Climate Change Policy Narratives and Pastoralist Predicaments in the Horn of Africa: Insights from Ethiopia and Kenya

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Abstract
Drawing on the findings of a two-country case study this paper examines the discourses and narratives found in contemporary climate change and national development policy in Ethiopia and Kenya, the actors and networks shaping those policy narratives, and in turn, their consequences for pastoralism. The research reveals that while concerns around climate change and calls for strengthening resilience of dryland communities have given a new impetus to pastoral development, old arguments and assumptions that depict pastoral areas, and pastoralists, as unproductive and in need of modernisation remain deeply embedded in policy making. These open up spaces for the state, investors, and local elites to extend control over natural resources previously managed under customary institutions. The resultant climate policy solutions and dryland investments are, in turn, leading to new patterns of social differentiation and vulnerability among pastoralists. Clearer overarching national land-use policies that integrate principles of 'pastoral governance', and that put measures in place to prevent the further loss of key pastoral resources would make a difference in terms of enhancing pastoralists' rights and livelihoods.

Introduction
While there is a growing body of knowledge on the effects of climatic and other forms of change on pastoralism in Africa, less is known about how recent policy responses and development interventions in the name of climate change, or drylands development, in the HoA, are shaped by certain discourses and narratives, and what the outcomes of the prescriptions and decisions that flow from policy narratives are for pastoralist communities. Studies to date have focused on, for example: the persistence of drylands narratives in Kenya (Odhiambo, 2014); the influence of global climate change narratives on agricultural policy including pastoralism in Kenya and Ethiopia (Maina et al., 2013; Yirgu et al., 2013); localised climate adaptation interventions in pastoral areas in Ethiopia (Erickson and Marin, 2015); or on green economy discourses and the role of the state in Ethiopia and Kenya (Jones and Carabine, 2013; Death, 2015). These (and several earlier) studies[1] point to the fact that, for decades, dominant dryland narratives of 'tragedy of the commons', 'desertification' and 'overgrazing' underpinned conventional pastoral-development policies and did little to strengthen pastoralist livelihoods. At worst, they led to displacement and marginalisation (Fratkin, 1997; Little et al., 2008; Catley et al., 2013; Abbink et al., 2014). In recent years, the state and their development partners have sought to respond to regional concerns about climate change, food security and political security. It has been suggested that while the language may have evolved, some of the narratives driving current climate-change and green-economy policies in Ethiopia and Kenya are not necessarily 'new', but are instead rooted in historical discourses around 'unproductive' drylands and the need for modernisation (Odhiambo, 2014; Weisser, et al., 2014; Krätli, 2019). Policies, furthermore, do not cause outcomes in a linear fashion. The kinds of changes underway in pastoral areas are driven as much by demographic growth, changes in market supply and demand, and regional security concerns, as they are by policymaking and political processes. Growing urban settlements, new roads, renewable energy projects, oil and mineral extraction – even wildlife conservancies – are increasingly linked in a modernist vision of economic and social transformation (Mosley and Watson, 2016; Regassa, et al., 2019; Lind et al., 2020). Combined, these factors have profound implications for the future of pastoralism, as large expanses of grazing land are no longer accessible, and mobility – pastoralists' key strategy for managing variability – is restricted. Yet these developments are generally perceived by policymakers as part of a wider – and necessary – dynamic of

[1] For a history of dominant dryland narratives in the HoA, see also: Swift, 1996; Fratkin, 1997; Little et al., 2008; Catley et al., 2013.

commercialisation and (green) growth, and even as a precursor to enhancing climate-resilient livelihoods "outside of pastoralism" (Krätli, 2019: 12).

Methods

This paper is drawn from the findings of a Doctoral research project, undertaken by the author between 2016 and 2020. The study employed a comparative case study approach composed of two macro-units of analysis (Ethiopia and Kenya), using content analysis (CA) and discourse analysis (DA) of relevant national climate change, agricultural and economic development policy documents (17 in the case of Ethiopia, 16 from Kenya, from the period 2007-2017), supplemented with data drawn from interviews with 68 key informants in the two countries. Care was taken to identify and select informants from a range of policy actors, sectors and perspectives.

Ethiopia and Kenya were intentionally selected as they have much in common but also have quite different political and historical contexts. Both are prominent adoptees of policies favored as part of the new international consensus around 'green development' and climate change (Death, 2015). They share similar dryland zones, with significant populations who identify themselves as pastoralists, or agro-pastoralists. Both have been considered relatively successful in economic development terms, yet are experiencing similar development and climatic challenges. In recent years, Ethiopia and Kenya, like other countries in the HoA, have both seen increased frequency and severity of drought – albeit with impacts and consequences that are site-specific, varied, and uncertain.

Results

Discourses and Narratives

The CA and DA of policy documents revealed that despite new thinking around the inherent resilience and adaptive nature of pastoralism, a 'transforming pastoralism and the drylands' discourse remains dominant in both cases, if slightly less so in Kenya. Within this discourse, often simplistic and depoliticised environmental crisis narratives of 'unproductive and conflict-ridden' drylands and 'climate-induced pastoralist vulnerability' remain to the fore. Arguably, such simplifications are convenient for policymakers in that they help generate consensus and make action possible in the face of uncertainty (Roe, 1991). They also amplify the perception that some kind of 'intervention' needs to take place, so opening up space for the state, or other actors, to gain greater control over land and other resources previously managed under customary institutions. If drylands are perceived – or deliberately framed - as somehow 'empty' or 'unproductive' then it follows that conversion to other forms of land use – irrigated cropping, resource extraction, wildlife conservation – is justifiable. In both cases, it is apparent that the desire to 'transform', 'commercialise' and 'integrate' dryland resources - including the pastoralist economy - within a broader framework of national development, is being driven by an ideology of market-based economic growth and modernisation, notwithstanding a strong mediation role for the central state. The imperative of climate change, meanwhile, has provided a new language to policymakers to reframe growth as an opportunity to build a 'green economy' and to redefine the role of the state (Death, 2016). At the same time, the analysis reveals a higher level of interdiscursivity within the Kenyan policy documents reviewed. Reflecting perhaps of the more open and participatory nature of Kenyan policymaking in general, but also of the fact that a conducive 'policy space' for pastoralists to engage in Kenyan politics opened up at a particular point in time: notably the formation of the Ministry for Development of Northern Kenya and Other Aid Lands (MDNKOAL) in 2008, the subsequent *ASAL Policy* (2012), and the process of political devolution underway since 2012.

Policy Actors and Networks

Interviews revealed that government actors in both Ethiopia and Kenya (but especially in Ethopia) were more likely to frame contemporary challenge facing pastoral areas in terms of a naturalistic understanding of vulnerability and the causes of conflict, while prescribing largely technocratic solutions – broadly matching the dominant 'transforming pastoralism' discourse found in the document analysis. Non-state actors, utilising metaphors and narratives more usually associated with 'pure pastoralist' and 'modern and mobile' (IIED and SOS Sahel, 2010) discourses (that holds that mobile pastoralism the most ecologically and economically appropriate form of land use in dryland areas, and which highlights pastoralists as innovators), pointed instead towards the appropriation of critical rangeland resources as undermining pastoralist's inherent adaptive capacity. Nonetheless, state actors in both cases have clearly adopted the language of counter

narratives – as they seek to mobilise resources around common goals of 'climate resilience', food security and economic growth. Giving credence to the assertion that narratives shift to suit the needs of actors as new opportunities and contexts arise (Whitfield, 2016). While pastoralism may no longer be considered as 'backward' or the antithesis to the modern state, and the language of 'resilience' has been adopted as a means to rationalise government mediated development interventions – the research found that 'transforming pastoralism and the drylands' remains the dominant discourse on pastoralist development amongst Ethiopian officials interviewed. There is a sense that the state in Ethiopia is using climate change to validate the continuation of past unpopular policies which may actually exacerbate vulnerability – such as sedentarisation, or the displacement of pastoralists from key resources. Nonetheless, the influence of donors, of UN agencies - and to a lesser extent, a select group of INGOs and individual drylands researchers - on shaping current narratives, and bringing elements of the 'pure pastoralism' and 'modern and mobile' discourses to debates on the future of pastoralism is significant. Donors clearly have the financial resources and close links to government departments to be able to influence some polices, especially those focused on 'resilience building' or rangeland management - INGO and CSO informants to a lesser extent. In Kenya, in contrast, considerable discursive commonality was identified within the responses of Kenyan informants. While there was consensus that climate change is just one of a number of stressors currently driving pastoralist vulnerability, there was some difference in where causality for these challenges was placed, and the extent to which pastoralists are either taking advantage of, or being pushed aside by, the changes underway. Here too, government officials have clearly absorbed the kind of narratives and metaphors associated with a 'modern and mobile' discourse, while also retaining certain perspectives in line with the 'transforming' discourse that was to the fore in most policies analysed. Ultimately, the Kenyan government is motivated by the desire to transform and integrate it's dryland resources and production within a broader vision of national economic development set out in *Vision 2030*. While the state is the dominant actor driving national policy narratives it is not the only influential actor. INGOs, researchers, UN agencies, and even certain CSOs, form part of a 'discursive coalition' (Hajer, 2005) of like-minded actors who have brought about a noticeable paradigm shift in thinking around pastoralism – a shift that is beginning to be reflected in the rhetoric, if not necessarily in all areas of policy implementation.

Policy consequences

Data from interviews broadly supported what has been argued by a number of scholars elsewhere: that the kinds of policy prescriptions and planning that flow from dominant narratives surrounding climate change, the 'green economy' and the development of pastoral areas more generally primarily serve the interests of those who have most to gain from greater commercialisation, changes in land use and the privatisation of formerly communally managed resources. In Ethiopia, this includes the state itself - in terms of higher economic growth (the benefits of which are arguably being reinvested in rural development and improved services) - but also private investors and a growing commercial and politically well-connected class within pastoralism. Technocratic solutions and control-orientated measures – programmes of sedentarisation, fixed waterpoints and conversion of dry-season pastoral reserves to crop cultivation – continue to be prioritised by the state, despite a long history of similarly ill-fated interventions. As a result, communities along the Awash River (Afar) for example, or minority indigenous agropastoralist groups, such as those in the Lower Omo Valley, face enforced villagisation and subsequently find themselves more vulnerable, or even destitute as a consequence. Similarly, narratives of 'green growth', 'food security' and 'climate resilience' are being evoked by policymakers in Kenya as a means of legitimising new infrastructure projects and private investments in ASAL counties. While infrastructure development corridors (LAPSSET), the rapid growth in towns, investments in extractives, green-energy projects (Lake Turkana Wind Power), irrigated cropping - even wildlife conservancies - bring gains for some others are 'losing out' as a consequence. As in Ethiopia an emergent local elite (including large herd owners and ex-pastoralists) has been able to use their political connections at both national and county level to capture the benefits of devolved power and resources, or have managed to profit from compensatory payments for infrastructure development and changes in land tenure. At risk of falling into destitution are those less asset-rich households and/or minority groups that face new forms of displacement in the name of green economic growth or conservation, or as political boundaries are redrawn along ethnic lines. Such groups are less equipped to deal with climatic 'shocks' when they do occur. There are some differences nonetheless. The study found that there is a stronger coherence between various climate-adaptation and drought-management strategies in Kenya. Under the 2016 *Climate Change Act,* all such policies and plans must be channelled and mainstreamed through devolved government, so (in theory) opening up more space for community engagement in decision-making. In Ethiopia different ministries are more likely to work separately on different policies, often competing for donor support. In

Kenya, while many pastoralists suffer the consequences of rangeland fragmentation and inappropriate development, they are not subject to any official sedentarisation policy (as in Ethiopia) – nor would they accept such an imposition, given their stronger political power. In Kenya, local communities have shown they have the power to resist unwelcome forms of development, in a way that has not been permitted in Ethiopia until very recently. In Kenya, the 2016 *Community Land Act* (CLA) is generally welcomed as offering a progressive means by which communal land holding can be legally recognised and pastoralist tenure protected. No such similar legislation exists in Ethiopia.

Conclusions

This paper argues that policies and interventions in the name of climate-change adaptation and pastoralist development need to be considered within the context of political interests and governance in pastoral areas. Climate-adaptation and resilience-building types of policies and programming on their own, whether well-intentioned, or, as we have heard, designed with other interests and priorities in mind, are clearly insufficient to address the multiple challenges faced by pastoralists in the HoA. 'Governance' opens up a broader political agenda that addresses the political processes and relationships through which state and non-state actors interact, allowing policymaking in the HoA to move beyond the kinds of depoliticised 'environmental-crises' narratives that are a feature of the 'transforming pastoralism' discourse described above. It is evident that clearer overarching national land-use policies that integrate principles of 'pastoral governance', and that put measures in place to prevent the loss of further key pastoral resources would make a difference in terms of enhancing pastoralists' rights and livelihoods. At the heart of such governance is the need to facilitate, rather than impede, mobility – pastoralists' primary means of managing variability. There is a need, furthermore, to safeguard strategic resources from inappropriate forms of capital accumulation – investments frequently driven by the very policies that purport to transform pastoral areas in the name of 'green growth' or 'climate resilience'. The extent to which poorer pastoralists will be able to adapt to environmental, economic and political change, and take advantage of policy initiatives and economic opportunities – in a manner that is both equitable and sustainable – depends on how willing the state is (with or without the support of development partners), at both national and local government levels, to create an enabling space for responsive and inclusive governance in pastoral rangelands.

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