



Horn of Africa Drought 2011

Pastoralism, Change and Urbanisation | Dec 2011

Horn of Africa Drought: *Urban Centres and the expanding pastoral rangeland*

The large scale humanitarian impacts of drought in the Horn of Africa in 2011 were a not just a reflection of drought but also the fragility of changing livelihoods of pastoral communities. Rural towns form an integral part of evolving pastoral and rural livelihoods in Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASALs). Relationships between urban and rural areas are becoming integral to a pastoralist's or urban dweller's household food security. In effect, urban centres are a component of an *expanding rangeland*. Urban centres provide coping options, a cushion for failed pastoralists, and different developmental opportunities. As evidenced by the drought, this period of changing rural livelihoods leaves households very vulnerable. Policy and drought risk reduction investments which recognise and enhance the role of urbanisation in household coping and ASAL development can ensure this *expanding rangeland* better facilitates change and drought management in ASAL communities.

1. Livelihoods in Transition: Changing conditions, changing livelihoods and a new role for urban centres

We often think of the arid lands in the Horn of Africa (the regions affected by drought and famine in 2011) as a place of traditional pastoral and subsistence livelihoods. In these lands, pastoral communities have traditionally managed drought. However, changes in pastoral environments and livelihoods have also changed the impact of drought.

- Over the last 50 years there has been dramatic growth in population, levels of education, transportation and communication networks. These changes are further driving change in settlement, migration as well as consumption patterns and demands for cash. Embedded in these changes are issues of natural resources mobility required by pastoral livestock-keeping systems. Effectively the traditional income base is being eroded while demands for cash are increasing. Another change, just emerging, with significant implications on the future are maturing youth. Youth today – which is proportionately much greater – is living in a vastly different world than their forefathers. Will pastoralism remain an attractive, viable option of them or will their different world view create vastly different expectations?
- People have adapted (i.e. commercial, pastoral-ranching systems, transport business, small/micro enterprises, casual labour, etc.) to accommodate demographic, structural and socio-economic changes. However, rural economies remain very small with limited options. Increasing demands by a rapidly growing population on traditional pastoralism or even economic opportunities in rural areas can not be sustained. While some individuals have successfully adapted livelihoods to these changes, many are less successful. Most rely on limited income generating options, which do not meet daily needs and may not be robust enough to manage times of crisis. Most households appear to be caught in transition, between the traditional, pastoral world of their forefathers and a new one.



- Urban centres are assuming new roles for livelihoods and households in transition. Urban centres provide access to services, labour, commerce and other resources. Rural households will access services or options available in urban centres periodically, or permanently by establishing part of the family there. Beyond these practical household considerations, youth appear to be attracted to urban life more so than the traditional lifestyles of their parents.
- Urban centres and family members who live there are creating a changing form of mutual assistance during times of hardship. Those earning incomes in town may send remittances of goods to those in rural areas. Children may be sent to stay with relatives in town during crisis. Families can migrate, temporarily to town and be assisted by relatives during extreme crisis or hardship.

2. Lessons Learned from the 2011 Drought (this analysis represents learning in Ethiopia and Kenya and excludes Somalia).

Famine early warning systems indicate communities coped with the 2011 drought crisis (i.e. the crisis did not result in spikes in the crude mortality rate, morbidity at population level or mass migration – unlike South and Central Somalia). However, given the number of people affected in 2011, and the growing number of “drought” events (four in the last decade) there appears to be decreasing levels of resilience. The transition in rural livelihoods is inadequate to reduce risks imposed by drought, even if those households are becoming decreasingly dependent on rainfall for their livelihoods. Households can’t go back to old livelihoods and struggle to move forward into new ones. In other words, even if these households coped with the crisis, repeatedly having to cope with drought leaves them unable to adapt or develop new livelihoods and reduce risk in the long term.

There was also increasing discussion about the growing number of permanent settlements (formerly relief centres) and the rate of growth in the larger urban centres in the ASALs. As well, questions were emerging about the role of urban centres in pastoral livelihoods, particularly in terms of crisis coping. Questions were asked about the level of remittances (M Pesa in Kenya) sent from town to rural households, temporary labour in town as well as the number of rural family members absorbed by extended, urban family during the crisis period.

3. The role of urbanisation in drought risk reduction

Changes in the ASALs, the challenges presented by those changes as well as emerging forms of adaptation require that we revise our understanding of food economies and food security in these regions. We must shift from perspectives assuming food security is based on subsistence pastoralism, to a modern *pastoral rangeland*, which includes, cash, commerce, labour, and a dynamic and progressive role for towns.

- *Drought: Don’t blame it on the rain* – Change our views and assumptions about vulnerability to drought in ASALs. Investigate and document how food security is increasingly becoming a function of income (and increasingly urban based employment/enterprise) and food markets over traditional, subsistence livelihoods and rural/urban linkages.
- *Engage with change:* Policies/programming can promote food security through improving rural linkages to emerging opportunities in rural settlements or urban centres. Improvements in transportation, communication, market and financial services can support development and rural growth as well as enable mutual assistance or crisis coping.
- *Respond at Scale and Reinforce Local Institutions:* During times of crisis enable rural populations to access labour opportunities, short-term residence, and education and health services in urban centres. Develop policies and promote investments that reinforce roles for urban and rural institutions/services to meet demands during crises.