



© Helvetas Ethiopia

Women harvesting hay from enclosed pastures (*ka/oo*).

## BRIEFING NOTE 4: SUPPORTING THE MORE EQUITABLE AND PRODUCTIVE USE OF TRADITIONAL PASTURES

**Briefing Note 2** described briefly how, over the past four decades or so, the area of pasture accessible to the Borana for communal use has shrunk and undergone degradation – the latter especially through the invasion of woody species. This Briefing Note focuses on the way that the NRM-Borana Project intervened to support improved, more equitable rangeland management as well as improved productivity. These were pilot activities, intended for further uptake once proven through experience.

### JOINT RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

### PLANNING ACCORDING TO THE

### SEASONAL CALENDAR

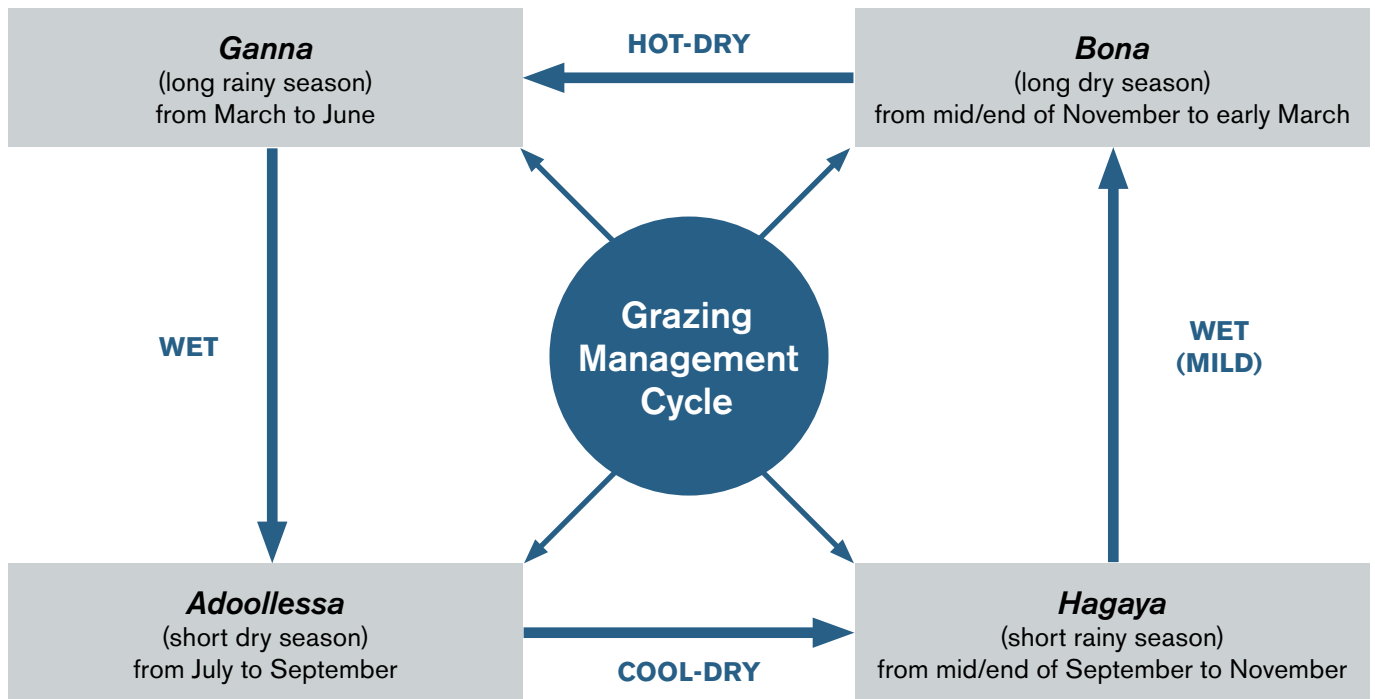
One of the most important elements of traditional natural resource governance by the Borana people is the *Kora Dheeda*, an annual assembly of pastoralists to coordinate the movement and settlement of livestock and people relative to the availability of pasture and water. The *Kora Dheeda* serves as a forum to discuss and clarify two important traditional bylaws: the bylaw of pasture, the *Mata Tika*, which enforces the use of pastures at the same time, and the law of settlement, *Dongora Seera*, which prohibits settlements near open or enclosed grazing areas to safeguard the pasture. These bylaws served to avoid conflict and mitigate rangeland degradation. At the *Kora Dheeda*, any transgressions were also discussed, with penalties set and enforced according to the gravity of the offence.



© Jane Carter / Helvetas

Whirling clouds of dust become a common phenomenon in times of drought – as here, in March 2022.

Although the traditional movement of livestock according to the seasons (see figure 1) has been considerably restricted in the last few decades, it is still practiced to some extent. However, it is conducted in a less coordinated and more sporadic manner than in the past and can lead to conflicts. One intervention of the NRM-Borana project was therefore to revive the *Kora Dheeda* in the *dheedas* (rangelands) of Golbo, Dirre, and Wayama – allowing potentially difficult issues to be discussed, pasture degradation mitigated, and conflicts avoided as far as possible.



## BORANA SEASONAL GRAZING PATTERN

Since government policies have tended to discourage seasonal grazing movements, it is important to create a better understanding amongst local government staff – as well as associated actors such as staff of NGOs and of research institutions – of the reasons behind traditional practices. This potentially allows for compromises to be found in current land use planning. With this aim, the NRM-Borana project facilitated a joint rangeland management planning exercise in the Dirre *dheedda*. The exercise brought together the customary leaders *Abba Dheedda*, *Abba Reera*, and *Jarasa Madda*, the Yabello Dryland Agricultural and Pastoral Research Centre (YDARC), the project’s implementing NGO partners, and local government representatives from the *kebeles* within the *dheedda*. For many of the researchers and local government officers, it was their first opportunity to learn about the details of the customary system.

As a result of the planning exercise, a greater understanding was developed between local government staff and customary leaders of conflict-provoking situations, and how to deal with them in a conflict sensitive manner. Specifically, joint planning based on the seasonal calendar led to the identification of dry and wet season grazing areas, a strengthening of community engagement, and an agreement with the local government to limit the expansion of land privatization. Community dialogues were conducted at *reera* (cluster), *arda* (*kebele*), and *olla* (village) by community leaders to raise awareness about the forum decisions. Following community consultations, at least 195 unauthorized private enclosures (*kaloos*) and cases of illegal land grabbing were identified, the fences

demolished, and the land integrated back into communal ownership. Recognized herding routes that had been blocked were re-opened, and the location of several temporary settlements was adjusted to fit seasonal livestock movements.

Unfortunately, the drought of 2021–22 halted all these positive developments, as livestock herders focused on simply keeping their families and animals alive. However, the knowledge that was shared and the mutual understanding gained between traditional leaders and local government staff remains. It provides a base for further constructive rangeland management once there are again pastures on which livestock can graze.



Livestock die in large numbers during drought; photo taken in March 2022.



## BUSH THINNING – CLEARING

### INVASIVE SPECIES

The area available for grazing has not only shrunk due to the privatization and enclosure of land and the establishment of settlements. A very significant factor has been the growth of woody species following a government fire ban introduced some 40 years ago for military reasons. This prevented the Borana from practicing their traditional system of controlled burning, which destroyed young saplings and promoted grass growth. By contrast, grass growth is almost completely inhibited under the now dense shrub lands. The composition of such shrub lands varies, but common species include *Commiphora* spp, *Hibiscus sparseaculeatus*, *Senegalia mellifera*, *Vachellia reficiens* and *Vernonia phillipsiae* (*Senegalia* and *Vachellia* were both formerly known as Acacias – a genus that has undergone a major reclassification).

Various attempts have been made by NGOs working with pastoralists to remove the bush and return land to pasture, but this has rarely met with any long-term success. Many of the woody species coppice readily and thus re-sprout after manual thinning. The project conducted participatory action research at four sites in Gayo, Hidhababo, Madhacho, and Magole to determine more effective means of control. This identified base burning of the bushes (with or without cutting them first) as the most effective treatment, killing over 80% of the plants. It was also the treatment preferred by community members, as it is the least labor intensive. Meanwhile, cutting and debarking killed only about 30% of the bushes.

Although the results of the trials were clear in terms of the best control method, burning is difficult to recommend as the government fire ban remains in force. In addition, burning is not ideal from the perspective of carbon release (although to no significant scale). Nevertheless, the bush thinning treatments stimulated considerable reflection and learning on control methods, including the importance of focusing on certain sites that can be readily rehabilitated rather than trying to control a large area. This is also of relevance to another project intervention: hay making and baling.

### HAY MAKING AND HAY BALING

In times of good rain, grass growth in Borana can be tall and plentiful – at least if it is not subject to grazing. When cut and dried to make hay, this serves as excellent dry season fodder, especially for milking cows and for calves. These animals are generally the responsibility of women – and it is women who bear the brunt of feeding them during the dry season, often spending many hours seeking out fodder far from the homestead and then carrying it back.

Hay making is not possible on communal pastures but is an option on *kaloo* – enclosed land. The project worked with women's groups to support hay making on such *kaloo* plots, providing advice on optimal cutting times and drying methods. Through the zonal pastoralist development office services, hay baling machines were made available to pack the hay into readily transportable bales. The project also supported the construction of warehouses to store hay locally, in appropriate conditions.



© Helvetas Ethiopia

Hay baling supported through the NRM-Borana project.



Women relax after the hard work of harvesting hay.

This ensured both that it retained its nutritional value and that the women could access it readily.

The practice of hay making and baling offers a means to improve the optimal utilization of meagre pasture. It also serves as one means of reducing women's labor burden. A further benefit is that the hay represents an easily transportable asset that can be sold in case of need. Cases were observed of poor households selling the hay bales to better off households (with more heads of cattle) during the long dry season, thereby having quick access to cash.

Reference on bush control methods:

HAFL Pascale Waelti, Christoph Studer, Tabea Allen, Demisachew Tadele Ayana, Liban, Jaldesa Doyo, Belda Edeo, 2022. Participatory Action Research for the NRM-Borana project Capitalization of Experience Report, HAFL.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Bush thinning, however conducted, is laborious and difficult – although base burning of bushes is clearly the most effective method. It is best focused on relatively small areas of land that can be then managed by women and used for hay making.
- In years of good rains and hence good grass growth, hay making and baling on enclosed land (*kaloo*) is an excellent “women-friendly” preparedness strategy for the long dry season. The availability of hay significantly reduces women's drudgery in feeding milking cows and calves through this time. Hay bales also have the advantage of being a ready source of cash for contingencies.

### For further information, please contact:

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation  
Addis Ababa / Ethiopia  
Tel. + 251 (0)11 467 2934 35 36  
[www.helvetas.org/en/ethiopia](http://www.helvetas.org/en/ethiopia)