

## Tackling Massive Livestock Deaths in Borana through Livestock Bank

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### 1. Introduction

For the last four decades, the Borana pastoralists have been facing effects of recurrent drought, mainly that of massive deaths of livestock. Even though the pastoralists, the government, and development partners have made several attempts to tackle these effects, a sustainable solution is yet in place. Cognizant of this fact, Jimma University, in collaboration with ResilientAfrica Network (RAN), has paved a way towards seeking a sustainable innovative solution to the challenge. Since 2014, the University has undertaken rigorous studies, identified innovative pathways, and piloted potential solutions.

**Context:** Pastoralism is nearly the only means of livelihood among Borana pastoralists whereby the livestock are central to their economic, social, cultural and political lives. Massive livestock deaths, therefore, have multifaceted implications on the survival of the people, their culture and institutions including the Gada



System. Tackling the massive livestock deaths due to drought is a matter of urgency for the people and **Livestock Bank** is the most promising solution at hand.

*Fig 1: Photograph by Hunde Doja (August 2017)*

### Key Findings

Studies confirmed that recurrent drought is the single most important survival challenge of the Borana pastoralists. Recurrent drought occurs in the Borana Zone of Oromia Region in Southern Ethiopia every 1–2 years compared to every 6–8 years in the past (Riché et al, 2009) and wipes out thousands of livestock. For instance, 80% of Borana livestock died in the 2000 drought (Angasse A. & Oba G., 2007), and about 34,000 cattle died only in Arero District in the 2017 drought (Arero District Office, 2019). As we speak now, a new round of livestock massive deaths is taking place in Borana and Bale zones.

Humanitarian interventions have dominated over sustainable development efforts as solutions to the challenge. Most development and emergency relief efforts undertaken in response to the recurrent drought have either been proved failure or insufficient to meaningfully tackle the massive livestock deaths and its negative consequences on humans and the environment. Even Index-Based Livestock Insurance (IBLI) which is considered relatively a more effective ongoing initiative has suffered from limited coverage and low uptake. As a result, the Borana are trapped in life threatening survival challenges than any time in history and looking for a system level, contextualized and sustainable solution.

*Livestock Bank* is found a highly promising innovative solution to meaningfully tackle the effects of the recurrent drought (Dejene, Gudina, & Nega, 2020).

## 2. Conclusions and Implications

**Conclusions:** Effects of recurrent drought on pastoral communities are very complex. They have far-reaching local, national, and international implications on humans, livestock, and the environment.

The Borana pastoralists are suffering due to the damaging effects of the drought on their physical and cultural existence. Persistent famine, shock and stress, food insecurity and conflict have become part of their lives. Moreover, their cultural values and practices including Gada related rituals have become compromised since recently. Therefore, saving the livestock from massive deaths means saving the Borana and the ‘intact’ Oromo values and institutions from disruption. Turning a deaf ear to the challenge could be considered equivalent to letting the damaging effects to advance against humanity.

**Policy Recommendations:** System-level innovative solutions to climatic changes were highly recommended by several researchers. Looking at the issue as business as usual and seeking simple solution to the complex problem is called to an end. This policy brief rather strongly suggests collaborative efforts among local, national and international actors on livestock, environment and pastoralists. Relevant ministries, bureaus and agencies are expected to lead the collaborative efforts as primary stakeholders.

A proper balance between emergency relief and sustainable development solutions should be maintained by the government and its development partners. Innovative solutions should seriously take the context of pastoralism into account and its unique features among the Borana given many initiatives short off this aspect have failed. Academic institutions with particular reference to Jimma University and the University of Borana should take note of this fact and act accordingly.

Contextualized innovative solutions owned and operated by the community’s active engagement are strongly recommended. All actors including the pastoralists should seriously consider this reality.

Partnership and collaboration among the key stakeholders: the pastoralists, academia, government, private sector, civil society organizations and development partners is essentially needed. Multidisciplinary approaches are crucial for better understanding and effective implementation of the solution.

## **Livestock Bank as Innovative Solution: A brief description**

*Livestock Bank*, as a system-level innovative solution to the effects of the recurrent drought emerged in response to ResilientAfrica Network's international call in 2016. The idea passed through multilevel evaluations and was piloted in 2019 in a village called Fulduwa in Arero District of Borana Zone. The innovation was awarded seed grant fund from USAID through RAN Secretariat, a consortium of 16 universities in Africa led by Makerere University in Uganda to which Jimma University is a member.

*Livestock Bank* is a microfinance-like community-owned business institution that operates based on all logic and activities of financial banks contextualized to livestock production, marketing and utilization. The bank will be legally established by shareholder pastoralists and other relevant partners hence profits are proportionally shared. It uses a mix of livestock and cash as currency for exchange. The bank deposits, buys and sells, produces, and exports livestock, commercializes livestock products, gives loan, and invests in livestock services in a manner all practices maintain local values and international standards. It regulates livestock production and distribution based on market needs, climatic forecast, and environmental safety. Unlike previous initiatives, it regularly operates regardless of the existence of drought and other development activities. The bank creates business and development partnerships with relevant local and global actors to fulfill its goals.

The idea was introduced to the formal and informal local governance systems and selected communities in Borana. It was highly accepted by all relevant stakeholders. Finally, the service was simulated in a fattening center with five elders, ten unemployed youth, and five poor women who participated as bankers, production staff, and loan users, respectively. This briefing, therefore, calls for all potential actors to collaborate in the establishment of the bank to tackle the massive deaths of livestock in Borana and in other similar pastoralist contexts.

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