



# Towards Education for Nomads:

Community Perspectives in Kenya

Izzy Birch, Sue Cavanna, Dauod Abkula and Diyad Hujale

August 2010

# Towards Education for Nomads:

## Community Perspectives in Kenya

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To the Boran, Somali, Gabra and Turkana nomads who openly welcomed these discussions and gave their considered opinion despite times of drought and hardship, we extend our appreciation.



# Forward

Arid Kenya, which covers more than half of the country, and where nomadic pastoralism is the economic mainstay, has historically been at the periphery of national development. Pastoralists have faced high levels of marginalisation in most areas of their lives.

However, there has recently been a marked shift in thinking. Today's policy-makers acknowledge mobile pastoralism as a productive livelihood system best suited to the arid lands. The Government of Kenya has constituted a co-ordinating Ministry, with dedicated funds at its disposal, to spearhead development in the region in partnership with other state and non-state actors.

Most notably, the Government is pursuing a new approach to nomadic education, allowing pastoralists to access education without compromising their way of life. Distance learning via radio will target 400,000 primary-aged nomadic children who are currently unable to access any form of education.

In a departure from previous policy-making processes, this approach is being developed in a most progressive manner, with direct input from pastoralists. This new intimacy between service providers and end users will narrow the gap between policy and implementation.

This booklet, which documents community perspectives on nomadic education, is testament to the importance of consulting end users. The 'voices of the people' captured in its pages will influence the design of an education system that will better equip pastoral citizens to secure their own future.

**David Siele**

Director of Human  
Capital, MDNKOAL

**Sue Cavanna**

Programme Manager,  
Education for Nomads

**Sara Ruto**

Women Educational  
Researchers of Kenya

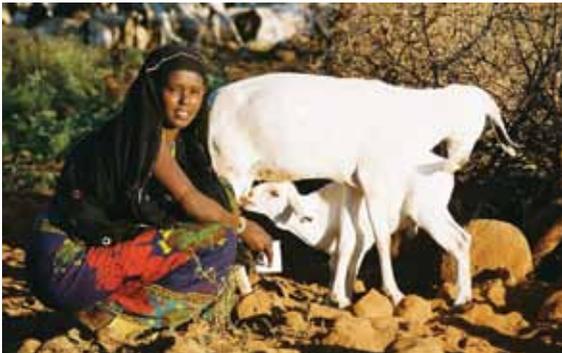


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# Acronyms

<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>EfN</b>	Education for Nomads
<b>IIED</b>	International Institute for Environment and Development
<b>MDNKOAL</b>	Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands
<b>NACONEK</b>	National Commission on Nomadic Education in Kenya
<b>WERK</b>	Women Educational Researchers of Kenya



## Summary

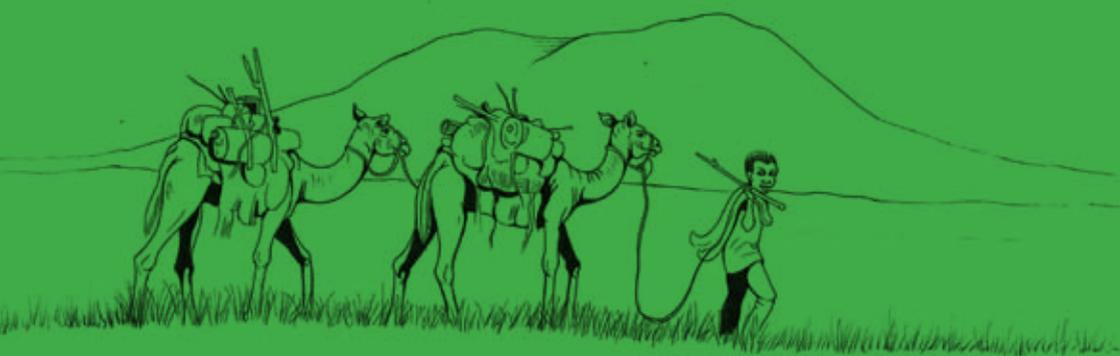
This booklet captures the voices and concerns of Kenyan pastoralists about education. It was produced as part of a broader action research programme that is guiding the Government of Kenya's strategy for nomadic education.

The purpose of the booklet is to share the views of pastoralists with education policy-makers and practitioners, particularly those in Kenya who are in a position to act on them. A DVD to accompany the text can be found inside the back cover.

After a brief summary of the consultation process used to gather these views, the main part of the text summarises pastoralists' thoughts about the current education system in Kenya and the ways in which it could adapt to better serve their needs.



# Introduction



# Introduction

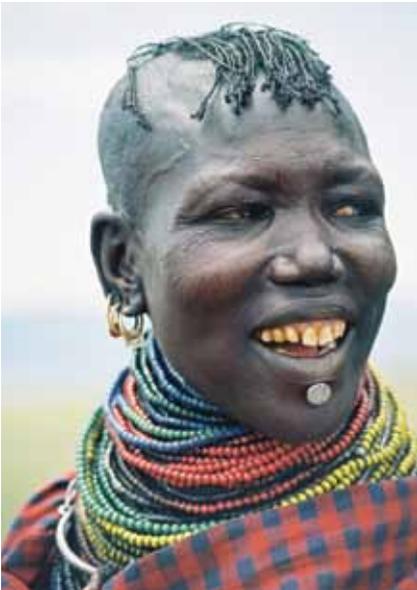
This is one of a series of publications produced by the Education for Nomads (EfN) team attached to the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). The team is helping the Government of Kenya develop a strategy that will enable children from nomadic pastoralist families to access quality education.

Educating nomadic peoples is both a conceptual and a practical challenge, which questions assumptions about the nature of education itself (Krätli and Dyer, 2009). In several countries there are now encouraging efforts to look beyond school-based systems in order to ensure universal enjoyment of the rights articulated in global statements such as the Millennium Declaration and the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA).

In Kenya, the Ministry of Education has taken several steps towards meeting the distinctive needs of the country's estimated four million pastoralists, a substantial number of whom are nomadic. A Policy Framework for Nomadic Education was launched in July 2010, which among other things commits the Government to establishing a National Commission on Nomadic Education in Kenya (NACONEK).

In addition, several education providers, including the Ministry of Education, have experimented with alternative models of service delivery in pastoralist areas, such as mobile schools and shepherd schools.

However, too many pastoralist families are still unable to reconcile their growing desire for education with the largely conventional education system on offer. The result is that educational outcomes in predominantly pastoralist districts are still much lower than those in other parts of Kenya. A recent education assessment revealed that as many as 42% of children in pastoralist Samburu North district are currently out-of-school, and that the difference between the districts with the highest and lowest reading levels in Kenya is a massive 44 percentage points.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> UWEZO Kenya (2010). The best-performing district was Kikuyu; the worst Pokot North.

In 2008 the Government of Kenya established the Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands (MDNKOAL). The Ministry works alongside other parts of Government to adapt policy and practice to the particular challenges of development in arid areas. The Education for Nomads programme is being carried out at the Ministry's invitation and in partnership with the Ministry of Education. Although its primary focus is children's education, the programme's interest in the concept of family learning, through which a wider social group may benefit, ensures that the priorities and concerns of both adults and youth can also be addressed.



# 1. The Process



## Summary of the process

A critical part of the work of the Education for Nomads team is to elicit the views of pastoralists themselves on the kind of education system they prefer. To that end, a series of consultations were held between April and September 2009 with members of four of Kenya's pastoralist groups – Gabra, Boran, Somali and Turkana.

In January 2010 the conclusions from these consultations were presented at a high-level meeting attended by senior officers from both the Ministry of Education and the MDNKOAL. A DVD which captured the voices of pastoralists and brought them directly into the meeting room proved to be a powerful influence on those discussions.

A second round of consultations was then held with the same pastoralist groups in April 2010 to brief them about the inter-ministerial meeting and gather further views on the detail of the proposed nomadic education system (see table).

Round One			Round Two	
	Location	Date	Location	Date
<b>Gabra</b>	Near Balessa	21-24 April 2009	Tumticha (Balessa)	22 April 2010
<b>Boran</b>	Boje	25-27 May 2009	Halango (Merti)	19 April 2010
<b>Somali</b>	Jai Kutulo	27-29 May 2009	Naga Nikah (Durweya)	18 April 2010
<b>Turkana</b>	Nakinomet	1-4 September 2009	Nakinomet	15 April 2010

The Education for Nomads team made every effort to consult with pastoralists in remote areas outside the main settlements. The discussions revealed the wealth of knowledge and understanding among nomadic herders, despite their relative isolation, as well as the high degree of commonality between pastoralist groups which had never previously interacted.

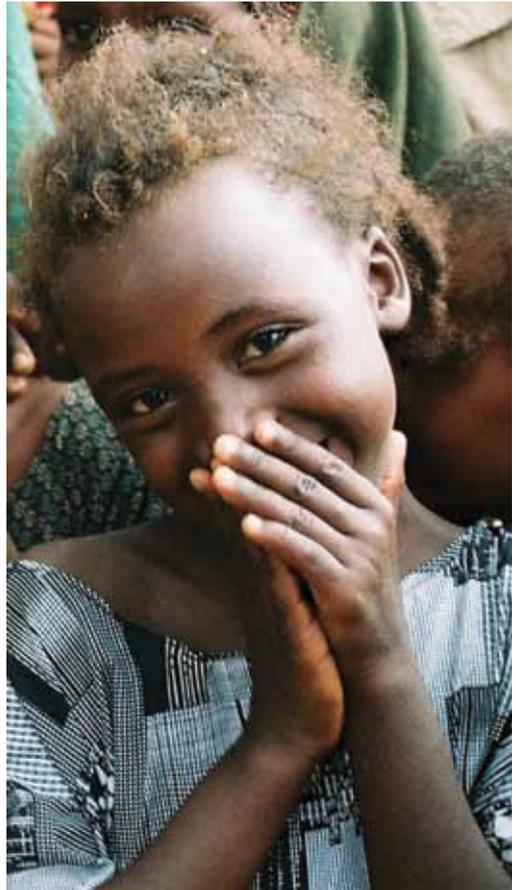
*"The Government is asking how education and livestock can be combined. It wants you to succeed in both, and has sent us to find out how you can combine the two. We want to take your views on this back to the Government so that the information can be used for planning."*

**Joyce Emanikor, Turkana facilitator**

1 September 2009



The consultations were carried out using a scenario planning approach developed by SOS Sahel UK. This approach has been documented in other publications and is therefore not described again here,<sup>2</sup> other than to note the pivotal role of the facilitator. S/he will have strong roots in the community, either by birth or prolonged contact, but will also have enjoyed wider exposure and contacts and thus be equipped to understand and bridge different perspectives. The facilitator's legitimacy and insights generate an unusually rich dynamic, as these discussions demonstrated.



<sup>2</sup> SOS Sahel UK (2009); Cavanna, S. and Abkula, D. (2009).

# Community perspectives

2.1 Hard choices: education today

2.2 Flexible choices: options for the future

2.3 “What children learn should inspire them to be pastoralists”:  
content, delivery and target group

2.4 “One can learn while in the hills”:  
the potential for distance learning



# Community perspectives

## 2.1 Hard choices: education today

All four pastoralist groups – Turkana, Gabra, Boran and Somali – generated a common critique of the education system, highlighting the way in which it separates children from their culture and way of life:

*“ When the child goes away for education they lose touch with the animals. They get modern and do not look at the animals as valuable. They will not come back.”*

**Asiyalem, Turkana mother**

September 2009

This concern is about more than the physical separation of children from their families and the loss of their labour to the household economy. It is also about how the values and knowledge children acquire through the school system may affect their attitude towards their home environment. Educating a child within the present system is clearly done at significant cost to the family, which is far more than financial:

*“ We spend money sending them to school for 12 years, and the end product is a double loss. Not only is the child absent so cannot help with herding, but when he finishes education he is far removed from the pastoral system. School teaches them that pastoralism is backward. How do you expect them to return to animal herding?”*

**Dokata Wario, Boran father**

May 2009

The irony is that this situation persists at a time when demand for education is higher than it has ever been. Despite some residual concerns that ‘the pen’ (symbolising the modern system of government) has weakened the power and authority of traditional systems, and despite worries that school qualifications no longer guarantee employment, pastoralists recognise the potential of education:

*“ If you go to school, you are in the picture of everything.”*

**Mama Yatani Roba, Gabra grandmother**

April 2009

*“ The only thing I knew was my livestock. Now I am beginning to get the idea that everyone should go to school.”*

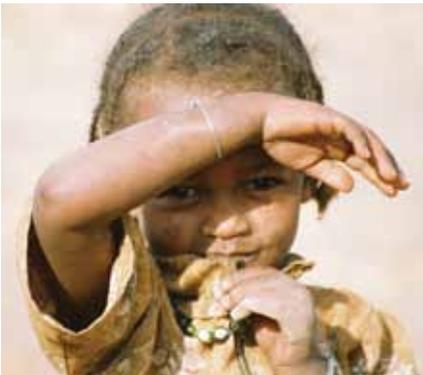
**Mzee Emuge, Turkana man**

September 2009

*“ We see examples of our own children becoming successful. They have been educated, but they still buy animals and support pastoralism and are not unbelievers.”*

**Somali father**

May 2009



Families who wish to educate their children must therefore make some hard choices. Parents in all four areas described the criteria they use to decide which children are sent to school. Those kept within the pastoral system tend to be first-born children (to perform rituals), the physically strong, and those with the greatest affinity for looking after livestock. School is often an option for 'stubborn' children; in some cases it may even be a punishment. However, parents recognise that this strategy is failing both groups of children;

*" We always have to make the crucial decision between sending children to school and losing out on production, or keeping them here where they cannot engage with the outside world."*

**Halima, Boran mother**

May 2009

*" Before, I was thinking that I can divide my children - one goes to school and the other goes herding. Now I am thinking that even the one who remained herding will blame me in future for not letting him go to school."*

**Turkana mother**

September 2009



## 2.2 Flexible choices: options for the future

All four pastoralist groups were aware that alternative models of education are already available. Mobile schools and shepherd schools (evening classes) are operating in some areas, but still on a small scale and largely outside the mainstream education system. There was a universal desire for children to learn within the pastoral system and under the supervision of their parents:

*"The education system that fits us will be the one that follows us, that follows our animals."*

**Godana Sime, Boran man**

May 2009

*"If you get a system that moves along with us, the children will be with us so will not be spoilt."*

**Somali Qur'anic teacher**

May 2009

This is important to children as well as parents:

*"We want to learn while we are with our parents."*

**Amina, Somali girl**

May 2009

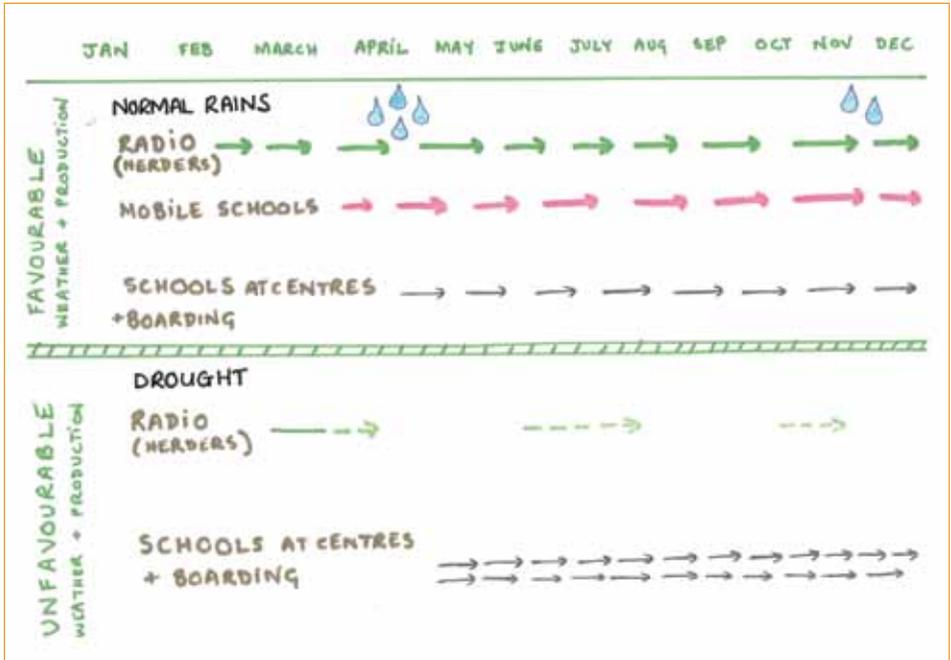
*"I love my school and I love my life here."*

**Ali Mola, Gabra boy**

April 2009



Pastoralists also explained that all education models should ideally accommodate the changing fortunes of the pastoral system. For example, when pasture and water are plentiful, the labour demands on families are lower. Households tend to congregate closer together, making teacher contact easier. But when conditions are less favourable, the opposite is true.



The seasonal diagram above was drawn by pastoralists in Turkana, who herd their animals close to the Ethiopian border and are affected by both drought and conflict. An education system which recognises these changing seasonal demands, and which allows children to learn in different ways at different times, was held to be ideal.

However, there are important differences between pastoralist groups in Kenya, influenced by factors such as age, gender and location, which also need consideration. For example, the labour demands on Turkana boys increase as they get older because of the security risks associated with mobility; teenage Somalis, on the other hand, may find themselves with more free time once their younger brothers and sisters start to take on greater responsibility for managing livestock. Among the Gabra, the herding responsibilities of boys and girls are fairly equal, but among the Somali, girls tend to look after those animals closer to the homestead. The pattern of household distribution and movement is also affected by factors such as conflict, which in areas such as Turkana may cause families to herd closer together for security.

Pastoralists are clear that education can not be addressed in isolation. Many factors, including drought, disease, conflict, mobility, and the availability of infrastructure and technology, will have an impact on learning in pastoralist areas:

*"We cannot just consider education in isolation. We also have to do something about conflict and about preparing for drought and making information available to people."*

**Boran Man**

May 2009

Finally, pastoralists are well aware that neither the mainstream education system through settled schools nor recent innovations such as mobile schools are working well. There are clearly positive stories and inspirational individuals – such as the Gabra girl who said that she was happy at her boarding school because she had a woman head teacher, or the teacher of Yaa Sharbana nomadic school in Marsabit, who has taught students in the evening for seven years, despite being unpaid. But all schools are under-resourced, and the mobile schools in particular enjoy little technical back-up or support.

As the seasonal diagram illustrates, pastoralists are interested in a mix of solutions – distance learning, mobile schools, and static schools – and in a strategy that addresses these elements in a holistic manner.

*“Conventional education still has its problems. All of us here have divided our children and sent some to school in town, but even these schools don't provide high quality education. There are not enough teachers, and materials are lacking. Why don't you address these issues jointly together?”*

**Diba Golicha, Boran**

May 2009



## 2.3 “What children learn should inspire them to be pastoralists”:

### content, delivery and target group

There was a universal desire among all four groups that the education system should build respect for, and understanding of, their way of life. While education is recognised as a route out of pastoralism, it should also help families thrive within their environment and reinforce the rich and complex learning that takes place within pastoralist societies.

Parents would like the curriculum to include subjects relevant to pastoralism, such as animal husbandry or range management. They would like teachers who understand their environment or are capable of adapting to it, and who will act as positive role models for their children. They would like learning to take place in the mother tongue in the early years, but then progress to learning in the national languages over time; there was no desire for pastoralists to be locked into their own languages. And they are looking for ways in which students can stay connected to their communities and contribute to the societies in which they belong.

Parents recognised that alternative delivery models to the static school system would require changes in how learning is organised and managed. Gabra informants suggested the idea of learning camps during the wet season, where children would benefit from intensive interaction with teachers at a time when families were gathered close together. Boran informants also felt that variations in teacher-student contact could work and would be acceptable to them as parents.

Among the Somali, the dugsi system of Koranic education is embedded in their way of life. Children learn for six to eight hours each day, spread over three sessions (early morning, midday and evening). Learning takes place in the most remote of communities. Girls learn alongside boys; there are no gender barriers. Somali families were therefore interested in the potential for the dugsi system to integrate other forms of education.

Students themselves can also be important role models, helping to reinforce both the values of pastoralism and the benefits of education through their interaction with their peers:

*"When I went to school I only had a bar of soap and a bit of sugar; everyone else was coming with all sorts of shopping. I didn't even have much Swahili, but I wanted to prove myself. Now it seems I am a role model: children talk to me, and many want to go to school. I still have friends here in the village - we herd together. Because today was a special day to discuss education, I was asked to be around, but I am off now to go and get the goats."*

**Ali Mola, Gabra boy**

studying at Meru secondary school.



While the consultation process demonstrated parents' concern for the future of their children, it also revealed a desire for learning within the community at large. Several adults already attend literacy classes offered by mobile school teachers, and expressed their hope that a distance learning programme would benefit them as well as their children:

*"It is not only for children. This idea of combining school with pastoralist life is also good for the general community."*

**Gabra,**  
April 2009



The important link between literacy and active citizenship was also raised. For example, young Turkana herders on the hills bordering Uganda wanted to understand the draft constitution and track the prices of livestock, but knew that they needed an understanding of Swahili in order to do so.

The intense interest in education – among adults, youth and children – was clearly evident, but not at any price. Pastoralists are looking for a form of education that respects and accommodates the world they know, while at the same time opening up new avenues and possibilities.



## 2.4 “One can learn while in the hills”: the potential for distance learning

One of the specific issues discussed during the consultations was the viability of distance learning for pastoralists, in this instance delivered through radio. The Education for Nomads team wanted to know whether this would be a useful addition to the mix of educational options.

In all four areas the response was positive. Radio is a familiar technology and is widely used, including in schools. The discussions revealed an awareness of the challenges of designing and implementing a distance learning system. Pastoralists’ comments addressed issues of ownership, power, training, and monitoring.



### Ownership and care

*“ We women will be responsible and take care of the radios. The children will have their own special time for learning. The radio is for the child and not for the father.”*

**Boran**, April 2010

*“ The parents must be responsible for the gadgets. When the children are moving they will put it in a small bag, the way they carry their bucket for water.”*

**Gabra**, April 2010

*“ We will make some bags for the radios. We will cut around the knobs so that the child doesn’t damage the radio.”*

**Turkana**, April 2010

## Power

*"If we are in the satellite camps and run out of batteries we will have problems. Can we get power in a different way?"*

**Gabra**, April 2010

*"We can sell animals to buy batteries, but rechargeable ones are better. The government should provide batteries like it provides chalk."*

**Turkana**, April 2010

## Training

*"Tuning the radio and operating it may be a problem. But if we are trained, there won't be a problem and we will be responsible."*

**Boran**, April 2010

*"Parents should take responsibility for training children on how to use the gadgets and look after them."*

**Somali**, April 2010

## Monitoring

*"How will education be monitored when learners are in the bush?"*

**Turkana**, April 2010

*"The radio is only audio education. What about visual education, for example when the children need to learn their alphabet?"*

**Somali**, April 2010

*"Parents are responsible to follow up on the learning. We can know by questioning our children and asking what they have learned."*

**Boran**, April 2010

*"Although we can't read or write, we know at least one person who has some education and we will make them responsible for monitoring."*

**Somali**, April 2010

# Conclusion



## Conclusion

*" We want school. If we went there to the big people in Nairobi, we would say we want school. Tell them that we want a school of children that can herd and still get education."*

**Shambo, Gabra boy**

April 2009

The consultations in the four areas demonstrated genuine interest in a new approach to education. Pastoralists are excited by a model of service delivery that is in harmony with their way of life and a curriculum that reinforces it. However, given the generally poor track record of Government in pastoralist areas, the optimism was also tempered by scepticism:

*" How serious is the Government about delivering this thing on nomadic education? We know the Government: it might commit to this and then take the resources to other priorities."*

**Gabra man**

April 2009

There was universal appreciation for the consultation process, which was felt to be credible and trustworthy. During the first round of consultations the Education for Nomads team promised to return with news about how policy-makers had reacted to the ideas. This was done in April 2010, through a DVD which combined footage from the first round of consultations with reactions from participants at the inter-ministerial workshop held in January 2010:

*" You have come back after you got information from us. Through the video we can see that you delivered the message. This is important for our children and for us, and for all the Gabra."*

**Gabra mobile school teacher**

April 2010

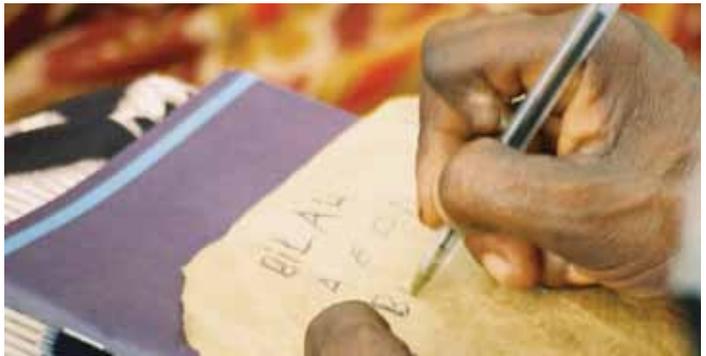
There have also been developments in two of the four areas independent of this programme. The Boran group set up their own mobile school in January 2010:

*"After you left, the rains came and we had a meeting. We decided to open our own mobile school. We sent a delegate to MIDP.<sup>3</sup> They are paying for one teacher, and we are paying for the other. All of this is in readiness for the distance learning programme, inspired by our meeting with you last year."*

**Boran elder**

April 2010

The Boran group has also persuaded the head teacher of the nearest settled school to provide books and to register children in the mobile school for the school feeding programme. And among the Somali group, two boys have since been sent to school in Nairobi. During the school holidays, one of them teaches his uncle, who can now write his name and do basic arithmetic:



*"It is wonderful that I can be of value to my family. It is useless and selfish to keep education to yourself."*

**Bilal, Somali,**

April 2010

<sup>3</sup> Merti Integrated Development Programme

In Wajir, the deputy head of the school in Dambas has started five mobile schools since the first consultations in May 2009. He mobilised the community, provided chalk and books, and sought blackboards from a local NGO. Although the mobile school teachers are not yet being paid, they are being assisted by parents, who are themselves taking literacy classes in the evenings. This example illustrates the important link between the static school system and alternative models of education, such as mobile schools or distance learning. The support of local education officials and head teachers is essential to their success.

*"Over the years, the education system has worked very hard to change pastoralists. Now it is time for the education system to change to suit pastoralists."*

**Daoud Abkula, Boran facilitator**

January 2010

Attitudes towards education in pastoralist areas are changing fast. Pastoralists are making their views clear, and the Government is listening to what they are saying. It is designing alternatives which mean that pastoralist families will no longer have to make the hard choices they make at present. The policy framework on nomadic education launched in Garissa in July 2010 includes the following statement:

*"Since nomads are mobile and cannot therefore be confined to a geographical location, the policy will target them wherever they are."<sup>4</sup>*

The consultations carried out by the Education for Nomads team during 2009 and 2010 will directly inform strategies that make this commitment a reality.

<sup>4</sup> Republic of Kenya (2010)

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# DVD Supplement: 'Voices of the People'

'Voices of the people' includes footage from consultations on education with Boran, Somali, Gabra and Turkana nomadic pastoral communities in Northern Kenya. This film has proved to be a key tool in influencing government policy. It represents the beginning of a dialogue between nomadic pastoral herders of Northern Kenya and educational policy makers in Nairobi.





With special thanks to: Olita Ogonjo for his skilled camera work and our interns, Sarah Witts and Hannah Curwen for producing this short DVD from hundreds of hours of footage.

Particular thanks are also due to many others who have made this film possible: the drivers who helped us reach the isolated communities, our colleagues from ALDEF, PISP, Oxfam GB and MID-P for facilitating the community meetings, and above all the communities themselves who actively embraced these deliberations and gave permission for filming so that the material could be used to represent their ideas to decision makers in Nairobi.

This DVD was commissioned by the Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands, produced by the International Institute for Environment and Development and funded with the generous support of the Waterloo Foundation.

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