

Including pastoralists in Education for All

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In 1990, Article 3 of the World Declaration on Education for All identified nomads as one of several groups who are discriminated against in access to education services. It demanded 'an active commitment' to removing educational disparities. Twenty years on, the 2010 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 'Reaching the Marginalised', noted that this challenge had become urgent: in the rapid progress towards Education for All (EFA), pastoralists have been left far behind (GMR 2010, 179) and continue to face extreme educational disadvantage. As the Millennium Development Goal deadline nears, there is compelling evidence for a renewed focus on how educational inclusion for pastoralist groups can be achieved.

Accurate counts of their populations are very hard to achieve. Official figures for Africa vary but a conservative estimate is some 50 million mobile pastoralists in the drylands, with over 200 million agro-pastoralists across the continent (IIED/SOS Sahel, 2009). There is no overall figure for South Asia but there are significant concentrations of pastoralists in Pakistan and across India, in both the Himalayan region and semi-arid zones (Sharma et al., 2003). Yet the proportion of pastoralists in Commonwealth countries who have accessed formal schooling is very small indeed (Carr-Hill and Peart, 2005; GMR, 2010; Dyer 2006b).

National education data systems do not specifically record data pertaining to nomadic groups; but over the last two decades, despite the EFA push, there have been few sustained positive achievements for pastoralists. Their enrolment, attendance, classroom performance, academic achievement, transition to higher stages of education, and gender balance remain well below those of other groups (GMR, 2010; Dyer, 2006a; Krätli with Dyer, 2006; Dyer, 2009).

Pastoralists' inclusion in EFA is possible. There is new interest and willingness to look afresh at how formal schooling can become compatible with pastoralism. An understanding that pastoralism is a viable contemporary livelihood (Mortimore et al., 2009) is casting doubt on the pervasive view that education is needed to bring an improvement to pastoralists' standard of living and reduce their poverty. This re-framing of pastoralism challenges the dominant understanding of schooling as a means to assist pastoralists' 'development' by transforming them into, for example, settled farmers or waged labourers, or 'modern' livestock producers (Dall, 1993). It confronts the problem of previous uses of schooling as an instrument for agendas of cultural assimilation and sedentarisation of pastoralists (Aikman, 2010; Dyer, 2008).

Changes are resulting because this approach is not working. It is becoming clear that EFA requires a re-thinking of *how* pastoralists make a living and thus how formal education fits. Pastoralism is and will remain the main economic driver in most dryland regions of Africa, and is important also in semi-arid areas and mountainous

highland regions in South Asia. Successful production remains largely dependent on mobility (IIED/SOS Sahel, 2009); patterns of mobility vary and link with complex strategies for animal production. These patterns have critical implications for educational provision (Krätli and Dyer, 2009).

What has been tried: the Commonwealth experience

It has become increasingly apparent that formal day schools that serve majority / sedentary populations around the world are unable to facilitate access to education for mobile children. Efforts have gone into trialling alternative measures by which to reach them; these have had mixed success and all adhere to a school-based model that is problematic.

Boarding schools

Boarding schools have been trialled in several Commonwealth contexts, including Kenya and Nigeria, but African experiences suggest that this model of provision is hard to manage and sustain (Sifuna, 2005; Tahir, 2006). It is difficult to recruit and retain teachers who have both suitable qualifications and the will to work in harsh, remote conditions, where both support and teaching resources are lacking.

Mobile schools

Mobile schools – a tent, a bus, or boat, depending on the local terrain – avoid some of the problems associated with sedentary provision. Bangladesh has provided boat schools for its river gypsies (Maksud and Rasul, 2006); in Sudan, UNICEF sponsorship helped establish some 200 mobile schools in the mid-1990s, some of which are still operational; while Kenya has over 50 mobile schools. However, mobile schools are usually seen as an 'alternative' system, run by non-state providers, often in collaboration with the government, such as the Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) project in Uganda – a Save the Children Norway / Ministry of Education collaboration, which inspired a similar programme in Turkana, Kenya, by Oxfam in 2004 (as ABET – Alternative Basic Education for Turkana). In fact, Krätli (2009) reports that mobile schools were not introduced in Karamoja until May 2009, despite requests from pastoralists, and only comprise 15 of about 500 ABEK centres. Turkana Education for All (TEFA), of which ABET is part, runs about 30 mobile schools.

Distance education

Distance education has also been trialled, particularly the adoption of Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) programmes, where radios are

provided to school settings and operated by teachers in front of a class. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria has the longest history of experimenting with radio broadcasting in nomadic education; IRI has also been trialled in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia, focusing on English and Maths. Although there is enormous potential for radio-based education, so far it has largely been used as a teacher substitute, *without* departing from the school-based model.

The drawbacks to alternative approaches

These 'alternative' approaches require special provider effort, additional expense and logistical capacity. While non-state provision has filled some gaps, all these services experience problems:

- in staff recruitment and retention;
- in curricular relevance, and its capacity to sustain continuous, good-quality learning opportunities;
- in the transition of learners to educational levels above lower primary; and
- in regards to the language of instruction, a major issue whose significance requires greater recognition (Pinnock, 2009).

The enduring problem of the school-based model of formal education

With the imperatives of universal inclusion in mind, it is crucial to understand that even if current school-based models described above are up-scaled substantially, they will still not reach pastoral producers. Improving the limited scale of provision by rolling out more schools of these kinds is not the answer. A more fundamental problem is at the heart of pastoralists' current exclusion from education: the school-based model itself (even with its alternatives).

The children who are left out from the encouraging statistics on progress towards EFA (GMR, 2010) are not just a proportion of all those in pastoral households. They are, rather, *particular* children who have been effectively (even if not deliberately) *selected out* by the system of provision: those who are directly involved in production. How does this happen?

Most pastoralist families nowadays are aware of the potential benefits of formal education. It can provide not only tangible literacy and numeracy skills, but also an awareness of the wider world that becomes available through the school curriculum, the confidence to speak with authority to strangers, and a sense of equal inclusion as citizens. Yet a pastoralist child who seeks to gain these advantages of education in a school-based system has to choose between the educational experience available in school and that available within the family unit. This is a serious consideration with long-term consequences: children can only learn pastoralism by apprenticeship within the family, a form of learning 'on the job' that is tailor-made to their needs and not available anywhere else. If they opt for schooling, they almost without fail opt out of pastoralism and a livelihood uniquely suited to dry- and semi-arid lands.

The statistical trends outlined above reflect this dilemma. For pastoralist families, even current alternative forms of formal educational provision require the household (and pastoralist

production team) to split up to aid school attendance. Not all the children in the family can be enrolled; some are needed to sustain the family production team and its livelihood. After one generation, some children in the family, if they are retained in school, will have gained status through their education; others will see little change, and continue to produce livestock despite the many hardships. But if all does not go well with schooling, the family faces a different problem: children who drop out of school struggle to find a place in the wider economy and are equally hard to employ in the livestock economy.

Trends of change: a scenario of optimism

Trends of contemporary change give rise to cautious optimism. UNICEF captures the emerging mood: 'Education for All is more likely to be achieved if boys and girls are not forced to choose between herding and schooling' (UNICEF, 2007: 6). There is growing evidence of the competitive productivity of *mobile* pastoralism. Recent scholarship has provided strong evidence of the complex and proactive ways that pastoralists move animals in order to exploit the best pasture quality and generate reliable levels of enhanced productivity. It is increasingly recognised that mobility as a livelihood strategy is both here to stay and uniquely suited to particular, often very large, areas of many countries. Mobility is gaining a legitimacy that has been absent in the past.

Institutional recognition of supply-side constraints is growing, and is reflected in the increasing policy visibility of pastoralists: in Tanzania's Basic Education Master Plan (2000); Ethiopia's Pastoralist Programme; a Nomadic Education unit forthcoming in the Puntland State of Somalia; a Nomadic Education Strategic Plan that was launched in Sudan in 2009, together with the Government of South Sudan's hosting of an international conference on nomadic education. Elsewhere, Kenya's 2005 policy framework for education insists that the approved national curriculum should be consistent with nomadic patterns and lifestyles and its 2009 Policy Guidelines on Nomadic Education call for a National Commission on Nomadic Education. In South Asia, Bangladesh's 2005 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper identifies river gypsies as educationally deprived; while India's Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)¹ identifies nomadic groups as a population category that requires special attention (SSA, 2005), although it is up to individual state governments to design specific measures.

Pastoralists themselves are actively engaging with the challenges of combining formal education with pastoralism, not only by expressing demand but also by defining their expectations from educational services and engaging with national and international actors in order to achieve them.

Towards inclusive approaches to EFA

As pastoralists and providers all engage more closely with how schooling itself has presented an unnecessary barrier to pastoralists' involvement with formal education, it is becoming evident that a way forward is an Open Distance Learning (ODL) approach. ODL's potential has been acknowledged at the All-Africa Ministers' Conference on Open Learning and Distance Education (South Africa, 2004) and two Commonwealth-supported forums on flexible education (on Africa in Kenya in 2006 and on South Asia in New Delhi in 2008).

ODL is not a 'magic bullet' and it may not prove less expensive than conventional schooling. But using ODL is not a question of economics. For EFA to include pastoralists, it is a necessity driven by practical, educational rationales for including learners who are systematically excluded by current approaches to school-based education. These learners can be reached, but only if the contemporary value of pastoralism and mobility as an enduring feature of it, are fully recognised by all Commonwealth countries. This is a prerequisite to modifying approaches so that livelihoods of families as mobile producers are assured, and this very large group of children is included within the educational mainstream and EFA vision.

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Endnote

¹ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is the Government of India's inclusive education programme, which was launched in 2001 to ensure that all children aged 6–14 attend school and complete eight years of schooling by 2010.

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