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Sugar for the Tea:

or An Overview of Humanitarian and Development Assistance and the State of Pastoralism in the Horn of Africa.

When a young man asked me what I was there to give them I responded with a curt “nothing”. I was irritated by his question but upon reflection it was fair. After all this is the way the humanitarian and development assistance systems deal with his people in his little village lost somewhere between Mandera and Moyale in Northern Kenya. Someone shows up one day to give them something. Perhaps it is a water pan, or maybe a school, and most probably some relief food. After an appropriate discussion with the village elders, the agreed-upon assistance is delivered and the aid workers go away, only to reappear sometime in the future to give them something else. Every village in the pastoral areas of Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia has a collection of sign boards announcing that “such and such” assistance was provided by “This” Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) or “That” and funded by USAID or EC or DIFD or UNDP or the World Bank.

This is how “we” provide humanitarian and development assistance to pastoral peoples in the Horn of Africa (HOA). There are good reasons that explain why: it is expensive to maintain a permanent office and staff in these remote areas; communication between these villages and headquarters in Nairobi or Addis Ababa is tenuous at best; security, or rather insecurity, is a constant worry; and funding by the donors to the NGO implementers is short-term and haphazard. This all conspires to create a system that delivers “things” but does not deliver economic security.

Foreign assistance comes in two basic forms - humanitarian assistance, which is short-term (one year) and aimed at saving lives and reducing suffering during an emergency; and development assistance, which is longer-term (two to five years) and directed at improving the economic security of the target population. The two forms of foreign assistance are commonly administered by different agencies with funding sources that come from different pools in the donor country. The amount of humanitarian assistance, primarily food staples, exceeds the amount of development assistance in part because the HOA is considered a place in permanent crisis. For instance, in 2008 USAID spent 295 million USD for humanitarian assistance in Somalia versus 26 million in development assistance.

There are about 20 million people living in the Pastoral Arc of the Horn of Africa - the largest conglomeration of pastoralists in the world. This Arc stretches from the territories of the Afar where Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Djibouti meet and passes down through Somalia and Eastern Ethiopia (Ogaden), and west across northern Kenya to the territories of the Turkana and Pokot.

About half of these pastoral peoples belong to clans associated (sometimes loosely) to the Somali identity. The Oromo are the next largest tribal group.

All of these pastoralists share a culture of living from sheep, goats, cattle and/or camels which graze on arid and semi-arid pastures. The key for these nomadic peoples is mobility because rainfall is erratic the herds must travel long distances for feed and water. Clan survival also depends upon two contradictory principles. The clan elders are tasked with negotiating and mediating a network of reciprocal agreements with neighboring people which gives the clan access to water points and pastures during drought or conflict related emergencies. But clan survival also depends upon the ability to defend the clan's resources and the willingness to take water points and pastures by force if the situation requires or if the neighboring people cannot defend themselves. Consequently the Pastoral Arc has historically been an area of continual conflict, a reality that is increasing as populations increase and natural resources are over-exploited.

Humanitarian food assistance is obviously most needed in the southern parts of Somalia where up to 3 million people are on the move attempting to avoid the conflict. Although there have been many valiant attempts on the part of the NGO implementers to maintain permanent presences with the communities with whom they are engaged in southern Somalia, open conflict eventually engulfed most areas and the NGOs have been forced to evacuate. I believe that currently, no NGO international staff can visit their project sites and just recently the United Nations has suspended operations in much of southern Somalia. In fact, for the last number of years the NGO presence in southern Somalia has been staffed primarily by Somali and Kenyan citizens. This staff does heroic work in a chaotic and dangerous environment but their work has been limited as to what they can actually accomplish.

The humanitarian assistance system in south Somalia delivers primarily food assistance along with programs focused on health and the provision of clean water. But too often the foreign humanitarian assistance fuels the very conflicts that the assistance system is responding to. I first witnessed this dynamic on the Shabelle River in December 1991 just before the US Marines landed in Mogadishu. People were starving in a market place stacked with rice and beans stolen from the relief food effort. However, a child feeding center that only supplied a corn- soybean mush was operating without problems because the corn-soy flour did not have enough market value to attract the militia gangs.

And it is not just the food that attracts looting by the militia gangs. Employment offered by the relief and development systems is a huge source of militia revenues. NGOs need offices and living quarters, which often must be rented from militia leaders even when the buildings in question do not belong to that militia or clan. Transportation, also primarily stolen, is provided by militia leaders along with an appropriate number of guards. In 1991 each Toyota Land Cruiser came with a driver and three armed guards. A few years later when security was even more

tenuous it took two additional guards who rode on the roof. Now with the conflicts more open and violent a “technical” battlewagon must be rented to accompany each vehicle of NGO staff. When the NGO works in neighboring territories controlled by different clans, vehicles and guards must be rented from each separated clan and a transfer made at the border between the two clans. The expense is considerable.

Other employment, besides guards and drivers, also becomes subject to clan and militia politics. The pressure on NGOs is unrelenting to hire persons from just the controlling clan, whether or not they are qualified. Professionals of Kenyan or Asian ethnicities have a hard time finding acceptance, the argument being made that Somalis should be hired instead and trained if necessary. I came across a situation a few years ago in Somalia where an NGO program had been “captured” by one of the various clan factions vying for control of this particular community. The result was that work was no longer possible but for some reason the NGO in question, rather than close the project down, continued to pay the local staff even though no one was working. Another example was a hospital where the guards were running the hospital for their own economic interests. In this case the NGO in charge was resisting resulting in the hospital being closed. One of the less attractive aspects of the Somali psyche, from my observation, is their sense of entitlement to the foreign assistance. Just like the green grass that grows after a rain, an NGO project is considered a resource to be consumed by the first people to reach and defend that pasture.

The bottom line is that emergency humanitarian assistance reaches a limit where the compromises made to get the assistance to the affected population exceed the good being done. The assistance itself becomes the means of survival for the militia gangs and the conflict becomes permanent. At some point the policy makers should face up as to whether the humanitarian programs are prolonging the suffering. As hard as it might be, the humane thing might be to halt outside assistance until the antagonists decide to resolve their differences.

Because of the increased level of conflict in southern Somalia during the last few years, economic development as opposed to humanitarian assistance is no longer possible. However, in northern Somalia, particularly in Somaliland, development assistance has made a difference in the economy. Early on the ports at Berbera and Bossasso were rebuilt and port management systems put in place. Airstrips were also rehabilitated. Education projects helped to train and upgrade the skills of many human and animal health professionals, and naturally wells and water pans have been built or repaired. In more recent years, schools from primary to post-secondary have been established and supported.

It must be noted, however, that the most important investments in northern Somalia have come from Somali businessmen. Telecommunications, air transportation, commercial radio stations, money transfer businesses, import and retail enterprises, and livestock exports have done more good for the people of Somalia than anything that has been done by the international community.

Also the continued flow of funds from the Diaspora (perhaps as high as one billion USD per year), both as remittances to individuals and as funds to support projects such as schools and hospitals, exceeds monies coming from the international humanitarian and development sources.

Northeast Kenya and the Somali National Region of Ethiopia have different realities than Somalia. The conflicts in those areas are more directly related to control of pasture and water although it should be noted that at its core the conflict in southern Somalia is also related to the control of pasture, water, and other economic resources including the anticipated foreign aid. Historically the governments of Kenya and Ethiopia have neglected the economic development of pastoral regions, from their point of view, for good reason. The northern and northeastern lowlands of Kenya was considered by the post colonial government of Kenya to be a source of insecurity and banditry with little economic potential. In the eyes of many, Kenya stopped, or started (depending upon the direction you were looking), at Isiolo and the Tana River. Kenyans of a certain age still recall the Shifta War with disdain for the Somali protagonists. The result is that these territories have little in economic infrastructure: not many kilometers of all weather roads, spotty access to telecommunications, few banks, and - outside of larger towns - no schools.

That neglect is changing as the politics of Kenya matures. Politicians from the pastoralist communities now hold the balance of power in the Kenyan parliament and as a consequence development funds are flowing to the lowlands. However, they have a long way to go before the pastoralist areas have the infrastructure needed for a sustainable environmental and economic system. But this new focus on the pastoral populations brings its own problems because much of the assistance can be inappropriate, an issue that I will discuss in coming paragraphs.

The situation in the pastoral areas of Ethiopia, particularly the Somali National Regional State (Ogaden), is very different. Unlike the Kenyan Somali population, who now see advantage in being Kenyan citizens, Ethiopian Somalis do not seem to share that same attitude towards Ethiopia. Even though the federal system that now constitutes the government of Ethiopia gives each Regional State much political autonomy, people do not appear satisfied and insurgency simmers. Consequently the highlanders who control the government in Addis Ababa and who are already nervous about the chaos in Somalia see the conflicts in the Somali National Regional State as a destabilizing threat. The result is military repression of the occupants of the Ogaden, little different from that historically experienced under the Ethiopian Emperors. The Ethiopian army chases down and confiscates herds from nomads whom they suspect of smuggling livestock out of Ethiopia. The nomads, who of course do not consider taking their livestock to Somaliland or Kenya as smuggling, fiercely resent the interference. Somali businessmen who smuggle consumer goods into Ethiopia without bothering to pay taxes - goods often purchased with the proceeds from the exports of livestock often originating in Ethiopia- just fuel the Ethiopian government's resolve to impose order and control on the Somali regions.

Given the government of Ethiopia's negative perception of their pastoral citizens, very little development infrastructure is offered to those regions. It should be noted that Somalis are not the only tribal group that is disadvantaged, because the Ethiopian government also has problems with the Afars to the north and the Oromos to the south. One modern technology with the potential to be transformative to pastoral people is the mobile phone, but the Ethiopian government keeps a tight rein on the communication system. NGOs working in the pastoral areas are viewed with considerable suspicion and must be careful so that their staff members are not arrested and their programs suspended. Food aid is controlled by the government and truck convoys carrying food are sometimes blocked from going to people that might be supporting insurgents. From the Ethiopian government's point of view all of this disadvantage to the pastoral areas is rational and part of their mandate to keep control of their country.

I mentioned above that the mobile phone is transformative technology for pastoral people. They certainly see it that way; in Kenya and Somalia every nomad that can has a mobile phone. This makes sense from two different cultural aspects of pastoral people. First they are oral societies with low literacy levels. The mobile phone is the perfect tool for people who communicate with each other by talking. Second, mobility is the key to survival for nomadic people. Adaptation to modern realities requires that pastoral families spread their human resources to other enterprises than herding livestock - in essence, expanding the range of their nomadic activities. Pastoral family survival in modern times requires that family members have businesses or jobs in other areas - even in other countries. But if they are to remain a family they need to stay in communication with each other. The mobile phone is the perfect technology. This is why the telecommunications system expanded so quickly in the economic free for all of post-1991 Somalia. In Kenya, after the government monopoly on telecommunications was subject to private enterprise competition, the mobile network also expanded rapidly. The mobile phone companies have been surprised to find that many of their most profitable cells are in the sparsely populated pastoral areas of NE Kenya. In Ethiopia, however, the government continues to keep a tight control on the telecommunications system.

The NE Region of Kenya now gets 52% of food needs through the humanitarian food system. The food aid initially comes as a response to drought emergencies but never stops because of pressure by Kenyan politicians. There is no question that there is a livelihoods crisis in the pastoral areas. If you consider numbers of livestock, for instance in Mandera District of Kenya, you will find that there are only enough animals to provide a minimal living for 40% of the human population. As you travel through NE Kenya you pass little clusters of dilapidated nomadic huts (aqeals), put together with pieces of cardboard, plastic, and empty maize sacks. If a food distribution is imminent, these camps are occupied, otherwise they are abandoned.

The targeting of food aid to recipients that have the most needs is difficult. Usually the clan elders are asked to identify persons who require food assistance. The elders naturally try to include everyone in the clan. After all, it is free food. Many recipients of course need the food aid to survive but others sell the food. It is expensive to deliver the food because so much of it is diverted at every stage of the process and the long distance it is transported over sometimes nearly impassible roads is costly. So you have the absurdity of some of the food aid recipients selling the food for a fraction of the cost of delivery. Food aid is a very inefficient way to deliver assistance to people, particularly now when neither the United States nor Europe has surplus supplies of maize or wheat. In the NE part of Kenya there is an experiment in progress to provide the poorest of the poor with cash instead of food. On the surface this approach makes sense as it is more efficient. But the problems of targeting and fraud continue. And too there is something fundamentally wrong in creating a dependency to outside assistance without making a sincere effort to give these people the tools to live independent productive lives. And it is wrong to make people dependent upon outside assistance when there is no guarantee that the assistance will continue.

Another thing happening because of food distribution is that the food relief camps tend to turn into small villages, especially, when permanent water sources are developed. Water is the key to all of it. Ask any pastoralist what it is he needs most and he will reply “water”. This fits well to the work of the humanitarian and development systems because water development is relatively easy and inexpensive to supply. The only problem is that water development is destroying the environment and accelerating the cycle of drought emergencies. This is because the inhabitants of each village keep a resident herd of livestock which utilize the pasture within a day’s walk around the village. With more villages springing up, more and more areas are depleted of grass or browse, reducing the mobility of the nomadic herding system.

Survival for pastoralists, as I wrote above, depends upon mobility because the rainfall pattern in the HOA is erratic. The herds must follow where the rain has fallen. What pastoral groups developed over the centuries are large ranges that increased the probability that it would rain somewhere within their territory. Much of that range had no permanent water source and could only be used during the rainy season. This left wide areas within the nomadic system with plentiful grass, browse, and wildlife. The nomads would trek their herds to these places in the rainy season and return to their core pastures where they had permanent water and where grazing had been prohibited by mutual consent to be used only in the dry season.

The proliferation of villages with permanent water sources in what had been dry season grazing areas is disrupting the entire nomadic system. Not only is this accelerating environmental deterioration and increasing the frequency of drought emergencies, it is creating tribal conflict. Currently in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia there are armed conflicts between the Garre and the Marehan across the border of Kenya and Somalia; between the Garre and the Borana in southern Ethiopia; between the Borana and the Gabra across the Ethiopia – Kenya border; and

between the Pokot and Turkana in western Kenya. These are all conflicts over control of the grazing and water.

In my travels and work in the HOA I have come across a few pastoral visionaries. These are men and women, pastoralists themselves, who believe that pastoralists must take control of their own destinies. If assistance from the outside is to help more than it hurts, that assistance must be guided by the recipient community itself.

This is something easier said than done. I have discussed with Somali friends and read other accounts written by Somalis who despair that their clan system is totally dysfunctional in dealing with the forces that has engulfed Somalia. I am not convinced. The one thing that Somalis and other pastoralists have is community, and belonging to, and having a place within that community. The issue is how to use that clan-based community to solve the problems faced by the community rather than let the community disintegrate and follow the leadership of the most greedy and violent among them? The cultural tools are there, already in place, for the communities with the will to use them to solve their common problems. Winner-take-all brute force does not have to prevail.

It is a small story but it is perhaps indicative as to how the international assistance system and national governments can work with community leaders to guide pastoral communities to confront the difficult issues they are facing. In 2008, I traveled into northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia to look at projects funded by USAID. In southern Ethiopia there is an area referred to as the Singing Wells. These are amazing wells dug over the centuries by the Borana people of the region. After a certain depth it is impractical to raise water by hand all the way to the surface, so the people have dug trails into the earth to a staging area where the water troughs can be filled by a chain of five or six men perched on ledges in the wells themselves. The staging area is 15 to 25 meters below the surface of the earth and the water itself another 10 to 15 meters farther down the well. The men of the clan pass the containers of water up one to another to fill the watering troughs for the herds, singing to coordinate this hard work in the depth of the cool earth.

I visited these wells with a young Borana man who was working for an international NGO involved with his community. He showed me a well where the NGO had provided funds to expand the opening and the trail into the well and to make a permanent concrete trough where before the people had mud troughs that needed continual repair. It was impressive and certainly useful, but I asked the young man why they had provided funds to do this? He said it was a model for other clan groups who have similar wells. However, upon further questioning it came out that there were eight wells in the immediate vicinity and the NGO had provided funds to rehabilitate five of them, presumably with plans to rehabilitate the remaining three. I did not argue with this young man, but I failed to understand how if the NGO was rehabilitating all of the wells how this could be considered a “model.”

Later on that trip I visited an area in northern Kenya, also Borana territory, and assisted by a local NGO. Again I visited wells that had been improved by the addition of permanent concrete water troughs. I asked the Borana man who ran this NGO why he had elected to do well rehabilitation. He said he was “bringing sugar for the tea”. His point is that everybody has tea but sugar is expensive and if you are going to have a meeting, someone has to provide the sugar for the tea. The concrete trough was the “sugar” to give him a forum to discuss the broader issues face by that community of pastoralists.

Is this too idealistic? Is it possible for the foreign assistance industry to collaborate with pastoral communities and together guide economic development? The distance between the world capitals where decisions to fund foreign assistance and a small village in the Mandera Triangle which receives those funds is much more than just the air miles between. Washington and Brussels live in a reality based on the political winds of the United States and the European Union. Pastoralists of the HOA are, you might say, stretched between the realities of the present and the traditions of the centuries. For nomads in the HOA the tension must be extreme because the past is not yet over and the present has not quite arrived.

The human population of the pastoral areas of the HOA is too large for what the environment is able to provide. But too many of the people are under prepared to lead lives other than as pastoralists. Their social and clan governance systems are seemingly unable to cope with the changing conditions and circumstances imposed by the outside world. And their national governments along with the international humanitarian and development systems too often respond with assistance that increases the problems.

I am overstating this to some degree because, for the inhabitants of northern Somalia, conditions are not that bad. In fact, it seems to me that northern Somalis have a better economy now than at any time in the past forty years in which I have witnessed conditions in Somalia. In Kenya things are changing for the better. The city of Garissa in eastern Kenya is booming, as is the Somali enclave of Eastleigh in Nairobi. The Somali Diaspora also has a bearing. A million Somalis are now residents of the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Many are doing very well economically and many are helping the people still in the homeland.

But on the negative side, conflict reigns in southern Somalia, and that conflict has now taken on religious overtones where before it was primarily economic. We can't expect too much progress until peace returns over the whole of the Horn of Africa and peace now seems further away than ever. But when that day arrives, we will still be left with a population that is too large, an environment which is deteriorating, and too few economic opportunities for too many people who are underprepared to meet that future.

We Do Not Sell the Grass: Pastoralism in Transition

by Gilles Stockton

In the spring of 2012, as a part of my assignment to evaluate a pastoral areas development project in southern Ethiopia, I interviewed two elders of the Boran tribe. Their sub-clan had in recent years shifted from a nomadic existence to living in a group of small settlements where the women, children and elderly stayed while the younger men moved with the herds through the Boran's traditional extended pasture. These settlements had no stores or services so could not be considered to be villages, but the people had enclosed a number of areas where grass was protected from indiscriminate grazing. In these enclosures, the inhabitants cut grass to feed a core group of lactating cattle and goats kept by the individual households.

This shift from nomadic life to semi-nomadic agro-pastoralism is happening within all the various tribal groups I have visited and throughout the Horn of Africa (defined here as Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, with 25 to 30 million people having a cultural background of pastoralism in a total population of 150 million). I was trying to get a feel for the underlying economics behind this move to a semi-sedentary livestock-rearing strategy and asked Boran elders, for example, how much money they could earn by selling the cut grass in neighbouring towns. They looked puzzled, spoke to each other for a moment after which one answered, "We do not sell the grass, it belongs to all of the Boran people."

There was a loud inaudible click as a light bulb came on over my head. Of course! Nomadic people do not sell the cut grass – the hay – because it is owned communally. I had been seeking, without knowing that I was looking for that little bit of information for nearly three decades. And it explains a lot.

The big danger in working in economic development in areas such as the Horn is getting it all wrong. Wrong assumptions result in recommendations that are not only wrong or wasteful, but can also cause harm. In 1987 in a paper for UNICEF/Somalia, Reginald Green and Vali Jamal, noted development economists, advised those of us working within the development context that *"... to be precisely right is rarely a realistic goal; to be precisely wrong is an ever-present danger."*

My Somalia visit 1986

My search for the answer about the lack of hay for sale began in 1986 when my job was to recommend to the government of Somalia the infrastructure requirements to increase the livestock exports. More hay was an obvious need. The cattle, camels, sheep and goats destined for export to the Middle East needed hay to maintain themselves during the marshalling period and for the many days they would spend on the sea. Yet, even though the prices offered for hay was high, there was little available on the market in Mogadishu.

There was hay, actually freshly-cut grass, coming into the city daily to be purchased by people keeping a milk cow or goat in their back yards. This grass was cut from the edges of fields and

borders of roads by poor people, and transported to the market on women's backs or donkey carts. Every time I ran the calculation as to the potential income from actually raising grass specifically for the market, it came out very positive. More profitable, in fact, than from devoting the field to maize or sorghum. Yet no-one was raising hay.

In northern Somalia, the business of marshalling livestock destined for export from the port at Berbera was more developed than from the Mogadishu port. The ecology in the north is much different from the fertile valley of the Shabelle River adjacent to Mogadishu. Berbera is located on an inhospitable desert shore. Inland there is an escarpment to the Golis Mountains and a wide plateau with a reasonably pleasant climate. But this highland plateau is a dry savannah where hay can only be raised on the flood plains of the seasonal water courses. The business of raising hay for the export trade was, at that time, in its infancy. Or more precisely, still just a notion on the part of a few entrepreneurially-minded livestock traders.

Hargeisa 1987

In the spring of 1987, my counterpart and I made a trip to the north to see how the livestock export market functioned. The regional office of the Agricultural Ministry in Hargeisa was our base and was tasked to provide us with a guide and transport. Since they could not come up with a working government-owned vehicle, the Ministry hired a young livestock trader to drive us around. We drove from Hargeisa to Berbera where we looked at the port facilities and the marshalling yards. The next day we went on to the livestock market town of Burao located on the highlands 100 km southeast from Berbera. It was April, the end of the dry season and just before the long rains were due; the countryside was completely denuded of grass. There were some leaves on the acacia and other trees but the ground underneath was completely bare - right down to the sand and rocks.

The barrenness of the landscape is jarring to those of us raised on the Great Plains of North America where there is always vegetation in evidence. Bare ground to us means serious overgrazing. Near Burao we stopped at a spot along the road where a small river channel crossed the highway. There was an enclosure owned by one of the livestock traders and within the thorn brush-fenced area was a sea of grass. It was a stark contrast – lush grass within and bare ground without.

Further down the highway beyond Burao we visited another enclosure. This plot of land was on the livestock-trekking corridor where continual overuse had denuded the land and sheet erosion had left the trees standing on little hillocks. But after just one year of protection, the interior of the enclosure was covered with grass. On the Great Plains of North America, this level of overgrazing would require a long-term process of restoration. Yet from what I was observing, in northern Somalia, serious overgrazing could be reversed with a year or two of rest. The difference is that the grasses and other plants native to the Horn are adapted to continual severe usage. To an outsider, like myself, seeing this landscape for the first time at the end of the dry season, one could easily jump to the conclusion that northern Somalia was permanently overgrazed and the rangelands essentially non-productive.

A little bit further down the highway from Burao we reached Tug Dheer, the major drainage for the northern highlands of Somalia. Tug Dheer is a seasonal river and at the time of this visit it was completely dry. The nomads had dug wells in the bed of the river where with the aid of hand-made ropes, leather buckets, and hollowed-log troughs they were watering the herds while the women washed clothes and spread their colourful wraps on the bushes to dry.

Off the main road along the course of the dry river, we drove through a village that was guarded by a squad of nervous soldiers who pointed a bazooka at us as we drove up. It was a reminder that the northern area of Somalia was close to open rebellion against the government of the dictator Said Barre. A carload of government officials would have been a tempting target to the rebellious tribesmen but because our driver and guide was a local livestock trader we were safe and because we had a carload of government officials, we were, in addition, safe from the soldiers.

Further on, we came to an area where another livestock trader was in the process of building a series of water divergence dykes to spread the seasonal flood water over fields where he intended to cut fodder. All during this trip, my government colleagues had maintained a steady dialogue about how stupid the livestock traders were in conducting their business while they, representing the government, would be doing a much better job of it. I was slowly coming to understand that the Livestock Marketing Project that I was advising, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), was being used by the government to take direct control of the livestock export business. A proposition not lost on the northern Somali clans who up to then, controlled this trade – hence the growing insecurity.

I took the opportunity while we were stopped to ask the young trader if my colleagues' conversation was upsetting. He responded that I needed to understand the socialist mind-set: "If you ask a socialist to choose which is most useful - a vessel full of milk or an empty container - they will choose the empty container because you can put something into it." It was a wry observation on the economic destruction caused by Said Barre's governing philosophy of Scientific Socialism and gave me a good chuckle.

My return visit, 2010

The area we had come to see had the potential for producing lots of hay. The water diversion dykes that we were looking at were exactly the practice necessary. The flat flood plain of Tug Dheer could raise much of the hay required for the expanding livestock export trade. Fast forward 23 years to 2010 when I again visited this area along this seasonal river. I found stacks of hay. When I asked one farmer what he was going to do with his hay. He said that most of it would be fed to his own animals during the coming dry season, but he would sell the portion he did not need to a livestock trader.

So pastoral people do not sell the grass because it is collectively owned by the entire clan. And yet they do because the entire pattern of nomadic life, and all of the traditions and conventions that have guided pastoralists through the centuries, are in transition. At the base of this transition is the demand for meat in the Middle East and in the rapidly growing cities of Nairobi and Addis

Ababa. This transition to a market-driven economy brings with it profit, but also change and uncertainty.

It is not only hay that was not sold by pastoralists. Milk was shared. Pasture and water were free to everyone who was not at war with the clan, and clan members who lost livestock to conflict or drought were restocked by the entire community. Land was communal even though different families and sub-clans held user rights to certain areas and water sources. This non-legal tenure to the land is now a problem for the pastoralists. The post-independence autocratic Socialist governments of most, if not all, of the countries of the Horn claimed title to the land in the name of the people. The farmers and nomads used that land at the pleasure of the government. People fought and died over the land but in a legal sense they did not own it.

But now, formal and legal land-ownership is important. As with the Boran community of Southern Ethiopia or the Somalis living on the flood plain of Tug- Dheer, people are claiming land to put into non-traditional private use. And it is not just any land, but the best land, land formerly used by the entire clan as the communal dry-season grazing reserves.

With a diminishing and fragmenting area for grazing during the dry seasons, more pressure is put on the remaining rangeland. Overuse is just one aspect of the challenges faced by the pastoralist system. As mentioned above, the ecology of much of the Horn is resistant to overgrazing. However, high levels of grazing does take its toll and it is hardest on those parts of the Horn adapted to grasslands. With overuse there is a shift from grass to low-productive types of tree species in a succession process of bush encroachment.

Solution to overgrazing

Part of the solution to this situation is to raise fewer cattle and more camels and goats that exploit browse. Another part of the solution is better coordination of grazing times and limitations on the overall numbers of animals. However, this is not easy to implement. I have broached this subject with elders of a number of tribal groups living in different parts of East Africa – Maasai in south Kenya; Samburu in north central Kenya; Oromo/Boran in south Ethiopia; Somali in north-east Kenya, northern Ethiopia, and Somaliland; and Afar in Djibouti. Each time I got a stony silence. They refused to talk about limits on the numbers of livestock because the tradition is that any clan member may herd as many animals as they can manage to own.

Overuse is just one challenge resulting from the changes happening across the pastoral areas. Shifting pastoralists to agro-pastoralism has been the dream of many African governments from colonial times to now. Governments claim that this is for the people's good because services are hard to provide to nomads, but civil control is also hard to impose on people who are here today and gone tomorrow. There is an element of tribalism in these negative attitudes by the highland-farmer-dominated governments of Kenya and Ethiopia towards their lowland nomadic neighbours. After all, nomads have long had a difficult and sometimes predatory relationship with their sedentary farming neighbours. But even within the nomadic areas, the best land - that with good soil and consistent rainfall - has long been occupied by people practising agro-pastoralism. Land to be settled by these "new" agro-pastoralists is marginal. And socio-economic

studies confirm that agro-pastoralists tend to be more vulnerable to climatic fluctuations than their more nomadic kinsmen.

The example of Montana, USA

So, is a shift to agro-pastoralism as good a trend as it initially seems? Although the ecology and times were different, what happened in my community in central Montana, USA, is perhaps illustrative of the risks being faced by today's "new" agro-pastoralists. At the end of the 19C, using newly-invented horse-drawn machinery, homesteaders ploughed up the range grass and planted wheat, barley, oats, and maize. Initially crops were bountiful and prices good. By the 1920s and 1930s, drought and the collapse of prices forced the abandonment of the land. The reality is that central Montana is more suited to the raising of livestock than farming. Now a ranching system appears to be environmentally sustainable and sometimes profitable. A system based on small-holder farming could not be sustained on land that does not have good soil or sufficient rainfall.

Economic multiplier effect

When one makes the calculations based on the official human and livestock populations of any given pastoral district in the Horn of Africa one finds that there are only enough livestock to sustain 30% to 45% of the inhabitants. Granted, official statistics for livestock (and human numbers as well) are not very accurate, but even if the numbers are not exactly accurate they are in the ballpark and point to the fact that a significant portion of the people living in pastoralist areas do not depend entirely on products produced by livestock.

What then are these people doing to survive in these places that are often quite remote, barren, and devoid of modern infrastructure? The three major income streams that bring money into these pastoralist communities, in order of importance, are (a) earnings from livestock sales, (b) remittances from family members working outside the pastoral areas, and (c), foreign donor-provided relief assistance programmes (often including food commodities).

Money is flowing into even the most remote pastoral communities and what had been a subsistence economy is in transition towards a market economy. The advantage a currency-based economy has over a subsistence economy is the multiplier effect of that currency. Before the cash earned from livestock sales (say by a son working outside the community), or before cash earned through a cash-for-work relief project leaves that community, it is used to buy maize and sugar from a local shop, clothing and lantern oil from a women's cooperative, air time on a neighbour's mobile phone, or school fees. In other words that currency circulates through the community giving income opportunities to a number of people.

By contrast, in a subsistence-based economy a multiplier effect cannot exist other than at a minimal level for the trade in personal obligations. People can only survive on what the land can provide and their population is also limited by this factor. In a market economy there is an opportunity for many people to share in the income stream and this is what we are seeing in the proliferation of agro-pastoralist settlements across the Horn.

Women's associations

One of the most useful and inspiring things happening in these agro-pastoralist communities is the advent of women's micro-savings and trading associations. Most women in traditional pastoral communities never handled money. What little currency the family earned from livestock sales tended to be controlled by the male head of the family. Pastoralist women have had few opportunities for education, and as a consequence most are illiterate and innumerate. In general, the formation of a women's micro-saving and trading association begins with a compact between a group of women and an NGO (non-governmental organisation). At the initial stage the women are organised and trained on the goals. Normally, each woman is required to invest a small amount on a monthly basis, usually less than the equivalent of US\$1, until the group has saved an agreed amount of money (often in the neighbourhood of \$200 for a group of 20 women). At this point, the NGO sponsor of the group will match the saved funds, and the women will begin to use the money to finance trades in consumer items or food stuffs. The NGOs that do the best job of organising women's groups often offer literacy and numeracy classes as well as matching funds.

The women are grouped in teams of four, and each team is given their share of the accumulated funds. For instance if there are 20 women sharing a total capital of \$400, there would be five teams each utilizing \$80. Each woman in the team will be given the opportunity to invest the \$80 for a fixed number of months, at which time she pays back the \$80 plus a user fee and the next woman in the team has the opportunity to utilise the fund.

Often, the women will start their trading activities investing in common household items such as soap powder or plastic shoes which they resell to their neighbours. As their confidence and experience increases they begin to invest in a few goats or sacks of maize or rice. When the capital fund is sufficient the women may pool their efforts to invest in entire truckloads of maize or a large number of goats and sheep. One goal set by many women's associations is to start a community store. The capital fund for a well-organised, competently-trained, and cohesive women's micro-saving association can grow at an amazing rate.

It is inspiring to hear the women relate how their pride and confidence grew when they experienced success in the management of their capital fund. One memorable interview included the confession of a lady who told us how her husband had ridiculed the idea that she or any of the other women in the village could be successful in trading. This lady was so intimidated and so afraid of letting down the other women, that when it was her turn to invest, she hid the money so that she would be sure to return the full amount back to the group. This happened twice before she found the courage to invest in soap powder and other small trade goods.

The particular group which included this lady was extraordinarily successful and at the time that I visited them had built their initial capital to \$25,000. In the process they had recruited 60 more women. At another interview with a different but similarly successful group, the women told me that their husbands were also less than encouraging. Their president smiled when she said that now they pay their husbands to unload the truck-loads of maize.

The women's micro-savings groups are one of the most positive things that are happening as the pastoralists of the Horn of Africa change from a subsistence economy to a money-based economy. It is a growing movement as women share their successes and experience with others. But problems loom.

Pastoralism is doomed

In truth, pastoralism has been in transition for a very long time because it has always been a dynamic response to trying to survive in a harsh environment. But over the recent decades the market demand for livestock and livestock products outside of the pastoralist area has become consistent and consistently attractive. The construction of highways and telecommunications allows for that market to function more efficiently, accelerating the pace of change. Motorcycles and trade trucks allow for families to live in one area and yet maintain livestock elsewhere.

Many may lament the demise of pastoralism, and undoubtedly many ancient cultural traditions will be lost. However, since subsistence pastoralism cannot feed all those who have been born over the recent decades, nomadism as we have come to know it, is doomed. Elements of nomadism will survive, just as in Montana where the tradition of cowboys herding cattle on the open range still exists. We celebrate those traditions in our mythology: cowboy hats and high-heeled boots, even though the management of cattle has changed so much since the 1880s. Changes in the Horn of Africa are spontaneous and just as unstoppable. The question is how can economic development policies assist the changes so that the transition is smooth, and the results sustainable?

The shift from nomadism to a homestead-based livestock-rearing system masks the impoverishment of many herder families who struggle to survive the loss of livestock to a rapid succession of droughts. There is, however, a question of whether droughts are more common than they were, or if dry periods that are simply normal fluctuations, now result in the significant loss of livestock and impoverishment. If the climate today is dryer, there is not much that can be done except adjust to that reality. If, however, excessive exploitation and a reduction in available pasture due to privatisations of former communal land has resulted in making the herds vulnerable, than changes in how the rangelands are managed could stabilise the situation.

What is clear is that many pastoralists face difficulty in coping. Meanwhile wealthy people, often no longer even living in the rural areas, are amassing large herds and essentially privatising extensive areas of former communal land. The herders who have lost their livestock become the employees of the absentee owners, and both groups, employers and employees, are now dependent upon the new monetary-based economy of the pastoral areas of the Horn.

The traditional systems of councils of elders that provided the cohesion for the pastoral systems are also becoming increasingly incapable of adapting to the new reality. Where there used to be social mechanisms that imposed orderly patterns of using water and pasture, preserving the rangeland, and ensuring the survival of all members of the clan - a vacuum now exists. Assistance programmes implemented by NGOs attempt to fill this void by convening

conferences for elders, assisting destitute families to establish themselves in homesteads, and sometimes even restocking the lost herds - all functions the clan formally provided.

NGOs working in the pastoral communities can certainly do a lot to help struggling people but can they, or more importantly, should they be in the business of governing them? Governance and social cohesion should come from within, but the nature of money-based economics encourages social fragmentation - not social integration.

The demands of the future

Will the Horn, therefore, go through the process that my grandparents suffered in Montana? If the transition towards a market-based livestock-rearing system is to be sustainable and successful in benefiting the growing population of the Horn, than at least three things need to happen:

Land tenure. If people are to invest in the land and improve its productivity, they must be secure in the knowledge that they will be able to profit from that investment. Hence a long-term lease or a registry that says the land belongs to them is vital. Ultimately it should be possible to buy and sell that land and use it as collateral for bank loans. There are two levels to the issue of secure tenure - the individually-owned homesteads, and the communally-owned rangelands. Both types of land ownership should be legally formalised. [A significant example of the process of land registration is provided by the work of John Drysdale in the Gabiley district, west of Hargeisa. His mapping and land registration activities are described, for example, on page 58 of Journal Issue 33, Spring 2003. – Ed.]

Education. Nomadic peoples' success through the centuries is the result of practical flexibility. A pastoral family has always been a family enterprise, where each member plays a different economic role assisting the entire family to survive drought, conflict, and disease epidemics. Where possible pastoral families keep different types of livestock because whereas cattle might succumb to drought camels might survive; goats might die of tick infestations but sheep resist. It was this mix of livestock, with the ability to move to distant pastures, and family members with different income sources (such as a tea shop, or a job in the city) that made pastoralism resilient. The future survival of the pastoral families, however, will depend increasingly on income from sources other than livestock. For young people to be prepared to find work or run a business, they will need to be better educated.

Range management. It is simply not sustainable for each clan member to maintain an unlimited number of livestock on the communal rangeland. Ultimately, it must be determined what the limits are, and who has the right to pasture a given number of animals on a delineated rangeland. Ideally that grazing right should include a dynamic grazing plan that protects the forage and mitigates the damage of overuse. This presupposes that there will be an entity, such as a council of elders, with the authority to require limits in livestock numbers and able to impose a grazing plan. Because rainfall patterns in the Horn are so erratic, it is not feasible that the evolving livestock system will feature "ranches" as they exist in North America or Australia, where each individual ranch owner controls a personal rangeland. Instead it will require that livestock herders have a grazing right in an extended communal pasture. In order to maximise the ability

to survive failure of seasonal rains, the communal rangelands should be as large as feasible, possibly even overlapping with adjacent rangelands controlled by neighbouring clans. This would approximate to the different user rights that have traditionally been allowed between clans. The personally-owned homesteads would, in this livestock management system, produce fodder to sustain the herds during the dry seasons.

The comparison between forming homesteads in the Horn with the homestead movement in the Great Plains of North America is far from perfect. The big mistake in North America was the attempt to raise annual cereal grains in dry areas with erratic rainfall. The result was the “dust bowl” where the top soil from those fields blew away in clouds that hid the sun.

The homesteaders in the Horn, from the beginning, have been more oriented towards integrating livestock into their homesteads and less interested in raising crops. But they have virtually no access to agricultural extension services which, along with a land registry, basic education, and a system to allocate and manage the rangelands, would go a long way towards assisting the transition to agro-pastoralism-based livestock-rearing. They are left to experiment on their own. The risks they face are great and a major drought could very well trigger a massive famine, an outcome we all wish to avoid.

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