



GENDER ISSUES IN PASTORALIST SOCIETIES

A presentation made to ECHO Pastoralist symposium.



Definition of gender

- Socially constructed roles, behaviors, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.
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MAJOR ISSUES

I. Participation and decision making



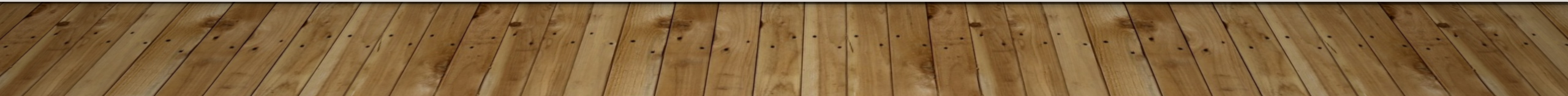
- women have almost no direct decision-making power especially over livestock
- Men can control a woman's ability to participate in activities outside the home by assigning her more tasks
- Men control the purchase and sale of livestock (Economic power in pastoral societies).
- Exclusion from decision making weakens women

2. Unequal opportunities

- Women and men's empowerment is primarily defined in financial terms but show different paths to empowerment for men and women.
- Men own livestock almost exclusively and wealth and empowerment often is defined by the number of cattle owned. Women more often gain empowerment through group membership and running small businesses.
- If women successfully improve themselves financially, the community sometimes tries to hold them back by accusing them of witchcraft or prostitution. These accusations tend to diminish over time, but it is important for women to donate to community fundraisers, act humbly and share some of the proceeds with the husband. Some husbands demand that wives give them all of their outside earnings. As a result, most women will keep silent about their actual outside earnings.
- Education for girls and boys

3. Social upbringing

- While women can visit different areas, they are rarely away from home for extended periods of time.
(Enkon'gu naipung'o eng'en)
- women's and men's roles are culturally defined, men can tell women what additional tasks they need to complete. If women do not carry out the assigned roles, they can be beaten especially activities directly related to livestock care.
- Domestic violence is seen as a common part of life. Both sexes consider it normal under most circumstances
- violence often prevents women from taking initiative or requesting greater decision-making power and mobility
- While men from the onset are taught to be assertive, women are taught to be timid.



4. Unbalanced roles

- Generally women tend to carry more roles than the men
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- The trend is changing, while generally herding has historically been a male role, more and more women are herding livestock on top of their hectic daily routines
 - Most of the productive time of pastoral women is used up rearing children while men have the choice of what to do when to do, how to do and who to do
 - More and more women are taking full responsibility of providing food for the family

What do these existing issues mean to pastoral societies?

- Inequalities that exist, prevent society from realizing the full potential of women in:
 - i. Social context
 - ii. Economic context
 - iii. Political context and
 - iv. Legal context

It also means an enabling environment is socially created to benefit one group and not the other

Women rights and leadership forums (WRLFs)





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