

Pastoralism in the Horn of Africa - To Be or Not To Be: An Evolutionary Perspective

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The paper provides a broad context to the current status of pastoralism in the Horn of Africa from an economic and resource competition/conflict perspective. It argues that traditional pastoralism as we know it (i.e. an environmentally/socially sustainable livelihood) is going through serious self generated and externally driven evolution process which may be irreversible thus changing the pastoralist production system as we knew it. This realisation the author believes is so fundamental if planners, researchers and funders wish to contribute to the well being of pastoral peoples in this region. Drawing from experiences from Eastern Sudan and Western Eritrea, the author argues that researchers and planners often ignore the above challenges and the changing livelihood parameters.

There is also growing evidence that pastoral peoples are in urban and peri-urban economic activities in a symbiotic manner with other groups. Pastoral peoples are not as marginalized as is often claimed by some academics and over the last 20 years we have seen considerable growth in pastoralist led civil society organisations both at the national and local level. Pastoral peoples have now their political constituencies and have say in political systems regardless of the nature of the ruling elite. The author demonstrates that pastoral peoples despite the evolution mentioned above possess tremendous skills in animal production/management and own productive breeds of livestock, which could form the basis for more sustainable people, centred development. The author believes that it is critical that we recognise and build on these opportunities thus promoting a new agenda for sustainable pastoral development.