

PASTORAL WOMEN, TENURE, AND GOVERNANCE

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Pastoral land tenure and governance: Complex systems

Customary pastoral tenure and governance systems are relatively broad sets of institutions characterized by principles of collectivity, flexibility, adaptability, and multiple uses by multiple users (Davies et al. 2016; Flintan et al. 2021). These tenure systems are becoming ever more complex as livelihoods and land use diversify and as pastoralists attempt to access land and resources through mechanisms other than their customary institutions, including through privatization and formalized land certification (Flintan et al. 2021; Nori 2021). The resulting tenure systems are described by Robinson (2019) as “complex mosaics.” Alternatively, Flintan (2021) (following Niamir-Fuller 2005) refers to them as “nested” systems where regulating laws and institutions work on the basis of “territory” or “domain,” under which there is a hierarchy of nested, overlapping bundles of rights for diverse sets of users and often for the same resource. Despite these complexities, collective tenure continues to be core, ensuring pastoralist systems function well and their resilience to crises such as drought is strengthened.

In pastoral systems, permission to use land and resources is granted first and foremost to members

KEY MESSAGES

- Pastoral tenure and governance systems require enabling policy and legislation that supports equitable access, use, and (where relevant) ownership of land and resources.
- Where pastoral tenure and governance systems are strong and functioning well, women (and men) gain greater long-term benefits from collective tenure systems than from those systems that provide individual rights.
- In pastoral tenure systems, there is little discrimination against women regarding communal land use.
- Given the opportunity, women are willing to participate in activities and processes to improve their tenure security. Women readily work together, strengthening collective and reciprocal relations that contribute to important social networks.
- Building the capacity of women to play a more active role in decision-making processes and community activities was most successful in improving women’s confidence and position or status in the community, and it encouraged them to take up leadership positions.

of the pastoralist group, which can be defined by ethnicity, kinship, lineage, clan, or geography (Ostrom 1990; Ostrom et al. 2002; Cousins 2007). Being part of the group confers greater benefits than being an individual or household. When those benefits are diminished, or more and better benefits can be obtained from outside the group, there is greater incentive to challenge the group and seek individual rewards.

Pastoral communities – and their lands and resources – are vulnerable to the pressures and changes around and within them. Competition for pastoral lands and natural resources has increased greatly over the last two decades as the interests of governments and investors in these lands have grown (Flintan et al. 2021).

Gender brings additional complexities

Gender adds another layer of complexity to already complicated pastoral land tenure systems. If we are to develop more appropriately targeted interventions and support, we must understand how changes in pastoral areas affect men and women differently. To contribute to this goal, the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets (PIM) supported a series of studies on pastoral women and land tenure as part of its research flagship on Governance of Natural Resources (Flintan 2019).

The studies were carried out between 2018 and 2021 in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and India. The main findings are available in ILRI Research Paper No. 92. Additional details can be found in the series of case study research papers summarized below.

Ethiopia

A policy review (Belay 2020) showed that while there is policy and legislation to support more equitable access to land and resources in Ethiopia, little has been done to implement it in pastoral areas or in a manner feasible for pastoralism

as a viable land use. There is a need for awareness-raising and legal empowerment of societies, integration of customary and religious systems with statutory systems, mobile legal services for pastoralists, and cultural mapping and monitoring.

Another study focused on women's participation in and benefits resulting from participatory rangeland management (PRM), which was implemented in pastoral areas of Ethiopia from 2010 onward (Flintan et al. 2019). Results showed that PRM successfully improved women's participation in decision-making processes, although participation was less visible in higher-level governance bodies. Where women were not involved, their absence was explained by heavy workloads, long distances to meetings, and cultural barriers and perceptions.

In household surveys, women said they were satisfied with PRM processes. Of the top six impacts of PRM, two involved improving (1) women's participation in rangeland management and (2) women's access to rangeland resources. Informants agreed that the main factors influencing these positive results were the steps taken by NGOs to include both women and men and to offer women-targeted activities and training.

PRM has challenged existing gender inequalities and customary patriarchal systems that exclude women from more public- or community-level decision-making processes. Using PRM as an entry point for community empowerment has provided a new space for discussion on gender equality in relation to rangeland access and management, as well as more broadly. It was widely agreed by respondents that women should be included in PRM as important rangeland users and not to simply fill quotas.

Tanzania

Tanzanian pastoralists face daily challenges to their land rights. Land tenure security is low, despite NGO and government agency support to

communities to improve village land use planning and tenure security. Building women's capacity to participate in and lead these processes can be empowering. To this end, a study was undertaken to understand the impacts and dynamics of women's rights and leadership forums (WRLF) established by the Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT), an NGO in northern Tanzania, including impacts on women's empowerment and the securing of access to land and resources (Dungumaro and Amos 2019).

Milestones and impacts resulting from WRLFs included (1) an active platform for raising women's voices, (2) heightened public awareness of women's rights, (3) recognition of women's rights in communities and the issuance of individual land titles, (4) understanding of how women can participate in land management and governance processes, (5) positive changes in perceptions toward women adopting leadership roles, (6) increase in the number of female leaders in villages, and (7) economic empowerment.

The findings show that WRLFs strengthened women's collective ways of working, improved group solidarity and status, and helped them feel more comfortable advocating for their rights. Women also increasingly engaged in "forum shopping," turning to either the customary or statutory system for recourse in land disputes depending on which they thought would best support their claim. As a result of the study, the Sustainable Rangeland Management Project supported the establishment of WRLFs in order to strengthen women's roles and participation in joint village land use planning processes and governance (Ferrari 2021).

India

Although reliable data on the status of pastoralists and commons in India is not available, it is widely acknowledged that both pastoralists and commons are in decline. The status of pastoralist women's social, economic, and political relationships with the commons is not well understood,

either. In 2018–2019, Maldhari Rural Action Group (MARAG) and ILRI conducted research in Gujarat State to better understand pastoral women's perspectives on pastoral systems and trends, women's roles in land resource management, and the status of land tenure rights and investment in sustainable land management (Agarwal et al 2021).

The study found that pastoralist women can access and use the commons in the same way as men. However, pastoralism is increasingly challenged by a lack of investment and support, and rangeland resources are being fragmented and lost as more pastoralists turn to growing crops. Reliance on the use of postharvest crop stubble to graze animals is also increasingly high.

It is clear that socioeconomic changes are eroding the pastoral way of life and the status of women. In the last 10 to 15 years, many pastoralist families have sold all their livestock to buy a tractor or digger, primarily because of challenges in accessing grazing land. Ex-pastoralists now migrate with a tractor or a digger, just as they previously migrated with livestock. Discussions revealed a decline in herd sizes due to lack of access to grazing land and an aspirational shift toward education for pastoralists' children.

Although women have a wealth of knowledge and skills in animal husbandry, the management and decision-making about farming and non-pastoral livelihoods increasingly lies in the hands of men. Women's relationships with their animals and the land are changing, and their knowledge of animal and plant husbandry is being lost. They have also lost their role as household finance managers, as men now keep the cash they earn. High tenure insecurity provides little incentive to invest in sustainable land management.

Despite the challenges faced by pastoralist men and women, both want to continue their traditional way of life. For women in particular, pastoralism provides clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and status, as well as control over some finances and household decision-making. This highlights

the need for greater investment in pastoralism, which makes use of land and resources that are suitable for little else.

Conclusions

As these studies have shown, change is happening at a rapid pace in pastoral areas due to a number of forces. Men and women do not experience these changes in the same way, and it is vital that these differences are understood and incorporated into projects and programs that seek to intervene in these areas and support women specifically.

The results of these studies highlight that challenging male-dominated governance structures to make them more open and inclusive is no easy task. Doing so requires time and commitment. Rather than singling out women for privileges or supporting their access and rights to land and resources as individuals, a better approach to effect change is to work with and through pastoral communities as a whole. This approach strengthens the entire collective and pastoral system, while also improving women's place and status in the community and how they contribute to and benefit from the system.

The greatest success in improving women's confidence and position or status in the community resulted from building their capacity to play a stronger role in decision-making processes and community activities such as PRM or the WRLFs. Within the PRM process in Ethiopia, there was clear evidence that women's participation in decision-making processes had improved and that women were taking committee positions and stepping forward as leaders or local government representatives. Both men and women said they benefited from the process, and rangeland management and productivity also improved.

In Tanzania, WRLFs not only helped women gain the confidence to step forward as leaders but also improved men's perceptions toward them. Including men within the WRLFs proved to be

an important step, helping the forums become stronger and gain greater status and recognition. This inclusion also helped build trust, as men saw firsthand that giving women more power did not diminish their own power and that by working together, greater benefits were realized for the household and the community. Unity and solidarity were other important gains that strengthened pastoral society as a whole.

Women are particularly vulnerable in situations where customary institutions and collective tenure are breaking down, and there is no governance – or only weak governance and tenure systems – to replace them. This is the case in India, for example, as resources become more privatized and livelihoods move away from pastoralism toward those that rely more on the labor of men, which is often poorly paid. Women are losing status, self-worth, and direction while quality of life declines and poverty increases.

Positive social and cultural change can take time. If the process is rushed or overly pushed by outsiders to a community, those experiencing the changes may resent the process and try to stop it. Change needs to be carried out at a pace that is comfortable for everyone but finding that balance is difficult. Building the capacities of women and providing them with options so that they can choose and lead their own transformation, is an important move toward such a balance.

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