

# Putting pastoralism into numbers: Addressing the need for better data on the magnitude of the pastoralist sector in Kenya

By Helen de Jode and Vanessa Tilstone<sup>45</sup>

Two workshops held recently in Kenya and Ethiopia presented the findings of the DLCI study report 'Counting Pastoralists in Kenya'.<sup>46</sup> Based on the Kenyan workshop presentations and the report, this article highlights the urgent need for better methods to assess the pastoral system, why improved data collection methodologies would more accurately assess the pastoralist sector in Kenya, and what opportunities are available to achieve this.

## Booming interest, busted datasets

Building resilient livelihoods for pastoralist dryland communities is now the central thrust of a great many initiatives in Kenya—whether focused on climate change adaptation, humanitarian disaster response or long term development planning. At the same time there is marked change in perspective from previous decades in terms of how to achieve this, with pastoralism now being seen as less of a 'problem' and more as an 'asset' at least by the academic community.

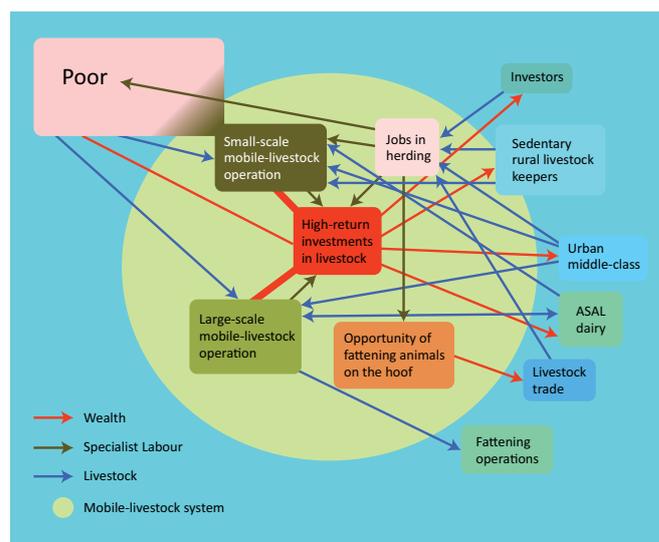
The valuable contribution of livestock to local livelihoods and the wider national economy of Kenya is recognised in the 2012 ASAL Policy, which defines pastoralism as 'an animal production system specialised in taking advantage of the characteristic instability of rangeland environments.' The importance of protecting dryland livelihoods is also highlighted in the Kenyan Constitution. The value of pastoralism is not accepted across all sectors of government however—many would still prefer to transform dryland areas into alternative economic sectors—and there is still a lot of catch-up to do with the scientific understanding, particularly among some humanitarian and development organisations.

In Kenya, the development agenda is undermined by a fundamental lack of good quality data on the pastoralist sector. Existing data sets fall short of representing pastoralism's scale and value within local economies. For policy making to be based on an understanding of the true costs and benefits of transformation initiatives (such as changes in land use), this information gap needs to be addressed.

## Keeping data gathering abreast of the changes

Traditional definitions of pastoralism used in data gathering exercises frequently include the percentage of household income obtained from livestock (>50% rule) and mobility-based definitions focused on what people are (e.g. nomadic/semi-nomadic) rather than what they do (their strategies of livestock production). These definitions no longer capture the pastoral system as it exists now: people who herd in an extensive production system (i.e. are mobile) may not necessarily own the animals they herd, and those people who do own animals are not necessarily mobile/engaged in herding. With this ownership/management gap it is no longer useful for data collection methods to try and measure the proportion of households who are 'pastoral.' The mobile-livestock system now incorporates a large number of stakeholders, as shown in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: The current pastoral system in some areas<sup>47</sup>



The analysis of the best available data sets in Kenya for the DLCI 'Counting Pastoralists' study reveals that livestock holdings tend to be under-represented. The datasets overlook the livestock ownership-management gap and the issue of mobility, and focus on a household based approach that can hide pastoralism. Gathering data on pastoralists has always been difficult: people in pastoral areas have never wanted to count or report their livestock to officials, and what is 'their' livestock is often very complex—with lending and looking after other people's livestock still very common. Besides, with data collection often being in the context of relief programmes, under-reporting livestock holdings happens almost 'by design'.

## Findings from the best available datasets in Kenya

The DLCI Counting Pastoralists study identified four datasets through which it was possible to generate an indication of the current pastoral sector in Kenya. These included the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) 2012-13 baseline that covered four counties; the Index Based Livestock Insurance (IBLI) purposive sample of households in Marsabit 2009-13; the Household Economic Approach (HEA) in 3 counties 2011-12; and the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) monthly surveys since 2006, which was potentially the most complete. Yet even with triangulation of the four datasets, there are a number of ways in which 'pastoralism' has been under-represented:

<sup>45</sup> Based on a review and summary brief.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/east-central-africa/dlci/documents/detail/en/c/4059/>

<sup>47</sup> From workshop presentation, July 2014

1. *The assumption that ownership and management are the same:* Asking the question 'how many pastoralists?' is getting in the way of analysis. What matters is not whether the owners are pastoralists but whether the livestock itself is managed in a mobile system.
2. *The definition of household:* registering sub-units of households as discrete either due to polygamy or splitting of households misrepresents herd size, mobility and income
3. *The focus at the scale of the household:* Crucial economic functions in pastoral systems take place above the household level in extended families and support networks.
4. *Income analysis that ignores annual herd growth:* Herd growth should be included in measuring livestock-based income (e.g. in order to define pastoralism).
5. *The pastoral development legacy:* Decades of adverse policies and interventions can make households reluctant to classify themselves as livestock owning or mobile.

Despite these constraints, using these datasets it became clear that pastoralism is still the major income source in the Kenya's ASALs. The number of households depending on pastoralism has not collapsed, as many humanitarians and government would have one believe. Although the NDMA data has some challenges its aggregate trends are instructive (see Figure 2 below).

### Immediate opportunities

To improve data collection in the drylands it is necessary to identify much more appropriate methods that are not going to illicit meaningless data. There are a number of existing opportunities that could provide more accurate information if they took some of the issues highlighted above into account. In Kenya, data collection processes that are on-going, and that can take on these issues, include: the plans for a new HSNP baseline in 2015; the on-going review of the NMDA monthly early warning data; the new agricultural census currently being planned; the on-going livelihood zoning process; and the forthcoming county level livestock censuses – e.g. Wajir. There are a number of issues that will still need to be addressed for these opportunities to be maximised:

1. *Secure the capacity for ASAL data analysis:*

It is necessary to ensure there is representative basic data for planning before embarking on complex resilience-measurement tools. This could draw upon the many years of experience with

participatory methods, especially *participatory mapping*, to generate useful sampling frames; and the experiences with surveys that produce 'participatory numbers'. Sampling methods designed to effectively reach mobile populations might be of help especially if stratification is made more sensitive to the logic and constraints of pastoral strategic mobility.

2. *Monitor and publicise the limits of data supply:*

The limits of existing and new data sets with regard to satisfying the demand for data on the magnitude of pastoral systems should be monitored and published by a central agency (NDMA could be such agency, in partnership with Kenya National Bureau of Statistics). Survey designs that are known to compromise the utility of the data with regard to pastoral systems should be replaced or complemented.

3. *Make data widely accessible especially to counties:*

Data need to be representative of well-defined administrative areas and commensurable across geographically partial data sets: Ultimately, there is a need for more specialised and broader supply. The county level is now getting interested in collecting their own data, and it is important that this is done robustly, in ways that allow for review and discussion and that can be compared across counties. The on-going livelihood zoning process might offer an entry point for feedback from the grassroots.

4. *Develop cases studies in selected counties to explore specific issues of relevance:*

- The population dynamics within groups that are running the mobile-livestock system (movement in and out);
- The proportion of income hidden in annual herd growth;
- Areas of humanitarian work where inadequate assumptions in data collection and analysis (e.g. assuming division and isolation of production systems) may have direct negative impact on resilience (e.g. breaking down interactions and therefore creating division and isolation between producers).

There is much work to be done and many actors need to be involved in understanding current pastoral systems, however without basic and meaningful data on pastoralism, planning for sustainable development in the drylands will be severely constrained.

**Figure 2: NDMA Time series data (Source: FAO)**

