

Accounting for pastoralists in Kenya



Photo: Ilse Köhler-Rollefson

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IN KENYA, THERE are at least eight ethnic groups that are recognized as traditional pastoralists, and include the Borana, Gabra, Maasai, Pokot, Rendille, Samburu, Somali and Turkana, along with various smaller groups. These peoples inhabit 13 arid and semi-arid counties that cover a large part of Kenya.

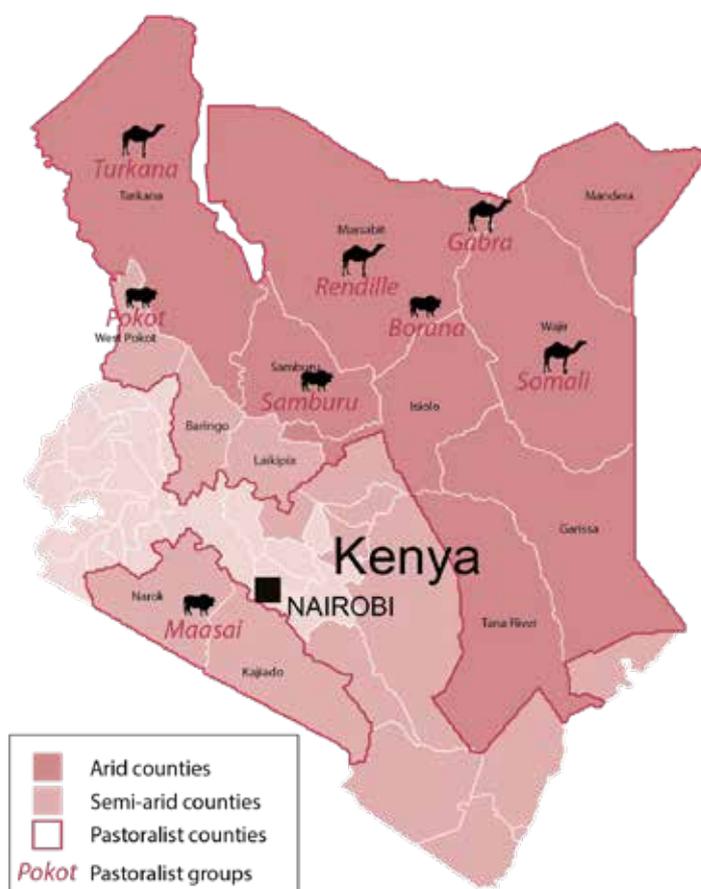
While the Borana, Maasai, Pokot and Samburu represent cattle cultures, the Gabra, Rendille, Somali and Turkana traditionally herd camels as their main animal type. In adaptation to climate change, some members of traditional cattle cultures have also adopted camels. All groups also keep sheep and goats, and some of them keep donkeys for transport.

Although Kenya has an official definition of pastoralism, its draft National Livestock Policy of 2019 categorizes the country's livestock production systems into intensive, semi-intensive and extensive. These systems correspond to the country's agroclimatic conditions, which reflect variations in altitude, temperature, soil and rainfall patterns. Kenya's livestock keepers are grouped into farmers, agropastoralists, pastoralists and ranchers.

Although official surveys do not use a "pastoralism" category, the surveys conducted by the Kenya's Bureau of Statistics provide valuable data. According to its population and household census 2019, there were 8,785,058 "ethnic" pastoralists in the arid and semi-arid counties – people who identify themselves as pastoralists but do not necessarily actively manage livestock themselves.

Key messages

- Kenya has some 8.8 million people (1.73 million households) who identify as pastoralists. Of these, 4.0 million individuals (0.8 million households) depend directly on livestock.
- They manage about 70% of the country's cattle, 87% of its sheep and 81% of its goats, 100% of its camels, 88% of its donkeys and 74% of the beehives.
- Their products include milk, meat, honey, beeswax, and skins.
- The pastoral sector was worth \$1.13 billion in 2019: 92% from livestock and 8% from other products and services.
- Kenya's tourism industry is highly dependent on pastoralism as it helps to conserve wildlife and unique cultures. Pastoralism's support to tourism was worth \$29 million out of a total industry value of \$2.5 billion.
- Official surveys do not use a "pastoralism" category, but by comparing county-level data for production systems and populations it is possible to estimate numbers of pastoralists.
- Bodies mandated with data collection should segregate data between pastoralists, agropastoralists and farmers.



Kenya's pastoralists herd their animals in the country's arid and semi-arid areas.

Many have moved to the towns and cities to seek work and return only occasionally to their home areas. If we juxtapose this with the observation by Krätli and Swift (2014) that 57% of ethnic pastoralist households practise pastoralism, we arrive at a figure of around 4 million practising pastoralists.

Pastoralists manage about 70% of the country's cattle, 87% of its sheep and 81% of the goats, all the camels, and 88% of the donkeys. In addition, 74% of Kenya's beehives are located in the dry-land area. Pastoralist products include milk, beef,

chevron, mutton, camel meat, honey, beeswax, donkey skins and meat. Pastoralists also play an important role in Kenya's attraction as a tourist destination. Their animals are mostly indigenous breeds that are adapted to the harsh climatic conditions of the area. However, some pastoralists keep less-adapted exotic breeds such as Sahiwal cattle and Dorper sheep. A lot of random cross-breeding has taken place, threatening the survival of local breeds. One of these is the Red Maasai sheep, which has generated scientific interest because of its tolerance to endoparasites.

Socioeconomic and ecological contributions

Kenya's pastoral sector has an economic worth of US\$1.13 billion, with livestock accounting for 92% (\$1.04 billion) and other products (such as honey) and services (such as tourism) providing the remaining 8% (\$0.09 billion) (Nyariki et al. 2019). In 2016, pastoralism accounted for \$29 million of the \$2.5 billion that Kenya earned from the tourism sector (Nyariki et al. 2019, Table 10).

But there is considerable uncertainty about these figures. According to data from the IGAD Livestock Policy initiative, which used production-based esti-

mates, pastoral livestock products contributed up to \$2.4 billion a year of the national total of \$5.1 billion. This consisted of \$1.08 billion from milk, \$0.64 billion from live animals and meat, \$0.31 billion from manure and \$0.42 billion from financial services (such as the use of livestock as credit and insurance) (Behnke and Muthami 2011).

Pastoral lands are also home to much of Kenya's wildlife and biodiversity and cultural richness, which contribute greatly to the country's attractiveness as a tourist destination.

Scarcity of data makes it difficult to quantify the contribution of pastoralism to ecosystem services and wildlife conservation. But livestock *bomas* (thorn-fence corrals that pastoralists set up to protect their herds during the night) accumulate dung; when they are abandoned, they develop into biodiversity hotspots that attract and support wild herbivores, influencing their migratory patterns. Kenya's iconic wildlife areas have been significantly shaped by the presence of pastoralists over the last several thousand years (Marshall et al. 2018).

Definition and historical context

The government of Kenya's draft National Livestock Policy of 2019 defines pastoralism as "an economic activity and a cultural identity that takes advantage of the characteristic instability of rangeland environments through strategic mobility, where key resources such as pastures, nutrients and water for livestock becomes available in short-lived and largely unpredictable concentrations".

This definition is also used in the Community Land Act of 2016. It emphasizes the interaction of people, animals, the environment, flexible resource management systems and non-exclusive entitlements to pasture and water resources. It regards pastoralism as both an economic activity and a cultural identity.

Data sources

Nonetheless, official surveys do not use a "pastoralism" category. The Population and Housing Census, the population data gathered by the Kenya Bureau of Statistics, and the National Livestock Census do not segregate numbers of pastoralists from the general population. However, the Livestock Census does distinguish between intensive, semi-intensive and extensive livestock production systems and provides livestock numbers by county, while the Population and Housing Census gives their human populations. The numbers given for arid and semi-arid counties that are populated by pastoralists therefore can serve to estimate the number of pastoralists and their livestock.

Livestock censuses are carried out very irregularly, with the latest one conducted in 2009. Furthermore, livestock numbers in pastoral areas often fluctuate widely due to frequent droughts.



Photo: Ilse Köhler-Rollefson



Photo: Jacob Wanyama



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Institution	Parameters	Area covered	Years covered	Accessibility
Kenya National Bureau of Statistics Population & Housing Census	Number of households	 Nationwide	2019, every year	Bureau website
Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries and Kenya National Bureau of Statistics Kenya Livestock Population Census	Number of cattle, sheep, goats, camels, donkeys, chickens	 Nationwide	2009, very irregular	Ministry website
Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Kenya Livestock Insurance Programme Index based livestock insurance	Livestock holdings and mobility	 Sampled counties	2010–18, piloted by International Livestock Research Institute	ILRI and ministry websites Grey data from ministry library
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations IGAD LPI Working Paper No. 03-11.	Number of cattle, sheep, goats, camels, donkeys, chickens Economic contribution of livestock	 Nationwide	2015, yearly 2011, one-off	FAO website IGAD website
Researchers Nyariki and Amwata	Value of pastoralism in Kenya using total economic value approach	 Pastoral regions	2019, one-off	Online, Springer Open Access
Krätli and Swift	Counting pastoralists in Kenya	 Mandera, Marsabit, Turkana and Wajir	2014, one-off	Online, Researchgate
NGOs Household Economic Assessment	Pastoralists' household incomes	 Project areas	Project-dependent	Grey literature from NGOs
National Drought Management Authority Hunger Safety Net Programme	Livestock holding and mobility	 Turkana, Wajir, Mandera and Marsabit.	2013–19 after droughts	NDMA website
Early warning household surveys	Sources of income and mobility	 All arid and semi-arid counties	>13 years, historical depth, monthly	NDMA website



National level



Sub-national level



Individual study



Photo: Paul Mundy

How to improve the data situation?

It is difficult to assess the economic importance of pastoralism from national economic data. A significant amount of data on pastoralists is collected on a project basis and for specific locations. To improve the data situation, official bodies mandated with data collection and analysis should segregate data between pastoralists, agropastoralists and farmers at the national level. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics should take the lead, working with:

- Ministries, such as the Ministries of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Finance and Planning, and Environment and Forestry
- Institutions such as the National Drought Management Authority
- County governments of pastoral counties
- Research institutions such as the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation
- NGOs working in pastoral areas.

Vision for the future

Pastoralism is a resilient and highly adaptive form of land use in large areas of Kenya. This has become clear during the Covid-19 pandemic, when pastoralists have been relatively little affected and have found ways of dealing with the situation.

To take advantage of this resilience, pastoralists need to gain official recognition for their contribution to Kenya's economy and ecology. Budgets

must be shared equitably, based on a realistic accounting for pastoralists' numbers and economic contributions. More investment in transport and infrastructure and enhanced access to markets will enable them to earn a decent living.

Pastoralists manage most of Kenya's land, but the spread of farming, ranching and wildlife conservancies leads to tensions. Ensuring access to their

traditional grazing areas will maintain pastoralists' ability to respond to droughts and climate change. In Kenya, 93% of news articles on pastoralists are about drought and conflict, and 51% of these present pastoralists as the cause of the conflict

rather than its victims (Shanahan 2013). Pastoralism should be seen not as part of the problem but as part of the solution in Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands.

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Published 2020 by the League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development (LPP), www.pastoralpeoples.org

Financial support Misereor

Citation Wanyama, J.B. 2020. *Accounting for pastoralists in Kenya*. League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development, Ober-Ramstadt, Germany.

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