

## **Change of wind or wind of change? Climate change, adaptation and pastoralism**

Climate change will be felt differently depending on where you are and what you do, and opinions over what the future holds for the world's pastoralists are polarised. Some experts believe that pastoralists will be the first to feel the effects of climate change, whilst others consider that, since pastoralism is an adaptation to climate change, pastoralists will be amongst the best equipped to deal with such a threat. Such polarised opinions present challenges for policy makers and planners in the drylands, and the intention of this e-conference was to bring the divergent opinions out into the open and see what sort of consensus could be found.(...)

Pastoral adaptation faces a myriad of challenges, of which climatic change is but one. Indeed, the challenge of climate change seems insignificant to many pastoralists who are faced with extreme political, social and economic marginalisation: relax these constraints and pastoral adaptive strategies might enable pastoralists to manage climate change better than many other rural inhabitants. The vulnerability that is associated with climate change in some pastoral environments has its roots in the restriction of tried and tested pastoral coping strategies, including the ability to move through different territories, to access critical livelihood resources, to trade across borders, to benefit from appropriate investments, and to participate in relevant policy decision-making. As is so often the case in developing regions, the main concern for pastoralists is the accessibility, rather than the availability or variability, of resources.(...)

In marginal environments characterised by resource variability mobile pastoralism can be the best way to mitigate against risk and it may be part of the solution to climate change, just as enhancing mobile pastoralism is part of the solution to

overcoming poverty and reducing drylands degradation. In a dynamic climatic environment, the flexibility, mobility and low-intensity use of natural resources afforded by pastoralism may increasingly provide a sustainable means of providing security where other more sedentary models fail. Enhancing pastoralists' entitlement to a wider range of resources, agro-ecological as well as socioeconomic, and enabling them to use such resources as needed, is vital to reducing their vulnerability and to supporting their capacity to tackle the sustainable development challenge in marginal areas. In the debate over whether there is a difference between development and adaptation, it is worth recognising that the capacity to adapt is something intrinsically pastoral, and its loss has been associated with 'development'. Sustainable pastoral development must be founded on the understanding that adaptive capacity is what makes pastoralism work: restoring and enhancing adaptive capacities must therefore be central to development plans. The adaptive capacity of pastoralists needs to be seen not as something different to, but as a primary indicator of, pastoral development.

The Report:

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