

# Changing mentalities towards pastoralism across scales: the World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism and other related initiatives.

Manzano, P.<sup>1</sup>, Ng'eny, N.<sup>1</sup> and Davies, J.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>International Union for Conservation of Nature

pablo.manzano@iucn.org WISP, IUCN-ESARO, P.O. Box 68200, 00200 Nairobi, Kenya

norah.ngeny@iucn.org WISP, IUCN-ESARO, P.O. Box 68200, 00200 Nairobi, Kenya

jonathan.davies@iucn.org IUCN-ESARO, P.O. Box 68200, 00200 Nairobi, Kenya

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## Introduction

Extensive mobile livestock production systems, classified as pastoralism or ranching, are the most extended land use, accounting for up to one fourth of the emerged lands and comprising 1.5 billion animal units (AU; Asner et al. 2004). Mobile pastoralist systems have a long history, most likely having been adopted by sedentary agriculturalists that looked for pastures further and further away from their communities (Grigg 1974), although the competitive displacement of migratory herbivores by their hunter-adopted domestic counterparts could occasionally have happened (Manzano Baena & Casas 2010). In marginal lands – understood as those places with high climatic constraints that limit agricultural production, such as e.g. mountain areas or arid lands – mobile livestock achieves the most efficient and economically sustainable land use on marginal lands (Niamir-Fuller 1999, Bunce et al. 2004, Beck and Sieber 2010). This unbeatable efficiency is based on the heterogeneous distribution of resources, both in time and space, from which mobile herds are able to take advantage (Krätli & Schareika 2010). It is also well known that extensive livestock maintains biodiversity, especially in more humanized systems (Bunce et al. 2001), a fact probably related with the impoverished guild of herbivores there and the ability of livestock to substitute wild herbivores in the ecological processes (van Wieren 1995, Wallis de Vries 1995). The role of mobility in promoting biodiversity is less clear, but some studies highlight the important dispersal processes being supported by livestock (Manzano et al. 2005, Manzano and Malo 2006), and new data evidence the role of mobility in promoting biodiversity at different scales (Olea and Mateo-Tomás 2009, Robleño et al. 2011).

In spite of the overwhelming evidence to support pastoralist as custodians of an economically, socially and environmentally sound livelihood, they are often regarded as primitive people whose rangeland management techniques are a major driver of land degradation (Niamir-Fuller 1999). The process that has led to this situation derives from a vicious circle that starts with the implementation of alien practices from areas of higher agricultural production. Mobility is often prevented on the basis that pastoralists do not respect private property, after privatization of communal land has been boosted by authorities. In many cases also, colonially derived borders designed after the principle “divide and rule” separate seasonal pastures of a community. Their ecologically sound transhumant movements are prevented on the basis of national security or for prevention of livestock diseases. The settled pastoralists find themselves unable to respond to the climate variability inherent of the places they live in, and their herds cannot feed on the meagre resources of the new system that is left for them, due to the reduced carrying capacity of the ecosystem (Sinclair and Fryxell 1985). Ironically, the practitioners of an effective climate change coping strategy (Davies and Nori 2008) are left without their best survival tools. On top of this, they are usually blamed for the land degradation that follows, tagged as “overgrazing” without deeper analyzing the underlying causes, and intensification programmes for livestock husbandry are adopted. More productive solutions are sought for the land they were using, and often their communal land tenure systems suffer heavily from land grabbing. Paradoxically again, much of the land grabbing is oriented towards energetic crop plantations, ignoring the role of grassland in storing carbon, even in arid areas.

Mobile pastoralism is spread across all continents, but Africa is usually identified as the most paradigmatic region. This circumstance may be related with the common identification of African indigenous groups along

land use lines due to land grabbing phenomena (Barume 2010) in order to implement different activities, such as ranching. This contrasts with the American continent, where the displacement of indigenous peoples by European colonialists generated a reciprocal antagonism even if they share the land use and thus many of the problems. In addition, many of the indigenous pastoralists of the contemporary Americas adopted pastoralism after being forced to leave their hunting-gathering livelihoods at the conquest, so that the land use is not a strong part of their cultural identity. The notable exception to this are the camelid pastoralists in the Andes highlands, who are – not by chance – the most representative pastoralists of the region. In Central Asia, many countries have pastoralism as a very important, or even as the main source of the countries' GDP (WISP 2008a), and the pastoralist problematic relates more to the massive generalization of state practices not adapted to local problematic and to the privatization ardor in the post-communist economies. India and China host the largest pastoralist population, but the development experienced in their countries pushes pressure on natural resources, leaving little space for long-term considerations on their management. The resilient pastoralist livelihoods are thus often abandoned in favour of more production-oriented systems. In Europe, with a long tradition of pastoralism, its positive values have now been increasingly acknowledged for two decades, and policy is increasingly being oriented towards favouring them (Peco 2001). Here, pastoralism is a significant land use in terms of territory occupied, but the number of pastoralists represents a tiny percentage of the population and continues dwindling, influenced by the low social prestige, the dependence on oral tradition for the transmission of knowledge and the disappearance of small farms in favour of bigger ones (Manzano Baena and Casas 2010). The lack of women empowerment in the past and the consequent feminine exodus from the countryside may also be a powerful driver for the lack of generational replacement. The problems sustainability of pastoralism faces in developed countries is a warning for indigenous and non-indigenous groups that practice pastoralism and share similar present or future challenges in any other region of the world.

## **Materials and methods**

Many of the described problems faced by pastoralists derive from policies that – with the best of the intentions – are focused on obtaining quick short-term profits, but which do not take into account the long-term results of their interventions. These policies often originate in the governmental sector but, as already pointed out by Fryxell and Sinclair (1985) many of them also originate in the Foreign Aid sector. The priority is therefore to mainstream pastoralism as a highly sustainable livelihood across all levels of society, including decisionmakers of all kind, but also the pastoralists themselves, so that they can advocate for their own rights.

During the last decades, a significant corpus of scientific knowledge from various disciplines – rangeland ecology, economics, sociology, anthropology – has been developed, confirming the values of pastoralism. However, there has been a limited degree of communication between academics and, more importantly, this knowledge has not but this knowledge has not gone beyond academics. This is a usual problem of scientific knowledge, because popular science does not build up on the scientific curriculum and academic publications are far too arid to be read by unskilled public.

Since its inception, IUCN's World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism (WISP) has produced materials specifically designed to spread and mainstream knowledge on pastoralism, and has executed activities with the specific aim to influence the pastoralism agenda. This has not been an isolated phenomenon – other entities such as IUCN's Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the International Land Coalition (ILC) or SOS Sahel, to mention a few, have followed similar procedures. WISP's flagship products are 4 page-long easy to read, visually attractive policy briefs, with versions in English, French, Spanish and Arabic languages so far. Other spreading materials such as videos, which can be released through video-sharing Internet facilities, can be produced in the future. Activities have been centred along three axes, namely i) gathering the existing knowledge on pastoralism that is spread out across different academic disciplines, ii) building capacity of practitioners, and iii) advocating for scientific arguments in local, regional and global forums. The information gathered is centred on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of pastoralism, and studies have been commissioned to cover knowledge gaps, with a stronger input on economics so far.

The policy briefs provide the basic information in a way that can be understood by a variety of stakeholders, but the mechanisms to use this information is very context-dependent. In Europe, North America or Australia, popular science on pastoralism can put scientists in contact and can make them aware of what others are doing. This is an important step, as academics are the greatest advocates for pastoralism, with the dwindling pastoralist population suffering from isolation and disconnection across groups. Conversely, the situation in developing countries relies in a much higher degree on the action of pastoralists themselves. A good compilation of actions of groups of pastoralists in defending their land rights can be found in the study *The Land we graze* (IUCN 2011), to be published soon. Several basic steps should be followed:

- **Become aware of the situation of themselves**  
Building awareness among the pastoralist population and to increase their self confidence is capital. Many times, it is the pastoralists themselves who do not put any value any more on their activity, because they have been convinced by external actors of having a primitive and useless livelihood. To make them aware, through easily understandable materials, of the multiple and complex value of their activities and livelihoods, will cause them to have the motivation to struggle for something that is worth the effort. Among the key characteristics of pastoral societies that they should be aware of, the high environmental sustainability of traditional practices and the value of customary organizations to administer commonly held resources should be highlighted.
- **Organization inside pastoralist groups**  
Pastoralists have to have valid interlocutors to communicate with other key stakeholders. Ideally, those should be pre-existing organizations of pastoralists that will not depend on aid funding for their existence, but whose activity will be boosted by external resources. Attempts to organize and fund a pastoralist network where it did not exist beforehand have been proved to be ill-fated, because they are not sustainable once funding is gone.
- **Capacity building**  
The local legal framework should be known by the pastoralists' interlocutors, so that they can use the existing legislation to defend their rights. They should also be aware of the surrounding social environment and of the organizations and stakeholders they can rely on for networking and mutual support. It should not be forgotten that the aim of many of the decisions taken to disrupt pastoralist systems are not to damage pastoralists, but to improve their livelihoods – even if these decisions are not well oriented. Key partner stakeholders can be found in the decisionmakers that may have previously contributed to disrupt pastoralist livelihoods. To alter those approaches, capacity building in the field of communication is also essential.
- **Take action**  
Possible actions rely heavily on what is acceptable for the cultural context or political situation. Several options include the negotiation or mediation in case there is competition for resources; administrative or court procedures when existing law is not being implemented or in cases of corruption; networking and lobbying to foster changes in legislation; and political demonstrations to raise awareness on deficiencies in policy, legislation and administration.

The strategies with decisionmakers are very different depending on the origin of the involved stakeholder. For NGOs and aid agencies, the change in attitudes towards pastoralism is usually simpler, as they are very receptive towards inputs from academic information and this can make them modify their programmatic approaches to take into account sustainable pastoralism. Confronted with objective data, the shift of attitudes towards pastoralists is usually smoother than with governmental stakeholders. The latter usually have preconceived ideas that are difficult to overcome, and in this sense economic argumentations and examples from other parts of the world are especially useful – to make them see that what is going on in their area is by no means exceptional. Economic arguments are particularly valuable, especially using the lesser known indirect values of pastoralism (Davies and Hatfield 2007, WISP 2007), and facilitation by skilled mediators is particularly useful at this stage. General advocacy at international forums such as the UN conventions on Biological Diversity, Desertification and Land Degradation, and Climate Change, are especially useful to provide an internationally agreed framework that highlights the values of pastoralism.

## Results and discussions

The pastoralist agenda is increasingly getting a higher recognition. The most important steps are being observed in developed countries and in international forums, where the role of mobile pastoralism as a great tool for climate change adaptation and for preserving biological diversity has been widely mainstreamed in the last years. As a result, new initiatives such as the formulation and recent approval (October 2010) of a Framework Policy for Pastoralists at the African Union have been observed. Boosted by the insecurity of pastoral areas in Africa, this Framework Policy has had a long consultation phase with pastoralist networks and related CSOs and organizations working with pastoralists, and it is a big step in securing pastoralist rights. The constitution of the Coalition of European Lobbies for East African Pastoralism (CELEP), a platform of a diverse array of collectives working with pastoralists, with the specific objective to lobby as a unit at the European Union for policies favourable for pastoralists in Eastern Africa, is another positive big step.

International donors are giving support to specific programmes to include pastoralist issues in the agendas of their interventions, such as IFAD, who also sponsored a gathering of Women Pastoralists. Mainstreaming in many international donors' and NGOs' programmes remains a challenge, however, because even if some programmes may strengthen the pastoralists rights agenda, other actions such as the construction of wells or agricultural programmes in wrong areas may counteract the positive actions done elsewhere. The process of mainstreaming is long and sometimes slow, especially with environmental subjects that are inherently complex and not easily understandable at the first glance, but the trend is nonetheless positive.

More importantly, the vision on pastoralists is also being shifted from the romantic view of repositories of ancient traditions that will get lost in the modern world, to the one of efficient environmental managers able to spare millions in terms of fire prevention, skilled managers of mobile phones that have turned upside down the way of doing business in the African countryside, and champions of climate change adaptation that can get additional resources from establishing wildlife conservancies in tourism-saturated areas such as Maasai-Mara, needed of diversification. Gender issues, to which WISP has also contributed (Flintan 2009), are being taken into consideration by pastoralist collectives themselves, as can be seen in light of the celebration of the above mentioned Global Gathering of Women Pastoralists in India in November 2010, conceived and organized by pastoralist networks. WISP has contributed to those processes by supporting existing pastoralists' networks such as MARAG in India or Billital Maroobe in Western Africa, the latter being a supranational "network of networks" that makes international representation a lot easier. Research on land rights by WISP and ILC (IUCN 2011) also shows that pastoralists are able to secure their land rights if adequately empowered, being able to decide on their future and their resources.

The most challenging issue remains to access the decisionmaking level at the governments, be local or national. Positive examples include agreements in West Africa to facilitate pastoral mobility across borders, which has made it possible to recover transhumance corridors and has relieved the situation of pastoralists confronting drought. In the last years, Kenya has seen how a parliamentary group of pastoralists and a specific ministry for pastoralism issues were created and how a programme for education for nomads was put into practice. In many other countries, however, the situation remains challenging.

Perhaps the most challenging situation is to be found in Latin America, where as mentioned above, the consciousness of being pastoralist remains to be spread. Positive signs are to be found in the Bolivian Altiplano, where alpaca pastoralists have been allowed to continue with their traditional practice to secure the management of the moorlands or *bofedales*, a sustainable practice that had been disrupted (WISP 2008b). In order to make pastoralists aware of themselves, WISP has as a near-future objective to organize a Pan-American Pastoralists gathering that can contribute to a much more effective networking among pastoralist groups in the region.

Overall, it is difficult to attribute the success of the gradual mainstreaming of pastoralist to WISP or any other platform or organization. However, the joint effort has been yielding results for the last decade, and academic knowledge on pastoralism is being more and more widely known worldwide. The success of empowered pastoralist collectives in reclaiming their rights is also a good proof of strategies that work for

achieving better consideration for them. It is hoped that the trend towards high quality products in a globalized world will also contribute to further incorporate pastoralists and their well-positioned resources (LPP et al. 2010) in the global scene.

## Conclusions

The existing gap between scientific knowledge and practitioners capacity and action is a recurrent subject in policy practice analysis. Initiatives such as WISP, however, show how this gap can be reduced through the production of specific materials and activities aimed at multiplying the connections between such distant collectives. Easy understandable language is essential to bring science closer to all stakeholders involved, at all levels. Objective information such as the one provided by academic research cannot only help decisionmakers change the orientation and scope of their politics, but also can empower weakened collectives such as many pastoralist communities so that they are able to effectively defend their rights. The consequence is a stronger framework for the conservation of indigenous knowledge and for a sounder natural resource management, which will contribute to alleviate the loss of biodiversity and the consequences of climate change.

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