

“A Brief Dialogue on the Gender Dimension in Pastoralist Development”

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Biography and Theme Introduction.

I. Summary

Approximately 30 of the ECHO Symposium attendees participated in this dialogue. First, we established some basic definitions, and noted that poverty and political marginalization has affected men and women differently. While all pastoralists suffer discrimination, loss of land, degraded natural resources and insecurity, women experience additional disadvantages within their homes and communities, such as domestic violence, a longer work day with unimproved technology, and little direct say in community decisions. We examined the symptoms while noting the benefits when such disadvantages are addressed. We then discussed the root causes of gender disadvantage, and gave examples of best practices for addressing them. Last, we identified some steps for the future for ending gender discrimination, so that men and women could work as partners to develop their own communities.

II. Definitions

Gender means the socially defined roles and responsibilities of both men and women in a given culture.

Sex is biologically determined, so that women have the capacity to bear children and men have the capacity for insemination.

People are born male or female, but learn how to behave as men and women from their society, where accepted behavior is rewarded, and unacceptable behavior is punished physically, financially or socially.

In development, gender is often used to mean “women,” and projects claim to be “doing gender” when they establish separate projects for women (that are usually small, underfunded and focus on welfare). However, women do not live in isolation, **and a better future requires both men and women to change their beliefs, attitudes and behavior regarding women’s status and place in the community.**

Gender sensitization is a set of activities leading to reflection on the biological and social differences between men and women. Individuals become aware of their own beliefs, attitudes and behaviors towards men and women, which are often rooted in harmful stereotypes. Awareness can help replace mistaken assumptions, (e.g. that women are too stupid to learn new things, or they need to be beaten to respect men) with new understanding and behaviors.

Gender Analysis is a set of tools and practices to systematically examine both men and women's preferences, perspectives and priorities, and to establish development goals and activities that benefits everyone. Gender Analysis recognizes that households are not homogeneous, and that the head of household's perspective may not provide a complete picture of the entire family.

One tool is the **Gender Action Learning system (GALS) developed by the Dodoth Agro-Pastoralist Development Organization (DADO) in Karamoja Area**. It uses pictures to permit the participation of men and women who have not had the opportunity to learn to read and write. See the presentation by Pius Loupa.

"Social Intersection" is the recognition that gender is not the only social variable that can result in exclusion. Age, wealth and ethnicity can intersect with gender to deepen discrimination. For example, a poor young girl will have less power to protect herself than a wealthy older woman. Women can discriminate against each other, just as men can. However, gender discrimination is found in all societies, and is the most common form of disadvantage. It must be recognized by itself, because if it is included as just one of many forms of social exclusion, resources become allocated elsewhere, to those areas of greater interest to men.

III. Symptoms of gender discrimination and exclusion

Women are disadvantaged compared to men in their own communities in terms of ownership, access and control of resources, including livestock, cash, and all forms of capital including education and technical training, and time for leisure.

Women headed households are poorer than male headed households, and are more food insecure, although some studies show some nutritional outcomes are actually better for children, perhaps due to greater control of income by the women, and lower consumption by males.

Women are disadvantaged compared to men in terms of making decisions about selling cattle, and using the money. It is still typical for men to sell a cow, and the wife who has cared for the cow receives only a tiny fraction of the money in order to feed for the family.

"An earlier presentation gave the example of a man taking a cow to market, and his friends all followed him, because it was expected he would spend most of the money on food and entertainment for all of them. When the cow was sold for 40,000 KSH, at the end of the day, only 4,000 KSH was given to the wife to spend on family needs."

Women are overburdened with a longer workday, using unimproved technology. They are responsible for providing food for the family, either by producing and processing it themselves or purchasing it. They must provide water for cooking, bathing, and cleaning, and fuel for cooking, which takes more time in degraded environments. They are responsible for childcare and family health. Women also have responsibilities with the family livestock kept near the home, which may include feeding, cleaning manure, fetching water, observing for disease, taking them to pasture, and (depending on the ethnic group) milking. Women process the milk and often sell it as well. When agriculture is practiced, women are responsible for planting, weeding, harvesting, and often processing. Men usually are responsible for plowing, which is heavy work but for only a few days. Men also sell the crop and typically keep the money. Increasingly women are involved in income generating activities such as craftwork, which provide income to purchase additional food.

Women's health is compromised when their pregnancies are too closely spaced for their bodies to recover, or when they are married at such a young age that they begin to have children before they are fully grown themselves. When families have more children than the natural resource base can support, it causes population pressure, resulting in further degradation of the land. This is a gender issue because a women's education is closely correlated with smaller healthier families, while the father's education has less impact. Surveys show that pastoralist women usually want to space their pregnancies through medical forms of birth control, while their husbands do not. Therefore, reproductive health activities must target men as well as women.

Gender based violence is common in pastoralist areas, with women experiencing beating or even rape within their homes from family members, and from outsiders in the form of rape. The shame and stigma of rape prevent most women from publically acknowledging it. This violence and shame diminish a person's sense of self-worth, and causes suffering.

Both male and female pastoralists in conflict zones are subject to violence. Due to the proliferation of firearms, both men and women are now killed or injured. In the past, conflict was between men only, and due to simpler weapons, there were fewer fatalities.

It was noted that young men are recruited into armed gangs due to social pressure and lack of alternative livelihoods, and are more likely to die violently. This is a gender difference, and it could be argued that it is a type of gender disadvantage, since girls do not experience it. However, it is not especially fruitful to spend time debating who's suffering is worse, since both are important. It is significant that more money, time and attention at the local, national and international level is given

to addressing (if not solving) the armed conflict issues, and male mortality, while a much smaller percent of resources are spent addressing the many other needs of women and girls.

IV. Root causes of gender discrimination

Pastoralist societies in East Africa are male dominated, and boys are raised to think they are superior to girls. Pastoralist cultures are full of expressions belittling women's abilities, intelligence, or value. Women are raised to defer to men, and when present in public meetings, are reluctant to speak. One example from an earlier session was the Samburu tradition that a woman must "hold the grass with her hand when speaking, because her husband is the lion, and she must show her subordinate status [like the prey of the lion].

Benefits of traditional culture

However, traditional culture also provided women with important benefits, such as security and protection from outsiders. Traditional culture emphasized shared responsibility for each other, so that when a man died, the widow and children were provided for, often through marriage to the man's brother. No one was left to go hungry.

Among the Karamojong, if the Elders learned that a man had beat his pregnant wife, they would take him to task, and in turn beat him. And it is reported that although women would not speak directly at the Council of Elders, she could ask her husband or brother to speak for her. If a woman was displeased by a man's behavior, she could refuse to feed him (Flinton, 2012).

It is also important not to idealize the past. Violence against women in the home was widespread, as was women's labor in livestock production while the benefits accrued to her husband. Furthermore, pastoralist culture has needed to be flexible and somewhat opportunistic for survival, and new "traditions" are added all the time.

Erosion of pastoralist culture

The group agreed that pastoralist culture has been eroded in recent years by ongoing loss and degradation of the land, and responsibility for its management has taken over by governments or outside institutions. Furthermore, entrenched poverty has brought dependency on aid and handouts, weakening traditional governance. It was noted that even training children and teaching cultural values is the role of schools now rather than the family or clan.

Firearms and conflict

Conflict between ethnic groups has a long tradition, but the introduction of powerful automatic weapons has changed the norms and consequences. Massacres of non-combatants, escalating violence and capacity for increased damage raise the stakes,

and entrench poverty and distrust. Traditional methods of resolving disputes, such as negotiations between elders, are no longer as effective as in the past, since the Elders themselves have less authority over the group.

Individualism

Individual self-interest is assumed and rewarded in the market economy rather than the sense of shared responsibility that defined pastoralism in the past. Also, all of the stress of poverty, land degradation and armed conflict can lead to more individualism, because one become desperate just to survive. It was even suggested that one reason polygamy is on the decline is due to increased individualism and preference for individual happiness rather than the larger group's survival.

Men and women experience a loss of traditional identity in different ways. For women, the erosion of group responsibility means that if they are widowed or impoverished, they can no longer expect support from the clan. They must respond to their situation as individuals, and try to support themselves without having the skills to succeed in a competitive marketplace. Thus, women may find themselves burdened with more responsibilities than in the past, taking on both male and female roles to care for their families. However, their traditional core identities as wives and mothers are not diminished.

The modern world has eliminated most of the traditional roles of pastoralist men, leading to a crisis of identity. Traditionally, men were responsible for hunting, protecting the group, stealing cattle and fighting enemies. Hunting wildlife is now illegal, cattle theft is punished, and national armies are the only legitimate fighters, leaving the men without a clear place in the world. The one aspect of tradition that they can claim is superiority to women.

Many pastoralist men feel undervalued themselves, which can make them uninterested in the plight of women. They may even feel threatened and hostile when they hear about "women's empowerment." They may fear that women will want to be equals, or even sit on their heads and be superior to them.

Therefore, the gender approach to development is needed, involving both men and women in defining a shared vision of the future, and working as partners to achieve it.

V. Progress in the past 20 years

Women (and gender) are more visible in the development agenda. Women's projects are widespread, including a wide range of activities that often help build social capital through group development and training. Women gain confidence and respect in their communities through public participation, learning new skills, and earning income.

Many more girls from pastoralist communities are in school today, although boys still predominate.

More women are managers of projects, or professionals like veterinarians, administrators, business owners, and they can be role models in the community.

Women sit on village councils in some communities, such as the “Emergency Preparedness Committees” in Ethiopia, where each community selects 2 men and 2 women.

Some communities have developed new initiation ceremonies for girls to replace female genital mutilation. However, in many places where FGM has been outlawed as a top down decree, the practice continues to be performed secretly because the people perceived it as an attack on cultural continuity.

Some police units have a “women’s desk” because women often fear police, and will not report a rape. A female police officer can increase women’s access to justice.

There are many “women projects” now in pastoralist areas, but they are not as well funded as “economic projects for the community as a whole,” which tend to provide resources (cattle, dams, training, vet supplies, credit) to male heads of household, with the (often unfounded) belief that benefits will trickle down to all household members. Also women’s projects tend to focus on welfare (health and nutrition), subsistence agriculture (rather than commercial) or activities that generate very small amounts of income.

When women’s projects become financially successful, men may become interested and take over. That is the limitation of focusing on women in isolation from the men, whose beliefs, attitudes and behaviors are unchanged.

Most major donors have “gender equality policies” and require a statement about projected impacts on both men and women. To date, they have been ineffectual because managers, staff and beneficiaries have not received training in gender sensitization and analysis. Furthermore, donors have rarely allocated the budget necessary for community level training and reflection on the existence and consequences of gender discrimination.

In general, large-scale donor projects have been unsuccessful because they are top down, and give only lip service to the participatory process. Interventions that do not integrate social and ecological concerns with income generation are rarely successful or sustainable.

VI. Best practices

1. Commitment to participation

A good community self-assessment can set the stage for reflection and dialogue about gender roles, fairness, and a shared vision for the future. This takes trained facilitators, time and budget, but is linked to the most sustainable and successful outcomes.

2. Discuss age differences before gender differences because it is less controversial, but teaches the use of an analytical framework.

3. Advocate for girls education, no matter the type of project you are working on. Model this by sending your girls to school.

4. Invest in building the capacity of women through vocational training, literacy, business skills etc... to compensate for their previous marginalization. Single sex training is often better so that women feel more free to speak and also to practice new skills without embarrassment, or without the men taking over.

5. Use technical training opportunities with men (for example on animal health) to have brief discussions on gender, and the important role of women in daily care of animals. This will build awareness and respect for women's activities. Provide technical training to women as well as men.

6. Mobile banking can lead to greater transparency from cattle sales, because wives can have access to family bank account.

7. Outreach to all women is important, including the most vulnerable, such as the disabled, the unmarried, those living with HIV/AIDS.

8. Use a religious perspective, and engage religious leaders to support greater respect for women, and mutual support within the family. Use Biblical, Koranic or traditional quotes or stories to encourage men to value and respect their wives. Reassure men that they can be head of household without having to control, ignore, take advantage or punish their wives.

9. Visit other communities that model successful sharing of labor, benefits and decision-making between men and women.

10. Use a "gender perspective" so that both men and women are involved in all important decision-making, and women are not isolated in "women's income generating projects," while men's attitudes do not change.

11. Involve men in family and reproductive health education, and also nutrition education, since male head of households may not know how much (or how little) other family members eat.

12. Pastoralist communities must develop intentional and internal programs to educate children about their own cultural heritage and values, since the government

school system will not do this. Parents, especially fathers, should spend more time with their children to teach them about their own past.

13. All development is a social process, not just about economic needs or market access. Address men's need for new roles and identity in the modern world.

VII. Way forward

1. We as development workers must educate ourselves first. Only half of the participants had attended any type of gender training. We must understand the issues before we can share with the communities we serve.
2. Educate donors and policymakers about the gender perspective, and why both men and women must be included in all development interventions.
3. Advocate for the donors and policy makers to fund activities like gender workshops, "behavior change communication" campaigns (BCC), and the staff time to use participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation.
4. Teach gender analysis and respect between girls and boys in schools, even at the primary/ordinary levels.
5. Recognize that change is difficult but necessary. Pastoralist men cannot restore the past, but they can shape their future. It has been difficult for all male dominated societies to transition to greater partnership between men and women, but at the end of the day, this brings benefits to everyone.

Additional Resources

See the presentation on the Gender Action Learning system (GALS) presented by Pius Laupa at this Symposium. It is a community led empowerment methodology aimed at constructive, social economic and political transformation on gender justice. It was developed among pastoralists in communities of SokoduKaabong District, Karamoja Region, Uganda.

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