

# Key Challenges to Pastoralists

*All over the world, pastoralists form some of the most vulnerable people groups, facing significant challenges due to global warming, HIV/AIDS, discrimination, and other global issues!*

Pastoralists – those people who live in arid environments and depend on livestock keeping for their existence - are facing many challenges that contribute to their struggle for survival. The schematic below illustrates some of the serious issues that Sauti Moja confronts in its work with the Maasai of Tanzania, and the Borana, Gabra, Samburu, and Rendille communities in Northern Kenya. It represents some of the complicated layers that add up to make pastoralists, especially the women, vulnerable. The very survival of these communities teeters on an unstable collection of the following issues.

- 1. Social-Political Discrimination.** Often, pastoralists, like the ones we work with, are indigenous peoples. Like similar groups around the world, they have a long history of discrimination from the government and dominant groups in their respective countries. They maintain language, cultures and ways of living that are quite different from the global norm and different from those living around them. Low population density and nomadic lifestyle combined with a perception of lower contribution to the economy has led to fewer government services, such as health and education. As a result, they generally have poor political representation, and are often treated poorly and accused of being “backward” and “not wanting development”. Nothing is further from the truth, yet government officials continue to apply discriminatory policies based on such misperceptions.
- 2. Land Grabbing.** One of the most significant challenges facing pastoralists these days relates to pressures on land, and the shrinking land resources they have to rely on. Their ancestral lands are being misappropriated more and more due to international business interests. Whether due to oil extraction, mineral mining, forest harvesting, large scale agriculture, tourism, or wildlife conservation, pastoralists are facing crises due to shrinking access to grazing and water resources. Latest trends have been referred to as “land grabbing”, and some argue that its escalation represents a “new scramble for Africa”, not unlike the historical, exploitive trends of colonialism.
- 3. Global Warming & Civil Conflict.** Everyone has heard about Global Warming. What many don’t realize or see is the incredible affect this is having on communities around the World. The pastoralists we work with are on the front line. Their communities are accustomed to dry seasons; their entire lives revolve around travelling with their livestock far distances to find grazing lands. However, droughts are increasing in seriousness and frequency. This is causing a great loss in the livestock they depend on, which is increasing poverty and hunger. As people are getting more desperate, there is more conflict between groups over resources, especially access to water.
- 4. HIV/AIDS Epidemic.** The HIV/AIDS epidemic is like a fire on dry grass. While it hasn’t impacted many pastoralist communities yet - often due to geographic isolation, it threatens to do so terribly. For a host of reasons, especially relating to poor government services (e.g. education and health), the HIV/AIDS epidemic threatens to devastate the communities we work with. It has already started to do so in some of the communities where there is greater interaction with other communities. We are confronted with more and more stories of death, illness, and orphans left with neither family support nor hope for a future. Who will care for the livestock and the children, if so many are lost due to this disease?.



5. **Gender Inequality.** In all of Sauti Moja's work, we focus on the most vulnerable, which often includes women and girls. While not inherent to pastoralist cultures, the changes that these communities have undergone in the past century (e.g. missionization, colonialism, market integration, etc) have tended to empower men while subordinate the significant political, social, and economic roles women have always played in the community. As a result of these recent changes, we often witness women and girls facing less opportunity, sometimes mistreatment, and greater poverty. It's another sad legacy of colonialism and all the other global disruptions that the communities have had to confront.

All in all, this means that the pastoralist people that we work with, especially the women and girls, are often in dire-straits. Given the discrimination they face, and in absence of sufficient government services, your financial assistance can provide a much needed stimulus for overcoming the hurdles they face.