POLICY BRIEF

Transforming the Livestock Economy in Kenya's Frontier Counties

The FCDC Livestock Sector Strategy 2025–2035

Executive Summary

Livestock is the backbone of the economy in Kenya's Frontier Counties, supporting millions of pastoral and agro-pastoral households while contributing significantly to food security, employment, trade, and economic growth. The Frontier Counties Development Council (FCDC) Livestock Sector Strategy 2025–2035 presents a ten-year regional roadmap for transforming livestock from a predominantly subsistence livelihood into a modern, competitive, climate-resilient, and market-driven economic sector. The Strategy provides a coordinated framework for harmonising investments, policies, institutions, and partnerships across the ten FCDC member counties—Turkana, Marsabit, Isiolo, Wajir, Garissa, Mandera, Samburu, Tana River, Lamu, and West Pokot—to unlock the immense potential of the livestock economy.

Despite possessing the majority of Kenya's livestock resources, the frontier counties continue to experience low productivity, recurrent droughts, weak veterinary systems, fragmented markets, inadequate infrastructure, and limited value addition. These challenges are compounded by inconsistent county policies, weak inter-county coordination, and insufficient public investment. The Strategy therefore calls for a shift from fragmented county interventions to a coordinated regional approach that promotes policy harmonisation, climate resilience, private sector investment, stronger institutions, and evidence-based planning.

Why This Matters

The livestock sector is the single most important economic activity in Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). Across the FCDC counties, livestock contributes between 60 and 80 percent of household incomes and up to 80 percent of agricultural GDP within ASAL regions. Nationally, the livestock sector contributes approximately 12 percent of Kenya's GDP while providing employment and livelihoods to more than 80 percent of the rural population in these counties. The frontier counties alone account for approximately 95 percent of Kenya's camel population, 58 percent of goats, 55 percent of sheep, 58 percent of donkeys, and 30 percent of cattle, making the region the country's principal livestock production zone.

Yet this enormous economic potential remains largely untapped. Persistent droughts, degradation of rangelands, recurring livestock diseases, poor market infrastructure, inadequate veterinary services, fragmented value chains, and weak governance continue to constrain productivity and competitiveness. Unless these systemic constraints are addressed through coordinated regional action, the livestock sector will struggle to contribute fully to economic transformation, food security, and poverty reduction.

The Challenge

Although livestock dominates the economies of the frontier counties, investment in the sector remains disproportionately low. In many counties, expenditure on livestock represents less than ten percent of county budgets despite livestock being the primary economic activity. Veterinary services remain under-resourced, disease surveillance systems are weak, diagnostic laboratories and cold-chain facilities are inadequate, and livestock extension services have limited reach. Consequently, diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Contagious Caprine Pleuropneumonia (CCPP), and Rift Valley Fever continue to cause significant livestock losses and restrict trade.

Climate change has further intensified vulnerability across the ASALs. Recurrent droughts, erratic rainfall, shrinking pasture resources, land degradation, and increasing competition over water and grazing resources have reduced livestock productivity while fuelling conflicts among pastoral communities. Weak market systems, poor roads, limited aggregation centres, inadequate cold chains, and low private sector investment continue to constrain commercialization and export opportunities. Women and youth, despite playing critical roles in livestock production and marketing, remain excluded from productive assets, finance, training, and decision-making processes.

Strategic Response

The FCDC Livestock Sector Strategy provides a comprehensive regional response to these challenges through seven mutually reinforcing strategic pillars that seek to transform livestock production, improve animal health, strengthen markets, enhance climate resilience, improve governance, promote inclusion, and accelerate innovation. The Strategy envisions "a resilient, inclusive and economically vibrant livestock sector that sustains livelihoods, enhances food security and drives regional development in the frontier counties." Its mission is to coordinate livestock sector development through policy harmonisation, infrastructure investment, institutional strengthening, sustainable resource management, and regional cooperation.

The Strategy recognises that livestock challenges extend beyond county boundaries and therefore require coordinated regional planning, harmonised policies, joint investments, and strengthened collaboration among county governments, national institutions, development partners, research institutions, communities, and the private sector.

Strategic Priorities

The Strategy identifies livestock production and rangeland management as the first priority. It seeks to restore degraded rangelands, strengthen community land governance, promote rotational grazing, rehabilitate migratory corridors, establish grazing plans, expand fodder production, and invest in strategic water infrastructure to reduce the chronic feed deficits that limit livestock productivity. Climate-smart production systems, improved pasture management, and sustainable land-use planning are expected to enhance resilience while increasing livestock productivity.

A second priority is strengthening animal health systems. The Strategy proposes harmonised disease surveillance across all FCDC counties, coordinated vaccination campaigns, improved veterinary laboratories, strengthened cold-chain infrastructure, mobile veterinary services, community animal health workers, regulated pharmaceutical supply systems, and stronger disease reporting mechanisms. These interventions aim to reduce livestock mortality, improve productivity, safeguard public health, and expand regional and international trade opportunities.

The Strategy also prioritises livestock marketing, trade, and value addition. Investments are proposed in modern livestock markets, sale yards, abattoirs, tanneries, cold-chain systems, livestock aggregation centres, transport infrastructure, digital traceability systems, quality assurance, and export certification. The Strategy further encourages public-private partnerships and stronger producer organisations to improve market access, increase competitiveness, attract investment, and generate employment throughout livestock value chains.

Recognising the growing impacts of climate change, the Strategy places significant emphasis on strengthening pastoral resilience. Proposed interventions include climate-smart livestock production, drought-tolerant breeds, water harvesting, early warning systems, contingency planning, livestock insurance, livelihood diversification, social protection programmes, and disaster risk financing. Together these interventions seek to reduce vulnerability while protecting household incomes and food security during climate shocks.

Institutional strengthening forms another critical pillar of the Strategy. The document proposes stronger governance structures, harmonised county livestock policies, enhanced institutional capacity, improved monitoring systems, increased county budget allocations, stronger advocacy, and coordinated implementation through the Sector Forum for Agriculture and Livestock (SFAL). These measures are intended to improve planning, policy implementation, inter-county coordination, and accountability.

The Strategy further recognises that sustainable livestock development cannot be achieved without deliberately empowering women, youth, and marginalised groups. It therefore seeks to mainstream gender across livestock programmes, strengthen women-led cooperatives, promote youth entrepreneurship in livestock value chains, and ensure equitable participation in governance and decision-making structures.

Finally, the Strategy emphasises research, innovation, and digital transformation as key drivers of competitiveness. It proposes establishing a Frontier Counties Livestock Data Hub, strengthening partnerships with research institutions such as ILRI and KALRO, expanding digital livestock extension services, supporting innovation by youth enterprises, and integrating indigenous knowledge with modern science to improve productivity and resilience.

Implementation Arrangements

Implementation of the Strategy will be coordinated through the Frontier Counties Development Council Secretariat using the Sector Forum for Agriculture and Livestock (SFAL) as the primary coordination mechanism. County governments will integrate Strategy priorities into County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs), Annual Development Plans

(ADPs), and annual budgets, while national government agencies, development partners, private investors, research institutions, producer organisations, and communities will play complementary roles in implementation. The financing framework combines county resources, national government allocations, development partner support, climate finance, producer contributions, and public-private partnerships to ensure sustainable financing throughout the ten-year implementation period.

Expected Results

Successful implementation of the Strategy will lead to improved pastoral livelihoods, enhanced food and nutrition security, greater climate resilience, healthier livestock populations, stronger disease control systems, increased livestock productivity, expanded formal livestock markets, higher private sector investment, improved value addition, and stronger regional coordination across all FCDC counties. It will also strengthen governance, promote evidence-based decision-making, increase participation of women and youth in the livestock economy, and position Kenya's frontier counties as the country's leading livestock production and export region. Progress will be monitored through a regional Results-Based Management framework, annual performance reviews, digital dashboards, mid-term and end-term evaluations, and harmonised monitoring systems across all member counties.

Policy Recommendations

1. County governments should significantly increase budget allocations to the livestock sector to better reflect its contribution to livelihoods and county economies. Livestock priorities should be fully integrated into County Integrated Development Plans, Annual Development Plans, and Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks to ensure sustained financing and implementation.
2. FCDC should lead the harmonisation of livestock policies, regulations, disease control protocols, livestock movement systems, and market standards across all member counties to promote regional integration and facilitate trade. Strengthening the Sector Forum for Agriculture and Livestock as the principal coordination platform will enhance joint planning, policy dialogue, and resource mobilisation.
3. County governments should prioritise investments in veterinary services, rangeland restoration, fodder production, water infrastructure, livestock markets, abattoirs, digital information systems, and climate-smart technologies. These investments should be complemented by stronger partnerships with the private sector, research institutions, development partners, and producer organisations to leverage innovation, financing, and technical expertise.
4. Finally, governments and development partners should strengthen research, innovation, monitoring, and evidence-based planning while promoting gender equality, youth empowerment, and community participation to ensure that livestock development contributes to inclusive economic growth, resilience, and sustainable development across Kenya's frontier counties.