

## STRUCTURED SUMMARY

# THE INCONVENIENT TRUTHS OF WATER DEVELOPMENT IN THE DRYLANDS OF THE HORN OF AFRICA

How to use new water sources to support resilience for pastoralists

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### Motivation

Permanent water supplies are often assumed to have a positive impact on climate resilience. However, there are concerns about potential negative effects of water supply developments in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) on grazing patterns, settlement and conflicts. To manage these risks, planning for water investments must be informed by evidence (not assumptions) on their link with resilience.

### Purpose

We returned to developments of new permanent water sources in ASALs, looking at: how they functioned and were managed; their impact on people's resilience and ability to cope with drought; their wider impacts on access to resources and power; and the perceptions of different stakeholders on the role of new water supplies in resilience strategies and climate adaptation.

### Approach and methods

The research analysed water policy in the drylands and the language used to describe new water development. It compared this with the evidence from visits to 25 boreholes across four sites in Marsabit county, Kenya and five sites in Somali Region, Ethiopia.

We looked for explanations of the extensive weaknesses in the performance of the water supplies and their wider impacts on pastoralists' access to resources. We drew out policy conclusions.

### Findings

Water systems are being introduced with no connections to the governance of natural resources as a whole. This is being guided by asking communities the question, 'Do you want a water source?' rather than asking how people access and use those resources, and how that can be improved.

Water systems are being introduced with little connection to local informal institutions that manage natural resources. As a result, water governance is seen in isolation from the rangeland as a whole, and water governance often fails.

Water is being seen in technical terms, and the politics and power relations around water are inadequately considered, even though, like all other public resources, water is inherently political.

Only around half of the boreholes visited were functional, and most of those were providing saline water only, causing health problems. This is hardly ever acknowledged and instead, success stories are presented.

The boreholes led to settlement, overgrazing and rangeland degradation, undermining mobility. Projects had been used to advance claims for resources, leading to conflict.

## Policy recommendations

- The narrative must change. Water supply development does not always build resilience and can even undermine pastoralists' resilience.
- New water supplies need to be planned as part of a wider rangeland management plan.
- Where water is located matters. Permanent water creates permanent settlement. In the wrong places, new water sources can reduce pastoralists' access to pasture, mobility and membership in social networks.
- Borehole governance reflects how societies govern themselves, their internal and external power relations, and how claims are made on resources. Local governance arrangements must be understood to avoid exclusion, conflict and corruption
- Too many boreholes are producing water that is too saline for use, with management systems that fail to meet the demands of water users, because quality is being sacrificed to achieve quantity.

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