



## Pro-Poor Livestock Policy in the small desert entrepôt of Djibouti

Livestock production in Djibouti, a small, young country on the Horn of Africa, has a curious character: it accounts for only 3-5% of GNP and 10% of food requirements, yet is the main or sole method of livelihood for one-half to one-third of the country's population and 90% of the rural populace. The vast majority of Djiboutian livestock producers are extremely poor nomads, engaging in traditional, non-commercial subsistence pastoralism. In general, it does not appear that the government gives priority to the livestock sector or the ministry responsible for it, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and the Sea.

### ● Political economic environment

The political economy of Djibouti is that of a classic neo-patrimonial rentier state. Rents come from two large foreign military bases, the deep-sea transshipment Port of Djibouti, and a remarkable amount of US foreign aid. Despite this income, Djibouti is one of the poorest countries on earth, with 75% national and 96.7% rural poverty levels. Government revenue largely benefits the elite at the expense of the poor, as the rentier nature of the economy permits it to neglect governance issues.

Politics in Djibouti is highly centralized in the capital and personalized around the executive. Djibouti is an electoral democracy, though the ruling party has won every seat in every election since independence. This control has exacerbated tensions in the country, as politics is sharply divided along the country's two ethnic groups, *Issa* and *Afar*, and the majority *Issa* have held power, as well as most government and

military positions, throughout the country's history. While the executive has tried to manage minority *Afar* discontent by distributing some appointments, goods and services, ethnic tensions erupted into civil conflict for much of the 1990s. The final peace accord, in 2001, brought promises of decentralization and electoral reform, but these have yet to be truly enacted.

Under these conditions, policy and institutional changes aimed to improve the lives of the livestock-dependent poor are difficult. Livestock producers face additional constraints as well, including:

- Extremely harsh, arid climatic conditions, with severe persistent drought causing loss of fodder and livestock, which in turn has led to the breakdown of traditional land and environmental management strategies and rapid urban migration;
- Very low marketing infrastructure levels for livestock and related products;
- Exceedingly low human and organizational capacity, with only 27% adult literacy and a dearth of resources and training opportunities;
- Poor access to markets and credit;
- Lack of alternative livelihood opportunities / exit strategies from an unproductive livestock sector;
- Insufficient access to animal health care and pharmaceuticals;
- Inadequate sanitation and hygiene regulations and protocols in the sector;
- Lack of donor coordination on livestock development efforts.



- **Bringing livestock issues to the fore**

Two recent developments, however, have changed the marginal status of livestock issues. First, severe repeated droughts have resulted in rapid urbanization rates that have overwhelmed the government's urban service capabilities. As a result, the Government of the Republic of Djibouti (GORD) has found new interest in rural development. Second, Djibouti has been given an opportunity to quarantine Horn of Africa livestock for export to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has banned East African livestock for nearly a decade.

Because of these changes, a number of politically feasible strategic entry points now exist on which to engage policy or institutional change that will help the livestock dependent poor.

- **Capacity building in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and the Sea (MAEM)**

Since the GORD is currently focused both on rural development to slow urbanization and on developing a competent authority for livestock export certifications, supporting MAEM should be well received. Increasing management, planning and technical skills, as well as the number of qualified staff will provide MAEM with the ability to write feasible multi-year policies, reduce the need to work in "crisis" mode, supply human resources for data collection and analysis, and allow MAEM to develop its animal health services, including its nascent Community Animal Health Worker (CAHW) program. A complete capacity assessment of MAEM should be initiated as the first step.

- **Rural development**

Because of the prolonged drought, it will be important for the GORD to introduce a new pastoral law for the management and preservation of pasturelands. Researching and implementing ways to deal with the

prosopis plant explosion and to help the GORD provide training, extension services and water retention facilities for gardeners are also feasible.

- **Animal health**

Deregulating or simplify licensing processes for veterinary pharmacies so that drugs could be made available outside the capital would greatly assist the livestock-dependent poor, as would allowing the importation of animal-specific medicines from non-European sources. Follow-up for the nascent CAHWs program, including an assessment of its impact to date and both continued training for the CAHWs and sensitization campaigns generally would also be beneficial.

- **Trade and export development**

Working with MAEM and the Ministry of Commerce to update hygiene regulations for livestock trade and export, including for the quarantine, abattoir, and livestock market will be crucial for Djibouti to maintain access to export markets. Regionally, FAO will look to the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development's Livestock Policy Initiative (IGAD LPI) to take a role in coordinating overlapping livestock-related donor projects, as well as providing a regular forum for the facilitation of accords and harmonization of disease control regulations and protocols between IGAD member states and target importers.

**Policy Brief based on:**

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