

Case Study Challenges in policy and practice: pastoralists and nomadic peoples

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Pastoralists and nomadic herders number several tens of millions of people worldwide. Located mainly in the dry lands of Africa, South and Central Asia, and the Middle East, they include some of the most vulnerable peoples in the world, though they frequently make an important contribution to national food production. In several countries of the Horn of Africa, a significant proportion of the population – at least 10 per cent – are considered to be nomads or pastoralists. Other countries, such as Nigeria and Tanzania, now refer to new types of nomads, including not only fishing communities but also small-scale mining groups, tea harvesters and sugar cane cutters. The mobility of these groups and the remote, often harsh environments in which they live are persistent obstacles to the provision of formal education, and millions of nomadic children remain outside the education system.

One of the biggest risks for these children is that, with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) being based on national averages, such inequalities within countries can be obscured. Absence of reliable data and the resulting invisibility of pastoralist groups within national education statistics renders them unseen, uncountable and uncounted. The disconnect probably derives from assumptions that the nomads fit poorly in the imperatives of Education for All and of the MDGs for multiple reasons, which mainly include the scattered and low-density distribution of pastoral populations, their varying degrees of mobility being seen as negative indicators of social development rather than viable livelihood and natural resource management strategies. This is to forget that the Millennium Declaration is both visionary and pragmatic. As the UNICEF *State of the World's Children* report proposed in 2006, its vision is a world of peace, equity, tolerance, security, freedom, solidarity, respect for the environment and shared responsibility in which special care and attention is given to the vulnerable, especially children. Its pragmatism lies in its central premise: human development and poverty reduction are prerequisites for such a world.

International definitions and recommendations

When nomadic peoples are made invisible, it is easier to deny them recognition and the rights common to any national citizen. However, while nomadic peoples are often invisible at the national level, there are several international precedents that can assist to

define and make visible their rights. The first definition of 'mobile peoples' in the international context is given in the Dana Declaration (Jordan, 2002):

'The term mobile peoples (i.e. pastoralists, hunter-gatherers, shifting agriculturalists and other peoples with dynamic regular changing patterns of land use) refers to a subset of indigenous and traditional peoples whose livelihoods depend on extensive common property use of natural resources over an area, who use mobility as a management strategy for dealing with sustainable land use and conservation, and who possess a distinctive cultural identity and natural resource management system.'

The first definition of mobile *indigenous* peoples is included in Recommendation 27 of the 5th World Parks Congress (Durban, September 2003):

'Mobile indigenous peoples (i.e. nomads, pastoralists, hunter-gatherers, and shifting agriculturalists) are a subset of traditional and indigenous peoples whose livelihoods depend on some form of common property use of natural resources, and whose mobility is both a distinctive source of cultural identity and a management strategy for sustainable land use and conservation.'

Most recently, the Segovia Declaration of Nomadic and Transhumant Pastoralists (Spain, 2007) recognizes the need to:

'promote education of children in mobile communities by providing mobile and boarding schools as required, using the indigenous or local languages, and respecting the dignity of mobile communities by incorporating in the teaching curricula elements of the local culture and indigenous knowledge.'

The Segovia Declaration also promotes the responsibility to:

'assure equal access by pastoralists and other mobile communities to higher education, and develop specific educational programmes on pastoralism and subjects related to mobile and nomadic communities, promote action-research of relevance to mobile communities and ensure access by mobile communities to such relevant educational and action-research programmes.'

The Segovia Declaration builds on both the Dana Declaration and the World Parks Congress

recommendations, reaffirming the right of all children to learn while recognizing their diverse needs within a range of flexible learning and teaching strategies and spaces.

Overcoming issues of mobility and remoteness

If nomadic peoples' continuous mobility is perceived as a lack of social evolution, it legitimizes any political push for sedentarization, and educational provision may well serve as a direct or indirect instrument in promoting a hidden agenda of changing the attitudes and beliefs of nomads, when there is no alternative provision that adequately responds to their needs and respects their right to education and learning. Do pastoralists and other mobile communities want their children to learn to read and write?

In effect, with the consequences of food crisis, climate change and globalization and other factors, nomads are having increasing difficulty sustaining their livelihood. Education can bring a sense of possibilities and fulfilment to community members. For example the Tigré community in Geleb, on the Eritrean coast, who live part of the year in semi-desert areas, have seen increased access to education for their children over the last three years, as well as an improvement in safe water supply and sanitation. Quality of life for the community has greatly improved. The elders say their children are learning new concepts and skills, which they hope will provide a future different from their own lives, largely determined by the daily struggle for survival and seasonal migrations in search of water.

Nomads and pastoralists may be turning to education as a means to assure their children's future, but when the outcomes of such provision remain uncertain, they turn away. Consequently, these nomadic pastoralist communities have very low enrolment figures and high drop-out rates in the formal system. Estimates of numbers of nomadic and pastoralist children out of school worldwide are difficult to make because of the invisibility of pastoralist groups within national aggregated education statistics. A 2003 Oxfam study puts the estimated number of nomadic and pastoralist children out of school between 15 and 25 million.

As defined by the 5th World Parks Congress Recommendation 27, pastoralism, as a livelihoods

Right: Children line up to enter the Galifega Alternative Basic Education Primary School, Ethiopia. When they move to a new location, families can dismantle the 'mobile school' along with their huts. The 'alternative education' model adapts learning environments to the pastoral way of life. *Indrias/UNICEF.*

and resource-management strategy, is also deeply interrelated with identity. Saverio Kratli, researcher at the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University, points out in a study for the World Bank that, when addressing the education of pastoralists:

'it is all too often forgotten that to be "pastoralist" means being Turkana (Kenya), Rabari (India), Qashqa'i (Iran), or from some other community. It is an identity these people take pride in, a complex and sophisticated way of life which, with all its harshness, they profoundly love.'

Arguing that education has mainly been intended as an instrument to transform the pastoralists into something else, however, he explains that:

'The history of mass education programmes for nomads has been that of an encounter between people seeking new ways of adapting to an evolving context – monetarization of the economy, commodification of labour and privatization of land – and a broad set of actors, from policy-makers and project officers to teachers and local officials, who widely believe that nomads have to be "saved" from their way of life. It is upon this cultural clash that the "problem" of delivering mass education to nomads has been framed and policy solutions devised.'

Problems are defined according to the line that the mobility of the nomadic pastoralists makes any effective use of conventional schools difficult. Low population sparsely distributed over an extended area requires a large catchment area to provide enough children for a school, leading to long walking distance to school each day. At the same time, the rigid education system does not allow children of nomadic pastoralists to attend school as they are required to provide labour in herding animals. This also leads to the question of national centrally mandated curricula, which are meant to



realize national objectives and foster national unity through a uniform system. When the centrally planned and controlled curriculum stresses formal academic achievements rather than knowledge and practical skills relevant to pastoralists, it is invariably perceived as inappropriate and irrelevant, alienating children from their communities and lifestyles, and contributing to poor attendance and participation in education. Central curricula tend then to create disparities between pastoralist communities and the rest of the population.

Inequity also comes from an education of poor quality delivered through poor infrastructure and inadequate facilities. Furthermore, the use of permanent and immovable structures for conventional classrooms and schools is unsuitable for nomads, who are continually on the move, migrating from one settlement to another in response to seasonal and occupational demands. With the best intentions, these constant migrations disrupt their children's schooling as they do not stay long enough in a settlement for learners to complete an academic session or school year. For instance, due to a lifestyle

of constant search for pasture for their animals, very few Wodaabe children of Niger go to school. It has not been part of their tradition and they are constantly prone to periods of hunger, especially when there is a drought and they do not have access to millet or to water. Often the Wodaabe would be forced to sell their cattle.

In Ethiopia, pastoralists often do not send their children to school as they cannot afford to pay for their food and lodging in the towns where the schools are located. However, economic challenges are not the only barrier to education for nomadic boys and girls. Even when fees are not charged and indirect costs are low, or when parents could in principle afford to send their children to school, there are other interrelated problems. There is a wide range of tasks that both boys and girls in rural areas are expected to carry out, such as tending livestock, collecting water, cooking. Sending children to school imposes a significant additional non-cash burden on the families. This is particularly important where tasks, and other obligations, fall disproportionately on girls.

Articulation of knowledge systems

Mobile and boarding schools have not always been the best solution. Kratli notes that, in 1970, the parliament in Kenya amended the Anglo-Maasai agreement which had kept reserves closed to non-Maasai, and launched a programme aimed at improving enrolment by setting up low-cost boarding schools. However, the new educational facilities were flooded by pupils from non-pastoral ethnic groups and were disregarded by the Maasai. Mobile schools, likewise, can sometimes turn out to be costly and unsustainable.

Experience in the non-formal education sector shows that community-based interventions that respond to context and mobility patterns can have greater success. In fact, recent work has increasingly reverted to policy frameworks which accommodate diverse provisions and support a variety of responses to the situations and learning needs of nomads and pastoralists. Nomadic and pastoralist families' own informal educational transmittal of their wisdom and their knowledge system is concerned with teaching about their way of life and their values. As Roger Blench describes, in a 1999 paper for the Overseas Development Institute in London:

'In reality, pastoralists' landscape is flecked with an invisible constellation of resources. They have to balance their knowledge of pasture, rainfall, disease, husbandry, political insecurity and national boundaries with access to markets and infrastructure, and preferred established migration routes. Pastoralists usually only diverge from their existing patterns in the face of a drought, a pasture failure or the spread of an epizootic. Nonetheless, this flexibility is often the key to their survival.'

The knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation, as they try to adapt to new circumstances and articulate different forms of knowing.

New opportunities for nomadic children

More in-depth studies, better data collection and promising initiatives are forging new trends and creating new opportunities for nomadic children. A 2006 study commissioned by UNICEF and the African Development Bank, *The Education of Nomadic Peoples in East Africa*, identified major societal issues impacting on more than 10 per cent of the population in the countries studied (Djibouti,

Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda), which pose a serious threat to the challenge of the MDG of Universal Primary Education by the year 2015. The study makes a set of recommendations for what can be done to resolve problems of equity, access, quality of education provision and learning, and to ensure an environment that is conducive to learning, the assumption being that each context creates the rationale for appropriate policy response(s) and services that address the specific educational needs of nomads.

The recommendations include better articulation of the particular situations of nomadic groups in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, specific support to nomadic communities, as well as training in community participation, and dialogue in education and learning. Multi-sectoral responses for improving the nomads' situation should be conceived alongside poverty reduction strategies as a means to include them within the wider development process and ensure that they are not ignored when MDG-based strategies are being developed and implemented. These issues should also figure prominently in educational fora that often do not underscore them.

The new Nomadic Education Strategic Plan launched in Sudan at the end of March 2009 is expected to respond to the special educational needs of the estimated 500,000 nomadic children living in the northern states, and sets out to increase enrolment rates to 70 per cent by 2011, compared to current levels of 32 per cent. Government enrolment figures for the northern states of Sudan indicate that girls' enrolment in primary education stands at just below 66 per cent. The Plan will also set out to strengthen the responsiveness of the education system and curriculum to the needs of nomadic children, and increase the number of trained, motivated teachers.

Among the practical responses offered for nomadic children is a shift from provision of mobile schools to on-site learning centres, as many children remain in one place for up to six months of the year. The Plan also emphasizes the value of boarding schools for nomadic children, to enable them to continue learning even while their families are on the move, and sets out to enrol a further 133,000 nomadic children in regular primary education. The importance of increasing perceptions of value of education among all families is also highlighted: the 2008 Baseline Survey of Education in the north-

ern states, undertaken by the Federal Ministry of General Education, found that more than one-third of families that did not enrol children in school did so through choice rather than because of any external obstacle.

In Kenya, it is estimated that there are about 6.7 million children of school age (6–13) with about 660,000 in the twelve pastoral districts. These areas have a comparatively low gross enrolment rate (GER), with a majority of children of primary school age not enrolled in schools. The predominantly Muslim North East Province districts of Garissa, Wajir, Ijara and Mandera have the lowest GER. The GER for Garissa indicates that 87 per cent of children are outside the formal system of education, possibly engaged in early marriage, child labour, herding or involved in household duties, combining these activities with koranic teaching in *madrassas*.

The net enrolment rates (NER) in districts where nomads coexist with sedentarized communities are high but very low where nomadic pastoralists are a majority. To increase GER/NER in the ASAL district, UNICEF recently supported the development of a draft nomadic education policy, paving the way for the establishment of a national commission as a significant step in formalizing and assuring viable schooling or learning options for children living nomadic lifestyles. Life skills curriculum development is also ongoing and will be incorporated into the peace education curriculum to prevent or reduce conflict, including ethnic clashes and cattle rustling.

Conclusion

Despite positive commitments to the MDGs and EFA, rigid state control over education can be a barrier to social change. Formal education systems promoting a national curriculum, standardized pedagogy and with inflexible scheduling can lead to conflict between the traditional values of nomadic and pastoralist peoples and state policies as promulgated through the educational system, threatening the very sense of collective unity such policies are often intended to promote. If, in part, the situation of pastoralists and nomadic groups is just an extreme example of the problem that marginalized groups encounter, it is also a reminder that no learning process is context-free. ■

Complementary Elementary Education (CEE) in Eritrea

By UNICEF

Nomadic populations in Eritrea move twice a year between the lowlands and the highlands. These migrations are incompatible with the formal school calendar. Generally, classes are already in session when the time comes for nomadic children to resettle. They end up being excluded from the formal system. Non-formal Complementary Elementary Education (CEE), with its flexible calendar, is more suitable to their migration patterns. CEE is having a positive impact on access to education for nomadic boys and girls, providing them with new opportunities for learning.

The establishment of education committees composed of community elders, mothers and fathers has also contributed to the increased value attributed to the education of girls amongst pastoralists – and to the appreciation of its long-term benefits for the community as a whole.

'UNICEF and the government request that we send more girls to school', said one elder.

'This is a piece of welcome advice. The community is a combination of boys and girls. Unless the girls are developed, the community cannot develop. The sun gives light to the outside world in the daytime. The moon and the stars shine in the sky at night. The light inside our homes is given by our women and our girls. Education can make that light even brighter.'

So far, education for pastoralists has mainly been provided through CEE in Eritrea. The country is now moving towards developing a provision that is tailored around the needs and lifestyles of this group. In December 2008, the first National Consultation on Nomadic Education was held in Eritrea ■