AFGHANISTAN'S *KUCHI* PASTORALISTS: CHANGE AND ADAPTATION

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Abstract

Afghanistan's nomadic peoples are now either migratory and livestock-dependent pastoralists or recently settled but formerly migratory pastoralists, who still hold on to the cultural identity and refer to themselves as *kuchi.*

Radical changes in both summer and winter pastures have taken place over the last centuries, and currently the pastoralists' access to the summer pastures in the central highlands is compromised. Customary mechanisms had come into existence over the last century, and still function in certain areas. However, in large areas, and in particular those where issues of grazing rights have become heavily politicized and strongly associated with ethnic identity, there is a high level of conflict over these user's rights, which have often proven to be inflammable.

There are large differences in migration patterns and livelihood strategies between the pastoralists of the different regions. Income derived from livestock production is often supplemented by other income sources, like harvesting and casual labour, but also through the purchase of agricultural land. In recent years, an increased diversification of household income and a move towards a more semi-migratory lifestyle has taken place.

Pastoralists still do make an important contribution to Afghanistan's national economy, as they did in the past (35 per cent of all exports were from livestock products). Recent estimates indicate that there around 2.5 million *kuchi*, of which 1.5 million are still migratory pastoralists and one million are currently not migratory and are former pastoralists. The drought of 1999 to 2004 severely affected pastoralist livelihoods and livestock numbers plummeted. Estimates on livestock numbers indicate that in the north they started reaching their pre-war levels, whereas the south and the east are still lagging behind. It has been estimated that *kuchi* own around 30 to 50 per cent of the national herd.

Keywords: Afghanistan, pastoralists, nomads, land tenure, conflict, migration

Who are the '*Kuchi*'?

'*Kuchi*' is a term that is generally used to describe the transhumant or nomadic pastoralists of Afghanistan. In fact it is a term that may cause confusion, since it

doi:10.3167/np.2007.110102 ISSN 0822-7942 (Print), ISSN 1752-2366 (Online)

refers to a mode of living (migratory), a production system (livestock dependent) and a cultural identity.

The production mode traditionally employed by the *kuchi* is pastoralism, a social and economic system based on the raising and herding of livestock, in which the people migrate so that their livestock can benefit to the maximum from seasonal pastures. In Afghanistan, the climate serves as an additional motivating factor for migration, since tents do not provide adequate protection for either heat or cold.

Historical, geopolitical, environmental and ethnic factors have led to many changes in the context to which the *kuchi* have had to adapt. This has led to a myriad of livelihood options employed by them nowadays, and the single term '*kuchi*' can now refer to people with very different livelihood patterns. Many *kuchi* may have settled decades ago, own land or large transportation companies, and still refer to themselves as '*kuchi*'. Also those that have lost their livestock during the years of war or the recent drought and have been forced to settle – sometimes temporarily – still refer to themselves as *kuchi*, and have as yet not been able to establish an alternative livelihood. These 'settled *kuchi*' may still perceive themselves as *kuchi* and may be represented by the *kuchi* leaders. In socio-political terms they still form part of the *kuchi* community. However, they are not migratory, and not livestock dependent.

Particularly in the north, the migration patterns of the (former) *kuchi* have been disrupted quite severely, which has led to major changes in livelihood patterns. Also, land ownership among *kuchi* is relatively high in the north, which has led to a high number of settled *kuchi* in those areas. This, combined with the fact that many non-*kuchi* residents of the area also practise transhumance where they migrate to more elevated grazing areas (*ayloq*) during the spring or summer season, leads to a serious blurring of boundaries between *kuchi* and non-*kuchi*. In the west, the term *kuchi* also needs to be used with caution or even avoided, as it is often perceived as derogatory and the term *maldar* is preferred for the migratory communities – in particular for the non-Pashtun nomadic communities, such as the Farsiwan, Aimaq, and Arab.[1]

The term *kuchi*, therefore, is commonly used, also by the *kuchi* themselves, though it is not a practically useful definition. It will have become clear from the above that several sub-categories exist under the broader term '*kuchi*', and that in fact the boundaries are deeply blurred. In summary, three categories can be differentiated: (1) migratory, livestock dependent, (2) recently settled, formerly migratory, livestock dependent, and (3) settled people, that still hold on to the cultural identity and refer to themselves as *kuchi*. The first category consists of different ethnic groups, predominantly Pashtun, Beluchi, Arab, but also Aimaq, Tajik and some Uzbek in the north. In this article, this category will be referred to as 'pastoralists'.

The second category is similar to the first, but these people have recently settled due to the effects of war and recent drought of 1999 to 2004. Often they

live in the same areas as the migratory pastoralists of the first category, and belong to the same communities. Therefore, they are difficult to distinguish from the first category, especially considering that many pastoralists who lose all their livestock will still continue migrating in order to benefit from community support mechanisms or seasonal labour. This second category may be referred to as 'former pastoralists'.

The third category consists of those people that have become settled over the last decades, but still consider themselves to be *kuchi* (as a cultural identity) and still feel represented politically by *kuchi* leaders. These people are predominantly Pashtun, and in this report will be referred to as 'settled *kuchi*'. They like to wear the typical *kuchi* dress, speak the *kuchi* dialect, and will refer to themselves (often with pride) as '*kuchi*'. Many of these settled *kuchi* still live in the same areas as their migratory relatives; one may find *kuchi* communities where all households are fully settled, or ones where a proportion of the community continues its seasonal migration and others have become settled (partially migratory communities).

A fourth group may be distinguished, but is left outside the scope of this article, which is the group of former pastoralists that have moved into urban areas and have merged fully with the urban labour force. These people may still feel a cultural connection to 'being *kuchi*', but are not easily recognizable as such, in particular after a few generations.

Population Estimates

The most comprehensive census in Afghanistan was carried out in 1972–1974; it reported just over ten million settled and one million nomadic populations. A census carried out by UN-CSO in 1979 reports just over thirteen million settled and an estimated 800,000 nomads. This census is not very highly credited, since only 56 per cent of the population was enumerated and the remainder extrapolated (allrefer.com).

Population censuses have traditionally struggled with the nomadic communities, even in purely logistical terms. In addition, the definition of 'who is a nomad' is fraught with problems, and depending on which definition is used (both in theory and practically by the enumerators) will easily double or half the numbers.

To use these census figures from the past as a projection for current figures is also a complicated affair; it is very difficult to extrapolate population figures over time for a country where so much flow in and out of the country has taken place. For nomads this problem is even more daunting, due to the tendency of some nomads to sedentarize and then re-nomadize.

Recently, new data have become available through the National Multi-sectoral Assessment on Kuchi (NMAK), a nationwide exercise carried out by the Ministry

of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, in collaboration with the Ministry of Frontiers and Tribal Affairs and the Central Statistics Office (Weijer 2005b). This was not a census, and the figures have to be treated with caution. As much as verification of population figures was built into the methodology, it is still based upon reported figures and not a physical headcount of individuals. Nonetheless, the Central Statistics Office still uses the NMAK figures as the most reliable currently available on the pastoralists.

The communities visited by the NMAK were identified in the primary instance by the provincial councils of *kuchi* leaders, which were established under the auspices of the Ministry of Frontiers and Tribal Affairs. The definition used to determine who would be included in the survey was 'those that consider themselves migratory livestock keepers that are either still migratory or have settled recently due to loss of livestock during the last drought'.

A 'community', the basis unit of observation, was defined as 'a group of households' that stay in one area, and have the same winter- and summer grazing area. Therefore, one *dasht* (grazing area) can contain more than one community. Generally, these communities have a clear sense of identity (tribally based) and have a clear leadership structure with a community council (*shura*). Interviews were conducted at the 'community-*shura*' level. The NMAK data show the *kuchi t*o number 2,426,304 individuals or 239,859 households in total.

The total number of individuals in the last category of 'settled *kuchi*' communities is 365,106 individuals. This figure refers to non-migratory individuals living in communities that are on the whole non-migratory.

In addition, there are non-migratory individuals in migratory communities; within one community not all households necessarily migrate to the summer areas. In such communities, which can be referred to as 'partially migratory communities', some households remain behind. Within the communities this ratio between migratory and non-migratory individuals can vary between 1 per cent and 99 per cent, and communities can split between households, or within households.

The total number of non-migrating 'former pastoralists' was 967,210. This number then includes both 'the non-migratory individuals in entirely settled communities' and the 'non-migratory individuals in partially migratory communities'. The table below shows the overview of population figures:

Table 1. *Overview of Kuchi Population Figures 2003*

Total no. of families	Total no. of individuals	No. of non-migratory families	No. of non-migratory individuals	No. of migratory individuals	Migratory individuals as % of total
239,859	2,426,304	93,859	967,210	1,459,103	60.1%

Source: data from NMAK (de Weijer 2005b)

Using the most recent CSO population estimates, the overall population of Afghanistan (excluding the nomads) is 20.6 million. When using the total number of *kuchi* covered by the NMAK, this would mean that 10.5 per cent are *kuchi*. When only considering those that are currently still actively migrating, this would equate to 6.3 per cent of *kuchi* in the country. These numbers exclude the *kuchi* that migrate across the borders to Pakistan and Iran, which are estimated to present between 5 and 10 per cent of the Afghan *kuchi* population.

Rangelands and Pastoralist Grazing Systems

Rangelands cover around 45 per cent of the total land area in Afghanistan, according to the FAO land cover map (Figure 1). However, large areas which are considered 'barren land' or 'waste land', which are coloured white in the figure, are also used for grazing, particularly in the winter season. The total grazing area therefore is much larger, estimated at 70 to 85 per cent of the total land area.

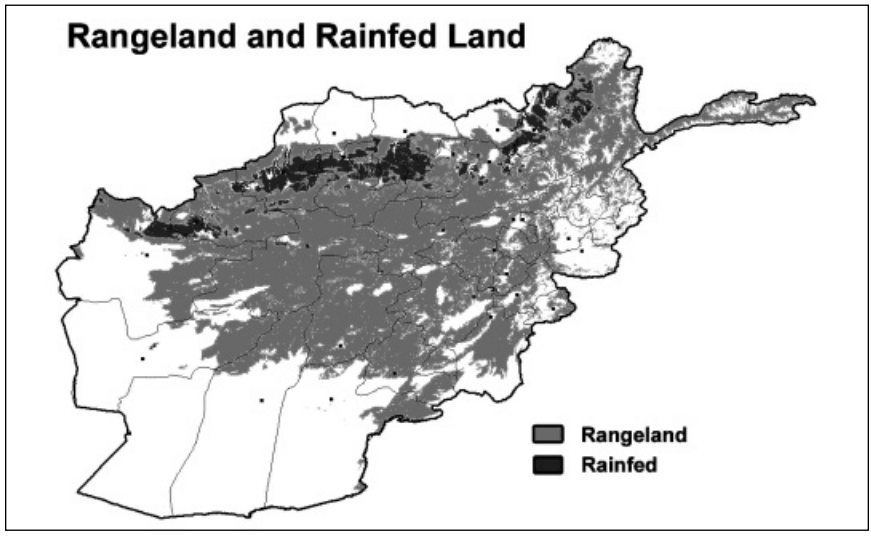

Figure 1. *FAO Land Cover Map: Rangeland and Rainfed Land*

This figure also does not consider the grazing of pastoralists' animals on agricultural fields after harvesting. Therefore the real use of the resource base by the pastoralists can not easily be quantified, and the 'carrying capacity' of the land can not be estimated on the basis of the rangeland alone; calculations would inevitably lead to the false conclusion of severe overstocking, even at times when livestock numbers are known to be very low.

Figure 2. *Example of Summer and Winter Growing Areas*
Source: Cassidy 2004

No comprehensive nationwide assessment has been carried out of the current status of the rangelands nor of the extent to which the effects of the recent 1999–2004 drought on the rangeland[2] are reversible. There is a general understanding that current management systems are not beneficial for sustainable rangeland management (Bedunah 2006). Due to socio-political factors that led to a high level of conflict over the pastures, access to certain pasture areas has been reduced, which could theoretically even have led to under-grazing in these areas, whereas pressure on other areas has increased proportionally. Increasingly, pastures have come under rainfed crop production, with devastating effects, for instance in Dasht-e-Laily (Favre 2003). It is often seen in pastoralist systems that a lack of mobility causes overgrazing.[3] FAO states also that in Afghanistan 'overgrazing is probably mainly caused by the sedentary stock since the pastoralists only graze for a short season (and rested the land under their traditional systems) whereas farmers' stock graze every day unless there is snow cover' (Thieme n.d., Chapter 5).

The more elevated pastures start to grow with the receding snow line after winter, producing good vegetation during the spring and early summer (Figure 2). By mid to late summer, the vegetation starts drying up. A study conducted by the International Office for Migration (IOM) shows two distinct growing seasons in Ghazni and Zabul provinces: lower elevation districts in the south exhibit lower levels of vegetation, growing primarily during the winter months, while upper

elevation districts at higher latitudes grow primarily during the summer months, and have greater levels of vegetation. This means that the higher elevation districts in the north can be utilized from early May through September, and districts in the south from September through April (Cassidy 2004).

The summer pasture is used for production: animals grow in bodyweight and production levels increase. The winter pastures are used for maintenance: in most cases supplementary feed is required for the survival of the animals. A number of studies have shown that the body weight of the animals is severely reduced during the winter period, when grazing is limited. This is often considered the nutritional bottleneck.[4]

The deficit of feed available during winter limits the number of animals that can be kept in the highlands. Retreating towards the winter pastures and using these pastures as a secondary resource allows for the summer pastures to be utilized to their full potential. By adopting this migratory strategy, the pastoralists can use the marginal rangeland areas most effectively. The sedentary farmers cannot increase their animal numbers up to the levels that the pastoralists are able to keep because more sedentary animals cannot be fed during the winter period of feed shortage. The migratory pastoralists, making use of the seasonal pastures in the high and the low areas, can therefore produce livestock more efficiently. However, they are still in competition with the local sedentary populations for the scarce resources in the highlands, since the sedentary farmers would also like to use the standing grasses as hay for winter feeding, thereby boosting their livestock numbers. The pastoralists do not therefore occupy their own niche as there is continuous competition over these resources.

Afghanistan is under pressure to produce ever more food crops and intensify its agricultural potential – both to remove chronic food insecurity and to feed increasing numbers of people, be it due to natural population growth or the influx of returnees. With increasing intensification of production in Afghanistan, it becomes even more crucial to put the marginal lands which are not suitable for crop production to optimal use through sustainable livestock production, be it by sedentary farmers or by migratory pastoralists.

Encroachment on Pasture Land

Ploughing up of pasture land for rainfed cropping is an increasingly widespread phenomenon in Afghanistan. In the hope of getting a quick return, the pastures are ploughed up and the indigenous vegetation destroyed, resulting in severe erosion. FAO estimated that 50 per cent of Dasht-e-Laily in the north has been ploughed up – a process that started probably in the early 1990s and was exacerbated during the last few years. Low livestock numbers and the flight of many pastoralists from the area led to a vacuum, which was quickly filled by commanders (warlords) occupying these areas. Lawlessness, combined with low livestock numbers and

lack of awareness or concern about the long-term consequences of this practice, led to significant reduction of pasture land. Patterson (2004) describes a similar story for the Shiwa area in Badakhshan in Afghanistan, where an estimated 22 per cent of the pasture has been converted into agricultural land.

Due to specific historical factors and economic imbalances between the nomads and the resident population in the highlands (in particular in Hazarajat), potential crop land ended up in the hands of the nomads, and was being used as pasture land (Mousevi 1998). Alden Wily presents examples where the valley floor is owned by the pastoralists and therefore used as pasture land, whereas more productivity from this land could be obtained through rainfed agriculture. Currently, many of the pastoralists do not have access to these lands, due to ethno-political tension and a sense of resentment among the original occupants of the land, and many of these lands are again used for crop production by the local resident population.

Number of Livestock in Afghanistan

The National Multi-Sectoral Assessment on Kuchi, conducted in late 2003, also provides information on the number of animals kept per household by the pastoralists in Figure 3 (NMAK 2005). (Again, this data needs to be treated with caution since it relies on reported data.)

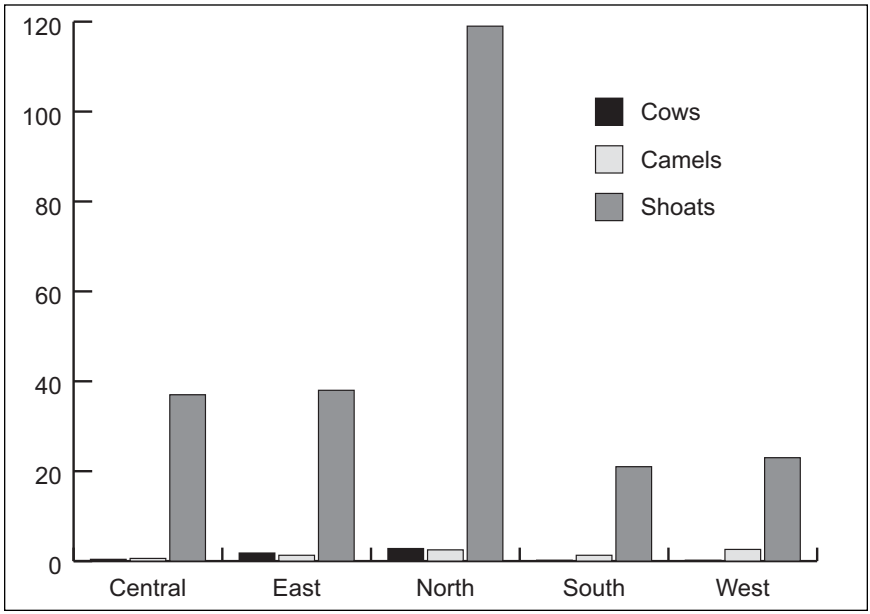

Figure 3. *Kuchi Livestock Ownership per Region*
Source: NMAK 2005

The average number of livestock kept per household, according to NMAK, was 50 shoats (sheep and goats), 1.7 camels and 1.2 cows. This is about half of what was estimated by FAO in 1995 (FAO 2003).

Large regional differences were seen in the NMAK data: the number of 'shoats' per household in the north was 119, 37–38 in the central and eastern parts, and 21–23 in the south and west. This would indicate that livestock numbers from the pastoralist flocks in the north are back to pre-drought levels, whereas the other regions of Afghanistan have fallen far below pre-drought levels. FAO completed a livestock census in 2002–2003, shown by comparison with other census figures in Table 2:

Table 2. *Comparison of Livestock Numbers (in millions)*

Species	**1978-79**	**1995**	**2003**
Cattle	3.73	3.69	3.72
Sheep	14.41	22.0	8.77
Goats	3.00	8.93	7.28

By comparing pre-war livestock figures (1978–79) with post-war pre-drought levels (1995 census, one which is more reliable than that of 1998) and with these post-war post-drought levels (2003), it seems that the number of cattle has remained relatively stable, but the number of sheep has fluctuated greatly.

In 2003 the country was still recovering from drought, so it may be expected that the numbers of sheep are still rising. However, interestingly, the number of goats kept in Afghanistan in 2003 was 2.4 times higher than in pre-war times, whereas the number of sheep was only at 60 per cent of pre-war levels (see Table 2). This may reflect a post-drought recovery situation, with goats being more drought-resistant and therefore more likely to have survived the drought, but it could also indicate an overall trend towards goats keeping. This latter explanation may reflect a tendency of the pastoralists to use the more marginal pastures – those that are more remote and in the mountainous areas, where goats have a comparative advantage over sheep.

Unfortunately, the livestock census only covered a small number of pastoralist families, mostly due to insecurity along the Pakistani border (FAO livestock census 2003). Taking into consideration the fact that the NMAK survey does not constitute a census, and its figures have to be treated with caution,[5] it is still an interesting exercise to compare these FAO figures with the NMAK figures:

Table 3. *Comparison between NMAK 2005 and FAO 2003 Livestock Figures (in millions)*

Source of data	Cattle	Sheep	Goats	Camels
FAO	3.72	8.77	7.28	0.18
NMAK	0.29	12.0		0.4
TOTAL	4.01	28.05		0.58
% kept by *kuchi*	7%	43%		69%

It may be deduced from these figures that the *kuchi* hold a substantial proportion of the livestock in Afghanistan, and that the FAO livestock census is severely under-reporting total livestock figures in Afghanistan. To strengthen the conclusions drawn from these figures, a comparison with the literature can be made: FAO estimated that in 1995 the pastoralists owned 50 per cent of the national herd.[6] The FAO 2001 annual report shows that the pastoralists owned 30 per cent of the sheep and 39 per cent of goats. However, the source of this information is not clear to the author, since these are estimates rather than census results.

Pastoralists' Contribution to GDP

In pre-war years, livestock and livestock products (handicrafts, rugs, carpets) contributed 16 per cent and 8–10 per cent respectively to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Afghanistan, according to a World Bank study (Khan and Iqbal n.d.). Livestock products were about 14 per cent of total exports, with carpets and rugs accounting for a further 9 per cent, totalling US$65 million per year. This is excluding unrecorded live sheep exports to Iran, which were estimated at an additional US$33 million per year (4.5 per cent). Including these exports, the total exports stemming from livestock and livestock products represented 34.6 per cent of total exports.[7]

However, as a result of the drought, livestock numbers have plummeted and at the moment Afghanistan cannot even supply the meat consumed within the country. High population growth and strong economic recovery since 2002 in Afghanistan is increasing the buying power of urban consumers, leading to a firm domestic demand for meat (Thomson et al. 2005). Mutton is a very large contributor to total livestock products. The high estimated income elasticity for demand for mutton coupled with a high growth in per capita GDP suggests that the outlook for demand for mutton over the next five-year period is favourable (Thomson et al. 2005).

Pastoralists are the main keepers of sheep and goats in Afghanistan. It was reported that in pre-war times that approximately 75–80 per cent of the sheep population was managed in transhumant (nomadic) flocks (Cossins 1994).When comparing livestock data from NMAK (Weijer 2005b) with the FAO livestock census data, 43 per cent of the sheep and goats seem to be kept by pastoralists. The *kuchi* are therefore important producers of mutton and should be able to benefit from the growing demand for mutton in and outside the country.

Changes in Access to Pasture

A brief historical overview is required to paint a picture of how the current migration patterns came into existence, and which factors have affected them ever since. Contrary to popular belief, the migration routes now used by the *kuchi* are not 'traditional', in the sense that they only came into being 120 years ago, and have since undergone major changes. These changes have affected both the summer and the winter pastures, and are the root cause of the tension that at times exists between the nomadic and the sedentary communities.

Changes in Summer Pastures

Summer pasture of the majority of the contemporary pastoralists of Afghanistan lies in the central highlands. It was only in the late nineteenth century that these areas were opened up to the *kuchi* by Amir Abdurrahman Khan, as a means of extending his own control into these areas. He did this by settling Ghilzai Pashtun into the northern and central areas, through providing them with agricultural land and through formally granting them access to the largely unused pasture areas in the Hazarajat (the Central Highlands, inhabited by the Hazara people).

In 1894 the emir even issued a decree forbidding the Hazara henceforth to use any pastures at all. The *kuchi* were issued with grazing rights. Changes in the legal status occurred in the mean time, which further entrenched the *kuchi* rights to these pasture lands, and even allowed them to trade in these rights (Mousevi 1998).

In the period leading up to the 1970s a certain level of symbiosis was present in these central areas, with Hazaras also benefiting from the presence of the *kuchi* as traders and occasionally as providers of labour opportunities. Local mechanisms to regulate pasture access came into being, and conflicts were often solved through local negotiation and compromise.

However, conflict would erupt at times and although the Hazara did not passively accept the situation, they were also not able to fight what they perceived as the unfair appropriation of their pastures. Trade on credit basis was introduced into Hazarajat by the *kuchi*, which in some cases led to *kuchi* obtaining agricultural land (and the pasture lands associated with it) in exchange for defaulted loans. This led to the *kuchi* becoming landowners in these areas, and a change in power balance in favour of the *kuchi*, causing even greater Hazara resentment (Alden Wily 2004).

During the Soviet occupation period and the *mujahedin* government (1979–1989), Hazaras gradually retrieved their lands. During the years of the fight of the *mujahedin* against the Soviets, and the period of the *mujahedin* government with the associated factional fighting that followed, the grazing areas in the central highlands became increasingly inaccessible to the nomads. The Hazara started to reclaim the lands and rebel against the absentee landlordism of the *kuchi*, who they felt had often obtained the land in dubious ways. A council of mullahs was established, and in some cases the Hazara managed to get the land legally restored to them. This process was stopped by the Taliban (Alden Wily 2004).

In addition to the problems the *kuchi* started to face with accessing the pastures in the Hazarajat, their migration routes to and from the summer areas were also disrupted, due to the chequered control of different *mujahedin* commanders controlling different areas and 'taxing' the livestock. Many nomads in the north abandoned their migratory existence after being looted on numerous occasions and losing their livestock.

During the Taliban years of 1994 to 2001, the power relations shifted in favour of the Pashtun *kuchi*, who to some extent benefited from this situation. The Pashtun *kuchi*, who are ethnically affiliated with the majority of the Taliban, were generally perceived to have provided support to the Taliban; many Taliban recruits did indeed come from *kuchi* background.[8] A number of incidents occurred where certain groups of nomads were reported as wreaking havoc in the Shomali plains and Ghorband valley by allowing their livestock to graze and destroy vineyards and agricultural lands. Other nomads returned to Hazarajat, where they still owned land, and demanded to be paid 'rent' for their land, in the form of harvest produce, which in some cases they took by force. However, it must be stated that the Taliban did not provide full support to the nomads and did try to control the situation by reducing access of the nomads deep into Hazarajat.[9] The nomads complain that they have not received full access to the Hazarajat since the revolution of Daud Shah in 1973.

These days, the former system of regulating access to the pastures is to a large degree determined by local power relations. The payment of illegal 'taxes' to the people who control the pastures (be it villagers, other *kuchi* or local commanders) seems to have become increasingly prevalent, and the access to pasture is therefore partly determined by political clout and purchasing power.

Large pasture areas, particularly in the Hazarajat, can currently not be accessed by the *kuchi*, who are forced to remain behind in areas with less pasture. NMAK estimated that in 2003 21 per cent of the *kuchi* could not access their 'traditional' pasture area due to these ethno-political conflicts.

In addition, the perceived alliance between the 'Pashtun *kuchi*' and the Taliban led to an increased resentment of the non-Pashtun against the Pashtun, which in turn led to movements of Pashtun refugees from the north to the south or to Pakistan after the fall of the Taliban. Overall the relations between Pashtun and non-Pashtun are under pressure. Alden Wily (2004) and Patterson (2004) describe

a number of case studies from the north (Faryab and Badakhshan) which paint a grim picture of how relations have deteriorated, and how access and ownership or appropriation of pasture lands often lies at the foundation of the conflict.

Changes in Winter Pastures

During the time of the British occupation of India, when their effective control expanded into the border areas in 1849, the Afghan nomads were still using the lowlands of India as their winter pastures. The then increased presence of a stable colonial government led to a reduction of the mobility of the nomads in British India, and increasing numbers of pastoralists stopped crossing the border into British India and instead wintered in Afghanistan (Pedersen 1994). The colonial government, and after independence the Indian government tightened border controls in an attempt to increase their control over the nomadic trade.

The partitioning of India and creation of Pakistan in 1947 caused many of the nomads' (Hindu) business partners to flee to India, which further damaged the nomads' trade. The regulation of movement across the border became even stricter under the Pakistani government (Pedersen 1994).

The Pashtunistan conflict which erupted in 1961–1963 effectively led to a closure of the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. As a result Afghan nomads were cut off from their winter grazing grounds and were forced either to abandon pastoralism or relocate to winter grazing areas within Afghanistan (Pedersen 1994). During the first year, and then with lesser intensity in 1962, nomads actually fought with each other as they competed for new winter grasslands, and farmers resisted the nomads who established winter quarters near their villages (Dupree 1980).

This led to a reshuffling of pasture user's rights in these new winter locations, from which ripple effects are still visible today in the provinces bordering Pakistan. Many of the wealthier *kuchi* abandoned livestock production at this point, and invested in other businesses, which is one of the reasons why many wealthy *kuchi* are involved in the transportation business nowadays.

Pasture Users' Rights

As Alden Wily describes, the legal status of pasture is very unclear in current legislation. Over the years, pasture has alternately been described either as 'un-owned land' or as government land. The Land Decree issued in 2002 by President Karzai effectively places all pasture lands once more under government control, and leaves no space for communally-owned pasture, let alone for a distinction between private and public pasture. In such a case, the government owns the pasture, and can allocate 'users' rights or leasing rights to individuals or groups. Existing documents remain valid, in spite of the fact that many of these documents are conflicting with each other (Alden Wily 2004).

A traditional Islamic (or Pashtun?) practice states that as far as the voice of the muezzin can be heard, the pasture land belongs to the village ('private pasture'), whereas beyond that boundary it is public pasture. During the Taliban rule, the

official legislation on land included an article which used this principal to determine the boundary of private pasture. That Taliban law is the only law in the recent history of Afghanistan that recognizes the concept of private pasture and public pasture. Private pasture is defined as those pasture areas which can only be used by the residents of the adjacent communities, and 'public pasture' may be used by anyone. The distinction between public pasture and private pasture is quite well understood by the people.[10]

For example, Alden Wily describes how the Hazara people in Bamyan use a system whereby the pasture lands upland from the farmland, 'up to the highest visible ridge above it' are private pasture (2004). Glatzer (1992) described in detail the mechanisms that applied to pasture rights in western Afghanistan.

Pasture user's rights have in the past been obtained through different mechanisms: through pasture rights allocation by royal decree or through the provincial administration, through customary practice, and through payment of taxes to the 'rightful' users.

There is a great overlap in these various mechanisms and different interpretations by sedentary and nomadic communities. Since a single formal and mutually recognized system does not exist, this is an area of immense discontent. Existing power relations have always had great influence on how the various 'rights' were interpreted.

When different customary arrangements meet and are found to be conflicting, problems may occur. These customary arrangements may also be interpreted at will, to maximize one's own benefits (Alden Wily 2004).

Even the public pastures are not really 'free for all', as in most areas they have been sub-divided between specific *kuchi* tribes, who use the pasture and exercise control over other users. In the eastern and southern parts of the country, the areas best known to the author, large pasture areas have been 'allocated' to different *kuchi* tribes, who hold customary 'user's rights' to these pastures, which are generally recognized by other *kuchi* and also by the settled people. Some of these 'user's rights' have indeed been granted through legal documentation, whereas in other cases these rights are based purely on customary rights.

During interviews held by the author with *kuchi* communities in Nangarhar and Laghman, several cases were found where *kuchi* tribe A would negotiate access to the pasture area of *kuchi* tribe B. A delegation was sent to determine the exact conditions of use, which included the payment of 'taxes' for the use of that pasture. Each year this contract would need to be renewed.

In other cases the settled people would allow the *kuchi* to graze on 'their pastures' through payment of a tax. This tax serves two purposes: compensating for the use of their resource, and, preventing the *kuchi* building up 'customary' user's rights to these pastures. This may well be the system that is abused by local commanders, levying extortionate 'taxes' on *kuchi* grazing 'their lands'.

These systems are also referred to as *hamsaya*, living as neighbours with other people. Pastoralists in the Parwan province describe how communities that have

difficulty accessing their traditional pastures may live as *hamsaya* with other pastoralist groups or with the settled people. In some cases no payments are required, particularly when it only involvs a few families, whereas in other cases taxes are demanded both by other pastoralist groups and by settled people.

Having to depend on the goodwill of neighbours leads to an increased fragmentation of pastoralist communities in the summer season. Communities that would normally prefer to stay together during the summer are now forced to split up and move to different areas.

In spite of the enormous level of conflict surrounding access to the pastures, and the continuous changes in policy and preferential support of different groups, it is in fact remarkable how well the customary systems still functions, possibly with the exception of the Hazarajat. Even there, though, pockets exist where community-based agreements function. User's rights are therefore still quite well established and recognized, albeit in different ways in different areas.

Clearly, the fact that a certain system of customary user's rights – with a certain degree of mutual recognition of these rights – exists, does not mean that no conflict can erupt. Balikci (1990) describes how grazing rights do need constant political manoeuvring within local power relations and are not static. The fact that customary arrangements do exist and have functioned in the past to some extent could be built further upon as mechanism for reconciliation.

Residential Land Tenure Insecurity

In addition to problems related to grazing rights and access to the pasture, which are most prevalent in the summer areas, there exist issues related to residential land insecurity. The winter area is, in relative terms, the more permanent base for the *kuchi*. Increasingly, one can find communities that are settling on the land where they would traditionally dwell only in the winter. This is most common among destitute *kuchi*, those who have lost all their livestock and have turned to other sources of income. In addition, there is a tendency for communities to move towards a system of partial migration – consisting of households that do migrate in the spring, and others that stay behind.

Ongoing urbanization and modernization will lead to an encroachment upon the grazing areas, since these are the only areas upon which expansion can take place. It has to be recognized that this reduction in pasture land will continue, and hence the number of pastoralists living a sustainable livelihood as 'pure pastoralists' will need to reduce over time. This requires education, a diversification of income sources, a reduction in migration and increased sedentarization as a result. This trend is already visible in many parts of the country, in particular in the eastern parts. However, this development brings along its own problems – those of residential land tenure insecurity.

Due to the relatively major tenure security problems associated with the summer pastures, and the fact that the *kuchi* are much less fixed in one place during the summer than during the winter, it is in the winter area that development projects for

the *kuchi* would most likely take place. Schools, community health centres, water sources – all greatly in demand – will have the greatest impact in the winter area.

However, it often happens that the local resident people will allow the presence of the *kuchi* on the land, as long as this is only on a seasonal basis. As long as they pitch their tents for a few months a year, all is well, but establishing infrastructure, or even a well is quickly associated with the *kuchi* increasing their claim to the land. This immediately evokes a reaction in the local residential population or their leaders of 'you're a *kuchi*, go and migrate!'. In other words, they are not allowed to create a settlement.

Conflict may erupt, and has often erupted in the past. This type of land tenure insecurity is only likely to increase if the trend towards partial migration continues, as it probably will. The power relations in the area, and the level of discontent over the land, determines the outcome of this conflict, but many *kuchi* communities that have become 'settled' find themselves constantly at risk of being evicted or are made subject to high 'taxes'. Settled or partially settled *kuchi* communities often continue to live in tents or put up very simple structures because the settled people will not allow any more permanent building. There are many known cases where the *kuchi* are being subjected to extortionate, random taxing by local commanders or even villagers. Water and sanitation projects have had to be stopped due to threats by the local commanders.

This land tenure insecurity hampers all development and all modernization of the '*kuchi* way of life'. To adapt to modern circumstances, the *kuchi* must have the flexibility to adapt, which is greatly constrained by this land insecurity. Women in particular are suffering from land insecurity, since they tend to be the first ones pleading for a more sedentary lifestyle; they are the ones having to walk long distances to the nearest water source and having to pack up their tents and pitch them elsewhere.

Current Migration Patterns

The migration patterns of Afghan pastoralists are largely predictable, determined by the availability of pasture and the climate. In the absence of constraining factors, pastoralists would tend to migrate to the same area each year. Particularly in the winter areas, but even in summer areas, there is a tendency to start creating some infrastructure, ranging from basic comfort-increasing structures – such as creating an area for the tent which is slightly below ground level or building low walls which can form the basis of the tent – to complete housing.

Broadly, three types of migration patterns may be distinguished: long-range, short-range and the non-migratory. The NMAK survey shows the distribution of these patterns between *kuchi* households: (1) long-range migratory pattern (52 per cent), (2) short-range migratory pattern (33 per cent), (3) non-migratory pattern (15 per cent).

A long-range migratory pattern takes pastoralists across province boundaries. Generally the migration goes from the periphery of the country towards the central areas in spring. Map 2 presents the migration patterns of the early 1970s, which forms the basis for the current migration patterns.

Summer grazing is predominantly in the foothills of the central highlands and other mountainous regions, while winter grazing is in the plains. Often, the migration towards the elevated summer pastures goes in stages, with specific spring grazing areas on the way.

Long-range migration can also take place across national borders. In the west, particularly in the province of Herat, cross-border movement of the pastoralists does take place, though in a quite limited degree. In the east, more cross-border movement occurs, in particular from the provinces of Khost, Nangarhar and Paktika. Also in the south, from Kandahar and Helmand, pastoralists cross over into Pakistan, in particular those who use the Registan as their main resource. In the NMAK survey these cross-border pastoralists were not included, but their number is estimated not to reach more than 10 per cent of total kuchi population.

A short-range migration pattern refers to a seasonal migration within the province. In particular in the northern provinces, and in the west, many pastoralists migrate seasonally between areas within the province. In the northern provinces, this migration pattern can be clearly discerned as an adaptation to change; due to the disruption of migration patterns during periods of war, short-range migration has partially replaced long-range migration. In certain cases, short-range migration may also be seen as an adaptation to a lower number of

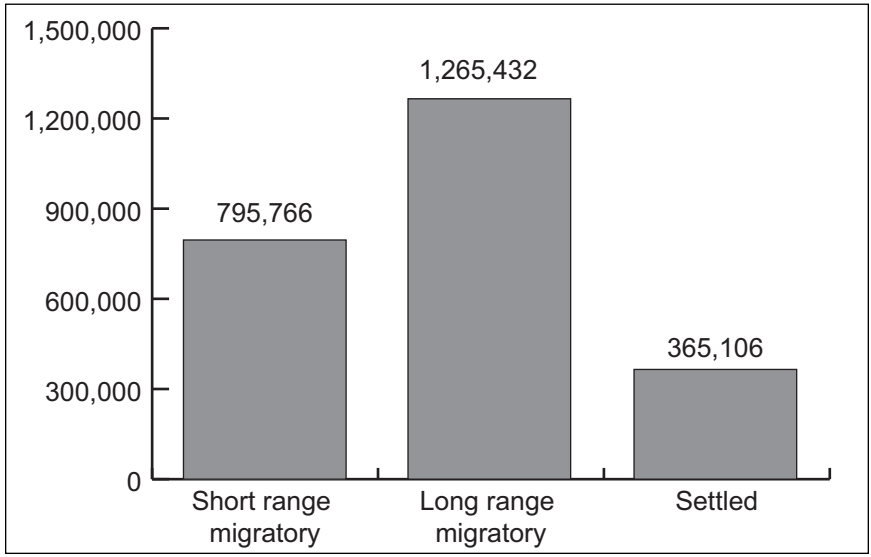

Figure 4. *Kuchi Population by Migration Categories*
Source: NMAK 2004

livestock, since it accommodates for alternative sources of income in addition to that derived from livestock. However, in other areas, such as the Registan pastoralists, short-range migration is the traditional migration pattern.

For both long- and short-range migration patterns the onset of movement is closely related to the seasons: in early spring (February/March) the pastoralists start their migration towards the summer areas. The migration period differs depending on the distance travelled, the climate (temperature and rainfall), the amount of pasture on the way and the particular weather conditions. The duration of migration is between one and ten weeks, with the return migration of a similar duration. The return migration to the winter area usually commences around September/October, again depending on these same factors.

The household tends to split during the migration: the men take the sheep through the mountains, allowing them to graze on the way, while the women take the camels, donkeys and young lambs and kids along the road. They follow specific routes, but in many cases the modern tarmac roads follow the same valleys, which is why one can often seen the very colourful *kuchi* women striding along the roads, accompanied by one man and a few large dogs.

The migration patterns described here present a broad pattern, within which many individual strategies exist. Households take their decision to migrate independently, according to factors such as climate, labour opportunities, type and number of livestock, economic situation, access to 'traditional' summer areas and tenure security in winter areas.

Throughout the country, one can find *kuchi* who have settled either in their winter area (most commonly) or in their summer area. These are either conscious decisions and thus a sign of relative welfare (land ownership, ample employment opportunities), or signs of destitution. This corresponds well with Barth's famous axiom (Barth 1961) that on both sides of the spectrum of pastoralism people settle – the rich because they invest in land or other assets (for instance trucks), and the poor because they lose their livestock and drop out.

Regional Differences

There are large regional differences between the pastoralists' livelihoods, due to historical, socio-political and ecological differences.

The North

In the 1970s the migration routes in the northern provinces followed the general patterns described earlier: from the periphery of the country to the Central Highlands (Ghor, Bamyan) and the Hindu Kush mountain range (the western spur of the Himalayas). These migration patterns find their origin in the late nineteenth century, with the trans-settlement of Ghilzai pastoralists from the south to the north, and the opening up of the Central Highlands (the Hazarajat) to the

pastoralists. Many of these pastoralists settled on the land they obtained, either immediately or with time. These enforced movements of Pashtun from the south were quickly followed by more spontaneous movements from the south and notably the east, which continued up to the 1970s. Many of these former pastoralists now own agricultural land and have become fully settled, while still maintaining their *kuchi* identity: they still speak the dialect, wear the dress and feel represented by the *kuchi* political leaders and their tribes.

Partly because of these historical patterns, the level of land ownership among *kuchi* is significantly higher in the north than in other regions. Nonetheless, many pastoralists maintained their migratory heritage, and as soon as they arrived in these northern areas started to migrate from the lower northern areas towards the more elevated southern areas in the Hindu Kush mountains and the Central Highlands.

The wars of the last three decades and the associated factionalism led to a severe disruption of these migration patterns in the north; seasonal grazing areas have become no longer accessible, the migration routes were blocked off or exorbitant illegal 'taxes' were levied by the commanders in place, and looting of livestock was widespread. Many pastoralists were forced to flee or settle in other provinces like Ghor, and those without agricultural land, in particular, saw their livelihood severely eroded.

The pastoralists adapted to these changing circumstances in different ways: by fleeing, settling or adopting short-range migration patterns. For this reason, but also due to the favourable geographical conditions in these provinces, there is quite a high proportion of short-range migratory pastoralists in these northern provinces. They move relatively short distances to the seasonal upland pastures (*ayloq*). Many of the resident local people (for instance Tajik, Uzbek, Arab and Pashtun) use a similar system of transhumance, which makes the boundaries between *kuchi* and non-*kuchi* quite blurred.

Even recently, however, there were still long-range migratory pastoralists that used the central highlands as their summer grazing area. Movements into the provinces of Ghor and Bamyan have been considerably reduced, but anecdotal evidence shows that this migration is again taking place, though at lower numbers than in the past. The Kunduz – Takhar – Badakhshan migration route is still in use. A major grazing area in Badakhshan is Shiwa dasht, where a high number of pastoralists concentrate in the winter. Over the years the number of pastoralists using the Shiwa area has varied, depending on the prevalent power relations. Nowadays, it is being used both by short-range pastoralists of all ethnic groups and by long-range migratory pastoralists (mostly Arab and Pashtun, from Kunduz and Takhar) (Patterson 2004).

In spite of all these factors affecting the migration patterns in the north, it must also be said that the drought affected the northern areas less than the southern areas. Livestock numbers in the north have increased over the last few years, and the highest number of livestock per pastoralist household can now be found in the north (Weijer 2005b).

The West[11]

The western provinces have more short-range than long-range migratory pastoralists. In particular, pastoralists in Badghis and Faryab provinces mostly practice short-range migration. They tend to migrate within the province, where they may keep large flocks.

Many of the pastoralists in the western provinces are Durrani-Pashtun. Glatzer (1981) describes how these pastoralists have a tendency to sedentarize and re-nomadize depending on the economic and climatic circumstances, for which these kinship ties between the communities are essential.

In the past, the Pashtun *kuchi* from Herat province used to be long-range migratory pastoralists, migrating in the summer into the mountains of Ghor province. This pattern has now mostly been replaced by a short-range migratory pattern, where they still migrate towards the east but do not reach into Ghor province. The majority of these pastoralists have built houses in their winter areas, and often combine herding with farming. Some pastoralists still continue their long-range migration into Ghor province, and may still live in tents for the entire year.

In addition to these Pashtun pastoralists, many Dari-speaking and Aimaq communities in Herat and Ghor province also migrate with the entire household to the pastures in the spring. During the spring and early summer they stay in tents in their pasture areas, which are also mostly located towards the eastern parts of Herat province.

The South

In broad terms, the southern provinces hold two types of pastoralists. One group are the long-range migratory pastoralists, moving towards the central highlands in the spring and returning to the southern plains during the winter. These are predominantly Pashtuns, whereas the second group consists mostly of Beluchis. The second group, the pastoralists from the Registan, have not been well covered by the NMAK survey,[12] but substantial information on these groups is available from NGOs (VARA/Cordaid 2003, CADG 2004, Jost 2004). There are distinct cultural differences between the two groups, however many Beluchi have started to use Pashtu as their language, and indeed intermarriage between the Baluchi and Pashtun in Registan is reported to be common (Jost 2004).

Until recently, the majority of the Registan *kuchi* stayed in the Registan area during winter and spring, moving to the Arghandab and Helmand valleys to live with the resident population there in summer and autumn. A relatively small number of Baluchi *kuchi* would stay permanently in the Registan, and would remain close to their wells and *nawars* (water pans that collect water during the rains) for the entire year. In addition, there were long-range migratory *kuchi*, predominantly but not exclusively Pashtun, who used the Registan area in early spring, before they started moving to their summer areas in Zabul and Ghazni provinces (VARA/Cordaid 2003).

These patterns were interrupted in 1999 when the *nawar*s (water pans) dried up and the pasture became inadequate due to severe drought. An evacuation was organized by the Taliban government, and eventually all of the pastoralists were forced to leave the Registan desert. The majority are currently staying in or around camps for internally displaced people (IDP) in Kandahar and Helmand provinces, although efforts to support a slow return to the Registan have started to have some effects.

The long-range migratory pastoralists in the south were also severely affected by the drought, in which high numbers of livestock were lost, estimated at 70–80 per cent (Weijer 2002). This was no doubt compounded by the restricted access to some of the main summer pasture areas, like Nawor district, due to ethno-political strife.

The winter grazing areas in the south are relatively poor, leading to a high dependency on supplementary feed. In normal situations, the animals lose body weight during autumn and winter when they are in the southern grazing areas, only to gain body weight again in spring and summer. With decreased access to the more highly productive summer pastures, the animals entered the winter season with a reduced vitality, thereby limiting their ability to withstand drought conditions.

In contrast to the pastoralists of the east, west and north, the pastoralists of the south are relatively pure pastoralists, with a low degree of diversification and little scope for crop agriculture as a secondary resource. Due to geography, there are fewer opportunities here to combine livelihood activities, or to change to short-range migratory patterns. This is one of the reasons why the pastoralists of the south (and the south-east) were more severely affected by the 1999–2004 drought than the pastoralists of the other regions.

The East

Pastoralists in the eastern provinces are predominantly long-range migratory. Migration is towards Kabul, and then either southward to Logar or northward towards Parwan and Panshir provinces. A small proportion of the pastoralists from the east move into Pakistan during the winter provinces. Nangarhar is the province with the highest number of pastoralists in Afghanistan, even though a relatively high number of these are only partially migratory.

Levels of income diversification are higher in the east than in the south, and a relatively large proportion of the pastoralists own some land and practice agriculture alongside pastoralism. The eastern pastoralists have been less affected by the drought than those of the south, and livestock numbers are higher, though nowhere near as high as the northern provinces.

The south-eastern provinces were also quite badly affected by the 1999–2004 drought. An additional compounding factor in the south-eastern provinces, and in particular in Khost, is the after-effect of the reshuffling of land that took place in the early 1960s. The closure of the border with Pakistan caused many *kuchi*s to choose between Pakistan or Afghanistan. Those that remained in Afghanistan had

to struggle to obtain new user's rights to these winter pastures, as previously described. There still exists a relatively high degree of land tenure conflicts in Khost province, which tend to erupt from time to time. Many *kuchi* decided upon a different strategy at the time of the border closure; they sold their animals and entered into new businesses, notably in the transportation sector. For some, this business, possibly combined with smuggling activities, proved successful and allowed them to acquire large properties, thereby feeding the often-voiced opinion that 'all *kuchi* are rich'.

Most of the Khost pastoralists are long-range and move towards Paktya province in the spring. During the winter, some of these pastoralists move across the border into Pakistan. Paktika province predominantly contains short-range migratory pastoralists, with some groups also moving into Pakistan.

Pastoralist Household Economy

Livestock-derived income

Afghan pastoralist households are relatively independent economic units; internal support mechanisms do exist to some extent, particularly between relatives, but as a general rule the households are economically self-sufficient. This stands in contrast to most pastoralist societies in Africa, where community-support mechanisms and stock lending is of the highest importance. Such mechanisms are essential for risk spreading and function most efficiently in a subsistence economy. In contrast, the Afghan pastoralists are much more integrated into the cash economy, with a purchased commodity (bread) being the staple diet.

Afghan pastoralist households produce mostly milk and milk products (ghee, yoghurt, buttermilk and *qurut* (dried buttermilk). Most of these products are used for home consumption, and the milk is reserved for the lambs and kids, but surplus dairy goods are sold in the market. Wool is also sold in the market, and is considered to be the second-most important source of income. The main source of income however is the sale of male lambs. Household expenditure is on wheat, tea, sugar and other food commodities, alongside other essential items such as supplementary livestock feed, medicines for humans and animals, and clothing.

Lambs are born in spring and raised until they are ready for sale. The age of sale depends on the need for cash, the availability of pasture, the availability of working capital to purchase supplementary feed, and the market prices. Lambs that are sold at one year, one and a half or even two years are more profitable than those sold at six months. However, anecdotal information suggests that a high proportion of the lambs are sold around six months in order to reduce the costs for supplementary feeding through the winter. The market prices and the condition of the animal are other important factors that contribute to the economic profit to be made. At certain times of the year (notably at the Muslim

festivals of *Eid*) the prices are high, and animals in good body condition can fetch very high prices (up to US$160).

Fattening of the animals is an economically productive exercise, if funds for the purchase of feed are available (Weijer 2005a). Therefore, the age of the lamb at the time of sale, and the price fetched are good indicators of the economic stress of the pastoralist household.

Non-livestock Derived Income

Income from livestock products is a very important source of income, but by no means the only one. Even in the best of times, it is only the richest of the pastoralists that manage to obtain all their income from their livestock. Pastoralists seize other income opportunities, such as harvesting in the crop harvest season; shepherding animals for other pastoralists, settled people or for traders; selling firewood or dung, and livestock trade. These are normal livelihood strategies which can be upgraded at times of increased stress, when demand for these additional income sources rises and supply decreases. Shepherding is a mechanism with mutual benefit for the shepherd and the owner of the livestock, but with increased climate stress and reduced livestock numbers the opportunities for shepherding plummet and demand for shepherding employment rises. Pastoralists turn increasingly to agricultural labour and casual labour in the main bazaars – they collect stones for construction, work in brick factories, try find employment in road construction, and even beg.

No data is currently available, but anecdotal evidence clearly suggests that high numbers of male members of the pastoralist household leave the pastoralist community to go to the main bazaars in an attempt to find casual labour to supplement the income of the family. On a regular basis, for a week or even a few months, they return to the family with their contribution. When visiting a pastoralist community nowadays, it is not uncommon that not a single man of medium age can be found; the animals are herded by young boys, while older men take care of security and social obligations. One of the inherent problems with this type of 'income diversification' is that the pastoralists do not have any comparative advantage vis-à-vis other casual labourers; they generally do not have the right connections and they are unskilled.

A small proportion of the pastoralists own agricultural land and use crops as a secondary income source; they can therefore be called agro-pastoralists. Sixteen per cent of the pastoralists assessed in the NMAK own some land, but some of these only grow fodder crops (Weijer 2005).

Increasingly one may find that the pastoralist communities, or part of these communities, are adjusting their migration patterns to seasonal labour opportunities. Certain labour opportunities, in particular for agricultural harvesting, are strongly seasonal and dependent on climatic conditions. Pastoralists in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Laghman may prolong their stay in these lower-lying provinces to benefit to the maximum from harvesting labour opportunities, and may subsequently rush to the more elevated districts of Kabul and Logar

provinces to benefit from harvesting opportunities there. These migration patterns mirror their traditional patterns, but the timing has become more dependent on the cropping season than on the pasture needs of the livestock. This pattern of labour migration is not limited to agricultural harvesting, but stretches to all sectors of the casual labour market, thus effectively creating a migratory '*kuchi* proletariat'.

The Future of Pastoralism in Afghanistan

It is clear that there is a national economic justification for pastoralism: livestock and livestock production made a significant contribution to the GDP and to exports in the past. Currently, livestock for slaughter is being imported, whereas in the past Afghanistan was an important exporter of livestock products. With increasing competition for landed resources, and a trend towards intensification of agricultural production, the marginal lands need to be put to optimal use. When considering that between 70 and 85 per cent of the total land area in Afghanistan is used for grazing, one can see the importance of this consideration.

There is a strong economic rationale for the nomadic livestock production system, as employed by the pastoralists. Only through a migratory system can the marginal lands of Afghanistan be put to economic use. In the current situation of increased competition for land, and the need to increase national food production, these marginal lands need to be put to optimal use.

There is no reason why pastoralism cannot adapt to modern circumstances, and in fact these mechanisms are already taking place – for instance through trucking of the animals from the winter to the summer areas. Pastoralists can, under the right conditions, play an important role in the ecological maintenance of the pasture areas, if appropriate management systems are put in place. Traditional systems still function to some extent, and have functioned in the past, but the new socio-political realities require new strategies to prevent both over-grazing and under-grazing of the pastures, and reduce conflict over these pastures.

The question of environmental sustainability of pastoralism in the current circumstances brings us to the very difficult question of how many livestock and therefore how many pastoralists this country can support, in other words the question of carrying capacity. This is a concept which is heavily disputed amongst academics, and the usefulness of the term, particularly in nomadic production systems, has been often questioned.

In any case, in Afghanistan there is not sufficient information available at this point to draw conclusions about the number of animals the country can support. This is not only because important information about potential dry matter off-take of the rangelands is not available or not sufficiently reliable, but also because the rangelands are only one component of the feed source of the animals. Supplementary feeding is common practice, as well as grazing the crop fields

after harvesting. These are not easily quantifiable but play a major role in animal feeding practices, and cannot be ignored.

Although there are a lot of reasons to support pastoralism, it must be clearly recognized that not all *kuchi* can become fully nomadic again, nor should they be forced to do so. Even if no hard conclusions can be drawn, a simple reasoning shows that the number of people that pastoralism supported in the pre-war years when conditions were relatively good can probably not be exceeded by much without destroying the ecological balance. This applies especially when considering that not all pastures once under pastoralist use can be reclaimed by the pastoralists, and that pastures have been encroached upon. Increased reliance on supplementary feeding, improved pasture management practices and improved animal husbandry techniques can prove effective to some extent, but one cannot expect the land to support double the current number of pastoralists.

So, in addition to the much needed support for pastoralism, opportunities must be availed to those who want to diversify – either in terms of the income base within the household so that the remaining members can continue their livestock production, or as a total shift away from pastoralism.

Already one can see a shift away from pure pastoralism to a more diversified income base. This process was already noted by Dupree (1980) as early as 1970. The Ghilzai Pashtun *kuchi*, who were given land in the north, did not initially intend to settle on these lands, but kept them as a second resource. However, with time many of them did settle. Also, the *kuchi* in other areas increasingly moved towards a semi-nomadic existence. A part of the family would remain behind in the winter area while the rest would migrate with the animals.

Migration patterns are increasingly influenced by other factors, such as labour opportunities, land ownership and other forms of income diversification, with the overall trend leaning towards partial migration and short-range migration patterns.

Increasingly, and particularly during times of drought, the men of the household tend to leave the *kuchi* areas to search for employment opportunities elsewhere. These attempts are not always successful, due to lack of skills, but as a coping strategy it has anchored itself in the pastoralist communities. Trade has always been a major contributor to pastoralist income, but over the last few decades the pastoralists' comparative advantage in trade has been greatly diminished due to the emergence of modern transportation and the expansion of roads into formerly inaccessible areas. However, pastoralists still maintain a comparative advantage in livestock trade and other petty trade, through their particular skill set and migratory patterns. This is also used as a coping strategy – increasingly becoming a normal livelihood strategy.

These livelihood strategies show a trend towards a decreasingly migratory way of life among the pastoralists. They are also a sign, though, of how diversification of the income base can make pastoralists less vulnerable to drought. Additional income sources which support the family through hard times can provide them with the opportunity to continue their livestock production. So it is exactly the

diversification of pastoral income sources which allows them to use marginal areas and raise the large numbers of animals that once contributed so much to the Afghan economy.

Nowadays, the overall number of *kuchi* assessed by NMAK is around 2.4 million, of which around one million are currently not migrating (Weijer 2005b). This clearly shows the trend towards partial settlement and increased diversification of the pastoral economy. This is an important risk mitigation strategy which needs to be supported. In the light of these trends, pastoralism is likely to become more of a specialization in an otherwise diversified economy. This specialization, however, is important for Afghanistan and needs to be supported. It can adapt to the modern circumstances, as it has always done in the past.

Having said this, it is important to emphasize that the pastoralists nationwide have expressed a strong desire for education. Depending on the way an education system will be set up (boarding schools, mobile schools or distance education), this will to a greater or lesser degree cause a withdrawal from pastoralism as a natural phenomenon.

In conclusion, there is a tendency towards increased settlement and a more diversified income base. Improved education and health care can only further entrench this trend. However, there are sufficient reasons to promote pastoralism as a specialization, to encourage the extensive livestock production system and strengthen its risk management mechanisms through improved access to pastures, better pasture monitoring and management, and improved animal production.

Notes

1. For more information about the origin of this population group, refer to Barfield's 'The Central Asian Arabs of Afghanistan' (Barfield 1981).
2. Rangeland assessments have been conducted for the provinces of Ghazni and Zabul (Cassidy 2004) and for the Registan desert by CADG (CADG 2004).
3. See for instance Niamir-Fuller's comments in PolicyMatters 10, September 2002 (Niamir-Fuller 2002).
4. For instance research conducted in 1979 (McArthur 1979), corroborated by research conducted by the author for MISFA (Weijer 2005a).
5. These figures have been obtained through extrapolation of the average number of livestock kept in the different strata of the community (poor, medium and rich; with an assumed ratio of 1:2:1), multiplied by the total number of households.
6. FAO 2003.
7. This calculation is based on the assumption that the inputs for carpet production (e.g. wool) stemmed from local production. This assumption is probably true for the 1970s, but in recent years the supply of wool has not been able to sustain carpet production levels and styles. Large amounts of wool are currently imported.

8. According to many *kuchi* they allowed themselves to be recruited more for economic reasons than for ideological reasons, but it is likely that Taliban support for gaining access to the pastures was an additional motivating factor.
9. This perception of affairs was shared by Kuchi leaders in Ghazni, by Hazara leaders in Ghazni and by a number of international aid organization workers who had been working in these conflict areas.
10. According to interviews held by the author with sedentary and nomadic populations in various districts in Ghazni, Parwan, Nangarhar and Laghman provinces.
11. In the west the term *kuchi* is often not used, and the term *maldar*, for 'livestock keeping people', is preferred.
12. The NMAK survey had a slight bias towards Pashtun pastoralists, due to the over-representation of Pashtun pastoralists in the provincial and national *kuchi* councils.

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