

## Owning the Futures: Using Scenarios in Pastoral Development

### The issue

Pastoralists have always lived with and adapted to change, but may now be on the verge of a far more significant transformation in their circumstances. Critical trends in politics, climate systems, urbanisation, economics, education, demography, and technology are starting to converge. The pace and scale of change are unprecedented, and are by no means entirely negative. The outcome for pastoralists will be determined by how well positioned and equipped they are to take advantage of emerging opportunities and mitigate potential threats.

Although pastoralism faces significant threats, the overall climate for pastoral development in Africa is significantly more positive than it was a decade ago. A generation of pastoralist children has passed through the education system and now occupies influential positions in government, business, and NGOs. Attitudes are starting to change; governments and donors are embarking on major initiatives in drylands, and there has been a flourishing of civil society activity in pastoral areas. However, much of this activity has been reactive, responding to an agenda set by others. Rarely have pastoralists succeeded in articulating a vision of the future they want to see on their own terms, and in a manner to which policy-makers can respond.

### The idea

Scenario planning has reportedly helped large private sector companies deal with an increasingly complex and uncertain future. More recently, it has been used at critical moments of national transition (for example in South Africa and Kenya) and by public sector bodies. The idea which this pilot project will explore is whether it could also help pastoralists better manage the complexity and uncertainty of their own environment.

Scenarios are provocative and plausible stories about the future that throw light on the driving forces affecting a particular issue or system. They are not predictions or forecasts, but they can help us understand how different futures might unfold, and examine not just those we prefer but those with which we may have to deal. Scenario analysis is not a simple act of imagining what might happen, but rather a systematic construction of alternative futures by combining different drivers of change and exploring the interplay between them. The idea is not just to understand how change might come about, but to help people act on that knowledge. Scenario analysis may create a context in which ordinary people can think more clearly about the futures they may have to face, and then decide what they want to do about them.

## The plan

A small group of experienced development practitioners from pastoral backgrounds met in August 2007 to consider this idea. They concluded that the potential benefits of scenario analysis are that it encourages thinking in generational terms (rather than the 3-4 years of most project plans) and that it forces us to concentrate on what makes change happen. Moreover pastoralism, more than most livelihood systems, has suffered from highly polarised opinions about its viability. Scenario analysis may provide a place where the pessimists and the optimists can meet, since it involves the exploration and evaluation of a range of possible futures, whether positive or negative.

SOS Sahel UK will manage a six-month pilot project in Kenya and Mali to test out these ideas on the ground. One way in which this will be done is directly with pastoral institutions. All pastoral societies have their own institutions for debate and decision-making which are generally closed to outsiders. Sometimes these are used as 'entry-points' for community development, but often this takes place on outsiders' terms. The approach here will be for one or two of those who attended the August workshop, and who are themselves members of the institutions in question, to introduce scenario thinking to their group and to evaluate its usefulness as a tool for community analysis and planning.

A second strand of the pilot will be to introduce the approach to key government officials with responsibility for pastoral development. A process of scenario analysis will at some stage be facilitated between government and pastoralists themselves, perhaps at a decentralised level (such as in a constituency or district), as possibly the first step in setting out a long-term vision and plan for pastoral development.

At the end of the pilot we aim to have a tested methodology for facilitating scenario analysis with pastoralists at community level, as well as an indication of the level of interest within the governments of Kenya and Mali in integrating these methodologies into their long-term thinking. The lessons learned during this process will be carefully documented and widely shared.

## Further information

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