



Advocacy instrument to voice pastoralism: experiences and lessons learned from Ethiopia

Getahun, T¹; Hussien, AA²; Tolossa, D³; Desta, SD⁴

¹Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia, Addis Ababa University, tezerag@yahoo.co.uk (contact person);

²Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia, abdidheere04@yahoo.com; ³College of Development Studies, Addis Ababa University, degefa.tolossa@aaau.edu.et; ⁴FDRE Ministry of Peace (MoP), shanko_d@yahoo.com

Key words: Pastoralist Day, IGAD, Lobbying, Partnership, Networking

Introduction

In Ethiopia, pastoralists are over 14 million citizens (NDRMC 2018:2). They live in 182 Woredas¹ (23% of the total) across seven Regional States and Dire Dawa City (MoFPDA 2016; USAID 2018; NDRMC 2018). Pastoralists inhabit the country's lowlands, which are 60% of its land (IGAD 2017; MoFPDA 2018; DFID 2018). Almost all the pastoral inhabitants are considered rangelands. The pastoral population is diverse in ethnicity and social structure. 90% belong to the Afar, Oromo, and Somali groups. Most of these groups are in the country's peripheries. They have similar ancestry to those in the bordering countries. IGAD (2020:9) estimated the value of pastoral livestock at ETB 256.0 billion (\$US 8.5 billion) in 2019. This includes cattle, camels, goats, and sheep. Pastoralists have faced marginalization and exclusion from decision-making. This is despite the benefits of their livestock-based livelihoods.

This paper

This paper aims to share lessons from advocating for pastoralism. We sought to improve the voice of pastoralists in Ethiopia's policy-making. We did this through a specific activity: the Ethiopian Pastoralist Day (EPD). Over the years, EPD's partners have developed the paper by reflecting on their work. The questions are: How much has the EPD helped mobilize pastoralists? Has it let them share experiences with each other and others? How much has EPD raised the profile of, and concern for, pastoralists? Has it created a supportive policy for their development at all levels? local, regional, and national? What have been the key successes and challenges of EPD? What did we learn from the lessons? This includes those for other pastoral communities outside Ethiopia. It also includes organizations that want to help them. The paper has been developed through a self- and peer-reflective process by individuals and partners who have been involved in the development of EPD since 1999.

The Birth and Development of Ethiopian Pastoralist Day

In 1996, elders and leaders from the Somali and Oromo groups in Ethiopia, along with the local NGO PCAE, organized a conference. They aimed to discuss the situation of pastoralists, marginalized and excluded for ages. They called for inclusive development, highlighting their unique pastoral system. That was the birth of the

¹[In Ethiopian Woreda administration equivalent to district](#)

Ethiopian Pastoralist Day (EPD) in 1999 and its later development. Since the first celebration on 25th Jan 1999, EPD has been celebrated nineteen times. EPD is an *integrative* advocacy instrument. It is a unique event and process.

EPD brings together almost all pastoral actors in Ethiopia for a common cause. The Day is marked in the presence of pastoralists, policymakers, and Ethiopian dignitaries. EPD seeks to sway policymakers, the media, and development actors to change their policies and practices. PCAE and pastoral representatives organized the first three EPDs (1999-2001). They aimed to recognize pastoralism as a way of life and a viable production system. Ethiopia's pastoral groups are diverse in identity, location, and problems.

As a result, PFE has taken the role of spearheading EPD at the national level. Government and PFE collaborated on EPD from 2008 to 2022's 18th edition. The 19th EPD (25th Jan 2024) celebrated in Eastern Africa level, in partnership with IGAD, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. We believe that the collaboration among these institutions makes EPD a powerful advocacy tool.

Key Successes and Challenges of EPD

EPD mobilized pastoralists and created a platform for sharing experiences. It has been celebrated in rotation at national and Ethiopian regional levels. The pastoralists share customs, environments, and development from each avenue. Pastoralists from different areas can discuss their issues and present to the government. The local word, Zelan, means "wanderers and lawless." It's a derogatory term. It's been fading away. They are now called *Arbetoader* (pastoralists). It was in 2008 (eight EPD) that the Government of FDRE recognized EPD as a National Day. This is a milestone in the advocacy and lobbying work of the PFE and partners.

EPD raised awareness of pastoralists and improved policies. At each EPD, pastoralists made resolutions. They called for recognition of their unique livelihoods. They also requested pastoral-focused institutions. The EPD influenced the Federal Parliament's establishment of the PASC. In 2021, the Ministry of Irrigation and Lowland (MILL) was established. Various regional pastoral governments have also been formed. Later national plans (e.g. poverty reduction or growth-transformation papers) included pastoralism. They also increased pro-poor services (health, education, water) threefold. So far, we see two challenges. First, EPD is not well-institutionalized. It lacks a clear monitoring and evaluation system. Second, EPD is slow to move to the regional and continental levels. This would benefit pastoralists in neighboring countries by creating opportunities.



Fig. 1. 19th EPD and East Africa Pastoralist Expo celebration in the presence of high-level government delegates in Ethiopia, pastoralists and guests

Lessons Learned for Other Countries

EPD's multi-pillar approach has opened new opportunities to influence policy. EPD has united disadvantaged groups by working with various actors. These include national and local governments, elders, representatives of marginalized communities, Civil Societies and media. They now have a common voice that supports pastoralism.

Conclusions and Implications

The EPD has proved a challenging but innovative way to raise the voice of pastoralists. It aims to boost the profile and investment in pastoralism. It is a way of life, a productive livelihood, and a land use system. EPD has changed social development. It included a pastoral agenda in policy work.

The FDRE Government has recognized EPD as a "national day." High-level officials, including the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, attend the celebration. However, some compromises and trade-offs have had to be made along the way in order to address some of the challenges faced. Though the situation for pastoralists has improved, much remains to be done. We must fully recognize and support their potential and livelihoods. The continental and regional African bodies would use EPD's lessons to promote integration and peace.

References

- DFID. 2018. Sources of Growth in Lowland Peripheries. Final report [↑](#)
- IGAD Centre for Pastoral Areas and Livestock Development (ICPALD) 2020. Total Economic Valuation of Pastoralism in Ethiopia. STUDY REPORT [↑](#)
- IGAD. 2017. Policies and Proclamations Relevant to Pastoral Areas Land Management for Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda Regional Pastoral Livelihoods Resilience Project (RPLRP). IGAD Centre for Pastoral Areas and Livestock Development [↑](#)
- Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development (MoFPDA). 2020. Pastoral Development Policy and Strategies. AA. [↑](#)
- Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs (MoFPDA). 2016. Planning document on the Ethiopian Pastoralist Day. Unpublished data., Addis Ababa [↑](#)
- National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC) 2018. Humanitarian and Disaster Resilience Plan. Joint Government and Humanitarian Partners' Document. NDRMC. Ethiopia. [↑](#)
- Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia (PFE) is a group of 26 NGOs. They are both Ethiopian and international. Their mission is to improve the lives of Ethiopia's pastoralists. [↑](#)
- USAID 2018. Report on Pastoralist Areas Context Analysis to Enrich and Update the Draft Pastoralist Policy and Strategy Framework. Addis Ababa [↑](#)