

Approaches to education provision for mobile pastoralists

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Summary

Experiences of mobile pastoralists often attest to a wide range of contradictions about the presumed advantages of formal education. While effort to 'reach' pastoralists has intensified under the global Education for All movement, there remain considerable difficulties in finding ways to make formal education relate to pastoralist livelihoods and complement endogenous knowledge. This paper examines how these dynamics play out across models of formal and non-formal education service provision, and identifies innovations that offer promising ways forward: Alternative Basic Education, Open and Distance Learning, and Pastoralist Field Schools.

Keywords

Alternative Basic Education – Education – Education for All – Field School – Livelihood.

Introduction

Education is widely viewed across development narratives as having a central role in individual and national socio-economic development (e.g. 1). Apart from being a basic human right, it is seen instrumentally as a means of alleviating poverty (2, 3; but see discussion in 4), addressing societal inequalities, facilitating the social inclusion of disadvantaged social groups (5) and, broadly, as a means to modernity (6). However, such narratives tend to be silent about other established roles of formal education, such as its instrumentality in agendas of state-building and social reproduction (cf. 6, 7, 8, 9). Experiences of mobile pastoralists often attest to a wide range of contradictions about the presumed advantages of formal education in relation to their traditional livelihood: they demonstrate that education is a highly contested resource both in theory (e.g. 10, 11), and on the ground, where practices often belie grand statements of policy (e.g. 12).

In keeping with grand development narratives of education as a public and individual good, the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) stressed that there must be an 'active commitment' to removing educational disparities and specifically identified 'nomads' as one among several underserved groups (13). A repeated EFA call, again noting 'nomads' as a group requiring 'special attention', was made a decade later in 2000 (14) – the year of the Millennium Declaration and launch of the Millennium Development Goals. A further decade later, the 2010 EFA Global

Monitoring Report from the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 'Reaching the Marginalised' (15), called for 'urgent action' to address what it described as mobile pastoralists' continuing, extreme 'education deprivation'.

The 2010 Report's assertion of education deprivation is a mainstream interpretation which reflects narratives of formal education as an unproblematised good and has pertinent shortcomings – not least of which is failure to recognise the value of endogenous education and, in our case, its essential role in sustaining a livelihood as a mobile pastoralist. While effort to 'reach' pastoralists has intensified under EFA, as this paper shows, there remain considerable difficulties in finding ways to make formal education relate to pastoralist livelihoods and complement endogenous knowledge – and this is particularly the case in relation to educating pastoralist children. These difficulties, in turn, reflect how dynamics of education service supply and demand are shaped by the status of pastoralism in national political economies, which is itself contested (16). Nevertheless, there have been some important innovations, within and outside the education sector, that offer promising ways forward. At the same time, there is also an urgent need for much better documentation and analysis of those innovations before their effectiveness can be confidently claimed.

This paper begins by framing a fundamental tension that shapes the dynamics of education service supply and demand: the relationship between differing forms

of education and pastoralist livelihoods. Drawing on this discussion, subsequent sections briefly review experience of different modalities that have been adopted, and their relative advantages in relation to pastoralists' livelihood aspirations. The paper identifies Alternative Basic Education, Open and Distance Learning, and Pastoralist Field Schools as innovations that offer promising ways forward, although experience so far has shown that there are issues that require attention, as will be discussed here. The analysis draws on: desk review; episodes of field research in Western India since the mid-1990s (funded by the United Kingdom's Economic and Social Research Council and Nuffield Foundation); and roles as a technical advisor to international development agencies and the governments of Afghanistan, Kenya and Ethiopia.

Education for or out of pastoralism?

There is increasingly robust evidence that pastoralism is a viable and sustainable livelihood, and that pastoralists have expert skills in productively managing uncertainty and risk in arid land ecosystems (17, 18). Despite this, mobile pastoralism is often interpreted as the very antithesis of modernity (19, 20) and elided with 'backwardness' (see 21 for examples). Positioning this livelihood as in need of modernisation at the very least and, at worst, an anachronism best left behind (22) posits formal education, given its own associations with modernity, as the logical 'solution' to enable pastoralists to exit this livelihood. Of course, according to their particular circumstances, pastoralists may indeed want to diversify away from their traditional livelihood, but they may also recognise an underlying instrumentality to which resistance can be expressed by staying away from school. In the education sector, planner awareness of and/or conviction about the rationality of mobile pastoralist livelihoods is far from universally established. The education inclusion that policy narratives promote is, then, far more political than their technocratic and target-orientated discourses of universal access and retention would admit, because it is also about the legitimacy and sustainability of a particular (mobile) livelihood.

Day and residential schooling

Day schooling is the dominant mode of providing formal education to young children. Investing in this form of education is widely recognised among mobile pastoralists as a form of future proofing – a component of a household strategy to diversify income. In pastoralist zones, rates of participation, retention and achievement in such provision are lower than national averages (15, 23, 24, 25, 26),

although data on trends among pastoralists specifically are in short supply. At one level, this reflects general systemic issues of poor service supply in the sparsely populated rural areas that pastoralists inhabit (27, 28). At another, however, these trends reflect the difficulty that, even before issues of curriculum relevance come up, enrolling children in this form of provision conflicts with the mobility and patterns of labour distribution that characterise successful mobile pastoralist production (17). In order to access sedentary schooling, children need to be available for most of the day and on a daily basis. Pastoralists seeking to acquire the benefits they see from participation in schooling thus need to adapt production in ways that typically include curtailing mobility to remain near the school and/or household splitting to enable some members to remain with animals while others attend school (29). These strategies can facilitate enrolment and there is evidence that pastoralists do sedentarise deliberately in order to access formal education (particularly where there is no alternative) (21). This strategy may, however, favour boys if girls are then expected to prioritise domestic roles over school attendance in the split-off household. The trends on participation noted above cannot, therefore, be entirely attributed to the now widely acknowledged low quality of provision itself (30): they also reflect livelihood imperatives that compete with the requirements of service supply.

Boarding schools are well established as a means of enabling mobile pastoralists to access formal provision and there have been notable large-scale state-driven initiatives in Mongolia, Iran and Nigeria. Mongolia in particular is usually cited as an exemplar of significant success, but – importantly – its residential schools for pastoralists ran under particular circumstances that no longer exist. The socialist regime offered residential schooling as an integral component of state-funded structural effort to integrate the pastoral production system within the nationalised, command economy (31, 32), but the switch to a post-1990 market economy marked the decline of both the availability and quality of residential provision (31). Iran's iconic state-provided white tent mobile schools were first mooted in 1924. They were funded, with support from the United States (33), under Persia's Tribal Education Programme, founded in 1955, which offered primary and secondary education in Persian (34). In their heyday both these initiatives were able to integrate formal education into a pastoralist context, and validate pastoralists' cultural values alongside introducing different ones (34). The success they claim rests on a view of pastoralism as a legitimate livelihood which is enriched by formalised education; the same delivery system can easily fail where this view does not prevail (35). Nigerian residential school experience illustrates the difficulties of achieving enrolment, ensuring high-quality provision, and developing appropriate capitation formulae for schools specifically designed for nomadic groups (36), even when these are overseen by a

dedicated body, in this case the National Commission for Nomadic Education established in 1989.

Alternative Basic Education as a policy response

The search for flexibility to fulfil the EFA pledges has resulted in growing attention to ‘alternative programmes’ offering ‘basic’ education to fulfil children’s basic right to education where formal schools are unsuited (37). Alternative Basic Education (ABE) is typically offered in a range of partnership modalities between state and non-state organisations. For mobile pastoralists, it generally aims for provision that can move too – a ‘school’ in the form of a tent, bus or boat, or a couple of boxes on the back of a camel or donkey. Another promising model is the *dugsi* school (38), which provides Koranic education and can be adapted to offer a secular wrap-around. Beyond mobility, the professed strengths of ABE compared with static mainstream provision are flexibility over curricular content and entry qualifications for teachers; respect for community social values; and capacity to investigate and respond to demand. Experience has shown that if mobile pastoralists feel that educational provision is responsive to their needs and priorities, and if the distance between child and provision is minimised, they are more willing to enrol both boys and girls (25, 39).

On the ground, ‘mobile’ provision carries an inherent bias towards serving concentrations of semi-mobile learners: to be viable, it depends on aggregates of learners, but those aggregates can scatter rapidly. Enrolment and progression are thus liable to be unstable, and learners with more complex, sporadic patterns of mobility are unlikely to be enrolled at all, let alone retained (40, 41). In fact, although the need to provide services suited to mobile livelihoods is widely acknowledged, ABE has often established (temporary) structures rather than providing truly *mobile* schools (40). Schools on camel-back have been trialled in Kenya and Ethiopia, but these initiatives lack both continuity and scale. Creating truly mobile provision for highly mobile learners carries with it further challenges – of identifying, training and retaining teachers, and of monitoring and quality assurance (42) – both of which are already challenging in fixed-place provision in pastoralist zones (15, 30).

Forms of ABE offer some opportunities for the acquisition of a ‘basic’ formal education, including skills of reading and writing, although supply is fragmented and the efficacy of this form of provision is very difficult to assess (43). However, learners who wish to progress to more advanced levels of learning find themselves needing to

transition into formal provision and thus, again, facing the structural barriers outlined above. The trend of involving non-state actors in ABE delivery can significantly improve systemic ‘reach’ for the acquisition of basic skills and, to that extent, address constraints of delivery capacity. It does, nevertheless, make learners within ABE dependent on the capacity of non-state organisations to manage and sustain successful programmes, and exposes them to the potential vagaries of short-term programming.

Documentation of ABE provision is very problematic, and generally too poor to enable detailed assessment of its quality and capacity to know, and respond to, learner aspirations. Data that go beyond statistics on enrolment to provide detail on retention, let alone learner achievements, appear to be rarely collected and are very difficult to find in the public domain. These information gaps are usefully illuminated in a UNESCO-commissioned collation of ABE project information in Ethiopia (44). Since official recognition of ABE is variable, assessing its scale and impact is further complicated because children who are enrolled in such provision may be officially recorded as out of school (24, 43, 44). Major questions remain, therefore, over accountability for children’s learning in ‘alternative’ modalities, and these questions demand future research attention.

Open and distance learning

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) offers learning without barriers of time, place, pace or methods of study (45). It is the only delivery model that really has the capacity to go to scale and enable the participation of learners who have complex patterns of movement, and there is increasing policy-level awareness of its potential to deliver on EFA commitments (36, 40). Implementation, however, lags far behind advocacy; and personal communications with policy communities (Niger 2013, Afghanistan 2012, India 2012, Ethiopia 2015) confirm that there is a reluctance to depart from familiar teacher–learner provision on the ground, and a perception that innovative provision of this nature is a risk with high start-up costs. So far, radio-based instruction has been the key technology in ODL programming among pastoralist groups, although mobile telephony offers obvious options as networks expand, and television has been used among some communities, e.g. the Sami in northern Scandinavia. Radio has been used effectively to support adult pastoralist women in vocational education in Mongolia (46) and to deliver formalised education for children in Australia, where it was an early component of Schools of the Air. Kenya put considerable effort into developing an ODL radio-based strategy for highly mobile pastoralists in 2010 (47) in a design that closely addressed the logistics of mobility; but government

representatives' insistence on adhering to the national curriculum left unaddressed the matter of the relevance of its content to pastoralist aspirations and how it should best be adapted to learning needs in the pastoralist context. This is, nevertheless, a promising initiative which has attracted renewed attention from Kenya's National Council for Nomadic Education. In Ethiopia, where the 2008 national pastoralist education strategy is undergoing revision for a second iteration in 2016, attention is also being paid to radio's potential to support teacher and ABE facilitators' training in pastoralist regions.

There is strong global experience of using ODL either as a support to enrich teaching in under-resourced school classrooms or as a means of facilitating adult learning. Much work will need to be done to develop ODL that responds to pastoralist communities' contextualised learning needs and, more specifically, their younger learners.

Pastoralist Field Schools

Pastoralist Field Schools (PFS) are a relatively new adaptation of the Farmer Field School (FFS) model developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (48; see 49 for a systematic review). Intended to serve adults, a Field School typically involves 20–30 participants and a facilitator who meet regularly, and uses systematic field learning activities to analyse and take action on a situation. This form of education aims to enhance both participants' conceptual understanding of the underlying basic science, relations and interactions in their given context (48) and their capacities to take joint action in response to collective analysis. FFS were first adopted in agricultural areas of Eastern Africa in 1995 and were adapted for pastoralists in 1996 in northern Kenya. Since then, PFS have been rolled out across Kenya (50), Ethiopia (51), Tanzania and Uganda by a range of state and non-state organisations (52). PFS are an extension approach that aims to equip pastoralists with the knowledge and skills that can help make them more resilient and reduce vulnerability to recurring drought, escalation of conflict, hunger and animal disease (48, 52). They support pastoralists in problem solving and adapting to change by 'sharpening their ability to make critical and informed decisions on their coping mechanisms' (51); they also provide a platform for pastoralists, extension workers and researchers to explore development options in specific local contexts (51).

The PFS model is a promising approach – success has been met with demand for more provision (51). It is now being strongly promoted by FAO and other development agencies across the Horn of Africa, albeit in the absence, as yet, of rigorous evaluation. There are, nevertheless, inherent limitations in the model in relation to its suitability

for some pastoralist learners. For example, PFS have been successfully used with agro-pastoralists, because the group of participants is usually stable (this is the approach that the FAO is currently promoting in South Sudan), but a model that is effective for semi-sedentary agro-pastoralists is not necessarily applicable for those whose mobility is less predictable and more extensive, such as those across the pastoralist zone of western and central India.

In addition to the question of the suitability of PFS for all groups, there are issues that require attention in order to ensure that the quality of PFS is maintained when the model is scaled up and institutionalised. For example, there are currently not enough facilitators with the knowledge and skills needed to locate learning within the dynamics of the local ecosystem and to be responsive to changes and participant needs. The experiential learning process in PFS depends heavily on the skills of the facilitator, so facilitation that is ineffective jeopardises the systematic learning process outlined above. Furthermore, Okoth *et al.* (48) report on high staff turnover, which compounds the initial difficulties of identifying facilitators who have the appropriate knowledge and background. The conundrum of facilitator recruitment/quality/retention is widely noted in evaluation reports of the longer-established FFS (49), the experience of which informs PFS development.

While PFS have significant potential to work well for some – but not all – pastoralist communities, it is challenging to ensure that there are enough high-quality facilitators who have the ability to contextualise educational inputs. In this respect, it is worth noting that adult education provision and skills development have, in general, been a neglected strand of EFA. Too little focus on providing appropriate, continuous training for the adults who perform roles as educators of both children and adults has been a significant dimension of this neglect. This general systemic issue intensifies the challenges of ensuring that adult education provision is universally available and relevant for pastoralists in particular.

Conclusion

This brief overview has outlined progress made in including mobile pastoralists in pledges of EFA and shown that there are two broad trends of provision. That which promotes formal education as the route to leaving a pastoralist livelihood is well established and is a strategic option for households who wish to use formal education as a means of household livelihood diversification. There is, nevertheless, compelling evidence that provision in pastoralist zones is often so poor in quality that its capacity to serve that household intention may be doubtful. ABE, on the other hand, includes delivery modalities that can enable

pastoralist learners to combine formalised education with situated family-based livelihood learning. This is made possible through a flexible approach and being responsive to learner demand, and by the involvement of non-state partners. The ABE approach appears to be attractive to pastoralist communities: it enables learners to acquire useful literacy and numeracy skills alongside the indigenous education needed to become a successful pastoralist. It also tends to adopt a community-based approach and this is effective in encouraging girls' attendance. Documentation of approaches under the broad ABE umbrella is, however, very weak and in need of significant improvement.

Both formal and non-formal approaches have constraints of provider capacity, in relation to coverage and to maintaining high-quality learning within programmes. Further, there are some learners whose roles as mobile pastoralist producers mean they are unlikely to be able to benefit from either approach. Although, in the shape of ODL, there is an education delivery model that has the potential to surpass this difficulty and reach such learners, it has yet to be fully trialled on the ground for pastoralists in low- and middle-income country contexts.

All these delivery models raise questions, as yet unresolved, as to what is the most appropriate curriculum for pastoralist learners beyond 'learning the basics' (30), and how ABE

provision can transcend concern that it is a form of second-best education for marginalised learners because it does not offer qualifications of equivalence in the employment market place, or comparable social standing.

The PFS model offers considerable promise, but requires rigorous evaluation alongside consideration of its potential to provide educational opportunities for young children. There is also a curious silence in the literature about how PFS interface with participants who have low/no literacy, whether skills of reading and writing are in demand and/or whether PFS can/should offer opportunities for adult literacy training.

Running across all of the delivery models reviewed is a common theme of difficulty in identifying, training and retaining teachers/facilitators who are both technically competent to provide quality learning opportunities, and comfortable with the generally challenging field conditions where pastoralism flourishes.

Les offres éducatives destinées aux pasteurs nomades

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Résumé

Les expériences rapportées par les pasteurs nomades témoignent souvent de contradictions diverses concernant les avantages présumés de l'éducation formelle. Les efforts visant à proposer une offre adaptée aux pasteurs se sont intensifiés dans le cadre du mouvement de l'Éducation pour tous mais se heurtent à la difficulté d'élaborer des solutions d'éducation formelle en lien avec les moyens de subsistance du pastoralisme et complétant les savoirs endogènes. L'auteur examine l'évolution de ces dynamiques dans différents modèles d'offres d'éducation formelle et non formelle et identifie trois champs d'innovation qui lui paraissent prometteurs pour l'avenir : l'Enseignement élémentaire alternatif, l'apprentissage ouvert et à distance et les écoles pastorales de terrain.

Mots-clés

Enseignement élémentaire alternatif – Éducation – Éducation pour tous – École pastorale de terrain – Moyens de subsistance.



Métodos para impartir enseñanza a los pastores nómadas

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Resumen

La experiencia de los grupos pastorales nómadas suele evidenciar muy diversas contradicciones que ponen en tela de juicio las presuntas ventajas de la educación formal. Como parte del movimiento mundial en pro de la Educación para Todos se han redoblado esfuerzos para «llegar» a los grupos de pastores, pero aun así subsisten considerables dificultades a la hora de encontrar fórmulas para impartirles una enseñanza que guarde relación con sus medios de sustento y venga a completar los conocimientos endógenos. La autora examina el modo en que esta dinámica se articula con los modelos de prestación de servicios educativos formales y no formales y describe innovaciones que abren vías prometedoras: la educación básica alternativa, el aprendizaje abierto y a distancia o las escuelas de campo pastorales.

Palabras clave

Educación – Educación básica alternativa – Educación para Todos – Escuela de campo – Medios de sustento.



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