

7th Oxford Interdisciplinary Desert Conference
University of Oxford on 20th - 21st March 2025
Roundtable on:

Pastoral Systems and Reductions in Aid: Fallout from USAID Cuts, Challenges and Prospects

The Second Presidency of the Trump Administration has sent shockwaves through the US domestic, international diplomacy and global political order. Overseas aid hasn't been immune to Trump's action, which increased the uncertainties of existing aid models of the humanitarian and development agenda. Long before the return of Trump, a critique of international development aid and the business model of humanitarian aid has been in process. Trump's return to office and the abrupt dismantling of USAID offices and halting of existing programmes has shocked the world. USAID, with an annual budget of \$40 billion, has been supporting millions of communities across the globe. He has recalled agency workers and forced the shutdown of vital programmes without a smooth transition and exit strategy. This has had a profound effect on humanitarian and development programmes. As the key critic of US aid policy, Elon Musk, the tech billionaire, has become the reform enforcer, calling USAID "a criminal organisation" and spreading misinformation on its personnel and programmes. This has been a trend in how corporate leaders influence the aid model. Like the abolishment of DFID and making it part of the Department of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office in the UK, the US plans to make USAID part of the Department of State and recasting aid to be aligned with an "America First" foreign policy. One should question whether this will be a trend for the overall future of aid.

Following Trump's actions, the UK labour government cut its overseas aid budget from 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) to 0.3% from 2027 to fund defence spending. A trade-off called by many a "dereliction of duty" and regression of commitments under its '*Global Britain*' agenda.

Cuts in aid from the EU and other donors have also been going on over the last two years, exacerbated by the situation in Syria, Ukraine and Gaza. The big blows from the US and UK governments have left the international aid model in a chaotic situation, leaving millions unsupported without alternatives. For pastoral and agro-pastoral communities, being the most affected by climate change and relying on aid for their livelihoods, this will have devastating consequences. These cuts also have implications for aid programmes targeting government reform and capacity building for developing specific Pastoralist policies emphasising long-term resilient livelihoods and implementation of the SDGs.

The Roundtable explores and reviews existing models and possible implications of the cuts for the pastoral systems in sub-Saharan African and Asian countries. Discussants from PENHA and other experts will share information and analysis on questions, including:

- Overseas aid and pastoral systems: History, status and existing challenges.
- Reflections on Aid dependency. Does overseas aid for pastoral systems need restructuring or reform? In What ways?
- Why are the US, UK, and EU - showing a paradigm shift and retreat from their global development commitments?

- Current trends in overseas aid for pastoral systems: Is overseas aid the best model? Are there any alternative models for a rigorous reform agenda?

Chair:

Bereket Tsegay (PhD) is a Senior Researcher and Policy Analyst at PENHA, a Research Associate at SOAS, University of London, and a Non-Resident Fellow at the African Studies Centre in Leiden, Netherlands. He obtained his PhD in Development Studies from SOAS. His research interests encompass conflict analysis, climate change, migration, policy, and governance analysis.

Discussants

Angela Raven-Roberts is an independent consultant and researcher, PENHA Senior Advisor and formerly an affiliate at the Department of Education, University of Oxford, UK. She works on capacity development, specialising in gender, youth and livelihoods in emergencies; post-crisis recovery; pastoral livelihoods in change; and the role of national civil services in disaster preparedness and is reviewing current educational policies for pastoral communities in the Horn of Africa. Angela was formerly the regional chief of emergencies at UNICEF Geneva and has more than 30 years' experience in humanitarian and development work at the UN with NGOs and in academia.

Moffatt K. Ngugi (PhD) is a geospatial ecologist specializing in rangeland management, land resources, and agroecology. He studied at the University of Nairobi, Ghent University, and Colorado State University, and has worked globally, collaborating with stakeholders to tackle climate change and promote sustainable development.

Ruta Nimkar (DPhil Researcher and Director of Meraki Labs) is an experienced humanitarian and migration professional. She has held regional and country senior management positions and has consulted for donors, UN agencies and NGOs. Ruta was the Country Director for the Danish Refugee Council in Iran. In addition to her DPhil in Migration Studies at the University of Oxford, she is the Director of Meraki Labs, a consulting company aiming to ensure that refugees co-author all work and migrants and people from conflict-affected communities. Ruta has researched mixed migration routes and smuggling networks in Central Asia, the Horn of Africa and West Africa. Ruta's thesis focuses on smuggling ecosystems and how they engage with national and international political dynamics.

Sergio Magnani (PhD in Social Anthropology from EHESS) is post-doctoral researcher at the French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment, researcher associate at the French Research Institute of Development. Over the last fifteen years his work has been focusing on dynamics of social change in rural and pastoral societies in West Africa and more recently in the Mediterranean, with regard to frictions with policy and development frameworks and their effects on local socio-environmental relations and socio-political systems.

Terrence Hay-Edie (PhD) is a Programme Advisor (Biodiversity) for the UNDP-implemented Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (SGP), and Programme Manager for the Global ICCA Support Initiative funded by the German Federal Ministry of the Environment. Since its inception in 1992, the SGP has provided cumulative funding of over \$640 million to

civil society organizations in 128 countries worldwide to develop innovative nature-based solutions to address the inter-linked crises of biodiversity loss, climate change, and land degradation. He holds a PhD (Social Anthropology) from the University of Cambridge.

Prepared by:

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