

Accounting for pastoralists in Uganda



Photo: Jacob Wanyama Barasa

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ESTIMATES OF THE numbers of pastoralists in Uganda vary widely – from 1 to 10 million. The actual number is probably around 5 million, or 1.1 million households, out of an estimated total population of 40.3 million in 2019.

According to the 2014 census, the “cattle corridor”, a swathe of rangeland that covers 42% of Uganda’s land area, has 6 million inhabitants, many of them pastoralists and agropastoralists. This corridor cuts diagonally across the country from Mbarara in the southwest to Kaabong in the northeast. Pastoralists and agropastoralists in the corridor manage about 44% of the country’s cattle, 34% of the goats, 60% of the sheep, 92% of the donkeys, and 98% of the camels. The agropastoralists are largely sedentary, combining livestock and crop production. The transhumant pastoralists maintain a home base and satellite herds.

Many people identify themselves as pastoralists because of their background or ethnicity, but they now are engaged in other activities, such as growing crops or work in urban areas. Many maintain links with their families’ herds: they may do herding on a seasonal basis, or own animals that are kept in their home areas.

There are at least six major pastoralist groups: the Bahima/Abanyankole in Kiruhura, Mbarara and Ntungamo districts in the Western region; the Karamojong in Moroto, Kaabong, Nakapiriprit and Kotido districts in the Northern region, and the Basongora, Itesot, Baruli and Banyarwanda in the centre of the country.

Key messages

- Pastoralists in Uganda range from largely sedentary agropastoralists to transhumant herders who maintain a home base and satellite herds.
- No official definition for pastoralists exists. Official surveys do not use “pastoralism” as a category. This makes it difficult to estimate the significance of pastoralism.
- Five million pastoralists in the “cattle corridor” manage 44% of Uganda’s cattle, 34% of the goats, 60% of the sheep, 92% of the donkeys, and 98% of the camels. They produce milk, meat, honey, beeswax and skins.
- Annual direct benefits from livestock are worth US\$ 299 million. About half comes from milk, 25% from sales of animals and meat, and 25% from use of livestock as insurance and credit.
- Pastoralist areas in the south and north have great potential for tourism. Ankole cattle are a national symbol and tourist attraction.
- National data collection should categorize production systems as pastoralism, agropastoralism and farming based on clear definitions.



Uganda's cattle corridor occupies the largely tsetse-free central band of the country.

MacGregor and Hesse (2013) estimate that pastoralists contribute 19% of the country's agricultural GDP, make up 90% of the country's livestock owners, keep 95% of the indigenous cattle, and produce 85% of the milk. The products from pastoralism and agropastoralism include milk, beef, chevron, mutton, camel meat, honey and beeswax, and donkey skins and meat.

Pastoralists in Uganda have created unique livestock breeds, including the famous Ankole cattle with their huge horns (traditionally kept by the Bahima/Banyankole but now managed by many

other groups) and the Zebu (kept by the Karamojong). These breeds are highly resilient and optimally adapted to local conditions. Unfortunately, a great deal of cross-breeding occurs, especially of Ankole cattle, with the less-adapted exotic Frisian milk breed. This threatens the purity of the indigenous breeds.

Although no accurate figures exist, the pastoralist areas, especially the Banyankole and Karamoja regions, have great potential for tourism growth. The Ankole cattle are recognized as an important national symbol and tourist attraction.

Socioeconomic and ecological contributions

Pastoral products contribute greatly to Uganda's economy. Livestock are estimated to contribute US\$ 299 million to the economy each year (Behnke et al. 2012). This consists of \$146 million from milk production, \$70 million from live animals and meat, \$0.1 million from blood (used in Karamoja as food), and \$75 million in the form of

financial services (animals are used in lieu of money as a form of credit and insurance).

The limited availability of data makes it difficult to quantify the contribution of pastoralism and agropastoralism to ecosystem services and wildlife conservation (IUCN 2011). However, pastoralism

is said to contribute immensely to biodiversity through the practice of selective grazing, the spread of seeds consumed and excreted by animals, burning of brush (which stimulates new growth), and manure deposits (Byakagaba et al. 2018).

Government conservation strategies, which focus on forests and wildlife, threaten the survival of pastoralism. The National Land Policy of 2013 aimed to promote the efficient utilization of pastoral rangelands by zoning off agroecological zones suitable for pastoralism so as to maintain a balance between the use of land for pasture and crop growing. However, a lack of effective implementation has led to intensive crop and livestock development at the expense of pastoralism.

Definition

There is no official definition for pastoralists in Uganda. However, many authors quote general global definitions which recognize pastoralists as people for whom livestock contributes significantly to their livelihoods and incomes. Pastoralism in Uganda is often described as mainly an extensive livestock production system, with or without mobility. Pastoralists are identified as almost exclusively cattle herders who occupy the cattle corridor. Pastoralism is said to encompass both transhumant pastoralists, who depend solely on livestock, and agropastoralists, who often practise cropping as an alternative livelihood. The latter is increasingly common due to the frequent droughts that decimate livestock.

Data sources

In addition to not having an official definition for pastoralists, official surveys do not use “pastoralism” as category. The Uganda Population and Housing Census and the Uganda National Livestock census – two official sets of data gathered by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries – do not desegregate the numbers of pastoralists from the general population; nor do they treat pastoralism as a distinct production system. Furthermore, livestock censuses are very irregular, with the latest conducted in 2008. Livestock numbers in the Karamoja region fluctuate widely due to frequent droughts and raiding.



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Table 1. Sources of data on pastoralism in Uganda

Institution	Parameters	Area covered	Years covered	Accessibility
Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS)				
National population and housing census	Number of households and distribution	 Nationwide	2014, every 10 years. Fairly regular	UBOS
Integrated household surveys or national household surveys	Key outcome indicators for National Development Programme, including land use, livestock rearing and farming	 Sample districts	2014, twice yearly. Fairly regular since 2013	UBOS
UBOS and Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF)				
Livestock census 2008	Number of cattle, sheep, goats, camels, donkeys. Livestock ownership & land used for livestock	 Nationwide	2008, every 10 years. Very irregular: latest in 2008	UBOS and MAAIF
Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and UBOS				
IGAD LPI Working Paper No. 02-12 (Behnke and Nakirya 2012)	Economic contribution of livestock	 Nationwide	2012, one-off. IGAD Kenya Bureau of Statistics Initiative	IGAD website
NGOs and development projects	Various	 Project locations	Various	Various

 National level  Sub-national level  Individual study

The housing census does not provide data on the household incomes of pastoralists from livestock. However, it does distinguish between intensive, semi-intensive and extensive livestock production systems, between livestock keepers and farmers, as well as between ranchlands and cropping areas.

It also lists the distribution of livestock and human populations by district. Since the number of cattle in the corridor districts and their respective populations are known, it is possible to approximate the numbers of pastoralists and agropastoralists and their livestock.

How to improve the data situation?

A lot of data on pastoralists in Uganda is collected by both government institutions and NGOs. However, the lack of an official definition of pastoralists and of a categorization of pastoralism in official data makes it difficult to assess the economic importance of pastoralism to the national economy.

NGOs often collect detailed data which categorizes pastoralists. However, this is time-bound, localized and project-specific.

To improve the situation, official bodies mandated with national data collection, analysis and dissemination should:



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- Agree on a definition of pastoralism
 - Adopt a production-based or total economic valuation approach in their estimates
 - Regularize population censuses.
- The Uganda Bureau of Statistics should take the lead, working with the:
- Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Industry and Fisheries
 - Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
 - National Agricultural Research Organisation
 - National Agricultural Advisory Services
 - Dairy Development Authority
 - Relevant NGOs and local pastoralist networks.

Vision for the future

Resource-based interethnic conflicts, especially among Karamojong sub-clans and with cross-border communities in Kenya and Southern Sudan have painted a bad picture of pastoralism, earning them the name *balaalo* (a Luganda word used to describe “cowherds”, now used in a derogatory way) and giving the government a justification to force them to settle in one place through programmes that aim to abolish nomadic pastoralism and promote agriculture (Wambede and Woniala 2019). In southern Uganda, ranching as a communal land use in the Bahima pastoralist community is being promoted.

Such government pressure to eliminate pastoralism is misguided. Pastoralism is not only economically important; it is also resilient in the face of

threats such as drought and the current Covid-19 pandemic – providing pastoralists are able to retain sufficient mobility to maintain their herds.

To change the negative narrative towards pastoralism, data collection methods that capture the real picture of pastoralists’ contributions should be established. This would reveal the benefits of the pastoralist production system.

Investment is needed to encourage local production and markets. The Ugandan government and development organizations should radically enhance their support to the local production, processing and marketing of pastoralists’ and smallholders’ products.

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