Pastoralism under Stress: Resources, Institutions and Poverty among the Borana Oromo in Southern Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines pastoral production and poverty in Borana in southern Ethiopia. The main objective of the study is to understand the manner in which external factors, such as government policy and the natural environment affect the pastoral resource base, how this in turn influences poverty and wealth, and how customary institutions respond to these influences. Furthermore, inconsistencies between government and local perspectives are interpreted with respect to differing views about development and integration, and associated conceptions of what poverty means. The study was conducted in four localities that each reflects different livelihood options and strategies.

The study employed participant observation, a household survey, key informant interviews, case studies, and discussions during an organized workshop. The household surveys covered 330 randomly selected households from four sites in the Yaballo and Dirre districts.

Persistent and increasing poverty in Borana is attributed to impacts of state land use policies over different historical periods; incompatible conceptions of poverty and differently envisaged alleviation strategies by development planners and pastoralists; decline in the rangelands, and associated livestock loss; internalization of these problems in a manner that aggravates vulnerability to poverty; and a decline in the capacity of the customary institutions to address poverty. Poverty drivers have different household impacts. While some households lose capacity to attain food security and self-reliance and thus drift into chronic poverty, others respond by diversifying livelihoods and herds.