

Research Update

Range enclosures in southern Oromia, Ethiopia: an innovative response or erosion in common property resource tenure?

By Bokutache Dida

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Summary

- In the pastoralist livelihood, the most important change is physical fencing of areas - but reserving a section of rangeland for later use has always been an integral part of the pastoralist innovation land use system
- Today, expansion of crop cultivation near towns and increased livestock marketing is triggering de facto private enclosures (e.g. in Moyale District) – these contribute to fragmentation of a rangeland ecosystem that is very inter-connected
- Pastoralists are responding with community reserves: heaps of hay within enclosures covered for protection from rain and sun; these community 'fodder banks' are meant for use in the elongated dry season and drought years

Background

Reserving sections of communal rangeland for later use has always been an integral part of pastoralist innovation systems.

Among the Borana, the restricted areas of a mountain, open pasture or valley bottom was intended for calves (seera/kaloo yabbii) and were generally not fenced.

But the growing trend now is to fence out these reserved areas. As pressures increase on open ranges, the effectiveness of traditional enclosures is getting weaker and trespassers have become more frequent.

Methodology

This research centres on pastoralist responses to rangeland enclosures (kaloo) in Borana and Guji Zones of Oromia Regional State, southern Ethiopia.

It examines the processes, trends, typologies, rationale and status of enclosures through visits to reserved sites in Gorodola and Liban districts (Guji Zone), Arero, Yaballo, Dirre, Dillo, Talattalli and Moyale districts (Borana Zone). The data was collected through direct observation and interviews with key informants and pastoralist communities.

Analysis

In the Borana rangeland today, grazing reserves exist in various forms:

- the customary enclosure where a group of villages reserve pasture on communal basis;
- the enclosures introduced or supported by NGOs emphasising hay availability during critical times; and

- enclosures that are fenced and have two sections: one for crop cultivation and one untilled for grazing.

Drivers of change

New enclosures are a response to expansion of crop cultivation in the rangelands, which had previously been restricted to sub-humid rangelands near towns and cultivators.

Since 1997, large scale crop expansion has meant that it is rare to find a Borana household that is not involved in some form of crop cultivation as frequent droughts force people to diversify and maximise options for survival.

Another driver of change is the increase in livestock marketing opportunities that have triggered de facto private enclosures. Moyale is now has an important livestock trade that provides an international business outlet for herders and traders in southern Ethiopia.

Given the opportunistic nature of livestock marketing in pastoralist areas and unpredictability of selling, animals are often backlogged in the supply chain. Nearby communities are responding by enclosing land to rent grazing to animals that must wait for processing.

As well, NGO-supported enclosures (to improve supply hay availability in critical times) are increasing and thought to improve local capacity in minimising the vagaries of drought through community enclosures.



Photograph: Bokutache Dida

Boran bulls

Community reserves are being established that collect stores of hay – these fodder banks are meant for use only in elongated dry season and a drought year. There is remarkable interdependence between the communities over these reserves. People travel long distance with pack animals to take hay from friends (e.g. Qoratti). The recipients reciprocate later when their hosts face hay scarcity (e.g. Dambalaa Raabaa). The community hay heap indicates an innovation as opposed to customary community grass stands that are grazed by herd classes when the reserve is opened up.

A close look at the innovation

Pasture is a key pastoralist resource, also a key social resource. Pasture sale raises many doubts among pastoralists. Some view it as a positive innovation (i.e. obtaining cash income from the sale of what is a household asset). Others relate it to the bigger issue of property rights, with the practice contributing to the erosion of common property resources and tenure. The worry is that this key social resource will find its way into markets as a commercial commodity.

Related to resource sharing and symbiosis within and between pastoralist communities, the very practice of pasture sale can become part of a larger production system and affect reciprocity and social fabric. These key resources may cause conflict and peace between pastoralists. Some observe: “we do not need pastoralism – if we can attract financial value, why does it matter”?

Enclosures are the most important (and negative) change within the customary pastoralist domain. When we examine pasture utilisation and decision-making processes, pasture is still in the customary public domain. It is the public that decides when and where to fence the land, which villages will use it, what rules are applied to deter illegal use, etc.

Customarily, the legitimate ‘owner’ unit of an enclosure is a village or a number of households or families. And in this system, a group of villages may also ‘own’ an enclosed area. This is still the case to a large extent. But there is a growing tendency for elite pastoralists to fence an area arguing that they have huge herds and need extra pasture. The rich also have influence in different areas – this triggers intense discussion among the community members with debates, disputes and conflicting ideas about enclosures.

As well, external pressures can often compel pastoralists to adopt practices that might carry unforeseen consequences for sustainable livelihoods and peace within the community. These practices have already contributed to a fragmentation of the very inter-connected rangeland ecosystem. In the past, herd mobility and variable grazing practices meant that the production system was successful. Many have a growing concern that enclosures may break down this connectivity.

Looking ahead

What are other implications for rangeland enclosures?

- **Social:** As pasture is common property with rules and principles governing its use. If elites can spontaneously fence an area, what does this imply? Some may exploit connections to politicians, civil servants, merchants, etc. What is the implication of this for social relations and for resource sharing?
- **Economic:** Those who can afford fodder will buy it but those who cannot will be excluded. The cultural concept attached to this key resource contributes to its bio-diversity and its conservation because it is “God given” and is not for sale – not at least until now. What will happen if these resources are openly commercialised? What guarantees will there be that this key resource won’t be for open sale in the future? Pastoralists are increasingly interacting with markets and absorbed into cash economy. Where does this leave pastoralists?

As one colleague stated, in the rangelands, livestock was initially monetised, then livestock products (milk, meat, hides), now the resources that support livestock production are being monetised. The entire production system is entering the domain of markets. When the full production system is marketed, weaker pastoralists may fall out and gradually, it will grow into an industry and mobile pastoralism will morph to resemble western ranching systems.

This Research Update was written by **Bokutache Dida** of the Future Agricultures Consortium. The series editor is David Hughes. Further information about this series of Research Updates at: www.future-agricultures.org

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