

Challenges and Prospects of Pastoralist Displacement and Urban Settlement: A Socioeconomic Study in Yabello, Borana Zone

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Abstract

Pastoralism is widely recognized as the backbone of the economy in arid and semi-arid rangelands, yet it faces increasing natural and human-induced pressures that contribute to displacement and livelihood transformation. This study examined the challenges and prospects of pastoralists' displacement and settlement in Yabello, Borana Zone, southern Ethiopia, with particular attention to the gap between formal state policies and local customary institutions. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrated household surveys, field observations, key informant interviews, case studies, and focus group discussions, focusing on former settlement camps established during the Derg period in peri-urban areas. The study involved a total of 257 participants, comprising 222 displaced pastoralist settlers selected through Yamane's (1967) sampling formula and 35 purposively selected qualitative participants, including 20 key informants from relevant government institutions and 15 community representatives such as elders and clan leaders knowledgeable about customary governance systems. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations, while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and insights. The findings reveal that displaced pastoralists have adopted diversified livelihood strategies, including urban agriculture and petty trade, but face constraints due to weak policy implementation and institutional inconsistencies. Despite policy provisions recognizing their right to urban settlement, practical support remains limited, and previous studies have not adequately addressed permanent settlement as a viable solution. The study therefore recommends that urban local governments facilitate the permanent settlement of displaced pastoralists while promoting diversified livelihood opportunities and strengthening coordination between formal policies and customary systems to ensure sustainable integration.

Keywords: Displacement, livelihood diversification, pastoralists, policy guidelines, settlement.

INTRODUCTION

In the world's arid and semi-arid regions, livestock production remains one of the principal means of subsistence for pastoral communities. Pastoralists are generally defined as people who depend predominantly on livestock rearing for their livelihoods in environments characterized by high temperatures, low and erratic rainfall, and limited grazing resources. Pastoralism is livelihoods system in which people derive most of their income from livestock and practice mobility to manage variable and fragile dry land environments (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2018). Pastoralism is commonly understood from two perspectives: production and livelihood. While production is a branch of agriculture centered on livestock rearing in dry or cold rangelands, livelihood represents a distinct way of life organized around mobility and herd management, enabling communities to survive in marginal environments through adaptive strategies (Freier et al., 2012; IFAD, 2008).

In the African context, the setting of pastoralists is increasingly marked by rising displacement and a gradual shift toward urban and peri-urban settlement, driven by factors such as climate variability, recurrent drought, resource-based conflicts, and policy pressures (World Bank, 2021). These dynamics have undermined traditional mobility-based livelihoods by reducing access to grazing land and weakening customary institutions, forcing many pastoral households to adopt alternative survival strategies. While displacement poses significant challenges, including poverty, social marginalization, and loss of cultural identity, it also creates opportunities for livelihood diversification through engagement in small-scale trade, wage labor, and urban agriculture. However, the success of urban settlement as a sustainable adaptation strategy depends largely on effective policy implementation, institutional coordination, and the alignment of formal governance systems with local practices remain inadequate in many contexts (IGAD, 2020).

In Ethiopia, pastoralism is officially recognized as a subsistence system embedded within the broader agricultural economy. Due to its significant altitudinal variation, Ethiopia experiences diverse climatic conditions (Kotir, 2011), making it one of the most ecologically heterogeneous countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The majority of Ethiopian pastoralists inhabit lowland regions, including Afar, Somali, Oromia, and the Southern Ethiopia, as well as parts of Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz (Hagmann & Mulugeta, 2008). Broadly, three livelihood systems, defined

as combinations of activities, resources, capabilities, and strategies that individuals or households use to make a living and sustain their well-being, dominate these areas: farming, pastoralism, and agro-pastoralism (including former pastoralists).

Despite the extensive land area traditionally used for grazing, pastoral societies in Ethiopia are facing unprecedented pressures. Rapid population growth, encroachment of grazing lands by agricultural expansion, ranching, wildlife conservation areas, and urbanization, as well as the increasing commodification of livestock production, has significantly altered pastoral livelihoods. These challenges are compounded by internal conflicts, recurrent droughts, famine, and poverty-driven migration (Urgesa et al., 2016).

Studies in various African pastoral regions indicate that, in response to changing political, economic, and social conditions, many pastoralists have diversified their livelihoods by adopting agro-pastoral practices, engaging in wage labor, integrating into markets, and migrating to urban centers. While these transitions may create new economic opportunities, they also generate social differentiation and can have mixed effects on household welfare, particularly for women and children (Catley et al., 2016). Natural and human-induced shocks continue to disproportionately affect vulnerable pastoral groups, often overwhelming local coping mechanisms and government response capacities.

To address pastoral development issues, the Ethiopian Constitution (FDRE, 1995) established institutional frameworks such as the Ethiopian Parliament Pastoralist Affairs Standing Committee and pastoral affairs units under federal ministries. At regional levels, pastoral development offices have been created in areas where pastoralism constitutes a major production system. However, policy implementation has often lagged behind institutional establishment. Although national policy frameworks recognize the rights of displaced pastoralists to settle and engage in urban economic activities, practical guidelines and effective legal provisions for permanent urban settlement remain limited.

The pastoralists in Borana Zone rely heavily on livestock not only as an economic asset but also as the foundation of their cultural identity and social organization (Boku, 2008). Livestock ownership signifies wealth, status, and social hierarchy, and it underpins customary institutions such as the Gada system. Within the traditional Gada governance structure, power is transferred between generational classes, and livestock play a central symbolic and practical role in

sustaining institutions such as the qaalluu (Legesse, 1973, as cited in Boku, 2008). These institutions foster social cohesion, conflict resolution, and religious life. Consequently, displacement and sedentarization pose not only economic challenges but also are the threats to cultural continuity and identity.

In Yabello, many displaced pastoralists currently reside in peri-urban areas originally established during the Derg regime. These settlements accommodate both indigenous Borana pastoralists and displaced households from neighboring zones. While some households have diversified into petty trade, microenterprises, and wage labor, many continue to face severe poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to infrastructure and basic services. In the absence of clear legal recognition and urban integration frameworks, most displaced pastoralists remain in precarious conditions without formal rights to land, housing, or public services.

Moreover, livelihood strategies such as charcoal production and firewood sales that are adopted by some displaced households have brought a conflict with Borana customary norms that prohibit deforestation and the cutting of indigenous trees. This tension further illustrates the complex interaction between survival strategies, environmental sustainability, and cultural values.

The present study investigates local government interventions concerning forcibly displaced pastoralists in Yabello. It examines the extent to which existing legal frameworks, policy guidelines, and job-creation initiatives facilitate or constrain sustainable urban settlement. By analyzing the intersection of policy provisions, customary institutions, and livelihood adaptation strategies, the study seeks to propose context-sensitive interventions that promote integrated livelihood improvement while respecting the cultural foundations of pastoral society.

Statement of the Problem

In the ecosystem's dry land regions, livestock rearing, particularly cattle production remains a principal source of livelihood for pastoral communities. Across the vast arid and semi-arid rangelands, pastoralists are widely regarded as the backbone of local and national economies (Osman, 2018). Despite its substantial economic contribution, the pastoral production system faces numerous challenges, which can broadly be categorized as natural (such as drought and climate variability) and human-induced factors.

Article 40 of the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution, entitled “The Right to Property,” guarantees pastoralists the right to free land for grazing and cultivation, protection against displacement from their land, and access to natural resources, markets, and fair prices. It further stipulates that pastoralists should not be displaced from their land without their consent. To give effect to these constitutional guarantees, the government introduced national policies and strategies aimed at promoting development in pastoral areas (Mohammed, 2015). Nevertheless, these policies often lack coherence and, in some instances, contradict one another. In particular, they remain largely silent on the issue of displaced pastoralists who have settled in nearby towns. Although Proclamation No. 819/2014 provides additional legal provisions, it has not been effectively implemented, and the problems of displacement remain unresolved.

In recent years, climatic hazards, recurrent droughts, and other environmental and socio-economic pressures have increasingly necessitated livelihood diversification among pastoral communities (Rotich, et al, 2023). In the study area of Yabello, Borana Zone, pastoralist communities face multiple challenges, including recurrent drought, land degradation, resource competition, and socio-economic marginalization, which increasingly threaten traditional livestock-based livelihoods (Solomon et al., 2008; Berhanu, 2016). Livestock remain the primary source of income and a core element of identity for the Borana Oromo community, compelling many pastoralists to remain with their animals even during crises. In response to these pressures, many households have diversified their livelihood strategies by combining agro-pastoral practices, wage labor, petty trade, market integration, and temporary or permanent migration to urban centers. These adaptations reflect efforts to enhance resilience and sustain household well-being amid changing political, economic, and environmental conditions.

Existing literature indicates that pastoralists face multifaceted socio-economic challenges, including poverty, limited access to markets, inadequate urban services, and marginalization, while legal and institutional frameworks often remain weak or inconsistently implemented, creating gaps in protection and support for displaced households (Bostedt et al., 2023; Lind et al., 2020). However, few studies have specifically addressed the settlement and integration of forcibly displaced pastoralists in urban areas such as Yabello, leaving significant gaps in understanding the combined effects of formal policy, institutional capacity, and customary governance on their adaptation strategies. Despite various cultural and socio-economic studies

undertaken in the area, little attention has been given to the issue of forced pastoral settlement in Yabello, highlighting the need for context-sensitive research (Solomon et al., 2008; Berhanu, 2016).

The customary Borana Gadaa system continues to influence pastoralists' decisions, often reinforcing their reluctance to abandon traditional livelihoods even under severe hardships. In this context, the Abba Gadaa and associated traditional institutions have a crucial role in mediating the challenges faced by forcibly displaced pastoralists, particularly vulnerable groups such as women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. At present, however, legal protection for forcibly displaced pastoral communities in the town remains largely theoretical, with limited practical enforcement.

These realities informed the formulation of the study's basic research questions, aimed at addressing both observed urban pastoral dynamics and gaps:

1. What are the major socio-economic, legal, and institutional challenges faced by forcibly displaced pastoralists settled in Yabello town?
2. What opportunities and prospects exist for the sustainable integration and livelihood improvement of displaced pastoralists in the study area?
3. To what extent is the local government prepared, in terms of policy, institutional capacity, and resource allocation, to address the needs of forcibly displaced pastoralists in Yabello?
4. How do customary institutions, particularly the Borana Gadaa system, influence the settlement, adaptation, and resilience of forcibly displaced pastoralists in the town of Yabello?

By linking these questions to both the empirical context of Yabello and existing gaps in the literature, the study seeks to provide evidence-based strategies for addressing displacement, supporting livelihood diversification, and fostering sustainable, context-sensitive integration of pastoral communities in urbanized environments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

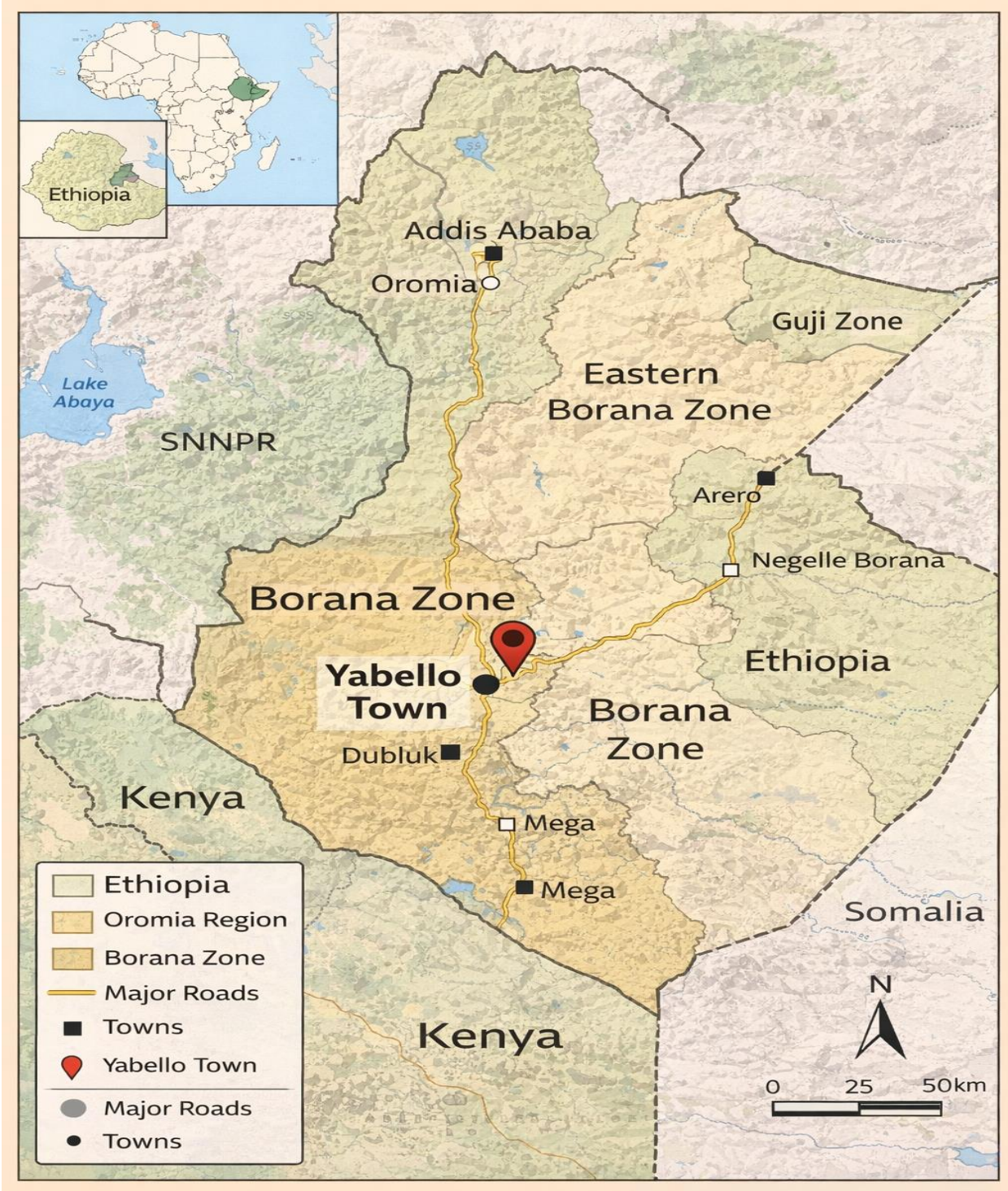
Study Area Description

The Borana Zone, one of the administrative zones of the Oromia region in southern Ethiopia, is characterized by semi-arid rangelands and a predominantly pastoral landscape. Yabello, the

capital town of Borana Zone, is situated approximately 570 km south of Addis Ababa, bordering Kenya to the south, the Somali Region to the southeast, the Guji Zone and the eastern Borana Zone to the east and northeast, and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region to the west (Solomon, 2008). The topography is largely flat to gently undulating, interspersed with occasional hills, with soil and vegetation types adapted to low and erratic rainfall, which averages 400–700 mm annually (Angassa & Beyene, 2023). Water sources are seasonal, and rangeland conditions are highly variable, influencing livestock mobility and pastoral livelihoods. The biophysical environment has historically shaped Borana pastoralists' adaptive strategies, including communal grazing and traditional natural resource management under the Gadaa system (Salifu, 2020).

Administratively, the Borana Zone is subdivided into *woredas* (districts), *kebeles*, and *ollaas* (neighborhoods), with Yabello town serving as the study site (Solomon, 2008). Within the selected Woreda, there are 20 pastoral associations, most of which were originally organized during the Derg period and later restructured to improve service delivery and administrative efficiency (Berhanu, 2016). Approximately one-fourth of the Woreda's population resides in towns, with 90–95% of them are living in Yabello town. Urban residents are predominantly engaged in business, trade, or civil service, while rural inhabitants rely on pastoralism and agro-pastoralism. Opportunistic cultivation occurs mainly around towns and in valley bottoms, where soil moisture allows crop production (Angassa & Beyene, 2023). The Borana people are the predominant ethnic group, with smaller pockets of the Gabra ethnic group, who primarily specialize in camel herding (Berhanu, 2016).

Yabello town hosts several peri-urban camps for forcibly displaced pastoralists from surrounding pastoral associations, including Cholkassa, Haro Bake, and Hidiale, which were selected as primary data collection sites for this study (Solomon, 2008). These settlements provide a practical context to examine livelihood diversification, adaptation strategies, and the interface between formal policies and customary governance structures in a rapidly urbanizing pastoral environment.



Developed by GIS experts (2026)

Figure 1. Specific Study Sites within the Borana Zone, Yabello

Research Design

The choice of research design is guided primarily by its suitability for addressing the research problem. For this study, a mixed-methods research design was employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This design was selected to comprehensively examine the complex issues surrounding the settlement of forcibly displaced pastoralists in Yabello, capturing both measurable trends and in-depth personal experiences.

The descriptive design was used to systematically identify and describe the characteristics of the settlement problem. It is particularly suitable for understanding the socio-economic, demographic, and environmental attributes of the displaced pastoralists and their host communities. This component of the study primarily relied on quantitative methods, such as structured surveys, to collect data on population size, access to basic services, livelihood patterns, and settlement conditions.

The explanatory design was employed to explore the underlying causes and effects of displacement and settlement. It allows for analyzing relationships between different variables, such as the influence of institutional support on community resilience or the impact of environmental factors on livelihood adaptation. This design facilitated the integration of qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observational data, to provide rich contextual insights into the lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of displaced pastoralists.

The mixed-methods approach combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. Quantitative data provided measurable evidence on settlement trends, resource allocation, and socio-economic indicators, while qualitative data offered an in-depth understanding of human experiences, social dynamics, and cultural considerations. The integration of these methods enabled a triangulation of data, enhancing the validity, reliability, and comprehensiveness of the study's findings.

Study Population and Sampling Techniques

The study purposively focused on the Borana Oromo of Southern Ethiopia, given their large pastoralist population in the Borana Zone and the significant role of the Gadaa system in

influencing the settlement of forcibly displaced groups in Yabello town. The study population included displaced settlers in the old peri-urban camps, key informants from local institutions (Yabello City Administration, Zonal Pastoralist Affairs Office, Social Security and Labor Affairs Office), and community representatives such as elders and clan leaders. For the quantitative component, the sample size of displaced settlers was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for a finite population:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$
, with an estimated population of 500 and a 5% margin of error, resulting in 222 survey participants. For the qualitative component, 35 purposively selected participants (20 key informants and 15 community representatives) were chosen based on their experience, leadership roles, and knowledge of the Gadaa system. This mixed-methods sampling approach allowed integration of quantitative surveys to capture socio-economic and settlement trends with qualitative interviews and focus groups to provide in-depth insights into governance, cultural practices, and institutional support, ensuring both scientific rigor and contextual depth.

Data Sources and Types

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the settlement challenges and prospects of forcibly displaced pastoralists in Yabello. Primary data were collected directly from participants through household surveys, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, and case studies. Quantitative data from household surveys captured socio-economic characteristics, livelihood activities, access to services, and settlement conditions, while qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and case studies provided in-depth insights into cultural practices, governance mechanisms, institutional support, and coping strategies. Secondary data were obtained from official records, reports, and publications of local institutions such as the Yabello City Administration, Zonal Pastoralist Affairs Office, and Social Security and Labor Affairs Office, as well as previous research studies, policy documents, and relevant literature on pastoralist displacement and settlement.

Data Collection Instruments

To investigate the challenges and prospects of forcibly displaced pastoralist settlements in

Yabello, the study employed multiple data collection instruments consistent with a mixed-methods approach. Household surveys were administered to 222 displaced settlers to collect quantitative data on socio-economic characteristics, settlement conditions, livelihoods, and access to basic services. Key informant interviews were conducted with 20 representatives from local institutions, including the Yabello City Administration, Zonal Pastoralist Affairs Office, and Social Security and Labor Affairs Office, providing insights into institutional policies, programs, and challenges, while allowing observation of non-verbal cues and clarification of complex issues (Daniel, 2001).

Focus group discussions involving 15 community representatives, such as elders and clan leaders, facilitated interactive dialogue on cultural practices, local knowledge, and the role of the Gadaa system in settlement processes. In addition, field observations were carried out in peri-urban camps and surrounding areas to capture living conditions, housing structures, and environmental contexts, and selected households were studied as case studies to explore unique experiences and coping strategies in depth.

The document review examined relevant secondary sources, including published and unpublished studies, policy documents, institutional reports, and other records related to pastoralist displacement and resettlement. It specifically addressed questions regarding historical and contemporary policies on pastoralist resettlement, documented challenges and opportunities for forcibly displaced pastoralists, and the responses of local institutions and governance structures. This review provided essential background, contextual understanding, and comparative insights that informed the design of primary data collection instruments. In addition, a preliminary visit to Yabello enabled the researcher to observe local conditions, settlement patterns, and social dynamics, further enhancing the relevance and focus of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Key Characteristics of Respondents

The study involved 257 participants, including 222 displaced settlers (survey), 20 key informants (interviews), and 15 community representatives (FGDs and case studies). Displaced settlers ranged in age from 18–65 years, with the majority (35%) aged 26–35 years. Male respondents

constituted 60%, while females made up 40%. Household sizes ranged from 3 to 12, and the primary livelihood was pastoralism (63%), supplemented by small-scale farming and casual labor. Key informants were mainly male (70%), aged 30–60, and worked in local administration, social services, or pastoralist affairs. Community representatives were predominantly elders and clan leaders (73% male), aged 35–75, with extensive knowledge of the Gadaa system. These characteristics contextualize subsequent findings regarding socio-economic, legal, and institutional challenges and opportunities.

Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Participant Group	Total	Age Range	Male	Female	Household Size	Primary Livelihood/ Role
Displaced Settlers (Survey)	222	18–65	133	89	3–12 members	Pastoralism, Farming, Casual labor
Key Informants (Interviews)	20	30–60	14	6	N/A	Local administration, Social services, Pastoralist affairs
Community Representatives (FGDs)	15	35–75	11	4	N/A	Elders, Clan leaders, Local governance knowledge

Major Socio-Economic, Legal, and Institutional Challenges Faced by Forcibly Displaced Pastoralists in Yabello

As of table 4.2, the displaced pastoralists in Yabello face multiple livelihood insecurities. Poverty is the most prevalent challenge, with 70% of respondents reporting a lack of income, indicating severe economic hardship. Employment opportunities are highly constrained, as 69.8% of households rely on low-wage or informal labor, which is insufficient to secure sustainable livelihoods. Limited access to health services affects 60% of the population, while 54% experience malnutrition, highlighting the strong link between economic deprivation and poor health outcomes. Educational challenges are also pronounced, with 44% of children not enrolled in school, reflecting both financial pressures and inadequate institutional support for vulnerable households.

Table 4.2: Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities of Displaced Pastoralists

Vulnerability	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty / lack of income	156	70%
Limited access to health services	134	60%
Unemployment / low-wage labor	155	69.8%
Children not enrolled in school	98	44%
Malnutrition / food insecurity	120	54%

This aligns with earlier findings that associate displacement with poor health outcomes due to weakened service delivery and livelihood disruption. Educational challenges are also significant, with 44% of children not enrolled in school, highlighting how poverty and institutional gaps jointly undermine human capital development in displaced pastoral households.

The analysis of both primary and secondary data revealed multiple, interrelated challenges faced by forcibly displaced pastoralists in Yabello. Legal and policy gaps are central concerns. Although the 1995 FDRE Constitution and national pastoralist policies theoretically provide protection, their implementation has been weak, leaving displaced pastoralists without clear guidance on their rights, access to services, or long-term settlement support. Historically, legal and policy interventions under the Imperial, Derg, and EPRDF regimes shared a common misconception that pastoralism is backward, extravagant, and incompatible with modern development. Consequently, the needs of pastoralist communities were largely ignored across successive governments, reinforcing structural marginalization.

Socio-economic challenges are equally pronounced. The loss of livestock, the primary source of livelihood, has resulted in widespread poverty, malnutrition, and chronic diseases among displaced pastoralists. Employment opportunities in Yabello are mostly informal and low-waged, including casual labor, petty trading, charcoal production, and firewood collection, with few value-added industries to absorb the growing number of the unemployed. These constraints exacerbate economic vulnerability and reduce the capacity of households to meet basic needs. Vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, and the elderly, face disproportionate risks, with children's school enrollment has been declining due to insufficient resources for supplies and fees. NGO interventions exist but are often inconsistent and inadequate to provide long-term support.

Institutional and infrastructural limitations further compound these vulnerabilities. The local government lacks targeted policies, dedicated resource allocation, and operational guidelines for displaced pastoralists. Essential infrastructure, including healthcare, education, water, and sanitation, is insufficient to meet the needs of both urban residents and newly settled pastoralists. Key informants noted that many displaced households experience psychosocial challenges, including loss of social identity, harassment, and malnutrition due to the absence of livestock-derived food products. Migration to peri-urban areas often occurs as a coping mechanism for drought, poverty, or chronic illness, yet the lack of clear policy guidance hampers sustainable settlement and integration.

Globally, the challenges faced by pastoralist communities are recognized as severe, requiring national policies that promote participatory approaches in the formulation and implementation of development strategies (FDRE Constitution, Art. 89(5)). Top-down interventions have repeatedly proven ineffective in addressing the structural marginalization of pastoralist populations. Thus, the findings underscore the urgent need for integrated legal, socio-economic, and institutional interventions to support the sustainable settlement and well-being of displaced pastoralists in Yabello.

Opportunities and Prospects for Sustainable Integration of Displaced Pastoralists

Many displaced pastoralists in Yabello reside in peri-urban encampments such as Cholkassa, Haro Bake, and Hidiale. These temporary settlements provide partial access to basic services, healthcare, and potential livelihood opportunities although they remain informal and lack adequate policy support. Descriptive statistics indicate that while a significant proportion of households benefit from these encampments, access to services is uneven and limited. For example, approximately 60% of households reported some level of access to healthcare, and 40% had opportunities to engage in small-scale income-generating activities within or near these sites.

The finding aligns with earlier studies (Fratkin, 2014; Catley et al., 2013), which note that peri-urban encampments often function as transitional spaces where displaced pastoralists gain limited access to services while remaining structurally marginalized. Descriptive results show that about 60% of households reported some access to healthcare, while 40% engaged in small-

scale income-generating activities such as petty trade and casual labor. However, consistent with Tache and Irwin (2003), such access remains uneven and highly constrained, indicating that these settlements provide only partial integration rather than sustainable livelihood security for displaced pastoral communities.

As table 4.3 shows that among displaced pastoralists in Yabello, 40% benefit from temporary peri-urban settlements that provide partial access to healthcare and basic services. 35% engage in adaptive livelihood strategies such as seasonal migration, small-town trade, and small-scale livestock-related industries, which enhance income without requiring permanent settlement. Meanwhile, 25% rely on cultural and institutional resilience, particularly the Gadaa system, which facilitates social security, dispute resolution, and resource sharing. Together, these opportunities provide a framework for sustainable integration while preserving pastoralist identity and traditional practices.

Table 4.3: Potential Opportunities for Displaced Pastoralists (with Percentages)

Opportunity	Description	Percentage (%)
Temporary peri-urban settlement	Access to basic services and health facilities	40%
Adaptive livelihood strategies	Seasonal migration, part-time trade, small industries	35%
Cultural and institutional resilience	Gadaa system for social security, dispute resolution, resource sharing	25%
Total		100%

Several themes emerged from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, highlighting the prospects for the sustainable integration of displaced pastoralists in Yabello. Despite the challenges they face, there are notable opportunities for livelihood improvement and social resilience. Temporary peri-urban settlements, including Cholkassa, Haro Bake, and Hidiale, provide partial access to basic services, healthcare facilities, and potential livelihood opportunities, although these sites remain informal and lack adequate support from formal policy frameworks.

Cultural resilience and the Gadaa system play a crucial role in shaping pastoralists' engagement with town-based livelihoods. Their strong attachment to livestock and adherence to traditional laws facilitate partial participation in urban economic activities while maintaining pastoral identity and social cohesion. While resilience is frequently challenged by drought, poverty, and disease, certain adaptive practices demonstrate potential pathways to improve income and livelihoods without forcing full sedentary settlement.

Adaptive livelihood strategies include diversified seasonal migration, small-town trade, and the development of small-scale livestock-related industries, such as milk and meat processing, local trading, and value-added products. These strategies build upon traditional pastoral knowledge and practices, allowing pastoralists to maintain cultural and social connections while integrating modern economic activities.

Finally, community-based support mechanisms, rooted in Gadaa practices such as collective decision-making, resource sharing, and informal social protection, can be incorporated into urban planning and settlement policies. Integrating these mechanisms can enhance adaptation, economic security, and community resilience, providing a culturally appropriate framework for the sustainable integration of displaced pastoralists in the study area.

Local Government Readiness to Address the Needs of Displaced Pastoralists

The thematic analysis of interviews with key informants from the Yabello City Administration revealed that the local government currently lacks specific policies, operational guidelines, and dedicated resource allocation strategies to support forcibly displaced pastoralists. National frameworks, such as the Ethiopian Pastoral Settlement Scenario (2010–2025), provide general guidance on pastoral development, but they do not clearly define mechanisms for permanent settlement, access to basic services, or sustainable livelihood support in urban areas. This absence of targeted policy instruments limits the local government's capacity to plan, coordinate, and implement interventions tailored to the needs of displaced pastoralists.

Institutional gaps are further compounded by insufficient infrastructure and public services. Descriptive statistics from household surveys show limited access to essential services: 25.5% of households report inadequate healthcare access, 23.4% lack sufficient access to clean water, and

21.3% face challenges in accessing education. Employment opportunities are extremely constrained, with 29.8% of households relying on low-wage or informal labor, including casual work, petty trading, and charcoal or firewood collection. These limitations leave many displaced pastoralists economically vulnerable and dependent on sporadic NGO support, which is often inconsistent and insufficient for long-term livelihood security.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on pastoralist displacement in Ethiopia and East Africa, which reported that displaced pastoral communities often experience inadequate access to basic services and sustainable livelihood opportunities (Catley et al., 2013; Fratkin, 2014). Similarly, the dependence on informal employment observed in this study supports earlier findings that pastoral displacement frequently leads to economic insecurity and livelihood diversification. However, the current study further highlights the continued dependence of many households on irregular NGO assistance, suggesting that existing institutional support remains insufficient for long-term integration and livelihood security.

The combination of institutional weakness, infrastructure gaps, and employment constraints illustrates significant barriers to sustainable integration. While cultural and adaptive livelihood strategies provide short-term coping mechanisms, the absence of targeted policies and resources reinforces socio-economic vulnerabilities, limiting opportunities for permanent settlement, access to services, and economic resilience.

Table 4.4: Local Government Readiness and Service Gaps for Displaced Pastoralists

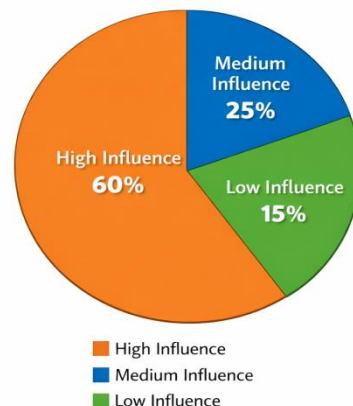
Aspect	Qualitative Findings (Themes)	Quantitative Indicators (Household Surveys)
Policy and Operational Readiness	Lack of targeted policies, operational guidelines, and resource allocation for displaced pastoralists	–
Infrastructure & Services	Limited healthcare, education, water, and sanitation facilities	Healthcare: 25.5% inadequate access Water: 24.3% inadequate access Education: 21.3% inadequate access
Employment Opportunities	Mostly low-wage casual labor, petty trade, charcoal/firewood collection	29.8% of households rely on informal/low-wage labor
NGO Support	Sporadic and inconsistent support; insufficient for long-term solutions	–
Impact on Integration	Limits planning, coordination, and sustainable settlement of displaced pastoralists	–

Influence of the Borana Gadaa System on Settlement and Resilience

The Borana Gadaa system plays a central role in shaping pastoralists' settlement patterns, adaptation strategies, and resilience. Pastoralism is not merely an economic activity but a cultural and social system intertwined with Gadaa rituals, identity, and risk management. Deeply rooted cultural norms discourage leaving ancestral lands, even in the face of drought or disease, as relocation is perceived as a loss of social identity and status.

Key informants emphasized that many forcibly displaced pastoralists regret leaving their home areas and prefer to maintain proximity to traditional lands or settle temporarily near towns without abandoning pastoral practices. The strong attachment to livestock, which is central to Gadaa rituals and daily life, further limits full urban integration.

The Gadaa system also provides informal social security, dispute resolution, and resource management, which enhance community resilience. Displacement disrupts these customary structures, leaving pastoralists vulnerable. Nevertheless, elements of the Gadaa system, such as collective decision-making, resource sharing, and community-based support, could be incorporated into urban planning and settlement policies to strengthen adaptation, improve integration outcomes, and promote sustainable settlement.



Pie chart 4.1: Borana Gadaa System influence on resilience and settlement

Pie chart 4.1 it clearly illustrates the strong role of traditional governance in shaping community organization and spatial planning. A majority of respondents (60%) indicated that the Gadaa system has a high influence, showing that cultural norms and customary leadership remain

central to decisions about where and how communities settle. This reflects the enduring authority of indigenous institutions in guiding social order and land use.

Meanwhile, 25% of respondents reported a medium influence, suggesting that while modern administrative structures are emerging, traditional values still play a complementary role in settlement choices. The 15%, who noted low influence, represents areas or groups where modernization, urbanization, or external policy interventions have begun to reduce the system's direct impact.

Hence, the chart underscores that the Gadaa system continues to serve as a foundational framework for community governance and spatial organization. Its influence ensures that settlement decisions align with cultural principles of harmony, hierarchy, and social balance, demonstrating how indigenous governance remains integral to sustainable rural development and identity preservation.

The finding that the Borana Gadaa system shapes pastoralists' settlement patterns and adaptation strategies is consistent with earlier studies (Legesse, 1973; Bassi, 1996; Tache & Irwin, 2003), which highlight its role in social organization, resource management, and cultural identity. Similarly, Homann et al. (2008) found that customary institutions strongly influence pastoral decision-making and resilience. The present study confirms that attachment to ancestral lands discourages relocation, as displacement is often perceived as a loss of social identity and status. However, unlike earlier studies that emphasized mobility as the primary adaptation strategy, this study reveals an increasing tendency toward permanent settlement among displaced pastoralists due to recurrent droughts and livelihood challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the settlement dynamics of forcibly displaced pastoralists with particular emphasis on socio-economic, legal, and institutional dimensions. The findings indicate that displaced pastoralists commonly experience serious socio-economic challenges, including poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, and limited access to essential services such as healthcare, education, water, and housing. These vulnerabilities are largely associated with the loss of livestock, which traditionally serves as a key source of livelihood and social protection. In addition, the study highlights gaps in legal and policy frameworks, where existing provisions are

inadequately implemented and fail to offer clear guidance or targeted support for displaced populations in urban contexts. Institutional constraints, including weak infrastructure and limited coordination, further intensify these challenges.

At the same time, the study identifies notable opportunities for sustainable integration and livelihood improvement. Peri-urban settlements provide some level of access to services and economic activities, albeit in informal and under-supported conditions. Displaced pastoralists exhibit resilience through adaptive livelihood strategies, such as seasonal mobility, small-scale trade, and engagement in livestock-related value chains. Furthermore, indigenous institutions, particularly customary systems, play a significant role in maintaining social cohesion, facilitating resource management, and providing informal social protection. These findings suggest that sustainable integration can be enhanced when development interventions are aligned with local cultural systems and support diversified livelihood options.

However, the study reveals that institutional readiness remains limited, particularly in terms of policy clarity, administrative capacity, and resource allocation. The absence of targeted settlement policies and inadequate service provision constrain effective responses to the needs of displaced pastoralists. Moreover, displacement often disrupts customary institutions that traditionally support resilience and adaptation. Nevertheless, integrating elements of these indigenous systems, such as collective decision-making and resource-sharing practices, into formal planning frameworks offers a promising pathway for improving outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policymakers should develop clear, context-specific, and operational frameworks for the settlement of forcibly displaced pastoralists, ensuring consistency with national legal provisions and relevant international and regional standards. Such frameworks need to define practical mechanisms for access to basic services, secure tenure, and sustainable urban integration.

Local governments, in partnership with NGOs and other stakeholders, should prioritize targeted interventions that address the needs of vulnerable groups by expanding access to essential infrastructure, including housing, healthcare, education, and water supply. Strengthening coordination among institutions and ensuring efficient resource allocation are critical to improving service delivery and long-term planning.

Intervention strategies should integrate indigenous knowledge systems by recognizing and incorporating customary institutions such as the Gadaa system into planning processes. At the same time, promoting livelihood diversification through culturally compatible activities, such as livestock-based value chains and small-scale trade, can enhance economic resilience while preserving social identity and traditional practices.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with the publication of this paper.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation in surveys and in-depth interviews was voluntary, and respondents' confidentiality was maintained. The researchers avoided falsification, fabrication, or misinterpretation of data. All works of other researchers and authors were properly referenced using the American Psychologist Association. Communication regarding the research was conducted with honesty and transparency, ensuring that no misleading information was provided and that primary data findings were presented objectively and without bias.

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