

Theme: Nomads – a Centuries-old Life is Threatened

“1.2 billion people worldwide inhabit property for which they do not hold formal rights and live without permanent homes or access to land...”

*—Nirj Deva, Rapporteur
Committee for Development, European Parliament*

By Donna Shaver

The earliest peoples of the world were nomads, existing long before the advent of settled communities. They were hunter-gatherers living on the bounty of animals and plants, and moving as necessary to find sufficient food and water. Probably the best-known population of hunter-gathers in modern times is the San (previously called the Bushmen) in what are now Botswana, Namibia, Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. In the early 1980s, diamonds were discovered in the San reserve. Soon after, government ministers went into the reserve to tell the Bushmen living there that they would have to leave because of the diamond finds. Within the last fifty years, almost all of the San have been settled and [effectively banished from returning to their ancestral hunting grounds](#).

Other hunter-gatherers still exist, but are less well-known, such as the [Punan](#) in the Indonesian province of East Kalimantan in the Philippines, the [Mbuti](#) in the Ituri Rainforest of Zaire, and the [Piraha](#) in the Amazon. According to [Survival](#), the global movement for tribal peoples’ rights, there are over a hundred tribes that are not in contact with the modern world.

Pastoralists

Far more common today are the pastoralists--nomads that are herders, moving their livestock as needed to find good forage and adequate water. Some groups herd only one species, such as the [Dukha](#) in Mongolia, who herd reindeer. Others have a more diverse mixture of livestock, such as the [Turkana](#) of northern Kenya, which maintains five species: camels, cattle, goats, sheep and donkeys, each with different food and water requirements.

The pastoral life requires mobility, and in many cases, requires crossing borders. The Tuareg, for example, are to be found in several North African countries. Some may live for whole seasons in one location, and may send flocks or herds to higher pastures without having to move

the whole community. Other pastoralists have to move herds often to find appropriate grazing. Some cultures move as individual families, some as small groups—each tribe has its own traditions. Increasingly, pastoralists may have some settled members. And they are coming under significant pressure, especially in Africa, to give up their way of life.

Challenges to Education and Healthcare

The mobile nature of pastoralists makes basic services of society such as education and healthcare a significant challenge.



Our July 2014 Dining for Women recipient organization - **RAIN for the Sahel and Sahara** - addresses the twin issues of educating nomadic girls and empowering nomadic women in Niger. Fewer than 10 percent of the girls are enrolled in school, and their mothers are illiterate in equal numbers. Through mentoring, RAIN's **Learning and Earning Programs (LEGS)** are creating educational opportunity for at-risk girls and empowering nomadic women through learning new livelihoods. In remote desert communities of northern Niger devastated by displacement and several drought induced food crises, lacking infrastructure, and receiving little or no outside assistance, this program will have a great impact. RAIN works with the

two largest pastoralist populations—the *Tuareg* and the *Wodaabe*.

Climate Change

Climate change is having a profound effect on the lives of pastoralists, particularly in Africa. Droughts have been severe in recent years in northern Africa, and many thousands of pastoralists have been forced to give up herding and settle down. But there is some disagreement on the factors that are at work. Some see [nomadic peoples as the first victims of climate change](#). There is no doubt that pastoralists have lost many animals in drought conditions. Drought has also brought farmers and pastoralists into conflict. Nomadic herders are moving south as a warming climate is destroying grazing land and turning it into desert. In Nigeria's eleven northernmost states, 35 percent of the land formerly under cultivation has been turned into desert. According to [IRIN humanitarian news and analysis](#) in 2009, "The livelihoods of some 15 million pastoralists in northern Nigeria are threatened by decreasing access to water and pasture...." According to the pastoralists, some of the areas in dispute were grazing reserves set aside as international cattle routes. [In Kenya in 2009, pastoralists fought over water and pasture](#), and dozens of people were killed.

Pastoralism as a Sustainable Solution

But others see the pressures on pastoral people from a different perspective. The UN's International Fund for Agricultural Development has this to say in their paper on [Livestock and pastoralists](#):

"Pastoralists inhabit zones where the potential for crop cultivation is limited due to low and highly variable rainfall conditions, steep terrain or extreme temperatures. Within this unpredictable, vulnerable and dynamic environment,

they have developed successful mechanisms of adaptation to maintain an ecological balance between themselves and the natural environment.



Pastoralism is therefore an economic and social system well adapted to dry-land conditions and characterized by a complex set of practices and knowledge that has permitted the maintenance of a sustainable equilibrium among pastures, livestock and people.”

According to the International Institute for Environment and Development’s report, [Misconceptions on Dry-lands and Pastoralism](#), Pastoralism directly supports approximately 20 million people in East Africa, producing 80 percent of the total annual milk supply in Ethiopia, and

providing 90 percent of the meat consumed in East Africa. When measured per hectare, pastoralism also out-performs ranching and sedentary livestock keeping in similar environments.

“With appropriate support, pastoralism is actually the most cost-effective and climate resilient livelihood system for the dry-lands. Even with a legacy of antagonistic policies, pastoralists are not just surviving but are creating substantial economic value.”

*International Institute for Environment and Development
ActionAid 2014*

Land-grabs: Nomads and Property Rights

But in many African countries, there is a strong movement toward “*sedenterism*” - forcing pastoral people to settle in one place. There are a number of reasons for this movement, but increasingly it is to free up large tracts of land that can be sold or leased for foreign investment.

In the developing world, most indigenous peoples do not have legal title to the land they may have used for centuries. This is true of most of the land inhabited by villages and smallholdings—small family agricultural plots—but even more true for pastoralists. Unlike villages and smallholders, pastoralists require access to lands that may be widely dispersed, in more than one country and much of it, at any given time, not in use.

Land used by Indigenous People for Centuries is being sold to Corporations in Other Countries

Lack of formal property rights is causing great stress, especially in Africa, because of pressure from outside the continent, combined with the collusion of corrupt governments, to sell access to large swaths of land for agriculture,

bio-fuels and other activities such as big game hunting concessions. Although it may technically be lucrative for the country, seldom is any of the income used to improve the lives of people who have been displaced by the enterprise. The people whose lands are appropriated are usually pushed aside, with no place to go and no means of support. And many, if not most, of African farmers are women.

“Even so-called ‘empty land’ usually has legitimate tenure rights holders who might use that land for a variety of purposes. For example, very little land in Africa is truly idle, given pastoralist activities, traditional land management techniques in semi-arid regions, use of land for ritual/religion, and natural forests providing a source of many essential products.”

*The Great Land Heist
ActionAid 2014*



[Since 2000, over 1600 land deals have been documented for over 60 million hectares](#)—an area larger than Spain, Germany, or Kenya. Often the host countries give incentives to the incoming company, but offer little, if anything, to the people who will be dispossessed of their homes, lands and livelihoods. For pastoralists, this may mean traditional grazing lands seized, access to water controlled by the new “owner”, and/or the only routes between grazing areas blocked. Often the affected population doesn’t know about the deal until they are forcibly removed from their land.

The advent of leasing/selling large tracts of land to commercial interests in other countries is exacerbating poverty in the host country. And it is no surprise that many government officials in the host country benefit personally from these transactions. [According to Oxfam](#), “local rights-holders are losing out to local elites and domestic or foreign investors, because they lack the power to claim their rights effectively and to defend and advance their interests.”

When people are dispossessed from the land from which they obtain their livelihood, they add to the ever-growing population of people living in poverty. As [Olivier De Schutter](#), UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food stated, “...there is a clear tension between ceding land to investors for the creation of large plantations, and the objective of redistributing land and ensuring more equitable access to land, something governments have repeatedly committed to, most recently at the 2006 International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development. “

The government of Ethiopia [forcibly resettled 70,000 semi-nomadic people](#) in the Nuer and Anuak tribes in western Gambella with plans to resettle more. They arrived in new villages to find little or no food, and no farmland, healthcare, or educational facilities. A troubling aspect of any of the ‘villagization’ programs is the profound [negative consequences for women](#). Villagization is “the clustering of agro-pastoral and/or shifting cultivator populations into more permanent, sedentary settlements.” It’s rural gentrification, in which vulnerable populations are forcibly relocated, often at gunpoint

and never with any consultation, so that the land might become ‘more productive.’ Often the men leave and the women are left behind to cope with finding food and water, and taking care of children and elders. They are especially vulnerable to assault.

In 2013, the government of Tanzania informed Maasai herders that some 1,500 square kilometers of their land would be cleared as a big-game hunting firm reserve for the royal family of Dubai. Some 40,000 Maasai were to be evicted. [After lengthy protests and worldwide petitions, government officials backed down.](#) A global petition was signed by more than 1.7 million people.

Land-grabs have Cross-border Consequences

[Huge tracts of land in Ethiopia’s Lower Omo Valley](#) are slated to become sugar plantations. This would require relocation of 150,000 indigenous people through a highly unpopular “villagization” program. To provide water to the plantations, a



large dam will be built on the Omo River, which empties into Lake Turkana at the border with Kenya. The lake level would drop by as much as 22 meters. The water project would be devastating to the pastoral Turkana people in Kenya. In all, it would devastate the livelihoods of half a million people on both sides of the Kenya/Ethiopia border.

Ethiopia’s sugar plantation scheme points to a significant problem with many of the land deals: it’s not just the land, it’s the water. The Omo Valley

sugar plantation project is not an anomaly. A report from the Oakland Institute, [Understanding Land Investment Deals in Africa](#), paints a chilling picture of the water implications for both settled and nomadic populations:

“Extent of Water Takings: If all of the 40 million hectares of land that were acquired on the continent in 2009 come under cultivation, a staggering volume of water would be required for irrigation. The Oakland Institute estimates that 300 to 500 cubic kilometers (km³) of water per year would be used to produce crops on this land, approximately twice the volume of water (184.35 km³) that was used for agriculture in all of Africa in 2005. In the event that the annual rate of land acquisition continues at 2009 levels, demand for fresh water from new land investments alone will overtake the existing supply of renewable fresh water on the continent by 2019.”

The future is not looking bright for pastoralists in Africa, but it has been shown that they can make effective use of land, and that their way of life is viable if they have access to water and can freely move their herds to find water and grazing. The likelihood is that there will be ever more pressure to settle down and give up their way of life.

"I have only 10 cows now and it's not enough. We sell them to pay for schooling, shelter. They are life to us. Now I have to grow maize and vegetables, but pastoralism is more secure than cultivation. You cannot rely on the weather for growing food, but we do know where to go to find pasture."

Orumoi Evans – Maasai pastoralist in Kenya

For more information on **Land Grabs** as they affect women in the developing world, see

[Land and Power: The growing scandal surrounding the new wave of investments in land.](#) Oxfam. September 2011.

[Pastoralism in the New Millennium.](#) Food and Agriculture Administration, 2001

[Promises, Power, and Poverty: corporate land deals and the rural women of Africa.](#) April 2013

MacInnes, Megan. **Corruption and large-scale land acquisitions: an analysis of the role high level corruption plays in enabling elite capture of the land.** Paper - Intl Conference on Global Land Grabbing II, Oct. 2012 Cornell University – [download the PDF](#)