

## Foreword

A better understanding of pastoralism is slowly taking hold in the international development community as the findings of research, which demonstrate the rationality and resilience of pastoralism, are mainstreamed in the work of NGOs, international donors and national governments. Such an understanding comes none too soon in the struggle to help pastoralists build sustainable livelihoods for themselves in the face of poverty and vulnerability. But the work of understanding must go on, and it must also avoid creating new orthodoxies in the place of old ones.

Eritrea, still only fifteen years from independence, is a country where relatively little information about pastoralism exists, and where that information is in scattered form, and largely contained in project reports written for particular projects with differing aims and intended beneficiaries. It is to the credit of the authors of this review that they have so carefully identified, studied, critiqued and synthesized this scattered literature. What the literature points to, when it has been so carefully analysed, is the fluidity of boundaries between "pastoralist", "agro-pastoralist" and "agricultural" communities, with people shifting between these livelihood strategies and maintaining many important contacts and interdependencies with those in other communities.

As the authors say, there has been a perception in some quarters that the Eritrean government is unsympathetic to pastoralism. In reality, it seems the issue is neither a refusal nor an inability of government to recognize pastoralism as a valid way of life: but rather a difficulty of finding the best levers of pro-pastoral development. External actors, and pastoralists themselves, need to identify partners in government at various levels with whom they can reinforce the message that support to pastoralists' natural resource management, through safeguarding their access to land, is the most important of those levers of change.

The authors rightly call for more research on how and why pastoralism in Eritrea is changing. This includes the question of how pastoralists and farmers compete (in some circumstances) how co-exist (in others), and on the phenomenon of settled farmers adopting pastoral migration in times of crisis. The authors also call for research on the contribution of pastoralism to the national economy, and how an even greater contribution can be realised through concrete action on the ground.

The authors also recommend practical surveys in the area they describe, the Gash-Barka Region, to map migration routes, key feed and water resources, and opportunities for production of cultivated fodder. Such surveys should be action-oriented to allow *now* the safeguarding of important grazing areas along the major migration routes.

I am therefore very pleased to recommend the study presented here, as a contribution both to understanding pastoralism, in all its complexity, and to identifying feasible, pro-poor, pro-pastoralist development strategies, which will also be of benefit for other communities.

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