

FSN FORUM DISCUSSION No. 37
**FOOD SECURITY IN ARID AND SEMI-ARID LAND: THE CHALLENGES OF
SUSTAINABLE USE OF SCARCE RESOURCES**
FROM 15 JUNE TO 10 JULY 2009

Dear colleagues,

I am a livestock development and policy consultant (freelance) with about thirty years of experience working to achieve improvements within the Kenyan livestock sector (Diary bias). Of major interest is the contribution of livestock to sustainable improved livelihood of the rural communities in Kenya.

Having lived in marginal areas and participated in forums and assignments discussing the many challenges facing communities living in marginal (arid and semi arid) lands (pastoralists/nomads) I have noted with concern the deteriorating of living conditions and situation of the of communities living in the vast arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) of Kenya although over 70% of livestock (ruminants) and 100% of camels populations are found in this area. Some of the contributing factors to the deterioration of these areas overtime are: the changing, unreliable and unpredictable weather patterns, uncontrolled increasing human population and encroachment of intensive agriculture and demarcations of the better and productive areas into individual/group ranches thus interfering with migratory patterns of the pastoralists/nomads. As a result of worsening situation, there have emerged lobby groups and NGOs, some of which make matters worse (lack of professionalism, creation of dependence syndrome and serving self interest) and seem to only address short term and emotional issues while the more serious problems which require long term solutions are left unattended. The Government approach to these issues is no better.

Food security and nutritional status for communities (livestock producers and pastoralists/nomads) in these areas, where poverty levels and conflicts are also very high, is and will remain a great challenge to decision/policy makers and advisors (consultants). The best solution would be one based on mobilization of resources found in these areas.

The question then is **how to use the resources in the vast ASALs of Kenya to boost food production in these areas in a sustainable way**, given the current situation, to at least address the food security and nutrition of communities in these areas. A number of options have been tried in the past: irrigation schemes where there is water (but note this is usually done by outsiders since this is a new idea to nomadic/pastoralist); establishment of grazing blocks for different seasons and development of infrastructures (management of this is complex and requires high commitment from government and the local involved communities sometimes warring); capacity building/training and empowering of local communities to make the best out the difficulty situation, among other efforts. Please share with us any success story along the same lines, your insights on the issue and any good practice known to you.

It is my hope that your responses to this question will not only help me to contribute in an informed manner to future forums but will also find audience to those groups working in the ASALs some members I believe participate in the FSN Forum.

Let me sincerely thank in advance for finding time to read and contribute to above question.

I trust that some of your responses will go a long way in helping Kenya solve the chronic food shortages in the ASALs.

Best regards,

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