



SOS SAHEL UK Presentation – Dr Jeremy Swift  
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**POSSIBLE FUTURES FOR SAHELIAN PASTORALISTS**

I will talk briefly about pastoralists in the African Sahel.

Pastoralists are people who live principally from animals, and include some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world.

Well known African examples are the Twareg or the Maasai. Some pastoralists move seasonally, in which case we think of them as nomads.

There are perhaps some 200 million pastoralists in the world - in central Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

Pastoralists in the Sahel now face a crisis. The survival of pastoralism may be threatened by land encroachment by farmers, by increasing drought, by the activities of governments, and even by the fight against international terror.

I want to sketch two possible scenarios – feasible future situations: one positive, one negative. Reason is not to try to guess the future for pastoralists, but to identify key driving forces, so we can manage them.

**Negative scenario: ‘Business as usual’**

*Present trends continue:*

- Crisis of the *pastoral economy* grows: continued population pressure against vulnerable and diminishing resources; inefficient markets;
- Crisis of *governance*: greater economic and political marginalisation: pastoralists don’t carry any political weight; increasing civil conflict;
- Crisis of *development*: failure of countries to meet millennium development goals for education, poverty reduction, health;
- Crisis of *livelihood*: drought is a test of survival every five to ten years;
- Likely result: ‘*Death of Pastoralism*’ - end of pastoralism as it now works. It will survive as part of a tourist itinerary or as a subject for David Attenborough films, but not as a living livelihood system.

*New threat in business as usual:*

To add to this gloomy picture, there is a new threat to Sahelian pastoralists.

Sahelian countries are now a front line in the 'war on terror'. Somalia has long been of concern, as the classic 'failed state', unable to control its territory or borders. Less known: US now has troops across whole Sahel and in the Sahara. Their mission: prevent spread of fundamentalist insurgency into tropical Africa. These troops are training local armies, listening, and where necessary fighting. But they are also moving into key rangeland areas, occupying water points, hindering or halting migration and long distance trading. On the Ethiopia-Somali border they have triggered an economic crisis for pastoralists and traders by halting the movement of livestock, people and money. In West Africa, similar counterinsurgency activities are starting between the Sahel, Sahara and North Africa.

The pessimistic scenario is only one possible future. An alternative is:

### **'Pastoralism successfully repositions itself for 21<sup>st</sup> century'**

In this scenario:

- Pastoralists special skills are recognised and supported in national and regional economic policy, e.g new AU policy;
- Accelerating urbanisation > increased demand for livestock products – especially milk, meat – which pastoralists can provide because of the development of efficient markets;
- Global climate change > perhaps positive for pastoralists in dry west Africa and parts of Horn and east Africa: more wetter years > more pasture, although highly irregular; the irregularity reduces competition for land from farmers; pastoralists – because of their mobility – can make use of it;
- Pastoralists will leapfrog to new technologies and new institutions: e.g radio education; satellite phones on which they make futures deals to supply livestock to urban markets; internet access (Google Earth to find new pasture);
- Fears of spread of fundamentalism will provide motivation for governments to support real development, e.g means to achieve Millennium Development Goals for all pastoralists;

Outcome of optimistic scenario: pastoralism becomes one of dry Africa's key productive and sustainable livelihood systems.

Scenario planning of this sort is perhaps a good example of leapfrogging more usual methods. Scenarios are a new way of looking at future directions in development planning, ways in which pastoralists themselves can join with practitioners like SOS Sahel to plan a decent future.

Neither of these scenarios will happen exactly as described. Point is for organisations like SOS Sahel to identify and work with or against trends – *against* out-of-control counterinsurgency, *with* the search for new markets. i.e. 'accentuate the positive' in pastoral livelihood systems.

It's important for NGOs to become reliable allies of pastoralists as they lift themselves out of the man-made mess they are in. I am sure SOS Sahel and other NGOs will respond to this challenge.