

Youth participation in capturing pastoralist knowledge for policy processes

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by CHARLES KESA

Introduction

I am programme manager of the Pastoral Youth Leadership (PYL) project, supported by Horn Relief. As such I have the overall responsibility of managing and providing technical advice to the PYL team. The project is being implemented in Sanaag Region, a territory disputed between Somaliland and Puntland governments.¹ This semi-arid area is mainly inhabited by pastoralists. Their livelihoods are on the decline due to pressure on grazing land caused by multiple factors such as prolonged drought and charcoal burning.

This article shows how determined youth involved in the PYL project, as part of their learning process, went back to their pastoral roots amid challenges of insecurity and a hostile environment. They conducted a pastoral community survey through a unique, innovative and participatory ‘camel caravan’ process. The evidence generated through the survey brought to the fore the situation of



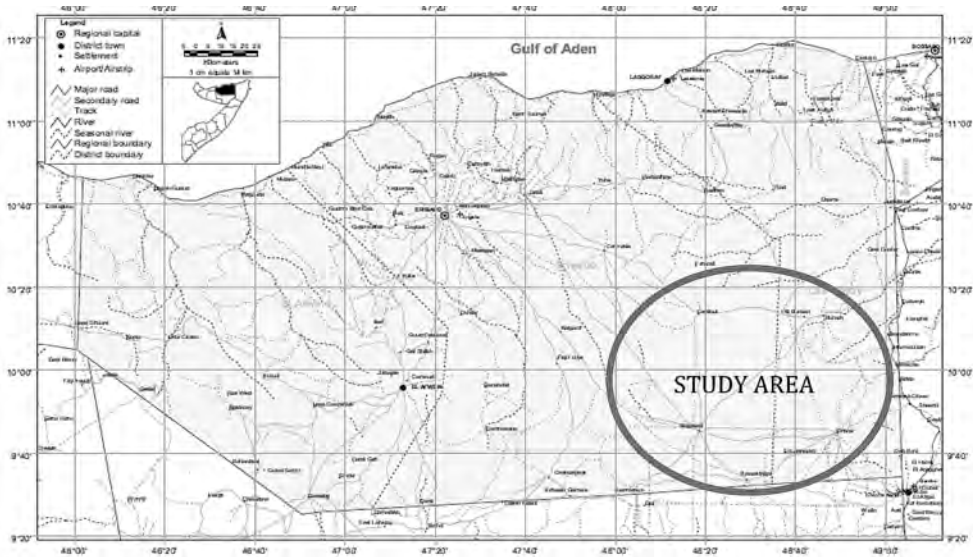
Photo: Horn Relief

Prolonged drought has led to much loss of livestock.

pastoralists in this region. Through the camel caravan process, indigenous pastoralist knowledge was transformed into policy knowledge that could be taken up and used by government policy makers and development partners such as aid agencies and NGOs.

The Pastoral Youth Leadership (PYL) project
PYL is a non-formal education project which started in 2002. It targets pastoral

¹ Puntland and South Central Somalia are part of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Mogadishu, whereas Somaliland is autonomously governed.



Map of study area, Sanaa Region. Source: (FSAU, 2005a)

youth aged between 15 and 25 years in six villages (Badhan, Lasqoray, Baragaha Qol, Hingalol, Elbuh and Dhahar) in Sanaa Region. These are mainly youth who would otherwise have never had an opportunity to access education and livelihood opportunities. They include internally displaced persons (IDPs) displaced from other regions of Somalia by civil strife and feuding among families and clans, and also pastoralists who have lost livestock and livelihood opportunities due to successive droughts. They also include pastoralist youth who have moved from purely pastoral areas to semi-urban areas in search of education and training, or alternative livelihood opportunities. Some are males who are expected to fend for their families; some are girls seeking educational opportunities or refuge and safety when their families had to disperse due to prolonged drought (this is a common coping mechanism in times of drought and hunger). Some are orphans and vulnerable. The project has so far made a difference in the lives of over 1000 youth (Horn Relief, 2011).

The project's curriculum focuses on four thematic areas:

- natural resource management, on which pastoralism is dependent;
- human health, to address the pastoralists' poor access to modern health services;
- animal husbandry, the core mainstay of pastoralism; and
- leadership and governance.

The last of these is critical in an environment where there are scarce resources and where a formal central government is in effect replaced with informal pastoral governance (see Box 1).

Through PYL's experience gained over the years, the youth involved in informal pastoral governance have been at the forefront of community-driven initiatives that address local challenges. These initiatives include dissemination of health messages, improved animal husbandry and safeguarding the environment. They have also been central in continuous assessment of the needs of those communities during times of crisis and providing plausible solutions. In particular, the youth tend to take leadership roles in community peace-building initiatives and are often called upon to facilitate community dialogue, or to mediate between parties in conflict with each other.

Box 1: Pastoral governance

The livelihoods of pastoralists depend mainly on livestock and their products. However, today the pastoral way of life is under constant threat thanks to a long history of clan conflict, war, recurring drought and environmental degradation, which exacerbates conflict over pasture and water for livestock.

The sustained absence of a strong central government has affirmed the importance, survival and continuity of pastoral governance. This is a lightly structured indigenous system of decentralised self-governance based on indigenous Somali cultural governance practices. Its aim is to address issues of internal and cross-boundary conflict affecting pastoralists. These include safeguarding the environment which is key to their survival and that of their livestock, ensuring access to meagre resources for their animals and control over their land.

Consensus is often reached through inter- and intra-clan dialogue among clan leaders and community members, with the ultimate aim of sustaining peace, pursuing reconciliation, resolving conflict and nurturing clan stability among pastoralists.

PYL curriculum materials were developed through a highly participatory process involving pastoralists over an eight-year period. The participatory action research approach used by the project enables the youth involved to be as appropriate and responsive as possible as they engage local community members and implement development initiatives. The learning process emphasises the practical over the theoretical and seeks to empower the youth and foster awareness among them and community members. The youth, who are mostly born and raised as pastoralists but now live in semi-urban areas, get an opportunity to go back to their communities to share information about what they have learnt, and to gather relevant data and information through the camel caravan.

The camel caravan process

The camel caravan, funded by UNICEF, is one of the main activities of the PYL project. It is a unique pastoral community

survey that provides an opportunity for youth to engage with pastoralists as both facilitators and learners. The youth use research skills learnt under the PYL to gather information on indigenous knowledge that is important to pastoralists and pastoral livelihoods, and to government, aid and development actors. Over the years it has been conducted annually in Sanaag Region among pastoralists who are often marginalised culturally, socially, economically and politically, and where access to basic services, including education, has been denied.

Preparations for the camel caravan

The latest camel caravan was conducted in January 2010 over a period of 10 days. For the youth who participated, it was an opportunity for them to share information and to learn more about the life, challenges and opportunities faced by pastoralists in their day-to-day lives. Pastoralists are not often willing to share with strangers, nor are they open to answering questions because similar surveys over many years have made no significant contribution to improving their lives or developing their areas. The camel caravan process is deliberately devised to ensure that close rapport, relationships and trust can develop between the youth and pastoralists in their natural environment, as opposed to suspicion which has hindered other studies on pastoralists.



Evening time: PYL youth during the camel caravan.



Photo: Horn Relief

The camel caravan.

The 18 youth who participated in the survey were selected from all the villages where PYL works, based on expressed interest. They took part in a one-day briefing by PYL staff and other youth who had participated in previous camel caravans. The briefing shared with them the aims of the camel caravan and what was expected of them.

Subsequently, for five days, the youth were trained by PYL project staff, themselves pastoralists, on data collection, interview techniques and how to conduct focus group discussions (FGDs). Upon completion of the training, under the direct supervision of the training officers, the youth participated in piloting data collection tools, which were later refined as appropriate. They also practised how to totally immerse themselves in communities.

Immersion in the communities

With all preparations ready, the youth travelled to the pastoral areas. When the youth encountered the pastoralists they were to enumerate they stayed with them, joined

them in their work, lived with them and ate what they ate. For 10 days, using camels as the main mode of transport, the youth travelled with the community members, walking as part of a caravan every day and recording information and using digital cameras where possible.

The youth were divided into four groups and given a different topic to focus on each day. Each group was assigned a pre-determined area which it crisscrossed, sharing experiences and gathering information and data. The focus on the same topic by four groups working in parallel in different areas was intended to allow cross-referencing and triangulation to increase the completeness, validity and reliability of the findings. The youth researchers used conventional data collection tools such as questionnaires, interview guides and FGDs to gather information, but skilfully distanced themselves from conventional 'pure', 'cold' survey enumeration by totally immersing themselves into the pastoral way of life. For instance, they always started with greetings and sharing of general informa-

Photo: Horn Relief



Learning from pastoralists during the camel caravan. A young woman interviews a pastoralist and her children.



The four groups working in different areas later cross-reference and triangulate responses to validate findings.



The youth travel with the community as part of a caravan, recording information and using digital cameras where possible.

tion based on the Somali saying *'War war baa laga ceshaa'* ('If you get news you should respond with news').

During this period the youth reached 634 heads of households through interviews, household surveys and FGDs. In total, 11 FGDs were conducted, with each of the four groups carrying out FGDs related to three thematic areas. The youth

conducted error checks on all the data collection instruments. They also checked the instruments for completeness in readiness for quantitative and qualitative analysis by a consultant who focused on specific predetermined themes. Further analysis would be done later as needed. Indeed, this would unearth interesting themes.

Box 2: Experiences and insights from the camel caravan

Amal Duale

The experience of participating in a camel caravan excursion, especially for me as a pastoralist, fills me with a special feeling. What touched me most was when I came across a sick and frail-looking old woman. From where she stayed and the physical health of the children, it was evident this was a family in dire need of support.

After an experience like the camel caravan my one wish would be for the government and civil society to make a bigger effort in the provision of education for pastoral communities in order to improve their livelihoods. Maybe this can be done through providing mobile schools and training of mobile teachers. I would be glad to be one such teacher.

Abdulaziz Warsame Mohamoud

During the survey I spoke to a teenager... He was part of a family of eight we were interviewing. He told me that it made things easier using mobile phones especially when one family member became sick or if their livestock suffered. They would inform relatives so that they could ask for social support or help with getting access to medicine if traditional medicinal methods failed.

Reflections on the process

I realised that this approach of interacting with pastoralists and the immersion of youth in the pastoralists' natural environment was a positive way to share knowledge, learn from experiences and gather data. It created rapport, built confidence and created an environment of openness. The youth who participated gained much experience and insight (see Box 2). The process was very different from formal surveys carried out by government or consultants, where information is often provided unwillingly, in a climate of suspicion and sometimes out context.

Feeding the camel caravan findings into governance and aid circles

Once analysed, the findings from the camel caravan brought out many pertinent issues regarding education, perceptions of children's economic activities, livelihoods, pastoral traditional methods of communication, coping mechanisms, medicine and

human and animal health. Some findings were unsurprising, e.g. that there has been a limited or no access to formal education opportunities for pastoralists over generations. Other findings were unknown, e.g. use of traditional medicines such as sheep fat as treatment for sexually transmitted diseases (see Box 3 for more findings).

What was significant about the survey was that this was the first time this sort of information had been systematically gathered and shared widely with various stakeholders for reference when planning for the future. This sharing was done by the PYL project, led by myself, through a conference held in Nairobi, Kenya. Among the participants were regional government actors including the Minister of Education from Puntland, the Honourable Abdi Farah Juxa, the Director General from the same ministry and representatives from the Ministries of Livestock (MoL) and Environment Water and Tourism (EWAT). International NGOs and civil society organisations working with pastoralist communities in Kenya, Ethiopia, Puntland, Somaliland also attended, as well as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The two-day conference included presentations, sharing of experiences and discussions. Despite the willingness of governments to support the development of pastoralists, they have limited resources, including human and financial resources, and are unable to provide quality and relevant education and other services to

Box 3: Some key findings from the survey

- 79.4% of pastoralists had never received any form of education due to their pastoral way of life.
- 56% indicated that nobody within their family was literate and only 8.6% of children currently attended school or had ever attended to school.
- 81% of pack camels had been lost due to the long drought and over 70% of pastoralists owned no pack camel.
- 94.7% of the pastoralists indicated that they migrated from one area to another as a coping mechanism during times of disaster.

Box 4: Conference recommendations

- PYL to approach the Education Sector Committee of the Somali Support Secretariat to constitute a Pastoral Education Taskforce for improved interagency coordination.
- PYL to conduct a comprehensive survey and analysis of the status and needs of pastoralists in Somaliland, Puntland and South Central Somalia. The findings of the survey to be shared and serve as reference for governments, stakeholders and development partners.
- Provision of support by development partners to the governments in Puntland, Somaliland and South Central Somalia to develop and implement an education policy framework to guide the education of pastoralist communities.
- PYL and stakeholders to carry out advocacy campaigns among pastoralist stakeholders on the use of relevant, flexible, friendly and participatory teaching and learning approaches taking account of the pastoral way of life.

pastoral communities. There is a need for the support of international development organisations, which normally have resources but have limited knowledge regarding pastoralists. This constrains their ability to work closely with pastoralists and with organisations that have greater understanding of pastoralists' needs and of the innovative approaches best suited to engaging with them.

Based on the policy knowledge arising from the camel caravan, and drawing on the experiences and lessons shared by different regional actors, recommendations for improving the education of pastoralists in Puntland, Somaliland and South Central Somalia were agreed upon (Box 4).

Ways forward and scaling up

Dissemination of the camel caravan process and findings on the pastoralists' situation is bearing fruit. Other Horn Relief projects such as Social Safety Nets (SSN) and the Somali Emergency Response Project (SERP), following the experience gathered through the camel caravan, are working with PYL youth participants to collect data and conduct community mobilisations.

UNICEF has committed to funding a

comprehensive baseline survey focusing on pastoralists in Puntland, Somaliland and South Central Somalia with Horn Relief as the lead agency. *Eureka!* It is foreseen that the survey will use the lessons learnt from the camel caravan with the enumerators immersed among pastoralist communities – as opposed to the conventional way of data collection.

The themes of the baseline will include education, health, animal husbandry, nutrition and livelihoods. UNICEF has also committed to providing additional funding to enable PYL to reach out to more school-age children through mobile schools in three nomadic/pastoralist communities and five new semi-pastoralist areas. This should provide more opportunity for pastoralist children to access and participate in formal primary education programmes.

The Ministry of Education and other stakeholders have also called for the expansion of the participatory PYL project activities to other areas outside Sanaag Region to enable more pastoralist youth to participate in non-formal education and be active and useful members of the pastoral and emerging sedentary urban society. Horn Relief hopes to be involved in these efforts.

Conclusion

In Somalia and elsewhere, youth are often subject to negative stereotypes which associate them with armed militancy and piracy. The camel caravan presents a very different, positive, image of youth contributing to improved service delivery and governance. It has also empowered pastoralist youth by providing them with the skills to act as responsible members of their community and help shape the future and citizenship of their fellow pastoralists.

The evidence collected through the camel caravan has also highlighted the dire status of pastoralists. The indigenous information and evidence gathered and disseminated in the form of policy-relevant

knowledge will, we hope, continue to serve as a reference point in designing essential development initiatives for pastoralists, whether led by regional government or development partners. While these development initiatives for now aim at improving basic service provision to this marginalised population, pastoralists will one day evolve from being users of services to participating in public decision-making. The role they have played in the camel

caravan has enabled them, for now, to participate in constructing the policy information on which decisions about service provision to their region are based.

I would like to end by thanking the PYL youth involved in this project. They have shed new light on the situation of pastoralists, as well as the urgent need to address and support development initiatives that seek to bring about positive change for both pastoralists and pastoralism.

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