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## Borana Women in Livestock Management: Roles, Perceptions, Recent Changes

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### Abstract

Pastoral production is a family farming system in which the different household members take over specific tasks and responsibilities. In the last decades, the Borana pastoral production system has changed due to a number of factors, such as environmental degradation, enactment of policies that affect pastoral land use, and infrastructure development. These changes might be accompanied by changes of the roles of pastoral women in the production system.

This study examines livestock related roles and responsibilities of women in the Borana community of southern Ethiopia. It explores women's perceptions on their role in livestock management, and investigates changes in the last 40 years. We conducted 82 semi-structured and 30 narrative interviews with Borana women across all age-sets and with elderly and middle aged men.

Borana women's current roles and responsibilities include milking of cattle and shoats, milk processing, and care of young stock. The spectrum of shared tasks is considerable, including for instance camel management, cattle dung removal, and livestock medication. Women can take over all traditional men's roles in case of labour shortage except slaughtering. Husbands likewise assist their wives in the course of their regular activities and in puerperium particularly; thus, the gendered labour division is flexible. Girls are actively involved in herding and in their mothers' livestock work. Widows take over the role of their late husbands in case their sons are not able to carry out the activities; hence, the workload of young widows is particularly high. Throughout all age-sets and family situations, the respondents showed great contentment with their role in livestock management. Main factors of gender change include both environmental changes and governmental interference, the first increasing the labour requirement and the latter retaining labour force through compulsory labour of doubtful effect. Novel livestock management strategies such as fencing of grazing reserves and fodder storage are mostly conducted jointly by both genders, whereby most of the specific working steps are again allocated to either men or women. The general trend points to enhanced mutual support of women and men, with particularly men becoming increasingly involved in former women's activities.

**Keywords:** Borana livestock production, gender, pastoral women, Southern Ethiopia