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“Under One Tree”? Exploring Pastoral, National, and International Approaches to Humanitarian Action

Phase 1 Synthesis Report in the Diverse Perspectives on Humanitarian Action in the Pastoral Drylands Series

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“Pastoralists ... don’t try to eliminate variability;
they make use of it.”

—Scoones, 2021

“A lot of effort has been happening from
the humanitarian side to better predict and
monitor the behaviors of the climate, [but] this
has been happening parallel to the
community-level processes.”

—Interview with an international practitioner, July 13, 2023

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a rapid rise in humanitarian needs worldwide, driven by trends in climate change, conflict, economic shocks, and growing inequalities. At the same time, pastoralism in the dryland¹ areas of the Greater Horn and Sudano-Sahel continues to undergo significant transformations to adapt to the local manifestations of these trends. Many of these adaptations improve the resilience of these pastoral systems to one-off shocks, but the combination of multiple shocks (such as conflict plus drought) or protracted shocks (such as multiple seasons of failed rains) can weaken the ability of pastoral livelihood systems to recover. These factors have led some external observers to view pastoralism as being on the brink of extinction.² This perception overlooks the reality of dryland areas where pastoralism remains a core livelihood for a majority of people, even while undergoing rapid change and even in the face of numerous constraints and uncertainties. Resilience is an inherent component of pastoral systems but must be adequately understood and supported through effective national and international policies, programs, and approaches.

However, to date the evidence provided by pastoralists and organizations working with pastoral populations suggests that international and national humanitarian assistance is rarely provided in ways that are truly helpful for pastoral communities to protect their livelihoods over either the short or long term. Given the importance of providing more impactful assistance and recognizing the resource challenges of responding to repeated emergency appeals, United States Agency for International Development/Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA) asked the Feinstein International Center at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science

and Policy at Tufts University to explore how international and national humanitarian action—comprising early warning, anticipatory action, and emergency response—can be more attuned to the needs, perspectives, and approaches of pastoral communities in order to better meet immediate emergency needs and promote longer-term resilience in these regions.

This synthesis report brings together the findings from the first phase of a three-year research project entitled “Re-examining Early Warning Systems and Humanitarian Responses in Pastoral Areas of the Sudano-Sahel and the Greater Horn of Africa.” The main outputs from Phase I are three desk studies examining the components of humanitarian action (early warning, anticipatory action, and emergency response) from three different perspectives: the views of the [pastoralists](#), [national governments](#), and the [international community](#) (Hassan et al., 2024; Caravani et al, 2024; Fitzpatrick, 2024). These studies entailed reviews of large amounts of secondary literature, both peer reviewed and grey. In addition, we conducted a “landscape review,” whereby we interviewed approximately 50 key informants working in or on pastoral areas from the humanitarian, academic, and development sectors.³ The desk studies incorporate the information shared by the key informants and found in the literature.

This synthesis report does not summarize the desk studies. Rather, we reflect upon the cross-cutting learning and key themes, and consider the implications for international and national humanitarian action in dryland areas. We adopt a broad understanding of pastoralism for the purpose of the desk studies, this synthesis report, and the case studies (see Box 1). This understanding of

¹ In the context of this report and associated desk studies, drylands are characterized by significant fluctuations in rainfall in regard to both timing and location, which create uncertainties in the availability of water resources and pastures for livestock. Due to these environmental conditions, mobile pastoralism emerged as the most viable livelihood system, with the ability to transform high-variability inputs (e.g., water and pasture) into lower-variability reliable outputs (e.g., meat and milk). See Nori, 2022, Krätli, 2015, and FAO, 2021.

² This is exemplified with what is known in the literature as Sandford's thesis. See Sanford, 2022.

³ We used snowball sampling to develop the list of key informants for the landscape review. Pastoralists themselves are underrepresented in the landscape review given our starting points in international agencies, government entities, and universities. Similarly, the desk review on pastoral perspectives relies heavily on secondary data about pastoralists. We will compensate for this gap in the generative case studies in Phase II of this project.

pastoralism includes communities who rely on livestock husbandry as the basis of their livelihoods, who use mobility of animals and people to maximize returns from a variable climate and environment, and who culturally and socially identify with pastoral systems; that is, they retain the norms and values of their pastoral identity even if they are no longer engaged in livestock production as an occupation. These enduring norms and values often include social obligations of mutual support and linkages to broader pastoral communities. Importantly,

pastoral systems and societies—like all systems and societies—include processes of exclusion, marginalization, injustice, and inequality. Although these topics are beyond the scope of this synthesis report, these characteristics do affect the flow of information, the nature of decision-making in periods of crises, the distribution of and access to resources, and the ways in which support systems function. We acknowledge these aspects despite not discussing them in depth in this forum.

BOX 1. Different perspectives on the definition of pastoralism

We opened most of our landscape review interviews by asking key informants how they defined pastoralism. Answers ranged widely, and some were narrower than the definition we adopt in this report and project. All definitions accounted for some degree of mobility, but only a handful discussed mobility and production vis-à-vis land and natural resources. Some focused on the current livelihood and others on the history of a person or family, or their lifestyle.

Pastoralism as an occupation:

“Pastoralists base their livelihoods on livestock and seasonality and migrate in search of pasture and water. Agro-pastoralists have a more sedentary lifestyle, but their livelihoods still rely heavily on livestock. ... If you are a pastoralist and lost your livestock, I'm not sure you would still be considered a pastoralist.”

– International humanitarian actor

Pastoralism as a production system taking into account mobility and natural resource interactions:

“My understanding of pastoralism is that it is a production system in an area that is characterized by variability of climate, and this is what determines the availability of resources, grazing or water resources, and how [people] use pastoralist lands, their use to access resources. [Pastoralists] access these resources through mobility as a mechanism. ... Pastoralism is about interaction of three things, the herd, the people, and the environment. In the absence of one pillar, the system does not function well.”

– Academic from a pastoral background

Pastoralism as a social, cultural, political, and economic system:

“It is not only a livelihood system, it is a sociocultural system, and it determines or defines sociopolitical relationships between community members. ... Livestock are assets, but also vehicles through which relationships are created and maintained. Livestock also hold pastoralists in a moral economy of debt and obligation in a positive way.”

– Practitioner and academic

MAIN MESSAGE AND THEMES FROM PHASE 1

We intentionally avoid framing the discussion in this section along the lines of early warning, anticipatory action, and emergency response. While national and international actors may conceive of distinct phases of humanitarian action in order to facilitate their efforts, pastoralists themselves generally do not compartmentalize their information systems, actions, or support networks. As such, we seek to move beyond these parameters in our presentation of findings and key themes, most of which apply broadly to humanitarian action as a whole. These issues are discussed separately and in more depth in the three desk studies.

Main Message: Major Disconnects in Perspectives and Approaches Undermine Effective Humanitarian Action

In an early interview, a key informant lamented the disconnects that exist between pastoral and national and international approaches to humanitarian action

The most important message from Phase 1 of this project is the existence of multiple disconnects between the perspectives, approaches, priorities, and outlooks of pastoralists as compared to national and international actors. These disconnects affect the success or failure of humanitarian action in the drylands.

and the negative effects that these disconnects have for the effectiveness of external support. We found evidence of these disconnects across all the desk studies and multiple interviews. This informant asked if it might be better for the different stakeholders to come together “under one tree” in an effort to reach a more coherent, inclusive, and effective approach. This section unpacks the thematic areas that characterize, situate, and explain various elements of the disconnects between how pastoralists conceive of various elements versus how humanitarians and

their governments conceive of them, and therefore how they structure support for pastoralists.

Theme 1: Failure to Fully Understand, Recognize, or Accept Pastoral Systems

A central component of these disconnects is that national and international actors often do not fully recognize, understand, or accept the unique dynamics of pastoral systems. This means that support is frequently provided at the wrong time or the wrong place, is in an unhelpful form, is incomplete, or excludes pastoralists altogether.

As one example, government administrative systems and humanitarian activities are based on geographic boundaries that do not take mobility into account. Due to the nature of the ecosystems and livelihoods, pastoralist areas generally have a low population density, but their vast areas of activity often overlap with or border those of more densely populated cultivating areas. When data and programming areas follow large geographic or administrative population trends, the needs of the pastoral portions of a zone are often overshadowed by those of the cultivating areas. Interviews conducted and the literature reviewed for the desk studies indicate that resources for basic services like healthcare or education are allocated based on number of residents, even if a mobile group is elsewhere for half of the year.

Most states and humanitarians also apply this population-based framework to humanitarian responses. For example, the evidence shows that the distribution of emergency food aid often takes place based on the registered population in a specific geographic or administrative area (see Box 2). Therefore, providers of this aid may not count pastoralists, and even when they do, the distributions may occur when mobile pastoralists are not able to access the relief. Services such as clean household water, schools, and clinics also assume a fixed and stable population. This model creates pressure on pastoralists to settle at least some family members in these locations, a strategy that can weaken

BOX 2. Exclusion of pastoralists from programming

An example of an unintentional exclusion of mobile pastoralists comes from a BHA-funded livelihood resilience program in Darfur. This intervention targeted rainwater catchment areas but included only those people living in sedentary villages. While pastoralists who lived in the areas seasonally were allowed to join the resilience activities, the community-based targeting strategies essentially excluded the pastoralists, and the activities were not designed with the pastoralists' needs in mind. Consultants hired by this program to conduct impact surveys excluded pastoralist populations in their sampling. Programs that do specifically target pastoralists often only include support for their livestock, leaving immediate needs of the household unmet. (Fitzpatrick and Young, 2016)

productivity and increase vulnerability through decreased access to animal food products. Despite these examples, better informed governments and humanitarians are working to adapt the frameworks for service and humanitarian provision to ensure better access, sometimes with quite positive results.

The evidence shows that another source of difficulty is the application of lessons learned and responses developed in settled agrarian contexts to pastoral settings. National and international humanitarians tend to default to these agrarian models, but, without adaptation, the approaches from settled cultivating contexts will often fail or be ineffective in dryland contexts. For example, early warning systems that monitor precipitation and vegetation seldom account for the types of vegetation useful to livestock, who has or does not have access to that vegetation, and the timing of its presence in different areas along a typical seasonal migration. Likewise, early warning systems developed in cultivating areas are more likely to focus on potential crop yields or food availability rather than on food access. These systems often rely on metrics related to grain availability, rainfall predictions, and biomass production forecasts, thereby neglecting crucial data on nomadic movements and the rights of pastoral groups to access natural resources.

The desk studies and landscape review interviews indicate that the failure of humanitarian stakeholders to fully understand or recognize the pastoral contexts and the associated disconnects arise for a number of reasons. International humanitarians may lack previous exposure to pastoral systems, leading to unintentional mistakes. It may also result from a desire to increase efficiency in global responses with insufficient resources through the standardization of processes and procedures across contexts. Similarly, state policies and strategies tend to seek simplification through standardization in ways that

(intentionally or unintentionally) include a bias towards sedentarized contexts. Settled contexts—often of cultivated agriculture—are generally more predictable and provide an easier system in which to deliver services than the more marginal, mobile, and seemingly unpredictable pastoral contexts. Moreover, pastoral regions frequently overlap with border areas and are hard to reach, have limited infrastructure, are sometimes subject to insecurity, and are often considered politically or economically unimportant to centralized systems. Such characteristics contribute to marginalization of these areas in many countries, with limited economic development and minimal political will towards addressing structural/fundamental issues in these locations. These biases may manifest themselves in some state actors' desire to transform or “modernize” pastoral regions and populations instead of supporting the existing strengths and systems. Worsening the disconnect between the center and marginal drylands are the rigid structures and procedures and top-down knowledge approach that characterize many centralized bureaucratic states and large humanitarian organizations. These rigid structures can make it nearly impossible for actors to pursue the more adaptive and flexible approaches that would be more attuned to the dynamic and unpredictable contexts in pastoral areas.

Yet some states have undergone decentralization or devolution of authority in order to provide lower administrative levels with more autonomy, control, and resources to provide services and respond more flexibly to crises in their regions. In cases where these administrative districts have a large pastoral population, such as in Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), local authorities are more likely to be from pastoral ethnic groups and to have greater awareness of the local context and needs, although such characteristics do not necessarily translate into good governance or being

able to deliver. Additionally, efforts to tailor global humanitarian tools to the needs of pastoralists such as the Predictive Livestock Early Warning System (PLEWS) have been made in some cases. Although such programs are not immune from the challenges discussed here, these are positive steps that may lead to the implementation of more appropriate programming for these areas and a more responsive approach to pastoral needs and perspectives.

Theme 2: Embracing Versus Controlling Uncertainty

Pastoralism is a dynamic and flexible system *because* of the high degree of variability and uncertainty inherent in the ecological environments where pastoralism thrives. Conflict, disasters, and uneven implementation of development and humanitarian programs further contribute to this uncertainty. This context means that pastoralists must accept uncertainty, recognize unpredictability, and continually make choices that keep open as many options as possible. This approach allows people and herds to be flexible to emerging risks and responsive to possible opportunities. In stark contrast, state and international actors often assume the future to be potentially controllable and outcomes to be predictable and calculable; they therefore aim to identify and predict covariate risks in order to control or mitigate their potential impacts. Pastoralists tend to approach the same risks through monitoring, flexibility, and responsiveness; these everyday activities allow them to manage or embrace the extreme variability of their settings or surroundings, but this is usually not adequately appreciated, understood, or supported by most external stakeholders.

One of the ways in which this disconnect becomes most apparent is in the context of anticipatory action. The idea of a catalogue of anticipatory actions to be implemented based on specific (and usually externally identified) thresholds is an exogenous notion; pastoralists themselves are constantly anticipating and adapting accordingly. Adaptation and anticipation are endogenous to the pastoral system and illustrated through risk mitigation practices, including mobility, herd diversification, herd splitting, dynamic herd ownership, household splitting, and social systems that spread both support and risk. External stakeholders may struggle to recognize that anticipation is part of how pastoralists think and act, and—when they are able to function with minimal

constraints—it is the combination of this anticipation with the uncertainty that characterizes dryland regions that enables pastoralism to be the most productive and appropriate livelihood system for these conditions. As a result, humanitarian action tied to externally identified thresholds is operating from a different paradigm and does not support existing pastoralists' strategies in ways that are most meaningful and beneficial to the communities.

Another manifestation of this disconnect relates to the issue of mobility. Mobility is a strategic way in which pastoralists manage risks, anticipate shocks, and take advantage of different opportunities. It is at the heart of the resilience inherent within pastoralism and may take place across national and international borders to enable pastoralists to take advantage of markets, natural resources, and extensive networks of social support and information. Paradoxically, many of the policies, programs, and actions by both national and international actors limit or constrain (either intentionally or inadvertently) the mobility that lies at the heart of the resilience of pastoral systems. These constraints come in the form of access barriers to resources (such as the establishment of parks, conservation areas, enclosed ranches, or private lands without rights of passage), political directives prohibiting herds and herders from crossing borders, national development policies aimed at sedentarization, and international and national humanitarian programs that use a fixed-place approach to services and humanitarian relief. This clash between the need for mobility and the restrictions upon movement is central to the disconnects in how pastoralists and external actors approach and manage uncertainty.

Theme 3: Predicting the Future

Both pastoralists and external actors seek information about possible future events, but these information systems are extremely different. As such, both the process of seeking to understand possible future events and the ways this information is used contribute to a disconnect between pastoralists and external actors.

As detailed in the desk study on pastoral perspectives, pastoralists seek information on coming events through indigenous forecasting systems that rely on the natural and spirit world. Local and specialized diviners and forecasters examine animal entrails, stars, plant growth, animal behavior, wind direction, and other patterns

appearing in everyday life and livelihood activities. When these forecasts point to covariate shocks, pastoralist leaders engage in deliberation and collective discussions to weigh the information they receive, decide which sources to trust based on past reliability, and share information through various networks. Based on this wide array of information arising from observations and networks, pastoralists adapt to emerging risks and opportunities and adjust their plans and activities accordingly. For pastoralists, anticipatory actions are not a specific or linear phase of a response program but are incorporated into a continuum of daily activities informed by an adaptive approach. This is very different from the sequential approach that characterizes most international responses, although some systems, such as the Kenya Met forecasting system, are increasingly trying to incorporate components of pastoral strategies.

In contrast to the localized, collective, and subjective sources of early warning information used by pastoralists, the desk studies show that national and international actors rely on highly technical and quantitative data from representative assessments, satellite imagery, and meteorological patterns. Such data are aggregated over relatively large geographic areas. These sources and scale often align poorly with the localized, flexible, and timely ways that pastoralists make use of variation within their areas. Aggregation also obscures the important variations within an area that could inform the timing and design of interventions. Increasing data granularity could reveal important differences in opportunities and risk within dryland regions, but this level of detail and the need for local triangulation can be challenging for overstretched and underfunded national and international systems.

The evidence shows that the differences in the type of sources and the nature of the early warning information used by pastoralists versus external actors can lead to a lack of trust and credibility on both sides and define another disconnect in the perspectives and systems. External actors frequently have little time for or faith in information coming from local diviners who predict climatic events based on animal entrails or the pattern of a tossed string or beads. Pastoralists often find little relevance or reliability in satellite imagery that does not reflect their local pasture conditions or in weather reports that cover vast regions, though in some cases they do draw on and incorporate relevant parts of this broader information. In addition, pastoral

communities generally respond to negative news of a climate or conflict shock through rituals and ceremonies designed to head off such an event. For pastoralists, the lack of action taken by scientific and technical experts can breed distrust for their indicators and the stakeholders behind them. Also, they generally regard the external information as “old news.” On the other side, technical early warning experts place limited value on indigenous ceremonial responses. Regardless of the amount or quality of information collected through even the most integrated and nuanced methods, foreseeing and preparing for every conceivable outcome is not possible. This means that “failures” will always exist in any form of early warning system, potentially contributing to a lack of confidence by either side.

Theme 4: External Versus Internal Models and Systems for Support

Pastoral societies rely on vast networks of relationships built on trust and reciprocity, and people depend on these networks for both normal daily strategies and assistance during crises. A household may be both provider and recipient of assistance, and inclusion in these networks requires adherence to norms and expectations. Networks are concentric and overlapping, with the smallest circle depending on mutual support and shared access to resources. More-distant circles may involve no more than the exchange of information. These networks form the basis of the long-term resilience strategies of households and communities.

External humanitarian practices and interventions run the risk of interrupting these customary social networks and undermining both the support they offer and the resilience they ensure. Humanitarian approaches, whether from international or state actors, generally assume that resources are owned and shared at the household level and target assistance accordingly. For example, surveys to assess vulnerability may ask how many livestock a household owns. This question fails to account for different types of dynamic and communal ownership with varying levels of decision-making over resources, including milk. Furthermore, targeting nuclear households for assistance does not account for the extensive sharing that forms the basis of long-term, dynamic social support networks. While assistance of all forms is generally widely shared, selective targeting at the household as opposed to the collective level can create a dissonance that may weaken social cohesion.

The table below summarizes and compares some of the disconnects highlighted by the three desk studies in regard to the actions taken by external actors (state and humanitarian) and typical pastoral practice. Although the contrasts may not always be

this stark, the table captures the broad differences in approaches that help to explain the reasons for the disconnect.

TABLE. Differences in approaches to early warning, anticipatory action, and emergency response between external actors and pastoralists

	EXTERNAL ACTORS' PRACTICE	PASTORALISTS' PRACTICE
Theme 1: Failure to Fully Understand, Recognize or Accept Pastoral Systems		
RESIDENCY	Static fixed-place delivery	Flexible and at times beyond borders
LIVELIHOOD	Agrarian focus	Pastoral focus
Theme 2: Embracing Versus Controlling Uncertainty		
CRISES	Single crisis event, e.g., "drought" risk	Multiple threats and compound shocks
UNCERTAINTY	A negative to overcome	A central ecological characteristic underpinning pastoral production
Theme 3: Predicting the Future		
KNOWLEDGE	Top-down (scientific) and centralized information aiming for standardization	Rely and mobilize multiple knowledges for variability
Theme 4: External vs. Internal Models and Systems for Support		
ASSISTANCE	Targeted at household	Collective between extended groups

IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN PASTORAL LOCATIONS

Phase I of this project highlights numerous difficulties that humanitarians face in providing truly helpful support to communities in pastoral settings. These emerge from disconnects between the perspectives, approaches, priorities, and strategies of the external state and international humanitarian actors on the one hand and the pastoral communities on the other. Overall, an incomplete understanding on the part of humanitarians of pastoral systems has frequently led to inaccurate paradigms that may lead to responses that are either unhelpful to or exclude pastoralists. Pastoralists often do not have opportunities to meaningfully inform or participate in the design of humanitarian systems or responses to correct this state of affairs.

The review of the disconnects discussed above points to at least three potential broad strategies that international and national actors could adopt to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian action in pastoralist communities. These strategies are not mutually exclusive, and adopting two or three strategies together could have greater impact.

Strategy 1: Support the System

This strategy recognizes that pastoralist communities have developed over centuries a highly sophisticated social, cultural, political, and livelihood system tailored for surviving and thriving in dryland areas. Much of the system is neither formal nor fixed, but it interacts with elements of more formal systems like government policies, programs, and services. By supporting the pastoral system in an informed way and minimizing the constraints of these external factors, state and international stakeholders can provide assistance that bolsters existing mechanisms and values pastoral systems.

It can be difficult for humanitarians who are “outsiders” to pastoral communities to fully

understand the mindset, nuances, and subtleties of the approaches involved in managing risks and crises in such a complex system. One aspect that can be difficult for external actors to comprehend is the collective versus individual nature of pastoral society and thus the need to think not just about individual resilience or productivity, but also about collective resilience and productivity. This may require a shift in thinking about systems and how the components of pastoral systems work jointly to adapt to and benefit from the environment.

This first strategy emphasizes supporting the system to function with maximum choice and agency and minimum interference. This would involve, for instance, expansion of interventions such as unconditional cash transfers that allow pastoralists to use the resources in the ways they deem most appropriate while simultaneously stimulating the functioning of related systems, such as markets in the private sector. Existing social protection mechanisms (such as formal social safety net programs) that provide cash transfers may need to better adapt to the pastoralist realities by, for instance, altering the timing, location, and targeting of the assistance to reflect the communities’ preferences and needs.

It may also mean having a greater policy or advocacy focus by ensuring that the institutions the pastoralist systems depend on can function as they need to (e.g., markets, vet extension/vaccination, agreements for access to pasture and water, etc.). Other systems-focused interventions that currently exist in minimal form in some locations and that could be expanded to aim at higher levels include facilitating markets, health systems, and other institutions to provide appropriately designed services that are also responsive to the variability in pastoral strategies. Supporting community-wide

systems shifts the support away from the individual household, thereby implementing support that is in sync with pastoral concepts of flexible ownership of assets and communal management of natural resources. By employing this strategy, international and national agencies would serve as a critical source of humanitarian resources but would trust the expertise of pastoralists to determine how to best use these resources. This strategy allows the system to do its work and strengthens the system rather than trying to replace it in an unsustainable way or by creating parallel systems with no hope for integration.

A strategy that supports the system has the advantage of empowering local actors, relying on their profound knowledge and expertise, and compensating for what may be a lack of deep understanding on the part of international and national actors. However, potential disadvantages of this approach also exist. First, it may miss opportunities for shared learning across the different levels (e.g., a combined early warning system approach that includes both technical scientific and indigenous sources of information). Second, it may reinforce the disconnect that leads to misunderstandings and decontextualized responses. Informed understanding would still be needed in this strategy to know the most effective parts of the pastoral system to address, such as policies to support mobility or adaptations to social protection programs. Third, it might work through social systems that may, in some cases, perpetuate practices of marginalization that run counter to the goal of the humanitarian community to support the most vulnerable. Fourth, it may create discomfort for some agencies due to difficulty in controlling and monitoring resource use and providing accountability to donors.

Strategy 2: Co-create a Shared Pathway

This strategy starts from the premise that all stakeholders—pastoralists, national actors, and the international community—have important insights to contribute to better humanitarian action. It seeks to co-develop and co-create collaborative approaches to early warning, anticipatory action, and humanitarian response that draw on these different sources of expertise to shape a more holistic and effective system. The question to answer collectively is “How can we generate reliability in

contexts of deep uncertainty?” Existing sources of trusted knowledge and support within pastoral communities are the high-reliability networks that provide essential information, assistance, and support for both everyday functioning and in response to shocks and crises. Working with these networks towards a strategy of co-development, international and national early warning systems could enhance and complement traditional pastoral approaches to drought with more technologically driven meteorological forecasts and information. The approach would not involve substituting one approach for another but rather emphasize building rapport and trust between external actors and pastoralists to see how the expertise could be combined for an improved understanding. This strategy would involve co-development of the approach, ongoing conversations with communities, and repeated iterations over time to create a joint system. Similar coproduction strategies could be used for anticipatory action and humanitarian responses.

The process of coproduction itself can be as important as what it produces. By working closely with pastoralists, humanitarians become more aware of the unique aspects of pastoral systems and therefore pastoral needs. Increased exposure to the dynamics of pastoral systems will organically challenge and modify the paradigms that lead to inappropriate humanitarian activities. These lessons will extend far beyond the specific outcomes of a single system or response.

The advantages of this strategy are that it draws on the expertise of all actors and builds trust, understanding, respect, and relevance that is essential for success in complex environments. But there are potential disadvantages. First, the strategy requires a significant investment of time and resources into the iterative processes of cocreation. Some agencies may find it difficult to make these long-term investments if they are uncertain of the eventual outcome and face other pressing priorities. Second, and relatedly, it will involve a commitment to mutual trust and understanding and examining power imbalances, all of which takes time and openness. There may be structural issues—such as staff rotation policies, language barriers, short-term funding cycles, and security constraints—that work against this kind of sustained and open-ended engagement.

Strategy 3: Think Like a Pastoralist

This strategy involves international and national actors adopting or at least deeply understanding the mindset and insights that allow pastoralists to survive and thrive in risky and uncertain environments in three ways. First, it means redesigning or reconceptualizing assistance to pastoralists in a manner that works with and better supports pastoralists' own approaches. Current humanitarian approaches attempt to identify a small number of "most likely" threats and a small range of indicators that may predict a crisis relating to one of these threats. This is in contrast to pastoralists who maintain a flexible, responsive approach while remaining alert to a wide range of indicators. In order to think like a pastoralist, early warning and anticipatory action systems would need to be more alert to a wider range of potential shocks and focus on broadening the population's options in relation to these shocks. This broader approach would allow pastoralists the flexibility to adjust their strategies to not only avoid potential risks, but also to take advantage of potential opportunities that shocks may provide.

Second, thinking like a pastoralist also means adjusting humanitarian agencies' approaches and rigid protocols, thus shifting from "standard operating procedures" to flexible and locally embedded initiatives. Humanitarian agencies should think beyond western concepts of private ownership and resource control. Current humanitarian thinking and program design is often based on resource sharing exclusively within a nuclear household—a husband, wife (or wives), and their dependents. Although it is acknowledged that in many contexts assistance may be "redistributed" within a community, donor expectations and legal considerations reinforce the focus on the household. This emphasis on the nuclear household is reflected in the targeting of surveys, measurements of food security, indicators of wealth, and humanitarian distributions. In contrast to this western model, the long-term resilience of pastoral groups is heavily dependent on reciprocal arrangements that underpin the giving and receiving of food or livestock or sharing of access to natural resources in ways that not only cement relationships of trust, but also create resource pools that can be drawn upon in times of crisis. This resource sharing—of both tangible assets and natural resources—extends far beyond the household. Thinking like a pastoralist to support livelihoods means working at a higher level to ensure that communal structures that normally

manage these resources are incorporated into any early warning system or humanitarian response.

Third, thinking like a pastoralist will mean creating a more flexible and holistic approach to support pastoral needs. The current humanitarian system operates largely within separate sectors, with some additional mechanisms that attempt to bridge or link these sectors. These sectors are not only siloed but are also country-specific, meaning they can't take into account the cross-border ecosystems that define many pastoral communities. When addressing the needs of a pastoral system, the integration of these sectors becomes particularly paramount—for instance, sectors that are normally handled separately, such as child nutrition, livestock health, and livelihoods support, are intricately linked. Adopting a more holistic approach will require turning the current sector-based system on its head. Thinking like a pastoralist means moving planning and implementation out of individual sectors in order to more effectively focus on the needs and systems of specific populations, including both pastoral and non-pastoral groups. It also means advocating for national and regional actors to recognize the continued centrality and importance of livestock across multiple sectors. This more integrated strategy promotes a more flexible and responsive approach that takes multiple components of livelihoods and related institutions into account. As such, this much more effectively mirrors a pastoral approach.

Fourth, thinking like a pastoralist will require being more responsive to the situation on the ground through more nimble funding mechanisms, an expanded notion of accountability, and the willingness to take risks and learn from both successes and failures. Pastoralists keep their options open; to mirror this, donors and organizations need flexible funding streams to respond to emerging situations and opportunities. On accountability, most programs currently focus upward when thinking about accountability—i.e., accountability to donors and managers. Downward accountability to "beneficiaries" is normally relegated to technical grievance processes. What would accountability towards pastoral communities look like within humanitarian action? Lastly, impactful humanitarian interventions in pastoral areas necessitate systematic, collaborative, and gradual learning of lessons from both failures and successes. Humanitarian organizations funded by bilateral donors require the ability to experiment, improvise, and eventually fail.

CONCLUSIONS

Pastoralism remains the most efficient use of dryland resources, providing resilient livelihood opportunities to millions of people in the face of multiple and often overlapping shocks (climate, finance, conflict) while also contributing significantly to national economies. However, pastoral systems pose unique challenges for standard humanitarian approaches developed in more settled and predictable contexts. If not appropriately adapted to the needs and dynamics of pastoral systems, humanitarian action can be inefficient, ineffective, and even harmful. Increasingly endangered dryland ecosystems, rising global humanitarian needs, and shrinking funding pools make it more important than ever to ensure that assistance in dryland regions is both effective and appropriate.

The three proposed case studies were designed and adjusted as the results emerged from the desk studies. The case studies do not align one to one with the desk studies; rather each case study explores elements of the potential strategies—support the system, co-create shared pathways, and think like a pastoralist—to assess their applicability and practicality as approaches to bridge the disconnects and improve humanitarian action.

The first case study in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia explores local and cross-border networks and the repertoire of knowledge and practices critical for pastoralism. The case study will investigate how pastoralists interact with community conduits of early warning information, reliability networks, local practices, and external humanitarian support and structures to predict, mitigate, and respond to shocks. This is achieved through collaboratively mapping flexible and adaptive practices on how local and indigenous early warning systems can interact with national or international systems towards better response for pastoralists. The mapping process will aim to provide alternatives on the ground and learning from pastoralists' real-time experiences. Instead of simply implementing the standard suite of projects, it is hoped that opportunities to incorporate approaches from below can emerge. In light of the findings, the case study will suggest which strategy or components of strategies might be most beneficial for communities and humanitarian actors operating in this context:

support the system (Strategy 1); co-create shared pathways (Strategy 2); or think like a pastoralist (Strategy 3).

The second case study in the Karamoja region of Uganda and the Turkana region of Kenya will investigate the type of knowledges and resources pastoralists rely on to respond to shocks and uncertainty and the ways in which national and international programs (e.g., early warning systems, anticipatory actions, humanitarian response, and social protection) intersect or conflict with local livelihoods and institutions. Based on this understanding, it will explore the different avenues and possible benefits arising from different approaches by national and international actors. This will entail investigating the possible gains from taking a more minimalist approach that “supports the system” (Strategy 1) or by international actors transforming their approaches to “think like a pastoralist” and thereby better and more fully engage with the communities (Strategy 3).

The third case study attempts to test a method to address the desk study finding that humanitarians face practical and knowledge barriers that prevent them from interacting with pastoralists. These practical—and often logistical—barriers prevent humanitarians from learning about and from pastoral systems (“thinking like a pastoralist”—Strategy 3), which in turn prevents them from developing effective interventions, thereby creating a self-reinforcing cycle. This case study will attempt to break that cycle using a coproduction approach (Strategy 2) to create a health and nutrition monitoring system. The coproduction process would facilitate several aims: 1) the coproduction process would establish direct connections between humanitarians and high-reliability experts among pastoralists to begin dialogue and relationships; 2) the process of designing a system together would push humanitarians to listen to and learn from the high-reliability experts (the first step towards thinking like a pastoralist) as to how to resolve practical problems; and 3) the data generated by the monitoring system would be rich with information about how this pastoral system (in the Liptako-Gourma triangle) functions and how pastoralists respond to risks and shocks throughout

the monitoring period. The learnings from this case study will explore whether international and national humanitarian actors might benefit from coproduction (Strategy 2) and thinking like a pastoralist (Strategy 3), and how the resulting knowledge and information could potentially improve humanitarian action in dryland regions.

Through these case studies, we will both ground-truth the information arising from the desk studies and hopefully identify which strategy or combination of strategies allows national and international humanitarian actors to best support pastoralist communities.

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