Educating Nomadic Herders Out of Poverty?
Culture, education and pastoral livelihood in Turkana and Karamoja

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research has been carried out under the umbrella of the Learning and Research Program on Culture and Poverty of the World Bank. The Program’s objective is to learn about the relationship between culture and poverty, and particularly how attention to aspects of culture can help reduce poverty and improve the well being of the poor.

Overall, the data collected in this study suggest three major points:

- **Mainstream society in Kenya and Uganda represents pastoralism as a fundamentally flawed way of life.** This public image of pastoralism (for example in the media, in the education system, in the public administration) provides the overall explanatory framework for the common understanding of pastoral livelihood and the outcomes of formal interactions between pastoral people and mainstream society.

- **There is a wide gap between pastoral livelihood and its representation within the culture of mainstream society.** Fieldwork in villages and kraals gives a picture substantially different and in most cases opposite to the way pastoralism is commonly represented. That is, the public and institutional image of pastoralism is a gross misrepresentation.

- **The general cultural attitude towards pastoralism, based on this misrepresentation, plays a silent but pervasive role in undermining pastoral livelihood by reproducing wrong policies, pre-empting service provision, turning positive programmes into useless or negative outcomes and preventing communication and good circulation of knowledge.**

With regard to our initial framework therefore, our findings are that the poverty of pastoral people may be more closely linked to the mainstream culture in their country than to their own. The link between education and poverty of pastoral people (via development policies and practices) appears to concern the nature of the education undergone by pastoralists’ fellow citizens at least as much as it concerns the lack of modern education amongst the pastoralists themselves.

At the core of the public representation of pastoralism is the idea that “pastoralism” and “modern life” are mutually exclusive, as two successive stages of human development in a unique line that goes from nature to civilisation, passing from sedentary life and agriculture. This frame offers no ground on which pastoralism and modern world could meet: one being thought to begin where the other is supposed to end.

So informed, the discourse about pastoralists and pastoral development is constructed along strings of oppositions: nature vs civilisation; nomadic vs sedentary; traditional vs modern; ignorance vs education; irrational vs rational; dirty vs clean; women’s subjugation vs gender sensitivity; group tyranny vs individual freedom; prosperity vs poverty; etc.

In reality however, pastoral people and modern society appear to be not at all mutually exclusive. On the contrary, instead of the separation and opposition of two worlds one finds a high degree of articulation and integration, to the point that a clear distinction
appears misleadingly reductive. Pastoral social networks increasingly tend to include non-pastoral people in town. “Town” and “bush” people are strongly tied in relationships of economic interdependence. Pastoral material life relies substantially on “modern” items, and would use much more of them if only the market actually offered items useful for pastoral livelihood, rather than being geared towards urban dwelling or sedentary farming.

Although this situation is under everybody’s eyes, it often goes unrecognised even by those people who are part of it. As the public and institutional representation of pastoralism excludes it in principle from the modern world, there is no conceptual ground for thinking or talking about the real situation of confusion. People are forced to think of themselves and their friends and relatives as belonging to one side or the other.

Education programmes are currently designed and implemented within this context. Our initial hypothesis, that modern education is avoided by pastoral groups because of its anti-pastoralism attitude, was not confirmed by the pastoralists themselves. Children’s attachment to their families is thought to depend on their own nature (having a “good or bad heart”) and not affected by school influence: if many school children leave and never show themselves again, so, also, do many of those who are kept at home.

Although education is offered as an escape route away from pastoralism (education personnel interviewed confirmed this), pastoralists use it as a security net and a way to strengthen the pastoral enterprise. Education is seen as a way of accessing resources outside the pastoral circuit (mainly financial and social capital), particularly sought after by the growing number of households whose entitlements within the pastoral settings have been eroded for various reasons, and who feel increasingly vulnerable to destitution.

This suggests that, contrary to the common explanation, the rise in school enrolment figures over the last few years is likely to be an indicator of the increased vulnerability of the pastoral household rather than a sign of development. Even more so, since schools have become free-food distribution points.

The notion of individual development embedded in the idea of education for all is extraneous to the logic of the pastoral enterprise (based on a group of co-operative households). Education is provided in a logic of individual specialisation, but it is consumed in one of household diversification. Although the two perspectives can complement each other, the change in emphasis from the former to the latter makes the idea of educating all the children in a family, void of sense.

However, as the decision to send one child to school and keep another at home is not based on any consideration about individual development, the choice is not perceived by the parents or by the children as favouring one party at the expense of another. There is nothing like a partition of the family between lucky school children and deprived herd boys and girls. In particular, this should never be forgotten when looking at the reasons for the lower enrolment of girls in formal education.

In general, within the logic of the pastoral enterprise it makes more sense to invest in the education of a boy (whose only economic values come from labour and the volatile venture of raiding), rather than risking the otherwise guaranteed asset attached to a girl: livestock and, above all, the crucial social capital gained when she gets married. This, at least, given the present constraints of formal education (non-monitorability, anti-pastoral attitude, cost, uncertainty of the results). The girls majority in non-formal education programmes like ABEK (monitorable, cost-free, more pastoralist-friendly) suggests that general assumptions about gender discrimination in pastoral education are misleading.
Altogether, the findings suggest that poverty eradication amongst pastoral groups through education efforts is conditional to a radical review of the way pastoralists and pastoralism are currently represented within the mainstream national culture. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations articulated around three points:

- There is a need for fresh and specific data on the logic of the pastoral system, targeting systematically each of the issues commonly used to argue pastoralism’s fundamental inadequacy: economic inefficiency, health and nutritional problems, gender imbalance etc.

- It is necessary to work to ensure that rich and up to date information about pastoralism (in relation to the non-pastoral context), finds its way into the education system (from primary to higher education), the public administration and the press, as well as reaching pastoral people themselves.

- There is a need for systematic and structured opportunities for pastoral people to increase their experience of the outside world, and their capabilities to challenge the public image of pastoralism and articulate their view in non-pastoral settings.
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### PART 2: IN THE FIELD

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1. INTRODUCTION

Overview

This research has been carried out under the umbrella of the Learning and Research Program on Culture and Poverty of the World Bank. The Program’s objective is to learn about the relationship between culture and poverty, and particularly how attention to aspects of culture can help reduce poverty and improve the well-being of the poor. With specific reference to this research, the interest of the Bank focussed on (a) the methodology used for studying cultural variables and its strengths and weaknesses; and (b) how to improve education efforts for nomadic pastoralists to achieve poverty eradication.

The research builds on a recent worldwide review of the literature on pastoralists and education commissioned by the livestock group within the World Bank1, starting from the consideration that the unspoken aim of most education programmes for nomads is ‘to make them more like us’. It is widely accepted among specialists that mobile pastoralism is among the most economically effective uses of very large areas of land in some of the poorest countries, and that such pastoralism only succeeds because of extremely high levels of both individual and social specialisation2. Nevertheless, formal schooling marginalises and often ridicules both the technical knowledge upon which pastoralism is based and the social relationships and institutions (or social capital, in the sense of social norms, networks and relationships of authority) in which it is embedded and which underpin it. Consequently, although formal education may successfully prepare nomad children for new forms of livelihood outside pastoralism, virtually everywhere formal education is antagonistic to a pastoral livelihood.

In this perspective, we hypothesised that low school enrolment among nomads may be due more to a logical perception by pastoralists that formal schooling will undermine the basis of a pastoral livelihood than to supply side factors such as inadequate delivery mechanisms.

Methodology

In the field, the core research team was formed by Saverio Krätli (IDS) and two researchers from the sample areas in Uganda and Kenya, respectively, Vincent Omara Abura and Eris John Lothike. Jeremy Swift, based at the Institute of Development Studies in UK, supplied specific inputs to the research design and execution and directed the project. Whilst the two local researchers worked in their own countries for about five months, the researcher from IDS spent two months in one country and two in the other working with the help of interpreters/research assistants. The research team worked in

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partnership with OXFAM in Turkana and Kotido district, and with the Lutheran World Federation in Moroto. Given that the research addresses problems about the relationships between culture, poverty and education, the core research team was composed of social scientists. The two local researchers had substantial teaching experience at primary level in their countries.

The research takes a broad view, in an effort to understand the phenomenon of education provision to pastoralists and its actual outcomes beyond the classroom perspective and beyond the limits of its expected results. Three registers of investigation were used:

(a) *national culture*: the way the issue of education and pastoral development is constructed within newspapers, political speeches, government documents, and by local officers involved in the delivery of health and education services;

(b) *education policy and propaganda*: the way pastoralists and the need for education are represented and the ways those representations play a role in wider policies on pastoralism or directly affect pastoralists;

(c) *homesteads, households and individuals*: the way pastoralists' representation of themselves and of poverty and prosperity is altered through the process of formal education, directly or indirectly experienced; the way the specific social interactions and individual experiences essential to the generation, distribution and reproduction of pastoral specialisation (in the case of our three examples) are affected by the structure and content of formal education.

This research was carried out in Turkana district (Kenya) and in Moroto and Kotido districts (Uganda), using a variety of methods. Fieldwork in villages and kraals was based on participant observation, interviews and sometimes focus group discussions. We also carried out systematic interviews in town (in Lodwar, Lokichoggio, Moroto and Kotido), with local government officers at district and council level, and sampling interviews with school personnel (teachers and headmasters). In Lokichoggio, a small questionnaire was administered to some 70 pupils and teachers. Three focus group discussions were also held in Moroto, one out of school young men in the central area of Kamusaili market, and two in Acholin trading centre, just outside town, respectively with parents from a pastoral background and with youths who have left school and now divide their time between their villages and Moroto.

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<th>Period</th>
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<td>Weeks 15-16</td>
<td>SK: fieldwork in Kotido (Panyangara)</td>
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<td>VOA: fieldwork in Moroto (Bokora)</td>
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<td>Weeks 17-19</td>
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SK = Saverio Krätli; EJL = Eris John Lothike; VOA = Vincent Omara Abura.
A variety of documents were also collected and analyzed, both in the capitals and in the pastoral districts, including school curricula and text books, education, development reports, policy and project documents, newspaper cuttings and political manifestos (when the research was carried out, the presidential election was taking place in Uganda).

In order to make contact with pastoral groups, we followed the strategy of first contacting an elder in town, known to the local researcher and with good connections with the groups in the country side. We explained the nature, objectives and limits of our work, and our plan to spend some time in a kraal/village. We then asked the elder to introduce us to a friend or a relative in the bush. In Karamoja, for example, we accompanied the elder to the village of one of his relatives, bringing a goat as it was dry season and there were five of us. We discussed the research, ate the goat with our hosts (who also offered us food and local brew), and spent the night in their home.

The data collection was kept as informal as possible, mainly following the topics as they emerged from the circumstances and discussions. As a consequence, the body of data from all the areas of the fieldwork is not quite homogeneous. That is, a topic may sometimes have been investigated more deeply in one area than in others. All together, given the nature of this research and the similarities, in our experience, between Turkana and Karamoja, we believe that low homogeneity does not usually represent an obstacle to analysis and generalisation. Unless otherwise stated, our findings from the field work in Turkana largely apply also to Karamoja and viceversa.

Strengths and limitations of the approach

Life in villages and kraals can be fairly challenging and settling in, logistically, practically and psychologically, was time consuming. However, participant observation enabled the research team to gain fresh and first hand experience of pastoral life, and this proved to be an invaluable foundation for both the interviews with people in town and for the final analysis.

One common problem of collecting data from local people (even when using participatory methods) appears to be the difficulty to reach the women, particularly when the researchers are men as in our case. Discussion groups or PRA exercises need to be organised and the quickest and easiest way is to do it through the local (male) elders. Inevitably, these meetings have an air of officiality (they are “events”) that makes women’s active participation difficult. Often, the lack of the women’s perspective from the data on pastoral communities is blamed on the ‘traditional culture’ of pastoralists, that ‘holds back the women’. Instead, the fact that we informally stayed in the camps made it very easy to talk to women, even easier than talking to the men, who for most of the day were away with the animals. Outside the framework of an official or externally organised event, women of all age were usually confident, open and talkative, whilst no man appeared to make any attempt to “hold them back”.

Finally, trying to collect data on an intangible and sensitive issue like “cultural antagonism” proved a difficult task. Negative narratives and prejudices are hard to unveil. People who have the courage or the naivete to come out with clear opinions and real beliefs are rare. Instead, most of the time the researcher deals with allusions to supposedly obvious and shared knowledge, cagey answers or half statements rapidly adjusted as soon as something different is perceived to be a safer or more politically correct position. Therefore, the evidence one may be able to collect is diluted across a wide range of contexts and situations and never really strong enough to be final in any of the single cases. Nevertheless, when considered all together, we believe that these fragments produce a fairly robust evidence, certainly robust enough not to be ignored.
Structure of the report

The report is in four parts. Part 1 presents the information concerning the public image of Turkana and Karimojong. These are data collected in institutional contexts and in town, from interviews as well as from printed sources. The way Turkana and Karimojong are seen in their respective countries appeared to be very similar. In order to minimise repetitions we present here only the most emblematic examples from each country. Part 2 presents the data collected during the eight weeks of fieldwork in kraals and villages. These data have been organised in order to facilitate their comparison with the previous ones. After a brief presentation of the areas of fieldwork, the data for Turkana and Karimojong are treated separately. Part 3 and Part 4 offer, respectively, an analysis of the findings and some recommendations.
PART 1. FROM THE “OUTSIDE WORLD”

Introduction

Turkana and Karamoja are large territories of arid and semi-arid land, with relatively low population density (mainly pastoralists), little service provision, very poor communication infrastructures, and low security.

Turkana district covers 77,000 square kilometers (the size of Scotland) on the north-western edge of Kenya, on the border with Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda, and delimited on the east by the 200 km stretch of Lake Turkana. According to the 1999 census, an estimated 75% of the population depends on pastoralism as its main economic activity. The main period of fieldwork was carried out in an area called Loteere, in Loima division (T Turkwel), west of Lodwar on the border with Uganda. Interviews and focus group discussions were also carried out in Lodwar and in Lokichoggio. Lodwar is the major town in the district and home to the administrative power. Lokichoggio, at the northern extremity of the district, has become a major base for humanitarian operations in Sudan, with massive presence of international organisations and the only functioning airport in the district.

Karamoja, on the north-eastern extremity of Uganda, on the border with Kenya (Turkana) and Sudan, includes the districts of Moroto (14,000 km$^2$) and Kotido (13,000 km$^2$). In Moroto, field work was carried out in Matheniko (Rupa) and Bokora counties, as well as in Moroto town, including Acholin trading centre. In Kotido, data were collected in Kotido town and in Nakapelimoru and Panyangara sub-counties, within Jie county.

Pastoralists are usually described with reference to what they are thought not to have: individuals who don’t have food, water, health, clothes, shelter or literacy; children who don’t have the freedom to go to school; girls who don’t have the freedom to marry who they want; camps that don’t have latrines; communities that don’t have peace. Even the land, doesn’t have enough rain. They are also described in terms of what they are supposed not to be: a way of life that is not rational; mothers who are not careful about the health of their children; herders who are not bothered about the health of their animals; ultimately, people who are not “modern”. The next section presents this popular image of pastoralists, as it emerges from the documents and town interviews collected during the study. The data have been organised according to themes that are particularly relevant within the discourse of education.

Pastoralists from a distance

Seen from Kampala or Nairobi, Karamoja and Turkana are little more than words evoking a wild place of violence and lawlessness. The people we met every day, taxi drivers, shop keepers, hotel staff, sometimes didn’t even know where they were. Those who knew, were surprised to hear that we were heading there, sometimes embarrassed, like a teacher in front of a visitor who asked to speak to the difficult pupils rather than the best ones. Why on earth? Weren’t we afraid to be killed? With all the nice places to go in the country... As we offered a more positive picture of the situation and of the pastoralists, people who had been chirpy up to a minute before became quiet, perplexed, even suspicious. We often had the impression of having revealed an irrational and somehow deviant position of ours, and that that had affected our status in the eyes of our interlocutors. They quickly lost interest in us.
Months later, when we talked about the weeks spent in villages and kraals, even
the personnel of NGOs with projects in pastoral areas (apart from those with a pastoral
background) were incredulous: ‘What? You must be joking! You must be mad to risk
your life like that!’ But what do people in town really know about pastoralists, and
where does that knowledge come from?

In Uganda, a Social Studies text book series for Primary 1-7 (widely used in Karamoja),
in more than 500 pages of text mentions Karimojong once, talking of Nilotic populations,
in a twenty line paragraph focusing on Maasai and Turkana. One chapter on grassland
environments in Book 7 shows pictures of cattle herds in Britain and Australia, and
describes the life of Twareg and Fulani. The basic needs of ‘Ugandan people’ are
compared to those of Twareg on two opposed pages, one showing a drawing of a rural
house in bricks, with iron sheet roof and glass (sic!) at the windows; the other featuring
the photograph of a group of Twareg having tea sitting on the ground in front of a tent.
The text underlines that, whilst crops cannot be grown where Twareg live, ‘in Uganda
we are able to grow most of the basic food we eat’. A four page chapter on cattle-keeping
in Uganda, in Book 4, describes the Ankole-Masaka ranching scheme but makes no
mention of Karamoja.

When the Karimojong actually receive some attention in the national curriculum, they are
represented as the opposite of modernization, always in a light that makes them appear as
something of the past, cultural freaks and an evolutionary dead end.

A geography textbook for the Higher School Certificate published by the National
Curriculum Development Centre, one of only a handful of non religious books on sale in
Moroto, confirms the impression generated at primary level, only adding more substance.

The front cover couldn’t be more emblematic. The whole page is occupied by an aerial
photo of a Karimojong homestead and, on the foreground, a picture of the Kariba dam in
Zimbabwe. Whilst the latter is a well contrasted picture, that on the background is faded,
clearly suggestive of a world of the past fading away under the “bold impression” of
modernization.

On the inside, the reader can find almost a whole page on nomadism and half a page on
the pastoral system in Uganda. However, these are out of a thirty five page chapter on
agriculture which, amongst the rest, features two pages on the ‘case study of Court
Lodge Farm in the south-east of England’. About pastoral nomads, we learn that they are
amongst ‘the less developed societies’ and cause land degradation by burning the grass
and keeping unreasonably large herds. This also turns out to be a social problem because,
as pastures are overgrazed, the nomads ‘in their search for new grazing […] sometimes
allow their animals to encroach on arable land causing conflict with the farmers’. The
solution offered is ‘to get the nomads to settle […] if they did it, disputes over grazing
would be avoided and the quality of the herds would be improved’. In the 150 word
paragraph dedicated to the Karimojong within the section on the national pastoral system,
we are informed that ‘the growing of crops is left to the women, whilst the men lavish
attention on their animals’, but that doesn’t really matter as ‘they drink the blood and milk
of their cattle on a daily basis’.

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and Problems in World Development. Edited by Henry Lubwama. Macmillian Publishers, London and
Basingstoke.
These old beliefs do not just inhabit out-of-date school textbooks. As recently as 1999, the Minister of State for Agriculture blamed nomadic pastoralism for land degradation and desertification and urged ‘livestock farmers’ to build permanent homes (The Monitor, 9 July 1999).

Box 1. A town view of pastoralists

M. is a bright and well educated young man, and has a good job with a Kampala based audit firm. Son of a university teacher, he was, as he puts it, ‘basically brought up on the campus’. Spotless in his vest, mid-thigh shorts, white trainers and baseball cap, he looks like he has come out of an American university undergraduate prospectus. He has been sent to Kotido to audit the programme of a local organization. When we meet him, on his tenth and last day of work in Kotido town, he is still visibly shocked: ‘It’s incredible — he tells us — I would never had imagined that there were still places like this in Uganda’. At first, he can’t believe that we have just come back from a few weeks in a village, then he finally accepts the fact and says ‘Did you sleep on the ground? What were you eating and drinking? My God, I could not do that. You must be very brave, man!’.

In Kenya, where pastoral populations occupy some 75% of the territory, with the two Maasai districts next door to Nairobi, pastoralists are a more visible reality. Nevertheless, it has taken a considerable amount of lobbying from pastoral civil society organizations with international support to have a pastoral development policy considered for the new national Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Over the last few years, Karamoja has become increasingly popular with journalists. A glance at the collection of newspaper cuttings at the Centre for Basic Research in Kampala shows a surprisingly high average of two articles per week over the last three years. However, the interest of the press is driven by a search for the sensational, and nine articles out of ten have either ‘killing’, ‘raid’, ‘dead’ or ‘blood’ in the title; many openly indulging in cheap jokes meant to “wink” to the reader’s presumption of superiority. Karimojong are represented with gross uncritical generalisation, with a taste for showing them as anomalies, escape goats for all that the new middle class in town anxiously tries to obliterate from their life: disorder, insecurity, embarrassment for their past.

Violence in Karamoja is all ‘traditional’, Karimojong are all ‘warriors’, and the newspapers are covered with pictures of threatening looking armed men with captions like ‘Karimojong warrior cuddles his gun’, ‘Karimojong warrior caresses his rifle’. News are artificially inflated to make them more sensational. For example, the number of casualties in a raid on the 29th July 1999 was reported to be 40 on 2nd August by army field commanders. In The New Vision of 11th August, the number had grown to 140, 70 of which were said to be children. The next day, The New Vision repeated the figure, but saying the number had still to be verified. In the issue of 17th August, the number was rectified as being only 63, with no mention of children. The original figure of 140, however, reappeared in a later article (The New Vision, 13th September 1999).

Pastoralists are used as a mirror to provide town people with added certainties about their modernity, their achievements and the superiority of their culture. In a national Ugandan newspaper, an article entitled Karimojong harass nurses (note the use of the plural) reads:

Many things have been said about the Karimojong — raiding, cattle rustling, killing innocent people, highway thuggery — but one thing had been left out — the biting of nurses at Matany Hospital… the authorities were forced to close the hospital for three days in the hope that would change Karimojong attitude towards hospital staff… Medical staff in Matany hospital are often unjustly criticized and sometimes tormented by Karimojong, because of the Karimojong’s ignorance and inability to differentiate between good and bad (The Monitor, 18th August 1999).
To summarise, the public image of pastoralists appears to be articulated around a few main beliefs: they are ignorant, dirty and therefore unhealthy, violent, obsessed with an irrational greed for cattle, primitive and yet resistant to development. Indifferent parents who exploit their children’s labour instead of sending them to school. Lazy and abusive men who overwork their subjugated wives and force their daughters into early marriages for greed of bridewealth. Lawless warriors who kill each other and their neighbours for a handful of poor quality animals. Here is how these beliefs emerge from our data.

**Resistance to change**

According to the common sense in the “outside world”, pastoralists are ‘closed communities’ locked into their own traditions, and stubbornly opposed to any change or push for innovation. At best, they are seen as very conservative and slow to embrace the new national society, in historical settings in which ‘the rest of the country cannot wait for them to develop’.

One of the ways resistance to change is supposed to manifest itself is in the rejection of education. Such a rejection is understood as ultimately based on ignorance: ‘people don’t know the value of education’. Pastoralists’ attitude towards school is described as irrationally against their own interest. They don’t see the importance of being ‘enlightened’, pulled out of their primitive darkness and into the modern world. They don’t even see that education will provide the family with a source of income that will ‘make them less dependant on livestock’. For example, they avoid sending girls to school because they believe that an educated girl will not fetch cows on the day of her marriage: ‘all that they are after is livestock, they don’t understand anything else, they think that livestock is all that there is in life, even more important than people’. They are said to persist in accumulating huge herds of cattle without any care for their quality. The animals are thin, ill, full of ticks and hardly marketable. Large herds force people to live a nomadic way of life, in order to feed the livestock, so they can’t live in a proper house, have services or send their children to school. In the words of a government officer based in Kotido: ‘we tell them that they should have small, high quality herds and be settled; we show them the right way but they don’t listen, they are stubborn, they have this traditional conviction that if you have few cattle you are poor, the quality doesn’t matter to them’.

**Poor hygienic conditions**

Traditional practices, equated with ignorance or backwardness, are usually indicated as the main cause of disease amongst pastoralists. Both Turkana and Karimojong are depicted as dirty: they don’t wash, eat with dirty hands, put grease on themselves and their clothes rather than brushing with soap and water, don’t build latrines but rather free themselves behind a bush just like animals, wash utensils with cow’s urine and prefer the stagnant water from the ponds to that of the borehole, even when informed about the risks5. In a word, they lack the most elementary norms of hygiene. Primers are strong and clear about things like washing hands, and that is one of the first things that children are taught at school. In the school context, hygiene norms are associated with ‘being good’, that is they are loaded with a moral quality: good children wash their hands, lesser children do not. The teaching is about being civilized (or “developed”) more than about getting rid of bacteria.

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5 Apparently, despite many educational campaigns, pond water is still largely preferred to borehole water because of its flavour, described as ‘sweet’, whilst the water from the boreholes is often slightly salty.
One Science textbook for primary school which we saw in Moroto lists ‘wash hands’ and ‘pray’ amongst ‘the important jobs we must do before and after eating’. The new ABEK curriculum, designed to respond to pastoralists’ specific conditions, puts special emphasis in targeting and eradicating ‘unhygienic cultural practices’, like washing cooking utensils with cow’s urine or new born babies with oil, instead of water.

According to the recent Need Assessment Survey for Functional Adult Literacy in Karamoja, produced by the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development in collaboration with the World Food Program, ‘most people in Karamoja hardly bathe throughout the dry season [whilst] the scarcity of water has apparently turned mud into a valuable item of beauty and toiletry’. These habits should hardly be surprising considering that, as we are informed by the same report, ‘people do not have any disgust for human excreta and as a result freely dispose of it all over the place’. This is said to have a major impact on health, although the main cause of death is reported to be malaria. Health personnel in Moroto District offered very much the same perspective.

Box 2. From an interview with a local contributor to the ABEK curriculum

R: I heard that whilst the national curriculum is largely irrelevant to the life conditions of pastoralists, with ABEK you have made a special effort to match the curriculum with pastoral life. Could you give me an example with regard to the health education module?
I: Yes, ABEK curriculum has been designed specifically to meet the educational needs of pastoral people, keeping into consideration the way they live. You see, for example, they never wash hands before eating or after having gone to the toilet, they really don’t wash themselves very much… if you have been in a village, you must have noticed that… [turning up his nose and giving me a smile of complicity]. So ABEK acknowledges these problems and tries to fix them. We teach pastoralists that if they wash themselves their health will improve and they will catch less diseases.
R: This doesn’t seem very different from what I read about health education in the national curriculum, though.
I: It is different. We look at specific traditional beliefs and try to correct them. For example, Karimojong believe that if you wash a new born baby with water the baby will die. Instead, they smear the baby with some kind of oil. We teach them that there is no risk with water, that water is good and that they should wash the child with water in order to prevent diseases.
R: But how do you know that using water is fine? Maybe they have some reason not to use it. Did you actually ask them why they don’t use water?
I: [smiling at my naivete] You see: they have this traditional belief that water will kill the child. Of course, water doesn’t kill anybody: it’s superstition you know. Unfortunately our rural people are still very affected by superstitions.
R: Maybe. But when I was in the bush the only water available was muddy and, I guess, fairly dirty. What happens if they use dirty water? Do you tell them that not all water is fine, but only clean or boiled water?
I: Well… no, we just tell them that there is no reason to fear water and that they should wash their babies with water as soon as they are born. We actually hadn’t thought about dirty water…

\[R = \text{researcher}; I = \text{interviewee.}\]

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7 See Box 2.
8 One of the best and most popular medical field manuals recommends not to wash a new born baby with water — not even clean water — at least for a few days, until the umbilical cord has entirely dried (D. Werner with Carol Thuman and Jane Maxwell, 1993. Where There Is No Doctor. A Village Health Care Handbook, Macmillian, London and Basingstoke).
The “evolution” towards agriculture

All the people interviewed, including those more partisan for the cause of the pastoralists, shared the old socio-evolutionary belief that agriculture — and sedentary life — developed out of pastoralism — and nomadism — (not surprisingly, as this is what one is taught at school), along a line which goes from hunting-gathering to modern life. Such a belief plays a great role in informing policies and practices, as well as common people’s attitude.

Educated people interviewed often emphasised that ‘Karimojong are not nomadic pastoralists but an agro-pastoral population, and increasingly so’. They always said this stressing the ‘agro–’ with visible pride, clearly implying that the addition was to be seen as somehow making the Karimojong more fit for development than “pure” pastoralists.

The mandate of the District Departments of Agriculture in Karamoja is to promote the expansion of agriculture through teaching the people about improved techniques and new technologies, in order to increase the size of the farmed land and increase productivity. The massive shift from pastoralism to agro-pastoralism or to mixed-farming during the 1980s famine (for example in Labwor county), when people who had lost their livestock were forced to concentrate on farming in order to survive, is usually presented as a success story and an example of development.

According to many of the district officers interviewed, the best course of action with pastoralists, is to settle them. Only in this way will they be able to access medical and veterinary services, and education. One officer in Kotido lamented that today, less than 4% of the villages in Jie county are permanent. She emphasised that they don’t settle because they want as many cattle as possible: too many for keeping them always in the same place. Fortunately however, she conceded, pastoralists are not all behind: some have understood that sedentary life is far better and now want to settle. One day they will understand that quality in livestock matters more than quantity. If they settle they will be able to effectively treat their animals against diseases and parasites, as well as improve their quality by introducing high performance breeds. So they will keep less cattle but of higher quality. Smaller herds will be able to stay near the villages and there will be no need for mobility in search of pasture. At the end of the interview we asked the officer whether she had livestock of her own. ‘Yes, I do have cows of course, I am a Jie!’ We asked her whether she had settled her herd. She stared at us then said: ‘No. I keep my livestock in the kraal… my relatives look after it’, frowning with surprise as to say ‘where else?’ Then she suddenly got a glimpse of the paradox and burst into a laugh of complicity.

In another case, a deputy headmaster from a primary school in Matheniko county made a long speech about the necessity to send children to school rather than keeping them at home to look after the livestock. She had livestock but all her children were in school. Her livestock were with relatives, however, looked after by their children who had not been sent to school… The fact, she said when we pointed out the incongruence, is that ‘the fathers, (the elders) should take care of the livestock, instead of spending their days drinking and sleeping!’.

Women’s status

The popular discourse about pastoralists portrays women as subjugated and exploited creatures, sold for cows and forced by their fathers into early marriages with lusty old men, often raped by the “warriors”, overloaded with work and enslaved by husbands who sleep and drink all day long and only care about cows. This image is presented in
contrast with “modern” and “enlightened” attitudes about the issue of gender, as prescribed by international development policies and mirrored by national governments. Often, the narrative about pastoral women’s status is simply deduced as a logic corollary of the supposedly primitive state of pastoral society and, as such, uncritically accepted and reproduced.

For example, the recent Need Assessment Survey for Functional Adult Literacy in Karamoja, produced by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in collaboration with the WFP, explains that at the root of food insecurity is traditional gender inequality: ‘men look after the cattle, leaving the women to do all the domestic work, including all crop cultivation and even construction of huts. Obviously, the women are too overburdened with work to produce enough food during the short single rain season’ (Okech, 2000: 9).

According to the Participatory Poverty Assessment conducted in Kotido (UPPAP, 1999), ‘the women are normally told to surrender the money (obtained from brewing) to their husbands, who use the biggest part of it to buy booze’; ‘once married a woman is the husband’s slave’; ‘a man could beat his wife to death without the interference of his neighbours or her parents’; ‘women in Jie said to take about seven days before bathing after delivery. This looks to be unhygienic but it is their culture’; ‘sometimes people die without being taken to hospital just because they believe in ancestors healing them’; ‘men usually drink local potent drinks and quarrel with and/or beat their wives’.

As we mentioned in the introduction, women’s subordination is also the reason given to explain why their voice is usually missing from the findings, despite the good intentions of the modern researcher: ‘the traditional authority system in Karamoja […] keeps women in the background when it comes to speaking to outsiders’ (Okech, 2000: 16).

**Child labour**

To be a child in a pastoral context is also considered, from a town’s perspective, quite a bad luck. Children are thought to be neglected when very small, by mothers who don’t wash them enough and fathers who prefer to risk their life to starvation or disease instead of selling a few goats to buy food or drugs. Those who are lucky enough to make it through early childhood, by the age of five are used as unpaid labour by parents who don’t hesitate to deny them the right to enlightenment through modern education just in order to save themselves some time for drinking and sleeping. The girls get the worst deal: kept at home or withdrawn from school as soon as they hit puberty, to be exchanged for cows.

Whilst pastoral children, particularly the girls, are painted as passive, neglected and suffering, there is a growing body of popular literature on run-away girls who, having sought asylum in the modern world (usually by joining a Christian denomination), made it to a teaching or nursing qualification, or sometimes to university. Always described as escaping from a “traditional” life (but are they really?), these young women are celebrated in newspapers and even some NGOs’ propaganda as ground-breaking examples for all pastoral women and landmarks for the future.

**Poverty**

Pastoralism and poverty are often associated by force of logic: pastoralism is believed to be an irrational and underdeveloped mode of production, therefore pastoralists are, so to speak, poor by definition. They are believed to depend on food relief for their survival.
Indeed, food relief distribution provides a strong argument to the view that the pastoral way of life is structurally flawed and therefore unviable: pastoralists cannot even feed themselves.

Within this view, both pastoralism and poverty are dealt with as simple categories, almost synonymous, with no need for internal differentiation. In part, this reflects the prejudicial approach to pastoralism that feeds on generalizations and produces uncritical analysis. In part though, the impression of pastoral poverty is also the result of using poverty indicators that are inadequate for analysing the living conditions in the pastoral sector. The emphasis on income, for example, misses the target in an economic reality in which wealth is mainly constituted of combinations of livestock, labour and social capital. Similarly, to look at the number of permanent houses, or corrugated tin roofs, or latrines, makes little sense in a semi-nomadic context in which “houses” are to be moved regularly, whilst very low population density, mobility and burning hot sun all the year round make the idea of a latrine, where all the excreta of the neighbourhood are collected in the same smelly hole in the ground infested by flies, something of an exotic perversion.

The value of education

Pastoralists’ resistance to change, ignorance and the determination to exploit their own children (be it for labour or for bridewealth) rather than working harder themselves, are blamed for the low levels of education in pastoral areas. They “[the pastoralists] don’t see the value of education”.

On this point, the people interviewed often expressed themselves with particular emphasis. As with basic hygiene, literacy and school-going are loaded with huge symbolic value, well beyond the direct benefit which may come from the practice. Indeed, school going is often seen as hygiene of the mind, where ignorance is the dirt in which “diseases” like poverty and violence proliferate, and learning is first of all a cleaning process (cleaning from superstitions, from traditional beliefs, from one’s past in the darkness of a primitive life). In people’s words, echoing the style of policy documents and politicians’ speeches, ignorance and illiteracy do not refer to an absence but to a presence, something ‘physical’ that has to be ‘eradicated’, like a disease or an evil. A teacher in a rural school in Moroto district described his work and the mission of education as ‘fighting the community [in their beliefs and behaviours]’. Loaded as such with moral connotations, school-going is seen as implying not only the transfer of new knowledge, but also and above all of a superior inner quality that makes people inherently better. Not seeing this value, the ‘value of education’, is not only perceived as foolish but as outrageous.

Education and status

It appears to be a common conviction that modern education comes together with a feeling of superiority and higher status. Many of those interviewed underlined that educated people, even people with just two years of primary education or who come from ABEK or CEP9, feel superior to the rest of the village and sometimes actually enjoy a higher status. The feeling of superiority and of distinction from the non-schooled peers is fostered from the first years of primary school. The primary school anthem in Moroto recites:

We young women and men of Uganda, are marching along the path of education […] we are the pillars of tomorrow’s Uganda, let’s rise now to embrace true knowledge, yielding discipline resourcefulness, uniting for a better Uganda.

9 The Community Education Programme run by the Church of Uganda.
For several headmasters interviewed, going to school is clearly something a child should not just be happy but proud of, and that’s what the uniform is really about. In the words of a headmaster in Lodwar, ‘the uniform is what distinguishes a school-child from any child’, which in actual practice means to distinguish the school-child from out-of-school brothers and sisters and age mates, and from his or her own past.

According to our interviewee from the adult functional literacy programme run in Kotido district by the Church of Uganda (who described this as one of the benefits of education) even their REFLECT\(^\text{10}\) facilitators enjoy a feeling of superiority. Maybe they are the only people in the village with some school education so all the development programmes offer them work. They are often the Local Council secretary. When they have livestock, they command labour to look after their animals.

Those who complete the functional literacy course, are also in high demand as extension agents for aid organizations. The first generation of “graduates” from the programme have quickly found employment with organisations which can pay more and give more status than a job as a teacher. This is why most of the present facilitators are not programme graduated but usually school leavers from town. In a way, the adult literacy programme is creating a new class of middlemen, who quickly gain status and (relatively) money from their ability to administer the link with the world of aid.

\(^{10}\) REFLECT is an innovative literacy method developed in the 1990s by Action Aid and quickly spread, combining Freirean methodology with PRA techniques.
PART 2: IN THE FIELD

Introduction

The data from Turkana and Karamoja are presented separately. However, the issues largely overlap and even the distinction between the pastoral groups in the two areas is often more nominal than real. Turkana and Karimojong speak almost the same language, which makes relations very easy. Turkana graze their herds side by side with the Jie in Kotido district, whilst Matheniko homesteads live with the Turkana in Loima Hills. When groups are at peace with one another, intermarriage is common. All the most influential elders we met in Turkana were very well known and had good friends or in laws both among the Jie and the Matheniko, and viceversa. During the dry season, food relief received by the Turkana in Lokiriama is “reinvested” in Karamoja in order to gain access to grazeland. At the beginning of the rainy season, women from Rupa exchanged labour for maize in Lokiriama. Turkana from Loima find it much easier to walk across the border to the market or the hospital in Moroto rather than reaching Lodwar. Indeed, there are always people moving up and down across the border for one reason or another: maintaining contacts and shifting labour between village and kraal, grazing, visiting friends, trading or taking advantage of specific opportunities such as food distribution, smuggling cattle or following the foot prints of stolen animals. In fact, information travels more quickly between neighbouring groups across the international border than between pastoral groups and main stream society within the same country.

TURKANA

In a straight line, Loteere is perhaps 40 km from Lodwar, but it is deep into the hills and there is no road. We drove for almost four hours to Lokiriama, then hired two donkeys for the luggage and continued on foot. Leaving at dawn, we arrived at mid-morning on the third day. Turkana travelling without donkeys normally cover the distance in half of this time.

Facing the eastern side of Mt. Moroto, Lokiriama is the nearest outpost of the “modern” society in Loima Hills: a food relief distribution point, with a small dispensary, a primary school, a borehole and a police detachment with a (car)battery-operated two-way radio, that at the time of our visit — quite emblematically — had been malfunctioning for years and could only receive. The groups on the other side of the border (particularly Pokots and Tepeths) claim entitlement to the pasture in the area and do what they can in order to discourage any permanent Turkana settlement there, which makes Lokiriama the most insecure place in Loima. A few years ago a major raid killed several people and destroyed all the houses and shops. The centre, today no more than thirty huts, has been in a constant state of alert ever since.

More or less once a month, hundreds of Turkana from the hills (and a good number of Karimojong from Uganda) converge to Lokiriama for the distribution of World Food Programme rations, an operation which lasts for three-four days. Whilst we were there, foot prints of about one hundred people presumed to be a raiding party had been seen on the hills in the direction of Mt. Moroto. Every morning in Lokiriama, started with a council of elders to update the information collected by the scouts and to decide upon the military strategy for the day. In the evening, the young educated men coordinating and
supervising the distribution took off their “modern” clothes and turned into would-be warriors, wearing shukas11 with their trainers and magically producing AK47s entrusted to them by worried fathers in town. People here and there fired into the air once every half an hour to let the raiders know that the people in the centre were awake and armed. The situation was temporarily resolved when a group of scouts, as they said, bumped into ‘the enemy’ one night and shot a couple of them managing then to slip away without being seen. Incidents like that just before a raid are considered a bad omen by the raiders, who in these cases usually give up the venture.

We left at the end of the distribution, following a group (mainly women and children) on their way back home. We reached the hills in the late afternoon, after a break during the hottest hours of the day. From there on, we followed a barely visible path worming though a jungle of dry, thorny vegetation. The first night we stopped at a camp along the way. We spent most of the second day at a water point nearby, waiting for the water to surface so that our hosts could water their animals and, finally, our donkeys. The second night, we slept in the bush. We arrived in Loteere the next morning, in mid-February, full dry season.

In NgaTurkana, loteere means ‘border’. The name applies to a fairly large area with several scattered camps. In Lokiriama, we had met a woman married to a local warlord and she had agreed to host us, so we headed for her homestead. As with the camp where we stopped along the way, we could not see signs of human dwelling until we were no more than a few meters away from the huts. The place was very calm, with only a few women and children and some elders, all the men and boys being at the grazelands or, with women and girls, at the water points watering the animals. Later on, people told us that it was about ten years since they had had a visitor from as far as Lodwar. However, this was very much a one-way kind of isolation: one of our hosts for example, after some time told us (not without satisfaction) that he had seen Saverio in Moroto in January, and heard about our research from an in-law based in Rupa.

Literacy in Loteere was extremely low. We didn’t actually meet anybody who knew how to read and write, although a handful of people told us that they had a son in school, in one case in Lokiriama (the nearest school), otherwise in Lodwar.

**Dry season camp life**

The camp was made out of some twenty circular shelters of woven vegetation, mostly two thirds of a circle with no roof, scattered amongst trees and bushes in a hundred meter range.

People were extremely busy, with a daily schedule starting at about 4.30am and never ending before 9-10pm. Each day started with the kraal leader shouting instructions to wives and children all over the camp, as well as co-ordinating the herding activities of the extended family. This lasted for about half an hour. Then the herders started to leave the camp with the livestock. The cattle first, sometimes with the donkeys, at about 5am; then goats and sheep. Each herding team comprised of a few boys escorted by adults carrying rifles. The camels, the only ones to be milked in this season, stayed in the camp until dawn, at about 6.30am. Everyday, half of the cattle teams walked the animals for two-three hours into Uganda, at constant risk of attack from the hostile local groups. The other half, followed by a team of women and girls, took their herds to be watered at a water point some two hours away in the direction of Lokiriama. The young animals were

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11 The light fabric blanket worn by the herders.
left grazing nearby the camp watched by children, and watered at a small water point about ten minutes from the camp, which also provided for the people.

The water points are dug, progressively deeper as the dry season continues, in dry river beds, and usually fill up again with sand and other materials during the wet season, as the river flows again. People keep a mental map of good water points and try to dig in the same places from year to year. As water becomes scarce, new holes are dug, usually at night by men, tentatively looking for a place where the water level is high, following a range of indicators developed over generations through experience and observation. Although clearly a good enough system for survival, the number of dry holes, one-two meters deep, around the good water points suggests that the labour required for a functional well is huge.

The holes are dug in an irregular shape in order to allow people to stand at different levels in the holes. Sometimes, with very vertical or narrow holes, the trunk of a tree with a few stumps of branches left on is slipped in diagonally, to stand on. The water is extracted by a human chain, usually of girls supervised by women, who also ensure that the animals keep away from the hole and drink in turn. The availability of labour is crucial: by the time we arrived, the water points were already 8-12 meters deep, requiring a chain of 5-8 people. Working at full speed, the girls manage to extract about 50 litres per minute, but in practice a lot of time is wasted waiting for the animals to drink (the containers used for watering hold some thirty liters) and, above all, waiting for the water to rise inside the hole or digging it deeper. When water is scarce, watering a herd takes a whole day of work. Sometimes if a well is dry the watering team of that homestead moves to another family’s well, and helps them in order to speed up the process and leave time for the watering of their own animals.

On the grazelands, the boys stay with the animals whilst the adults constantly patrol the surroundings, or observe from strategic positions ready to ward off attackers. Each day of grazing is a military operation requiring considerable preparation, including intelligence work, information analysis and planning. The herders come back in the evening: the small stock and the camels at about six; the cattle, with most of the armed people, between eight and nine. When all the teams have arrived, elders from different camps usually meet with the kraal leader in order to share information and plan for the next day. Information is collected in a variety of ways, including the use of scouts deep in “enemy territory”. In general, everybody keeps their eyes and ears open, and reports every unusual sign, particularly unknown foot prints.

The men who don’t go herding spend the day between the camp and the water point, discussing amongst themselves, helping to water the young animals or just resting in the shade of the trees along the river, near the water point. Some women and girls, in turn, stay in the camp to take care of food preparation and other domestic tasks. Grinding a couple of kilos of maize (from the food relief distribution) using stones, takes several hours of continuous work.

Every evening, as they finished their tasks, the children (aged approximately between five and fifteen) spent hours singing together or playing and running around. They were remarkably lively and energetic, often playing until midnight even after a full day of work (and waking up again at 5!).

Most of the women and girls we saw in Loteere wore long leather skirts and aprons (decorated with beads), good for moving around in the thorny vegetation or sitting on the ground. The few with a fabric skirt seemed to have more difficulty keeping it in good condition. Leather picks up the dirt much less than fabric, however, it needs looking after and greasing often in order to prevent it from drying and breaking. Sometimes, women
also wear a shuka wrapped above the breast, or tied at the shoulder, but they take it off when they do heavy work in the heat.

All men wear a shuka, and often a strong shirt or a jacket (ideally a military one), particularly appreciated because of the pockets and the smart/exotic look (in local opinion) it gives to a warrior. Dark colours are preferred for reasons of security. Boys and very young children are usually naked, although herd boys may wear half of an old shuka. All adults and most of the children, wear sandals. Often the women wear hide sandals, whilst the men always wear rubber ones (made in town from old tyres), which are much thicker and stronger.

By mid dry season (February) the hand-dug water points in the river beds are drying up, and there is not enough water to supply all the animals in one day. So the cattle are watered in turn, every other day. This kind of grazing-water-grazing cycle puts a lot of pressure on the labour force, which has to be stretched across a double number of herds. Worse of all, this compromises security as fewer men are able to escort each herd.

**Health conditions**

As much as it could have been visible to a non-specialist, on average the people in the camp looked strong and in good health, and the same can be said for the people we met along the road from Lokiriama and in other camps in Loteere. Unlike in town, we saw nobody who was overweight, although adult women were often quite rounded. Although sometimes very slim, people proved incredibly resistant to physical stress. On the trip from Lokiriama, we were overtaken by women swerving their way round the thorny vegetation with some fifteen kilos of maize on the head, a baby on the back and a five litre jerrycan of water. When we finally reached the mid-way village in the evening of the first day, after some nine hours of trekking in the heat, we were exhausted and fairly dehydrated. The women who arrived with us just sat by the fire and started to chat with relatives without even drinking.

Although we did not investigate health conditions, people seemed to assume that we had drugs (and knew how to use them), and came to ask for help when they had a problem. In one month, coming into contact with about two hundred people, we were asked for medical help about nine times. Four times for eye infections (one elder, one young woman and two children), twice for a headache (women), once for a cough (elder), once for an abscess on a leg (man), and once for a scorpion bite (woman). One day our guide felt quite ill, with the symptoms of what might have been an attack of malaria. He had just come back (walking from Lokiriama to Loteere) after three days in Lodwar where he had certainly been bitten by mosquitoes. Two days later, he was strong enough to set off for another eleven hours of trekking (at nomad’s speed) to Lokiriama. In Loteere, perhaps because of the distance from water, we saw no mosquitoes at all, although there were plenty in Lodwar.

We met a young man with a dysfunctional leg, the result of a bullet wound in a raid a couple of years earlier. Although he could walk, he had a limp and found it difficult to cover long distances, so he was taking care of goats rather than cattle. Perhaps because of the limited physical activity, he was also the only man we met who was a bit flabby. He said that when he was wounded his family took him to hospital, but the doctors there wanted to saw the leg off. As he refused they took him back to the village, patched him up with herbs and waited. Somehow he made it, with his leg still attached. He told us he knew that he might have died, but he argued that he might also have died in the raid... or he might have made it, as he did. Like all the people we met, he showed a fatalistic attitude: we are caught up in forces that we cannot control, you die if it is time for you to
die, otherwise you live. As a one-legged man in Loteere he would have been condemned to a life of misery, likely ending up dead in a few years anyway.

A similar story, of a man from Mt. Moroto, with a paralyzed leg due to a snake bite, was told to us during the interviews with personnel of the District Health Services in Moroto. At the hospital, the leg was going to be amputated, but the relatives of the man refused, took him home and treated him with herbs, successfully.

**Women**

Due to the herd management’s busy schedule and to the dangerous grazing conditions which made it unfeasible for the herders to take us with them without putting everybody’s life at risk, for the month we stayed in Loteere we spent quite a lot of time in camps or at water points, and most of it with women.

Women stopped by for a chat in small groups or alone, when they had some spare time, bringing some food for us to try, asking for some tobacco or just to talk. Sometimes they sat on the ground, sometimes they stood around, having a quick rest as if stopping for a cup of tea in their living room. They were always very assertive and, of course, curious, asking questions about life in Nairobi or in Europe and, above all, trying to understand what kind of people we were, to travel so far away from friends and families in order to spend months in the bush. How could our children be fed in the meanwhile? Weren’t we worried about leaving our wives alone for so long? How did we deal with the sexual issue, being so far away from our wives? Did we take some special medication to keep the desire low, or we simply ‘endured the sufferance’?

The girls were always teasing us, challenging us to show whether we could water the animals, or flirting and making jokes about marriage: would we be able to protect them? Could we go raiding and bring back many cattle? Could we walk through the hills up to Uganda to take the animals to graze? Had we many cattle to give for them? Shouldn’t we give them some tobacco and maybe a shuka, just to show our good intentions? The only day that we managed to bathe in Loteere, after a rainy morning had left some surplus in the water point, the team of girls who fetched the water for our wash made a point of remaining to watch, at a distance, with the amused approval of an elder (man) as curious as them. Of course, children’s behaviour differed according to their family style and their own attitude, like everywhere, but in general the ones we met seemed very light hearted, positive and exceptionally sorted out.

In the camp, women were in charge of almost everything, from shelter building to food storing, from water fetching to milking. As men are supposed to keep away from most of these “women’s tasks”, they are very dependent on women for basic daily needs. For example, warriors may help water the animals at the water points if necessary, but are never seen fetching water to the camp or cooking (apart from roasting meat). A man contravening these rules would incur endless and merciless teasing by the women.

Once a group of three young men who had stopped by our place for a chat asked us to offer them some tea. As we agreed to provide the tea but told them that they had to prepare it themselves as we were not going to cook for them, the situation suddenly became difficult. First, two of the group tried to boss the youngest of them to boil the water. However, he politely resisted, embarrassed, arguing that as his girlfriend was in the camp, by no means could he afford to be seen doing the work of a woman. His fellows bought the argument and asked us, but we mirrored them, refusing on the grounds that we should not have been seen cooking for younger men. We then suggested they asked one of the girls in the camp. They called a girl of about fifteen and asked her
boldly to make a fire and boil some water for tea. She gave them a look of indifference, told them that she had other things to do and walked away. After some minutes of further unfruitful negotiation with us and the young man, the two senior herders called a little girl of about eight and asked her. She asked what was going on and suggested that we could have boiled the water ourselves, as we normally did. We made it clear that the tea was for the warriors and not for us. When the three men openly admitted that they could not be seen cooking in the camp and asked her again as a favour, she finally agreed. Within two minutes a pot of water was on the fire. She then came again to put in tea and sugar.

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**BOX 3. Being a pastoralist**

A. is a bright woman, extremely assertive and outspoken, very strong but not harsh, actually with some inner tenderness and a sharp sense of humor. She is in her early forties, the second or perhaps third wife of the kraal leader in Loteere, with four children, the eldest of whom is a herd boy of about sixteen. We met her in Lokiriama during the food distribution: A. is a member of the community committee that takes care that there is no cheating and that every family gets its share. We asked her whether it was alright for us to spend some weeks in her camp, and she accepted, making the decision on the spot, by herself. When we arrived at the camp, she took care of us.

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**Children**

In the camp set up, children are allowed to wander around amongst adults in all situations, from drinking sessions to councils of elders. They come along, lay down and observe. Mothers of young babies seemed to care deeply and be very closed to them, cheerfully playing and talking with them every time they have a chance.

Every time there is food around (on top of their normal meals), children are given some. When the women eat, they share their food with their children. As a matter of good manners, the elders (men) are not supposed to finish their food but always to leave some for the children. Particularly whilst eating meat, we often saw fathers passing over pieces to their small children, both boys and girls. Children get a share of sorghum brew in drinking sessions and get a pinch of tobacco to chew when available. Sick children are kept at rest at home by their mothers, even when this means to defend the decision with other women in the face of the heavy labour requirements of the dry season.

Children work from the age of 5/6 either helping with herd management, house work and looking after younger siblings. In all the families we visited in Loteere, this never seemed to be a burden for the children, certainly no more than going to school is in a “modern” context. Some like it more than others, some look forward to going and others fake illness in order to be kept at home for the day. Often, the problem is more in the relationship with the supervisor than with the work in itself, and to move them into another team does the trick. Careful fathers try to understand what the children like more: ‘some children are very unhappy looking after cattle, but like to herd camels, others prefer goats... some don’t like to stay in the kraal, but maybe do well at school’.

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12 Turkana think that tobacco has beneficial effects and for this reason afford it a very high status. Without entering into the merit of the validity of this conviction, our point here is that the position of children in the family is such that they are habitually given shares of an item that is extremely sought after by adults.
At work, children are usually responsible but also take time to play, or rest and chat. When accidents occur — in the case of boys, for example, usually the loss of animals due to lack of attention — the supervisor reports to the head of the homestead and a punishment follows. This may be good and reasonable or inappropriate, or cruel, depending on who deals with it. Like in any other social context, some parents do better than others. We only witnessed to one punishment. The father called the child to stand in front of him, having lost a lamb. The child, a boy of about six, had an eye infection and the father asked him about it, then, without raising his voice, asked what happened with the lamb and whether it was his fault. As the boy admitted his responsibility, the father whipped him very lightly (just with a movement of the wrist and more symbolically than for real) with a long thin twig three times, once on the top of each shoulder and once on the top of the head, than he dismissed him. The child shed some silent tears sitting away from the fire, terribly mortified. Some ten minutes later the father called him again, asked him to bring some water, then sat on his heels and carefully washed the boy’s face and his eyes, talking to him with a calm voice. We are not offering this as a typical example. In this case, we happened to watch an intelligent man under no special pressure, acting within a very united and rather happy family: a situation that with an easy guess is likely to be fairly rare amongst the Turkana just as amongst any other society. Nevertheless, that’s what we saw.

Knowledge and ignorance

The wealth of knowledge and degree of individual and social specialisation necessary to make a living as cattle keepers in the conditions of the drylands has been recognised and described for at least the last two decades and should not require further confirmation. Although we also collected data on this aspect for background information, their detailed description would take us far away from our focus and must therefore remain out of this report. Quite clearly, amongst pastoral people the lack of formal or modern education does not equate to lack of education. Pastoral children spend much more time with adults and older siblings than children in town. They undergo a long and complex, although informal, process of instruction and socialisation. On top of the practicalities of the trade (home and herd management), they learn how to build their own social network, learn sophisticated negotiating skills, learn effective communication skills and the rules of public speech (many of which are very similar to the common rhetoric elsewhere), learn to read and to interpret the signs of their environment, from weather to foot prints, to the presence of underground water. They learn mnemonic techniques (such as circular feedback in the communication of information) and develop unusually strong mnemonic skills.

Moreover, most of the people interviewed showed an exceptional capacity to observe characters and a deep and sophisticated understanding of diversity in life. They usually have first hand experience of the development of both animal and human life on a scale that is well beyond the reach of town people (often even beyond the means of professional ethologists). They observe generation after generation of animal behaviour in their herds. The homestead itself is an extraordinary environment for the observation of human psychology, with the cumulative interaction of the several wives who joined it over the years, and the round the clock spectacle of the children, often ten or twenty or more, day after day, year after year.

“Clean” and “dirty”

When the wind blows in Loteere, you literally get covered in sandy dust: your hair, your eyes, your ears. With walking, even if there is no wind, the dust climbs up your legs as
far as the knees. Dust is in your food and in your water. The Turkana don’t mind dust any more than the English mind rain (even now that it is acidic). They don’t mind donkey, camel or goat’s dung either: as long as they are dry, these are considered to be like soil. They do however mind human faeces. There is plenty of land, and people avoid defecating around the camp. On no occasion did we find traces of human faeces in the camp. When very small children free themselves within the area of the camp, whoever is in charge (even if another child as young as 5/6) carefully collects the stool together with the soil underneath and disposes of both outside the camp. They use a large leaf, or two pieces of wood or the underneath of a hide sandal, avoiding touching the faeces with their hands. When our guide came to Lodwar with us, he made friends with the watchman of our guesthouse who let him sleep in the courtyard. In the morning, it turned out that the place he had been given was just by the latrines, which made him complain filled with indignation for the smell...

On average, people seemed to wash themselves as often as they could. Women do not bathe in public, but men do: despite the dry season, we saw men bathing almost daily, usually at water points, if there was still water after the animals had drunk and the containers had been filled. Of course, when the water for drinking is scarce, washing scores lower in the list of priorities. Clothes are particularly difficult to keep clean. Soap is a rare commodity and it takes three times more water to wash a shirt than to have a bath. As a general rule, and particularly in the dry season, one’s cleanliness tends to be inversely proportional to the amount of clothes one wears: after the first three days in Lotearre we were definitely the filthiest ones around the camp.

Fortunately for us, just like everywhere else in the world, the local notion of cleanliness allowed for some flexibility in relation to the local living conditions, so people continued to talk to us even when the colours of our clothes had long since blended into a highly camouflaging “soil nuance”. Despite the tolerance granted to us as somehow exotic specimens, people had clear ideas about what was socially acceptable in terms of cleanliness, and what was not. We were told that sometimes a young person may develop a habit of not washing enough, not often as an adult is supposed to. In those cases, the age mates will soon complain. Turkana have a repertoire of derisory songs for fellows “with a body odour”, or just have fun making up new ones for the occasion.

**Social capital**

In Putnam’s definition, social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. In the areas researched, pastoral society appeared to work with very high levels of social capital. Association is considered the most basic asset, even more important than livestock and at the very core of all livelihood strategies. The pastoral economy is based on people’s capacity to associate with others and to acquire powerful memberships. Associations are both structural (through generation sets and age sets) and dynamic (through kinship and friendship).

The systems of age and generation sets have received abundant attention within the anthropological literature and this is not the place for describing them again. What matters here, is that they structure the society in ways that provide links across and within the generations. In other words, they provide a stable network of primary associations on which people then build their own dynamic systems of alliances.

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In fact, pastoral society is so permeated with links and associations that non-associated people are often also outcast. Social capital is so much overall that it becomes difficult to see it, particularly if we look for it from the experience of modern society, where associations stick out in a social landscape of poorly connected individuals and nuclear families.

Networking is a deliberate, planned livelihood strategy. Within an hour after our arrival in the camp, one of the wives of the kraal leader made up a song about the event and said that she should have been called “ata Lokiru” (mother of Lokiru). Lokiru, which means ‘of the rain’ was the name given to Saverio during the first visit to Rupa in January, when it rained all the time. Ata Lokiru took her role seriously, making sure that we had food and water, providing us with a cup of camel’s milk twice a day (in the dry season!), keeping an eye on our belongings when we were away from the camp and, overall, creating a sense of familiarity and a handy shortcut to human relationships. As her “son”, of course, Lokiru was also supposed to take care of her, a task in which she was ready to assist by suggesting a list of possible gifts.

The other two members of our group were Turkana and did not require much effort integrating into the local social network. All they had to do was go through their own social networks until they found some common link with the people they were visiting. People seemed to master this practice to the highest degree. Encounters between people who had never met before, were quickly driven towards the recognition of some kind of common link, when not directly through a common relative or in-law, at least through the powerful interconnecting systems of age sets and generation sets.

Almost every man and woman we met, as well as many children, tried to establish some grounds for “friendship” with us, usually followed by a request of some sort. However, the degree of sophistication and psychological subtlety in doing so, as well as style and “taste”, varied greatly from person to person. Some would shake your hand and ask for a blanket, whilst others would delay the hit for hours or even days, carefully preparing the ground first.

A witty elder, from another kraal three days walk deep into the Loima hills, meeting us for the first time managed to argue with a plain syllogism and charming smile that he was related to Saverio (Lokiru). He was of the clan of the gazelles, he said. Lokiru was the same colour as a gazelle. Therefore, Lokiru was his clan fellow... and as an elder of the same clan he was entitled to ask Lokiru for a new shuka and some tobacco.

**BOX 4. Being a pastoralist**

A. is a wealthy and highly respected elder. He has recently lost most of his cattle during a raid, but still has several herds and flocks, including a large number of camels. He has long been involved in peace keeping and has a reputation for being a “gentleman” [Turkana word? ask Ėris]. When we paid him a visit, we brought him some tobacco that he immediately distributed amongst his wives, keeping only a little for himself. In the evening, he invited us to remain, then teased us saying that, however, he had no water and no food. Were we going to stay anyway? We did, and he took great pleasure later on in producing a whole roasted goat and strong tea, served with a smile in a nice enamel tea pot that would have been difficult to find even in Lodwar. Before sleeping, we heard him talking to his first wife and singing her a song he had composed during the day.

The first impression, that friendliness was functional to demanding something, usually proved inaccurate. In fact, the opposite was often true: demanding as a way to establish a bond. Many people would just demand presents as a joke, for the sake of observing our reaction, learning something about us, aiming at establishing a first contact (and maybe a
Social networks are inheritable assets. The elder who guided us on the first trek from Lokiriama, later invited us to his camp and introduced us to his children. We spent the night there. He slaughtered a he-goat for us and, as the roasted liver arrived, he gave a ten minute speech to his sons (and indirectly to us of course!) on the importance of friendship and being open to people, on how that had been the key to his prosperity and how they should follow the same path. He concluded saying that from now on we were to be considered as family. In the future, should he not be there when we visit again, we should be treated as such; should one of us ask for a cow, they should give a cow. When he finished, he joined us to eat more of the goat. It was a hands-on lecture in networking.

BOX 5. Being a pastoralist

E. is a mother in her forties, with no husband. She is a sister of the kraal leader and clearly of the same family: every morning, as soon as he finished shouting his instructions for the day and left with the herd, she started long monologues, complaining against relaxed customs and idleness, hassling everybody for not working hard enough and always warning against the risk of lying back. She could be fairly abusive with children and girls, but the adult women in the camp could handle her, avoiding confrontation, seemingly respecting her commitment but without taking her manners too seriously. In her puritan acidity, she displayed theatrical hostility towards anything ‘exogenous’, including us, often warning (actually threatening) the children to keep away from our bad influence, although she never dared to violate the hospitality of her brother by being openly rude to us. One morning, at the peak of a sermon about some calves that had been lost the day before, in the middle of the camp she shouted: ‘This maize distribution will not last forever!’ We thought that that was a great line. Only towards the end of our stay did she soften a bit, and once even came along and asked for some tobacco. We wondered whether she was a widow or a single mother who had decided to remain unmarried, a condition socially very difficult to bear amongst the Turkana and that it is known to ‘harden people’s hearts’.

Attitude to change

The Loima Hills are considered one of the last strongholds of Turkana “traditional” pastoralism. A member of our team had a raincoat and, on one rainy day, wore it. It was a cheap raincoat bought in Nairobi, not very strong, with a pattern that was probably designed for a city girl, and even too small, as our friend had forgotten to try it on when he bought it. The way he looked could hardly have been more distant from the front page image of Turkana warriorhood. Nevertheless, the raincoat immediately became very popular amongst the herders, who had never seen one before and who suddenly saw the possibility of keeping dry whilst out in the rain with the livestock: something they had not even imagined. In the following days we had several orders: ‘the next time you come, bring many and you will sell them all!’, people told us.

We also had people asking for tarpaulin, to use as waterproof cover for short-term shelters during the movements at the beginning of the wet season. Somebody in northern Uganda had recently sold a stock of second-hand lorry tarpaulins from a closed down (?) WFP project. One or two had ended up in pastoralists’ hands and the voice had spread that they were good for building a quick rainproof shelter. So now people are looking for them. But where? No outdoor equipment can be found in Karamoja or Turkana, despite the prevalently nomadic population in the districts. One wonders why.
When, back in Moroto after the fieldwork in Turkana, we mentioned the request for tarpaulin during an interview with an officer of the district administration, the man laughed and said that we should have persuaded them to get iron-sheets rather than tarpaulins, and build a 'proper' house. Mud and grass houses, he later added, make Uganda look backward and underdeveloped.

New forms of social capital

The circulation of assets and growth of social networks within the pastoral context, is nowadays suffering a recession, apart from the movement of livestock through continuous raiding, which however destroys social networks more than generating them. Animal capital and networking, where still growing, seems to be increasingly concentrated in the hands of relatively few families.

Women (and consequently labour) are concentrated within powerful families through marriage. Rich men marry increasingly higher numbers of women whilst many other men start their families without formally marrying (with livestock). The children from these latter relations will lack the full back-up of the pastoral social network, which would have been produced through the movement of livestock, and will therefore be more vulnerable to crisis, unless they (or their parents) find other forms of security outside the pastoral sector.

The proportion between the demographic growth and the growth of the social network is altered by this process. Poor herders, who in the past had a chance to rebuild their herd by lending their labour to more prosperous “friends”, and receiving gifts of animals over the years, today have little or no hope of doing the same. In the past, a girl from a “poor” family stood a chance of being married to a wealthy man, as long as she had a good reputation. Nowadays, ‘the strong stay with the strong and exclude the weak’.

According to one of our informants, a man in his thirties who had recently lost most of his livestock, people are more individualistic than they used to be. They don’t help each other anymore, or at least the reciprocity is much more class-driven. At the same time, amongst the prosperous families, there is a growing ideology that condemns poverty: ‘if you are poor it is because you are lazy and don’t put enough effort into looking after the livestock’. Some wealthy elderly men interviewed, sustained that stockless herders can rebuild their herd by working for wealthier families, receiving animals in exchange for their work, mentioning goats and even bulls. However, several young men questioned on this point agreed that it is now fairly rare for poor herders to receive anything but food in exchange for their work, whilst it is common to be chased away at the first mistake, or worse, be required to compensate for the lost animals’.

The only ways to rebuild a herd today, they said, are through raiding or through short-cuts via the modern society (e.g. money from an educated child or from a “friend” outside the pastoral economy). But even with raiding, now that it is necessary to practice it in large groups of several hundred warriors, if one is ‘just a gun’, his share will be rather meager, perhaps a cow or even less. Education would be the obvious long term investment (of labour at least) for these homesteads.

At the same time, as pastoral families seek support outside the pastoral context and find it, they become more independent in relation to other pastoralists. In their strategies of association with the wider economy, pastoralists seem to be applying the same patterns they use to establish local social networks, only on a larger scale, using both livestock and educated family members in order to include town’s people, politicians, aid workers
etc. These new alliances are increasing the economic opportunities of those who manage to establish them.

**Poverty**

Many of the homesteads in our sample were not at all “poor”, although they all tend to qualify as such when the indicators used to determine wealth focus on income, “modernization” (corrugated tin roofs, permanent houses, latrines, formal education, use of technology), or even food security if defined as the stable availability of food all year round.

Indeed, local perceptions of poverty and prosperity focus on three parameters: labour (a large family with a balanced proportion of boys and girls), livestock and social network, the latter being the most stable of all the assets. Livestock and, to a lesser degree, labour are highly volatile assets, that raids, drought or diseases can suddenly wipe out. What makes them stable is the social network, that is the number of people one can rely on in case of need and the amount of support one can expect from them. According to the women who took part in the recent participatory poverty assessment in Kotido district, poverty is ‘when all the people who would support you, die’ (UPPAP, 1999: 9).

Turkana distinguish several dimensions of poverty. *Ekechodon* defines a man who has lost livestock but is expected to recover quickly using his social network. A man who has lost his family (labour) but is expected to recover using his livestock to marry and build a partnership, is *Elongait*. A loner with no animals or people (labour or social network), with little knowledge about the pastoral business, walking from camp to camp living out of charity, is *Emetut*. The “proper” poor though, is referred to as *Ekebotonit*, a social deviant, ‘a nobody who authors nothing’, an “empty” person. This term is in sharp contrast with *Ebarasit* or *Ngebaren*, used to define prosperity and expressing fulfillment and plentitude.  

A major distinction within the several dimensions of pastoral poverty is therefore between those poor who are still socially integrated and those who in fact have fallen out of the pastoral society, although they may still identify themselves with it.

Furthermore, poverty takes different meanings when considered at the level of the individual (disaggregating by gender), household or homestead (or a larger group). Men’s wealth, centred on livestock, is far-reaching but also more volatile than women’s wealth, centred on labour (children). In the case of polygamy, each homestead headed by a man is made out of several households, one for each wife (usually three-four, but a wealthy man may have ten-twelve). Although all the wives of a wealthy man are likely to rely on a certain degree of security, not all the households may be equally wealthy, depending on the family of origin of the wife, her seniority, her political and entrepreneurial skills, the number and age of the children etc. Apart from the wives and their households, homesteads usually include in-law relatives, either as households or as individuals. These may be unmarried relatives or widowed sisters, with or without children. All these people are likely to enjoy the general prosperity of the homestead to different degrees.

In all of these cases, people’s strategies with regard to education, as well as their potential results, are likely to be different. The decision to send a child to school is ultimately made
by the father. When there is no father (a situation increasingly common in raid-prone areas), decision making depends on the specific situation.

Sometimes a widow (and her household) is “inherited” by a close relative of the husband (a brother, or even the first born son, if from a different wife). Single mothers or widows who don’t remarry would stay with their own family, for example as part of the extended family of a brother. In these cases decisions about schooling will be the result of a negotiation, depending on the will and negotiating power of the woman (seniority, number of children, livestock entitlements, extension of her own social network), as well as on the resources available to the extended family and to the specific household at the moment of the decision (including both livestock and labour).

Despite the complexity of interrelations behind decisions concerning one child’s school education, one common pattern emerges quite clearly: school is seen and used as an alternative to herding. Those who go to school stop herding and, wherever financially possible, those who stop herding go to school.

**Perception of education**

In Loteere, schools are very much something people have only heard about. At present, the nearest school is in Lokiriama, more than a day’s walk away through dangerous territory. Lokiriama itself is a very insecure place constantly at risk of attack. In fact, most of the very few school-children from Loteere are in Lodwar or in the school along the road between Lodwar and Lokiriama. This means that the parents don’t hear from their children for several months at a time, without knowing whether they are well or not, as they are unable to read and there is no phone. Even during the holidays, it is difficult and expensive to come home and the children often remain in town, without supervision and without support from their families.

Therefore, people want a school nearby. They said they have been asking “the government” for years. Their intention is to send some boys, with the idea that at least a few of them will get a job and help their family during hardship (drought, raids, epidemics): ‘Today it is just too difficult to rely only on livestock, it is better to stand on two legs rather than one’. When we tried to get a sense of proportion, people said that, out of ten boys, they would send three or four to school, and would expect no more than one or two to succeed. We asked, should a school finally be provided, whether they would send all their children. Everybody answered positively: ‘Yes! We would send them of course, all of us at least one or two per family’. We said that ‘one or two’ doesn’t make all, and that if a school is provided, those who provide it would expect them to send all of their children. They looked at us with perplexity, then said that that was impossible: ‘Who would look after the animals? Some must stay with the herds’. Under this respect, pastoralism as it is at present is not so different from many farms and family businesses or co-operatives in Europe, and people respond to education more or less in the same way, investing some children in it (which in Europe would mean a degree in accountancy, law or a technical specialisation like agronomy) and making sure that others continue with the business. The difference of course being that in Europe, primary and secondary education is free and easily accessible, so children’s education only starts to be a family investment from upper-secondary or university level and onwards.

People know that those who go to school are lost from pastoralism, but also hope that some of them may help when they earn a salary. They don’t seem bothered about the proportion of drop out: ‘many children drop out of school and end up hanging around in town doing little jobs or lifting white sacs [the maize of the WFP] in Lokiriama for local brew, but also many of those who remain at home disappear. Those who remain, do it
because they like it: it is not out of necessity! Those who dislike the life with the livestock, always find a way out of it’. Another strategy for ensuring a flow of alternative resources to livestock, is to marry, alongside the other wives, an educated woman. The husband’s most likely strategy in this case would be to “keep” this wife in town (where her education will be more productive), maybe buying her a shop or helping her to get a salaried job (through the “town members” of his social network). Education is therefore not excluded by herdsmen as a quality of wife’s. The only problem in this case — the men said — is that educated women hardly ever consider marriage to a herdsman, although there have been cases. The point here is that in economic terms educated wives are appreciated and “invested in” exactly as educated children, that is as “town agents” for the pastoral household economy.

Box 6. The one-child-per-wife approach

A. is a man in his late 40s, head of a successful family, with no education, apart from the experience of a few days in school when he was young, before being withdrawn for herding. A. thinks that to have educated children with a salary may be useful to help the family in times of crisis. Consequently, he believes that a father should pay for the education of some children (boys), and in order to be fair, should pay for one child per wife, so that each wife could be equally protected against crisis. At the moment of the interview, however, he had no children in school as, as he put it, those who were not needed for herding were still too young.

‘Good hearts’ and ‘bad hearts’

It seemed to be a common belief amongst parents, that modern education has no relevant negative effects on boys’ feelings about pastoral values or about their own family and way of life. Boys, in the expectation of their parents, will ‘come back’ and will stay in touch and help when needed. Some don’t, people are aware of that, but they also believe that this is not because of the school’s influence but because of the bad temper or ‘bad heart’ of the boys in question.

In the words of a prosperous Karimojong elder in Loteere (sic), ‘Those who give up school are just like those who give up pastoralism: somebody does not have the heart to pursue a goal. It doesn’t matter whether it is school or pastoralism: you cannot change the heart of a person. Pastoral life can give great satisfaction, but it means very hard work in harsh conditions and many just can’t cope with it’. Those who cannot, usually ‘disappear’, sometimes quite literally: they leave when they are out to work and are never heard from again.

Some parents told us that they expect about half of their children to “disappear” in this way, whether they go to school or not. Those who disappear from school simply stop going home for the holidays and sever any contact. However, most parents seemed to believe that children ‘with a good heart’ would continue to visit and help, independently from what they are taught in school. Any suggestion that school education might create an unbridgeable cultural distance between the children and their parents, that at school, children might learn to despise the way their family lives, or be ashamed of them, was calmly but firmly rejected by parents (both men and women) on the basis of fatalism.

Some parents added that many children drop out from school or, disappear once educated, because the parents ‘throw’ them into school with little or no support and forget them, expecting the child to cope by him/herself. In a way, by sending children to school they free redundant labour with the hope that in the long term some returns might come
out of it, but are reluctant to invest anything else in the venture. Perhaps they pay the fees for one term and not for the next, refuse to pay for stationery or books, don’t ensure that the money is available in time to meet the deadlines and in general give a support that is erratic and insufficient, failing to understand that if the child is to succeed, there is a need for attentive and consistent support in school just as in herding. Another reason for this behaviour may be that people believe that it is not possible to predict whether a child will do well at school, or not. Indeed, as one elder put it, ‘it is just the same with herding, you cannot tell whether the child will take an interest in it or not, whether he will like herding cattle, or will prefer camels; whether he will be assiduous or lazy, responsible or irresponsible. And he may well turn out to be hard-working but irresponsible, responsible but lazy. For example, one herder-boy may work very hard, but also have a passion for meat and eat too much of it (that is “eat your herd”), whilst another may work less but be very respectful of your property’.

**Boys and girls**

Parents’ thinking on modern education and its cultural influence is completely different with regard to girls. In the case of girls, school education is thought to have a great and bad influence, to the point that, as people put it, school is believed to turn them into ‘prostitutes’ (*ngimalae*). Prostitution here is not meant literally, but broadly referred to any sex-related behaviour deviating from those formalized and institutionalized within the pastoral society. For example, to become pregnant just before your boyfriend asks your father about marrying you is accepted, but to have a sexual life without marriage is not (even without becoming pregnant). Although the contexts change, this broad use of the concept of prostitution is no different from the way many people still use it in “modern” societies, despite the sexual revolution.

Faced with examples of successfully educated girls with a good job, people said that in principle they were not against sending girls to school, but that it was much more difficult and risky than with boys. In other words, parents fear that the experience of school education will change the moral (and sexual) customs of their daughters. The fear is based on the following considerations.

A girl is monitored, controlled and protected by the community, particularly by her mother(s), her age mates and her “room mates”, that is the other women and girls who sleep in the same hut with her. This system relies on sharing activities around the clock and having virtually no experience of privacy (but not of loneliness either). The daily schedule of girls is very intense, with little free time between activities and no more than one or two hours in the evening. This is quite different from what happens to boys, who from an early age can find themselves alone with the livestock in the bush, and are able to enjoy relatively long periods of free time every day. Outside the context of family life, girls are subjected to little or no control or protection, with all the risks (real or imaginary) that that involves.

There are stories of school girls who, seduced by school mates, then ran away with them without ever contacting their parents again. There are also many stories of school girls being raped or seduced by school staff.

There are stories of girls who moved to town in order to go to school and were seduced with presents and material support by older men who took advantage of their vulnerable situation. Pastoral children come from a background in which material conditions are harsh but family support is usually strong and constant. We are talking about children who may only have heard of sweets, or who, if given one, can take a week or longer to consume it, only sucking it for a few minutes every day in order to make it last. At boarding schools, children are usually cut off from family support, in a context where if
on the one hand the spectacle of abundance may be beyond imagination, on the other hand failing to pay school fees by the dead line may result in you being thrown into the street, with no food, no shelter, no friends and no money to get home with. Moreover, pastoral children come from a culture in which asking strangers for favours and for presents is considered a positive social interaction, clearly ruled by informal institutions and supposed to lead to constructive developments.

It seems pointless to send girls to school if they have to be withdrawn as soon as they reach puberty, as just a few years of formal education is seen to be a waste of time, leading nowhere. On the other hand, it seems pointless to take the risk of not withdrawing them at puberty because whatever advantage they can provide with their future job, will anyway go to the family of their husband. Therefore the trade-off seems to be between the risk of losing the sure asset of the bridewealth (seen as a growth of the social capital and not as a mere acquisition of livestock), and the very small chance of sharing future help (from the daughter’s wage) with her husband and his family. In general, clearly not a trade-off in favour of modern education.

On several occasions we asked people how was it, that their thinking about school influence on children appeared to differ from boys to girls. The ‘good heart/ bad heart’ explanation, commonly used to dismiss the issue of school influence on boys, was never applied to the education of girls. ‘With girls — parents say — it is different... you cannot trust a girl... they run away’. Not all of them, of course, but why take the risk? Instead, boys are thought to be ‘more attached to their family… they are attached to the livestock [because of the inheritance] and they need it in order to get married… they usually come back… whilst the girls, if they find a man they like, just run away with him and you never hear from them again’.

From childhood, girls are considered to have a temporary place within their family of origin, and are accustomed to think that their position will become stable and permanent only after marriage. On the other hand, the husband’s family is often a “next door neighbour”: moving to his family is nothing like running away and disappearing. Not to mention that girls increasingly remain with their parents for a long time, as fewer and fewer herders can afford to pay the bridewealth all at once or even over a few years.

In principle, the husband of a girl is chosen by her father from those men who have made a proposal. In practice though the girls usually have several ways of affecting this process. However, with the weakening of livelihood security in many families, girls receive increasing pressures in matters concerning their marriage. Small herds require less labour, or no labour at all if the animals are so few that they can be given to another family to look after. In this way, men’s dependence on women’s labour for the survival of the livestock ceases, and consequently women lose most of their negotiating power with their husbands and fathers. Smaller herds means also that the whole family becomes heavily dependent on bridewealth for survival and for reproduction (through the marriage of the sons, usually funded with the bridewealth of the daughters). In families where the boys cannot take a wife until the bridewealth from the marriage of their sisters becomes available, the girls are also pressured by their brothers to marry soon and to accept the man who offers more livestock, or the first one who makes an offer, independently from other considerations.

Moreover, a workload considerably higher for girls (and women) than for boys (and men) may make the opportunity of leaving the pastoral context more appealing to the former. However, the evidence in this regard is far from univocal. We heard of girls who have boldly refused proposals from graduated men with very good jobs in town, simply on the basis that they had no livestock.
Conclusion

As we were told, the people on the hills in the area of Loteere have been asking “the government” (local politicians and administrators they met in Lokiriama or in Lodwar) for some specific interventions, for decades now, without results. They seemed clear about what they wanted, with a list of five priorities: water, a road, a school, a dispensary with a health centre, and improved security. Apparently, endless talks, negotiations and promises have been made to no effect. People were asked to contribute to the construction of the road by clearing a few kilometers of bush: the bulldozers have not yet arrived and now the vegetation is growing back. Every time a new meeting with ‘government people’ is held in Lokiriama, action seems to be just one step away, but then nothing happens. People are quite exasperated. They are deluded and suspicious. Feelings that turn into bitterness and anger in the dry season, in the face of the daily toll of animals who fall exhausted or get lost during the long treks to water or pasture.

The general picture emerging from interviews in the kraal is one of a serious lack of information, monitoring and evaluating capacity with regard to non-pastoral issues or, as it increasingly happens, with regard to the non-pastoral side of pastoral issues. In Loteere, people have been promised a solution to the problem of water scarcity on several occasions over the years. Apparently, they have even paid contributions in kind but have seen no results. As they told us, lack of resources is not the main problem: in principle, they could fund the entire project, but how to pay and whom? How to organize the payment in a safe way, making sure that the money isn’t stolen? How to check that costs are realistic? How to monitor the quality of the work? How to enforce ones’ rights if the work is not done properly? On which basis can people outside the pastoral institutional system be trusted? And what tools are available for gaining valuable information on them, in order to predict, monitor and control their actions?
Attedeoi is a village in Rupa parish, some ten kilometers north-east of Moroto town, about half an hour by 4WD, in Matheniko territory. The area is in a vast open landscape that stretches West of Mt Moroto, criss-crossed by small canyons and spotted with occasional trees and bushes. Villages are scattered around, some 1-2 kilometers from one another. Like any Karimojong “security village”, Attedeoi is surrounded by a wooden fence one foot thick and about six foot tall, with minuscule gates. Inside, there are more fences surrounding portions of space inhabited by individual households (some 15-20 altogether), each one with a few granaries, two or three huts and a courtyard. Each unit can only be accessed through tiny gates, even smaller than those on the outer perimeter, so that somebody coming from the outside has to crawl three or four times through these openings in a very vulnerable position to reach a hut. In the middle of the village, beyond more fences, there is a common corral for the large livestock, also accessible directly from the outside through a slightly larger gate. All the gates are carefully closed at night by pulling in a large thorny bush from the trunk, and locking it in position on the inside with a number of solid sticks inserted through its branches at different angles across the gate.

Because Rupa is only a couple of hours walk from Moroto, people can go to town quite often. Usually, they don’t actually reach Moroto but stop in Acholin, a trading centre about one kilometer before, where most of them have relatives and where the social and physical environment are a sort of mid-way between the village and the town.

Napumpum is a string of security villages in Panyangara, a sub-county of Jie county in Kotido district. Of this group of villages, the nearest to Panyangara has a school (there is also a school in Panyangara town). We stayed at the opposite end of the string, in the furthest village from town, a fifty minute walk from the school in Napumpum and about one hour forty minutes from Panyangara town. The area is served by a borehole.

Nakapelimoru sub-county, north east of Panyangara between Kotido town and the Kenyan border (Turkana), is a huge cluster of twenty security villages with a total population of more than 12,000 people. The main economic activity is agro-pastoralism, that is the combination of extensive livestock keeping (cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys and poultry) and the seasonal cultivation of crops (sorghum, millet, white beans, cow peas, water melons and cucumbers). However, the cultivation of crops is dependent on scarce and erratic rainfall. Despite the eminently pastoral economy there is no veterinary service in the area. Only two percent of the population can read and write. The drop out rate is 87%. In 1998, with a nominal enrollment of 86, 3 pupils sat for the Primary Leaving Examinations.

Wet season village life

When we arrived in Attedeoi in mid-April, at the beginning of the rainy season, the village was almost empty. All the men, the boys, some girls and the livestock were still in the kraal on the hills, whilst a group of women and girls had gone to Lokiriama for the food distribution (where, as they said, they were able to get some maize from the people in the settlement in exchange for collecting firewood and doing other small jobs). Those remaining in the village were hungry, literally waiting for food to arrive from Lokiriama, and for the grass to grow in the plain so that the livestock (milk and blood) could come back. In the plain, women had already started farming and men were training the oxen to
walk in pairs in front of the plough. Gradually, more women were sent back from the kraals, as well as more men and oxen. When the maize finally arrived from Lokirima, some was eaten and some was brewed and sold in Moroto for other food, ‘because one cannot just eat maize!’.

Surprised that the people in the village were remaining hungry for days on end whilst the homestead had hundreds of goats in the kraal (on top of the large stock), we asked them why they didn’t simply eat a few goats, perhaps expecting them to lament some story of neglect and greed. Instead, they seemed even more surprised by our question. The old man (their husband), as they said, had many wives and children, and there would not have been enough goats for all of them: ‘if you give in and eat your animals just because there is little food around, the herds will quickly disappear’. Although they were clearly hungry, they were not starving. Within a week or two the animals would have started to come back from the kraal, then the sorghum would have been harvested and there would have been plenty of food again. In the meanwhile, none of those we spoke to seemed to think that “abstention from consumption” was not the right thing to do.

When we arrived, our host was at the kraal. A boy was sent to inform him and the next morning one of his sons returned to the village with a goat to be slaughtered for us. Our host arrived the following day.

BOX 7. Being a pastoralist

L. is a herder in his mid-twenties from a prosperous family. He told us he is happy with his life: if he could change something of it, he would change nothing. He has a wife and can count on several heads of cattle of his own in his father’s herd plus a share of his father’s animals when he dies. He goes raiding, but ‘only the enemy and only for livestock’. That is, he does not take part in raids at the expense of non-enemies, that may upset a situation of peace, and he doesn’t loot vehicles along the road, which, he says, unlike raiding livestock is for cowards and nothing to be proud of. He goes raiding because everybody does it and you don’t want to be the only one to stay behind, but also because he likes it. Before saying good bye, he told us that our job seemed quite sad, keeping us away from home and from entertainment for months...

In Napumpum, the situation was slightly different from Rupa. By the time we arrived there the rain had come, and Jie country is generally wetter than Matheniko. Some of the herds had already come back from the kraal and the others were near by. Our hosts had plenty of milk, gee, sorghum and even chicken, whilst edible wild green plants (usually boiled) were growing everywhere. As in Rupa, locally brewed sorghum beer was abundantly produced and drunk.

Women

Although women, on first impressions to an outsider, may appear to have a lower status than men, gender relationships in pastoral society are too complex to be expressed by a simple equation of status.  

One evening, we witnessed a quarrel between one of the most influential elders in Rupa and his first wife. Apparently, the argument developed around an exchange of phrases in

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which the old mother told the husband (who was preparing to sleep in her compound),
that he should have gone to spend the night at another wife’s compound. The wife in
question had complained about not getting enough time and, above all, about the old
mother using her influence as first wife in order to keep the old man for herself. Taken in
a bad moment, as he had just arranged himself for the night, the old man reacted sharply,
shouting boldly that he was going to spend the night wherever he wanted and it wasn’t
the business of a woman to tell him where to sleep. This initial exchange of lines was
followed by some minutes of silence. Then the old mother launched a major, theatrical
counter attack, walking up and down aggressively in the middle of the compound and
shouting to the top of her voice, calling people from other compounds as witnesses and
judges of her arguments, and challenging the old man to come out of the hut and daring to
abuse her to her face. The intensity of the reaction and what we were able to catch of her
shouting suggested that the brief initial interaction had triggered a dormant issue: she was
clearly letting out what she had been storing for a while. The husband, remaining where
he was, changed tactic several times, from trying to talk her down, to threatening divorce,
to making sharp comments now and again. Overall though, he kept quiet, endured the
fact that she kept him (and everybody else) awake for almost three hours and didn’t once
show his face outside of the hut. The next morning, things were back to normal.

Amongst the Jie, according to one of our informants, a young man with the habit of
bullying girls is likely, sooner or later, to be ambushed by a group of vindictive women
and beaten with sticks and whips.

When a girl starts to have men interested in her, her age mates and “room mates” (those
who sleep in the same hut with her) play a crucial role in the choice by “liking” or
“disliking”, accepting or refusing, supporting or hindering a candidate, well before the
father of the girl is formally involved. Their support may mean that the girl becomes
pregnant by the man she likes (and they like), leaving the father with little room for
manoeuvre about the marriage.

In a context in which girls are supposed to have no say about who they are going to be
married to, one would expect them to have either a passive or rebellious attitude. Instead,
we met girls who were clearly playing an active role in the search for a husband, by
paying a lot of attention to their own appearance, by performing virtues and skills
designed to impress a potential candidate and by flirting, openly although carefully, with
young men passing by. On several occasions we were asked by girls to bring them beads
from town, so that they could thread them into necklaces and belts in order to make
themselves ‘more attractive to the warriors’. We never had the impression that this
behaviour was antagonistic to their parents will, on the contrary, one would have said that
the girls were seriously committed to attracting potential husbands in the interest of their
family as well as their own.

On one occasion we met a young woman of about twenty, married to an old man in his
seventies. She was the youngest of five wives, and by far the most outspoken and witty,
to the point of being almost flirty with us in a jovial way, in the presence of the old man.
He was both pleased and amused by the way she managed, in the meanwhile, to negotiate
the gift of ‘the largest possible sufuria 16, large enough — as she put it with a smile of
satisfaction— to cook a whole camel!’.

16 Cylindrical aluminium pans available in various sizes.
Children

As in Turkana, girls in Karamoja help with fetching water, firewood collection, food preparation and cultivation, whilst young boys look after the animals and may sometimes help with domestic tasks. In the village, as cultivating was just starting, there wasn’t very much for the children to do and they spent a great deal of time playing. Gradually, as farming and beer making intensified, girls were increasingly busy.

Despite the critical time, at the end of the dry season, the children were lively and in general appeared to be in good health. The day after we arrived we accompanied a woman to the dispensary, with her small child who was sick. It took about half an hour to walk there from the village. The child was seen, injected with an anti-malarial drug and given pills to take over the next few days. The woman paid for the drugs and headed back. That and the case of an old man with an eye infection were the only times we heard of people getting ill whilst we stayed in Attedeoi.

In the kraal, the life style was very basic and herdsboys didn’t feel ashamed to cook some posho if it was available, or fetch firewood. Usually there was very little water in the camp, as people drunk during the day as they found it whilst out with the livestock. A girl of about nine was the only “woman” around, taking care of two elders, three herdsboys and two boys younger than herself. The herdsboys had responsibility for camels, cattle and goats.

Different species present different management problems. Cattle are fairly easy to herd but must be walked for long distances, which means that cattle herders are the first to leave in the morning and the last to return at night. Moreover, cattle herds are by far those more vulnerable to raids, so the security around them must be tight at all times and therefore the responsibility is huge. Goats and sheep are much easier to content and can graze relatively near the camp, which allows the herders to take them out at about nine and return between twelve and one, have a rest for a couple of hours and go out again until five/six. However, in prosperous families goats and sheep are in flocks of 100-150 animals. Number and size of the animals make them easy to loose and difficult to herd, particularly in bushy environments. Although children often follow the flock to help, the shepherd is usually a very skilled young man with many years of experience and a thorough knowledge of his animals. A herder we interviewed in a kraal in Rupa, about 20 years old, had been looking after his flock for most of his life. We played a game with him of pointing to any animal in the flock and asking him about its mother, and the mother of the mother... He never failed to answer. He had taken care of each of the animals in the flock since the day they were born, and knew their genealogy and the major events connected to it for at least two generations.

His little brother, a small boy of about seven, didn’t seem as keen. He was supposed to help with the flock, but he screamed at the top of his voice every time the brother tried to force him to do so. The scene was repeated with increasing drama day after day, usually ending with the grandfather intervening in favour of the child, telling the brother to stop making him cry, and the older brother complaining that the child was making a fuss precisely because he knew that the old man was going to take his side. According to the shepherd, the child was a problem only when the old man was in the camp, otherwise he made no fuss. The shepherd tried every day to literally pull the screaming boy with him to the bush, and once he whipped him three or four times on the legs with a thin stick before the old man started to complain that that wasn’t going to do any good, and stopped him. In modern terms, as the grandfather owned most of the animals in the flock and both shepherds were actually working for him, one would have expected him to be twice as hard with the little boy who didn’t want to do his work. However, once again the situation was more complex, as the old man always treated the boy with kindness, to the
point of making sure that he had enough food even when the drama exploded at dinner time.

The other young boy in the camp, the youngest son of the old man, was slightly younger than his fellow and was not yet initiated in the art of herding. He asked on a few occasions to go out with the flock, but the old man told him to wait another few days, that having just arrived he didn’t know the whereabouts of the camp well enough and could have got lost. The two boys spent most of their time around him. In the evening, the two of them and the little girl ate with the old man and at night they slept next to him by the fire.

**Perception of education**

Usually people made positive statements about school and how ‘nowadays it is necessary to send some of your children to school, in order to help you in times of crisis’. However, those very people who talked in this way rarely had any children in school, although they maybe had a friend or a relative with some experience of school. In Napumpump this seemed even more common than in Rupa.

People said that most of the children who drop out of school, particularly those who studied for only a few years, remain in town or never entirely settle back into pastoral life. However, there are some who just take up herding again. We heard about young men who had followed this path, and they were respected by the elders and particularly valued for being “calm” (not aggressive, not so ready to fight with their age mates) and “disciplined”, as well as being able to help with written matters, particularly prescriptions or, sometimes, with reading or writing a letter.

In general, however, school drop outs who go back into herding do find it hard to be fully accepted, particularly by peers. If people in town have a poor opinion of “traditional pastoralists”, people in the bush have no better opinion of town dwellers, and by extension of “educated” people, seeing them as spoilt and useless. Back in the bush, a school drop out will have to prove that he/she is still a “real pastoralist”. Consequently, these children are more likely to be susceptible to peer pressure, more likely to show a formal attachment to traditions and to conform to a stereotypical “pastoral behaviour”. Paradoxically therefore, at least in as much as modern education is unsuccessful in setting young people up in a livelihood which is alternative to herding, it seems to generate conservatism rather than change in the pastoral setup.

Indeed, people often had a conflicting opinion of education. They acknowledged a growing necessity of gaining access to non pastoral resources, and they saw the status (and therefore the social advantages) associated with modern education. However, they also seemed to harbour a considerable amount of mistrust for education. This mistrust was articulated on the basis of past experience of relationships with the state. In Karamoja for example, the memory of the violence of previous governments is still vivid. On both sides of the border, there are countless stories of skirmishes with soldiers as well as of void speeches and unfulfilled promises from “government people”. As the government is very far away, with the present state of communication and information, from a bush perspective it is impossible to ascertain who exactly represents what. So every outsider is “government”, whilst the distinction between state institutions and private individuals (and interests) is extremely fuzzy.

Even when conflicts with the army are part of a law enforcement activity, the modes and reasons for the operations are often dubious (or at least appear so from a bush perspective). One good example is the “Panyangara incident” in 1999, when an army
operation to recuperate stolen cattle (an issue normally dealt with by the elders without violence) appeared to the pastoralists to be a raid and ended in the death of twenty three soldiers (there was no count of civilians) followed by months of retaliation with tens of people killed and the loss of hundreds of animals. Indeed, as cattle have been raided by all parties for decades now, virtually all present raids (unless it is in infraction of a formal peace agreement made by the parties) can be “justified” in the eyes of the raiding party as a way to regain cattle stolen from them in the past. Today’s cattle of a raided party are yesterday’s cattle of the raiding party, so on and so forth going back years. Consequently, law enforcement interventions from the state, even when carried out with the best intentions, appear arbitrarily inserted in these long chains of events, and hopelessly biased: why now but not before? — people think — why against us but not against them?

As school is also perceived as a government’s venture, the way people see it, despite the visible advantages, remains entangled with their general impression of the state as potentially helpful but ultimately unpredictable, and therefore not trustable. At the same time, the access to new resources apparently granted by education is perceived as utterly beyond one’s control, intangible and far more volatile than cattle keeping (although for different reasons). Although increasingly less so, pastoralists are autonomous producers. They own their means of production, manage themselves and have the skills and knowledge for running their own trade. Their success or failure is clearly visible in their material wealth as well as in their social status. Education, instead, seems to produce people whose status largely depends on actors others than themselves and whose usually unmatched wealth is a flow that can stop at any time. Education may be something that it would be good to have, but no successful pastoralist would exchange his or her life for a job in town.

A story we heard from a middle aged herder in Rupa is enlightening on this point:

One day in Moroto I met an old class mate, from the time when, as a child, I spent a few days in school before being withdrawn in order to look after my father’s animals. He was wearing a suit and behaved like a big man. I was in my shuka and sandals, but I had just sold some animals and had a lot of money on me. We went to a bar and he asked me to buy him a beer. He asked me! Ah! he and his suit! The suit was the only thing he owned! And yet, he was holding himself as if he was much better than me, because of his suit. You see, if I look at my old class mates, I can not see that having gone to school has given them any advantage. I see successful and unsuccessful ones, just like among the herders. Some of them are well off and maybe better off than me, because of his suite. You see, if I look at my old class mates, I can not see that having gone to school has given them any advantage. I see successful and unsuccessful ones, just like among the herders. Some of them are well off and maybe better off than me, but surely I am more successful than most of the others who now live on a poor wage as teachers or local administrators. Even if you study and become an MP, you might be in a powerful position for a while but, if you are not re-elected, overnight you become nobody with nothing to do. You see all these animals? There are new kids every year. I will have work to do until I die, I can never be bored. And no one can sack me, no one tells me what to do.

As school presents itself in a package with town life and as something radically alternative to pastoralism, even those parents who might afford the costs of formal education are sometimes held back by concerns about being unable to monitor the whole process, above all, the time spent by the child outside the family in an alien and perhaps dangerous environment.

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17 According to our informants, the soldiers broke into a security village with heavy vehicles, smashing everything in a straight line up to the central kraal. Then the soldiers loaded the cattle in lorries and left. Because of the way the operation had been carried out (in light of previous experiences) and because the soldiers left in the direction of Moroto rather than going north towards Kotido, which is the administrative and legal centre of the district and where cattle are normally taken in these cases, the Jie thought that the soldiers were raiding their animals, mobilized and struck back.
A very respected and prosperous elder interviewed in Rupa sponsored the education of one of his nieces when his father died, and still does. However, the old man has not sent any of his own children to school. Now that many of them are adults, he says he has decided to send the young ones, who are not required for the management of the livestock... Nevertheless, he cannot bring himself to decide. What will they do? Where will they stay? He says he is looking for somebody who is willing to assist him, either by paying the school fees or — above all — by ‘keeping the children and taking care of them whilst they attend school’.

**Going to school**

Poor families, and particularly the poor who have fallen out of the pastoral economy altogether and moved to permanent settlements, are those more strongly oriented towards formal education. As formal education appears as an alternative to pastoralism, that’s precisely what they need. However, they don’t have the means for supporting all of their children in school, and often not even one. This is clearly the case in Kenya, where there is a cost-sharing regime, but even the free primary education in Uganda involves some costs: uniforms and shoes, books, stationery. Most of the time the school will ask the parents to contribute towards the cost of firewood (for cooking the food of the WFP) and maintenance. These contributions are supposed to be voluntary, and even the uniform is not compulsory (in Uganda the law speaks of “uniform or any decent clothing”). However, schools may put considerable psychological pressure on the parents (and their children!) who don’t “volunteer”, and some headmasters will go as far as refusing admission to those children who do not conform to their requests (including that of wearing uniform and shoes). This is particularly true of town schools, and towns are where the non-integrated poor usually end up living.

The people interviewed in Acholin trading centre and Kamusaili market in Moroto stressed that the main reason for high levels of school drop-out and low enrollment is the lack of resources. Education is expensive and most people cannot afford it or can pay for no more than one child. As it was put by one of the interviewees, ‘If a father knows that his resources would only be enough to support all his children up to primary 7, which he knows will not be very useful, he is more likely to decide to concentrate on the schooling of one child rather than stretching his limited resources on many, and consequently leaving them all with nothing’.

When poor children do go to school, their situation is extremely precarious and at the first family crisis (loss of labour or livestock), or if the sponsor withdraws, they drop out. Often, the same accidents that cause school drop out among the very poor, drive into formal education, children from families that can still rely on resources from the pastoral economy but that suddenly find themselves seriously threatened in their position.

People emphasised that Universal Primary Education is likely to make things worse by taking children from families who cannot afford the cost of secondary education all through primary school, only to abandon them exactly when they would need more support: ‘children are regularly fed posho and beans for seven years and kept in the school environment with little or no work to do: an unrealistically soft life compared to the conditions in the family of origin. Then suddenly, as soon as they hit P7, they are dropped back into the real world: with no food, no shelter, no skills, plus the burden of having failed or the anger of having been let down’.

There is a widespread belief that such school leavers often end up in the ranks of highway robbers and commercial raiders. On the other hand, they are thought to be extraneous to the raids organized in the bush: ‘those people stay in town, how would they know when
a raid is being organised?” argued a young warrior who had just come back from an aborted raid against the Dodoth.

Box 8. Going to school

V. had been looking after his uncle’s cattle for several years, when the uncle decided to take another wife. The cattle were used for the bridewealth and V. remained without a job. So he was sent to school.

N. was the son of a famous warlord, head of a wealthy homestead. One day when he was about seven, his father was killed in a raid. His mother moved to town and sent him to school.

J. started school when he was nine, after his father died of cholera. A priest passing by his village offered to take him to school. So off he went.

M. had a chance to go to school when a nun offered to sponsor his education and that of his brother. One day the nun told his parents that they were to take care of the education of one of the children as she was no longer going to pay for both of them, having to help other people as well. So M. dropped out at P6 and now scrappes a living doing menial work whilst his brother has just passed his “O” level.

S.’s parents wanted him to study, but when he was in S1 his father died and he had to leave school in order to help his family.

From primary to secondary school, costs increase more than tenfold, up to about one fully grown bull per year for the cheapest option (one of the few, poorly staffed and poorly equipped local schools). Apart from rare, rare and fortunate pupils who manage to find a sponsor, children from poor families (and many from not so poor ones) drop out before paying the fees for the second term of Senior 1. Moroto and Kotido (and Lodwar) are crowded with Senior 3 and Senior 4 leavers.

Table 2. Expenditures for secondary education (as required by the schools)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Price in USH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 mattress</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 bed sheets</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 blankets</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 uniforms</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pairs of socks</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pairs of shoes</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 desk + chair/stool</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stationery</td>
<td>5,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>text books</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school fees (each term, 3x per year)</td>
<td>53,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOT.</td>
<td>370,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Karamoja, Senior 4 leavers have been able to work as ABEK facilitators. With a salary of about 40,000 USH per month (half of that of a primary school teacher, fifteen-twenty times less than a graduate development worker in a standard NGO), this is far from being considered a good job. Many also consider this to be a precarious situation, as they think that as soon as more highly trained people become available, the District will require a
higher qualification for the job. Parents are well aware of this problem, and know very well that low levels of education will not result in viable jobs. Indeed, when asked what level of education is required to secure at least a chance to find a good job, the majority of the interviewees said that one should get a degree.

Many parents (and children) are discouraged and de-motivated by this situation and decide therefore that even the investment in primary education, when affordable, is worthless. Primary education appears to be pointless unless one is sure to carry on studying, but often one is not even sure to make it to the end of primary school.

Those who fall out, regularly because of lack of money (the sponsor has withdrawn, the family has been hit by a crisis) are left with little hope. The youths interviewed in Moroto, ranging from P4-S3 leavers, said that they had even failed to be accepted on the adult functional literacy courses. All that was left to do was hang about looking for any odd chance of gaining some money, usually no more than 500 USH per day.

To a certain extent, non-formal education programmes like ABEK (Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja) by-pass these problems by virtually eliminating all of the costs, including production costs, allowing the child to remain a productive figure in the household. Indeed, these aspects together with the fact that learning takes place directly in the villages, where it can be easily monitored by the parents, results in the high participation of girls to ABEK classes (higher than boys). Unfortunately, instead of seeking full recognition and formal equivalence for its original designation of alternative and responsive education, ABEK is rapidly finding a niche as pre-primary education\textsuperscript{18}, seen as an instrument to draw pastoral children into the usual unresponsive school.

On the other hand, several educated people in town, from a pastoral background, expressed their concern that alternative education might just become a way of further marginalise pastoralists into a second class education that will take people no where, actually anchoring them to an institutionalised position of inferiority. Even innovative non-formal education programmes like ABEK find themselves to walk on a very thin line between responsiveness and status.

**BOX 10. Being a pastoralist**

R. is about twenty and lives in Kamusaili, Moroto, doing odd jobs like many other young people in the area of the market, mainly offloading lorries or carrying items. On a good day, he says, he can earn up to 1,000 USH\textsuperscript{19}, but usually it is no more than 500 USH. R. has no formal education, but speaks a bit of English, learnt in the ABEK course he is following. The problem with ABEK, he says, is that he never really knows which standard he has reached, he never feels that he is ‘going up’. He comes from a pastoral background and used to work in the kraal but didn’t like it, as he was overworked by those older than him. His family came to Moroto when they lost all their animals in a raid. Now he is married with children. He thinks his life has been improved by coming to town and would not like to go back to herding: there is no control now and nobody tells him what to do.

\textsuperscript{18} Alternative education does not have to be second-class or support-education, if this is usually the case it is only for political choice and not for pedagogical reasons: the distance education system in Australia, for example, allows a child to go to university without ever having stepped into a classroom.

\textsuperscript{19} The equivalent of less than three kilograms of *posho*, one non-refrigerated bottled beer, or a single treatment for an attack of malaria.
When children are actually supported throughout secondary school, their life couldn’t be more different from that of their siblings at home.

In pastoral families, labour is first of all allocated for herding — for each herd of cattle, for the sheep and goats, for the camels, perhaps for the donkeys and for the calves. Once the labour requirement for herding is ensured (and this may take some 15 years) the “surplus” children can be allocated for modern education. A school child is therefore very likely to have older brothers who take care of the family herd/s.

The herdsboy who has a hard and productive life is allowed to consume very little\textsuperscript{20}, whilst the school boy who consumes well beyond what would be tolerated at home — where consumption is seen as somehow inherently immoral — enjoys a comparatively comfortable and idle life, with three meals per day, plenty of water, “smart” clothes, a rainproof shelter with a soft bed and perhaps even pocket money. Almost inevitably, such a contrast is bound to raise tensions between the family members, at least as long as the family is not enjoying clear benefits from the investment, if ever.

In the pastoral set up, the right to livestock is directly associated with hard work, sacrifice and determination. In a way, one has to \textit{deserve} a herd. This is earned through risking one’s life in order to acquire animals (raiding) or to protect them; through an assiduous daily dedication to walking long distances under the burning sun, in order to lead the herd to better grass or more abundant water, sleeping in the rain, or deliberately starving when, at the end of every dry season, abstention from consumption seems the only way to limit the intake of animals from the herd. In the eyes of the herders, the fact that educated family members visit only now and again, rarely take part in herding and don’t ‘go to the kraal’, somehow makes them less entitled to the livestock, even to their own animals.

On the other hand, the physical distance of town’s people from the livestock makes monitoring of one’s property impossible. Even in the best of families, as a highly educated and successful man from a pastoral background underlined, ‘when you are always away and have no control on what is going on with the herd, it is always your animals that die of disease, or are stolen, or get lost and are eaten by the hyenas...’.

Although as a child one may share the view that his/her own education is meant to strengthen his family’s pastoral enterprise in the face of possible crisis, this perspective is likely to change as one grows up outside the pastoral set up, maybe dealing with a different kind of peer pressure, and starts his/her own family, maybe making plans for further education and personal development. Year after year, the person in town is bound to develop a different set of priorities from the rest of the family in the bush, and such a difference is likely to generate tensions, for example concerning the number of animals to be marketed from the family herd, or the allocation of income to expenses that, although important in the context of town life (such as smart clothes, a TV or a holiday), appear to be irrelevant to the economy of the extended family.

In extreme cases, some children grow increasingly distant from the pastoral world, feel entitled to a higher status and are embarrassed by their own families and living conditions at home. They remain in Mbale, Iriri or Moroto (in Uganda) or Lodwar, Kisumu or Nakuru (in Kenya), forget their parents and never go back home. Whether this is due to the influence of education or, as seems to be the most common view amongst

\textsuperscript{20} A herd boy eats what is available (topped up with wild fruits and little animals from the bush, and the leftovers from his father’s meals) and wears just half of an old \textit{shuka} and a pair of tyre-rubber sandals (which are likely to be the only bought thing he owns from birth to adolescence). A little girl often doesn’t even have the rubber sandals.
pastoralists, simply a personal inclination that would have manifested itself even had the child been kept at home (having a ‘bad heart’), remains an open issue.

Table 3. Upbringing costs for pastoral and school children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pastoral child</th>
<th>USH</th>
<th>Primary school child</th>
<th>USH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandals</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>Uniform</td>
<td>7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shuka</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>Firewood contribution</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Building maintenance</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stationery</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Books</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,900</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>37,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graduates interviewed in Moroto acknowledged some difficulties with their family of origin on matters such as hygiene and social interactions. They felt the pressure of being continuously targeted for requests from the other members of the family, who tend to see them as an inexhaustible source of gifts but, at the same time, are unable to relate to their generosity and take it as a sign of enormous wealth combined with a kind of town corruption that makes one dispose of his own property in a rather stupid way: ‘Sometimes when I visit home my brothers ask me for money. If I don’t give them any, they will say that I am greedy. But once, having given two thousand shillings to a brother of mine, I then heard him commenting with another about the gift, saying that I must have been awash with money to just throw it away like that’.

On the other hand, the people interviewed insisted that education does not change the way one treats (‘handles’) his own family of origin. On the contrary, it is more likely to improve it. School memories are often bad memories: people remember having been beaten or abused in various ways. As they suffered very much from homesickness, going back home was always tremendously nice and the contrast actually made them love their parents more, rather than less. Somebody stressed that at school, children learn to be respectful with masters and headmasters, and ‘carry’ that respect home (the example given here was children learning formal manifestations of submissive respect, such as kneeling, in the presence of somebody with status).

Contrary to what pastoralists seem to think, the majority of teachers, headmasters, district education officers and various local administrators interviewed, believe that modern education is antagonistic to the pastoral way of life. Some of them saw this as a problem, a wrong a counterproductive approach; others seemed convinced that to pull children away from the pastoral way of life is precisely what education is meant to do.

We visited several primary schools in Matheniko and Panyangara. It was the beginning of the wet season, which is the time in the year with the lowest levels of school attendance. In one school, with an official enrolment figure of 365, 162 children were said to be coming only to the morning assembly, in order to be counted for the food distribution at lunch time. The P3 class we entered officially had 4 pupils, of whom only two were present that day. P2 had 37 boys and 29 girls on the register, but only 20 attending. P1 officially had 98 boys and 141 girls in two classes, supposedly run by one teacher working alone. In practice, this proved to be no problem as only 25 children were actually attending P1. Apart from the two boys in P3 the classrooms were empty. Some children were running around outside. Of the staff, the headmaster was away on a workshop, whilst two of the three teachers that morning had not shown up. The only
teacher we met had shaky hands and a spirited look. He had no idea why the others had not come. Concerning attendance, he said that it was the same every year: as soon as the first rains show up the children disappear to help their families, in the kraals or with cultivation works. Apparently, suggestions had been made in the past to shift the school holiday to the season of lowest attendance, but nothing had ever been done. A World Food Programme inspection was in course when we arrived. We observed the teacher and the inspectors forcing open a small metal cupboard said to be used by the headmaster, which contained stocks of WFP food said to be missing from the official school store.

A bright young teacher we met in Matheniko had been teaching for one year, but as he was not a Karimojong he was still learning the local language and could therefore hardly communicate with the parents of his pupils (or the pupils themselves!). Despite having studied at the Teacher Training College in Moroto, he had received no language training (all he had was a dictionary) or any specific training for working with pastoralists in Karamoja. He believed that ‘the Karimojong sell their daughters at marriage and the bridewealth is retained entirely by the father of the girl’, having never heard of livestock distribution for networking. He believed that education should come before livestock, but admitted that, ‘as in the area where I come from, people are farmers and never keep more than two or three cattle, before coming to Karamoja I had never considered livestock keeping as a major livelihood strategy…’.

Summing up, the data collected during the fieldwork in town and amongst pastoral groups suggest a core finding:

- Mainstream society in Kenya and Uganda represents pastoralists as backward, conducing a fundamentally flawed way of life. This public and institutional image of pastoralists is a gross misrepresentation, as fieldwork in villages and kraals gives a substantially different picture, in most cases opposite to the way pastoralism is commonly represented.

An analysis of this point, as well as of pastoralists’ reasons for sending or not sending children to school, is developed in the next section.
PART 3: CULTURE, POVERTY AND EDUCATION

The data collected amongst pastoral Turkana and Karimojong during the period we lived with them, and the public and institutional representations of these people gathered from various sources in town, produce very different pictures. In the latter case, pastoralists are seen through a deforming lens, or are “removed” altogether from the social, cultural and economic landscape of their countries.\(^\text{21}\)

During the interviews in town, the idea at the core of the research, of a link between culture and poverty or between education and poverty, was often “naturally” understood in the sense that the culture “linked” to poverty is the culture of the poor and, on the other hand, that the lack of education concurs to maintain or reproduce poverty.

However, the data collected suggest a different scenario. Namely, that the poverty of pastoral people is perhaps more closely linked to the mainstream culture in their country than to their own; and that the link between education and pastoralists’ poverty concerns (via development policies and practices) the nature of the education undergone by pastoralists’ fellow citizens at least as much as it concerns the lack of modern education amongst the pastoralists themselves. An episode from Turkana will illustrate this point in more detail.

One day in Loteere, a woman came to see us, saying that her son was not well. She asked for drugs. We explained that we were not doctors and carried no drugs with us. She said that she actually had some drugs and was going to use them. She showed us a small plastic bottle containing some fifteen pills of differing shape and size. We asked her whether she knew what they were for. They were drugs, she said.

We asked whether she was aware that drugs can have very different effects from one to another, and that some can definitely be harmful when used for the wrong purposes. She looked perplexed, ‘we take them — she said — and usually we get better’. Insisting on our point, we asked her what she used when no drug was available. ‘Medicinal herbs’, she said. We asked whether, in that case, she looked for a particular herb according to the problem she had, or just took any herb, the first herb she came across in the bush. With a smile, she said that of course she looked for the right one. We asked why then was she ready to use any drug, rather than looking for the right one. She gave us no answer.

Turkana can be very knowledgeable about medicinal plants for both people and livestock. The experts amongst them, women in particular, know up to a couple of hundred different herbs and relative medicinal properties. So how is that people so sophisticated in the recognition and use of medicinal plants seem so rough and fail to make elementary distinctions when it comes to using modern drugs? An answer came some weeks later, when the research team was on its way back to Lodwar. A few women had walked with us for the two days it takes, from Loteere, to reach Lokiriama. The women were taking two young and ailing children to the dispensary.

We caught up with the group when they came out of the dispensary. The women had been given four pockets of paper ripped from a notebook, each one containing a handful

\(^{21}\) Indeed, quite removed from the physical landscape as well, by the poor state of communications with their “remote” areas: in today’s world of global communication systems, it is not distance but poor connections that make an area “remote”, therefore remoteness describes a political more than a geographical condition.
of pills, the name of which had been written on the outside by the health officer. They also had a card with instructions on how to use the drugs. The card had been scribbled quickly, and it took us some time to decipher it enough to understand that it was actually the wrong card, referring to different drugs from the ones given.

In any case, none of the women were able to read. We asked whether there was somebody in Loteere able to read the instructions. There wasn’t. So, as the pockets of pills were respectively for malaria, ‘chest problems’, cold, and stomach-ache, we asked how they were going to use the right drug for the right problem. Like the woman with the pills in Loteere, they said: ‘We just take one or two tablets, and usually we get better’.

We believe that this episode offers valuable insights into the way the public representation of pastoral people affects their interaction with the “outside world”, undermining service provision, jeopardising communication and knowledge exchange, and fostering more misunderstanding. What makes a relatively well educated health officer think that it is alright to give different drugs, only identifiable by written names and accompanied by written instructions, to people who can not read (instead of making the effort to deliver the information effectively)? Is there a link between the opacity of the process through which drugs are administered and people’s failure to differentiate within the category of “drugs”, despite being able to make sophisticated distinctions between medicinal plants?

With the present approach, the culture of pastoral Turkana or Karimojong is seen as less evolved than the culture of “modern society” (particularly town’s people) in the rest of the country: pastoral people are seen within the national society as a segment that has remained at a lower level of development. All that they have to do is upgrade. As one culture is supposed to end where the other begins, there is no conceptual ground on which they can meet and communicate. There cannot be exchange, only change; there cannot be dialogue and creation of alternative solutions, only preaching and imitation. Although this may be flattering or reassuring for town’s people, it is not the only way of looking at pastoralism, and it is not proving to be a good one either.

This seems particularly true with regard to state building, and yet this is expected to be one of the core effects of a national education system. Offering a univocal perception of reality and depicting pastoral and modern society as mutually exclusive, the present education system preaches a false unity that only widens the gap. A more fruitful alternative to the present approach to pastoralism, might be to look at Karamoja and Kampala, Turkana and Nairobi, “bush” and “town”, as different cultures, (for example like the French and the English), distinct although neither independent nor separate from one another. In this light, the “national society” is the corporate identity and interaction of distinct cultures, each one dynamic and traditional in its own terms, each one connected with the others and with the national, regional and global realities to different degrees, as a consequence of historical, geographic economic and political variables. In the long process of the political construction of the European Union, for example, millions of people from the different member countries have been offered opportunities to live and work together through endless (still on going) programmes of exchange. Indeed, communication and exchange of human resources on an equal basis proved a crucial condition towards integration. What would be the chances of a strategy designed to achieve unity by, say, “educating” the English people to change in order to become like the French?

The arguments that are used as evidence of pastoralists’ supposed state of underdevelopment and cultural backwardness do not stand up to close analysis. The behaviours and practices of pastoralists, the supposed irrationality of which is used to draw a neat distinction between pastoral people and the “modern” world, are often no different in their essence from behaviours and practices common in the “modern” world
itself. In the following paragraphs we analyse two of the most common predicaments about pastoralists in order to show (a) how they result from a biased and unfruitful approach, and (b) how they affect policies and their interpretation.

1. **Dirt and health education.** We have seen in Part 1 how pastoral people are believed to have very poor hygiene and consequently poor health conditions. The cause of such poor hygiene is identified in “wrong” practices, due to both ignorance and irrational traditions. This is why much emphasis is put on health education programmes and, particularly, on tailored ones, designed to target specific “problems” within the traditional culture in order to “fix” them. However, this should not draw the attention away from a history of inappropriate policies and a huge imbalance in service provision to pastoralists in comparison with other productive groups.

We do not argue that “tradition” is without problems, or that pastoralists’ day to day practices cannot be improved or should not change. Far from it. What we are interested to show here is that this predicament and its range of consequent actions feed primarily on cultural rather than on medical considerations, and this jeopardises the whole process. Behaviours and practices of pastoral people are rejected and condemned largely on a matter of taste, on the grounds of cultural preferences and the social construction of what is acceptable and what is disgusting in the “modern” society. Nevertheless, the rejection is not expressed in those relative terms but argued on moral and universal (scientific) grounds. For example, practices like using cow’s urine for cleaning (or cooking) purposes, or not washing a new born baby with water are not just “disliked” in town, but condemned as irrational and inherently “wrong”. And the judgement, of course, carries the assumption of the superiority of the culture from which the judgement itself is made. Very often, as in the case of not using water on a new born baby (as we have seen in Part 1), irrationality is only apparent, resulting from judging a practice against a supposedly universal system of norms instead of considering it in its context, where it would prove to be perfectly sensible, and usually better than its “modern” alternative.

Why is a Karimojong UPDF soldier, camping in the bush in a shelter of branches and grass, seen — legitimately! — as a modern figure behaving in a perfectly sensible way, but a Karimojong herder camping in the bush more or less in the same way is stigmatized as primitive, living a foolish life away from the comforts of modernization? Why is the field uniform of the soldier seen as modern and appropriate, but the working outfit of the herders, the recently adopted *shuka*, industrially made, imported from Kenya, bought at the market, seen as traditional?

Behaviours that are stigmatized when referred to cattle keepers (Turkana or Karimojong), raise no objections or surprise when they take place in “modern” contexts involving “modern” people. Both in Uganda and in Kenya, several thousands of people die every year in road accidents, a large proportion of which could be prevented by serious regulation and law enforcement on road safety. Why is a preventable death by dysentery in Karamoja or Turkana considered the result of underdevelopment and backwardness, yet a preventable death on the road in the rest of the country is not?

In those cases when rationality is hard to argue, as in preferring to drink stagnant water even when clean water from a borehole is available, the practice in itself is usually no more irrational than many common practices in the “modern world” that, accepted or discouraged, are not seen as the mark of a primitive condition. For example, thousands of educated modern men in Kampala (or Rome, or New York) who prefer not to wear a condom when having sex with a prostitute, despite being fully informed on the risks, never call upon themselves this sort of conclusion.
Countless examples of this sort are easy to find. To take the risk of catching parasites or infections by eating with (visibly) dirty hands, as the pastoralists are blamed for doing, is seen as the effect of ignorance and irrationality, but to take the same risk by grooming a pet dog at the dinner table or sleeping with a cat on the pillow, both common behaviours of pet owners in “modern” settings, somehow is not.

Most people in Europe would be horrified to be served a pastry by a shop keeper who a minute before had been seen picking his nose, but very few mind if he touches their food after having touched money, handled by thousands of people and surely much dirtier than whatever he keeps up his nose.

At the recent Oxford International Conference on Education, the participants were served a lunch of hors d’oeuvres which could only be eaten with hands. Of about one hundred people from the world educational intelligentsia — scholars, analysts, policy makers, curriculum designers, health education theorists, all people with not less than twenty years full time education — no more than two or three seemed to bother to wash their hands before eating. Clearly, invisible dirt bothers modern people much less than the visible dirt: not a very scientific attitude after all.

The mega-chain of fast food restaurants McDonald, makes a point of serving all its food and drinks protected in hygienic containers for the peace of mind of the hygiene-aware modern consumer. Yet, if you want to eat your cheeseburger and your chips, you must use your hands. In large modern towns, hands rub all day on bus seats, underground escalators, toilet handles, and money. Nevertheless, everybody is welcome to check how many of these modern customers wash their hands before happily wrapping their filthy fingers around their sauce-laden cheeseburgers. Cities are crowded with skin diseases, respiratory problems and flu (let alone the rest), but this doesn’t seem to be seen as a sign that “towns people” are backward or irrational, or ignorant.

Indeed, there is so much habituation and so little universality in hygiene wisdom. Amongst the groups we visited, there is no habit of using handkerchiefs: people blow their nose simply by spraying out its content (when indoor, they are careful to “aim” at the edge of the hut and away from other people). Most people in England today would find this habit disgusting, although it must have been common in the recent past, and probably it still is amongst many people who work outdoors. On the other hand, both in Turkana and Karamoja we were always looked at with suspicion and incredulity when we used a handkerchief. One day, in a mixture of gravity and sympathy, an elder in Turkana confronted one of us on the issue: why on earth was he carrying his mucus in his pocket? Was it for some kind of superstition...?

In fact, at a social level the accusation of being dirty is an old way of underlying cultural difference, usually intended to affirm one’s own cultural (and moral) superiority rather than actually being concerned about the other’s bacterial load. In Europe, despite half a century of preparation for the European Union, almost every country has a “story” about the people on the other side of the border ‘who don’t wash themselves’, although only few actually take the implied moral judgement seriously. In England for example, several people interviewed, who attended school in the 1980s, said that they had been taught (sic!) that ‘the French are dirty, in fact they don’t take baths but only have showers’. French people interviewed, had heard of similar stories about the English, for example that it is common that all the members of a family bathe in turn in the same water...

Because of the cultural framework they are caught up in, health services and health education in pastoral areas take the form of a struggle between good and evil, light and darkness, where there can be no middle ground for compromise or for communication.

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22 At the University of Sussex, UK.
and reciprocal understanding. Talking about health education, one primary school teacher got very touchy when we suggested that maybe people don’t wash very often because there is little water. ‘They have to look for water’ he said, and then, when we insisted ‘...but what if there is only enough water for drinking?’, he raised his voice almost telling us off and said shortly ‘they must find the water, they must find it and wash themselves!’.

2. Economic viability and food relief. A considerable amount of data collected since the 1980s indicates that dryland pastoralism is an economically efficient form of land use, given the constraints of ecology, lack of markets, lack of capital investment etc. With particular reference to Uganda, for example, when the full range of costs and benefits are calculated, the figures show that dollar returns per hectare and per animal are respectively two and three times higher under pastoralism than ranching. Similar data have been collected in Kenya23. Although the economical efficiency of dryland pastoralism has been for yeas common knowledge amongst the scholars even at the local level24, the public image of pastoralism remains unaffected.

Our second example, concerns the way the current conceptualisation of “food relief” concurs to fuel the belief that pastoralism is an economically unviable way of life, and therefore pastoral people are underdeveloped and their survival depends on help from the outside.

Food relief is a fairly common situation in developing countries and by no means a prerogative of drylands. Nevertheless, food relief to pastoralists is often used as evidence that the pastoral economy is unviable. The reason for this, of course, being the pastoralists’ inherently primitive and irrational production strategies. However, this view is only “logical” within the framework of beliefs that make up the public and institutional representation of pastoral people.

To the extent to which food relief is an injection of external resources into the pastoral economy in order to keep it going during periods of difficulty, it is no different from what, in other contexts, would be called “subsidy”. In the World Trade Organisation SCM agreement, ‘subsidy’ is defined as ‘a financial contribution by a government or any public body within the territory of a Member, which confers a benefit’. The definition includes the cases in which ‘a government provides goods or services other than general infrastructure, or purchases goods; or where a government entrusts or directs a private body to carry out these functions’25. The form of a subsidy may vary greatly, from cash to tax reduction or delay, from low or no interest loans to guaranteed prices above the real market level. Subsidies are very common in virtually all modern productive contexts: farmers get them, so do small businesses and industry, even banks sometimes get subsidies.

In the case of agriculture, in Europe for example, national governments guarantee prices for certain products independently from the actual market fluctuations. So if the price of maize is very low, the government will top up the difference (with public money), and/or buy the unsold produce at the guaranteed price. In fact, most of the food relief comes

25 WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/scm_e/subs_e.htm#Subsidies)
from these surplus stocks in affluent countries. In other words, before becoming food relief, a stock of maize has previously been unsold surplus in an affluent country, and therefore a state subsidy to the producer. It would be obvious to see also the last step as a form of subsidy like the previous ones, yet this is not the case. When public money is spent to support farmers, all that we see is a value-free, normal economic manoeuvre, but when public money (much less!) is spent to support pastoralists, this is presented as the ultimate evidence of the underdevelopment, inherent weakness and structural failure of the pastoral economy.

Moreover, misrepresentation and generalization hide the necessity to disaggregate the current category of relief into humanitarian interventions, directed towards ensuring the short term survival of destitute people (those who have no labour, no livestock and no social network to rely upon); and economic interventions, designed to (a) support pastoralists who have only recently been impoverished by a specific phenomenon such as an epidemic, a drought or a raid, in order to remain in business instead of selling all their productive animals; or (b) help all productive homesteads to get through the bad times (particularly the dry season) with minimal intake of productive livestock.

**Misrepresentation and explanation**

The public image of pastoralists and pastoralism provides the overall explanatory framework for the common understanding of pastoral livelihood (labour requirements, livestock management, gender relations); for the outcomes of formal interactions between pastoral people and mainstream society (use of services, political representation, economic performance, etc.); and virtually for all the problems in pastoral areas, from diseases to criminality. In this way, the mainstream cultural attitude towards pastoralism plays a silent but pervasive role in undermining pastoral livelihood by reproducing inappropriate policies, pre-empting service provision, turning positive programmes into useless or negative outcomes and preventing communication and effective circulation of knowledge.

With regard to health, for example, governments struggle to change the “hygienic” behaviour of modern people in town, facing huge costs in an effort to contain the rampant spread of sexually transmitted and other contagious diseases. As resources are limited, this leaves remote rural areas (most of which are pastoral areas) with very inadequate health services. Nevertheless, the people in rural areas are blamed for their problems: if they are sick it is because they are backward. What they need is ‘sensitisation’ and ‘awareness growth’. Although both people in town and pastoralists have perfectible hygienic practices, the former group receives expensive therapeutic help but is said to perform better than the other because of modern culture and education; the latter only receives a sermon on prevention but it is said to perform less well because of backwardness and ignorance.

The high child mortality rate in pastoral areas contributes towards exceptionally low life expectancy statistics. In fact, the major killers (TB, malaria and dysentery) spread exponentially with the increase of population density in settlements, particularly when sedentarisation has not been accompanied by necessary service provision and infrastructures. However, the received wisdom on child mortality blames the ignorance of the mothers and the culture of pastoral society, carefully avoiding consideration of any causal relationship with a policy-making culture that promotes sedentarisation and urbanisation (no matter how unplanned and chaotic) as a moral value. Education itself, prescribed as the crucial step forward against child mortality, is usually conceived and delivered as instrumental to sedentarisation.
With regard to gender relations, the popular discourse about pastoralism portrays pastoral women as subjugated and exploited creatures. This generalised narrative, supported with examples of abusive patriarchalism, is usually accepted with little or no criticism as a logic corollary of the supposedly primitive state of pastoral culture. However, cutting-edge anthropological work,\(^{26}\) dismisses this popular narrative as a male-centred construction (sic), in favour of a more critical approach that recognises the complex dynamics of gender relations among pastoralists (as among other groups). On the other hand, the new research points out that imbalance in gender relations and a supremacy of livestock production over other domains of pastoral livelihood (for example material culture), has appeared as a result of decades of male-centred development policies. This is particularly true amongst vulnerable households, dependent on settlements and on support from outside the pastoral circuit.

The misrepresentation of pastoralism of course plays a crucial role in understanding pastoral “development” as alternative to and away from a pastoral livelihood. Loss of livestock and a complete shift to agriculture for example are regularly seen as a positive change. The researchers who carried out the needs assessment in Karamoja in 2000, were faced with a puzzling result according to which it appeared that more than sixty percent of the respondents were actually non-pastoralist. They understand this result in the sense that “people of Karamoja are indeed becoming increasingly an agricultural people [...they] see a better future for themselves in agriculture: that is where they have plans to improve their lives. Information received from the WFP showed that a number of households, even in the cattle-keeping parts of the two districts, do not even own cattle\(^{27}\). Following their interpretation of the data, the researchers suggest recommendations for the adult basic literacy programme. There is never any consideration that the lack of livestock might be an undesired situation and a sign of impoverishment, rather than a rational choice and a sign that things are moving in the best direction. In fact, most of the data of the survey came from Labwor, the county with the most fertile land in Karamoja. Even there, the number of cattle owned by a family is considered to be the first indicator of livelihood security, whilst people actually lament becoming increasingly vulnerable over the last twenty years due to the loss of cattle, which has forced them to depend exclusively on agriculture\(^{28}\).

The examples from the press presented in Part 1 show how this explanatory framework affects the understanding of insecurity. All violence and abuse are explained as “traditional”, avoiding more thorny issues of destitution and impoverishment amongst the pastoral households, as well as an erosion of social cohesion, alcoholism, lack of hope amongst the youth and growing criminality in the settlements.

Both low school enrolment and increasing school enrolment are commonly explained on the basis of the pastoral image, the former as ignorance — overlooking the inadequacy of the service — and the latter as enlightenment and development — avoiding to see increased vulnerability.

Finally, the public image of pastoralism induces to understand pastoral poverty as the automatic result of backwardness, drawing the attention away from more complex and uncomfortable causes such as a tradition of inadequate development policies that has favoured (rather than prevented) a progressive loss of entitlement to crucial resources, the

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\(^{27}\) *Needs Assessment Survey For Functional Adult Literacy in Karamoja Uganda* 2000. Prepared by Anthony Okech, for the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, in collaboration with the World Food Programme in Uganda, Kampala (p. 19).

lack of services, the ideologically driven and chaotic sedentarisation, and the economic and political marginalisation.

Why pastoralists send their children to school

Modern education has been focussed on: (a) introducing general knowledge and competences of the “modern” society and its world, supposed to increase self-esteem and self-confidence as well as providing access to both higher education and income generation opportunities outside the pastoral context (mainly formal education); and (b) introducing specific technical knowledge directed towards increasing productivity — not necessarily in the pastoral sector — and income generation capability (mainly non formal education). These long term, unwarranted effects to date have had little appeal within the pastoral homestead economy. Nevertheless, there are conditions under which pastoralists do send their children to school.

Education as a security net. Although formal education strategies vary from family to family according to many variables, the choice of sending children to school seems to be most commonly linked to an increase in vulnerability.

The families making a living out of livestock appear to look at school education as an opportunity for economic diversification and networking. This is more likely to be the case when the family is not very prosperous or, otherwise, contains members of the extended family who are in a position to gain entitlement to financial support for school expenses, but who for some reason do not have access to enough livestock to be able to make a living as herders.

Heads of very prosperous homesteads are likely to feel that enough security is granted through the livestock and the networks they are able to generate with it. They may not feel the urgency to risk labour and livestock by investing in education, an entirely unknown process, impossible to monitor or to control, with returns that on top of being highly uncertain are also very distant in time. The potential advantage gained from schooled children on the long term is also likely to be relatively small if compared with more established forms of economic diversification, at least as long as a large capital of labour and livestock can be invested. However, even for these prosperous families, the risk of keeping all their capitals in the bush has become huge, due to the frequency and intensity of raids. Today it is not uncommon to hear of people who have minimized their herds and started to send their children to school as a way to keep them alive.

Sometimes, despite the intention, action may be postponed for years. For a countryside Turkana or Karimojong to send a child to school means to entrust unknown people (often with a bad reputation and identified with traditionally hostile national governments), in an unknown environment, with a largely understood task known to give unpredictable results, and with no chance of monitoring the process or communicating with the child for months or even years (when the school is far and there is no money for transport). The attitude of “waiting” for an insider of modern society, somebody who can be trusted, to ‘take care of the situation’, is therefore understandable.

At the other end, families enjoying a low degree of security, not poor but not even powerful and prosperous, are more likely to embark on educating one or more children. In these cases, it is often not an incapacity to make a living as pastoralists that pushes people towards schooling their children. Instead, it is the perception of one’s position within the pastoral economy as being highly precarious. Well rehearsed strategies within the pastoral economy have shrunk so much that, as put by one of the interviewees, the extended family is ‘like a man standing on one leg, who will fall even if slightly pushed’.
Families without strong and balanced assets (labour and livestock), or without a large and strong network of potential supporters, are at great risk of being ruined (sometimes overnight) by unpredictable crisis such as human or animal diseases, raids or drought. These families, whose “insurance policy” within the pastoral sector is not strong enough to cover the risks they face, and who therefore must look elsewhere for additional “cover”, may actually see a positive trade off in investing some labour (often redundant anyway because the herd is small) and some animals (anyway at risk of dying or being stolen) in the “gamble” (at least from a bush perspective) of modern education. The possibility that the educated child will at some point be able to provide an alternative source of support in times of crisis, however small (people are aware of this), is nevertheless perceived as more likely than the possibility of long term survival within the pastoral sector without such support.

The increase in school enrolment over the last decade — commonly referred to as a sign of enlightenment and positive development — should be interpreted as an indicator of structural changes within the pastoral society under the present political and economic pressure, in which more and more families are forced into increasingly precarious livelihood conditions (indeed, independently from whether they remain in the business or fall out of it).

**Education as a way to increase social networks.** The data collected in this study suggest that the pastoral homestead may use the very process of schooling as an opportunity for expanding the family’s social network in order to include supporters from the outside world, particularly as a channel into the “powerful” world of NGOs, churches and other development agencies. This represents an almost immediate advantage, far more certain than the intangible goals of education, and without having to wait until the child completes his/her studies and finds a job. Decades of “sensitization” and intensive pro-schooling propaganda conspire to generate the feeling that by sending a child to school one is pleasing the government and other wealthy and powerful people. Of course, this particular perception of schooling is reinforced by the distribution of free food to school children. Help is therefore likely to come, almost due. Priests, nuns, expatriate development workers are all known to be easily moved into sponsoring a “poor” child in school. And that it is likely to establish a link that may last for years.

The high consideration pastoralists give to powerful memberships could hardly be underestimated. In our sample area, one example (often inextricably linked with education provision) is the conversion to Christianity. We asked an educated man from a pastoral family to explain to us why so many Karimojong have turned to Catholicism. ‘Catholics — he said — have a very long history of missionary work in Karamoja. They have penetrated deeply even into marginal areas and helped many people. They have a lot of structures, vehicles for transport, services. They represent a powerful network and Karimojong value memberships in powerful networks’.

Social capital, like other key elements of pastoral livelihood strategies, seems to undergo a process of change and adaptation to new necessities and opportunities. However, as long as polar oppositions continue to inform our view of the issue, new opportunities will continue to appear in opposition to what is already there. Not surprisingly, these “new opportunities” seem to be treated with a great deal of mistrust by pastoralists. When they actually use them, it is often not as vectors for departing from a “traditional” way of life imagined from the outside as a frozen package of stereotypes, but as survival strategies and avenues for the continuity of real people’s livelihoods, capable of creative adaptation and regeneration.
Why pastoralists do not send their children to school

Education in the pastoral society is a homestead investment strategy that depends on many variables: the degree of livelihood security (present and predictable), the composition of the labour force in relation to herd management and domestic organisation, the gender of the child, the extent to which “the government” appears to be trustworthy from a pastoral point of view, the distance and quality of the nearest school, the attitude and preferences of the child, the existence of a sponsor, the existence of short term benefits, the likely possibility of employment for the educated child in the long run, the composition of the family’s social network, the availability of somebody in town to take care of the child. Decision making about sending a child to school is a process informed by the consideration of these variables. As always in life, some people are better or luckier than others at balancing pros and cons.

In the majority of cases, pastoralists did not seem bothered by the cultural (ideological) content of education and neither did it seem to affect their decision making with regard to sending children to school. Whether modern education is antagonistic to pastoral life or not, pastoralists seemed to believe that it can not have repercussions on children’s attachment to or respect for their own family. That, they say, depends only on one’s good or bad “heart”. Nevertheless, they do raise the issue of moral corruption when the discussion turns to the education of girls — although there are also several practical and economic reasons for keeping girls at home. Under this respect, the initial hypothesis of this research, that the perceived cultural antagonism of school education might have been a major factor in pastoral decision making about modern education, was only partially supported by the findings with reference to girls and openly disproved by the findings with reference to boys.

Although pastoralists showed very little awareness of what goes on in modern education, an overall understanding of the quality of the experience in school is not beyond their reach. They do go to the settlements, they see when the schools are no more than run-down empty buildings, see when all that the children do is run around unsupervised, or stay crowded inside unhealthy roasting-hot metal buildings; they understand whether “something” is actually happening or the children are just wasting their time. In certain cases, they even know through their acquaintances in town whether a school is worth going to or not. When the nearest school is not judged to be a good investment, the decision to send a child to a more distant school is often affected by the substantial increase in costs as well as risk, and by poor information.

Even when many other variables support the decision to send a child to school, the lack of an education option within a safe distance together with the costs of school education — relevant even at primary level in a context in which there are no opportunities of employment below Senior 4 and no substantial salaries below university qualification — may delay action for years.

In all cases, investing in the education of all children, or even just all the boys, is an option only when livestock has been lost, the homestead as an economic unit has broken down, and people are forced to seek alternative ways of making a living. The notion of individual development embedded in the idea of education for all is extraneous to the pastoral culture and economy. The minimal productive unit is the homestead and even the homestead depends on social networking for its existence as a productive unit. In this perspective of homestead investment — team work within the family business — access to modern education for each homestead is in fact “education for all”.

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29 I owe the understanding of this point to a discussion with Niek van der Steen, teacher and doctoral student at the University of London, Institute of Education.
A life in between

Pastoralists’ separation from the “modern” world is probably the major assumption at the core of the public image of pastoralism. This is due to the way pastoralism is publicly understood and, of course, also to the way “modern” and “modernisation” are represented. Pastoral culture is seen as belonging to the past. The fact that it is found in our modern present is an accident, an oversight that needs to be fixed, the quicker the better. Modernisation, is seen as something ready made, that pastoralists are supposed to imitate and embrace “as it is”, and in doing so shift from a past in which they are supposed to be trapped, to the present. Assigned as they are to different “time zones”, pastoral and “modern” realities are never supposed to meet, therefore any exchange between them is out of the question. The separation and incompatibility of pastoral and modern worlds could not be more clear cut.

If exchange is excluded, change is imperative. In fact, change is said to be the only possible relation between pastoralists and the modern world, and the only possible action pastoralists can take in order to exist in the present time. However, “change” here does not mean free and creative adjustment to globalising forces. Instead, change is understood in a very limited (and limiting) sense, as change towards a situation that is already in place: imitation, or guidance through a pre-ordained sequence of steps, ruled by the prescription of “doing like us”. This is how education comes to play its role, with the aims of national unity and state building as major drivers (understandably so, as if pastoral and modern society are mutually exclusive, pastoralism appears as a politically centrifugal and disruptive force).

Formal education is presented and perceived as an alternative to pastoralism (a departure from it), as part of a wide pastoral development discourse articulated around a long string of polar oppositions: nature vs civilisation; nomadic vs sedentary; traditional vs modern; ignorance vs education; irrational vs rational; dirty vs clean; women’s subjugation vs gender sensitivity; group tyranny vs individual freedom; prosperity vs poverty; chaos vs order; barbarian violence vs Christian values; dependence vs independence; etc. Ultimately, “them” vs “us”. All this, as far as representations are concerned.

On the ground however, there seems to be much more articulation than separation between pastoralism and the “outside world”, and pastoralists do not appear to be in the past but very much in the present like everybody else.

Over the years, pastoralism has become an increasingly complex social reality. Today it is less possible than ever to separate pastoralists from non-pastoralists, and even more so at the level of the homestead rather than the individual. The “pastoral” social network has constantly expanded and may now include a wide range of figures from the “outside world”: educated and semi-educated people in town, soldiers and police, government officers, politicians from as far as Kampala and Nairobi, nuns and priests of various denominations, NGO staff and even expatriates.

Also pastoralists’ material life includes many “modern” and industrial items: shukas and other clothes, rubber (tyre) sandals, blankets, jerrycans, cars, motorbikes, and public

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30 This view is part of a much broader issue, as imitation seems precisely the way many urban people in Turkana or Karamoja understand modernisation for themselves. That is, a make up, in which symbolic value and appearance stand in the place of functionality: bulbs and refrigerators without reliable power; sinks, showers and toilets without running water; computers disconnected from the socket; tarmac roads full of huge holes; “huts” in tin rather than mud; “western” clothes worn in the extreme heat; luxury cars without roads; bookshops and libraries with no books; TVs and mobile phones without networks; and everywhere, a feast of American trainers and baseball caps.
transport, human and animal drugs, *sufurias*, plastic cups and carafes, beads (usually from Eastern Europe), machetes, metal containers for storage, matches, ploughs, hoes, automatic weapons, boreholes, etc.

Although at a glance, the situation may look like people in the bush are dependent on the town for basic needs and services (we should ask ourselves why such an impression is so easily conveyed and accepted), in reality, interdependence would be much more appropriate to describe the relationship between town and countryside.

Indeed, most of the money circulating in Karamoja or Turkana arrives through churches and aid organizations in order to fund development or food relief projects officially directed towards pastoral people. However, most if not all of this wealth is likely to remain in town, pumped into all aspects of the local economy through the creation of jobs, the consumption of goods from the local markets and shops, house rentals, the use of restaurants and bars, the purchasing of petrol, the building of new offices, the use of hotels, the payment of allowances to government officers sent on training workshops.

Moreover, if the pastoral homestead relies on its educated members at times of crisis, family members in town rely on the family herd when the need for a lump sum suddenly arises, say for continuing education or building a house. There is also another way the pastoral homestead gives support to the educated in town: through lending labour. When (often) town’s people own livestock, these animals are looked after by people in the bush (usually relatives). In virtually all the households of educated people in town there are dependants from the countryside. The boys sometimes go to school, the large majority of the girls help or do most of the housework often only for food. This allows educated women to have a salaried job, and for their children to go to school, as the dependant girls take care of the house and act as baby-sitters.

Indeed, both in Turkana and Karamoja a considerable if not prominent proportion of town’s prosperity seems to result from the existence of the pastoral economy in the countryside, either directly as a pool of cheap labour and a bridge to resources that would otherwise be hard to exploit (livestock/pasture), or indirectly as a pole of attraction for money and jobs (aid/development). In a way, part of the family co-operotive now lives in town just as another part lives in the kraal. Many pastoral homesteads today are run across three contexts: village, kraal, and town31. However, whilst the relationships between village and kraal are clear and well established, those between countryside and town are still fuzzy and unstable.

Although almost everybody lives somewhere in between the two supposedly separated worlds, “in between” there is a grey zone, a cultural and conceptual void: the space is not on the map, what happens there is not visible because there is no conceptual ground or language to describe it. People “in between” find it hard to talk about themselves as belonging to anything other than one of the two sides, independently of how they feel.

Modernisation comes to pastoralists as a set menu, not as a complex of nuances and opportunities to shape one’s own dynamic adjustment. The “modern” items used in day-to-day pastoral life, for example, have to be “borrowed” from different purposes and adapted to pastoral necessities. The *sufurias* are hammered to increase their capacity and

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31 Or even four contexts: according to a recent study on Karimojong institutions, a new setting is common today, intermediate between village and grazing camps (nawii) and defined as ‘transition nawii’ (Otim P.O. 2001. *Pastoral Institutions and Development: The Karamoja Experience*, Report under the ISS/OSSREA Project on Pastoralism and Resource Competition in Eastern Africa, Kampala).
stability on the hearth\textsuperscript{32}. Strings of beads from the market are undone and re-threaded into belts and more complicated multicolour necklaces. Plastic bags are ripped into pieces and made into small sachets for tobacco. Small metal boxes are filled with precious little objects such as matches (a box of which can last a year to a warrior). Small plastic bottles from town (once containing eye drops or body lotions), make great snuff containers. Large metal boxes, sold in town for storage, once worn out are recycled as water troughs. Recently, some people have discovered that with a large tarpaulin they can quickly build temporary water proof shelters to make life easier during the frequent movements at the beginning of the rainy season. Unfortunately, whilst iron sheets are sold every where in pastoral districts, tarpaulins are no where to be found.

Although the global (modern) market is flooded with outdoor equipment of all qualities and prices, it is impossible to find such goods in pastoral areas, despite their largely nomadic population. One can buy a sleeping bag or a tent in Nairobi but not in Lodwar. Not even a raincoat is available in Moroto. Markets expand by offering people commodities that match their needs (real or imaginary), but pastoralists’ needs are deduced from the modernisation paradigm: building latrines and permanent tin-roofed brick-houses are thought to be their priorities, whilst neglecting, for example, to take advantage of “modern” opportunities to provide better protection from the weather whilst living outdoors.

In fact, at the root of the public representation of pastoralists there seems to be no clear distinction between the ideology of modernisation and the actual “modern” world. The polar opposition between pastoral and “modern” realities described above is conceptually possible only because a simplified and undifferentiated idea of pastoralism is outlined against an ideological construction of the “modern” world as a meaningful, coherent, and ordered picture. However, far from being coherent and homogeneous, the modern world proves to be a chaos full of twists and contradictions, and pastoralism is as complex and dynamic as anything else in it.

Instead of increasing people’s chances to expand their own experience of the world, making up their own mind about it, understanding it in their own way, choosing what they like and leaving what they don’t, pastoral development is usually narrowed down to catechising people into an ideology of modernisation where experience is mediated, understanding means to believe, and all the choices are already made.

The data collected in this study suggest that a participatory approach\textsuperscript{33} offers no guarantee against this risk. Increasing attention has been paid to pastoralists’ cultural specificity, indigenous knowledge and customary institutions over the last twenty years. However, the results have usually been poor and very little seems to have actually changed in pastoral development policies and practices on the ground.

A participatory approach can, all too easily, leave unchallenged the ideological opposition between pastoral and modern reality, as well as the teleological perspective at the core of it, that is the idea that the two realities are not both part of our time, but that one is the destiny of the other. Pastoral development continues to be see as an unavoidable transition from past to present. In this case, a participatory approach only adds an understanding of such a change as empowering inclusion rather than mere assimilation, and acknowledges that there are aspects of the “past” that may be worthwhile carrying into the “present”.


\textsuperscript{33} The participation paradigm is fully integrated into development practices both in Turkana and Karamoja.
Indeed, pastoralists’ public representation appears to be even more misleading when at work in conjunction with a participatory approach. The assumption of a polar opposition between pastoral and modern societies induces to think of each side as an undifferentiated group with no connection with the other. Thus, whatever data flow out of a PRA exercise with pastoral people are automatically authenticated as the view of that side and afford legitimacy to the consequent actions. However, this fails to recognise (indeed hides) the actual entanglement and circular feedback of unmonitored information, interests and beliefs between “bush” and “town”, often within the extended families themselves.

A good example of this circular feedback is the way top-down pastoral development “solutions” that were fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s, and finally disproved in the 1980s and 1990s, are now enjoying a revival “from within”. Having filtered down to the herders along the channels of poorly informed town acquaintances and local politicians, those very same solutions are now demanded by “the pastoralists” themselves during participatory need assessment processes. Turkana herders that we met at the border with Uganda, fed by decades of development rumors and propaganda, now in order to “resolve” the problem of water scarcity ask for dams ‘like in Jie country’.

Quite clearly, there is no quick fix for this scale of problem. Good ideas may give some temporary euphoria, but as long as they are aimed at short term and narrowly focussed interventions, they quickly deteriorate in the face of personal convictions and institutional attitudes rooted in the public image of pastoralists. To fix that, which is the real challenge and the only way forward, will take not less than a generation and a lot of goodwill.

The work for the creation of the European Union is a good example of how this kind of process can be long and tormented. It also represents a mine of lessons learned, at least once one steps aside from the traditional view of “pastoral” and “modern” societies as helplessly distant and incommensurable cultures, and looks at them simply as two societies of the present time. Pastoral and mainstream societies in their own countries have many distinctive characteristics, having developed in different contexts and under different shaping forces. But as is the case between national societies in Europe, they also have developed in relation to one another, being largely entangled and overlapping at virtually all levels (economic, cultural, political, religious).

Statements about the ideal unity of national society are worthless as long as “national society” is not a concept negotiated between all the parts, but remains synonymous with the most powerful group. Inclusion of pastoralists in a “national society”, therefore calls for a re-thinking of national society itself, the way it is understood and represented: not as something which is already in place and which pastoralists only need to become members of, but as something that will exist only when all the stakeholders have had their voice in shaping and building it. In the presence of diverse social identities, unity and state building are more likely to come from facilitating the open, positive and frequent encounter of such identities, rather than from trying to force one into the shape of the other. Whilst nothing new comes out of imitation, encounters are dynamic situations with the power to generate new realities by combining diversity rather than losing it.

The next section offers some suggestions for the way forward.

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34 There are four dams and three valley tanks in Jie county. Of the dams, only two are functional although one is incomplete and the other is half silted. Only one valley tank is functional. Even so, the unusual (although temporary) availability of water, has led to unsustainable concentrations of people and animals with subsequent increases in disease, overgrazing, land degradation and conflict.
PART 4: POTENTIAL ROLE FOR AGENCIES

The data collected in this study suggest that the misrepresentation of pastoralism is a serious obstacle to the design and implementation of adequate pastoral development policies, as well as of effective service provision in pastoral areas. Poverty eradication amongst pastoral groups through education is conditional to a radical review of the way pastoralists and pastoralism are currently represented within the mainstream national culture. The following set of recommendations is based on three points:

- there is a need for fresh and specific data on the logic of the pastoral system, targeting systematically each of the issues commonly used to argue pastoralism’s fundamental inadequacy: economic inefficiency, health and nutritional problems, gender imbalance etc.;
- at the same time, it is necessary to work to ensure that rich and up to date information finds its way into the education system (from primary to higher education), the public administration and the press, as well as reaching pastoral people themselves;
- there is a need to create systematic and structured opportunities for pastoral people to increase their experience of the outside world and their capability to effectively challenge the public image of pastoralism and articulate their own view in non-pastoral settings.

Outside agencies have an essential role to play in strengthening local capabilities whilst, on the other hand, creating the conditions for a change of perspective at institutional level in the national framework.

There is also an excellent opportunity for the government to be instrumental in facilitating and accelerating the process as well as building on its results.

National framework

National development indicators need to be reviewed to effectively represent the livelihood of pastoral people. For example, the level of social capital is appropriate to measure development amongst pastoral homesteads, including both bush and town, whilst the number of latrines is only meaningful with regard to large or permanent settlements. The level of literacy and school enrolment should refer to distribution across pastoral homesteads rather than absolute number: the increase in number of children in school, tending towards totality, is more likely to be the result of an increased vulnerability of a pastoral homestead. Seasonal oscillations in food availability (apart from the case of a serious drought) are not an indicator of poverty in the pastoral context, although they make the problem worse when combined with other factors that are so, such as small herds and/or low levels of social capital.

Pastoralists lack legal/formal recognition as productive categories. Whilst “farmer” or “fisherman” clearly refer to productive categories with their relative legal status and
rights, “pastoralist” largely remains used as an ethnologic category. This fails to represent
the situation de facto whilst twisting the process of economic integration into meandering
and illogical trajectories.

There are moves by members of parliament from pastoral districts to take the initiative to
help to transform institutional views and attitudes towards pastoralism. This would raise
the political profile of pastoral exclusion and should be supported.

Press coverage of pastoral areas is dominated by a taste for folklore and blood shed.
There is a need to work with major newspapers in order to provide more accurate
reporting. Journalists who understand about pastoral districts should be identified and
supported.

**Box 11. National framework**

- support new studies on the logic of the pastoral system: economic efficiency,
environmental sustainability;
- review national standard development indicators to match actual pastoral livelihood
strategies and living conditions;
- give pastoralists (men and women on an equal basis) full institutional recognition
and legal status as a productive category;
- promote counter informative courses, seminars and workshops in educational and
institutional settings;
- support initiatives by MPs to change institutional approaches to pastoralism;
- encourage better reporting on pastoralism in the national press.

**District level**

Most of the school teachers and government officers in pastoral areas come from a non-
pastoral background, don’t speak the local language and are ill-informed about pastoral
living conditions and the complexity of modern pastoral society. However, a significant
proportion of them show an interest and readiness to by-pass the common misrepresentation of pastoralists when given a chance to do so. Teaching personnel and field officers should receive appropriate training for their work with pastoral people, including up to date information on pastoral livelihood strategies, language training and first hand experience of pastoral living conditions.

The use of literacy in the context of service provision is a barrier to communication with
non-literate people, only resulting in waste of resources and learning opportunities and
making future communication more difficult.

There are moves by informal groups of educated local people to challenge the public
image of pastoralism, promoting a more informed and complex view of the reality in
pastoral areas. This represents an important resource for civil society and should be
supported.
Box 12. District level

- promote specialised courses for teachers and administration officers working in pastoral areas;
- promote a culture of two-way communication and knowledge sharing within service provision;
- explore ways of making the administration of service provision more receptive and responsive towards solutions generated in the field;
- provide field officers with special training for effectively communicating with non-literate people;
- encourage and support civil society action that challenges the national image of pastoralism.

Education system

With regard to education in particular, innovative and more responsive solutions are undermined by education systems centred on the school setting, that marginalise alternative ways of learning into subordinate or preparatory roles.

Alternative education should be allowed full integration into the national education system enjoying the same status as school education. It should become possible for a student, if needed, to reach university level entirely through non-school education (for example on the Australian model).

Access to university in disciplines leading to specialisations particularly needed in pastoral areas (for example human and animal medicine) should become possible for local people through selection, focussing on the skills and knowledge specifically required for the discipline, rather than on the general curriculum of primary and secondary school.

Box 13. Education system

- allow non-formal education to become a fully functional alternative to school-based learning (up to university level), fully integrated within the national education system and enjoying the same status as formal education;
- update the national curriculum and school text books, and promote the updating of higher education courses in regard to the logic of the pastoral system;
- create special examination boards for selection to specific university courses on the basis of necessary knowledge and skills rather than formal qualification;
- create funding schemes for people from pastoral households, who are committed to working in pastoral areas having qualified (selected disciplines).

Alternative ways of learning

Pastoralists’ poor information and lack of confidence about the “outside world” makes it hard for them to challenge their public image. At present, knowledge and confidence about the “outside world” is largely a by-product of education, school meaning leaving home and boarding in increasingly distant places as the education career continues. There
is no reason, however, why an experience of the world should not be pursued on its own. Special exchange programmes in combination with adult courses of English for the non-literate could offer rural people (not just students) the chance to “take a look” at the world without having to embark on a long process of education, or being sent to war (the other traditional way). Long-term exchange programmes could be with other pastoral groups on the model of those between students or professionals of different European countries (Socrates, Tempus, HOPE, etc.). Short-term exchange schemes could be organised between university students interested in pastoral life and language (from all disciplines) and pastoralists interested in doing an intensive course of English in the capital or abroad. As all these schemes should be closely monitored from a logistic, psychological and medical point of view through a network organisation, many outside agencies could use their local offices as an operational base.

The information flow to and from pastoral areas is very poor and unreliable, often monopolised by bottle-neck figures, or entrusted to education activities that reach only a few pastoral people and rarely those involved in decision making.

Current interdependence of literacy and English language at school, in social settings where English is a foreign language, hinders the learning of both literacy and English. There is a clear interest amongst adults in learning English for communicating with government people and NGO staff within and across the border. Indeed, pastoralists would probably be aided in such a task by unusually developed mnemonic and oral communication skills. However, they are held back by the obstacle (perceived as huge) of having to learn how to read and write at the same time. On the other hand, children who could learn basic literacy within weeks are held back by not understanding the English speaking teacher.

The education of girls is further hindered by parents’ fear about their safety in the school environment and by the scarcity of valuable alternatives to school education.

**Box 13. Alternative ways of learning**

- explore opportunities for pastoral households to gain first-hand knowledge of the outside world (including other pastoral societies); experiment with long and short term exchange programmes;
- provide support for and training in policy analysis and lobbying;
- create courses of spoken English designed for non-literate adults. For example, distance courses supported by periodical meetings with a tutor (as in the Distance Learning Programme in Mongolia);
- promote early primary education in local languages, with teaching of English as a foreign language;
- experiment with ways of ensuring girls’ safety and parental monitoring within the education context;
- provide financial support for girls’ education and schemes designed to guarantee the continuity of their education career up to university;
- explore ways of improving communication between towns and rural areas in order to leave children in school less isolated from their parents;
- support educational visits to the capital, national parks and rural areas in other districts.
Social capital

Education provision ignores the structure of the pastoral economy (based on homesteads rather than individuals) and its dependence on social capital. Normally education is geared towards the individual, is aimed at providing an alternative to pastoral livelihood and, as for formal education, is often meant to hinder children’s socialisation into the pastoral society.

Nevertheless, the pastoral enterprise values the education of some of its members as a gateway to new opportunities for expanding their network into the “outside world”.

As social capital is pastoralists’ most valued and most reliable resource against vulnerability, this represents a very important role that education could play in fighting poverty.

There is a precious opportunity to recast education to support, generate and diffuse social capital.

Box 14. Social capital

* explore the potential role of the education process for fostering pastoral social capital;
* experiment with (cross ethnic) school twinning, and exchange schemes;
* experiment with exchange programmes geared towards pastoral households in different countries;
* promote and support adult learning associations;
* experiment with cross-ethnic school events (sporting competitions, ritualised “raiding” competitions?);
* experiment with exchange programmes between pastoral homestead and university, for example for pastoralists interested in taking an intensive English course and students interested in a first hand experience of pastoral life;
* explore ways of making the present role of education as a security net more reliable (for example by diminishing the risk of fall-out because of financial difficulties and by linking education more tightly to the job market).