



Taking the Camel Through the Eye of a Needle: Enhancing Pastoral Resilience Through Education Policy in Kenya

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Summary

Since the introduction of free and mandatory education in Kenya in 2003, the number of children who have enrolled in formal primary education has increased tremendously. However, the pastoralist areas have continuously recorded a much lower enrollment and completion rates as compared to the rest of the country. Increasing scholarship establishes a nexus between the low pastoralist participation in formal schooling and the failed education strategies that are considered inappropriate to the circumstances in Kenya's pastoral districts. Acknowledging this reality, the Government of Kenya formally adopted the Nomadic Education Policy in 2010 to ostensibly boost education access to Nomadic communities. This study seeks to understand content of the Nomadic Education Policy through a prism of pastoral livelihood and resilience. It seeks to establish the extent, which the policy can offer a radical departure from the past, contributing not only to higher enrollment in schools but also enhancing resilience of pastoralist communities.

Introduction

Pastoral livelihood is considered as the most efficient use of the dry lands (Fratkin, 1986). Even with this importance, nomadic pastoralism has been viewed as a stage in socio-economic evolution and thus an intermediate between hunting/gathering and sedentary agricultural life. The consequence of this was that pastoralism was expected to die a "natural death". Thus modern existence of pastoralism in a period of modernity was seen as an anomaly, which had to be corrected through among other things the introduction of education. In this regard education for pastoralists was considered as an exit strategy, and not an end in itself. Education and pastoralism were considered not to be able to co-exist: there could be no educated pastoralists and vice versa, pastoralism meant missed education opportunities while education was an automatic exit out of pastoralism.

This debate becomes more important in the face of reducing coping capacities of

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pastoralists as a result of eroded asset base, poor policy, climatic stress related with climate change and the negative effects of globalization (WISP, 2007). The objectives of the study are thus two fold. These are (a) To understand the nature of pastoral resilience and how education policy can undermine their coping and adaptive capacity (b) assess the extent which the new Nomadic Education Policy can enhance the resilience of pastoral groups in Kenya. This paper seeks to contribute to the emerging dialogue on education and social resilience and link it to broader study of pastoralism and international development. More importantly the objective of the paper is to present an underlying argument and hypothesis for future research on education policy and resilience.

Background

Nomadic pastoralism is an ancient form of livelihood. It is said to be the most efficient use of the dry lands such as Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASAL) of Kenya. The ASAL constitutes about 84% of the total land and populated by about 20% of Kenya's population (GOK 2007). Pastoralism is practiced in 75% of ASAL (Mugo et al, 2009; Krätli, 2001). Nomadic pastoral communities that rely primarily on their animals as a source of livelihoods largely populate these regions. Collectively, these areas constitute the most marginalized parts of the country (Mugo et al, 2009). The economic contribution to Kenya, of the ASAL is significant, contributing to about 50-70% of the total livestock production (GOK, 2006). In terms of agriculture, pastoralism contributes about 50% of the total agriculture GDP (IIED, 2004). Large parts of the ASAL such as Northern Kenya attract the lowest and poorest service delivery.

Pastoralism has not benefited favorably from both the process and outcome of policy development. Usually, they are ignored and even when they are considered, pastoralism is viewed with skepticism. In this regard, development planners have tried to change pastoralism, establishing exit strategies that are clothed in language of legislation and policy. The United Nations Development Programme-UNDP (2009) argued, "Pastoralists have been ill-served by development policies and actions so far, since planners have almost without exception tried to convert the pastoralists into something else, judged more modern, more progressive and more productive".

In Kenya, pastoralists have been marginalized by government policy. The colonial structure considered pastoral livelihood as not being useful to the colonial enterprise, wasteful and administratively disturbing. Further, the pastoralists were not considered as industrious as the agricultural communities (GOK/ALRMP, 2004). The colonial government thus concentrated on areas that maintained the extractive nature of the colonial political economy. The independent governments continued with the policy of marginalization. Sessional Paper No: 10 of 1965 on African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya provided the economic blue print for Kenya's post independence development. This blueprint disturbingly stated as a policy the government would invest in regions that were considered most productive. Sadly, the ASAL were not considered "productive" and was thus largely ignored. Government policy has concentrated on making attempt at sedentarizaion of pastoralist population, which adversely affect pastoralist livelihoods (GOK, 2006).

With regards to education, the policy has targeted an increase in education. The policies were favorable to the needs and interests of those leading a sedentary and urban life. However they proved inappropriate to Kenya's pastoral districts. The consequence was the resulting low levels of educational enrollment, survival and achievement among pastoralists. The general education policy establish a fate accompli, in the sense that it becomes a "trade-off, that nomadic parents and children have to make between acquiring formal education through the school system, and the fundamental, informal learning about their own cultural, social and economic world available to them as members of the complex social networks of nomad life" (GOK, 2010a; 7).

Fratkin (1986) citing Holling (1973) defines resilience as the ability of a system to undergo shock and still maintain its ongoing functions and controls. A resilient population is therefore one that is able to absorb sharp changes and disturbances and still maintain its functionality. Social resilience is defined as the ability of groups to tolerate, survive and respond to environmental and socioeconomic constraints through adaptive strategies (Bradley & Grainger, 2004). Closely linked, adaptive capacity is a range of mechanisms that a society possesses to cope with change (Nelson et al., 2007). Thus

pastoral adaptive capacities refer to the cumulative capacity of pastoral households to adjust their livelihoods to multiple and interacting stressors (WISP 2007).

Pastoral herders live in uncertain climate and are experienced at coping with climatic variability and drought (Dietz, 1987; Little et al., 2001b). The risk vulnerability faced by pastoralists is high as a result of diseases conflict, climatic hazards and poverty. Their lives is based on the ability to successfully assess and manage risks, including being sensitive to climatic changes. Pastoralists are thus referred to as shrewd managers of risks and resilience (WISP, 2007). The climatic variability requires a system of flexibility required to cope with the hazards of livelihoods. Pastoralists use various strategies that facilitate adaptive and flexible risk management strategies. A central strategy for resilience and adaptive capacity is mobility, which is the ability for both people and livestock to move from place to place on the basis of need. Beyond mobility, pastoralists utilize a range of other techniques and institutions. These include herd splitting, herd diversity, using social capital and opportunistic cultivation. These risk management strategies enhance resilience (WISP, 2007).

For policy makers, mobility is viewed as a reflection of the ‘tragedy of the commons’, ‘backward’, and ‘chaotic’, ‘unnecessary’ and ‘socially & environmentally disruptive’ (UNDP, 2009). However, mobility is a rational response to ecological patterns in the dry lands. It is informed by several factors including climatic conditions, seasonal environmental conditions and the household exigencies. In this regard mobility can be seasonal or “regular as a pendulum between two well-defined pasture areas, following marked transhumant routes that have not changed for centuries” (UNDP, 2009; 3). Pastoral herders utilize the variety of pastures based on seasons, watering points and other resources within their ecological range with high climatic variability (Galvin, 2009). It is therefore an adaptation to the challenges of risky environment and a key feature of resilience in pastoral livelihood.

Methods

A review of published works was conducted, analyzing broad topics on pastoral livelihoods and education policy. Whereas no specific limitations were set, literature dealing with geographical areas outside the East Africa and more so Kenya was

systematically excluded to reduce the search giving attention to capturing literature on key concepts of this study.

The researcher conducted interviews (both in person and telephone) with individuals with extensive experience in education management in pastoral areas. In the summer of 2010, the author attended the launch of the Nomadic Education Policy in Garissa, Kenya. During this event, the author conducted semi structured interviews with public opinion leaders including representatives to the National Parliament, religious leaders and government officials. The researcher further conducted focus group discussions that were held in Isiolo and Garissa, Kenya. Three discussion groups were conducted in Garissa, one with randomly selected individuals who had achieved post secondary education, one with elders from the community and a third one with primary school teachers with varying degrees of experience. In Isiolo the groups were divided into neat categories of traditional elders and school going children from pastoral communities. In both locations selected for the focus group discussions the nature of outcome was perceived rich as a result of the researchers personal background of the area.

The researcher acknowledges from the onset that the questions of discussion were not framed in the language of resilience, however, key perspectives of resilience such as adaptation, coping mechanisms and survival were posed for discussion.

Findings and Discussion

Issues

Pastoralists have an ambivalent relationship with education. On one hand, taking children to school is a strategy on adaptation to facilitate an alternative livelihood for families and communities. On the other hand, education presents danger to the pastoral livelihood by antagonizing social institutions and altering social learning (GOK, 2010a). In the Kenyan context, education undermines institutions and systems that are utilized in pastoral livelihoods. It displaces both the technical knowledge and the social relationships of pastoral livelihoods with detrimental results (Krätli, 2001). In this regard education in pastoral communities possess both conceptual and practical challenges (Krätli and Dyer, 2009). Our study confirms the nature of this ambivalence. Those interviewed especially the older members of the community, raised concern about the future of the community

and about the fear that children might not manage their pastoral livelihood because they learn “the wrong things”.

As a result of the ambivalence, ASAL have had lower enrolment, retention, completion and achievement rates than the rest of the country. (Mugo et al, 2009, Sifuna, 2005). Only 32.3% of the total population in North Eastern Kenya¹ has enrolled in school compared to a national average of 76.8%. This situation is worse when it is viewed in light of low enrolment in post primary education. The secondary school enrollment rate for the ASAL was at 5% as of 2007 (Mugo et al 2009). In North Eastern Kenya, the population that has attended post secondary learning averages 0.6%. (KNBS 2008). Our study indicates that such dismal enrollment rate is as a result of the nature of secondary schools in these areas, which are largely boarding schools. Almost all secondary schools in the ASAL are boarding schools, which meant students are required to reside in the school within a school term and for the upper classes extending to part of the regular holiday.

Whereas government policy has sought to address this, the main focus has been on increasing enrollment and performance. (GOK, 2007; MOE, 2006). The solution was to increase education facilities (GOK, 1974), provide low cost boarding schools (GOK, 1970). When these strategies failed to achieve results, the simple solution was to withdraw the services, even in some cases prematurely (ALRMP/AAK, 2004). The strategies didn't consider the value and effect of education on resilience and coping capacities of communities and hence their failure. A corollary of this is that little attention was given to the opportunity cost that results in taking children of school going age away from their homes and the resulting effect of the household economy (Krätli, 2001).

With young boys and girls going to school, there is a redistribution of household tasks including herding of cattle being done by parents. Whereas this might not appear to be harmful, the fact that the certain groups haven't been socialized for these functions makes them more vulnerable as households. Pastoral livelihood is largely dependent on the individual and group specialization (Scoones, 1994). With the basic unit of pastoral economy being the household, absence of children will result in limited source of labor, in the sense that they are not available for mobility whereas the mobility of their labor

force is central to adaptation and risk management strategies of pastoralists (Fratkin, 1986). Distribution of households to undertake both diverse duties and share in the burden of task management is one perspective.

However, pastoralists also have other unique strategies to manage and spread risks among family members. One technique is to distribute portions of the herds to different family members to settle in diverse areas to both spread the risk and to access better grazing land (Galvin, 2009). The result of this was that pastoralists were pushed into sedentarization. Fratkin (2004) found that pastoralists in Northern Kenya have been forced into sedentarization by among other factors social services provided in towns such as schooling, which increases their vulnerability. In this regard the work of McPeak & Little (2005) establishes an empirical link between vulnerability to livestock losses in a drought with increase in sedentarization, their conclusion being higher levels of mobility result in less drought-related livestock losses and vice versa.

The gap between education policy and pastoral need became a crisis in 2003 when the government instituted Free Primary Education (FPE). The objective of this was ostensibly to attain Education For All (EFA) and more specifically Universal Primary Education (UPE). For the pastoralist, this thinking was not new since in 1971 through a Presidential decree, payment of school fees in ASAL areas was abolished. The impact of this was disappointing since it didn't have significant impact on enrollment rates. This necessitated the premature end of the program in 1974 (GOK 1974).

As a result of the FPE, the gross National Enrollment Rate (NER) as at 2007 was at 91.6% (Mugo et al, 2009). The areas with the lowest NER were from the ASAL areas (MOE, 2009). For example, North Eastern Kenya had an enrolment rate of 27.5% (GOK, 2010a). The combined enrollment rate for all the districts in the ASAL was 51.7% as at 2007(Mugo at al, 2009). This shows that whereas FPE has improved enrollment throughout the country, it is lowest in regions where it was needed most, the marginalized ASAL. Low school enrollment among pastoralists is a sign of resistance to an education system that would eventually undermine the pastoral livelihood (Krätli 2001).

The pastoralists interviewed highlighted that the manner in which the free primary education was implemented placed their livelihood in jeopardy. One elder in Isiolo said the local chief (a government official) came with policemen and took his two sons to

boarding school, threatening to arrest him if he resisted. He sarcastically inquired whether the government would send him any one to help him look after the cattle. This is indicative of the argument that in development policy planning and management there is insufficient understanding of the coping capacities, adaptive strategies and livelihoods patterns of the pastoral populations in the dry lands (Eriksen et al, 2006). Our research shows that whereas the intention of government in mandatory primary education is good, negative consequences in community livelihoods have not been considered. More specifically such policies made communities more vulnerable to the vagaries of pastoral life and no cushioning was provided.

An extensive study by Krätli (2001) established education for pastoralist was implemented as an exit strategy and largely resisted by the intended beneficiaries. However, the pastoralists “use it as a security net and a way to strengthen the pastoral enterprise” (Krätli, 2001;4). The research established that pastoralists are not inherently averse to education. Most of the elders interviewed appreciate that education could bring success to their people especially in light of the changing environment. Their concern was to place it figuratively, “putting all their eggs in one basket”. Our findings indicate the realization that education has an immediate advantage to pastoralists has necessitated sending some children to school. However, the logic of pastoralism discourages complete disruption of the household economy as a result of lack of labor. To find a balance pastoralists have opted to send some children to school, while retaining others at home.

The curriculum and instruction of schools in Kenya have had very little significance to the pastoral population. It has largely been biased to agricultural and urban communities (Mugo et al, 2009). For the pastoralist, education results in “cultural alienation” (Sifuna, 2005) and it has deskilled the pastoralists giving them “aspirations” that are not in line with the use and reality of pastoral life (Mugo et al., 2009). A major concern raised by the local community elders was the content of what children were learning. The shared view was that it was not responsive to the immediate needs of the communities they lived in. From their perspective, children were going to school to become “stupid”! On being prompted about their perception of the future of their communities, those interviewed expressed great concern about the survival of their way of life, with less children taking time to learn it and more being forced to go to school.

Over time, pastoralists have developed a social system that passed important information increasing social memory. When social-ecological system has low levels of social memory, then it becomes vulnerable to disturbance and crisis (Folke et al., 2005). Because the pastoralists don't go to school, it does not mean they don't learn. To the contrary, they undergo a thorough process of learning which gives the children the necessary know how for pastoral management. The practical skills that are imparted rather than instructed include details about their extended families, how to build bridging ties through effective negotiations, skills on interpreting weather phenomena, pseudo scientific skills on people, animal health and hydrology (Krätli, 2001).

Social capital strengthens resilience in communities. It comprises networks of relationships where social obligation is felt and shared (Fratkin, 2004 ; Krätli, 2001). It means developing, trusts, appreciating reciprocity and shared roles within a group. In the strict sense social capital includes, the bonding ties, which are relationship between same family, neighbors and friends. In its broadest sense social capital includes such bridging ties that are geared towards strengthening relationships outside the family. This is considered necessary to establish a relationship of reciprocity with other social groups (Folke et al., 2005). The pastoralists interviewed (mainly the elders) expressed difficulty in children learning social ties when they are absent from their homes most of the days attending to school. Boarding schools are especially problematic since they meant children would be away much longer. When this was raised with one education official, he estimated that children attending boarding school would be at their homes on average nineteen weeks in a calendar year with the rest of the time spent in school.

Social ties, shared but differentiated roles and networking are essential components of the pastoral livelihood. Social networks are essential and carefully managed. Taking time to learn management of relationships within a group and outside the group is taught from a young age. This requires time and continuous presence around communities they live in order to learn. It is therefore inherited and passed from one generation to another and “they provide a stable network of primary associations on which people then build their own dynamic systems of alliances” (Kratli, 2001: 27). Central to social learning is the level of importance the individuals attach to their livelihoods, the collective attitude and psyche of the people. In terms of attitudes of

children who have gone to school, our study contradicts the findings in Kratli (2001). With respect to the perception of those who have been educated, our study indicates that they considered pastoralism as not being viable in the long run and in many respects education established in the words of Kratli, an “unbridgeable cultural divide”. Those who managed to establish successful lives outside pastoralism considered it a key priority to assist their relatives “out of” pastoralism.

Nomadic Education Policy

The launch of the Nomadic Education Policy (hereafter, the policy) was held in Garissa Kenya on the 10th of July 2010 in an open function attended by top education officials, members of National Parliament from ASAL areas and other opinion leaders. The policy was the result of a process of collaboration between development agencies, the government and the pastoral communities. It seeks to address various issues surrounding nomadic education. According to education officials interviewed, the importance of the nomadic education policy was that it responded to the fears of the pastoralists. Whereas the officials doubted the feasibility of an almost immediate implementation, they expressed hope that it would make a difference. A discussion on the objectives of the policy indicates that pastoralists welcome conceptual thinking that informs the policy. An elder from the Somali community in Garissa noted, “if the government wants to combine educating our children and supporting our people, we will cooperate”. An education official shared this thinking saying it would make the work of the Administrators easier, if a system that both educates and allows pastoralists to maintain their way of life was in place.

The policy provides that the government would consider education strategies that would benefit both the children and their parents. Previous strategies had targeted only children as the beneficiaries of schooling. Young pastoralists interviewed suggested that this would benefit the young. In their opinion, it will serve to make the older people appreciate the value of education. Further, the older people felt this would be an opportunity for the children to learn from their parents important social issues in the comfort of the classroom rather than just learn modern things.

The policy contemplates education terms based on seasons rather than calendar terms. Pastoral livelihood revolves around seasons. Different seasons imply varying requirements of labor at the household level. Tasks are shared between family members when labor demands are high for example herding tasks are shared in the season where water is plenty during the wet season. While in other seasons, households may be divided with the productive animals being placed in satellite camps way from the main household locations (GOK, 2010a). To the extent that learning can be adopted around these seasons, livelihoods would be strengthened.

The policy requires the government to implement modes of education that take into account children's work at home and therefore schedule lessons outside nomadic working hours (GOK, 2010b; 2). By considering the reality of social capital, the policy locates the child in his/her role in the structure of pastoral livelihood. This by extension reduces vulnerability of households by strengthening social capital base. Opinion leaders interviewed stated that telling the pastoralist that they need to send children to school without suggesting an alternative source of labor for the household is an uphill task. This policy suggestion is a useful step in addressing this question.

The policy considers use of an academic calendar that would be flexible and factor in climatic conditions and patterns of nomadic livelihood (GOK, 2010b; 11). Education calendars will further utilize early warning system to ensure appropriate planning to avoid emergencies disrupting education (GOK, 2010b; 9). To this end government would utilize non-formal systems that are community based which can be used for education while at the same time remaining local to the community needs (GOK, 2010b; 10). Our study indicates that this provides an opportunity for the pastoralists to manage their own learning instead of learning managing them. Broadly this establishes opportunity for integrating education into traditional institutions and social systems that enhance adaptive capacities of communities.

The policy provides for the development of curriculum that would be useful to pastoral lifestyle. In development of this curriculum, the government would adopt participatory methods for management of the curricula in schools (GOK, 2010b; 10). The curriculum would also recognize the value of traditional knowledge and technique integrating them to the curricula. This would be buttressed by providing informal

learning materials that would carry information specific to these communities. In our interviews, leaders from pastoral communities considered participatory mechanisms as essential for the system to understand pastoralism and the pastoralists to understand the system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study confirms our hypothesis that education system as currently modeled undermines pastoral livelihood. Arising out of this, the study confirms our argument that the Nomadic Education Policy presents a framework that is sensitive to pastoral needs and by extension enhances the resilience of pastoral communities. It addresses both directly and indirectly the fundamental challenge of enhancing resilience of pastoral communities. In the alternative, it seeks not to undermine the resilience of the communities. The objective is to put in place a system that can provide quality education, which can be useful in pastoral adaptation while at the same time maintaining the strength of livelihood of the pastoral communities. The policy thus builds upon and supports pastoral resilience and adaptive capacity. The findings and discussion above hold important implication for understanding the resilience of pastoral communities in Kenya. However, further empirical research will needed to establish the effect of the policy on the resilience of pastoral communities.

¹North Eastern Kenya is composed of three districts, which cumulatively forms a large chunk of ASAL.

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