

Preface

The future of pastoralism

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) was founded to ensure transparent sharing of animal health information and develop standards for safe trade in animals and animal products, leading to a more coordinated approach to the control and elimination of transboundary animal diseases worldwide. Why would the OIE be interested in pastoralism and devote an issue of the *Scientific and Technical Review* to an ancient method of rearing livestock? Would this topic not be more appropriately addressed by ecologists and cultural scientists?

To meet the increasing demands of rapidly growing urban centres in the 20th Century, pastoral livestock holdings were, in part, replaced by modern intensive livestock production systems. However, pastoralism remains relevant because humans in semi-arid drylands, highland steppes and mountain areas could barely make a living without livestock. Plants which grow in these areas are only suitable as food for livestock because they contain cellulose, which cannot be utilised by humans. Without the milk provided by their animals, humans could not survive. Livestock, particularly cattle, yak, camels, horses, sheep and goats, are a significant asset because they extend the geographical area where people can sustainably live to include vast grasslands.

Pastoralist cultures highly value their livestock, and although they regularly consume the milk of their animals, meat is only eaten on special occasions. This high regard for livestock has been a feature of numerous different cultures for thousands of years. For example, ancient Egyptians considered themselves and their cattle to be 'one flock of God'. Today, Fulani poetry in West Africa venerates cattle, while highly productive female camels in southern Ethiopia are buried when they die. Extensive pastoral livestock farming is seen as an acceptable way for humans to use livestock in these cultures.

Pastoralists traditionally move their animals to new grazing areas whenever climate and environmental conditions change, and they have been accused by some academics of having an outdated attitude to their environment. Their lifestyle is often associated with desertification, land degradation and overuse of pastoral resources. Ruminant livestock, in particular, are stigmatised for contributing to the increase in greenhouse gases, and the carbon sequestration potential of pastoral areas is questioned by some. Pastoralists live on the fringes of society, where they are poorly served by public services. Lack of political representation and limited livelihood options have contributed in recent decades to civil unrest in some pastoral areas.

All of these related issues represent both direct and indirect threats to animal and human health. For these reasons, pastoralism is very relevant to the OIE, and the Organisation is working to facilitate sustainable pastoral production systems and pursue solutions for the social and ecological threats they face. This may involve a degree of transformation in pastoralist societies, for instance, families settling in villages with only the young men driving the cattle in search of pasture. In many regions, there are few alternatives to mobile livestock production, and the OIE and its partners are currently establishing dedicated assistance programmes, particularly in West Africa, to support the pastoralist sector.

The team of editors, Jakob Zinsstag, Esther Schelling and Bassirou Bonfoh, with support from Lisa Crump and Annie Souyri, have brought together more than seventy experts across all related fields to consider the history of pastoralism, uncover the complexity of pastoral systems and examine the very latest developments in policy and practice. This issue of the *OIE Review* is intended to spark debate and drive evidence-based planning for the future of pastoral systems, as these systems make a vital contribution to fulfilling the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This publication provides expert insight into this important topic, and I am sincerely grateful to the editors and all the authors for their invaluable contributions.

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