

Education and Nomadic Pastoralism in Ethiopia

Ziyn Engidasew*

Introduction

Pastoralists are primarily raising and depending on livestock. Their products are used as their sources of food and income (Dawit, 2000). Pastoralism which is a way of life for pastoralist is one form of nomadism. Nomadism is any type of existence characterized by an absence of fixed domicile. It reflects a life style based up on maintenance of herds of animals, which mainly migrate in search of natural vegetations, grasses and water (Awogbade, 1991).

Nomadic pastoral people have distinct cultural characteristics that are depicted by their varying residential and social settings. They are the most marginalized groups in the acquisition of education and other social services, because of their constant migration and dispersions. They are also considered as backward and change resistant. Thus, the rate of illiteracy among nomadic pastoralists in many African countries ranges from 80-100 percent (Ezeomah, 1995).

According to the World Declaration of Education for All (WCEA, 1990), education is a fundamental right for all people throughout the world. Ethiopia is committed herself to offer basic education to all sectors of the society regardless of any differences. In this paper attempt is made to highlight who are pastoral groups in Ethiopia and the trends of educational provision for this group of the society. What did the provision of education for pastoralists look like in the past regimes and at present is also another concern of this paper.

* Lecturer, Nazareth College of Technical Teachers Education.

Nomadic Pastoralists in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, pastoral nomads are estimated to be about 8 million, which constitutes some 13 percent of the country's total human population. Almost all are found in the marginal border areas and they inhabit the low land peripheral parts of the country. The rangeland inhabited by pastoralists constitutes about 500,000km² land areas of the nation. These societies belong to some 29 Nilothic and Cushitic groups spread over six regions of the country which are mainly in the Afar and Somali regions, Borena and Debub Omo Zones of Oromia and SNNPR regions (Getachew, 2001:1).

Table 1: Pastoral Groups, Location and Estimated Population in Ethiopia

Geographical Locations	Ethnic Groups	Human Population
North-East	Afar, Somali, Argoba, Oromo	1,400,00
South	Oromo, Somali	2,577,522
South - East	Somali	3, 383, 165
South - West	Dasentech, Hamer, Mursi, Bodi, Bumie, Bena, Erbore, Tsemay, Nuer, Anuak, Ari, Bali, Dimi, Nyangatom, Chai, Trima, Ruli, Dizi, Tishanor, Muguji	557, 132
West	Koma, Shinasha Gumuz, Beneshangul	37, 523
Estimated Total		7,955,342

Source - Dawit Abebe (2000)

As shown in the table, in Ethiopia a pastoralist specialization may not be confined to a particular ethnic group, but rather it seems to be an adaptive feature of many communities living under conditions which make extensive livestock keeping an effective way of utilization the natural vegetation (Hogg: 1997:6).

With regards to ownership of the country's livestock, the pastoral communities are believed to own the most significant. In Ethiopia, livestock herds and flocks are generally at about 27 million cattle, 24 million sheep, 18 million goats, 1 million camels and 7 million equines. This accounts for the largest concentration of domestic herds in Africa. Of the total, it is estimated that the pastoral nomads own 40 percent of the cattle, 75 percent of the goats, 25 percent of the sheep, 20 percent of the equines and 100 percent of the camel, (Arsano, 2002:1).

Moreover, some of the biggest rivers in the country, like Genale, Wabishebelle, Omo, Baro, Akobo, Abay, Tekeze and Awash pass through areas inhabited by pastoral communities. Almost all the national parks are found in the pastoral areas (Arsano, 2002:2). In spite of this great actual potential economic importance they have, there is meager information available on pastoralists and pastoralism in Ethiopia (Melakou, 2002:1). They live in terrible poverty and are exposed to periodic droughts and famines. Social services like education, health, transport and communication links with the rest of the country and other basic development infrastructures are relatively low and poorly developed in the pastoral areas of the country (ibid: 12).

Education Provision for Pastoralists in Ethiopia

As mentioned earlier, the nomadic pastoralists inhabit the low lands of the country, mostly between the highlands and the border areas of the country. This is estimated to cover 60-65 percent of the total area. They predominantly live in frequent change of domicile in search of grazing lands for their livestock. Because of this and other interrelated cultural and economic factors, the nomadic people of Ethiopia are among the most educationally disadvantaged in the country (UNESCO, 2002:30).

In the past, the political and administrative policies led to two types of actions in relation to educational provision for pastoralists. First, they

established dual systems of secular and religious traditional institutions. Secondly, special attention was given to the education of the sons of tribal chiefs (Ahmed, 1990:70). For instance, during the Imperial regime, some children of tribal chiefs, who had intimacy to the central governors, were chanceful to come to urban centers to attend schooling especially in boarding schools with the support of government fund. Since they were selected from prominent chieftain families, they were few in number. The main aim of the education was to prepare them for the monarchical political leadership (Sileshi and Kidane, 1995:35).

The effort made by the former socialist government for development of educational service provision in the nomadic pastoral area was very insignificant. Even though, the nomadic areas shared the same educational problems with the other neglected and underprivileged people in the country, the problems were more severe among the pastoral nomadic groups because a few primary schools established for them were concentrated in towns and agricultural plantations (Ibid: 36).

The issue of provision of education in pastoral areas had not been seen differently from that of other areas. The pastoral mobility and their life style had not been taken into consideration. For instance, the kind of education provided in the area had not been related and was not beneficial to the pastoral way of life (Taffesse, 2000:32). Moreover, nomadic pastoralists could not send their children to school due to their constant migration (Sileshi and Kidane, 1995:36).

In general, the past regimes had completely marginalized pastoral areas in terms of access to public education. Therefore, they have failed to bring educated pastoralists to the leadership level except in few instances. Consequently, those who rule pastoral areas have seriously lacked of leadership capacity in the contemporary federal administration of Ethiopia (Melakou, 2002:2).

At present, the development of education services to the underprivileged nomadic society has attracted attention. The

government has acknowledged the existence of inequalities and has made commitments towards remedy the imbalances. To mention some measures, Article 89 No. 4 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia states that *"the Government shall provide special assistance to Nations, Nationalities and peoples least advantaged in economic and social development"*. The National Education and Training Policy (1994) also states that *"special financial assistance will be given to those who have been deprived of educational opportunities and steps will be taken to raise the educational participation of deprived regions"*. Moreover, the policy indicated that local languages as a medium of instruction, decentralized curriculum, flexible school calendar should be used etc. (UNESCO/ IIEP/2002,30).

As follow-ups to these directives, intensive studies have been carried out to determine where to locate and construct boarding schools in the nomadic areas of the country. Based on the studies, there has been a plan to open 18 boarding schools (some are already opened) in the following areas: Gambella, Kumuruk, Negele, Gode, Gewane, Akobo, Chagine, Moyale, Harewa, Awasa, Maji, Asosa, Pawe, Elkere, Kebordahre, Dalecha and Guraferda (Sileshi and Kidane, 1995:37).

The construction of mobile schools has also been proposed as a strategy to provide education for the nomadic society. The Oromia region has also been experimenting the feasibility of the strategy suggested in a pilot nomadic school in Borena Zone. As the experiment showed, these schools have been found to be less expensive than boarding schools, so the action plan has also intended to pilot the same in Afar region.

The boarding school in Addis Ababa has also catered for children and adults from deprived regions including Afar, Somali, Beneshangule and Gambella. This school, known as "Ediget Adult's Boarding School," was established in 1998 in Addis Ababa. Its main goal is to produce educated manpower for the regions with in short period of time (UNESCO/IIEP/2002:31).

Generally, a conducive and comprehensive policy environment has been created and some tangible measures to increase the participation of the nomadic population in education have been effected. However, primary school enrollment in the pastoral areas of Ethiopia is still very low as the figure in the following table shows.

Table 2: Primary School enrolment Rates in the Nomadic Area of Ethiopia (2000/2001)

Location of School	Number of Primary Schools	School age children	Sq.km per school	GER %		
				M	F	T
Afar	131	242601	733	12.7	9.8	11.5
Borena	337	347874	284	68.2	24.1	46.8
Debub Omo	77	78990	309	-	-	30.5
Somali	250	807841	1282	13.4	7.2	10.3
National	11780	12904379	93	66.3	46.1	57.4

Source: MOE - Educational Annual Abstract and UNESCO/ IIEP 2002:30

As the table shows, the gross enrolment ratio in primary schools in most of the nomadic area was very low as compared to the national average enrolment in 2000/2001. Even in the existing conventional schools, those who were enrolled were not children of local community members, but people who came from the highlands and settled in the nomadic low land areas. Thus, the participation rates of children from the nomadic population would definitely be much lower (UNESCO, 2002:31). This situation is a series of national challenges for universalization of primary education as it is stipulated in the education sector development program of the country.

Conclusion

As indicated earlier, the education provision for pastoralists was insignificant in the previous regimes in Ethiopia. At present with the aim of expanding access to education, the government has introduced education policy and education sector development

program. It has also acknowledged the disparities in educational provisions in different parts of the society. Despite the tremendous efforts and gains made in the past few years, great challenges are remained in the provision of education for pastoral nomads who live in geographically remote peripheral regions.

Education provision for pastoral Nomads in the country is crucial for many reasons. It is obvious that the Ethiopian government is committed to offer quality primary education for all sections of the society. This is the main concern of the new education and training policy. We can not attain the goal of equality of opportunity and universalizing primary education as far as these people are educationally neglected.

Education is central for the development of the social and economic life of any society. Can be a solution to many, though it is not a panacea of the problems the nomadic pastoralists face. The country has recently prepared an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRSP) in which, education and capacity building are important instruments for achieving the goals of both the development as well as the interim poverty reduction programme.

It is only through education that the immense economic potential of the area inhabited by pastoralists can be exploited to contribute for national economy. It is also through education that their nomadic life style can be improved. Thus, promoting educational provision to the pastoralists should be given due attention by federal and regional government officials.

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