

**Report on the CELEP webinar**  
**“UNDERSTANDING PASTORALISM**  
**AND FRAMING THE ARGUMENT FOR ADVOCACY”**

**28 September 2020**

On 28 September 2020, CELEP and Misereor teamed up to organise a webinar entitled “Understanding pastoralism and framing the argument for advocacy”. The aim of the webinar was to discuss how pastoralism is presented in development and research projects and in advocacy and lobbying. The content of the webinar was provided by the pastoral development orientation framework Saverio Krätli recently developed for MISEREOR. Based on this framework, CELEP developed a paper entitled “*Pastoralists turn variability into food*”. The paper presents the absolute minimal shared understanding of pastoralism by CELEP and suggests what this implies for advocacy. The paper was discussed first during an internal webinar with CELEP members and partners only and the webinar on 28 September was meant to share the document and have an extensive exchange on the use of words, language, images etc. when it comes to pastoralism.

If you would like to watch the webinar again, you can download it [here](#).

The webinar was facilitated by Sabine Dorlöchter-Sulser (MISEREOR) and the speakers included:

- Saverio Krätli, independent researcher (editor of the journal *Nomadic Peoples*), UK
- Michael Odhiambo, former director of Resource Conflict Institute (RECONCILE), Kenya
- Loupa Pius, coordinator of Arid Lands Network and working for the Dynamic Agro-pastoral Development Organisation (DADO), Uganda
- Abdulkadir Noor, director of Partnership for Pastoralists Development Association, Ethiopia
- Monica Yator, Pastoralist Development Network Kenya (PDNK), Kenya.

*The keynote presentation by Saverio Krätli*

The webinar started with a [keynote presentation by Saverio Krätli](#). Saverio reminded everyone that the focus of the webinar is on framing the arguments in advocacy, and the way even advocacy arguments often reproduce the negative narrative about pastoralism. The paper “*Pastoralists turn variability into food*” engages with this particular problem. In order to refine and unite the representations of pastoralists in advocacy, the paper calls for consensus on at least two basic points:

1. Variability is the norm (not the exception). Whether it is a problem or an advantage depends on our capacity to engage with it. The main tradition within the modernization of agriculture has been to treat variability in the natural environment as a problem and create artificial environments in order to lock it out.

2. Pastoralism is a specialisation to benefit from variability. Risk and livelihood are not incompatible: professions that are inherently risky (tree surgeons, construction workers, war reporters) or even that specialise in engaging with risk (fire fighters, rescue teams, demining teams) are not uncommon. Some professions actually specialise in using risk and variability to their own advantage (trade and finance, pharmaceutical industry, commercial fishing). This point, that risk and variability *can* be an advantage and thus some livelihoods specialise precisely in turning it into an advantage is crucial as pastoralism is such a specialisation. Thus representations of pastoralism as struggling against a hostile environment (e.g. in terms of “vulnerability to drought or climate change”, or as “hanging in”, or as pastoral mobility as a coping strategy, effectively reinforce the negative narrative that frames pastoralism as an economic liability and a condition people need emancipating from.

Saverio thus directed our attention to how we shape our advocacy and lobbying communication: do we describe mobility as a *coping strategy*? Do we represent pastoralism as belonging to *marginal* lands? Do we buy into divisive categorisations like agro-pastoralists vs pastoralists, leading to the fragmentation of what is in reality a broader and more complex situation? These reflections call for a new way of creating a more united front of representation of pastoralism for our activities and campaigns.

In response to some questions from the audience, Saverio further commented on two key terms that are often used in advocacy on pastoralism:

- **Vulnerability.** It is not a matter of condemning the word or pretending that pastoralists never experience vulnerability. What is crucial though is not to fall in the habit of assuming that vulnerability is natural because the environment is hostile, as this effectively pre-empties the possibility of taking advantage of variability and therefore effectively denies pastoralism’s specialisation. If they show vulnerability to environmental variability we should not settle for the mainstream explanation that variability is a challenge, but ask why. What makes pastoralists vulnerable to the very conditions they specialise to benefit from? In other words, we should ask ‘what gets in the way of pastoralists’ specialisation’?
- **Agropastoralism.** If we find that the term is favoured by policymakers, perhaps we should look into the reasons for such a preference. Agropastoralism is a relatively new concept, introduced in the late 1970s. Before then, pastoralists who farmed were called pastoralists, with the information that they also farmed being added when relevant. Whether or not people in pastoral systems also practice other livelihood strategies (farming being just one amongst many additional strategies found today), their specialisation to take advantage of environmental variability remains crucial and should therefore be at the centre of attention in development policies and interventions.

Find [here](#) the text that was presented by Saverio.

*Interventions by the other speakers*

**Michael Odhiambo** highlighted how narratives derive from perceptions that inform the way we articulate both problems and solutions. The danger arises from the way the development system and practice is organised: the standard application form for grants and funds requires a problem statement, which leads to focus on what is not working in the pastoral system, leaving no space to emphasise its strengths over its weaknesses; this creates a wrong perception of the pastoralists' practice. It is therefore important that we start changing our own perceptions and narratives before doing it at the policy level: nowadays, "vulnerability as the key feature in pastoralism" is what shapes our lobbying activities; instead, we need to find a way to empower the narrative in advocacy so that we emphasise pastoralists' strengths (specialisation) over vulnerability.

He also agrees with the fact that the contraposition of agro-pastoralists and pastoralists conveys the idea that crop farming is an evolutionary step above pastoralism. This also negatively influences the relations between the two groups.

**Loupa Pius** showed how the (national) context influences how we perceive pastoralism. It is necessary that we understand the production system employed in a specific setting before giving a definition based on context. Loupa presented the example of drylands and water engineering, showing how irrigation systems can also be harmful. When talking about national context, he stressed the importance of government policies: in the case of Uganda, the government is promoting crop-farming activities in greenbelts that were once buffer zones between conservation areas and rangelands used by pastoralists; hence, the idea that pastoralists are vulnerable mostly because of climate change does not stand. Only analysing the specific context in which we want to act will allow us to understand what are the real challenges faced by pastoralists.

Many events and policies against pastoral productive systems are hiding behind the narrative of climate change, population pressure and a need to adopt food systems that are resilient. Climate change takes the lead in influencing how decisions are made by policymakers on the future of pastoralism with increasing population and diminishing land resources, yet land as a resource is currently available and enough to support mobility. The states only need to reduce their growing affinity for converting pastoral land into areas for military exercises, mineral extraction, monocropping and restricted-access gazetted nature protection.

**Abdulkadir Noor** said that, if we all find a common perspective on pastoralism, we will be able to solve many problems at the policy level. Regarding the Ethiopian context, he highlighted that pastoralism is a very vibrant economic activity that provides livelihood to a large part of the population. Nevertheless, the development actions of the past 15 years were aimed at making people leave this practice.

**Monica Yator** talked about mindsets (how do we frame pastoralism in our publications?) and suggests promoting policies that support mobility as a way to counteract the effects of climate change. We need to develop a strategy to effectively change mindsets, to bring pastoralism to the mainstream agenda and to integrate pastoralists in our narrative. This should help to reduce farmer-herder conflicts (peace-building and security) and to protect pastoralism as a viable livelihood.



### *Q&A session*

**Michael Odhiambo** commented from a perspective in Eastern Africa, stating that the real work of shifting perception is at the national level (policymakers, government priorities) and that the specificities of the national context determine how and when these policy issues are best to be profiled.

**Loupa Pius** focused on the situation in Uganda, saying that pastoralism is being discussed from above, starting from the regional laws that prioritise the development and the integration of pastoralists in national or international markets; the document *“Pastoralists turn variability in food”* will be used for advocacy activities in this context.

### *Conclusion*

**Saverio** concluded that, in this webinar, we exchanged on how important it is to interrogate ourselves on the opportunity of using certain terms and of presenting pastoralism under a certain light: even though these terms may be useful to obtain funding for projects, they may be problematic in the long term. What we say can influence mindsets and narratives on the usefulness of pastoralism.