Pastoralists and markets: livestock commercialization and food security in north-eastern Kenya

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Citation for published version (APA):

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Pastoralists' crises management strategies in north-eastern Kenya

A discussion on how the Somali pastoralists in Garissa District manage to live under difficult conditions is presented in this chapter. We start with reference to coping mechanisms and survival strategies for East African pastoralists in general, as described in the literature. A categorisation of the recent problems confronting the Somali pastoralists and their efforts in coping with and mitigating the effects of these problems will then be outlined. The key problems, which we refer to as 'crises', include drought, insecurity and environmental degradation. The last two are closely connected with the high number of refugees living in the area since 1991. A discussion on the most impoverished households in Garissa town will be presented, along with the survival strategies which they use in their livelihood struggles.

Coping with drought in north-eastern Kenya

North-eastern Kenya lies within the areas described as Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (Asals), with nomadic pastoralism as the main economic enterprise involving the majority of the people. Long dry seasons and droughts are well-known phenomena. Garissa District has not been spared the problems that afflict many pastoralists in dry lands, namely, drought and the concomitant lack of food and threat of starvation. The Somali pastoralists have always had various mechanisms of coping with drought, some of which are still employed today.

One of the key drought coping mechanisms was the pastoralists' movement across wide areas with the mutual understanding of their neighbours. We understand from earlier records that the Somali pastoralists had contacts with the Boran, the Rendille, the Gabbra, the Oromo, and even the Samburu; and they could move into any of these areas during times of localised drought. This had the effect of minimising losses from livestock deaths. Unfortunately, the colonial period created exclusive ethnic zones which prohibited access...
to others. The colonial restrictions on ethnic groups reduced the movement options of the Somali pastoralists even during localised crises. It is partly for this reason that the Somali became involved in grazing conflicts with some of their neighbours, especially during periods of drought. Although there were occasional tensions between neighbouring pastoral communities during the pre-colonial period, the colonial policies appear to have aggravated such conflicts.

Besides movements of people and livestock to areas that were less affected, the Somali pastoralists, like some of their counterparts in East Africa, used other options to cope during periods of crisis. Some of the strategies used have declined in recent years while others are still in use. Common strategies included dividing the animals and the family members; seeking lactating animals from relatives and livestock associates,\(^1\) selling or slaughtering livestock; seeking support from relatives living farther away; settling some family members in trading centres; and in extreme cases; leaving remaining animals with relatives and moving the whole household to settle in or near trading centres. Some of these strategies may be employed at the same time. We now look at each of them in turn and give an appreciation of the role each played during the recent droughts in northeastern Kenya.

The Somali call dry seasons *hagaa* or *jilaal* (representing the long and short dry seasons during the periods from June to September and December to February respectively), while drought is locally known as *abaar*. The latter implies difficult times when food and water may be scarce and it is a period the Somali pastoralists dread going through, but over which they have no control. During the early phase of the drought when expected rains fail and grazing gets scarce, one of the earliest adaptations is the division of animals into a strong herd and a weak, including some in lactation. The strong herd, usually consisting of dry females, males, and females that are in late lactation (known as *gabaan*) are taken away by the men and the male youth in search of better grazing. This part of the herd is referred to as *jilay*. The other animals are left with the women whose duty it is to look after the ailing animals as well as the more vulnerable household members such as the elderly and the children. It should be noted that those left behind may not necessarily be at a trading centre, although close proximity to a trading centre may be considered important. During the last drought, most of those left with lactating animals were found in Ijara area in the south of Garissa District, and most were within twenty kilometres of a trading centre. While in the homestead camp, the family members who are left behind may travel to the trading centres where relief food is distributed, but they often rely on remittances from those who took the other animals away. Such remittances are usually earned through the sale of livestock. It is when the drought is severe and many animals die or animals are moved so far away that contact is not possible, that remittances from the *jilay* cease. At such times, it may be necessary to move closer to trading centres or sell some of the animals available at the homestead.

In the past, it was a widespread practice to borrow lactating animals for the season to enable the needy household to improve its food status. Immediate relatives who were better off were usually the first option, followed by stock associates (livestock associates)

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\(^1\) Livestock associates are also referred to as stock associates. These are pastoralists who do not necessarily have kinship relations but who are friends and support each other economically.
who had mutual support obligations with the household in question. Borrowed animals were returned the next season or were retained by the receiving household for a longer period, depending on the loan conditions and the future needs of the household lending the animal. When lactating animals are either unavailable or inadequate, households tend to sell whatever livestock they may have to meet their food needs. The jilay may sell from the herd at their disposal while those left behind may similarly sell the animals left with them, or ask for a saleable animal from the jilay. Similarly, the slaughter of small stock may be common, especially when large animals (cattle and camels) are either scarce or unavailable for sale. Needy families also send messages to their kin in towns to send help (foodstuffs and money), while at the same time sending some household members to stay with relatives in towns.

Although socially accepted in times of need, asking for help may also mean a loss of social and individual esteem, and will be done only when there is no alternative (De Bruijn 1999). When the situation deteriorates further and the risk of starvation becomes imminent, most of the members of the household are taken to settle in the main trading centres while one or two male members may continue herding the remaining animals, or they may settle with their remaining animals, especially the small stock. In our survey of households in Garissa, the majority of households (68 per cent), had fewer than 20 head of cattle and were dependent on some of these options for their survival. However, when too few animals survive the drought, they are combined with those of relatives or friends in whose custody they are left, and the whole family converges around a settlement or town, where they undertake various economic activities while at the same time receiving relief food from government and relief agencies. Commenting on the strategies adopted by pastoralists displaced by the 1983-85 famine in Sudan, Salih mentioned that ‘those who lost all their animals migrated to relief food distribution centres only to live as destitutes depending on international charity and relief food’ (Salih 1991:51). It has been observed that the growing need for cash and a lack of cash resources tend to encourage poor, non-viable pastoral households to settle close to trading centres and small towns where job opportunities or market facilities are better (Talle 1988).

The specific income-generating activities undertaken by settled Somali pastoral households will be discussed in another section. However, suffice it here to say that household members often employ a number of options in order to feed their members once in the settlements, such as working in construction, or selling firewood, charcoal, handicrafts and miraa. Dietz reported some of these activities among the Pokot in Kenya/Uganda (Dietz 1987). Some Somali are reported to have married people of other faiths for material support, contrary to societal norms. In recent times, there has also been increasing involvement of some Somali in socially unacceptable activities such as prostitution, and an increased spate of theft and pick pocketing by young street children in the main trading centres.
Role of relief food in drought mitigation in Garissa District

Dependence on relief food has become a perpetual survival strategy for some of the households in north-eastern Kenya. This is confirmed when one observes the ever-increasing number of relief food recipients whenever there is a distribution of relief food in the area. In the past, a household that received relief food was not only held in low esteem but was also considered *midgan* (or a low class that was impure). As recently as the drought of 1969 when a huge part of the population was displaced in Garissa District, many pastoral households declined to go for distribution of relief food even under the threat of starvation. We have been informed of some families who lost members as a result of their failure to seek relief food, and who were finally saved only when the local chief took food to their houses (Mzee Mohamed, personal communication). It was also considered a curse on the remaining livestock and family members for a household to seek relief food when it still had a few live animals. Somewhere along the line, attitudes to relief food appear to have changed, and many Somali pastoralists today tend to see relief food as an additional survival opportunity rather than the taboo which it once was. It is taken to be one of the necessary diversification options available to poor households, while it may be absolutely critical for destitute households.

The Somali pastoral community makes a distinction between a poor person (*maskiin*) and a destitute person (*ceer*). A *maskiin* is a person or household with insufficient animals for subsistence. Traditionally, such a person was given lactating animals, milk, and assistance in a number of other forms. A *ceer*, on the other hand, is stockless and therefore destitute. Under normal circumstances, such a person is given a collection of animals by members of his *reer* to enable him to re-enter the pastoral economy. However, due to the changing economic fortunes of the Somali pastoral society, too many people appear to have landed in destitution, and are beyond the help of the traditional support mechanisms that could enable them to re-enter the pastoral economy. Although the sheer number of destitutes makes it difficult for the traditional restocking system to work. The increasing involvement of Somali pastoralists in the market economy through sales of livestock products also makes the traditional support system less likely to operate as well as it used to in the past. As a result of the looseness of the traditional support mechanism, many pastoral households no longer shy away from being seen to be dependent on relief food, contrary to previous norms. How did a poor or destitute pastoral household in Garissa District benefit from relief food in the area during the drought of 1997? In general, relief food is distributed without proper needs assessment and it often aims at benefiting the highest number of recipients — hopefully including the needy. The assumption is that those who are better off will avoid the embarrassment of asking for relief food and only the needy will seek assistance. However, reality is different because even the better-off households nowadays see relief food as an extra opportunity for saving costs or doing business. Commenting on relief food distribution procedures in northern Kenya, Little points out that:

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2 *Midgan* is a term used to refer to those considered to be of a lower class among the Somali society. They are traditionally hunters (an activity often despised by society) and do not intermarry with other Somali groups. To be called a *midgan* is considered an insult.
The effectiveness of food aid was and continues to be further diminished by the manner in which it is distributed. Relief is provided in order to support the largest number of families rather than only the poorest. The lack of storage facilities means that total shipments are distributed almost immediately after their receipt rather than being allocated sequentially to the neediest families (Little, 1992:127-8).

Although a storage facility is provided by the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB), there is still no needs assessment conducted and many of the recipients of relief food continue to be the better off - sometimes through contacts with those responsible for the relief food. The Somali households' strategies for enhancing their chances/opportunities of benefiting from relief food include, registering themselves in more than one distribution centre, varying the number of members of the household, enrolling as refugees in the refugee camps in the Dadaab area and trading in relief food. There may be several distribution centres within one trading centre, usually intended to ease distribution. Some households take advantage of this and register themselves in more than one distribution centre, and consequently receive shares for more than one household. Similarly, exaggerating the number of household members may bring in more food. This, in turn, enables many households, including the poorer ones, to enter the market economy and sell some of their food in order to buy other necessities such as sugar, tea, groceries and medicines. The poor households have few animals which makes it difficult for them to sell some. When they receive relief food, they can sell some of it to purchase other necessities, while at the same time allowing for the reproduction of their livestock. Although the better-off households are not commonly involved in multiple registrations, they often buy food (mainly maize grains) from the poorer households and trade for profits. The need for some starting capital usually means that the poorer households cannot engage in the trade of relief food since their consumption needs require them to use up their food allowances.

Refugees are supposed to be foreigners seeking security in the country, and it is illegal for Kenyans to enrol as refugees. However, registration in the refugee camps has also been practised by some of the local households as a mechanism for coping with the effects of drought and to minimise the loss of human life and livestock. Since all the refugee camps in north-eastern Kenya are in the Dadaab area, the households from this area may have been more involved in this practice than people elsewhere in the province. However, some of our informants mentioned that a number of households that moved from Wajir and Mandera also came to Dadaab and registered as refugees and settled in the camps. Due to its illegality, households are reluctant to disclose their registration in the camps and it has been difficult to get a reliable estimate of the numbers involved. It is because of the better living conditions in the refugee camps relative to those of the local people in the neighbourhood that many local households are attracted to the camps. While some households involved may move and settle in the camps, others may register but live outside the camps, returning only when there is a distribution of food or a headcount of people in the camps by the UN agencies.
Refugees and environmental degradation

Although it has not been quantified, it is our contention that the current levels of environmental degradation in north-eastern Kenya in general, and in Garissa District in particular, are unprecedented. In the case of the wider north-eastern Kenya, the single largest threat to the physical environment has been the establishment of settlements and trading centres in the area which have created islands of degradation. The causes and consequences of the establishment of many settlements in the area are discussed in Chapter Three in the area. It has also been observed in Turkana District in Kenya where Watson writes as follows:

The development of trading centres, government administration posts and development projects have enabled the small urban, sedentary segment of Turkana society to increase. This segment is developing into a society largely without the economic and cultural underpinning of livestock. (...) They engage in income-generating activities such as burning charcoal for which there is a market in the settlements, but which activity is generally considered of very low status among pastoralists (Watson, 1994:28).

In addition to the effects of the trading centres on the environment, there has also been the enormous impact of the refugee population in Garissa District. Kenya hosts a large refugee population, mostly from the Republic of Somalia, but also from Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. Although refugee camps had initially been established in several areas of the country, all the refugees in Kenya are presently concentrated in Dadaab in Garissa District, and Kakuma in Turkana — both dry and fragile environments. The camps in Dadaab enguised up large chunks of land with the three camps being more or less a trading centre on its own. This required clearing the land to pave the way for setting up the camps. All the camps had then to be fenced for security reasons, further consuming many live trees for the fencing needed. The international agencies involved, including the UNHCR and other agencies, also had to fence their camps. Although establishing the camps resulted in a loss of vegetation, it is the need for wood fuel for the large refugee population that has caused, and continues to cause, unprecedented environmental degradation in Garissa District in general, and in the Dadaab area in particular.

Since the setting up of the refugee camps in Dadaab in 1991, all refugee households have depended on the physical environment for their wood fuel needs, just like local households. In the early period, it was possible to collect dry wood within close proximity of the settlements. With time, it became necessary to venture farther afield in order to collect dead wood for household use. It was at this point that poor local households who previously collected firewood from around the centres and sold it for their survival increasingly found it difficult to find sufficient firewood. It took three to four times longer to collect firewood than before the arrival of the refugees. As a result of the need to venture farther into the bush in search of wood, it became necessary to cut down live trees and let them dry, to be collected for use at a later date. With the intense heat in the area, wood dries within a few days. With regard to this phenomenon of cutting down live trees because of a scarcity of dead wood, Joekes and Pointing maintain that:
Dead wood can no longer be picked up while on the move, and diminishing availability of wood means that settled pastoralists are, out of necessity, adopting the more damaging practice of cutting living wood, and in extreme cases, entire trees or bushes (Joekes & Pointing, 1991:18).

Since it is the women who are responsible for the collection of firewood in Somali society, they spend much of their time looking for firewood at the expense of other duties. Cases of rape increased because the women had to travel long distances in dangerous areas. The price of firewood in the market increased due to scarcity. UNHCR was hard put to find alternatives in order to protect female refugees from assailants wandering in the bush. As a result of pressure from the refugees themselves, UNHCR and other agencies involved in the refugee programmes contracted various individuals and local NGOs to supply huge amounts of firewood. Some contractors in turn sub-contracted others. Due to the increasing disappearance of dead wood in the area, the suppliers not only transport from far-away, but they mostly depend on cutting down live trees. The massive areas devoid of trees and even shrubs leave the local Somali women without any means of getting firewood since the UN agencies only cater for the needs of the refugee population. The argument is that the local people should be provided with wood fuel by the government (Maryam, personal communication). However, the local people do not have the necessary political clout to compel the government to intervene since they occupy a peripheral position in the national political as well as economic spheres. Van Dijk explains how people may not be able to effectively redress ecological problems like the one facing the Somali community in Garissa District. He contends that:

The extent to which individuals and groups are able to deal with ecological hazard in an adequate manner depends not only on their skills and knowledge as is commonly argued, but also, and perhaps even more, on the political position they occupy and the control over and access they have to crucial resources (Van Dijk, 1999:238).

Although there is an Environmental Working Group (EWG) in Dadaab, it mainly consists of elders who may not understand the implications of wood harvesting, or who are complacent simply because they owe the UN agencies favours. Some of those who voiced environmental concerns were silenced by being awarded part of the contract to supply firewood themselves. Thus, the situation not only threatens the stability of the physical environment, but it has also deprived some of the poorest households of a source of income (firewood and charcoal) which provided one of the strategies of survival at critical times of need in recent years. At the same time, continued clearing of trees and shrubs has created large tracts of land no longer useful for pastoralists at all. As a result of the loss of livestock coupled with the degradation of the range by wood fuel collectors, many poor pastoral households have decided to settle in trading centres, with few possibilities of resuming a full nomadic life, not least because of range degradation. These pastoralists may be referred to as environmental refugees or ecological refugees in their own land due to inappropriate utilisation of the rangeland.

Although clearing trees for firewood is the main component of environmental degradation in the area, other activities include ground water extraction and pollution. The UN agencies have dug several boreholes in the refugee camps to provide water for the
refugees. This has put enormous pressure on ground water resources in the area, especially considering the large number of refugees in the area. In addition to the pressure on the quantity of water through extraction, there is also ground water pollution. Numerous pit latrines had to be dug when the refugees first arrived ten years ago. Some of these latrines have already filled up and replacements have been dug. Assuming an average of twenty people per latrine, we estimate there to be about 20,000 latrines in an area of less than 100 km$^2$. Given the porosity of the sandy soils which dominate the area, substantial ground water pollution has occurred. Cases of disease such as cholera and typhoid have taken place in the Dadaab area.

Coping with insecurity in Garissa District

Garissa District and indeed most of northern and north-eastern Kenya have been bedevilled with continued insecurity over the years. Lane and Swift summarise this as follows:

No discussion of northern Kenya pastoral development is complete without reference to violence (Lane and Swift, 1989:4).

The region has become synonymous with insecurity since independence, with different people blaming each other for the lack of security. The thugs who block roads and kill, maim and loot are known by various names across the country. In north-eastern Kenya, they are referred to as bandits or *shifta,* while those responsible for the same atrocities in the rest of Kenya are simply referred to as thugs or gangsters. In other pastoral areas in Kenya outside of north-eastern Province, they are referred to as cattle rustlers. The government blames the local population for supporting those perpetrating the incidents while the local community blames the government for lacking the ability or willingness to stamp out violence. Be that as it may, insecurity in north-eastern Kenya has affected the local economy. Denying pastoralists access to good grazing land, pushing them into settlements in trading centres and limiting possibilities for livestock marketing are some of the ways in which the existing insecurity has hampered the development of the area and has contributed towards the impoverishment of the Somali pastoralists. Although north-eastern Kenya has known little security since independence, the situation worsened following the collapse of the Republic of Somalia in 1991. Since the area has a long common border with Somalia, there was an infiltration of arms and ammunition into the area, which was exacerbated by the Kenyan government's support of one warlord against another. Consequently, many areas became heavily infested with the so-called bandits to the extent that pastoralists no longer risk taking their animals there. Indeed, our informants confirmed that certain parts of Garissa District could not be used to graze livestock even during the drought due to insecurity, thus rendering such areas *de facto* 'no-go zones' for pastoralists.

3 The word *'shiftu'* is in neither the Somali language nor Swahili. It is said to have its origin in the Semitic languages of Ethiopia — and its meaning is closely related to banditry.
As a consequence, Somali pastoralists have to take their animals to areas even farther away, or practice group herding in which several families combine their livestock and herd them together. To protect their livestock, some pastoralists have purchased firearms for self-defence to counter attacks. Since it is illegal for individuals to acquire arms in Kenya, it is difficult to obtain much information as to the ownership of arms. Government security forces often invade pastoral homesteads in search of arms and those found in possession of fire arms are arrested and prosecuted. Local pastoralists point out that since the security forces in the area do not accord them sufficient protection against the bandits, they should be allowed to arm themselves for self protection — a very contentious issue. Despite the rampant insecurity in the area, only a few households lost entire herds in the process, with most affected households losing only a few head of animals which the bandits take and slaughter.

Insecurity is also partly responsible for sedentarisation in Garissa District and other parts of north-eastern Kenya. Many households have opted for moving into trading centres for security reasons. Trading centres have security personnel provided by the government, and households with only a few livestock prefer to live in trading centres where they can keep their animals and enjoy security as well. However, this is hardly an option for those pastoralists who have more livestock since grazing opportunities around settlements are inadequate. Permanent settlements also often act as relief food distribution centres, this being an additional reason for households to move in during periods of drought.

Impoverished households in Garissa District

Pastoralists in Garissa District, and indeed those in all other pastoral districts have been highly susceptible to the effects of droughts and, in some areas such as southern Garissa, disease in their animals. Following some of the drought years in the 1990s, especially that of 1992 and the more recent one of 1996/1997, many pastoralists have found themselves unable to continue with their pastoralism, either because of insufficient livestock or due to the total loss of all their stock. Most households moved into towns and trading centres in order to benefit from relief food from the government and NGOs. Some families moved into the refugee camps and registered themselves as refugees. Thus, pastoralists, who before losing their livestock were confident and self-reliant, found themselves in a precarious situation regarding their livelihoods following the loss of their livestock. They live in villages, locally known as bullas and they are almost entirely dependent on relief food and other assistance, with a few managing to obtain some income from casual labour in towns where this is available. Doornbos and Markakis point out that:

Devastated by famine several times in the last two decades, and unable to rebuild their herds, many pastoralists have been forced into what has been called "sedentarization through impoverishment". This accords well with official policy in the East African

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4 A bulla is a term referring to the shanty settlements of the poor, with hamlets mostly made of wooden materials covered with various pieces of rugs of all types and some grass, banana leaves or palm leaves.
states, whose governments regard 'settlement' as the only solution to the many problems posed by wandering herders (Doornbos & Markakis, 1990:271).

We conducted a survey among about 50 displaced pastoralist households around Garissa town in July 1997. They comprised 39 male and 11 female heads of households. The majority of household heads were married (74 per cent) and only 6 per cent were divorced and another 10 per cent widowed (Figure 8.1). It appears that not many single-parent households settled in the stockless destitute bullas around Garissa town, with only 10 per cent of household heads being unmarried. This goes against the view that single-parent households (especially female-headed ones) usually dominate in the settlements around towns as is the case for non-pastoral areas. The low number of single-parent households among the destitute households may be because of particular concern by kinsmen for female-headed families — be they divorced or widowed. Members of the reer find it embarrassing to see their members being pushed into destitution in towns as it often reflects badly on their assistance to the weaker families amongst them — even more so when they are female-headed. However, it may be that the female-headed households could not make it to Garissa town and opted to settle in the nearest relief food distribution centres instead. Besides, our sample may not necessarily be a good representation of the destitute population in the area due to its small size.

None of the survey households had any livestock with them in the bulla or elsewhere. Still, it is possible that some concealed livestock owned in anticipation of donations, despite our repeated emphasis that we were not from any charitable organisation.

*Figure 8.1*

**Marital status of household heads, (July 1997) (N=50)**

Source: Author's survey
Most households (54 per cent) said they had lost their livestock to drought and 42 per cent of households had lost their livestock to a combination of drought and disease. Nearly all households (96 per cent) had lost their livestock during the previous year (1996), rendering them destitute and only surviving on relief handouts and other forms of charity such as zakat and sadaka, along with other sources such as gifts from relatives and the sale of miraa. Although the Somali are predominantly Muslims, gifts of sadaka and zakat are usually between related households where a richer household assists a poorer one from his own reer or lineage. Thus, poor households who have no wealthy relations tend to suffer most since they often do not receive any zakat or sadaka. This is contrary to Islamic requirements of giving alms (zakat) and sadaka to the needy irrespective of kinship affiliations.

Most respondents had settled in their present bullas after July 1996, with 70 per cent of the households falling in this group. Only 12 per cent of the households had moved into their present settlements before 1996. The households originated from all over Garissa District with only a few in our sample coming from other parts of the region. Those who said they came from Garissa District mentioned the following areas: Mbalambala (4), Bura (6), Masalani (4), Hulugh (6), Ijara (8), Galmagall (6), Korakora (5) and Nanighi (2). Only 8 households (16 per cent) came from other parts of the province, mainly from the neighbouring district of Wajir. Some of these households moved into towns not only to benefit from relief food distributions but also to seek casual employment (18 households). While some households moved to seek alternative sources of livelihood or assistance from their relatives in town, others moved into town without knowing what was available in the town to which they were moving simply because they were unable to survive in their rural homes. 'In a big town, you will never starve', goes their saying. Almost all the households had moved with the help of motorised vehicles, with only 2 households making it on foot from Bura division to Garissa town, a distance of about 70 kms.

Relating their experiences as displaced families, the majority of the households (76 per cent) mentioned that their living conditions were better than in previous years as impoverished pastoralists in their rural homes. Only a few (22 per cent) said their new life was very difficult and they feared the uncertainty surrounding their lives. In their rural camps, the impoverished pastoralists had experienced hunger and the inability to move with the others since most did not even have pack animals left for moving their shelters and other belongings. This made their contention that life was easier for them as displaced pastoralists more understandable since they did not have to worry about migration and fetching water any more. However, this is only a short-term view emanating from the intensity of their livelihood struggles in recent periods. The traditional social system of assistance to the poor within the community seems to have declined among the Somali pastoral community. The major reason cited was the increasing number of households in need, while the number of those expected to assist continues to decrease. In addition, the marketing of most livestock products has meant that little can be spared for mutual

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5 *Zakat* is Islamic charity which makes it obligatory for a Muslim to donate 2.5 per cent of his wealth to the needy in society.

6 *Sadaka* is a gift to the poor which is not obligatory but highly recommended in Islam.
support of stock associates and social networks by households who still have animals left.

The former pastoralists (although they still regard themselves as pastoralists) received foodstuffs and other material assistance from various NGOs in the area, while only one household mentioned getting assistance from other sources besides NGOs. Although utensils, clothes and medicines are sometimes provided, the single largest form of assistance is relief food that is distributed by the NGOs once a month. This includes mainly rice/maize, beans, and oil, in various quantities amounts. In general, not more than 15 kg of rice/maize, about 10 kg of beans and about 10 litres of oil are provided to each family once a month. Such amounts cannot sustain an average family for a whole month, hence most households were involved in income-earning activities such as casual labour, handicrafts, charcoal burning and firewood gathering. Prostitution, theft, and pick pocketing by young children have also been observed to be on the rise. Socially, these are considered evil and immoral and are condemned by many people. The displaced pastoralists appear to be losing their grip on some of the common survival strategies as reflected in their projections of the future and their aspirations (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1
**Future plans and aspirations of the impoverished pastoralists, (July 1997) (N=50)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response category</th>
<th>Number of households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No plans at all</td>
<td>25 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go back to rural home at the earliest opportunity</td>
<td>7 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt at business if possible</td>
<td>6 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other plans</td>
<td>6 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to live on relief</td>
<td>5 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author's survey.

As shown, half of the respondents had no idea what they wanted to do and they appeared to be taking each day as it came. They were indeed in a confused state. Some mentioned that one can plan when one has some possessions of value, whereas, according to them, they only possessed their souls. They point out that a man without livestock is not independent and, some actually said they felt like slaves because of being ceer (without livestock). In all only 10 per cent wished to continue as relief dependants while the rest would prefer any alternative, indicating the low status dependency is accorded within Somali society, including those households that were themselves impoverished. The majority blamed the 'changing times' for the loss of their livestock, and their subsequent misery. Some of the changes included limits on livestock movement, increasing settlement centres in the Garissa area as well as other parts in the region, and increased insecurity. They had some suggestions regarding possible planning for drought and managing it when it occurred to reduce its effects on people and livestock in the future. These included better animal husbandry (20 per cent), the storage of food reserves ahead of drought (16 per cent), increased support for irrigated agriculture (16 per cent), better foodstuffs and shelter for drought victims (12 per cent), and urgent and timely
intervention in drought management (22 per cent). Drought management in this context refers to both household mechanisms (if any), as well as institutional intervention in pre-drought, drought and post-drought activities necessary to mitigate the consequences of drought.

If the increasing number of impoverished pastoralists in urban centres in north-eastern Kenya is not curbed, a sad situation with emerge. Despite the low representation in our random sample, we estimate from other observations that the population of Garissa town may have doubled due to the in-migration of people from other parts of the province since the early 1990s. A recent survey by a Garissa-based international NGO has estimated the number of displaced pastoralists settled in the bullas around Garissa town to be over 185,000 people (Mikono International, Garissa 1997). Assuming that an average household in the area has about 7 members, the number of displaced households would be well over 26,000. This is 82 per cent of the total district population of 226,000 persons (32,285 households) in 1996 according to the population projections in the 1989 census (RoK 1996). However, it should be noted that Garissa town is not only the regional capital, but it is also the entry point to the rest of the country and there are thus high inflows of impoverished populations from all over north-eastern Kenya. In addition, there is a large group from Somalia who have settled in Garissa town as well. Thus, as many as half of the displaced people around Garissa town may have come from other districts in north-eastern Kenya or from Somalia. Being the provincial headquarters for north-eastern Province, Garissa town attracts many people from the region because of its better services such as water, electricity and healthcare, in addition to a concentration of organisations involved in relief food distribution in the area. Nonetheless, the number of displaced pastoralists is very high, especially considering that these households have only a remote possibility of ever resuming their former lifestyle as pastoralists.

Summary of findings

Somali pastoralists in Garissa District, like the rest of their counterparts in north-eastern Kenya, have been adversely affected by the droughts of recent years, especially those of 1992 and 1996/1997. The Somali had mechanisms for coping with droughts such as movement across wide areas, splitting their herds and separating the different species, dividing the people between those looking after livestock and those settling in trading centres, borrowing lactating animals, selling or slaughtering livestock, and in extreme cases, whole households settling in trading centres and towns. The Somali consider begging as being socially unacceptable and yet some households necessarily had to beg for money and food during the droughts. Once in the trading centres, households involved themselves in diverse survival strategies.

Most registered for relief food whenever the opportunity was available. At the same time, selling firewood and charcoal were found to be common activities in many households. Some household members went even further and involved themselves in socially unacceptable activities such as prostitution and theft, with street children taking to pick pocketing. These social evils are mostly undertaken by young girls and boys who have
left their families elsewhere and who may not be known by many in Garissa town. Increasing incidences of such socially unacceptable behaviour may be an indication of extreme poverty or cultural erosion within Somali society. Some of the poor households enhance their share of relief food through double registration or registering in the refugee camps as disguised refugees from Somalia, since the conditions in the refugee camps are apparently more attractive than those in the local community outside the camps.

The Somali pastoralists are also faced with environmental degradation in the Dadaab area due to the large numbers of refugees. Since no alternative source of energy was provided for the refugees by the agencies responsible, firewood has remained the only source of cooking energy for the thousands of households in the camps. UN agencies and other agencies responsible for the refugees have contracted the supply of firewood to be collected locally. Due to the scarcity of dead wood, many suppliers now cut down living wood so that it can be collected a few days later and be delivered to the camps. This has created large areas without trees or even big shrubs, making it difficult for the pastoralists to live in such areas, and thus creating environmental refugees. The area is also faced with problems related to the excessive extraction of ground water and is subsequent pollution. Large numbers of refugees have been getting their water from boreholes for about a decade now and this may deplete ground water supplies, depending on the quantity, although this has not been determined so far. Pollution of the ground water from the numerous pit latrines may be a disaster waiting to happen.

Besides drought and environmental degradation, Somali pastoralists are also faced with high levels of insecurity. Travellers on foot or by vehicle along most of the routes in the region are often attacked and looted, killed or maimed, and women are raped by armed gangs — referred to as bandits or shifta. Such insecurity has rendered some parts of the area inaccessible to pastoralists, creating additional pressures for livestock and people in the remaining areas. The pastoralists attempt to solve the insecurity problem by pooling their livestock into herding groups and arming their herdsmen to counter attacks from bandits. The government does not allow private ownership of arms, even when security is clearly inadequate and the state is unwilling to contain the problem. The availability of cheap arms following the collapse of Somalia has made the security situation in northeastern Kenya worse, since there are large numbers of arms in the hands of unauthorised people.

Numerous households have become destitute following the loss of all their livestock to droughts. Most of the heads of destitute households living in bullas around Garissa town were married contrary to our expectation that the number of single-parent households would be disproportionally high in the sample. Although some may have had a few animals left in the custody of friends or relatives in the bush, none wanted to admit this. Traditionally it was considered taboo for a Somali to conceal his livestock ownership, but this appears to be changing. In addition to relief food, most of the impoverished households had sources of income or food. Gifts from friends or relatives, Islamic donations of zakat, sadaka, and the sale of firewood, charcoal, construction materials and miraa were other sources of income available to some of the households.

Most of the destitute households in our sample had moved from other parts of Garissa District, with a paltry 16 per cent moving into Garissa town from other districts in
the region. However, we believe that many of the displaced people in Garissa town have actually moved from outside Garissa District since the town is also the regional headquarters. Most of these households were found to be in a state of confusion with no idea of what they intended to do in the future. Although they still refer to themselves as pastoralists, there is a good chance that they may never go back to the pastoralist way of life again.