

# Pastoral Societies in Africa: A Case Study of the Horn of Africa

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## Abstract

Pastoralists in the Horn of Africa have become among the most marginalized and disadvantaged of minority groups. This is due to their wide dispersal, climatic and ecological conditions, state neglect, development plans that have excluded them, seizure of their land, land tenure laws, national borders that restrict their freedom of movement, internal strife and national conflicts. The corollary has been the neglect of gender issues in the pastoralist communities, where custom and religious teachings defining women's role have become irrelevant. Consequently, the bulk of the land in the Horn of Africa lies in the semi-arid and arid zone. Moreover, both colonial and postcolonial arrangements violated the social and political integrity of pastoralist society, and material hardship intensified competition for resources. The result was conflict both within the pastoralist society and with state authority. Pastoralists thus became known as 'unruly' and 'rebellious'. State policy throughout the region aims to develop livestock production, not to improve the life of pastoralists. It is based on the desire to turn their land over to commercial cultivation through irrigation, or to meat production through ranching schemes, leaving pastoralists sidelined. All attempts to secure ownership rights for the pastoralists have failed. This paper, discusses pastoralism and land tenure; land rights and gender; inequality and governance but paying a particular attention to causes and effects of pastoralist marginalization; the role of traditional institutions in pastoral societies and human rights among other related issues.

**Key words:** Pastoralism, Marginalization, Land tenure, Gender, Inequality and governance

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## Conceptualizing Pastoralism

Pastoralism is a subsistence (economic) pattern in which people make their living by tending herds of large animals. The species of animals vary with the region of the world, but they are all domesticated herbivores that normally live in herds and eat grasses or other abundant plant foods. Horses are the preferred species by most pastoralists in Mongolia and elsewhere in Central Asia. In the horn of Africa, it is primarily cattle. In

the mountainous regions of Southwest Asia, it is mainly sheep and goats. It is often camels in the more arid lowland areas of the Southwest Asia and North and the Horn of Africa. Among the Saami people (or Lapps) of northern Scandinavia, it is reindeer. Some pastoralists in northern Mongolia also herd reindeer. While the Saami mostly use their reindeer as a source of meat, the Dukha people (or Tsaatan) of northern Mongolia milk and ride their reindeer much as other Mongolians do with horses. However, it should be noted that there are essentially two forms of pastoralism namely; nomadism and transhumance. Pastoral nomads follow a seasonal migratory pattern that can vary from

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year to year. The timing and destinations of migrations are determined primarily by the needs of the herd animals for water and fodder. These nomadic societies do not create permanent settlements, but rather they live in tents or other relatively easily constructed dwellings the year round. Pastoralist nomads are usually self-sufficient in terms of food and most other necessities. On the other hand, transhumance pastoralists follow a cyclical pattern of migrations that usually take them to cool highland valleys in the summer and warmer lowland valleys in the winter. Transhumance pastoralists usually depend somewhat less on their animals for food than do nomadic ones. They often do small-scale vegetable farming at their summer encampments. They also are more likely to trade their animals in town markets for grain and other things that they do not produce themselves. It should, however, be understood that not all pastoralist societies can be accurately described as following a nomadic or transhumance way of life. As conditions change, pastoralists usually adjust. This can result in a traditionally nomadic society or some families within it becoming more or less transhumance in their migratory patterns if the opportunity arises. Likewise, a society that prefers a transhumance way of life may be forced by circumstances to change to a nomadic pattern for some or all of its livestock.

Again, pastoralism is most often an adaptation to semi-arid open country in which farming cannot be easily sustained without importing irrigation water from great distances. This means that Pastoralism is the most efficient way of using resources in dryland and marginal areas. Pastoralists are often better off than settled farmers during normal times. They can move their animals to follow the rains or take them to established seasonal grazing areas. Nevertheless, they are often the first victims of prolonged environmental stress, such as drought. Consequently, pastoralism is usually the optimal subsistence pattern in arid and semi-arid

areas because it allows considerable independence from any particular local environment. When there is a drought, pastoralists disperse their herds or move them to new areas. Farmers rarely have these options. They suffer crop failure and starvation in the same situation. A pastoral subsistence pattern reduces the risk when there is an irregular climatic pattern. This is especially true of nomadic pastoralism. The animals herded by pastoralists are rarely killed for family use alone. Fresh meat is distributed throughout the community. This is the most efficient use of their animals because they usually do not have the capability of adequately preserving meat. Not only does it ensure that no spoilage takes place, but it also sets up numerous obligations to reciprocate within the community. It promotes cooperation and solidarity. Often the slaughter of an animal is for a ritual occasion so that its death serves multiple purposes. It feeds both the gods and the people. Most pastoralists also get food from their animals without killing them. Horses, goats, sheep, cattle, and camels are milked. In East Africa, cattle herding societies also bleed their animals. The blood is mixed with fresh milk to make a protein rich drink.

Pastoralist societies most often have patriarchy descent patterns and are male dominated. Men usually make the important decisions and own the animals, while women primarily care for children and perform domestic chores. Compared to pedestrian foraging societies, the economic and political power of most pastoralist women is very low. However, the division of labour is based primarily on gender and age in both foraging and pastoralist societies. It should be noted, however, that pastoralists often have the same distinct qualities of personality regardless of the region of the world in which they live. Men in a local group tend to be cooperative with each other and aggressive towards outsiders. They usually have the ability to make important economic decisions quickly and to act on them independently. They have a profound emotional attachment

to their animals. These typical pastoralist personality traits are related to subsistence success. A pastoralist leader needs to be a man who can direct the movements of his herds and decide on an optimum strategy for using scarce resources without having to first consult others. He needs to make decisions easily and to act on them without hesitation. He needs to be able to take the initiative and to be a leader in aggressively defending his herd by expanding territory at the expense of others. He must always be realistic in his appraisal of the world. To do these things, he needs to have an attitude of self-containment, personal control, and bravery.

Men in pastoralist societies usually acquire prestige and power by being brave and successful in predatory raids as well as by accumulating large herds of animals. Teenagers and young men often are the community's bachelor warriors. This is especially the case among the Masai, Pokot, and other cattle herders of East Africa. They usually do not begin to acquire their own herds until they become warriors. As a result, there are often great status differences between young and old men. It is the older men who usually marry the young women. However, it should be noted that pastoralists today especially during the 20th century, most national governments tried to force pastoralists to stop their migrations and to reduce the size of their herds in order to prevent over-grazing. These efforts at controlling them have been consistently resisted by pastoralists. They usually see large herds as symbols of wealth and as security against unpredictable climates and periodic epidemics among their animals. Conservation has not been traditionally important since pastoralists migrated over vast areas and could easily move on when grasses and water were depleted. It is likely that pastoralists will not have the same fate as foraging societies. Pastoralism will continue for the near future in poor nations, especially in Central Asia, because it is generally an efficient, low energy requiring subsistence base for semi-arid regions.

### **Horn of Africa: Viability of Pastoralism despite Constraints**

Pastoralists in the Horn of Africa live in some of the harshest environments in the world. Conflict and migration is part of their daily life. Pastoralists from the Karamojong cluster group, for example, exhibit that pastoralism is a viable way of life, despite all the constraints. The Karamojong Cluster is a group of pastoralist communities living on the border areas between Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda. Ethnic communities such as Kenya's Turkana and Pokot, Uganda's Dodoth and Upe, Sudan's Toposa and Ethiopia's Merille are part of the Karamojong Cluster. For these people, pastoralism is the only way of life they know.

A major constraint for these ethnic groups is the fact that they live in arid or semi-arid areas in the four countries within the Horn of Africa as mentioned above. Moreover, these pastoralists mostly lack vital infrastructure such as adequate roads, schools, markets and health facilities. Due to their physical and social isolation, there are limited government services available in such pastoral areas. In addition, pastoralists remain isolated because of poor economic integration with their national economies, and their difficult circumstances are exacerbated by conflict within and outside the communities. In fact, conflict between different communities has long affected the Karamoja region along the Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda and Sudan borders. Moving from place to place in search of pasture and water for their livestock is a lifelong routine for pastoralists. The little cultivation they carry out is for the supply of vegetables and cereals for subsistence. The main staple is meat and milk. Livestock includes cattle, goats, sheep, camels and donkeys. For a majority of these people, boundaries denoting the various countries hold little meaning because where they pitch camp is not dictated by any administrative structure, but by climatic conditions and availability of water and pasture for their livestock.

Since pastoralist's key feature is migration, it is important not to stop them from this practice but instead to institute vital development interventions, such as education and health service provision, would have to recognize and adapt to this aspect of pastoral life. In addition, advocacy of an integrated approach to conflict and development in pastoralist areas be instituted targeting on education and health. This should be undertaken jointly by all development partners and built on traditional social institutions to allow pastoral livelihoods to flourish. However, contrary to popular belief, most pastoral communities have internal communal mechanisms that govern resource maintenance and migration patterns. Evidence is exhibited in cities in Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda, as well as in towns in pastoral areas such as Kitale, Kapenguria and Lodwar in Kenya.

All aspects of pastoral social and economic life are ordered in relation to livestock and the environment in which they live. In pastoralist societies, cattle hold central value within the society and are the basis of association in a complex of social, political and religious institutions. The livelihood is practised predominantly in semi-arid and arid areas where pastoralists are able to exploit land and conditions that normally cannot support other economic activities. The system depends largely on the availability of water and the distribution and quality of, and access to, pasture. It is important to note, however, that more than five hundred million people live in the arid and semi arid parts of the world, some of which forty million of them depend entirely on animals. Of these more than thirty million people, who constitute more than fifty percent, are found in Africa. Consequently, it should be understood that the Horn of Africa contains the largest grouping of pastoralists in the world. Sudan has the highest pastoralist percentage globally while Somalia and Ethiopia rank third and fifth respectively. In Djibouti, one third of the population is pastoralist. The

semi-arid and arid areas in the Horn make up seventy percent of the total land area, which provides an average of more than twenty percent of GDP. At the local level, as much as seventy percent of cash income is generated from livestock in the Horn of Africa. In Kenya, for example, semi arid and arid land constitutes 439,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the landmass, covers fourteen large districts, and is equivalent to eighty percent of Kenya's total land area. This area supports twenty percent of the country's population and half of its livestock.

However, pastoralism is under threat. The combination of weak governance; inadequate land and resource management policies; political and economical marginalisation; and increasing insecurity, resulting from small arms and cattle raiding, is taking its toll. The challenge now is to determine the actual conflict risks associated with pastoralism in the Horn and to identify potential opportunities for peace building. This requires an analysis of pastoral communities at risk as well as an exploration of the impact of policies at all levels (local, national and regional).

#### **Specific Analysis of Marginalisation of Pastoralists**

**Government Policies:** The range of policies pursued by successive post-colonial governments has led to the marginalisation of pastoralists from mainstream national development in most countries in the Horn. Over the years, there has been a tendency to neglect the needs of pastoralists and even to envisage the gradual eradication of pastoralism. In addition, there has been a tendency by governments to focus on the interests of agriculture and urban dwellers, thus marginalising other stakeholders. Most states in the Horn have pursued policies based on containment, pacification and sedenterisation of pastoralists. The pastoral livelihood has always been exposed to the vagaries of climate and harsh environmental conditions. However, in recent years, pastoralists have faced a myriad of new problems, including competition for

water and pasture in the context of decreased access to land; more explicit political and economical marginalisation; lack of appropriate responses to the deteriorating security situation; and the proliferation of weapons across the region. Indeed, governance in the Horn is dominated by manipulation of ethnicity, patronage and a political culture of exclusion. This has continued, in large part, from the period before independence. Although the governments of the Horn have made some efforts to include pastoralists in the civil service, cabinet ministries, and the army, they are still not adequately represented in political life. Pastoralists are not represented according to their numbers in parliament or in high-level civil service posts, nor do they have education rates in line with the majority of the population. In many of the semi-arid and arid areas of the Horn, pastoralists have very little formal education. For Kenya, this is borne out by the 1999 population-housing census. The situation is generally similar in nomadic areas of Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan and Northern Uganda.

**Socio-economic Marginalization:** The majority of pastoral land resources are held under a controlled access system that is communal in form. 'Communal' land tenure relates to that system of tenure in which the tribe or clan or a group has access to land. Tenure is thus a social institution: a relationship between individuals and groups or tribes consisting of a series of rights and duties with respect to the use of land. It is within this framework that pastoralists in the Horn of Africa have become among the most marginalized and disadvantaged of minority groups particularly in the access and utilization of land. Consequently, while there is some nonpastoralist production, the pastoralist contribution is more important economically, providing significant employment and income opportunities seldom shown in official statistics.

Traditional livestock production is becoming non-viable through the gradual ero-

sion of access to land and water, as they are turned over to cultivation. This loss has been facilitated by the unwillingness of states to acknowledge and respect pastoralists' rights to land. Loss of mobility of people and animals has disrupted the process of adjustment that maintains the balance between people, land and livestock.

State borders dividing ethnic groups, separating people from their kin, traditional leaders, places of worship, markets, pasture and watering places, have adversely affected pastoralist society. Colonial and postcolonial arrangements violated the social and political integrity of pastoralist society, and material hardship intensified competition for resources, further undermining social cohesion and traditional authority. The result was conflict both within the pastoralist society and with state authority. Pastoralists thus became known as 'unruly' and 'rebellious'.

State policy throughout the region aims to develop livestock production, not to improve the life of pastoralists. It is based on the desire to turn their land over to commercial cultivation through irrigation, or to meat production through ranching schemes, leaving pastoralists, whose terrain has remained state domain and can be alienated at whim, as the only sector without any rights of land tenure. All attempts to secure ownership rights for the pastoralists have failed.

It is worth noting that political marginalization of pastoralist communities was preceded by forcible eviction from their land and/or restriction of their movements. Currently, the trend towards globalization of the market, with pastoral lands increasingly being commercialized and/or turned into national parks, has resulted in environmental and ecological disaster. Poverty has increased, with women in particular being severely affected. Pastoralists are faced with a double marginalization – as one of the dominated ethnic groups, and as pastoralists. The marginalization they face as pastoralists is more severe than the oppression faced by other dominated ethnic groups. Traditionally,

in pastoralist society, land 'belongs' to a group or family that is linked by descent or cultural affiliation. Land is not owned but is held in trust for future generations. Because of the political marginalization of pastoralists, unfavourable land tenure reforms and the alienation of pastoralists from their lands, traditional mechanisms and customary methods of negotiation, arbitration and adjudication over land issues are breaking down. Pastoralists do not respect the state, which is seen as repressive rather than democratic, coercive rather than persuasive, as tax collector and embezzler rather than assisting development, nor do they respect state boundaries. East African states discuss land issues in terms of agrarian societies and peasants, since cultivation is the only rural economic activity recognized as productive and thus contributing to the national economy and capital accumulation. However, the issue of land is equally pivotal to pastoralists for whom pastoralist land tenure and land use is the most sustainable. African states do not consider pastoralism a viable way of life.

Pastoralists are not considered when it comes to formulating macroeconomic policies, or discussing state-society relationships, questions of democracy and the role of state in development – i.e. good governance. The role of civil society (i.e. representative institutions independent of the state) in good governance has been neglected. The African states' neglect of the indispensable role of civil society in political, social and economic development, as well as of gender issues, has cost them dear in terms of the resulting poverty and conflict. The state must assume the role of regulator rather than dictator, and recognize the rightful role of civil society. In good governance, the relationship between state and society is dynamic, involving the state in encouraging civil and community institutions to cooperate with state organs in development undertakings. Popular participation does not just mean taking part in elections, but includes social organization within civil society independent of the state,

recognizing the separate role of civil society in development and the political process, and encouraging a rapport between state and civil society through transparency and dialogue.

The marginalization of pastoralists as communities has overshadowed the degraded position of pastoralist women. In recent years, the social awakening of the women's movement has led to the development of a gender perspective. Despite all the legislation, UN declarations and resolutions, and global fora of women, the position of women has not yet substantially changed in Africa. For most African women, conditions have in fact worsened. Development must start with improvement in the conditions of women who are the most neglected – yet crucial – element of civil society and human civilization. Development and democracy must be defined and measured by positive changes in the position of women, and in the attitude towards women of men and women alike. Somali pastoral women pastoralists occupy a fragile ecological region in semiarid areas in the Horn of Africa, prone to drought, civil conflicts and wars, which pose major threats to their way of life.

In Somalia, pastoralists also face scarcity of resources, environmental degradation, ill-conceived governmental policies, such as forced sedentarization, and marginalization as agriculture, private investors, tourism and mineral exploration have encroached on pastoral lands, while no alternative arrangements have been made for displaced pastoralists. The failure of government to take account of traditional land tenure systems, and conflicts and disputes along national borders, have restricted pastoralists' freedom of movement and their ability to manage their livestock effectively. This has undermined the survival mechanisms of pastoral economies, in which livestock plays an important role in food security, pushing pastoralists, especially women and children, into poverty. While regions adjacent to former Somalia went through upheavals, conflict, wars and repression, women in Somalia before the

1979 war enjoyed relative peace and freedom. Contemporary Somali women are not subservient, but live with men in a relationship of interdependence. They are considered the most resourceful persons in the pastoral economy. They market milk products, farm produce and their pastoral crafts, as well as producing them for their own use or giving them away. This pattern has changed as urbanization encourages migration of young people to towns in search of work, depriving the pastoral family of their input. Restrictions on male movement because of conflict has led to a further loss of labour power, leaving women to cope with the management of the family, taking on roles vacated by men. Women play multiple roles in Somali society: in the family, as contributors to the pastoral economy, and bringing resources into the family through girl bride-price. Traditionally, women were dependent on men for their needs, for only men took livestock to markets. When women began to participate in animal marketing, the income generated reinforced their power and reduced their dependence on men. This benefited women but increased their workload, and men felt threatened and marginalized. Somalis adhere to Islamic law when it comes to marriage, inheritance and the family. Women cannot inherit camels, land and cattle. In marriage, the girl's consent is crucial, since without it the marriage is void, yet fathers or brothers will offer girls to anyone they choose without seeking their consent. With education for girls, women increasingly join the work force, which in urban areas has reversed their dependence on men. Many well off women participate in family decision-making. Acceptance of such participation by society is tilting the balance in their favour and they are increasingly breadwinners for the family while still managing the domestic scene.

*Education and Pastoral Communities: The Case of Eastern Sudan and Western Eritrea*  
As pastoralists, the main tribes inhabiting eastern Eritrea and Kassala and eastern

Sudan, move freely over a vast area during the wet and dry seasons, across the border between the two countries, in search of better grazing, watering places and markets. Political or socioeconomic change in either country therefore affects, directly or indirectly, the life of pastoralists on both sides of the border. Eritrea is divided into three geographical zones: the eastern coastal zone; the western lowland zone, where the majority of the population is agro-pastoralist; and the central highland zone, populated mainly by non-agropastoralists. Sudan is one of the largest countries in Africa with vast reserves of cultivable land and the largest area of irrigated agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa. Any attempt to improve the quality of life of pastoralists usually increases the influx of the dominant cultivators, pushing pastoralists to the margins of areas of high potential. This, combined with rapid population growth, has made it difficult for pastoralists to maintain the herd size necessary to meet their food and economic requirements; it has also resulted in lack of access to health services and education, and general scarcity of resources.

These trends, and increased competition for limited resources between cultivators and pastoralists, have inevitably led to frequent conflicts. In the Sudan the state advocates the settlement of pastoralists, who have been regarded as hostile, resistant to change, agents of soil erosion through over-grazing and deforestation, and a liability in relation to development programmes. Because of their mobility, pastoralists should be offered education and training on the move. Current educational systems are planned not for the benefit of pastoralists but to serve the policy makers in Eritrea and Sudan, with curricula designed to lead to higher education. Boarding schools in pastoral areas could play a role in the education of pastoralists, provided such education was relevant to the real needs of pastoral life, was controlled to some degree by parents and did not disrupt traditional cultural values and lifestyles.

Teachers would need to have a good pastoral background, teaching cycles should be adapted to pastoral seasonality and special provision should be made to ensure that girls have equal access to school. The wide gap in the provision of education between the highland farmers, who are involved in the decision-making process, and lowland pastoralists, who are deprived of basic human requirements, is one of the biggest problems facing pastoralists, and contributes to their continuing impoverishment and social marginalization. Where education is available, there are considerable disparities between regions with regard to qualified teachers, pupil-teacher ratios and examination pass rates. Although education policy in Eritrea provides for compulsory basic education for all children, this is not the reality on the ground. Inequality in educational opportunities, both in services and access to formal education between regions, results in high illiteracy rates, particularly among the pastoral peoples of western Eritrea. The 30-year conflict with Ethiopia has also played a role in denying thousands of Eritrean children in pastoralist communities' access to schools.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

**Empowerment:** The problems identified as holding back empowerment among the pastoralists are: lack of education and access to information; poor health service; poor infrastructure; deliberate discrimination and gender inequality. However, the opportunities for intervention are identified as being: mobilization strategies, such as: Training of community motivators; community meetings to enhance community participation; formation, support and maintenance of social institutions. More fundamental is the provision of a basic mobile health service, education on nutrition, maternity, child health, among others through the recruitment of community members; establish strategic dispensaries, health centres and hospitals for referral. Others include: Participatory Rural Analysis

as a tool; local/community radio; mobile education by the provision of equipment and staff and the establishment of strategic primary and secondary schools. This will greatly harness the neglected potentials in pastoralism. In this sector, the main actors who will help in facilitating the projects suggested would include the governments of the countries of the Horn of Africa.

**Gender Awareness:** Discussion with men and women on their individual roles, worth and responsibilities, and persuading them to become involved in the decision-making process; sensitize men, through the establishment of appropriate institutions, to their responsibilities towards women; establish strategies which will give girls a good foundation for life from a young age; arrange for group visits involving men and women to be exchanged between pastoral communities.

**Partnership and Networking:** Establishment and maintenance of a strategy that checks and balances the roles and work of the various intermediary groups and agencies (NGOs, aid agencies, spokesmen, politicians, researchers, scholars, among others.) needs to be commenced to ensure that pastoralists are not neglected. The lack of such overall networking is a major obstacle to empowerment as each agency is cut off from the others. Establishing and facilitating processes to lobby and influence policy makers on all issues, which inhibit the free movement and communication among pastoral communities is extremely necessary.

However, some success stories on this sector could be cited in Ethiopia from such forums as Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia (PFE), which is credited for spearheading partnership with the Parliamentary Pastoral Affairs standing Committee (PASC) and Ministry of Federal Affairs (MoFA). Besides, PFE has also created a good ground with other partners such as the Norwegian Peoples Aid and Development Fund/DF (Land Matters) and hence resulting in minimizing pastoralists' marginalization in Ethiopia.

**Advocacy:** There is need for the establishment of an advocacy strategy group and regional fora to pursue the interests of pastoralists generally. There is need to bring together organizations relating to minority rights in a regional forum. The Africa Union (AU) and IGAD, for example, should push forward the agenda for minority rights. Pro-pastoralist Parliamentary Group (PPG), an initiative of Kenya Pastoralists' Forum (KPF), has already started as an ad hoc committee with advocacy on land rights as its main agenda. This is a very encouraging move towards the right direction. There is also need to identify regional and national focal organizations such as KPF, Panos, Afar Pastoralist Development Association, Land Rights Alliance, and individuals who could speak out on behalf of pastoralists. Indeed, the setting up of PPGs in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda and the establishment of a partnership between such PPGs. The establishment of a regional PPG network to enhance the level of advocacy for the rights of pastoralists. Assistance to pastoralists to form groups and organizations and to establish a network to coordinate their efforts is extremely necessary. On the overall, there is a need to develop a pastoralist network consisting of indigenous pastoralist organizations but also involving scholars and researchers. In addition, every country in the Horn of Africa should establish a Pastoralist Parliamentary Group (PPG) to improve and maintain advocacy in the region. Moreover, every country in the Horn and East Africa should establish a focal points to steer advocacy strategies.

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