

This issue of Indigenous Affairs focuses on the situation of the millions of indigenous peoples who are nomadic pastoralists. Nomadic pastoralists have unique cultures and make unique and productive use of harsh environments. Nomadic pastoralists the world over are, however, the subject of an unusually large number of myths and misconceptions that have led to inadequate, often hostile development policies, entrenched pastoral poverty, discrimination and human rights violations. Pastoralists have much to offer in terms of unique indigenous knowledge, economic contributions, cultural diversity etc., but in order to realize their full potential, misconceptions need to be corrected and supportive policies and programmes put in place.

### The importance of pastoralism

Nomadic and transhumant pastoralists may number between 100 – 200 million people globally.<sup>1</sup> Pastoralists live in many parts of the world, including Africa, Central Asia, the Arctic and southern Europe. In sub-Saharan Africa alone it is estimated that more than 50 million people live as nomadic pastoralists. Pastoralist cultures and livelihoods – based on livestock such as cattle, goats, sheep, yak, oxen and reindeer - are uniquely adapted to surviving in and making productive use of harsh geographical environments such as semi-arid and arid lands and deserts.

There is an increasing body of scientific research that demonstrates that pastoralists and pastoralism make significant contributions to local, national and regional economies. As described in the articles by Ced Hesse and Joseph Ole Simel, research into African pastoralism shows that pastoralism is considerably more productive per hectare than commercial ranching or sedentary livestock keeping in similar environmental conditions, and that the high productivity of livestock in pastoral systems not only supports millions of pastoralists but also contributes significantly to other sectors of national and regional economies in Africa.

### Mobility

As emphasised in all of the articles in this issue of Indigenous Affairs, the key aspect of nomadic pastoral-

ism is mobility. The areas in which pastoralists live are most often harsh and non-fertile, with extreme environmental conditions, and it is therefore imperative for pastoralists to be able to move over large areas to find grazing and water to sustain their herds. The space and scope for mobility becomes even more important given the serious consequences of climate change that are exacerbating the already extreme climatic conditions that pastoralists have to cope with. Such consequences are described in the articles by Joseph Ole Simel, Stephan Dudeck and John Isom, focusing on East Africa, Russia and Tibet respectively. Pastoralist representatives participating in the recent COP 15 in Copenhagen also strongly underlined the serious consequences of climate change for pastoralists and the need to develop visionary adaptation strategies.

The space for mobility for nomadic pastoralists is, however, rapidly diminishing and pastoralists the world over are increasingly suffering from land and natural resource dispossession. Pastoralists are being evicted from areas which they have lived in and utilized for centuries in order to make way for sedentary farming, large-scale commercial farming, natural resource extraction, environmental conservation initiatives, commercial wildlife hunting, tourism development, etc.

### Negative stereotyping

Governments and mainstream societies are unfortunately largely ignorant of the dynamics and contributions of pastoralism, and pastoralists suffer from entrenched negative stereotyping and discrimination. Despite being useful for promoting tourism, and appearing as exotic and colorful attractions in commercial advertising, pastoralists and pastoralism are generally perceived as backward, irrational, unproductive, conflictual and environmentally destructive.

Moreover, pastoralists are often insufficiently represented in national decision-making bodies and not well organized at either local, national or regional level. They therefore tend to be in a weak position when it comes to conflicts and competition over land and natural resources.

Misconceptions and a lack of will to listen and learn on the part of governments lead to inadequate

and hostile development policies. Such is the case in Tanzania, for instance, where – as described in the article by Edward Porokwa – the current government is clearly anti-pastoralist and has adopted a number of policies which have a negative bearing on pastoralism. Tibet and Russia are further cases in point where, as described in the articles by John Isom and Stephan Dudeck, the livelihoods and future existence of the nomadic pastoralists have been undermined by disastrous development policies.

The negative stereotyping of pastoralists leads to severe human rights violations. These take many forms such as, for instance, the forcible evictions of pastoralists described by Edward Porokwa in his article on the situation in Tanzania. In some cases, the negative stereotyping cultivates a culture of ethnic intolerance and hatred. Such is the situation in Burkina Faso and Niger and, in his article, Issa Diallo describes the horrific massacres taking place towards Peul pastoralists in Burkina Faso.

Pastoralists in general suffer from marginalization but pastoralist women suffer from double marginalization, being both pastoralists and women. Many pastoralist cultures are profoundly patriarchal and this - combined with modern forms of development and decision-making, which are also male-dominated - suppresses pastoralist women. In their article, Rebecca Lolosoli and Johnson Ole Kaunga describe the situation of pastoralist women in northern Kenya and highlight serious issues such as widespread violence against women.

## Ways forward

Despite the many challenges, it is important to note that pastoralist communities are increasingly taking action to improve their situation and demand their rights. Self-organization and capacity building are key elements and, in his article, Dodo Boureima describes how pastoral organizations from West Africa have formed a regional network to defend the economic, political, social and cultural interests of pastoralists in West Africa.

As highlighted by Ced Hesse, an increasingly vocal and well-organized pastoralist civil society is emerging – notably in East Africa – and contributing to keeping pastoralism on the political agenda. In order to further develop successful advocacy aimed at obtaining conducive pastoralist policies, it is – as argued by Ced Hesse – important for pastoralists and their supporters to conduct sound field-based research into the total economic value of pastoralism in

order to gather hard evidence of the multiple contributions pastoralism makes to local and national economies.

It is important in this regard for pastoralists to engage in developing national climate change adaptation strategies and to remind policy makers of the economic, social and cultural benefits of supporting pastoralists' own adaptation strategies as defined by themselves. In addition, those donors who support states' climate change adaptation initiatives must be reminded of their duty to pay special attention to the most vulnerable groups. Such advocacy can draw support from the "Resolution on Climate Change and Human Rights and the Need to Study its Impact in Africa" issued by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on 25 November 2009, which emphasizes the need to include the rights of indigenous peoples in climate change adaptation initiatives.

The right of pastoralists to maintain and develop their own identity, cultures and livelihoods is a human rights issue and it is important for pastoralist organizations to make use of relevant international law in their domestic advocacy work. One key document is the recently adopted UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which provides for the individual as well as the collective rights of indigenous peoples, including rights to lands, territories and resources and the right not to be forcibly removed from their land and territories. In a regional context, pastoralists in Africa can make use of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the indigenous peoples' policy framework of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), which emphasize the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples in Africa – including land and natural resource rights.

It is to be hoped that pastoralist organizations will be strengthened in the coming years and their advocacy capacity further consolidated. They are up against strong forces and they need sharp and convincing arguments. Hopefully, over the coming years, we shall see a growing global pastoralist civil society that is able to promote their cause on the basis of solid research into the economic value of pastoralism, the use of national and international human rights law and increased networking and collaboration at local, national and international levels. □

## Note

- 1 According to the World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism: [www.iucn.org/wisp/](http://www.iucn.org/wisp/)