

Community institutions weakening in the wake of climate change



Garane Mohamud, 38, a former pastoralist, narrates his story about the effects of drought on his family at his new found farm in Kasha community of Garissa, Kenya.

ALP Community Stories

When his wife gave birth to their third child in February 2011, Garane Mohamud, 38, sold off his last goat. He regretfully let go of his grip on pastoralism and was left with virtually no means of earning income to cater for his family's basic needs. Born in a Somali family of nine, Garane spent his childhood and most of his adult life in Ijara community in Northern Kenya, admiring his father's herd of about 300 cattle and 600 goats that comfortably sustained the livelihood needs of their family in this arid land.

"My father died in the late 1980s," Garane says. "There is a Somali saying that 'when the head of the family dies, so does his herd.' In my father's case, drought claimed a significant number of the animals, while the rest of it was affected by the inheritance of the animals by several family members, which split the herd." Garane was forced to migrate from village to village looking for pasture. Because of the prolonged drought in the area, he didn't get grazing land and so most of his livestock died of hunger and disease. "I never thought that I could live without livestock in my life," he muses.

Unable to restock with more goats, Garane now survives from growing crops on land borrowed in return for working as a guard at night. He earns only US\$ 19 every six months from sales of bananas and supplements this with \$32 every month from selling charcoal with his wife Halima.

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Garane Mohamud

Increasing frequency and severity of droughts in recent decades has rendered pastoralists in Northern Kenya more vulnerable to their impact. Deterioration of grazing land quality and reduced forage availability has resulted in insufficient fodder during the drought seasons leading to increases in opportunistic diseases among livestock as their immunity is weakened.

This is increasing livestock mortality rates. It is also forcing the population to resort to other coping strategies including charcoal burning and selling, even if, like Garane, they know they are harmful to the environment and contribute to further degradation.

In the past, within the traditional 'irmansi' system, the community elders would organise and restock the lost livestock of a community member almost immediately, through contributions from other members of the community. However, traditional support systems in most Somali communities in the Garissa area are overwhelmed with more than 70 percent of the community members in need of their services. The situation of the weakening traditional systems is similar in other Somali villages across Northern Kenya.

Previously, polygamous relationships enabled a household to be firmly linked with other households in a form of social safety net that increased the likelihood that they would be looked after in the event of difficult times such as drought. Labour for herding and farming (provided by very poor and poor households and paid for by middle and better off households) was almost always sourced from within the community, a mechanism that ensured that money was not only kept within

the community, but that poorer families also benefitted from the livelihood production of the wealthier families.

However, with the effects of a changing climate, many of the families have lost the means to sustain the traditional safety net system. Short and long term loans between families and/or shop owners were common, but with virtually no income, loans are slowly being phased out, as are donations to the poorest people.

Communities do not rely on traditional systems alone. In Fafi village the Maendeleo ya Wanawake women's group (a branch of the national women's development association) is also active in promoting human rights, women's empowerment and social welfare. "With the children to feed and the men earning hardly enough for one meal, women have been forced to become the bread-winners," says Khadra Sigat, chairperson of the Fafi Maendeleo ya Wanawake group. "The women carry out petty trade, mainly table kiosks, with a majority selling livestock products such as milk. They have also begun to grow crops, through bucket fed small scale farming, while others have to turned to charcoal selling."

According to Khadra, the community is overwhelmed and has lost its ability to support vulnerable people – like Garane and his wife Halima – during prolonged drought periods. Khadra continues her advocacy work, promoting women's leadership in formal and informal groups; increased women's participation in decision making and policy influencing processes; and advocating for efficient and effective service delivery to the local community.

The Adaptation Learning Programme (ALP) in Africa will work with Khadra and her women's group, community leaders keen to see the reinstatement of safety nets, and others to help them take a lead role in analysing, planning and implementing community-based adaptation approaches that contribute to sustainable development – and also target the needs of the most vulnerable groups, particularly women. Through strengthening community institutions and building on progressive traditional mechanisms, ALP will help them to minimize the community's vulnerability to climate change impacts and build their adaptive capacity to climate change and variability.

For more information on the ALP in Kenya, please contact alp@careclimatechange.org or emmabowa@care.or.ke or visit <http://www.careclimatechange.org/adaptation-initiatives/alp>.

Story by Ahmed Hassan and Emma Bowa, May 2011

Khadra Sigat, chairperson of Fafi Women Group.



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