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## Determinants of Grazing Management in the Borana Pastoral System of Southern Ethiopia

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### Abstract

Borana pastoralists of southern Ethiopia had a very sophisticated grazing system where herding decisions across heterogeneous landscape was regulated by customary institutions. In this system, water and pasture use was carefully regulated to allow flexibility and strategic mobility dictated by the high spatial and temporal variability. Recent policy changes including the creation of the Pastoral Associations (PAs) have significantly weakened the traditional institutions thereby undermining their role in regulating pastoral land use. The objectives of this paper is to establish the implications of these changes on herders' decision space in three ecologically different zones of Dirre, Golbo, and Malbe in the Borana rangelands of southern Ethiopia. We used participatory rangeland mapping with Borana pastoralists using print outs of satellite imageries to delineate and characterise grazing units. Seasonal grazing calendar were used to reconstruct herd grazing itinerary for 90 cattle herds for over a year. Eighteen key informant interviews were conducted to learn about the regulations that are still controlled by the customary institutions and to understand the implication of weakening of the customary institutions for pasture use/grazing decisions. In each of the three zones, pastoralists successfully delineated the different grazing units (with sizes between 3 and 40 km<sup>2</sup>) and the described the characteristics and use of each unit. We established that herd owners have limited and at times no opportunity for individual decision to choose grazing units due to constrained grazing space that led to communal grazing arrangement of lumping grazing units into dry and wet season use. Across all the three grazing zones, herd mobility has been reduced to a predictable routine movement between wet and dry season in a communally administered fodder deferment plan instead of the traditional arrangement of herd division into mobile Foora (Dry stock) and Hawicha (Milk stock). Herd mobility is further constrained by the ubiquitous settlements resulting to all year round use in most of the grazing units. More centralised water and pasture resource management has reduced the role of customary institutions in decision making. Due to the reduced flexibility, pastoralists in Borana rangeland are more vulnerable to external shocks including frequent devastating droughts.

**Keywords:** Borana rangeland, customary institutions, pastoral land use, southern Ethiopia