

## **ALIVE/LEAD e-conference**

### **Maintaining Mobility and Managing Drought**

#### **Policy Options for Pastoral Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa**

The traditional pastoral systems in arid and semi-arid regions of sub-Saharan Africa used to cope effectively and in an environmentally sustainable manner with the prevailing harsh and erratic ecological conditions of those regions. The ability to move their herds over large distances, grazing the diffuse and scattered vegetation of the regions' rangelands, and being able to take refuge to more favourable sites during droughts, was the foundation of their system, and was critical to their livestock and their own livelihoods. However growing human populations are generating an increasing demand for food products and consequently increased competition for natural resources. This destabilizes the effectiveness of the mobile pastoral production system and creates the need to facilitate the development of the changing pastoral production systems.

During the last century pastoral development has gone through several phases, moving from a focus on veterinary services and water development in the fifties and sixties, to the development of ranches with reduced stocking rates and supply of water and veterinary services from the mid sixties to the early eighties, all with the objective to increase the production of meat for the urban areas. From the late seventies to the early nineties support shifted to rangeland management and empowerment of pastoral organizations, while continuing to advocate lower stocking rates and to provide services which tended to restrict animal movements.

These development approaches have provided a series of widely accepted lessons, among which are that policies for forced settlement, re-location and de-stocking have adverse economic, social and ecological consequences on pastoral production. The acknowledgment of the indigenous knowledge of pastoral people and the rationale of the mobile pastoral production system, as well as the understanding of the dynamics of rangelands and their continuous disequilibrium status has led to new approaches in pastoral development. Since the late 1990s, pastoral development is focused on community-based development programs seek to empower pastoral people and help them to better manage risks. The key elements of support became efforts to safeguard the mobility and to strengthen the resilience against drought.

However, empowering pastoral organizations, enhancing mobility and strengthening resilience against drought remains a challenge. Even more so, since voices get louder that question the expediency of further investments in pastoral development. They compare mobile pastoralists to dinosaurs, arguing that mobile pastoral production systems will die out because they cannot adapt to the changing environment. Facing the challenge to support pastoral people in their adaptation process to a changing environment, a new perspective on mobile pastoral production systems is evolving.

This perspective focuses on the interactions between the pastoral production system and the changing sociological, ecological and economic environment. On the one hand, this perspective is looking at the trends constraining the mobile pastoral systems and seeking to understand the underlying causes for:

- a.) increased encroachment of arable farming on the highest potential grazing lands
- b.) changes in farming practices leading to increased crop-livestock integration, with less animals remaining in the pastoral zone and more animals living in the farming zone
- c.) reduced mobility of pastoral people and preferences to stay in reach of markets
- d.) increasing degradation of rangelands
- e.) increasing vulnerability and increasing aid dependence of pastoral people on outside food aid

On the other hand, this perspective takes into account the trade-offs between increased demand for food and the provision on environmental services, in an environment of increasing degradation of rangeland calls for the development of a new vision for a sustainable development of the rangelands. This means that the:

- a.) Contribution of pastoral production systems to the sustainable development of the rangelands in sub-Saharan Africa needs to be discussed
- b.) Trade-offs between the investment and support of different systems and services of rangelands and pastoral production have to be analyzed,
- c.) Optimal resource use of contested rangelands needs to be identified,
- d.) The human carrying capacity of the rangelands need to be identified and
- e.) Transformation of the pastoral livelihoods needs to be facilitated.

The aim of this e-conference is to provide a forum for local research experts, representatives of pastoral people and pastoral organizations, policy-makers and experts from different disciplines to discuss the underlying causes for the above described trends, with a special focus on the causes for reduced mobility and increased vulnerability to drought, and to develop a policy vision for sustainable development of the rangelands in sub-Saharan Africa as well as to agree on the required steps to implement such a vision.

The first session will start a debate on the rationale to invest in drought management systems, as the central characteristic of pastoral development, and will analyze the potentials and constraints to drought preparedness and to mitigate the impact of drought. The following debate on options of rehabilitation of the pastoral production system after a drought will be expanded by discussing the necessity to create exit strategies for a growing pastoral population on decreasing rangelands. It will be examined to what extent the population pressure increases the vulnerability of pastoral people to drought and what other factors are leading to increased vulnerability.

Reduced mobility and loss of drought grazing reserves might be one of the main factors increasing the vulnerability of pastoral people to drought. With the aim to define a shared vision on sustainable development of the rangelands, the second session will concentrate on the underlying causes for reduced mobility and will discuss the changing role of pastoral production systems in adaptation to a changing environment. The possible contribution of pastoral production systems to sustainable development of the rangelands depends on the warranted support to the pastoral production system. Therefore this discussion shall be followed by an attempt to define the windows of opportunity to support the mobile pastoral production system, with a special focus on options to support the aspect of mobility, such as land and water access rights.