

Livelihood Diversification in Borana: Pastoral Communities of Ethiopia – Prospects and Challenges

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Introduction

This study focuses on the way of life of the Borana pastoral communities of Southern Oromia in Ethiopia, documenting a region moving from pure pastoralism to agro-pastoralism. This change is forced by a variety of factors, including environmental conditions, poor pasture and livestock productivity, and population growth. The aim is to contribute to a heightened understanding of the complex economic and social dynamics affecting pastoral communities with an eye to influencing effective policy decisions concerning pastoralist issues.

Commissioned by the Pastoral Community Development Project, the study was conducted in Dire District of Borana zone in Oromiya region in 2005. Three communities were chosen from Dire Woreda, a district approximately 665 km south of Addis Ababa. The communities Haralo, Dhasi and Gololcha were selected. Haralo is recognised to have both pastoral and agricultural activity, while Dhasi and Gololcha are classified as pure pastoral communities. However, evidence in the study suggests that elements of agriculture are now present in these latter two communities as well, due to poverty and decreased livestock productivity. The main issues covered in the survey include: land tenure, land and resource management, livestock mobility, livestock markets, sources of income, household expenditures, food security, and major challenges faced.

Land Tenure and Management

Land is divided into rangeland, cropland, forestland and water resource areas. Rangeland belongs to the clan, and is allotted to members of the community through decisions by the elders, known as the Jarsa Reera. While most grazing land is open to all, the Jarsa Reera fences off an area to be reserved for the dry season, and access to this land, called the “kalo”, is controlled though the elders.

The process for acquiring farming land was similarly simple. Individuals would approach the kebele officials and the Abba Olla, or village leader, and be allotted a plot of land. This land could be passed from father to son, but once abandoned (as the land is fragile and cannot sustain multiple rotations of crops) the land would return to the community. Sadly, due to increased demand, this process is slower and less reliable today. The increase in farmland threatens rangeland, as does the prospect of private ownership. And while owning livestock is a more secure livelihood, it is becoming too expensive for a large portion of the community who need to supplement their income with crops. Community member identify the following factors as a cause of poor productivity of the rangelands: Declining traditional management system, 27%; Increased livestock population, 48%; Climatic Factors including soil erosion, 25%. An important traditional management system was the clearing of brush by bush burning, which has recently been banned. This has led to an explosion of the local tick population and to an increase in the incidence of mastitis, resulting in only 40% of milking cattle having four functional teats.

Livestock Mobility

Before moving to potentially better pasture, the leader of the community sends a group of men to scout out the various migration locations. This group, called aburu, determines the presence of natural resources, the carrying capacity of the rangeland, and the presence of any livestock disease. Once a region is selected and the elders have negotiated the move with the locals in the new region, the boys and men set off with the animals, while the women and elderly stay at the permanent homestead. Those who are left behind are now responsible for tending to the new crops. In years of intense drought or conflict, a more permanent move may need to occur.

There are also negative effects of mobility. Competition for grazing land and water with the host community is a serious concern, which often spurs ethnic conflict. Greater environmental damage can occur with the greater volume of animals. The spread of disease is also a concern, with more possibility of transmission between herds. During the search for pasture, women are left without access to livestock, depriving them of nutrition.

Marketing of livestock and livestock products

While a market for livestock has emerged, there is little market for livestock products. Livestock have begun to fetch good prices at the districts markets Dubluk and Mega. Moyale's market, a likely source of illegal exports into Kenya, maintains even better prices for both livestock and milk. Milk sales are most often organized by the women, who sometimes consolidate their wares to maintain a higher volume and higher price.

Income and Expenditure

The major sources of income for the rich and the medium households are livestock and livestock products, crops, and trading services. Poor and destitute households manage through wages, crop farming, sale of charcoal and firewood, relief food and remittances (payments sent from wealthier relatives). The total annual income for a rich household is approx. Birr 7,800 (US\$900), while for a destitute household it is approx. Birr 2,020 (US\$233). When divided between a family of six, average per capita income for the rich is US\$150 and US\$39 for the destitute.

All wealth categories spend the greatest proportion of their income on food. The next highest household expenditure is on stimulants (such as tobacco and khat) and beverages, and this total is often close to the percentage spent on food. There are also traditional obligations, such as funeral expenses and gifts given when a son is titled.

Rich and Medium households have adequate food supply year round. Poor households are food insecure for about six months, while destitute households are food insecure all year round. Different coping strategies are employed by each group. In a crisis the rich and medium households can sell livestock, while the poor and destitute turn to eating wild root, called Burii. The poorer groups rely on one another through income sharing in times of need. Reduction of meals per day is an option for the rich and medium households, but only a last resort for the poor and destitute, as they are already down to one or two meals a day.

Major Challenges to the Pastoral Livelihood

Changes are occurring which are making traditional pastoralism more difficult. Border conflicts and population increases are straining rangeland resources. Cross-border trade restriction to Kenya, where sale prices are higher, and a deterioration of traditional support systems are eroding the pure pastoral way of life. Communities that were once able to rely on each other in times of need are now too poor to support the growing numbers of impoverished members.

Productivity of the rangeland and croplands are also falling, as is the productivity of the cattle. The falling productivity and increasing volatility associated with livestock production is the single largest contributing factor to the poverty in the region. Livestock represent nutrition, food security, liquid assets and has been the traditional foundation of these communities. The heavy expenditure on addictive stimulants is also cause for concern. There are few support systems in the area for veterinary and human medicine, and no development training or school system.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Pastoralism is deeply entrenched in the culture and traditions of the Borana peoples. However, the cons of living a truly nomadic pastoral lifestyle have begun to outweigh the benefits. Disease, drought, damage to the environment, and rising costs of relocation are forcing these communities to become more sedentary, but with scant options for alternate income sources.

The Borana people must diversify to support themselves. A new system is required for portioning land to encourage investment in agriculture. There is a need for an appropriate land use policy that can be agreed upon by all community members and officials. A solution is needed to accommodate and ensure the mobility of livestock while being cognizant of environmental factors. Trade can be expanded to create jobs and income. Access to credit and business training is necessary to nourish an entrepreneurial culture and would be especially helpful among already established women's groups.

Due to the new reality of a partially permanent agro-pastoral homestead, new infrastructure needs to be put in place to assist these more permanent communities. Construction of roads, schools and reliable water sources can provide stability for this new, diverse livelihood. Education regarding income-diversifying activities, especially for women, can help ease dependence on livestock production.

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