Unlocking Africa's pastoral potential: A call for inclusive market development





Pastoralism contributes 60-80 percent of the continent's meat and up to 50 percent of meat exports, while supporting national economies with 2-7 percent of GDP. Beyond numbers, they provide crucial ecosystem services, sequestering carbon, managing water resources, and sustaining life in marginal lands. Yet, despite their immense value, pastoralists remain on the periphery of Africa's economic and development agenda.

If Africa is serious about achieving inclusive agricultural transformation, it must place pastoralists at the centre of policy, investment, and market development efforts. This is precisely the vision of the African Pastoral Market Development (APMD) Platform, which aims to integrate pastoral economies fully into livestock value chains by 2030.

By doing so, Africa can unlock both economic growth and climate-resilient food systems.

The challenges facing pastoralists are profound and escalating. Climate change is intensifying droughts, reducing rangeland productivity, and threatening feed security. Livestock feed in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) often relies on seasonal rainfall and low-quality crop residues, while commercial alternatives remain expensive and inaccessible. Without urgent interventions, livestock productivity will continue to decline, undermining both livelihoods and food security. Moreover, land governance and rangeland management are pressing concerns.

Half of Africa is classified as rangelands, yet much of it suffers from degradation and overstocking. Weak policy frameworks and poor land-use planning exacerbate vulnerability, while limiting the mobility essential for pastoral systems to thrive.

Pastoralists also face barriers in regional and international trade, including cross-border livestock mobility-triggered conflict, and trade policy inconsistency (tariff and non-tariff barriers). Despite livestock being their main source of livelihood, much of the trade remains informal, undervalued, and constrained by border restrictions and non-harmonised cross-border trade policy and standards. As a result, pastoralists cannot fully tap into larger markets or secure fair prices for their products.

Transforming the pastoral sector requires a multi-pronged, market-driven approach. The APMD Platform proposes five priority actions:

1. Strengthening private and public sector engagement into potential investments and economic models in the pastoral livestock sector.
2. Encouraging regional and international trade, including removal of trade barriers and policy harmonisation.
3. Promoting investment and trade in fodder-resource management.
4. Facilitating access to logistics and services for pastoral livestock trade.
5. Strengthening knowledge sharing and data governance in the pastoral livestock value chain.
6. Promoting comprehensive data ecosystem for livestock marketing.

African governments, development partners, and the private sector must act collectively and decisively. Investing in the pastoral sector is not a choice. It is a strategic economic must. Every dollar invested in pastoral livestock marketing chain translates into stronger food security, higher GDP, and greater regional stability.

As climate shocks intensify and demand for animal-sourced foods continues to rise, pastoralists remain central to Africa's livestock future. Their integration into formal markets will not only provide meat for the table, but also drive prosperity, stability, and climate resilience across the continent.

During the Kenya Meat Expo 2025, the Africa Pastoral Markets Development (APMD) Platform stands ready to lead and coordinate this transformation. As a gender-inclusive, continental platform, APMD brings together governments, private investors, and development actors under three strategic pillars: Data Ecosystems, Enabling Policy Environments, and Enhanced Private-Sector Integration. By convening diverse stakeholders, amplifying market-focused interventions, and providing visibility to investment opportunities, APMD will catalyse action and scale impact where it matters most.

If Africa is to seize the full potential of its pastoral economies, now is the time to act, and APMD is the vehicle to drive this collective journey toward a resilient, market-driven pastoral future.

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