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Charting new futures in Africa's drylands - SPARC documentary

SPARC's new documentary shines a spotlight on one of the most critical, but marginalised livelihoods in Africa – and paints a rarely seen picture of the dynamism of people living in the drylands.

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Pastoralists hold the keys to a sustainable future for Africa's drylands. But that future depends on how governments, businesses, and others engage with pastoralism.

This documentary follows five stories of pastoralists driving positive change in Africa's drylands – from Kenya, Nigeria and South Sudan – and sets out how outsiders can support and strengthen what is already happening. It paints a picture of the drylands people may not be used to seeing: one of innovation, resilience and (largely unrecognised) potential.

Released before the start of the UN's International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026, this documentary sheds light on one of the most critical, but marginalised livelihoods in Africa – and paints a rarely seen picture of the dynamism of people living in the drylands.

Photo gallery - explore the stories and resources behind the documentary

Facing floods in Bor, South Sudan

In Bor, South Sudan, annual floods are becoming more severe and widespread – making it harder for Dinka pastoralists to graze their cattle. But pastoralists are used to dealing with change. During the rainy season more Dinka are switching from livestock to fishing - and making an opportunity from the floods. This change is particularly benefitting women, who use their traditional methods of drying and salting fish to prepare stocks for market. It is a very clear example of pastoralists' adaptability and innovation in the face of shocks.

Below: Women fishmongers at a fish market in Bor. According to Awur Thon Jok, a women leader and fishmonger (in blue): "The women who are at the riverside, many of them don't have husbands. They are the men and they are the women in their lives." Credit: Elphas Ngugi / Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC)



For more on SPARC's work with Dinka pastoralists and on gender dynamics in pastoralism:

- Technical report: '[Faced with floods: Shifting livelihood strategies among South Sudan's pastoralists](#)'
- Blog: '[Towards gender-transformative climate adaptation strategies in South Sudan](#)'
- Podcast episode of Dynamic Drylands: '[Facing floods and surviving civil wars: adaptability and resilience in Sudan and South Sudan](#)'

Water and resilience in Turkana, Kenya

In the drylands, obtaining enough water for households and livestock can be a challenge. Digging boreholes seems an obvious way to provide water in these remote areas, and it is something that governments, NGOs, and other well-meaning outsiders often do. Yet it is not so easy; boreholes can have unintended consequences.

These two stories, from different parts of Turkana, explore the difference between interventions which are locally led, and those which are imposed without a clear understanding of context or long-term plan for maintenance.

Below: An abandoned borehole in Oropoi village. According to Sammy Ekal, executive director of the Turkana Pastoralists Development Organization (TUPADO): "It's very important to have these pastoralists involved in decision making here, because it affects them on a daily basis. A stakeholder will come, and make a decision that does not support

people in this area.” Credit: Elphas Ngugi / Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC)



... Whereas on the shores of Lake Turkana, a more participatory process has led to investments - in fishing equipment, and water for a community garden - which are being used and maintained. When support from outside aligns with what pastoralists want and do, it is more likely to make a lasting difference - and to be maintained in the long run. Credit: Elphas Ngugi / Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC)



For more on SPARC's work on water resilience in the drylands:

- Technical report: [Do new permanent water supplies in the drylands help build resilience? The impacts of new boreholes on coping with drought in Ethiopia and Kenya](#)
- Technical report: [Does resilience-building last when projects end? Retrospective lessons from projects to support pastoralists in Turkana, Kenya](#)
- Photo essay: [The good and bad of water developments in six pictures](#)
- Podcast episode for Dynamic Drylands: ['Aid \(in\)effectiveness: "What really happens after an NGO packs their bags and leaves?'](#)

Resolving farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria

Nigerian pastoralist NGO the Fulbe Development & Cultural Organization (FUDECO) is supporting herders to access justice in the wake of farmer-herder conflict - and break the cycle of tit-for-tat violence that can often happen in remote areas, where access to government services is difficult.

Below: Sama'ila Nuhu, a pastoralist, stands next to his cow which is recovering from a gunshot wound as part of ongoing farmer-herder conflicts. Credit: Elphas Ngugi / Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC)



For more on SPARC's work on farmer-herder conflict and Fulani pastoralists:

- Technical report: [Causes of farmer-herder conflicts in Africa](#)
- Blog: [Farmer-herder conflicts in Africa – dynamics and potential solutions](#)
- Video: [How can farmer-herder conflict be resolved?](#) with FUDECO Chair Sarli Sardou Nana
- Podcast episode for Dynamic Drylands: '[Invisible yet indispensable: Fulani pastoralist women - in their own words](#)'

Microchipping and meat traceability

Online livestock platform Livestock247 is working with pastoralists to create digital records for cattle, ensuring that meat is traceable and health-certified. The microchip tech – which was developed to be compatible with Fulani livestock customs – is generating new insights on meat traceability, and helping pastoralists access better prices for their animals.

Below: RFID microchips enable Livestock247 to check cows' health and vaccine history. The microchips were chosen as a replacement for ear tags, which were too conspicuous to fit with Fulani customs. Dr. Musa Mansur Ahmad from Livestock247: "To [Fulani], their livestock are just like their accounts number. You don't want to show your account details or account balance to anybody." When technology aligns with how pastoralists protect

their herds and wealth, it can strengthen supply chains and help them to access new markets and command higher prices. Credit: Elphas Ngugi / Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC)



For more on SPARC's work on pastoralist-focused innovations:

- Technical report: [Innovations for pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in fragile and conflict-affected settings](#)
- SPARC's digital [innovation dashboard](#) provides a summary of the various types of innovations available to pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in dryland regions in SPARC focus countries.

About this work

This work was carried out as part of a partnership with the Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC) Programme, with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada, and by UK aid from the UK government. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of SPARC, IDRC or its Board of Governors, or the official policies of the Canadian or UK governments.

A photograph of a large herd of white cattle, likely Zebu, standing in a dry, brownish landscape. Several people are visible among the cattle, some wearing hats. In the background, there are dark, silhouetted mountains under a dark sky. The text "CHARTING NEW FUTURES IN AFRICA'S DRYLANDS" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

CHARTING NEW FUTURES IN AFRICA'S DRYLANDS

Credit: Elphas Ngugi / Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC)

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