

Seeking Survival: Case of Pastoral Drop outs in the Borana Plateau

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Borana people whose animals die and who lose their sources of livelihood are forced to exit the pastoral system. Others also exit the system looking for a better livelihood option. Those that painfully exit the system, however, move to livelihood system which in most cases is fated to be an inferior in terms of income generation and social status. Such social mobility in livelihood strategies is a sign of downward economic and social mobility. A study in three selected woredas of Borana zone, Oromia regional state, was conducted to gain understanding of general characteristics of those that are pushed out of the pastoral system-dropouts, destitute and stockless people who live within the pastoral communities, but on their way to exit the system. The main reasons for exiting the system were livelihood difficulties resulting from recurrent droughts, conflicts, accelerating population growth and weakening of the traditional mutual assistance mechanism. These people live in the periphery of the small towns and market centers. A significant number of the stockless who are on their way to exit the system live within the pastoral community, and negatively feedback on the system as they compete over the little available resources, and pressure on the traditional social safety nets. The current development approach has not considered options outside livestock for this sector of the population. Alternative livelihoods options for pastoral dropouts could be achieved through investment in education, skill development; women empowerment, creation of broader economic linkage and re-stocking. The study has clearly documented that the drought, declining traditional safety net, conflict and poor security situation as the major causes that drive pastoralists out of the system. It is doubtful if the conventional development approach that assumes homogeneity of livelihood strategies for people who live in pastoral areas could be responsive enough to deal with this complex issue.

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