

Status Paper

Socio-Economics of Pastoralist Communities of Highland Balochistan, Pakistan*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the prevailing socio-economic systems of pastoral communities, particularly those who migrate, and their recent trends in highland Balochistan. It was hypothesised that pastoralist communities are undergoing through a remarkable change as a consequence of various socio-economic motivations and compulsions. These motivations and compulsions have probably encouraged the settlement of pastoralists, migration of landless farmers to urban areas for alternate employment opportunities and more importantly the break down or weakening of traditional pastoralists decision making mechanism that probably accelerated irreversible degradation of rangelands. This paper reports the socio-economic status of pastoralist communities of highland Balochistan, Pakistan.

Key Words: Socio-economic status; Pastoralists; Balochistan; Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan, stretches over 34.7 million hectares (mha) making 44% of the country. Elevation exceed 2000 m in many areas with peaks reaching to 3,500 m around Quetta (capital city of the province). Aridity is prevalent and only 4% (1.42 mha) is cultivated for agriculture while rest of the entire area is classified as rangeland. Average rainfall is less than 200 mm, with a range of 50 mm in south to 400 mm towards north, over a narrow belt of Suleman mountains that receives some monsoon.

Rangeland resources and their use. The rangelands located in north with relatively better quality grazing lands constitute 38% of total area and carry about 76% of total livestock in the province. The rangelands in south are considered as poor and cover 62% of total area and carry only 24% of the livestock population. Dry matter production potential of rangelands in Balochistan is low and varies from 30 kg to 280 kg/ha/annum (FAO, 1983).

In Balochistan rangelands are a major source of livestock feed. The grazing rights on these rangelands have evolved over a period of time. In north of province (Pathan majority areas), the rangelands belong collectively to tribes and clans rather than individuals. Everybody is allowed to use the rangeland for free or for payment in cash or kind. In Central Balochistan (mixed Brahvi and Baloch area), the rangelands are owned by the tribal chiefs or the member of ruling class. As a general rule, no outsider is allowed to use the rangeland except with permission of the owner. Nomadic flocks (owned by Afghans and local tribes), who generally follow a traditionally determined routes, are allowed to use the grazing land without any payment.

Animal production systems. Traditionally animal production systems in Balochistan fall into three categories: nomadic, transhumant and sedentary. The local ecological conditions make it necessary for livestock owners to migrate in search of grazing areas. One estimate suggests that migratory livestock constitutes about 90% of the livestock population in Balochistan, out of which 60% is transhumant and only 30% nomadic.

Nomadic flocks have no fixed base but keep moving throughout a year in search of grazing. They migrate from uplands to lowlands in winter and vice versa in the summer season. Their migration follows fixed routes where they have contacts with the communities who provide them grazing facilities and animal feed, and in return, the nomads sell them animals, animal products and provide farm labour.

Transhumant flock owners can be land owner or landless. They practice agriculture by harvesting surface run-off and mainly grow winter wheat. Each winter they migrate with their flocks to the low lands and go back to their homes in summer.

Sedentary flock owners live in agriculture villages and raise few animals. Most animals raised on farm are either for household consumption or for sale just before religious festivals, when the prices are high. This supplementary livestock production accounts for a major portion of household income and helps to improve farm productivity.

Major issues. The traditional livestock production systems, particularly migratory, have been little described and documented. Moreover, during the past few decades, the migratory systems have undergone through a transformation. The transformation process has been catalysed by many factors like; increase in livestock and human population that have accelerated depletion of rangelands in terms of both ecological condition and

productivity; government policies that have encouraged underground water mining for agriculture and orchards, socio-economic uplift, and Afghan war. Out of these factors, indiscriminate mining of underground water and Afghan war are probably the most crucial factors that have direct implications on migratory livestock production systems.

Afghan war has compelled the pastoralists, either to settle or rotate their flocks within the boundaries of Balochistan, who used to travel as far as the borders of Central Republics and Russia. The other consequence of Afghan war is the influx of refugees in millions with their animals. Human disturbances, like building of mud houses, harvesting of trees/shrubs for fuelwood, and continuous over-grazing of Afghan animals along with local flocks, converted a vast area into a barren land.

This study investigated the prevailing socio-economic systems of pastoral communities, particularly those who migrate, and their recent trends in highland Balochistan.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this study a planning meeting was organised on September 20, 1999 in Quetta. The participants in this meeting were from non-government and government sector that included Department of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and Environment and a multi-disciplinary survey team was constituted. A training workshop was organised for the survey team to re-orientate them about participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques. The flock owners in the winter pastures (lowland areas), north and south (summer pastures) of the Highland Balochistan were surveyed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Different categories of migratory pastoralists. The rangelands of Balochistan are used by different groups/tribes of migratory/nomadic pastoralists. These pastoralists can be classified into following main categories:

(I) The local nomads. The local nomads can be further sub-divided into the Baloch and Pashtoon nomads.

The Baloch nomads. The Baloch nomads are true local nomads. They hardly cross provincial boundaries and rarely international. They can be further sub-divided into two general categories i.e. Brahvi nomads and Murri nomads. The Brahvi nomads used to roam in the districts of Quetta, Mastung, Kharan, Kalat, and Khuzdar. During the past two to three decades, the Brahvi nomads have become more transhumants and very few Brahvi families are still pursuing nomadic life style. However, we did not encounter any one during this survey. Balochi sheep is common in Brahvi flocks. The Murri nomads are found in district Kohlu. Bibrik sheep dominates their flocks. Murri tribes inherit very strong tribal set-up, rich in a distinctive culture. Murri can easily be

recognised from their typical get-up. Murri nomads migrate in two directions from their point of origin. During summer, they may travel towards Speraragha in the neighbourhood of Juniper forests in district Loralai or towards Muslim Bagh, district Qilla Saifullah in northern Balochistan. During winter, they migrate towards the plains of Sibi and Kacchi districts.

The Pashtoon nomads. The origin of Pashtoon nomads is northern Balochistan (i.e. districts of Pishin, Qilla Saifullah, Ziarat, Loralai, and Zhob). They spend their summer and fall at their origin and during winter they migrate towards adjoining warmer areas of NWFP in north-east, of Punjab in east, and areas of Balochistan and Sindh in south and south-west. The Pashtoon nomads are named after the language they speak (i.e. Pushto). The Pushtoon nomads are locally called as 'Pawinda' and have a recognised lifestyle and culture which is altogether different from the Baloch nomads.

(II) The international nomads. Most of the Pashtoon nomads may be called as international nomads since they use to cross the international boundary of Pakistan, Afghanistan and sometimes the Central Asian States. Because of civil war in Afghanistan, these international nomads no more enter into Afghanistan due to land mines, insecurity, highly degraded ranges and lack of other opportunities.

The Afghan refugees. The Afghan refugees are accidental nomads. They took refuge in Pakistan with their animals due to political disturbance in Afghanistan. The flock size of refugees have reduced considerably probably due to sale of animals and non-availability of forage. The rangelands adjoining to refugee camps have been converted into barren lands due to continuous heavy grazing and uprooting of shrubs/trees for fuel. As soon as the international aid was stopped, they moved out of refugee camps and adapted migratory schedule on the lines of the Pashtoon nomads. The Afghan refugees have greatly increased the pressure on already depleted range resources of Balochistan. The influx of refugees has also acted as a catalyst to induce shifts and changes in historically classified socio-economic systems of pastoralists in Balochistan.

Shifts and trends in socio-economic systems. Gradual socio-economic transformation of pastoralists has been a classical feature in Balochistan. However, pace and magnitude of this phenomenon have closely been associated with prevailing ecological, social and climatic factors. All three traditional classes of pastoralists (nomads, transhumant and sedentary) are subject to transformation in one or other way. The impact of government policies, for example, to develop agriculture in Balochistan is pronounced on pastoralists. Expanding cultivation is gradually restricting movements of free roaming animals. Thus, posing threats to the flocks dependent fully on natural vegetation for forage supplies. Shortage of forage from rangelands is forcing local pastoralists to think about

alternative sources of income. Moreover, pastoralism, particularly migratory, in any form has never attracted the policy makers to invite large scale modern development intervention. Migratory pastoralism as a lifestyle and profession is struggling for its survival. There is no formal institution to look after this historical and cultural heritage. There are many forums both at national and international level to advocate the conservation of Juniper forests, conservation of Chilghoza forests, conservation of wildlife and biodiversity, etc. but unfortunately this centuries old traditional lifestyle is dying without leaving any traces.

Migratory nomads are highly vulnerable to external forces. As a consequence, rapid changes are occurring in their traditional practices and norms as a part of survival strategy. During this study we found that within nomads following two more groups are emerging:

a) **Commercial nomads.** The commercial nomads are mostly Pushtoon and Afghan refugees. They do not own any flocks. During summer, they establish their camps in the suburbs of a city with major livestock activity like, Quetta, Kuchlak, Chaman, etc. They are regular visitors of city livestock market. A commercial nomad is always opportunist. On a downward trend in daily market prices of animals or whenever he manoeuvres a good price deal, he would buy few animals. Usually, a commercial nomad would keep maximum 20 sheep. He would daily take his animals back to market early in the morning and would stay there till noon. During this time he would try to sell his animals on higher prices and would simultaneously try to buy other animals at low price. Being a regular visitor of the market, he uses his market intelligence to fetch good deals by interacting with those who have come to sell their animals with little knowledge of animal prices. Conclusively, he is always looking for an opportunity to make profit out of each deal. At the end of the morning session of market, he would go back to his camping site with his flock. The daily flock size may decrease, increase, etc. depending on the kind of deals he had finalised in the market. In the afternoon, he would graze these animals in the neighbourhood of his camping site. Women would also try to harvest some green grasses, weeds etc. growing besides water courses to feed these animals. Sometimes, coarse grains are also fed to animals for strategic fattening purposes e.g., *landhai*.

Landhai is especiality of northern highlands of Balochistan. It is dry mutton prepared in a traditional manner before the onset of severe winter. Throughout winter, a pastoralist family would use '*Landhai*' meat for its daily meals. A family determines its winter needs of *Landhai* in terms of total number of sheep to be slaughtered during early fall. The '*Landhai*' making process would start sometimes in October. Prime mutton with a thick layer of fat is used for it. For this purpose, usually two years old, well fattened and castrated rams are slaughtered. These animals are prepared for '*Landhai*' by feeding them grains few

weeks ahead. Since a commercial, nomad is Pushtoon, he is well aware of the need as well as the prime market value of '*Landhai*' animals and the Pushtoon families living in cities, towns and villages with no or few animals purchase fattened animals for *Landhai*. The commercial nomad plans annually to benefit from traditional opportunities. On an average, he would fatten 35 male sheep and would sell all his animals in the market with a very good market price before he would migrate to his winter camping site (i.e. Sibi etc. in lowlands).

The commercial nomad also avails another annual opportunity to sell good number of sheep and goats. Eid-ul-Azha is an annual religious event of Muslims when every Muslim family with reasonable income source would slaughter a sheep, a goat, etc. The schedule of this event is linked with moon sighting and thus it keeps changing, on this occasion, the commercial nomad would make arrangements to buy 100 to 150 sheep and goats and would sell to the local Muslim population on profit.

A kinship of commercial nomads would hire jointly a truck to migrate towards winter station by road, sometimes in October, however, all families make sure that they have sold out all their animals in the market because their migration is now without livestock. As soon as they establish their new camp, same market activity is resumed. During their winter stay, a commercial nomad family would make sure that enough fuelwood is collected from the lowlands which would be sufficient for their summer domestic needs in highlands. As a consequence of severe degradation of summer ranges in highlands, these nomads also supplement there fuelwood supplies by transporting wood from lowlands. This practice cause heavy damage to shrubs and trees particularly in common lands.

b) **Transhumant nomads.** The transhumant nomads have fixed one point on summer ranges to live with their flocks. They have occupied openlands with no recognized ownership rights to establish their fixed points. Where they have erected semi-structured mud houses. The classical example of this type of nomads is a settlement besides roadside in Kuchlak area. The flock number is relatively small (i.e. <100). The flocks are grazed on neighbouring openlands. Surplus labour of family may work as labourer in town for supporting family income. Few of them have purchased tractors and trolleys for additional income. They also use tractors to transport their families by road during migration, whereas their flocks move along their traditional migratory routes. The movement schedule of flocks (i.e. daily camp locations etc.) is decided and flocks and families join each other in lowland or vice versa accordingly. On both ends, tractors are locally used on rental basis to transport goods, soil, etc. It was observed by the survey team that these tractor owners did not have agricultural implements to operate on local farmers' fields. These nomads also take advantage of tractor-trolley and harvest fuelwood in lowlands and transport it to summer ranges.

The shift of pastoralists from one animal production system to another may be termed as a general phenomenon in Balochistan. Eventually, with better economic empowerment, the commercial nomad and transhumant nomads may purchase land, develop underground water resources and become sedentary agriculturist or may explore any other better economic opportunity like business. Similar case may be with transhumants. At this stage, it is difficult to quantify the rate of shift in each socio-economic system, however, socio-cultural problems arising in the urban areas can be related to these shifts. Therefore, it is time to consider these issues at policy level. Necessary steps will be required to accommodate and facilitate these communities to avoid any future conflicts in different social groups.

Severe drought of 1999-2000 is a good reflection, indicating how pastoralists lives are becoming more vulnerable to the calamities. We have found that more than 70% mortality occurred in sheep/goat flocks in districts of Chagai and Kharan. In otherwards the pastoralists lost their even subsistence income from these flocks. The rescue and aid operations focus mainly on providing food and water to human population and these operations are based on short term strategies. The governments needs long term policies and planning to rehabilitate the drought hit pastoralists on their traditional lines. Otherwise, they would migrate to cities, towns or other provinces where there would be very limited economic opportunities for such raw hand labour. Consequently, civic, social as well as criminal problems may arise for local administration. Since there is tribal set-up in Balochistan, any social conflict may lead to a big civil insurgency. There had been examples of this kind in the past. The Murri tribe moved out of Pakistan and lived in Afghanistan for many years due to their political difference with Pakistani government. In Afghanistan they used to have social differences with local Pushtoon tribes. When Murri tribe returned back to their native ranges in Balochistan, they were very hostile towards Pushtoon nomads originating in Afghanistan. As a consequence, the Pushtoon nomads had to change their historical migratory routes to avoid security threats from Murri tribes.

In general, all pastoralists are under the influence of modern era developments. Their migratory routes are now subject to change due to better road links. The survey team has observed this type of route changes, for example, the Khuzdar to Shahdad Kot route is new one because of government intervention by establishing a road link between Balochistan and Sindh.

The Afghan problem has closed down all international routes for nomadic pastoralists. They used to travel as far as Central Asian States and used to spend more or less six months in international travel. These nomads do not cross international boundaries any more and consequently, the cumulative pressure on ecosystem is visibly beyond its threshold level. Damages to various components of ecosystem are devastating and irreparable because of hyper

arid conditions. Large scale reduction in plant cover has accelerated soil and water erosion. Water run-off losses are too much with very little recharge of underground aquifers. A person with a fair perception of ecosystem and the linkages of its various components with each other gets very worried after a round trip of countryside.

Spatial arrangements and migratory routes. The migratory pastoralists spend most of summer in highlands of Balochistan and winter in low lands of Balochistan and Sindh province. Their migratory calendar is illustrated in chart. Nomads in far north (Zhob) and far west (Kharan) of Balochistan begin their migration as late as 15th of October or as soon as winter season commences. The nomads in central parts or areas relatively closer to lowlands may leave their summer ranges little later. However, all these decisions are taken in the light of the availability of feed, water and weather conditions.

The migration from summer stations to winter low lands or other way round takes 15 to 45 days depending upon the distance between two locations. Most of the flocks reach in the winter pastures by November 15. These flocks stay in lowlands till the second week of April or as soon as they finish the grazing of harvested wheat fields to utilise the crop residues. Sometimes, their backward migration (i.e. towards highlands) is delayed due to drought or no rainfall in summer ranges. All nomads have their indigenous linkages and contacts on both locations and collect regularly updated information regarding rainfall, vegetation, weather conditions etc. and all the decisions regarding migration time and destination are made accordingly. They stay in summer ranges for about five months.

In northern highlands of Balochistan, Karez Qamardin, Toba Kakari, Pishin and Kuchlak areas serve as summer ranges for nomads. These nomads migrate through Bolan Pass and graze their flocks in district Sibi, Jhal Magsi and Patfeeder area during winter. Few of them from Karez Qamardin area would travel towards Musakhel onward to Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab.

On summer ranges, the nomadic flocks are dependent on forage supply from rangelands. However, in lowlands, the nomadic flock owners purchase cultivated fodder (i.e. sorghum, alfalfa etc.) from local farmers for their animals.

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