Gender Issues and Pastoral Economic Growth and Development in Ethiopia

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January 2010

Acknowledgements: This paper was written as a background note for a study of “Pastoral economic growth and development in Ethiopia” that was commissioned by the Department for International Development (DFID) at the request of the Government of Ethiopia. The author assumes full responsibility for the views and contents expressed in this paper.

Introduction
This Concept Note considers gender issues in pastoral development in Ethiopia based on an analysis of pastoral women’s livelihoods, preceded by a brief overview of some of the key issues facing women in Ethiopia nationally.

Women’s rights in Ethiopia are supported by law and a number of key policy documents, including Article 35 of the Constitution, the revised Family Code, the National Policy on Women, and the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, linked to Pillar 4 of the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP): ‘unleashing the potential of Ethiopia’s women’.1 Ethiopia is also signatory to various international instruments.2 As such, the policy framework for gender issues in Ethiopia is very positive, and is supported by key structures such as the Ministry of Women’s Affairs; the placement of Women’s Officers in each Woreda administration; and target quotas for council membership.

However, despite this, national statistics for gender equality in Ethiopia do not paint a very positive picture (see Box 13). Ethiopia’s policy provisions for gender equality are therefore very positive but huge challenges remain in the implementation and application of these policies in order to lead to effective change for most of Ethiopia’s women.4

Ethiopia’s Pastoral Women and their Livelihoods
Ethiopia’s pastoralists, like pastoralists the world over, remain at the margins of national economic and political life. However pastoral women are ‘doubly marginalised’ since they experience the discrimination and marginalisation described above, while also living in remote, under-serviced areas, leading a lifestyle that is misunderstood by many decision makers.

Box 1: Selected Gender Indicators for Ethiopia
- Gender-related Development Index (GDI): 142nd out of 157 countries
- Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM): 84th out of 108 countries
- Maternal mortality: 673 deaths per 100,000 live births (2005)
- Violence against women (including FGM): affects 73% of women and girls
- Early marriage: 75% of girls marry before age 17
- Combined gross primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment ratio as % of male: 76.4% (2004)
- Average adult literacy: women 34%; men 49% (notably worse in rural and remote areas)
- Political representation (1999):
  - Members of parliament: 42 (8%)
  - Regional councils: 13%
  - Woreda councils: 7%
  - Kebele councils: 14%
- Women’s Officers in local government: generally underfunded and lacking support from male colleagues.

Capital Assets: Financial Capital
Understanding pastoral women’s access and control over livestock - a key financial asset for pastoralists - requires moving beyond the concept of ‘ownership’ to a more complex set of rights and responsibilities, often overlooked by planners. While in most pastoral societies
the final decision to dispose of an animal by sale, gift or slaughter rests with the male head of household, his wives and even his daughters may need to be consulted and can exert a considerable amount of influence over this decision, related to both the origins and status of the individual animal (part of a woman’s bridewealth; a key milking cow, etc.) and also to the woman’s degree of ‘informal power’ (see Social Capital below). Disposal rights are therefore complex, and are also connected to women’s access rights to the products of any particular animal. Even customary pastoral inheritance law, which in most pastoral groups passes livestock automatically along the male line, may entitle a widow to keep the livestock given to her as gifts by her husband during their marriage.5

Milking is generally carried out by women and girls in most though not all Ethiopian pastoral groups, and the milk once obtained is generally in the exclusive control of the women.6 They decide on the distribution between: family consumption; conversion into other products such as ghee; gifts (to maintain social relationships); and sales. Depending on the terms of trade, the energy conversion rate from milk to grain can be up to 147 so many pastoral households, particularly the poorer, rely on sales of milk for their subsistence. At the same time, male heads of household may influence levels of milk offtake to ensure that livestock productivity goals are also met.8 In this way, the ‘ownership’ of livestock products is also a set of rights and responsibilities, a complex mix of access and mediated control between women and men, although women undoubtedly exercise more control over livestock products than over livestock themselves. Women generally control the cash income they receive from sales of milk, although if the business increases significantly in size this may change, while cash income from the sale of livestock is generally controlled by men.9

Other financial assets include hides, skins, and handicrafts which can be sold when markets are available and accessible.10 This trade is affected by poor processing and poor quality final products,11 as well as by the small number of micro-finance institutions and other financial services in Ethiopia’s pastoral areas. Because of existing cultural norms, lack of numeracy and literacy, and a general gender bias in the financial sector, pastoral women’s access to such services is even more limited than pastoral men’s.

Capital Assets: Human Capital
Box 2 presents a summary of key indicators for pastoral women’s health and education.12 In addition, pastoral women’s workload is acknowledged to be higher than men’s in most pastoral areas, although the disparity varies between pastoral groups and with season. Women’s control over their own labour varies with cultural norms, the gendered division of labour in their particular society, and according to their status and social capital. This also applies to their ability to control the labour of others, in particular that of the other women and girls in their household (see Figure 1 below).

Pastoral women’s human capital includes their knowledge and skills on animal health and husbandry, livestock management,
natural resource management and environmental conservation, much of which is unrecognised both by outsiders and sometimes within their own societies. Their human capital may however be limited by their lack of knowledge of the market economy and their rights under national law. In spite therefore of their indigenous knowledge, strong capacities and resilience, pastoral women begin life with less human capital than their male counterparts and rarely get the opportunity to redress this balance.

**Capital Assets: Social Capital**

Social capital is particularly important for pastoralists compared to other livelihood groups, since their production systems depend heavily on cooperation and joint management of shared resources. Contrary to common understanding, pastoral women exercise a significant amount of *informal power*, connected mostly to internal rather than external decision making, and focusing largely on their ability to influence men. It is subject to a number of variables, such as a woman’s age, her husband’s social standing, the number and age of her sons, and in some societies her ability to speak well and exhibit wisdom, as well as her relationship with other members of the family, see Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Women’s influence in their community - Turkana, Kenya](image)

**Pastoral women’s customary institutions**, often overlooked, build on and enhance this power. Pastoral women also have informal but effective communication networks to share information with each other and within the community. However, their formal public role remains constrained and their political participation is very limited. In 2006 there was only one woman among the 160 members of the Somali Regional parliament, and only 356 women were elected out of 3,309 councillors in the 2005 district elections. Nationally there are five women MPs from pastoral areas, three of whom now sit on the Pastoral Affairs Standing Committee which until 2005 was all male.

Since pastoral women’s *informal power* is based largely on their relationship to men, in particular their husbands, it therefore follows that women-headed households can be less powerful socially. **Female-headed households** remain relatively rare among mobile pastoralists: 5% of one sample in Somali Region (compared to 13% in the urban centres). Women-headed households in urban and peri-urban settings may enjoy relative economic freedom compared to their married mobile counterparts but at the same time are likely to suffer from diminished social standing as they cannot exercise their informal power as described above, particularly if they are poor. They also are likely to experience more poverty relative to their counterparts who remain in mobile pastoral systems.
Capital Assets: Natural Capital
Major decisions about the use of key natural resources are generally negotiated through indigenous mechanisms such as the clan or territorially-based institutions. Women’s influence over these management decisions is therefore largely on the basis of their informal power as well as the roles that they play within the management mechanisms. Day-to-day, pastoral women play a significant role in natural resource management, through their use of firewood, wild fruits, fodder and water. They also play an important role in managing the forest and its products, including non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

Significant changes in natural resource management, e.g. land demarcation or enclosure, have an impact on gender relations, particularly if women’s role in NRM is overlooked. For example, the women were not involved in the decision to enclose plots of communal rangeland in Harshin, a process which is also increasing their workloads. Subdivision of pastoral land in Kenya has significantly disadvantaged pastoral women: over 99% of Group Ranch members are men. Land registration is underway in Ethiopia but has not yet been applied to most communal pastoral land. Early impact analysis of this process in agricultural areas indicates that the issuing of title deeds to wives as well as their husbands has the potential to increase women’s access and control over land, although this needs to be supported with education about rights and a degree of cultural change.

Capital Assets: Physical Capital
Because of their remote location, pastoral areas generally suffer from poor public infrastructure such as access roads, means of transportation and communications systems. This affects all pastoralists, although women’s access may be further constrained by cultural norms and social expectations. Pastoral women use and control a number of private producer goods, including responsibility for building and maintaining the houses. As well as a productive asset, a woman’s hut can also represent a social and personal space symbolising her control over the food supply. Other physical capital such as milking tools and processing equipment, gourds, containers, and jewellery, may be used as financial capital for sale, and may also confer social status. Where ‘modern’ or non-pastoral physical assets such as mobile phones and radios are acquired by pastoralists, they are generally controlled by the men, as among other livelihood groups.

Vulnerability Context
The key shocks and trends affecting pastoral populations in Ethiopia impact differently on men and women, and can also change gender roles and relations. One of the common consequences of drought (and climate change) is the migration and/or splitting of the pastoral household. If men move away with the livestock women have reduced access to livestock products and may have to depend on firewood collection and other income generation activities. They may also lose some of the social power that is mediated by their menfolk. Workloads increase for all, particularly women, as water, grazing and fuelwood become more difficult to find. If the men migrate for wage labour as a drought strategy, the women are left with the extra burden of managing the stock, which may however increase their decision making power and social status, at least temporarily. Migration and separation can also increase women’s personal vulnerability: with the absence of their male family members women are less protected and may be vulnerable to attack when they search for firewood or water, or supervise livestock. In situations of conflict, this vulnerability is greatly increased.
Women are frequently marginalised in the process of **commercialisation**. It is generally recognised that women's income generating activities are often taken over by their husbands if they grow beyond a certain size – often when they shift from focusing on subsistence/feeding the family to larger scale businesses. This may even apply to the marketing of livestock products such as milk, over which women have customary control. In some pastoral areas in the Horn and East Africa the commercialisation of milk production has reduced this control and milk production and marketing has been taken over by men because the women lack the time, capacity, mobility or social authority to continue or expand their involvement, or their husbands become more interested as more income is generated. In other cases men may object to their wives growing independence and try to prevent it. Increasing market opportunities for livestock products therefore has the potential to increase pastoral women's economic status but does not necessarily mean that they will be able to take advantage of these opportunities. Developing milk markets may also negatively affect nutrition levels in the household, and/or the productivity of the livestock, as more milk is taken off for sale.

On the other hand, in some of Ethiopia’s pastoral areas, increasing **diversification** is enhancing the economic status of some pastoral women and challenging the status of men: as livestock become less important to the household economy, particularly in peri-urban and/or more sedentarised households, women engage in income generating activities (sale of firewood and handicrafts, petty trading etc.). In Somali and Afar Regions some pastoral men see non-livestock productive activities as low status, preferring to chew *khat* and leave their wives to provide for the family. While in Borana, women are increasingly involved in agriculture but without a corresponding increase in their control of the income derived from cultivation.

**Sedentarisation**, either as a result of diversification and/or impoverishment, is a growing trend that can have both positive and negative impacts on pastoral women. While there are more opportunities for income generation in urban and peri-urban settings (and in theory for enhancing human capital through improved access to health care and educational opportunities), female-headed households in these settings may also suffer from a loss of social status through a reduction in the influence they would wield as pastoral wives. Married women who settle near urban centres while their husbands remain mobile with the livestock (and usually another wife) may be able to make more of these economic and service opportunities whilst retaining social status as a married woman. A few women do succeed in establishing businesses in livestock trade or other economic activities, but most tend to remain small scale because of the cultural and social limitations placed on women, and the private sector remains largely male-dominated, with few women entrepreneurs.

**Policies, Institutions and Processes**

In spite of specific policy provisions for pastoral women (for example among the objectives of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality) there is a general recognition that much government and non-government development has failed pastoral women in the past in terms of both their strategic and their practical needs, and that the greatest challenge remains with regard to implementing these objectives on the ground and increasing women's awareness and knowledge of their rights and supporting policies.

Indigenous institutions in Ethiopia’s pastoral areas, including women’s institutions, provide a status and standing for pastoral women but at the same time many indigenous public decision making processes formally exclude women. Modern institutions such as local
government structures are similarly male dominated and often exclude women further because they ignore and consequently undermine the 'informal power' that women can exert through customary channels. Other aspects of indigenous pastoral culture continue to be sanctioned by pastoral societies even though they affect women negatively, for example culturally accepted violence against women, such as FGM, marriage by abduction, early marriage, enforced cross-cousin marriage (in Afar), and widow 'inheritance'. Many pastoral women remain ignorant of their rights under national law and lack the knowledge and/or capacity to challenge these practices.

Key Conclusions and Policy Recommendations
Pastoral women in Ethiopia have different livelihood strategies and varying livelihood capital assets according to their degree of sedentarisation. More mobile pastoral communities may be seeking to enhance their pastoral livelihoods and to a certain extent to diversify them, while sedentary or semi-sedentary women in the peri-urban and urban areas (ex-pastoralists) are generally seeking alternatives to pastoral livelihoods, although some may maintain linkages with the mobile livestock sector as well.

Conclusions and Recommendations with regard to Mobile Pastoral Women
Many of the recommendations below are in line with the specific objectives of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality relating to pastoral women, but these plans have yet to be effectively implemented and in general ignore the importance of recognising and building on pastoral women’s mobility in order to enhance their capital assets:

- Pastoral women play an indispensable role in mobile pastoral economies, not only through their labour but also through their access to and degree of control over livestock and other pastoral financial capital. This contribution is rarely quantified, although it can be assumed that it makes up a significant part of the direct and indirect measurable contribution of pastoralism to the Ethiopian national economy valued at USD 1.6 billion.32
- In spite of this significant economic contribution by pastoral women, there is little support to mobile pastoral women’s financial capital in Ethiopia, such as the provision of micro-credit or support to markets.33 Micro-credit has been successfully provided to semi-sedentary women’s groups in southern Ethiopia, as discussed below, but few schemes reach the more mobile women.
- Initiatives to build pastoral women’s financial capital need to recognise that women’s and men’s livelihood strategies may vary according to their different livelihood goals and priorities. Women’s production objectives may focus on feeding the family, and hence aim to maximise milk offtake either for consumption or for sale, while men may aim to retain milk for livestock consumption in order to maximise herd productivity to increase livestock sales for cash. Similarly women may prioritise addressing livestock diseases that affect income (e.g. mastitis) while men may prioritise diseases with high mortality rates.34
  - Improved markets and value chains for milk (and to a certain extent for other livestock products, and goods such as NTFPs) should be developed to enhance women’s incomes and financial capital.
  - However, three important caveats should be taken into account: first that increasing milk offtake (even if the proceeds are spent on grains) may have a negative effect on child nutrition, particularly in poorer families35; second, that milk offtake needs to be balanced against overall herd productivity; and third that increasing market opportunities does not automatically result in benefits for women if they do not have the social and financial capital to maximise them.

6
Market development has historically focused on fixed access points: ‘in general, governments have attempted to adapt pastoralism to services rather than services to pastoralism’. However, pastoral women may be best served by mobile rather than fixed markets. There already exist linkages between markets and mobile pastoralists – for example mobile livestock brokers or traders, and bush taxis that collect milk for transport to local towns. There is potential for these types of linkages to be enhanced to the benefit of mobile pastoral women and their marketing priorities. Sedentary peri-urban women’s groups could be connected with mobile pastoral women (either individuals or groups) for milk marketing, for example commissioning the bush taxis or using donkeys for transport. Collection points for milk marketing could be mobile rather than fixed; and training on basic hygiene (for example the use of aluminium cans instead of plastic containers) would extend the shelf life and quality of the milk and thus increase the price.

These and other initiatives to develop pastoral women’s financial assets should begin with the premise that support should be mobile and flexible, and also take into account the complex nature of livestock and other asset ownership in the pastoral sector.

- Failure to recognise and build on women’s informal power, indigenous institutions and communication networks will further undermine them and erode women’s social capital. This capital is key to building up their other capital assets and enabling them to access services and other goods.
  - Collective action (creation of women’s groups etc.) can help to strengthen social capital, but where possible should build on existing networks and institutions rather than creating new institutional arrangements.
  - Raising awareness about women’s rights with regard to gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices (according to current national laws and policies) should use women’s networks and institutions, as well as involving men and their institutions.
- There is an urgent need to build pastoral women’s human capital, with health and education as priorities, including basic adult literacy and numeracy.
  - For many pastoral women, mobile services are the only means whereby they will be able to improve their health and education status. Some Alternative Basic Education (ABE) schemes exist in pastoral areas of Ethiopia but few are really mobile and move with the pastoralists themselves. The children of mobile families thus have to choose between school and family/pastoral life; and mobile women are denied access to basic adult education.
  - Health and education services should build on pastoral women’s indigenous knowledge and skills, which are frequently overlooked and therefore undermined. In some areas women have already been trained as Community Health Workers and Traditional Birth Attendants, and in some cases as Community Animal Health Workers. Given the cultural barriers to women attending health centres staffed by men, training female Community Health Workers presents a vital mobile option for improving pastoral women’s health.
  - The possibility of training women community workers in other sectors should also be promoted, in order to build on their skills, facilitate their access to other women, and enhance their social capital at the same time.
- Although the PASDEP document appears broadly supportive of pastoralism as a livelihood strategy, the government’s implicit policy of sedentarisation will have significant implications for pastoral women and gender relations in the future. While sedentarisation offers potential opportunities for some women, the general trend in other pastoral areas is
that most women are further disadvantaged, both socially and financially, by a reduction in their mobility.

- Specific changes in land policy (such as registration and/or enclosure) have significant impacts on women and their access to and control of natural capital.
  - Land registration in mobile pastoral areas must take account of women’s need to access and control natural resources and include women’s names on any title deeds.
  - The impact of any registration process should be carefully monitored, including learning lessons from existing registration schemes in sedentary agricultural areas.

**Conclusions and Recommendations with regard to Sedentary, Ex-pastoral Women**

- Building the financial capital of sedentary women requires less focus on livestock production and more on alternative livelihoods:
  - Opportunities for women to develop small businesses should be increased, for example for trade in milk, NTFPs, hides and skins, and livestock, as well as petty trade.
  - Micro-finance should be made available to support these businesses.
  - Experience has shown that collective action provides women with more financial security as well as with social support. There are positive examples of sedentary and semi-sedentary women’s groups in southern Ethiopia establishing successful group or individual businesses and savings and credit schemes.43

- However, sedentary ex-pastoral women can have very low social capital which may limit the extent to which they can develop such businesses, particularly if they are heads of households and from the poorer wealth groups.
  - Interventions focusing on ex-pastoral women should ensure that female-headed households are included and are given the support needed to enable their full participation.
  - Increasing women’s skills and knowledge (for example basic literacy and numeracy, business skills) also helps to increase their confidence and enhances their social capital.

- Although their human capital needs may not be as great as that of mobile pastoral women, ex-pastoral women remain severely disadvantaged in their access to health and education services.
  - Health and education services should continue to expand in pastoral areas, including in the urban centres to service the sedentary populations.
  - Affirmative action to overcome barriers to women’s and girls’ access and uptake of these services should be undertaken in terms of quotas and awareness raising.

Women in pastoral areas in Ethiopia remain caught in a ‘double bind’: ‘as pastoralists, they are victims of social, economic and political marginalization, and as women they suffer inequality in accessing resources, social services and participation in decision-making’.44 In order to overcome this challenge, gender issues need to be mainstreamed at all stages of policy development and implementation. The ‘twin-track’ approach to mainstreaming involves specific activities focusing on women’s needs (such as described in the recommendations above) together with gender analysis and awareness in all initiatives, not only those relating to women. The capacity of policy makers, researchers and implementers to include detailed gender analysis of women’s livelihoods in their assessment, planning and implementation should be enhanced, supported by appropriate gender disaggregated data. The opportunity for developing a national forum for women from pastoral areas should also be thoroughly investigated.


Save the Children USA (2007) *Pastoralist Review: Save the Children USA’s work in the pastoral areas of southern Ethiopia* Save the Children USA and USAID, Addis Ababa


Notes

1 FDRE 2006a; FDRE 2006b

2 Including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the African Union’s Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, and the Millennium Development Goals.

3 Box 1 data sources: UNDP 2008; Patterson 2007; FDRE 2006a; WomenWatch (undated); FDRE 2008b; FDRE 2006b; World Bank 2009; Pastoralist Consultant International 2009; UNICEF 2009

4 CEDAW 2002; FDRE 2006b

5 Hundie and Padmanabhan 2008

6 Emana et al undated

7 Coppock 1994

8 McPeck and Doss 2006


10 The market for handicrafts is largely limited to those areas such as South Omo which are frequented by tourists, together with limited opportunities afforded by traders supplying shops in Addis Ababa. South Omo received over 200,000 tourists in 2005/6 (Oumer and Ali 2007)

11 Flintan 2007

12 Box 2 data sources: Catley et al. 2008; Devereux 2006; Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008; FDRE 2008a; FDRE 2006b; Sadler et al. 2009; Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia 2008; Ridgewell et al 2007; Mamo 2007


14 Source: Watson 2003

15 Hatfield and Davies 2006; Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008. Examples include Alokita in the Karimojong Cluster (Watson 2003), Ischar in Somali (Devereux 2006) and Siiqee in Borana (Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia 2008)

16 Pastoralist Consultants International 2009

17 Devereux 2006

18 Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008

19 Devereux 2006

20 Oumer 2007

21 Oumer 2007

22 Flintan 2007

23 Holden 2008

24 Flintan 2008

25 Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008

26 McPeck and Doss 2006. In this study in northern Kenya, reasons for the men’s reluctance to support their wives’ milk marketing included: the desire to preserve more milk for the livestock; concern about women’s control of the income from the milk sales, which is generally spent in the town on the same day; and fear that the women will develop relationships with men in the town.

27 Sadler et al. 2009

28 Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008; Devereux 2006; Alemu and Flintan 2007

29 Mamo 2007
Pastoralist Communication Initiative 2007

The Nap-Ge objectives include increasing pastoral women’s access to and control over resources, special service packages for pastoral women (extension, education, health, credit etc.) and projects to reduce pastoral women’s workload (FDRE 2006b)

‘Direct’ contributions of the Total Economic Valuation (TEV) include sales of livestock and livestock products and the subsistence value of livestock products. ‘Indirect’ contributions include inputs to agriculture and tourism, and dryland products. Direct and indirect contributions that cannot be measured and therefore are excluded from this calculation include employment, animal management and rangeland management skills, environmental protection, socio-cultural values and indigenous knowledge (SOS Ethiopia 2009)

Adrian Cullis, pers.com.

Heffernan 2002

Sadler et al. 2009

Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008

Wayua et al. 2008

Save the Children 2007; Pastoralist Concern Association Ethiopia 2006

Adrian Cullis, pers. com.

The WHO has recently ratified the dispensing of antibiotics to treat childhood pneumonia (a key contributor to child morbidity) by community health workers. However the Ethiopian Government is currently reluctant to authorise community workers to dispense antibiotics (Kate Sadler, pers.com.). Lessons from the change in policy towards Community Animal Health Workers may perhaps be applied here to bring about a similar policy change with regard to human health and facilitate an expansion of the role of (particularly women) community health workers.

Action Against Hunger 2005

For example, women paralegals have been trained with some success in some pastoral communities in West Africa (Flintan 2008)

Coppock et al. 2006; Coppock et al. 2007

Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008