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# Pastoral women's thoughts on 'change': voices from Ethiopia

By Fiona Flintan, Beth Cullen and Shauna Latosky

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# Pastoral women's thoughts on 'change': voices from Ethiopia

by
Fiona Flintan*
with contributions from Beth Cullen[1] & Shauna Latosky[2]

## Abstract

'Change' in pastoral areas and societies is occurring at an unprecedented pace. Pastoral women and men experience such change in different ways, and have different capacities to transform it into positive and/or negative impacts. Many women in particular, are having to make difficult decisions about whether and how they should embrace new opportunities that may benefit them as individuals, but are likely to damage the very roots of their cultural identity and existence. How can such contradictions of 'development' and 'progress' be mitigated? What development pathway should they take? Should they fight for their rights as women, as pastoralists or is it possible and more beneficial to do both? The views and perspectives of pastoral women from four different regions of Ethiopia have been captured by research carried out over the last six years using tools such as participatory video. The results highlight what pastoral women themselves think about 'change' and the dilemmas and questions they face.

## Introduction[3]

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* Fiona Flintan is a consultant specialising in land tenure and natural resource management, and development. Email: fionaflintan@yahoo.co.uk
[1] Beth Cullen is completing her PhD at Durham University, UK Email: bscullen@ymail.com
[2] Shauna Latosky is completing her PhD at University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Email: shaunalatosky@yahoo.com
[3] The personal experience on which this article draws has been obtained during work for a number of NGOs in Ethiopia including Save the Children USA, CARE International (funded by USAID) and SOS Sahel Ethiopia (funded by IDRC). Primary data cited in this article comes from interviews and focus group discussions carried out for these organisations and remains their intellectual property. The views expressed herein are

Over 180 million people in developing countries, broadly termed 'pastoralists', depend for their livelihoods on rangelands. Rangelands constitute some 35 million km$^2$ of the earth's surface area, of which the majority of is found in developing countries, and some 65 per cent of the total surface area (almost 22 million km$^2$) in tropical Africa (Seré et al 2008). Pastoralism is an effective and efficient land use system for livestock production in these areas, characterised by low rainfall and high rainfall variability (Behnke et al 1993; Scoones 1994). Mobility is key, being a rational mechanism for ensuring access to resources for livestock and people within conditions of spatially and temporally uneven resource distribution and environmental uncertainty. Mobility is also about the building of the social support relations and networks that are vital for a functioning pastoral society (Niamir-Fuller 2005; Hodgson 2000).

Women play a central role in pastoral livelihood systems as livestock keepers, natural resource managers, income generators and service providers, which are influenced by gendered norms, values and relations (Flintan 2008). Pastoral women are not only 'primary' users of land through their role as livestock managers, but are also major 'secondary' users, collecting rangeland products such as firewood, grasses, fodder, and palm leaves, gums, resins, saps and other medicinal plants (UNCCD 2007).

## Customary institutions for accessing, controlling and managing natural resources and land

In practice, natural resources found in pastoral areas, and access to them, have been managed communally by different types of customary institutions through a nested hierarchy of access and management regimes including 'territorial' units, social and cultural units such as clans, and resource units or 'tenure niches' such as water points or trees.

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my own personal reflections and do not necessarily reflect the views of these organisations.

These layers of resource rights are complex, inter-linked, inclusive and dynamic (Flintan 2011).

Traditionally, clan members allocated property rights and responsibilities according to the holder's perceived ability to manage that property for the benefit of the clan. Since effectively all members of the community, both male and female, only had rights of access and use, there was little difference in reality between the rights of men and the rights of women.

Women and girls gained access to property such as land through their male kin. As girls and unmarried women, they laid claims through their fathers and once married through their husbands. Through her husband she established relations with the community who protected her after the death of her husband. Divorces were rare but when they occurred, a woman usually returned to her home and claimed the same rights of access and use through her father or brothers. Property tended to be inherited through the male line, as it was more likely to remain within the clan (rather than be lost when women married outside the clan). In return, the clan provided social, economic and political protection and security for its members, including vulnerable groups and women (Adoko and Levine, 2008; Flintan 2009; Odhiambo 2006; Larsen and Hassan 2003).

This is a somewhat simplified summary of what in reality was a complex set of cultural, social and political norms, values, agreements and relations. And though there were cases where the system(s) failed (including in protecting its clan members – male or female) in general the system(s) worked well and women were assured of access rights that were nearly, or as secure as those of men.

## Changing livelihood and social systems

Over the last century, and particularly in the last fifty years 'external' forces effecting traditional systems including customary institutions have grown. Mobility of livestock and people has been challenged. Governments have annexed or removed land for commercial farming

(viewed as a more 'productive' use of the land) and for conservation purposes (as National Parks continue to grow). Sedentarisation and crop production has increased as settlers have moved into the rangelands from over-populated highland areas and pastoral 'drop-outs' unable to build up their herds after more frequent and intensive droughts, have turned to farming (Flintan 2011).

As sedentarisation has increased, so too has the 'privatisation' or 'commodification' of resources to be used for individual or household (as opposed to clan) gain. This has included the fencing of communal grazing areas for individual or 'group' livestock holdings, and the construction of individual water points from which water is sold (Shazali and Abdel 1999). Individual interests and wealth differentiation have tended to grow, while collective responsibilities, mutual aid and reciprocity have broken down (Larsen and Hassen 2003). Competition for and conflicts over remaining resources have risen (Atkinson et al 2006; Niamir-Fuller 2005; Mearns 1996). Though some individuals have benefited from such processes of change, those wielding less power in communities - often the women – have not tended to benefit so much (Mussa 2007; Hesse and Thébaud 2006; Hussein 2005; Meir 1985).

When the formalisation of customary tenure systems have taken place, women's rights are often ignored, resulting in men only gaining from the formalisation process, and in some cases women losing out (Kenya – see for example Meinzen-Dick and Mwangi 2007; Leonard and Toulmin 2000; Morocco – Steinmann 1998; Sudan – Larsen and Hassen 2003). Where land has been allocated specifically to women, plots are often small, of poor quality and difficult to access (IFAD 2003). Moreover, with communal access routes blocked through privatisation, women must now devote more time to collecting and gathering resources, or find the money to purchase alternatives which may mean relying on their husbands to a greater degree (Namibia – Sullivan and Rohde 2002; Wawire 2003; Joekes and Ponting 1991). Impoverishment has increased households' reliance on women's income. Diminishing access to livestock

has curtailed traditional exchange networks and important relations with livestock.

Sedentarisation has also changed the roles that men and women play in pastoral livelihood systems (Flintan 2008). In some cases women have been able to benefit, gaining greater authority over their own earnings, social gains as well as greater access to educational and health facilities (Brockington 2001; Smith 1998). Effectively, sedentarisation in these cases has acted to empower pastoralist women economically through market integration, which has in turn advanced their social status.

At the same time respect for traditional systems and customary institutions has reduced. Individuals keen for personal gain now ignore traditional rules of access to resources, and establish beneficial relations with government or between themselves as a small but increasingly powerful elite (more often than not based on resource-'owning' rather then resource-'sharing'). This has not only threatened the security of traditional leaders, but also increased the vulnerability of women and their rights, which in the past had been protected by 'the clan' (Odhiambo 2006; Flintan 2010).

Potentially women's vulnerability could be reduced by non-traditional institutions and indeed, there have been important moves in most countries to protect women's rights including to land and resources. However experience to date has shown that though governments have been quick to support such rights on paper, in reality and on the ground, their implementation has fallen far short of any great achievements. As a result, women, and in particular pastoral women, are in danger of 'falling between two stools': weakening customary institutions and non-achieving government ones (Adoko and Levine 2008).

*In East and Horn of Africa*

In the Horn of Africa and East Africa such changes have been occurring at an increasing pace. Pastoralists have seen their territories reduce

dramatically as they have been removed for conservation or commercial agricultural purposes.[4] More often than not the lands taken have been crucial seasonally used grazing areas, which have put enormous pressures on remaining resources, increasing conflicts and resource degradation (Niamir-Fuller 2005). Individualisation of the commons has in many cases led to massive land alienation and concentration of lands under the control of a few rich elites and influential individuals (TNRF 2006).

Rarely are women given a voice in these changes. With their 'double marginalisation' as 'pastoralists' and also as 'women' (Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008) they are not entertained in decision making forums in investment offices in the capital cities where businessmen discuss the development of pastoral lands. Women in particular experience a lack of information, capacity and security over assets meaning that they are limited in their responses and rather than leading their own development become increasingly vulnerable victims to greater political and socio-economic forces.

Even where resource losses are endured collectively, women are often less able to negotiate with private or group land-holding systems, which are emerging among pastoralists as a response to increasingly insecure

[4] For example, in September 2007 the Basongora of Uganda became one of the latest pastoralist communities to be evicted from a designated conservation area, when 8,000 people were removed from Queen Elizabeth National Park. In Kenya, a plan to produce biofuels in the Tana Delta was approved by the government in June 2008, but it has been heavily criticized due to concerns over both biodiversity and livelihoods. The delta provides crucial grazing land for up to 60,000 livestock during the dry season (Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008: 17). And in Tanzania evictions of pastoralists have occurred in Loliondo and Ngorongoro (Ngoitiko 2009) and the Sergengeti where Serengeti National Parks in collabaration with land surveyors from the Land Ministry "grabbed the richest part of Ololosokwan Village pretending they are adjusting park borders. While the village certificate of ownership from the same Ministry shows those areas belong to the village" (Olengurumwa, 2010).

tenure. For example, the Samburu were initially encouraged to form group ranches by the government of Kenya, and membership was granted exclusively to male household heads. The subsequent establishment of individual land-holdings has continued this trend, although a small number of women have been granted land by the District Land Adjudication Officer, despite opposition from the local land committee (Lesorogol 2003).

## Outline of this paper

If pastoralism is to survive as the effective land use system that it can be, then drastic measures need to be taken to curtail the continued removal of pastoral resources, increase pastoral men *and women's* security over them, and (re)strengthen 'appropriate' governance systems and institutions to protect and manage them.

This paper will consider these issues in relation to Ethiopia, a country where the majority of pastoral women fight a daily battle against poverty, food insecurity and gender-related inequities. They face extreme hardships collecting water and firewood, and ensuring enough food to feed the family members. The environment in which they live is highly physically challenging. The lack of services in pastoral areas mean that women do not have access to medical services or schools. Though the government is making efforts to fulfill these needs, the development of supporting services, and in particular *appropriate* supporting services, falls far behind non-pastoral areas. Harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation continue to be seen as an important part of cultural identity and some would argue, as a continuing way of oppressing women (Ahmed Mohammed 2006[5]).

Often girls and women do not survive this gender based violence,

[5] For a detailed account of women's views on gender-based violence see Ahmed Mohammed's report for SOS Sahel Ethiopia or his Master's Dissertation for Addis Ababa University.

contributing to the highly skewed population ratio in pastoral communities in favour of men. A study by the Ministry of Agriculture's Pastoral Extension Team – the Pastoral Areas Development Study – used the Ethiopian Census of 1994 to highlight that of the 8 million people who were living in the pastoral areas at the time, 4.2 million were men and 3.7 million were women. A normal population ratio should have slightly more females than males. Indeed, even if the ratio were 1:1 it would mean that within these pastoralist areas there would be over 500,000 "missing women". In Afar region the ratio was 136 men to 100 women, based on a population of 725,000 men and 531,000 women. This means that at the time there were 194,000 "missing women" in Afar alone.

Where changes are happening, women are having to make difficult decisions about whether and how they should embrace new opportunities that may benefit them as individuals, but are likely to damage the very roots of their cultural identity and existence. Should they allow their girls to be circumcised? What development pathway should they take? Should they fight for their rights as women, as pastoralists or is it possible and more beneficial to do both? This paper gives some voice to pastoral women in Ethiopia, highlighting some of their views and concerns, and also in many cases their very positive outlook. It draws on research carried out over the last six or so years in different regions of the country carried out by the author[6] with contributions from Beth Cullen working with the Karrayu, Fentale and Shauna Latosky working with the Mursi in South Omo.

## Changes in pastoral systems in Ethiopia

Change is happening at a dramatic pace in pastoral areas of Ethiopia. Since the establishment of the current government in 1991, Ethiopia has

[6] With team members from SOS Sahel Ethiopia – Getachew Mamo, Solomon Demlie, Kassaw Amare, Lemlem Areje, Lula Hussein, Zahra Ahmed Ali, Samuel Tafere, Sead Oumear, Andrew Ridgewell, Nimo Haji Ismail, Mohammed Awol, Yemene Belete and Honey Lemma.

seen a high level of administrative restructuring including decentralisation and development investment. Though in the past much of this has been targeted at the highland agricultural producing areas of the country, the government is now focusing on the lowlands and increasingly the vast areas of rangelands that remain dominated by semi-mobile livestock systems.

NGOs and development agencies have also increased their interventions in pastoralist areas, with a number of large back-to-back collaborative programmes providing funds for ongoing activities and support. This has increasingly 'opened up' pastoral areas, increasing pastoralist's exposure to political, economic and social forces way beyond the limited confines of clan boundaries. This paper will consider the impacts of these changes on two key aspects of pastoral life: one, access to resources and land; and two, cultural and social systems.

## Changing livelihoods and access to resources and land

In Ethiopia and on paper pastoralists' rights have received recognition at the highest level, as embodied in the Federal Constitution (1994): "Ethiopian peasants have the right to free land for grazing and cultivation as well as the right not be displaced from their own lands" (Article 40 (5)). This right includes the right to alienate, to bequeath, and where the right of land use expires, to remove property, transfer title or claim compensation for it, but not to sell or exchange it.

The rights of women and children are also enumerated, discrimination is prohibited and equality of rights to use, transfer, administer and control land has been laid down in Articles 25 and 35. Further the FRLAUP 1997 requires that landholding rights be assigned sufficiently to "both peasants and nomads without differentiation of the sexes" and that they be "secure against eviction and displacement from holdings on any grounds other than total or partial distribution of holdings effected pursuant to decision by Regional Council" (Article 6). However it is also stated that it has become necessary to establish a conducive system of

rural land administration that promotes the conservation and management of natural resources, and encourages private investors in pastoralist areas where there is tribe based communal land holding." Further, Article 5(3) states: "Government being the owner of rural land, can change communal rural land holdings to private holdings as may be necessary."

Despite their seeming protection under the Constitution, in practical terms pastoral lands have not been covered by specific national legislation and when competition or confrontation occurs between different land users, legislation protects investors or agriculturalists by default (Helland 2006). Despite the progress made in the highlands of the country[7], still today (with the exception of Afar region[8]) there are no clear policies or guidelines for registering or formalising land and resource rights in pastoral areas.[9]

Rather what legislation there has been is restrictive. The Oromia Rural Land Administration and Use Regulation No. 39/2003 states for example, that if land users fail to use their land in every production season (except in the case of restoring fertility) land use rights can be terminated (Article 3.5). After a period of three years without cultivation, the land will be

[7] A seemingly highly successful registration of individual plots of land has been carried out in the highlands and since the land registration process started in 1998, over 5 million certificates have been delivered to date. In some regions these include provisions for polygamous marriages which, although not recognised by federal law, are given separate attention with certificates for some landholdings being issued in the wives' names, with their husbands having only secondary interests recorded (Holden and Tewodros Tefera 2008).

[8] The Afar Pastoral Land Administration and Use Policy 2008 and the Afar Pastoral Land Administration and Proclamation No. ---/2009.

[9] The 1997 Proclamation's Article 6 (FRLAUP 89/1997) empowers regional nation states to autonomously administer land and, importantly, to determine the manner in which they implement this. Under the federal proclamation, regional states should also provide for communal use land areas to be demarcated. The proclamation provides the basis for land registration and certification and a 2005 addition (FRLAUP 456/2005) strengthens the basis for upgrading the land administration system and implementing sustainable land use planning. However guidelines on how this may be achieved are not provided.

expropriated; in the case of irrigated land, this can be applied after two years (Article 22.1) (Crewett et al 2008). This provides direct incentives for cultivating the land on a continuing basis, and any necessary mobility away from the land for a period of time – for example, in times of drought – could threaten the land's security and is therefore unlikely to be conducted or carried out with the risk that the land will be lost.

The insecurity of pastoralist's rights to land is aggravated by weakening customary institutions, the lack of good governance, the growth of individualistic and wealth-gaining interests, and an increasing competition for resources as populations grow, ability to cope with seemingly more common droughts reduce and resources degrade under pressure. As a result pastoral rights to land and resources are highly insecure, and increasingly so as interest in the development and investment of pastoral areas grows.

*Impacts*

The impacts of this land and resource insecurity is that pastoral lands and access to resources have been gradually eaten away by the establishment of government ranches and agricultural schemes; individual enclosures and the growing of crops[10]; leasing of land to investors; the building of large infrastructres such as the Gibe III Dam (Eshelby 2010); oil prospecting in South Omo and Somali regions; badly planned 'development' interventions; population increase including settlers moved in through resettlement programmes, enforcement of boundaries around protected areas; and conflicts between groups that are increasing as the competition for resources grows stronger due to such as changes in government administrative boundaries (Flintan *forthcoming)*.

[10] In 2003 it was suggested that 1.9 million hectares of rangelands in were under conversion to crop production (Beruk Yemane 2003).

Challenging and new threats include the continuing encroachment of non-native plants such as *Prosopis juliflora* which has taken over more than 1 million hectares of land and over 600,000 in Afar alone, important for grazing and access to water[11]. Land is being also being enclosed for private grazing or to use the trees for such as charcoal. No longer can pastoralists gain access to many vital water and grazing resources, the migration route blocked, and/or the resources given to others to use. As one woman in Harshin, Somali region lamented[12]:

*Land enclosures are a curse on the community as they stop the animals*
*from moving around. In the past they could feed from all the trees, shrubs and grasses and it was also good for their physical condition as*
*staying in one area for a long time will affect their body condition*.

Commercial investment in the country is likely to be the greatest threat to pastoral areas in the future. Commercial interest in the lowland areas began in the 1950-60s with the establishment of sugar cane and cotton farms in what are now Oromiya and Afar regions. Further lands were lost when the Awash National Park was established and the Nura Era Fruit Plantation. A study conducted in 2010 found that all Karrayyu households surveyed had lost grazing and water resources to non-pastoral uses (Eyasu Elias & Feyera Abdi, 2010: 7). Commercial investment in Ethiopia has increased dramatically in recent years. Data from the national inventories suggest that between 2004-2009 total approved land allocations for investment in agriculture (whether FDI or domestic investment, privately or state-led) covered approximately 600,000 ha (1.39% of land suitable for rain-fed agriculture). However this is unlikely

[11] Based on amending figures quoted in Flintan 2009b, based on a growth rate of 18% p.a.

[12] In Somali region many of the enclosures have been set up in order to individuals to gain from the making of charcoal from enclosed trees: it was estimated that in 2006 63,000 sacks of charcoal were harvested from Harshin woreda alone and transported to Hargeiysa on a monthly basis. This further impacts of this are discussed in Sead Oumar's chapter in Ridgewell et al 2007.

to reflect all land deals made and for example, enquiries made at the state-level Oromia investment promotion agency found evidence of some 22 proposed or actual land deals, of which 9 were over 1,000 ha, in addition to the 148 recorded at the national investment promotion agency (Cotula et al 2009).

Further land deals and being established with 3.7 million hectares already having been identified by the federal government and delineated, with nearly 1.6 hectares deposited in the federal land bank. The land is found in four regional states: Gambella (444,150 ha delineated), Beneshangul-Gumuz (691,984 ha deliniated), SNNPR (180,625 ha delineated in Dassenech, Nyangatom, Hamar and Southern Ari) and Afar (409,678 delineated) – all areas with significant number of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists (FDRE Embassy Sweden 2010).

*Women's views on these changes*

These increasingly rapid changes and threats are having a fundamental impact on pastoral livelihoods and their vulnerability to such as drought (Flintan *forthcoming*). They are also serving to destroy the foundations of pastoral society, which could be catastrophic not only for pastoral people but also for the economies and environment dependent upon sustainable rangeland systems.

Beth Cullen who has been carrying out PhD research with Karrayyu women in Fentalle (an area that has already lost much land to commercial investment – see above) describes some of the impacts of these changes on the Karrayyu society and pastoral systems, including the effects on Karrayyu women (see Box 1).

Box 1 "Without pastoralism I doubt there will be Karrayu, we will be Karrayu in name only"

Around Fentalle and as a direct result of changing land use patterns, traditional resource management systems have largely been destroyed and the land left for pastoral use is seriously degraded. This combined with frequent drought, means that 93% of Karrayyu households face food insecurity, irrespective of their economic group, and 20% are food insecure throughout the entire year (Feyera Abdi & Eyasu Elias, 2010: 14). Conflict over grazing, water resources and boundary claims, particularly with the neighbouring Afar and Argoba, has intensified and people die every year as a

result of such fighting. Despite these difficulties, the Karrayyu continue to practice pastoralism. Out of 18 rural *kebele*s, 8 practice exclusively pastoralist livelihoods, the other 10 *kebele*s are predominantly agro-pastoralist. According to data obtained from Fantalle Rural Development Office pastoralists constitute 60.4% of the total population in the district.

The situation is changing rapidly due to the introduction of a large scale irrigation scheme, funded by the Oromia Regional Government, which aims to convert Karrayyu pastoralists to agriculture. The scheme will cover eleven *kebeles*, the first phase has been completed and will be extended over the coming two years. The irrigation scheme, reported in Ethiopian newspapers as intending to 'help the Kereyu (sic) pastoralists to settle' (Yonas, 2010), is being introduced as a solution to both the 'pastoralist problem' and nation-wide development. The chief engineer has stated that irrigation will 'allow the community to adopt a technology that will change their mindset' (ibid.). However, considering the impact that previous development policy has had on pastoralist peoples, it is important to consider how the Karrayyu themselves view the scheme.

Previous research (Gebre, 2001) has focused on the continuity of the Karrayyu way of life through their apparent ability to adapt to huge changes; the Karrayyu, like other pastoralist groups, are described as remarkably flexible. But the Karrayyu now believe they are watching the disappearance of their culture, many anticipate that their traditional life will slip away with the coming of farming. A male elder commented: *'If the way of life changes then the culture also changes, the two are connected. Culture cannot maintain itself. The culture at the moment will not change because we still have our way of life, but during our children's lifetime it will change, once the irrigation comes'*. A female Karrayyu stated: '*Without pastoralism I doubt there will be Karrayyu, we will be Karrayyu in name only'.*

Herds are a defining aspect of Karrayyu identity. Cattle are primarily associated with women and the home, and it is frequently said that a Karrayyu woman is not complete without cattle. A young Karrayyu mother, explained: *'Cows are attached to the life of women. Without cows women are not women. Although men keep cows, they simply go behind with a dry stick. Men are not connected with cows; camels are of men not of women. Cows and their products are essential to our lives'.*

Although Karrayyu men may be decision makers in terms of livestock management and represent the household publicly, women play an important role in managing both the household and stock. Women maintain and control certain assets and direct the labour of household members. Female power can be seen particularly in the realm of food and milk processing, for which women are primarily responsible. Women also play a prominent role in *Waaqeffata* rituals and are placed on the right side of men, showing their *angafa* (senior) status, something which is also stipulated in Karrayyu law (*heera)*. Although women are actively excluded from public decision making processes, their prominence in the traditional religion and certain *Gadaa* rituals indicates the important role and respect accorded to women in other spheres of social life. As Lydall has written of the Hamar: 'behind the apparent male domination, we find a hidden, but none-the-less effective female power' (2005: 152-3).

Due to land loss, climatic changes, conflict over resources, as well as the adoption of new religions, modern education and urbanisation, the Karrayyu have experienced dramatic changes during the last 50 years. The effects of these changes are not evenly distributed. Men go further away from home for longer periods to find grazing for cattle and camels and face greater risk of death or injury due to increased levels of conflict. Due to pressures to diversify the family income they spend more time away from their family and stock. However, the changes are perhaps hardest on Karrayyu women. Environmental changes have led to a shift in women's workloads as they travel further away from home for water, grass and firewood. They report a decline in material culture and a shift in roles usually allocated to women, such as house building. In addition, as the number of cattle, and available milk, has declined people are unable to go to the ritual places. Through the erosion of ritual activities women are losing influence.

Even though changes to the pastoralist system have a heavier impact on women it seems they are

reluctant to make the shift to farming. Whereas men are generally more open to change, women are more resistant. This could be because men have more freedom of movement and therefore experience alternative modes of living, whereas women have less exposure to things outside their immediate environment. It could also be because women see themselves having less of a role in the agricultural system, and believe that the transition to farming will take away fundamental aspects of their identity. As one woman explained:

*'If cattle go, the first victims will be women. Even our appearance will be changed, dry and white as ash. Men have given up hope of continuing life with cattle but we women are struggling to maintain our way of life. The men are convinced they will become farmers, but nothing farming brings can touch us women. We know the products of farming cannot replace the products of animals. Oil for food and modern cosmetics can never replace how butter makes us feel beautiful and good about ourselves'.*

Many believe the conversion to agriculture will lead to the collapse of local support systems such as the *gosa* (clan system), *Gadaa* (socio-political system), and milk-lending mechanisms, leaving people vulnerable and prone to increased poverty. Elders cannot conceive of a life without animals and the younger generation is concerned about the effect that the loss of animals will have. One young person explained: *'It is not only about survival, their psychology is affected by their animals. They don't want to lose any of their animals. If such a thing happens they will be badly affected'.* It is hard to imagine how the Karrayyu will adapt to the loss of animals that are the foundations of their culture. This is a questionable route to 'development' as loss of cultural identity is known to contribute to conditions of social alienation, poverty and despair (Elias, 1991).

The fact that many Karrayyu women are staunch defenders of pastoralism perhaps indicates that outsider views of women's roles in pastoralist systems needs to be re-evaluated. Pastoral women are often portrayed as powerless figures, but as Debsu (2009: 16) writes 'unless we appreciate those subtle rights, our knowledge of gender relations in non-western societies remains partial'. Of course, there are differences among Karrayyu women and between them, and some may welcome opportunities for change that the irrigation scheme brings. However, it seems that there is little opportunity for Karrayyu women to participate in the decisions being made, or to define what **they** want as pastoralist women.

Ultimately the conversion from pastoralism to farming involves rapid change to another way of life that the Karrayu don't fully trust and, perhaps most importantly, do not have control over. Some support the scheme due to access to water, particularly those who have already converted to agro-pastoralism. However, many agro-pastoralists report that they cannot provide for all their needs from agriculture alone. It seems many Karrayyu would ideally prefer to maintain pastoralism, but this is difficult due to the impact of larger political-economic forces. They are being forced to make the change, rather than it being a choice. This is echoed by Eyasu Elias and Feyera Abdi (2010: 17) who state that, although 21% of Karrayyu interviewed are engaged in activities other than pastoralism, 'all respondents stated that they do not prefer these activities to pastoralism, but that they are desperate attempts to diversify their livelihoods.' Although Karrayyu community members, particularly women, are adamant they do not want to lose their link with livestock, it seems the continuation of pastoralism is an unlikely option. The Karrayyu face an uncertain future.

Contribution from Beth Cullen

The Karrayu women in Box 1 are highly pessimistic about their future and the future of Karrayu pastoralism, desperately trying to hold onto the things that provide them with a meaning for life.

However not all change may be negative, and some women in particular, have found that a more sedentarised way of life can have its advantages. Interviews carried out under a research project on gender and pastoralism funded by SOS Sahel Ethiopia (funded by IDRC) in Somali, Afar and Oromia regions reveal variable effects. The reasons for settling down may be complex and include a number of factors. However those interviewed stated that two primary reasons were the need to access social services such as schools, clinics and opportunities for farming, and the lack of grazing leading to an overall decline in the number of livestock which made pastoralism less viable.

For example, a group interviewed in Serkamo PA in Ambera *woreda,* Afar described how sedentarisation began after the fall of the Derg in 1991:

> *At that time there was hardship and we went from place to place searching for grazing land and water. We found water but the grazing land was getting smaller because of the new farms, the spread of prosopis and conflicts with the Issa Somali. Then we started to settle and not migrate as much. However, sedentariasation has benefited us through accessing water supplies and marketing livestock as well as the opportunity to form groups and cooperatives. Although there is no local school or clinic we have started to send our children to school and to use other social services.*

The status of women in some parts has also changed with them becoming increasingly involved in decision making with more men consulting with their wives over different issues. They are coming together to form groups and are no longer feeling isolated. Further their workload has been said to decrease with greater access to water. Exposure to other women, through such as NGO-organised exchange and learning visits, has also increased women's awareness of opportunities and the potential benefits of some change.

A woman interviewed from Dalifagi, Afar suggests that this has had a positive impact in terms education and health and households are less susceptible to droughts. Further their incomes have become more

diversified with new income generation activities and some people have found employment with private companies. Having joined an anti-AIDS club she and other women have become more vocal and active, though their lack of education continues to be a hindrance (interviewed 2007).

## Social and cultural systems

Social and cultural systems are also affected by these changes. As land and natural resources become more individualised and 'commoditised' customary support systems and relations built on trust and reciprocity are breaking down. Customary leadership is becoming weaker, marginalised by government and less appealing and legitimate in the eyes of the youth. 'Free riding' is taking place on common pool resources that are no longer controlled under a common property regime resulting in exploitation, increased settlement and further fragmentation of the rangelands. Both men and women still rely heavily on these supporting social systems as safety-nets in time of need and in particular in times of drought, where the sharing of food, livestock and resources protect the most vulnerable in the community. Without them their vulnerability to such as drought is increased, and their ability to cope and recover from such crises reduced.

In order to spread the risks they now face and to raise cash to purchase grain to supplement diets no longer able to rely on livestock alone, many pastoralists are trying to diversify their livelihoods. Women in particular are for example trading, participating in NGO-led income generation and credit/savings schemes (often targeted at women specifically) and livestock fattening. However, this is no easy task and often the returns are minimal despite high input of labour.

### *Women adapting to change*

Women appear to be more able than men to adapt to the changes taking place and for example capable of taking part in such as trading and money management, and small business development. The opportunities

provided by NGOs and local government to take part in meetings and development activities is not only increasing their ability to make money but also gives them greater status, knowledge and self-esteem (see Box 2).

Box 2 Making the most of new opportunities

Chuluk Kerabu, a Boran woman is a married mother of three sons and a daughter who is living in a house they constructed in the centre of the village of Dhas. She also has a teahouse and a shop that sells soft drinks and alcohol. The couple also trade livestock. When they first got married they had no assets and her husband herded other people's livestock. Beginning by selling local tobacco and tea they have steady improved their lot. Today they work together, with her selling livestock and travelling to Dubluk to buy supplies for the shop. From starting with only 80 birr she now estimates that her shop is worth 20,000 birr, the house 30,000 birr and their livestock 50,000

Before they started this business, they had an unhappy life. Over time their living condition changed little by little. Today she is happy to be independent, secure and a breadwinner for her family. They manage the profit they earn by allocating 50 per cent for household consumption, 40 per cent for expanding and replenishing their business and 10 per cent for savings. Livestock trade is given the greatest emphasis as they experience the best terms of trade in this sector. However, wherever the greatest profit comes from the agree how to spend the money together.

They now plan to construct a second house in the new *wereda* of Borbor that they can rent. They are also thinking to relocate the other businesses there if it seems promising. In addition they would like to buy an Isuzu truck when they have the money. She stated: "I want to advise other women to enhance and change their saving culture, experience different activities and involve themselves in different self-help groups like *ikub* and cooperatives to share experiences and appreciate business activities. If this happens I believe that our people will be free from poverty."

Interviewed in 2007

In Somali region women's powerlessness and marginality has often been highlighted, such as the fact that women only tend to be able to own small livestock. However, this can be to women's advantage – small animals can be more readily converted into cash and are more easily managed (easier to feed and water). Further if a woman earns money herself she retains control over it and does not have to consult her husband over how it is spent. Although a Muslim society, many Somali women are allowed to work outside the home and are able to participate in income generation activities. However, this has also meant that a

greater burden of providing for the family has fallen on women's shoulders. Further it has proved difficult for men to rebuild their herds after recurrent droughts or to find alternative livelihood opportunities. Women have suggested that this is not necessarily because there are no options or opportunities for men to diversify livelihoods but rather it is the reluctance of men to enter what they see as menial and low-paid jobs. Women however are willing to pursue such jobs and as a result are taking over the roles and responsibilities of men as 'household provider'. As one informant in this study stated:

> *All women, whether they live in the town or in the countryside, are fighting for the survival of their families. This used to be only the responsibility of men*.

By earning an income independent of their husbands, women now make many more decisions within the household. A major change in this regard is that in the past a large sum of money would be earned occasionally from the sale of an animal but now there is a small but continuous flow of money from petty trading or other businesses. Due to this, as well as the tendency of women to spend money on necessities rather than 'luxuries' (such as *khat*), household security has improved in many cases. Additionally those women who have started businesses have gained more confidence, status and self-esteem. This new assurance was expressed by one woman in the following terms:

> *Whatever happens, women will not return to their homes even if normality returns, because we have gained economic independence.*

*Limitations and negative impacts*

However the interviews carried out also highlight the limitations of this development approach. The need to gradually build the capacity of women members over time is very apparent as few have the confidence to break so quickly into this 'man's world'. Attaining legal status for a cooperative without having the requisite skills within the group will undermine sustainability. Financial literacy and business acumen take time to grow, especially among women who may have only had limited

experience of market transactions. In general there appears to be a tendency for groups and cooperatives to become dependent on external finances and training opportunities (as well as lucrative per diem payments that can come to represent a significant income to those women who are perpetually targeted by NGOs) (Ridgewell 2008)

The sustainability of NGO-led schemes in particular is questionable, often built on a poor understanding of gender roles, power relations and culture, as well as little capacity building and follow-up. For example women have not taken up a handicraft project introduced in Borana as it is seen as a taboo to produce crafts other than those for your own use. Women feel that if they take up the handicrafts it will suggest that they are in a desperate state. Normally a non-pastoral ethnic group – the *waata* – would be the only ones involved in such activities.

Often the setting up of the businesses is prohibitive to local people, markets are not established or functioning well, and appropriate or adequate support is not provided (for several case studies on income generation see Ridgewell and Flintan 2007). Women are limited in the skills required for trading, negotiating with buyers and reading/writing such as terms of trade. For example in Somali region the literacy rate for male pastoralists is around 22.7 per cent and for female pastoralists only 4.8 per cent, (Devereux 2006). As a result few such projects continue after the NGO or government assistance has stopped.

Due to unclear processes over land transactions (influenced by the often tenure pluralism that exists) least powerful members of the community lose out. For example Alia from Golan PA, Fentalle described how she started a petty trading enterprise with two friends who each paid ETB 5 to secure an area of land. However, despite receiving receipts for the site they were forced to vacate it soon after for another person (it was claimed that the latter was able to offer the administration more money) (Interviewed 2007).

On a number of occasions it is clear that community members have been

successful in producing commodities for sale only to see their efforts hampered by market access. Without the ability to find out market prices and few outlets for sale, profits find there way into the pockets of middlemen. Information communication technologies are now affordable options, particularly for groups, while the infrastructure for wireless communications is spreading into some of the lowlands. These may be viable means to access market information (Ridgewell 2008). In addition, as businesses grow workloads are likely to increase, and women are often subjected to harassment and insecurity traveling to/from and in such as markets. Further the increasing commercialisation of the pastoral economy is likely to have far-reaching and irreversible impacts.

*Complexities of change*

A number of complexly interrelated factors influence whether commercialisation will benefit or harm women's (and indeed men's) socio-economic status and access to assets. These vary spatially, over time and socio-economic development, and at different stages of a woman's life. But once women have invested money or energy into an initiative they are loath to abandon it, hoping they will receive some return in the future (Watson 2005).

Commercialisation within pastoral societies can have particularly concerning impacts as for many it is a relatively new concept and many still rely on informal methods of exchange such as bartering, trading and providing gifts. Encouraging continued commercialisation, the expansion of markets and subsequent commodification is likely to have an impact on this and probably result in the marginalisation of such social relations. Services that were once given free are now being charged for, and the traditional benefit sharing methods that have been important in helping communities get through crises such as drought.

Milk, for example, is a traditional product, produced and consumed within a clear set of cultural rules. The creation of markets challenges these social norms and provides new opportunities, however as described

above it can also result in restrictions. These norms surrounding milk are being renegotiated, both implicitly and explicitly, as households face the costs and benefits of these new opportunities (McPeak 2006).

Tourism is also a cause of changes in pastoral culture and societies. This is particularly the case in South Omo, where the region has seen a small but highly influential influx of
tourists since the 1980s reaching around 238,814 in number by 2005/6 (in Ridgewell and Getachew Mamo 2007). This development has manifested itself in the form of 'cultural tourism' in some areas – particularly among the Mursi and Suri – whereby it is the people and not the environment or history that provides the attraction (see Abbink 2000; Turton 2004). As a result, despite the fairly modest number of visitors, it can be suggested that this has disproportionately affected social relations. An example of how women are dealing with such impacts is provided in Box 3. Here two Mursi women are discussing the virtues of continuing to wear their lip-plate or not: the lip-plate is not only a symbol of their identity and culture, but also a means of earning cash from tourists. Removing it will risk losing these though it is likely to help one to 'fit in'.

**Mursi women in a merging world**

Shauna Latosky has been working with the Mursi in a number of capacities including PhD research since 2003. In a chapter in the book, *The Perils of Face* edited by Ivo Strecker and Jean Lydall she recounts a discussion that she had with two Mursi women both married with children. One – Bermille – wants to keep her lip-plate and the other – Legessa – does not want to continue wearing the lip-plate and to get her cut lip sewn up:

*SL:* L**ɛ**gessa says that she no longer wants a [stretched] lip.

*L:* That's right, I really don't want it!

*SL:* Barmill**ɛ** says that a [stretched] lip is nice. Why is this?

*L:* Yes, she can say what she wants and I can say what I want.
*L:* I really don't want mine; I want to be like an Amhara.

*B*: That's not what I want. (*Both begin to laugh*).

*L:* I made up my mind that I didn't want the [stretched] lip. If I were to go to Jinka tomorrow, I would have my lip sewn back and would learn how to speak the language of the Amhara. But you say, "I am Mursi!"

*B*: Yes, I am Mursi! I want a [stretched] lip, so that I can put in a lip-plate, lip-plate, lip-plate. If tourists come they will take photos, photos, photos, photos, like that. Now Lɛgessa says, 'I want my lip to shrink and I want to learn to speak Amharic.' Why shrink her lip? She's Mursi? Yes, she's a Mursi.

*L*: That's not what I want! That's not what I want! I only want to learn, to learn Amharic and the [language of] foreigner's, both! This is what I told Shauna.

*B:* Is this good Shauna?

*SL:* I don't know.

*B:* You don't know?

*B:* Lɛgessa, she's a liar.

*L:* I know [what I am saying]! I am a child of the state [a citizen]. Today Shauna asked: 'Why isn't your lip stretched, why aren't you putting in your lip-plate?' I want to learn. If I go to Jinka, I won't stretch my lip, and, if tomorrow, I become a child of the state, I will not stretch my lip, or wear skins, only clothes. That's what I have to say.

*B:* That's what you say, but I will stretch my lips, stretch my ears and the tourists will come. Even if my lip and ears are stretched more than yours, we are no different; I am also a child of the state, like you. I can also learn Amharic even if I have a long dangling lip.

*L:* Yes, fine. You have your way of looking at it and I have mine. I want it to shrink, to become small, that's what I have to say. I really don't want [a stretched lip], I don't want skins; today, I only want to wear clothes. We can still keep on having children without stretching our ears, without stretching our lips. That's how it is. I don't want to.

*B:* Fine, but I will always have a stretched lip; the lip will be stretched, the ears will be stretched and when the tourists come, they will shoot [their cameras], shoot, shoot [at me]. Now if Lɛgessa wants to shrink her lip and become a student, let her go and become a citizen of the state, let her sew her lip and let her ears become short. Go and become like them if you want, go without [this] (*pulling on her lip*); that's your choice. My choice is to make my lip long.

*L:* Keep quiet and listen! I don't want a big stretched lip. If, later on, Shauna says, 'Let's go to Arba Minch,' and you were to put in your lip-plate and walk into a big hotel together, where everyone is eating, the people will ask, (*running her finger down her chin*) 'What kind of person is this with drool!' The people will look at you and talk badly about you. I don't want this.

*B:* You might want to leave, but if I go with my lip [plate] to Addis Ababa (*clicking her index finger*), or to Germany (*click!*), or to Canada (*click!*), all of the foreigners will say, 'There's a Mursi, there's a Mursi, there's a Mursi!' They will come and look at me, [they will] see the lip, [they will] see the ears and will say: 'She's Mursi, she's Mursi!' Later they will say nice things. If you go, they will say, 'Hee! She doesn't have a dangling lip, she can't be a Mursi.'

*L:* But I have a hole [my four lower incisors have been removed].

*B:* 'There's no [dangling] lip, she's definitely not Mursi!'

*L:* I have a hole.

*B:* That's what the people in Canada will say.

*L:* I have a hole!

*B:* That's what the people in Arba Minch and Germany will say.

*L:* I also had my lips and ears cut and still look like a Mursi. Don't you understand? When tourists look at me, they will see that I have let my lip shrink back, but that doesn't mean they won't also look at me. Shauna it's true.

*B:* Okay!

*L:* Even if I have my lip sewn back, the tourists will still shoot [their cameras] at me.

*B:* I want the tourists [to come]. She says that she will have her lip stitched and still find tourists who will want to take her picture, even when she abandons her culture, they will still point [their camera] at her?

*L:* That's enough! I understand what you are saying. But if tomorrow we go together, me and Barmillɛ and Shauna, together to Jinka, we can learn the language of the foreigners, we can be students, students in Jinka.

*L:* Wouldn't you [want to] go? You don't want to? You wouldn't go?

*B:* Yes, I'd go.

In general, the voices of these two Mursi women are those of a culture in transition: they capture the same generation of women and different levels of commitment to Mursi life. Barmille articulates that the lip-plate announces who she is and suggests that outsiders will want to get closer to her, and will be more interested in her. L**ɛ**gessa's comments reveal a desire to belong, to blend in better, noting that with a dangling lip, outsiders would make fun of the drool dripping down her chin. This is a common complaint also made by some young Mursi men today. Interestingly, Barmille feels that she would still be seen as a Mursi even with a smaller lip, or if she were to have it sewn back. People would still recognise that her four lower incisors had been removed (in order to fit a lip-plate), for instance.

The lip-plate serves as both a major component of ones sense of pride and identity in the 'private' world of Mursi, and as a tool for mediating the potential conflicts that can arise when crossing over the periphery of the public world. Unlike a garment-wearing Mursi man[13], who does not appear as unapproachable and strange to most casual observers as a Mursi woman with a leather dress and lip-plate, L**ɛ**gessa argues that the latter two are obstacles in becoming a fully educated 'citizen of the state'. Barmillɛ, on the other hand, wishes to build on what she perceives as a new strength to establish new economic gains in certain situations, especially through encounters with tourists. She has appropriated, as have many Mursi women, this aesthetic category of 'Mursi identity' and transformed it in both discourse and practice[14].

It is not difficult to find examples of women like L**ɛ**gesse who stretch the limits by shrinking their lips and others, like Barmillɛ, who are judgemental about it. This case illustrates the complex way

[13] When Mursi men travel to the local market they will put on T-shirts (as well as jeans, hats and sunglasses if they have them) just before they reach a local village (like the Aari village of Belamer) or town (like Jinka) in order to blend in more. The women rarely do anything to blend in, though some will cover their breasts or wear men's cloth or skirts instead of skins.

[14] Jon Abbink discusses a similar occurrence among the Surma (Abbink, 2000).

in which Mursi women are currently choosing to wear or not wear the lip-plate as an act of volition. In other words, it provides an example of how social agency can be attributed to women who wear or choose not to wear the lip-plate.

## CONCLUSIONS

Both pastoral culture and gender relations have been seen as fixed and immobile due to the reasoning that these constructs are determined by livelihoods, which in turn have been seen to be stagnant and unresponsive (in Hodgson 16-17: 2000). However, pastoral societies as shown here have engaged with external influences in ways that have had both positive and negative impacts on their livelihoods and their cultures. For many, external forces of change have sped up and intensified with the process of modernisation, which in many circumstances has brought with it the localisation of peripheral societies and the perceived need to 'catch up' (Bauman 1998 cited in Turton 8: 2004). However, 'traditional' values and beliefs are rarely if ever simply replaced by their 'modern' counterparts. In the context of pastoral societies in Ethiopia modernisation has been a piecemeal affair representing expanding state authority, the incorporation of local communities into these structures and the adoption of external ideologies such as capitalism.

As these case studies highlight women experience change in different ways, and often this experience and how positive or negative it may be depends upon the security and accessibility they have to knowledge, skills, resources, and decision-making processes. When the future is unsure or unknown, it increases women's concerns and pessimism about what the impacts of such a future might be, and thus increases their vulnerability. Change appears to be particularly threatening for those who have had less exposure and live as part of more traditional societies. This suggests that more effort should be placed in developing sensitive supportive mechanisms for pastoral communities including women, that help them adjust to change and to build upon the positives aspect of it.

Sedentarisation does appear to increase women's opportunities to

resources and ways to diversify livelihoods away from a more nomadic lifestyle and the many demands it places on women. It also seems to provide some women with the means to gain greater status, respect and say in decision-making processes. In time this is likely to have further positive impacts and could lead them to gaining stronger and greater rights to land, as they become more knowledgeable, vocal and able to fight for their rights. Many women are optimistic that their daughters will have a better life than they did. For this to happen however, governments need to put into practice what is written in paper and ensure that women as well as men are provided with greater security to land, and the rights espoused in such as Ethiopia's Constitution are upheld.

Development actors can assist pastoralists and agro-pastoralists by pushing forward discussions on how to make access to land and resources more secure, for both men and women. Though it is likely that sedentarlisation of more pastoralists will occur, it is also necessary that some are able to maintain their semi-nomadic lifestyle in order to make the most productive use of the rangelands, and the spatially uneven resource distribution and climatic variation, and adapt to the potential impacts of climate change. How best this can be achieved is one of the most important questions for pastoral areas today.

In addition the different needs of women as pastoralists and as agro-pastoralists or agriculturalists need to be recognised. As livelihoods are changing these needs are changing too. With appropriate planning and support, the development of commercial farms such as those in Fantalle need not be entirely negative for either neighbouring sedentarised local communities or more mobile pastoralists. Local communities (both men and women) need to be part of these processes, and a better understanding of and involvement in decision made achieved. This includes both men and women. Indeed both pastoral men and women want to be able to sustain their own livelihoods. As one Borana woman stated:

> *"A woman does not have to wait for her husband's hands to do something. She has to start an activity that can begin bringing an*

*additional income into the home. She has to convince her husband to let her do something. Poverty is not in our hearts, but by sitting idle we invite it into our homes."*

The importance of recognising the dynamism within pastoral communities is clear from these studies. As Ethiopia's pastoral lowlands become more closely connected to the rest of the country through expanding road networks and the spread of telecommunications the pace of change will inevitably increase. But it is also clear that 'change' does not always lead to equality when it comes to gender relations. Assuming that an intervention will at worst 'do not harm' (and hopefully do some good) is not sufficient and practitioners need to recognise that customary rights can be eroded just as quickly as new rights can be recognised.

Pushing women into the domains of men is not necessarily the right solution to coping with change; women need to experience change at their own pace, in their own way and 'places and spaces.' As the example of the Mursi women discussing change showed, women are well capable of talking and developing their own ideas about change between themselves.

These changes have generated much debate in society particularly between elders and younger people. One elderly man spoke for many of his generation at a workshop when he asserted that women should maintain traditional roles, and cited a Somali proverb: *"Hooyadu mar waa dabaakh, mar waa doobi, mar waa daabad, marna waa furaash"* (A mother's function is to cook, launder, nurture and be a wife to her husband). This view is based in part on tradition but also the frustration that many men feel when not being able to support their families as custom prescribes.

Women often gain power through subtle strategies (some of which have been suggested above). They highlight their determination to stand up for their rights and are, crucially, a clear resistance to submission (Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008). Women are taking advantage of changes occurring

in their communities. But to better support them there is a an urgent need to understand the agency of pastoralist women; lack of research and planning can undermine what are already fragile rights and fail to provide them with the support they require. Only then are the changes happening in pastoral areas likely to result in positive results.

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