



# Focus on Pastoralism

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In recent years, pastoralists in South Sudan have seen their only source of income – livestock – decimated by conflict, cattle raiding, atypical flooding and consequent diseases that they have no means to treat.

**High numbers of people are engaged in pastoralism throughout the IGAD region, contributing significantly to domestic and international trade.**

Livestock rearing is a key livelihood activity in East Africa (ICPALD, 2024), with the Horn of Africa home to some of the largest pastoral populations in the world. Some 60–70 percent of

the IGAD region’s landmass is made up of arid and semi-arid lands, where pastoral and agropastoral systems are the main source of livelihoods (IGAD, February 2024). The numbers of people active in pastoralism ranges from over half of the population in South Sudan and Somalia to 30–40 percent in Djibouti and 10–20 percent in the other countries (Mkutu, 2018). Agropastoral

populations, engaged in both cropping and livestock-rearing activities, are also common across semi-arid areas of the region. An estimated 488 million cattle, sheep, goats, and camels are found in the region, of which over 60 percent are in dryland areas (IGAD, February 2024).

The livestock sector significantly contributes to export revenues, national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the broader socioeconomic development of IGAD countries. Around 10 to 50 percent of country-level agricultural GDP comes from it (ICPALD, February 2024). Live animal and meat exports to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) from the region generate more than USD 1 billion annually in earnings (ICPALD, June 2023; FAO and IGAD, 2019).

**Pastoral livelihoods can provide income and food to sustain household food security**

Among pastoral communities, herd sizes are a key determinant of household wealth as they act as cash buffers (small livestock) and capital reserves (large animals). They increase economic stability for agropastoral households and provide protection against inflation. Sale of livestock enables the purchase of food, other basic needs and services (such as education and health) (FAO). While wealthier pastoral households obtain the majority of their income from livestock, poorer pastoralists must complement livestock-related income with labour and social support from community members (FEWS NET, 2015; FSNAU, 2011).

The livestock sector is crucial for enhancing the food security, nutrition and resilience of pastoral households in the IGAD region (FAO,

2020; FAO, no date<sup>1</sup>, IFAD 2020). Livestock products, such as milk and meat, complement consumption of purchased cereals and provide high quality proteins, essential fatty acids, and various vitamins and minerals, contributing to healthy diets and improved nutrition, particularly for children (FAO, 2023). Children and pregnant women living in nomadic households in northern Kenya have been found to have better nutritional outcomes than sedentary households in the same area, due to improved access to camel milk (Fratkin et al, 2006).

**Successive shocks have undermined pastoralist livelihoods**

While at the macroeconomic level pastoralism was performing well before the 2020–2023 drought, increasing commercialisation of pastoral production is already leading to privatisation of resources, including water and rangelands. This limits the capacity of smaller herders to access critical resources in times of need and to increase herd size, leading to their abandonment of pastoralism. In some areas, increased commercialisation has also affected gender roles where men take control of livestock assets that were previously controlled or managed by women (Catley et al, 2016). Shocks, including droughts, flooding and conflict, affect access to water, pasture and markets, and risk triggering resource-based conflict and exacerbating intercommunal tensions. Cattle raids, farm destruction and disruptions to veterinary services and disease control can decimate livestock herds, impoverishing households and driving displacement. In South Sudan, insecurity and cattle raids have reduced livestock productivity

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In the vast lowland part of Ethiopia in South Omo zone, pastoralists have suffered frequent droughts forcing them to travel long distances in search of water for their livestock.

through disruption of normal grazing and watering patterns. Subsequent atypical migrations have heightened the risk of livestock pests and diseases, negatively impacting livestock production and reproduction. This has in turn reduced household food availability and driven up malnutrition among breastfeeding women and children under 5 years of age due to reduced dietary diversity and insufficient milk (FAO DIEM, January 2024).

In Uganda's Karamoja subregion, food availability is a major challenge partly due to sustained cattle raids that have led to the dwindling of livestock holdings. In almost all districts (except Amudat and Nabilatuk) fewer than 50 percent of households own livestock, a stark reduction from even five years ago (IPC, June 2024).

The increasing frequency and severity of climate-related shocks, exacerbated by climate change, contributes additional pressure. During the 2008 and 2011 droughts, Ethiopia lost 52 percent and 23 percent of its animals respectively. During the 2017 drought, Somalia lost USD 400 million in revenue from decreased export of live animals (ICPALD, June 2023).

The unprecedented 2020–2023 drought across the Horn of Africa then killed an estimated 13.2 million heads of livestock, including 6.8 million in Ethiopia, 2.6 million in Kenya and 3.8 million in Somalia.

During the drought, over 1.4 million children aged under 5 were estimated to have lost access to milk, with a severe impact on their nutrition status. IPC analyses from that period show that many of the areas that faced the highest levels of acute

food insecurity and malnutrition were pastoral or agropastoral.

SMART surveys conducted in Kenya found acute malnutrition levels of 35 percent, above the Famine threshold, in parts of Mandera and Turkana county. Reduction in milk availability due to the drought, as well as respiratory tract and water-borne diseases, were key drivers (FSNWG, 2022).

Flood events, such as those observed during the 2023 October–November–December (OND) and 2024 March–April–May rainy (MAM) seasons cause loss of livestock and extensive population displacements in pastoral areas (OCHA, 2024). The extensive flooding in April and early May 2024 led to about 13 900 livestock deaths in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia (OCHA, May 2024; WFP, May 2024). Heavy rainfall and flooding also increases the risk of livestock diseases, such as Rift Valley Fever (CDC 2024), health-related market closures and trade bans (Peyre et al. 2013; Mburu et al. 2022).

#### **Regional drought ended in 2023, but localized shocks continued into 2024**

In early 2023, pastoral and agropastoral areas of the Horn of Africa were suffering from the impacts of the historic three-year drought, including poor rangeland conditions, limited water availability for livestock, widespread livestock mortality, and high food insecurity rates (FSNWG, 2023).

Rains improved during the March–May 2023 season, marking the end of the drought in many areas (OCHA, 2023) but during the following October–December 2023 and March–May 2024 rainy seasons, floods caused widespread livestock deaths. Pastoralist livelihood recovery relies on increasing herd sizes through animal reproduction or procurement of stock and takes time. Some estimates suggest that recovery can take over five years (OCHA 2023) and can be difficult to impossible for smallholder pastoral families (Catley et al, 2016).

In other parts of the region, rains in late 2023 and early 2024 were not evenly distributed and dry spells and/or below-average rains were observed in parts of the Sudan, the Karamoja region of Uganda, South Sudan and northern Ethiopia (FAO, 2024; FEWS NET, 2024; IPC, 2024).

Livestock diseases, cattle raids and resource-based conflicts also continued to limit recovery and constrain pastoralism across the region (IPC, 2024), including in the Greater Darfur region of the Sudan where fighting and insecurity have restricted access to grazing lands and water (FAO, 2024).

The increasing frequency of shocks suggests that many pastoralist households are unlikely to recover their livelihoods and resilience before the next shock strikes. This drives pastoral migration into cities which in turn leads to poor outcomes including poverty and food insecurity, with one study from Marsabit, Kenya also reporting poor subjective well being, even years after livelihood transition (Duijine, 2024).

#### **Lack of actionable information continues to undermine development of this critical livelihood**

Despite the importance of pastoralism to the IGAD region and its potential contribution to economic growth, poverty reduction, food security and rangeland management, the statistics necessary to inform policy development and implementation are insufficient to do so (FAO et al, 2014).

Data at the domestic, regional and international level on trade flows, health and livestock populations remain insufficient and outdated. Data that are collected are not done so systematically and are of mixed quality, particularly in terms of timeliness, completeness, comparability and accuracy. This makes it challenging to support this critical livelihood and industry, as well as the pastoral and agropastoral families that rely on it.