralism in policy statements and documents. Kenya developed an ASAL policy and established an ASAL Secretariat to replace the Ministry of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands, and is supporting pastoralism through establishing ASAL stakeholders' fora at national and county levels. Tanzania created the Ministry of Livestock Development and Fisheries, which has a Department on Pastoral Systems Development. However, these can achieve relatively little within a bigger government system that is still not totally convinced of the value of the ASALs beyond the establishment of ministries and departments since, even with these systems put in place, they have very limited financing from the governments and therefore can operate fully. This is what constitutes the implementation gap when it comes to implementing the positive policies and legislation by developing programmes and projects that enable the people realize their objectives, thus the need for investments to nurture the improving policy environment but, more so, to turn policy provisions into programmes that positively impact on the livelihoods of people in the ASALs.

The Global Rangelands Initiative Programme

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