



Regional Learning &
Advocacy Programme
for Vulnerable Dryland
Communities

SUMMARY BRIEF: Changing considerations for gender-sensitive DRR programming in the drylands of the Horn of Africa

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Summary

In the past drought interventions have tended to lack gender sensitivity. This has improved in recent years with increased emphasis on longer-term livelihood-based approaches within DRR. However, many policy-makers, NGOs and government organisations still struggle to understand, fail to address, or simply ignore gender issues in relation to drought. This is impacting on the sustainability of their drought interventions as well as on the gender relations in communities. As incidences of drought increase under predicted climate change, and as change in dryland areas accelerates, more attention to understanding of gender issues and promoting equitable resilience is needed than ever before.

Gender relations in times of drought

In recent years pastoral men and women are finding it more and more difficult to prepare for and cope with drought. Traditional strategies, such as reserving grazing areas and water sources, or building social capital through self-help groups and mutually-reinforcing reciprocal relations, have been challenged by the increasing trends of privatisation and individualism in pastoral societies². Rangelands have become fragmented through agricultural encroachment, commercial investment, individual enclosures and the establishment of badly planned water points, resulting in access to common property resources being reduced. At the same time reciprocal, collective social systems—including customary institutions—have broken down (Flintan, 2011a).

At the onset of drought pastoral women and men adapt their activities in order to secure the survival of their livestock and themselves. Each has specific roles and responsibilities as part of an overall household and/or community strategy, in which decisions and actions by one group or individual affects others. Scarce resources may be redistributed within the community under the guidance of community Elders, and difficult decisions will be made in order to manage and protect remaining household and/or community resources. Men often take the main herd on a protracted migration to find grazing and water, and leaving women with responsibility for the remaining livestock and household members. In severe drought the women may have to move to relief distribution centres: for example, of those who recently fled drought in Somalia, 80% were said to be women and children (Dico-Young, 2011).

¹ The ideas and opinions expressed in this brief are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of REGLAP, or its members or donors. The author can be contacted at: fionaflintan@yahoo.co.uk.

² For more detail see Flintan, F. (2011) *Changing nature of gender roles in the drylands of the Horn and East Africa: Implications for DRR Programming*. Nairobi: REGLAP. <http://www.disasterreduction.net/east-central-africa/reglap>



The coping strategies undertaken by pastoral men and women in times of drought place a severe strain on social relations. Displacement may result in social ties being severed, making it difficult to resume collective activities—such as herding—once the crisis has past. In polygamous households relations between wives can deteriorate as competition to access the diminishing household resources increases. Men’s status may well be reduced as they fail to fulfil their role as household provider, or alternatively it may increase as aid agencies target them with new resources such as through restocking programmes. In the same way women’s status may be lost as milk production (and thus income generation from it) reduces, or their status may be enhanced as they take up the role of household provider in the absence of husbands, or as receivers of food aid.

Gender sensitive DRR strategies

Changing gender roles mean that new drought risk reduction (DRR) and drought response processes and activities are now required for pastoral settings. Common gaps and problems in drought interventions include women not being consulted or women not being asked to participate in DRR implementation activities. There are a number of strategies that implementing agencies should consider in order to be more gender sensitive:

1. Base interventions on a better understanding of the changing processes in pastoral societies and their impact on gender relations.

Pastoral systems and societies are changing as their access to resources is challenged and/or privatised, as the commercialisation of pastoral livelihoods increases, and as traditional decision-making processes shift or weaken. These processes are having significant impacts on gender relations within pastoral households and communities. Interventions aimed at supporting pastoral communities (both women and men) in times of drought need to fully understand these processes of change if they are to be successful. The drivers of change need to be identified and their impacts incorporated into decisions made by development actors. An in-depth contextual analysis, including gender and gender-sensitive evidence-based data, should be the starting point for all humanitarian interventions (Mazurana et al, 2011).

2. Use livelihood-based approaches rather than short-term emergency relief and aid as they offer greater opportunities for addressing gender inequities.

DRR and response strategies that incorporate support for livelihoods, capacity and capital/asset-building—alongside or instead of short term-term relief—are more likely to have positive long-term impacts. Such strategies also reduce the risk of aid-dependency amongst beneficiaries and the likelihood of causing harm to local coping strategies. They are also more beneficial to social relations by building on them rather than destroying them. If managed appropriately, activities such as destocking and restocking, and cereal banking, for example, can facilitate the growth of business principles both within communities and between communities and traders. With such support pastoralists are more easily and quickly able to rebuild their livelihoods.

However, providing new opportunities can raise new challenges: new income opportunities may increase the work burden of women; women may not be able to maintain control over the incomes raised; and ensuring women’s presence in meetings does not necessarily facilitate their participation. Establishing cooperatives and other formal organisations that will gain legitimacy from government can also be very difficult. Illiteracy challenges the involvement of both men and women, and directly targeting of women can cause resentment amongst men. By incorporating men and women (and their support) in decision-making processes right from the planning stages can help resolve these problems, whilst appropriate adult education programmes and/or the use of appropriate communication tools can help overcome challenges such as illiteracy.



3. Incorporate pastoral women as well as men as capable and effective actors in activities, and more specifically as agents of change, in order to have positive results.

Despite recent improvements it remains the case that women miss out the most from aid/relief interventions. In Ethiopia's safety-net programme female-headed households are 20 percent less likely to be included in 'public works' but only 6.5 percent more likely to receive direct support. Women in general have a low participation rate in 'public works' activities and in related decision-making processes, and are less likely than men to benefit from them (Sabates-Wheeler et al, 2011). Interventions including supplementary feeding of livestock, destocking and restocking have also all been shown to have a bias towards men in their targeting (Bekele, 2008). Where interventions have targeted women specifically the response and impact has been highly positive (ILRI, 2010). Given the right support and facilitating environment, both women and men can plan, lead and participate in DRR processes and activities. Communication is likely to improve and messages are more easily spread if women are also involved. Processes such as community-managed DRR, which builds on traditional drought management practices, have been shown to have positive impacts when women are included (Cordaid/IIRR, 2011).

4. Plan and implement DRR and responses, together with longer-term development, at an appropriate scale and level in order to support pastoral livelihoods more effectively.

Mobile pastoral communities affected by drought are likely to require different types of support to more sedentarised communities. However many DRR interventions focus on sedentary communities as they are more accessible and easier to provide services for. Those still leading a more mobile lifestyle (in order to make the best use of available resources) are often left out of decision-making and planning processes, and from the benefits of DRR interventions. All too often the needs of these mobile groups are only addressed once they reach a critical state and arrive at IDP (internally displaced person) camps. More effort needs to be made in identifying and supporting the specific needs of these mobile communities, both men and women. Maintaining their mobility and flexibility should be the principle upon which pastoral support is given in times of drought (Watson, 2011).

One intervention that is often poorly planned is water provision. Though most water relief interventions can be considered effective in the sense that they deliver the water (and for women in particular can save time and labour), their longer-term impact on pastoral livelihoods is limited at best, and is often highly negative. Water tankering is expensive and when targeted at livestock is rarely cost effective. It can also create dependency and increase vulnerability when provided on a regular basis (Flintan et al, 2011). The establishment of boreholes, ponds, wells and water storage tanks/cisterns can cause conflict both within and between communities if insufficient attention is given to understanding and accounting for social differences and inequities, and ensuring that effective long-term governance structures are put in place. But most importantly, such badly planned interventions can cause the breakdown of long-established traditional grazing and watering systems, together with their common property regimes. This increases the vulnerability of pastoral communities in the long-term rather than reducing it.

Disaster response, together with longer-term development, should be planned and implemented in a manner that builds upon the positive attributes of rangeland systems. A first step is planning interventions with the communities that they will impact, at a spatial and temporal scale that appropriately supports mobility and the other strategies that pastoralists use to optimise livestock production in the rangelands. This may mean working across smaller administrative boundaries and with a number of different actors, which can be challenging but not impossible given sufficient investment.



Implications for policy-making

As incidences of drought increase and as change in dryland areas accelerates, more attention to understanding of gender issues and promoting equitable resilience is needed than ever before. Many positive steps forward are being made to achieve this but there is still much room for improvement. Policy-makers can lead this process by providing clear guidance and structure for implementing change, which is based on support for women as active agents of change, and capable and effective livestock and rangeland managers, and household providers. Working with both men and women as members of pastoral household and community units, is vital if such change is to be sustainable.

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The project is funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO)

Copies of this brief and the full report can be accessed at:
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