

Summary paper to

Mobilising Pastoralist Women In Turkana: Shifting perspectives on gender relations to adapt to climate change

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Context

Pastoralism has been going on for around 4000 years and is practised all over the world. However, numbers practising nomadic pastoralism have slowly decreased, this is related to the rise in population resulting in less land for grazing, migration and government involvement in reducing and controlling the number of nomadic group in order to tax them. Anthropologists surrounding the subject in earlier times tend to overlook the role of women, often dismissing their role in pastoral communities as nothing more than an extension of male power (Hodgson, D.L. 2000:3-4).

Turkana is an arid and semi-arid land located in the North Western region of Kenya, situated between Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. It has an approximate population of 1 million, who mainly come from pastoral communities who rely on livestock for the income, this has been hugely affected by 2 major droughts and other climate related problems which has made it increasingly difficult for them to adapt. Pastoralist lifestyle requires marriage as one of the core components as a way to adapt to climate change, through accumulation of livestock through marriage as well as having children in order to help with the labour. Women's roles in pastoral tends to be limited to domestic roles, however this does not seem to be the case anymore with the increase in participation due to the ever changing and volatile environment. This research aims to investigate the livelihoods of pastoralists during extreme climate conditions and the role of women in these communities. Further, it seeks to understand the coping capacities of local communities who have suffered as a result of environmental and socio-cultural problems.

Aims

The research aims to address the following questions:

- How are pastoralists and agricultural livelihoods being disturbed by environmental problems?
- What is the role for woman concerning the threats of climate change? Do they have a role in the changing lives of pastoralism? Why is the role of women important in affecting change?
- To what level are traditional coping mechanisms helping against issues relating to climate change?

Findings

- Results show that human social reaction is closely interlinked with the reaction to environmental settings, however in pastoral communities such as Turkana their reactions to environmental changes is rooted in tradition and culture. By understanding the roles and how culture and traditions plays a heavy hand in male and female roles, we can begin to plan how to adapt to the environmental constraints.

- The study revealed that the Maasi environment is similar to the Turkana environment, as well as similar cultural practices and traditions. Projects to assist women in attaining their own livestock results in them being able to attain their own income, thus some form of authority in their community. From this they are able to send their daughters to school and more importantly, earn respect from men to participate in the decision making processes. This in turn will enhance their development and increase capacity to adapt to environmental changes.
- The study draws parallels between Upzila, Bangladesh and Turkana citing that although their environmental challenges differ, there are similarities in how malnutrition is closely linked to social gender roles. It is men who farm, thus who decide what is to be eaten leaving women with little control. The project case study in Upzila saw the empowerment of women through education and resources which has seen a subtle change in women's self-perception and what more should be noted is the number of men in Upzila who are going to women for advice. By including women into the conversations intrinsically affects the ability to respond to environmental changes better.
- This study confirms that the effect of climate change on Turkana is preventing the access to health, food, water and a sustainable livelihood. It's also creating challenges for the government to protect the population of Turkana, and most importantly gradually realising social and economic rights.
- The 2 case studies, although in differing environments have similar socio-cultural and environmental issues. These case studies shed light on how the people of Turkana can cope and show resilience to environmental changes and tackle gender inequality.
- The study concludes that by bringing ostracised women into the conversation, women are no longer considered invisible. They are accredited for the important role they do already play in society and this can be further advanced. They can begin to share their ideas, their problems, and have a greater role in the changing lives of pastoralism.

For access to the complete paper, please contact Research & Development at Humanitarian Academy for Development (HAD) at: research@had-int.org