

Horn of Africa Pastoralist Gathering

Over 300 pastoralists, representing 60 different ethnic groups and 18 countries converged for a historic meeting in southern Ethiopia from 11th to 18th July this year. The gathering was organised by the Pastoralist Communications Initiative of UNOCHA, and hosted by the Borana in their rangelands, in a camp prepared for the occasion under the acacia trees. The occasion was an opportunity for pastoralists from the Horn of Africa to sit down together to discuss their most pressing issues. They also invited pastoralists from West Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America to enrich the discussions, which lasted one week. On the last two days senior representatives from all the governments of the Horn of Africa and from international agencies were invited to hear the outcomes of their deliberations. The gathering was also a chance to share culture, entertainment and make friends, at one of the many musical events, or around the fires in the evenings.

The need for secure access land was expressed by pastoralists in Borana as a cross-cutting issue that underpins all other aspects of gaining a secure livelihood, including trade, governance, social organisation, drought resilience and conflict reduction. For some, securing land is an immediate livelihood issue. ILC met representatives of a pastoralist group of about 8,000 people that is facing expulsion from their rangelands as it is converted into a national park in southern Ethiopia – an area where there are very few alternative income sources than livestock. Another small pastoralist group from Central Ethiopia explained to ILC that most of their rangelands have been earmarked for a large sugar cane plantation. Added to the challenges of dealing with regular droughts, such loss of rangelands will make it impossible for many families to continue relying on livestock for their subsistence.

Although not all pastoralists at the gathering spoke of such immediate threats to their lands, all share the concern that their rangelands are slowly diminishing in size as other land users encroach on their land. ILC members and partners have been expressing increasing interest in the challenges of securing adequate land tenure for pastoralists. The success of pastoralism as a livelihood strategy is based on the ability to move in response to rainfall events in semi-arid environments. Yet, in almost every country in which pastoralists live, the legal system does not adequately protect the land rights of mobile peoples. As a result, pastoralists are one of the categories of land users most vulnerable to dispossession.

ILC is currently finalising a discussion paper, developed through an electronic discussion forum, on the land rights for pastoralists. This paper will provide a basis for ILC to better support initiatives by pastoralists to protect their land rights. ILC is also strengthening links with the World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism (WISP), a programme by IUCN and the Global Environment Facility to build an enabling environment for sustainable pastoral rangeland management. Through partnerships such as this one, ILC is likely to become more involved in supporting the efforts of pastoralists to [protect their land rights.

For further information, please contact Michael Taylor (m.taylor@ifad.org) in the ILC Secretariat. More information on WISP can be found at <http://www.iucn.org/wisp>

