

4. Beyond the Mainstream

Education for nomadic and pastoralist girls and boys



Community-based early learning, Ngorongoro, Tanzania

This paper illustrates the challenges involved in providing good-quality gender-equitable education for children who are beyond the reach of mainstream, formal education. It focuses on children of nomadic and pastoralist households, identifying specific issues in providing schooling for them, and drawing on lessons from approaches and initiatives by various agencies (government and non-government). The paper explores specific forms of discrimination that nomadic and pastoralist girls experience in relation to education, and highlights the need for deeper gender analysis in order to inform policy making.

Nomadic and pastoralist children beyond the mainstream

It is estimated that there are between 25 million and 40 million children of school age living in nomadic or pastoralist households of whom only between ten per cent and 50 per cent attend school. Between 15 million and 25 million of the estimated 100 million of out-of-school children are probably nomads and pastoralists.¹ While rates of participation and completion of basic education for pastoralist boys are very low, the rates for girls are far lower.

This paper draws primarily on evidence from NGO programme reports and research across West, Central, and East Africa with mobile and semi mobile livestock herders. In these regions many pastoralist and nomadic societies are characterised by poverty and particular aspects of gender inequalities, such as a rigid division of labour coupled with a heavy workload for all members of households. Other distinguishing features of these societies include the harsh effects of desertification and chronic drought, the ways that migration by men often entails further work for women, the practice of early marriage, and in some cases a belief in the intellectual inferiority of women and girls. While policies and practices need to address issues particular to pastoralists and nomads in general, they also need to address issues specific to pastoralist and nomadic women and girls.

Nomadic and pastoralist children still do not enjoy their right to a basic education.² The 2015 Education for All target will not be achieved unless policies and resources are directed to provide these children with access to relevant, good-quality education. There is little evidence, however, that pastoralist education has been addressed through major national initiatives in any country, with the exceptions of Uganda and Mongolia,³ since the World Education Forum in 1990.

Enrolment of pastoralist girls and boys in Kenya

With the declaration of Free Primary Education (FPE) in Kenya in 2003, a national Gross Enrolment Rate of 104 per cent was achieved. Despite this overall increase, the figures obscured geographical inequalities and, in pastoralist districts, the Gross Enrolment Rate was only 25 per cent, with as few as 17 per cent of pastoralist girls enrolled in school. This suggests that fees were not the only obstacle to enrolment. Hidden costs, such as uniforms, lunch, and community development funds, as well as unfriendly school environments lacking adequate sanitation facilities, have further excluded girls, rather than boys. Low rates of participation are also strongly influenced by mobility of pastoralist families.

Wajir Girls' Primary School in the north-east of Kenya was founded in 1988 following a road accident: a bus crashed while ferrying pastoralist girls from Wajir to a boarding school 200 kilometres away in Garissa, killing the girls on board. The community raised its own funds to construct a girls-only

primary school. Enrolment has since risen from 40 girls to 576 girls, and the school has now been incorporated into the government system. The school's popularity reflects a community activism on behalf of girls' education, often by those who have been educated themselves, in a district where there is also very strong opposition to educating girls. Female teachers have been trained to promote gender equality and do this through, among other things, running workshops, exploring issues such as girls' rights and cultural practices, including female genital mutilation.⁴

In terms of education, the *mobility* of nomads and pastoralists is a significant issue. This can be daily mobility, such as the movements of the Eritrean shepherders, or more extensive travelling, such as the seasonal journeys of Touareg sheep and camel herders. As a result of their mobility, pastoralist and nomadic children are unable to attend a static school during the usual daytime hours of a conventional school year. Children in travelling families, who do not see themselves as nomads or pastoralists, are in a similar position.

Gender relations among nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists in Uganda

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) studies carried out by the Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) programme working with pastoralist groups in Uganda, show that women are the main producers in pastoral society, accounting for 90 per cent of domestic labour. They make a significant contribution to livestock production but do not own livestock or land, have the highest illiteracy rate, have limited access to credit and modern technology, and suffer from domestic violence. Early marriages have denied many girls the chance to realise their potential, and men dominate decision making at household and community levels. Women's power to make decisions is mainly in the choice of crops to be planted, and even then men initiate decisions and only really present conclusions to their wives for approval.⁵

What nomads and pastoralists want from formal education

Nomad and pastoralist girls and boys have a right to good-quality basic education, but nomadic and pastoralist girls access less education than boys, and their participation and achievements are much lower, than those of boys. In order to design a flexible education policy and deliver gender-equitable education, policy makers need to identify what motivates nomads and pastoralists to send their children to school, understand the expectations and motivations of girls and their households and then develop strategies that take account of their expectations. There is a lack of relevant data about nomads and pastoralists in general, and women and girls in particular.

Evidence from fieldwork suggests that nomadic and pastoralist families' own informal education of their children is concerned with teaching them about their way of life and their values. Few adults

have themselves had the opportunity to go to school, and where there are opportunities they may send only some children to school, usually the boys. There is also evidence that nomadic and pastoralist households see schooling as part of an overall strategy based on their assessment of employment prospects, different sources of income, and vulnerability. When environmental change, conflict, or other factors put severe pressure on their ways of life, they look to formal education to provide alternatives for their children, especially their sons. For some, formal education is seen as a way to an alternative means of livelihood from pastoralism.

When pastoralist and nomadic parents send their children to school, they do not want a substandard education, but one which is both the same as others receive, with the same certification, and is also relevant to their mobility, way of life, and knowledge.

The Ngorongoro Early Childhood Development programme, Tanzania

The community-based Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme in Ngorongoro province has established ECD centres next to *bomas* (Maasai homesteads) in order to make sure that they are accessible to both boys and girls. Each centre has two Maasai teachers – one male and one female – who are trained in active-learning techniques, which encourage them to involve all children equally. These local teachers are sensitive to the cultural background of the children and they are trained in a gender sensitive way. The ECD centres are run by Management and both men and women are involved in decision making on issues affecting the centre.⁶

Specific policy issues

Decentralisation and financing

Basic education should be free for all boys and girls at the point of delivery. Governments should make specific allocations to ensure adequate financing for pastoralist education, but in reality the opposite is what happens. Although pastoralist and nomadic peoples contribute substantially to the overall national economy and to government revenues through, for example, taxes on their livestock, they do not benefit from investment in their education. For example, in harsh climatic conditions, with a low-population density and poor communications and infrastructure, basic services (including health facilities and schools) are to be found only in towns. Children whose families are mobile or semi-mobile cannot attend these schools on a regular basis. Mobile schools, where teachers with a minimum of materials move with the students, have been tried in several countries with different degrees of success, but today they are considered to be too costly by local education authorities poor areas, which have no means of raising local revenue for schooling. Moreover, mobile schooling is not often a priority for local or national governments with explicit or implicit policies of sedentarisation for mobile peoples. Boarding schools have also been established in towns

to cater for children from mobile families, but these have often been hampered by lack of demand, high running costs, poor facilities, shortages of regular supplies of food, and lack of security, particularly for girls.

Government decentralisation and civil-society participation are often considered to be essential for successful development. However, decentralisation, combined with economic liberalisation and privatisation of the education system, cannot automatically be considered beneficial. For example, when central government devolves the financing of education to district level in nomadic pastoralist zones, the ability of local government to raise revenue for schooling through taxation is often very weak. The result is that communities have to bear a heavy financial responsibility to ensure that schools function, and where schools *are* accessible, girls will be the losers if parents cannot afford to send all their children to school. As nomadic and pastoralist peoples generally live in the poorest parts of a country they feel the financial burden of providing education services more than other wealthier communities. It is important to understand the implications to both girls and boys of budget decisions and policy making, at both national and decentralised levels of government.

Charges for basic education, both user fees and hidden expenses, are especially unreasonable for nomadic and pastoral peoples. The financial burden is too great for parents to cover their children's expenses in boarding schools. When pastoralists *have* managed to contribute financially to their children's education, the opportunity costs are high. For example, pastoralism is labour-intensive, and children's contribution to the work is important. It is girls who walk great distances to fetch water for domestic use, and who also play a major role in watering the animals; this makes their labour an important contribution to the household economy. It is also the girls who have to fetch water for the school.

What kinds of school for gender equality?

Decisions about where to locate static schools have important implications for girls. Pastoralist children living in dispersed mobile groups may have many kilometres to walk each day to and from school. This raises safety issues for girls en route, and also in school, where they may be far from their family and therefore more vulnerable to abuse. In drought-stricken pastoralist zones of the Sahel, in-school feeding programmes are essential if boys and girls are to attend school, given the many hours they spend walking there and back. Parents may let their sons sleep on the school floor during the week, but not their daughters. If schools have no toilets or running water that is safely accessible to girls, they may miss many weeks a year of schooling while they are menstruating. Flexibility in the timing of the school day and annual calendar of the school is very

important in relation to workloads, and these all need to be examined for their different impact on girls and boys. Creative approaches need to be found, such as developing a network of host families to provide accommodation and security for girls and boys attending school far from home.

Mobile schools in Darfur, Sudan

The Darfur mobile school is a one-teacher multigrade school, supported by Oxfam GB, set up to provide schooling for small numbers of children travelling with their families in small groups. Low population density, high mobility, and limited demand for schooling mean that, under certain circumstances, a multigrade model can be highly appropriate.

However, the multigrade model approved by the government restricts schooling to only the first four years of basic education. As complete primary schools (i.e. schools offering all six primary grades) are available only in permanent settlements, few nomadic children continue their education for more than four years. This is especially the case for the girls, who are less likely than boys to go on to boarding school or to a static school in a settlement. This raises the question of what results can be achieved in these first four years, and to what extent girls have acquired sustainable skills and developed the expertise that they need for their futures.⁷

Breaking through the barriers to girls' schooling

Government agencies must develop a gender analysis of the obstacles and inequalities faced by nomadic and pastoralist girls and women, both inside and outside of the school. Although providing more schools may increase the *overall* numbers of children who have access to education, this does not necessarily address the lack of opportunities for girls, and it does not confront the problem of how to support girls to remain in school until they have achieved a good-quality education which can improve their capabilities. Depending on the context, successful initiatives to include girls, and to support them to remain in school and complete a basic education, might include girl-only schools, boarding facilities, or female 'animators' working in the community.

'Animatrice' in Mali and Niger

In pastoralist communities in north-eastern Mali and western Niger, Oxfam GB is working with school and community *animatrice*, or 'female mobilisers', in order to encourage higher rates of attendance and participation by pastoralist girls in formal schooling. Girls' participation is hindered by a range of issues, including early marriage, their excessive workloads, popular beliefs that women are inferior to men and less intellectually able, and widespread poverty. The *animatrice* help to tackle some of these issues by working with parents and teachers (mostly male) to change negative attitudes towards girls and schooling, and to reinforce the right to an education. By working in the school and with the teachers, they have helped to make the school environment more friendly to girls, and the walk to school safer.

By linking closely with parents and mobile households, the *animatrice* have helped fathers and mothers to understand the benefits of schooling for their daughters. As relatively well-educated local women in paid employment, the *animatrice* serve as positive examples for local girls. They have also encouraged the participation of women in parents' associations and women's groups, where women from otherwise scattered households welcome the opportunity to come together to exchange views and to learn basic literacy.⁸

Teacher policy and curriculum reform

The mobility of nomads and pastoralists means that they are likely to be particularly affected by poor retention of teachers in rural areas. Owing to the generally low education levels among pastoralists, it is difficult to recruit pastoralist teachers for mobile schools. And there are even fewer pastoralist or nomadic women with the appropriate formal qualifications, which means that there are few examples of pastoralist and nomadic women in different and challenging roles. Gender equality is therefore an important issue in the recruitment and retention of teachers. Teachers from outside, who *do* have appropriate education qualifications (though this rarely includes the local language), need strong incentives to work in mobile schools.

To be successful, mobile schools need to challenge well-established ideas of what a school is; mobility may necessitate a shortened school day, involve multigrade teaching (sometimes including adults too), require a truncated school year, and need an adapted curriculum which requires specific relevant training for teachers. In all schools in pastoralist areas, payment of teachers' salaries can be a problem if the government does not have a flexible payment scheme, or has devolved responsibility for payment to local government offices without an adequate budget, or if the community must carry the burden.

Basic education in the Jijiga and Fik Zones, Somali State, Ethiopia

In the pastoralist areas of Fik and Jijiga in Ethiopia, formal basic education provision reaches only 16 per cent of children, the majority from urban areas. In order to address the severe problem of lack of basic education in rural areas, Save the Children UK, working with the Regional Education Bureau, is implementing an alternative basic education programme for pastoral and agro-pastoral children. An appropriate and relevant curriculum has been developed, adapted from the existing formal education curriculum, and locally recruited teachers are given training in basic teaching skills and subject matter.

The school calendar is flexible, based on the seasonal movement of the community, and the school timetable has been negotiated in order to allow both boys and girls to attend classes. Links with the formal education system have been established in order to allow children who complete the three-year alternative basic education cycle to join the second cycle of primary education in the formal system.⁹

Increasingly, education reforms are providing the framework for governments to develop a national 'core' curriculum with flexibility for local and regional diversity: geographical, social, and cultural.

However, local government officials and teachers do not have the training and skills to adapt the 'core' curriculum to suit their local contexts. In other instances, curriculum modules intended to be relevant to local people are not developed locally at all, but by 'experts' or teachers. National teacher-training curricula need to equip teachers with the skills to be able to make the curriculum locally relevant (for example to respond to the local context of HIV/AIDS), to provide training in teaching the national languages as a second language, and to offer bilingual education. The teaching and learning should build on participatory methods and active learning approaches, and the curriculum should be sensitive to the needs of both girls and boys, responding social and cultural diversity, both locally and nationally, avoiding general presumptions, and promoting gender equality.

Recommendations

Mere *expansion* of formal education provision, based on a model of what works in urban situations, is not enough to ensure that Education For All reaches nomadic and pastoralist children. Limited provision of static schooling, or projects which have focused on getting nomadic boys and girls to adapt to the formal system, have failed. Experience in the non-formal sector indicates that interventions that are community-based, and that respond to context and mobility patterns, can work. Appropriate modifications, such as adjusting the school calendar to ensure appropriate timing, or adapting the curriculum to ensure its relevance, are necessary. Pastoralist schooling needs to take account of the different work practices of women and men when planning flexible provision of adequate and sustainable resources – both financial and human. It also needs to be sensitive to issues of safe and accessible water supplies and food security, which have a huge impact on schooling opportunities for children in pastoralist zones. It is only when governments have made efforts to reach nomads and pastoralists in innovative ways that completion rates have improved.

NGO methods, and work in collaboration with nomadic and pastoralist communities, indicate that most success in changing ideas and beliefs about education for girls, and increased enrolment and retention, comes when education is not considered in isolation from other social factors.

Policy frameworks

Coherent policy frameworks are needed to accommodate different provisions, and to support a variety of responses to the situations and education needs of nomads and pastoralists, paying particular attention to the interactions between women and men in their

societies. However, education for nomadic and pastoralist children must be accorded the same official recognition and status as formal government schooling elsewhere to avoid their further marginalisation. Education must also be attractive to and valued by the nomadic and pastoralist communities. Owing in part to a lack of national cultural, economic, and social data, government or donor education policy rarely refers to the specific situation of nomads and pastoralists, and literature addressing the specific needs of girls and women is very scarce. Therefore nomads and pastoralists are 'invisible' in many national statistics and reports – nomadic and pastoralist women and girls are doubly invisible.

NGOs are active in providing alternative education programmes, often working with local governments, many of which take a multi-activity approach which supports good-quality formal education in the context of community development, women's self-development and organisation, and capacity building on health issues. Examples of good practice need to be documented so that governments can incorporate them into their planning and policy design as part of their official systems.

Who can do what?

Government agencies

- Base policy on an analysis of the obstacles and inequalities faced by nomadic and pastoralist girls and women, inside and outside of the school.
- Ensure availability of national-level cultural, economic, and social data on nomads and pastoralists, disaggregated by sex and by region/province/district, to inform education policy making.
- End user fees and hidden costs for education.
- Provide specific training for teachers to address linguistic and cultural differences and gender inequality, and concurrently promote the training of local teachers.
- Promote participation of nomads and pastoralists in education planning and decision making, and develop policy frameworks in close collaboration with pastoralists and their organisations, including an equal proportion of women in decision making.
- Integrate successful, innovative approaches to pastoralist education into government policy.

Non-government agencies

- Exchange experiences, communicate, and learn from good practice in order to influence policy and practice. Prioritise gender analysis in all work.

- Raise the profile of nomadic and pastoralist communities' education and specific needs within NGO coalitions.
- Lobby governments and donor agencies for adequate and sustainable financing.
- Encourage community participation in schooling, involving women and men.
- Lobby and work with governments for successful and innovative approaches to pastoralist education that take account of gender equality, so that these can be incorporated into education policy.

Notes

¹ Oxfam GB (2003) 'Achieving EFA through Responsive Education Policy and Practice for Nomadic and Pastoralist Children: What can Agencies do?' Unpublished paper, Oxford: Oxfam GB.

² There is considerable debate about whether children of specifically nomadic and pastoralist households are different from other rural or marginalised households because of their mobility, but what is clear is that they suffer multiple discrimination, and there is a need for flexible education policies for millions of children who are beyond the mainstream.

³ Some recent developments at provincial and district levels have taken place in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sudan.

⁴ See: 'Pastoralist Education Learning Resource: A compilation of information on pastoralist education programmes in Horn and East Africa', Nairobi: Oxfam GB (2005), Leggett, I. (2005) 'Learning to improve policy for pastoralists in Kenya', in S. Aikman, and E. Unterhalter (eds) *Beyond Access: Transforming Policy and Practice for Gender Equality in Education*, Oxford: Oxfam GB and Unterhalter, E., Kioko-Echessa, E., Pattman, R., Rajagopalan, R., N'Jai, Fatmatta (2005) *Scaling up girls' education: Towards a scorecard on girls' education in the Commonwealth*. London: Beyond Access Project. <http://ioewebserver.ioe.ac.uk/ioe/cms/get.asp?cid=7746>.

⁵ Oxfam GB 2005 op. cit. p.65

⁶ E. Lugano, (2005) Correspondence with author.

⁷ Aikman, S. and H. El Haq (2006) 'EFA for pastoralists in North Sudan: a Mobile Multigrade model of Schooling' in A. Little (ed.) (2006) *Education For All and Multigrade Teaching: challenges and opportunities*. Amsterdam: Springer. The research for this publication and the case study was carried out in 2002. However, due to the current political situation in Darfur, the Oxfam GB programme supporting the mobile schools in Darfur is currently suspended.

⁸ Sanou, S. and S. Aikman (2005) 'Pastoralist Schools in Mali: Gendered Roles and Curriculum Realities' In S. Aikman and E. Unterhalter, op.cit.

⁹ Oxfam GB 2005 op. cit. p.9.

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