

RANGELANDS UTILISATION AND NOMADIC WOMEN

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Abstract

Nomadic Women: Who are they and where do they live? Nomads are member of the community who live in different locations, moving from one place to another. The paper will discuss the status of nomadic women, their property rights, their day to day activities. Nomadic women use natural resources. They contribute in livestock production. Usually we largely ignore women's economic activities and their status in our society. Lamently there is an underestimation of the role of women in pastoral societies. Undoubtly, women in pastoral societies as well as general have a critical role in the socio- economic and cultural activities. They manage and conserve natural resources. The multifarious role of women in nomadic society is nowhere described as being a serious lack of information about their relationship within the society. Thus, the paper will further discuss who they are, their role in pastoral societies, nomadic women's socio-economic status and their contribution in livestock products. It will further bring into light the various hazards of rangelands which come along them as barriers for their living.

This paper focuses on a process for enabling pastoralist women to achieve better lives for themselves, their families and their communities. The paper provides an overview of the challenges faced by pastoralist women. It aims to hold up development practioners in planning specific interventions and in mainstreaming the issues that affect pastoralist women into the accomplishment of development initiatives.

“Nomadism is a rational adaptation of human life to the environment and became a way of life. In most of the areas in which it is practiced, it is the only way to survive in marginal, semi-arid environments, and the majority of pastoralists have a deep respect

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

and knowledge of their environment.”

(Richard Hogg, *Distasters*, Vol16, No2,1992)

Hogg's definition is a main point since an ancient rhetoric which claims nomadism as responsible for environment degradation. It is noteworthy that ruminant livestock is husbanded to convert grass and provide us with useful products such as meat, milk, butter, cheese, yoghurt, blood, manure, hair, wool, hides and to provide herders with transport and traction. Horowitz and Jowkar demonstrates that

Most of these nomadic peoples are in a sustainable Relationships with their habitat though a series of adaptive Strategies including spatial mobility and broad though Controlled access to rangeland and water, herd diversification Prudent off take rates and exchange relationships with sedentary peoples. (1992)

It is found that the North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa include the largest number of Pastoralists. As Stanford asserts that

The arid and semi-arid areas of the earth... with a total Human population of 500-600 million people of these Total some 30-40 million are believed to have “animal Based” economies, and the majority of these are pastoralists ...in terms of the number of pastoralists, the most important Single countries are Sudan, USA, Somalia, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, ... including men, women and children.
(Stanford,1983:2)

Thus, the decline resources, the climatic conditions, increasing human and livestock production, disasters-human as well as natural, etc proved to be by far the biggest challenges that they are facing in this society.

Nomadic Women, generally common population ignore women, and their economic activities and social status. There is little improvement in the recent literature especially by anthropologists. (Horowitz, Jowkar, 1992)

We have generally found that there is lack of information regarding household, the nomadic organization their social gathering, their gender division of labour and there too is a lack of information and underestimation of the role of Nomadic Women who actively take part in livestock production and management of labour.

Unquestionably, women in nomadic societies play a very decisive role. Nomadic Women acquire status and have property rights within each livestock management unit, rights over animals and their products are differentiated by sex and age with older men generally privileged in the ownership and disposal of animals through their sale and slaughter. Especially Twareg women livestock ownership rights are specifically recognized.

Twareg women accumulate livestock through
Important gifts from both parents and other
Relatives after birth which form the basis of
their own herds. Women may receive outright
Gifts of livestock from consanguine kin through
Out their lives, and in all marriages after the first
... Twareg women may become quite wealthy in
Livestock, and it is not uncommon for a women to
Be wealthier than her husband..."

(Oxby, 278-279)

In case of the WoDaaBc community of West Africa, Women receive cattle from their families either as gifts or through inheritance, Mahr and maintenance. They completely belong to women, they control the milk, keep the animals in the case of divorce, and bequeath them to their children. In Islam religion, women's rights of ownership are recognized by the Shari'a, although Muslim law grants daughters only half the inheritance rights enjoyed by sons. However, women are able to acquire animals in exchange for dairy goods, handicrafts, cooked food, and such services as midwifery, collecting wool and herbage.

Micheal states that among the Baggara, women's cash contribution to household budgets from milk marketing which account for up to two-thirds of the total amount of household incomes. These incomes are controlled by women and often go toward the purchase of new stock and animal feed. They grant equal rights to women to enterprise, to earn and possess independently.

However, rights regarding livestock selling and purchasing, men show typical role of decision making with regard to the disposal of livestock of the household, they customarily consulted their wives before such actions of selling and slaughtering are taken as they enjoy equal rights. Nevertheless, these ideologies and structure that disfavor women's equal ownership rights over animals, by restricting the alienation of a woman's stock, may in the long run contribute to the security of the elder widows who depend on their sons for security and support. Despite, all this, these nomadic societies are androcentric as they show absence of women from political institutions. Herd mobility, conflict resolution, and diplomatic relationships with their neighboring groups and the state etc decisions are made by elder men of the society.

Gender discriminatory property relations and political representations may further be challenged through trousseau, fecundity, agnatic support, sexual rejection, public humiliations of husbands, refusal to do household chores, divorce rights and reproductive control. Women exercise, in fact, considered informal political influence in their society and households with regards to men's economic activities.

Although a lot of information and influences of women on land are given, still there is a lack of information of relationship between pastoral women and land. Moreover for example, Twareg Women in Algeria, Niger and Mali who may engage in herding activities of small and large ruminants are away from their domestic plain. (Worley 1991). While there are reports too that are related to women herding of sheep and goats, whose shorter range of grazing does not hamper their household activities.

Generally, men are associated with work where as women with child rearing and household chores. As a result, the extent of women's involvement with livestock has most of the time been neglected. In this scenario, the balance of work in such a way that women frequently spend more time in animal care than their husbands.

Women who are mainly housewives generally they are due to lack of education are closely involved in caring for their young children as well as for animals livestock kept at home. Their involvement in activities related to birthing and caring for newly born young ones is fundamental to the pastoral economy. They are responsible for milking, processing milk products and marketing of dairy products as butter, yoghurt, ghee, and cheese usually prepared and distributed by women, they are customarily associated with milk. In some communities of Northern Pakistan, only men milk yaks and goats and women milk cows. But, women's milk rights sometimes generate disputes based on gender specific perceptions of milk, related to women's relation to milk, dairy products and their allocation. Women's milk rights also grant them power of decision – making over food processing and distribution. Women took all responsibilities of all tasks including food preparation and collecting water and firewood. They are child rearers as well as their caretakers. They also dismantle and make their new houses when the herd is moved to new pastures. They do additional works like weaving mats and cloth for domestic use.

Each culture in general evaluates gender-specific activities and these evaluations are not necessarily similar with real gender contributions to the pastoral production system. Men can and do domestic works like cooking food and caring children. Whereas women too can and do assume male tasks, especially when male are absent.

Despite, some similarities and some differences, in some cultures, women have greater freedom of movement as compared to man rather as in Twareg culture, men who go to market and make household purchase.(Oxby, 284:1978)

The socio-cultural relevance of Nomadic Women

Now it is somewhat clear that women play a vital role in the socio-economic activities, as it is discussed earlier that there is lack of consideration and under-estimation on the part of women, women play a crucial role in livestock production and in management of labour. Their contribution in livestock production generates surplus above household and herd consumption requirements, woman may benefit by taking it to local markets and to small town processing centers.

Barbara Micheal reporting on production and marketing of milk and dairy products in the Sudan, states in her report that Baggara women take part in all stages of this economic activity and that their profits constitute two-thirds of total annual household budget. The income generated is controlled by women and often go toward the purchase of livestock. Literature is exceptionally unforthcoming on the roles of women in the marketing of wool, hides and skins. They are highly significant outputs of pastoral societies. For example, in East – Africa, where herding households tend to slaughter their own livestock, there is a greater household involvement in hide and skin marketing which is an important source of income for women.

Women gather wild foods like berries, fruits, plants, and roots which are also important resource for medicinal and other domestic purposes. There are various threats and challenges in front of women, the multiplicity of women's tasks involve them in a close interaction with and dependence on the natural environment for collecting food, water, wood etc for human as well as

animal consumption. There are therefore particular repercussions for women- especially poor-women as a result of availability of rangeland resources. (Pointing 1995)

Whereas degradation of pasture land increases the amount of time that has to spent caring for young, sick and feeble livestock which are kept at the homestead. It is women who collect water and fodder for these animals. Moreover, degradation of pasture lands contribute to the deterioration in the quality of grazing as it leads to reduction in milk production. Wood shortage another threat for women often leads to reduction in her income. Land privatization and environmental degradation also result in restricted availability of wild foods such as berries, fruits, plants and roots. Nomadic Women face additional challenges as a deterioration of the rangeland necessities more frequent moves to find new pasture. House moving is completely women's responsibility.

Thus, it clearly indicates that environmental degradation contributes significantly to women's work loads while plummeting their capacity to meet their household provisioning obligations. For poor women, or those who have limited access to resources, the impact is likely to be even greater. Another factor that is of sedentarisation affects nomadic women. Women's increased burden and struggle as well as the hardship they face in their daily activities and responsibilities to provide for her family is the result of sedentarisation and impoverishment of pastoralists.

Sedentarisation is an increasing phenomenon affecting all sectors of pastoral society. Negative impacts on women and girls include domestic and income generating burdens. Sedentarisation implies collecting wood to build houses. Actually, as sedentary women tend to build larger houses than nomadic women, more wood and more work is required for the building and repair of their homes. Women have to travel for collecting wood for their homes. Thus, there is various income generating opportunities as well for women which aimed at improving the position of nomadic women. Likewise, processing and selling livestock products, trees and forage products, wildlife products which are available in rangelands could be a good source of income for women.

Thus, it is very important that there should be some suggestions that would help them to have a better quality of lives and to improve their situation; a need is felt to understand the basic needs of nomadic women. The need to understand how can we respect their habitat, traditions and their mentality. There should be better understanding of the roles that Nomadic women have in the pastoral societies and how these roles are changing. Attention could be given towards the ways of reducing the amount of time nomadic women spent on dismantling and rebuilding their houses. Moreover, the need to recognize the changing roles of these women and their full participation in the development is of great importance. Till today, there is lamentably ignorance of the socio- economic roles of women in pastoral societies; women were treated as if they were unrelated.

Development planner's ignorance of the economic roles
Of woman in pastoral societies- indeed ignorance of
Pastoral socio economy and political ecology in general
Contributed to the relatively poor performance of
"livestock projects in the region." (Horowitz, Jowkar, 1992)