

The Effects of Food Aid on the Attitude and Practice of the Pokot People (of East Pokot District) Towards their Own Food Sovereignty

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Abstract: *Over ten million people in Kenya suffer from chronic food insecurity and poor nutrition. Between two to four million people require emergency food assistance at any given time. This study sought to find out the effects of Food aid on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot district towards their own Food Sovereignty. A descriptive research design was used. . It was found out that Food Aid has had a debilitating negative effect on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot district towards their own food Sovereignty.*

Keywords: Food aid, Food sovereignty, Attitude, Practice, Famine

1. Introduction

East Pokot District is one of the regions that epitomize food insecurity in Kenya where food sovereignty mechanisms are conspicuously absent and the people vulnerable to vicissitudes of weather. East Pokot District is a pastoral livelihood zone as compared to agro-pastoral neighboring Baringo district or even West Pokot. The Pokot people are found in the North Rift within the Northern part of Kenya. They predominantly occupy both East and West Pokot districts of Kenya. The Pokot rely mainly on a diet based on milk, blood and meat. East Pokot is exemplary for many areas where people depend predominantly on pastoralism and a little agro-pastoralist livelihoods unlike areas such as Turkana, Samburu, Marsabit, Moyale, Garissa, Wajir and Mandera. However, in the 1970s they started crop husbandry especially on the highlands. The 1980s saw rapid increase in farming activities within the highlands but 1990s and 2000s heralded an increase in the growing of maize even within the lowlands such as Kadingding and Churo. Churo is near Leroghi plateau and receives higher rainfall than the rest of the Nginyang division of East Pokot (Bollig, 2006).

Maize is not particularly adaptable to this region because of harsh climatic condition, the government and some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been encouraging the people to plant sorghum or millet that are more adaptable to the lowlands than maize. In order to address cultural, social and political impediments to food security and nutrition, there is need for the Government to promote production of traditional crops that can facilitate food access and food security over time. The major perennial shocks in the region include famine, drought, insecurity, and a feeling of marginalization of the people by the mainstream government of Kenya (Agricultural Sector Coordination Unit, 2011).

Currently, over ten million people in Kenya suffer from chronic food insecurity and poor nutrition, and between 2 to

4 million people require emergency food assistance at any given time. Nearly 30 per cent of Kenya's children are classified as undernourished, and micronutrient deficiencies are widespread (Agricultural Sector Coordination Unit, 2011).

Worldwide, between 1996/98 and 2006/08, the share of emergency aid rose from 38 per cent to 66 per cent of all food aid whilst programme aid shrank from 33 per cent to 12 per cent. Project aid also declined over the decade, from 28 per cent to 22 per cent, as did monetisation- support in form of money (Humanitarian Policy Group Overseas Development Institute, 2010).

East Pokot district has experienced catastrophes such as drought, famine, and insecurity for over eight decades since the *Koringring* earthquake and *Katarnngany* drought of 1928 and 1930 respectively. This perennial state of high vulnerability has been brought about by both climatic and human activities leading to low productivity of food locally in East Pokot district with more emphasis put on food security through importation. Thus apparently, there is less attention given to productivity from within using locally available resources and potentials. As such, there was need to determine the effects of all forms of Food Aid on the food sovereignty of the people of East Pokot District and the possibility of a paradigm shift from food security via food importation to community empowerment initiatives for enhancement of local productivity. Hence, this study focused on some of the dynamics inherent in food aid distribution to a people with a view to understand, strengthen and promote food sovereignty of the people of East Pokot district. Thus the study to find out the extent to which food aid supplies affected people's food sovereignty in East Pokot.

1.2 Objective and the Research Question

The objective of this study was to examine the effects of Food Aid on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot towards their own Food Sovereignty. The research question that directed the study was: What effect does Food Aid have on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot district towards their own Food Sovereignty?

2. Literature Review

The study was guided by the Rational Choice theory. This theory is based on the premise that all human beings are rational and tend to make rational choices depending on the scarcity of resources on their environment. The basic principles of rational choice theory are derived from neoclassical economics as well as utilitarianism and game theory (Ritzer, 1996).

2.1 Effect of Food Aid on People's Attitude towards Food Sovereignty

"Food aid is food from external source for survival. The concept of food aid may include more distant relatives who might for one reason or another be unable to provide for their own sustenance from their own resources through age, illness, displacement, crop failures and so forth" (Singer *et al.*, 1987:3). The Food aid may be given in the form of a loan, a credit, a sale below the normal market price or a free gift. It may be offered by governments, by international bodies, by regional institutions, by voluntary groups and agencies or by individuals. Most reasonable people will agree that food aid, if improperly handled, can do more harm than good, and there are plenty of horror tales to testify to that. Food aid can be said to have existed in one form or another for since antiquity (Singer *et al.*, 1987).

An attitude is a general and enduring positive or negative feeling about some person, object, or issue. The feeling of people towards an object or issue greatly influences the way they handle it and whether there will be success or failure. The most widely used measurement device for attitude is the Likert Scale (Worchelet *et al.*, 1991). This study interrogated the effect that food aid has had on the recipients' attitude towards their own food sovereignty with interesting findings as highlighted under Results and Discussion section.

O'Donnell (1994), states that there is likely to be no sudden change in attitudes as a result of exposure to the media or to a situation. However, there is what has been called the "drip effect"; constant repetition tends to familiarize us with the idea that certain types of behavior, perhaps violent or promiscuous are normal. Thus this study was an exploration of the effects of repetitive reception of food aid has had on the people's attitude. Such a study has been done in other areas of life such as in effects of mass media, advertisement but not about food aid provision specifically.

According to Fonte (1991), in primitive societies [*sic*], food is not like any other good. The rules which govern its exchange are completely specific; indeed, food is often not exchanged at all within the group, as it is the foundation of its identity and solidarity. The groups designated "the other"

or "different" are described pejoratively as eaters of food regarded as inedible by the "us" of the group. On the contrary, food that is a taboo for a group may be an item of exchange with other groups. Food aid (mostly corn) is produced in large scale in US not for human consumption but for livestock and horses. It is unfortunate that when corn arrives in Kenya, it erodes food sovereignty prospects of Kenyans. Food deserves to be treated with the uniqueness it demands and not as any other merchandise as people quickly develop attitudes towards food and feeding as they get more exposed to them.

Traditional food cannot always be treated as any other thing. Food is a vital element of primary necessity, often symbolic of hearth and home, if not of mother. Compared to other things, food is shared more promptly, more from need. Food transactions are a sensitive barometer, almost a ritual declaration of social relationships and food is used as mechanisms for starting, maintaining and distributing sociability. Even within a large social sector where money is exchanged with other things, food is protected against monetary (counterfeit) transactions and is often shared and rarely sold. In tandem with this is the Pokot culture, where food is not for sale and sharing of food is the norm rather than the exception.

For instance, Bollig (2006) propounds that among the pastoral Pokot, all transfers of livestock are accomplished in order to initiate long term relations among two herders. On the one hand this includes the promise of further exchanges of livestock and on the other hand entails strong emotional ties and social support. Bride-wealth exchange, bride-wealth distribution, stock-friendships, distribution within the descent group, and exchanges between two fixed descent groups stand out as the major institutions of reciprocal exchange. The coming in of food aid in form of other products different from livestock can certainly be said to have created confusion as far as food sharing and handling is concerned.

Food aid has caused a profound transformation in models of production and consumption, often resulting in the disappearance of local products and diets. Although the social effects on domestic organization, food preparation, and "table manners" have probably been considerable and relevant to the developing countries' capacity to guarantee food security, these have scarcely been documented until now. East Pokot is no exception as far as these parameters of consumption and production are concerned. This study analyzes these attitudes and gives recommendations on the way forward.

3. Research Methodology

A descriptive research design was used with a sample of 169 informants drawn from Nginyang and Mondri divisions. This study used primary qualitative data predominantly employing instruments that were prepared by the researcher. Semi-structured interview schedule was used. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was also employed where there was need to enrich the data collected. According to Flick (2009:195), a focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. Groups are

typically six to eight people who participate in the interview for one-half to two hours. The study was mainly concerned with perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and practices of the people of East Pokot and such information were best collected through tailor-made Semi-structured interviews, and Focus Group Discussions. These instruments enabled the researcher to balance the quantity and quality of data collected and provided more information for a fuller explanation of the phenomena. The collected data was processed and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS version 20.

4. Results and Discussions

This study examined the effects of Food Aid on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot towards their own Food Sovereignty. The effects of food aid on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot on their food sovereignty was defined in terms of the what the people owned, their feelings about the food aid, their own assessment of their current and future food situation, the regularity with which they received food aid and their own views on the food for work projects. The attitude was measured through likert scale where respondents' responses to stoppage of food aid and being assisted to produce and consume their own food were noted. This was categorized in terms of those who agreed, agreed strongly, disagreed, strongly disagreed, and those who did not know. The results are represented in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: How can you describe the future food situation in East Pokot?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Bright	25	14.8	14.8	16.0
Bad	5	3.0	3.0	18.9
Very bad	74	43.8	43.8	62.7
Unknown	63	37.3	37.3	100.0
Total	169	100.0	100.0	

It was important to get the information on the last time that the people received Food Aid in East Pokot as at the time of this study so as to establish whether such a phenomenon was still in existence (see Figure 4.1 below).

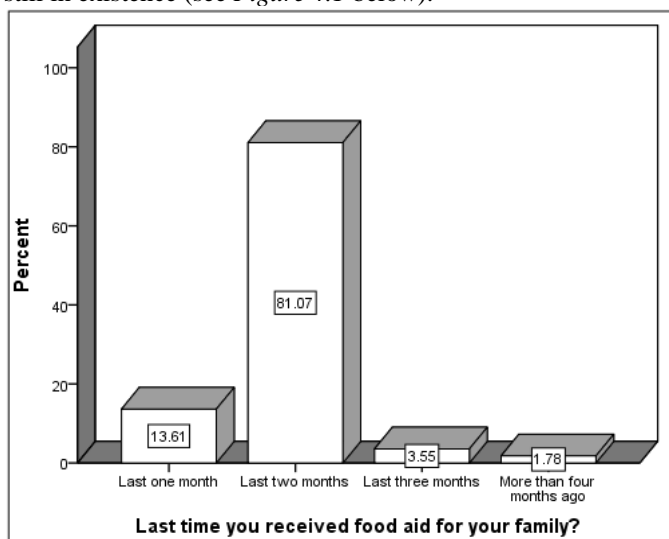


Figure 4.1: The last time Food Aid was received as at the time of the study

As at the time of the data collection, the majority of the respondents (81 per cent) indicated that they had received food aid within the last two (2) months and 14 percent had received food aid in the last one month. About 4 per cent said they had received food aid in the last three months and only 1 percent had not received food aid within the last six (6) months. The differences in the timing could be attributed to memory or maybe because some missed out during the distribution. There was less than one per cent who said they had not received food aid in the last one year because they had produced enough cereals in their farms located far away from East Pokot.

The attitude of the respondents towards food aid versus empowerment (Figure 4.2 below): The respondents had very different responses as far as empowerment to produce own food was concerned.

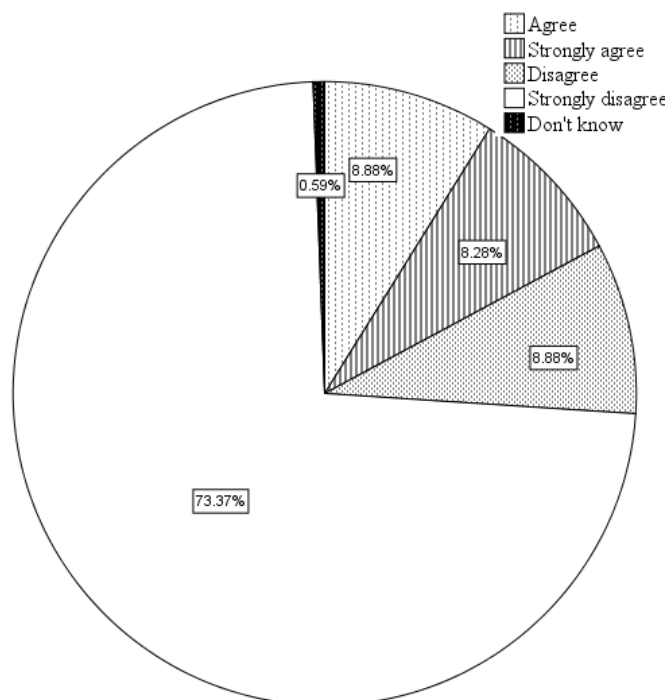


Figure 4.2: Food Aid should be stopped and the people helped to start producing their own food

The responses received when the people were asked about food aid being stopped and the people helped to produce their own food were mixed. The majority of the respondents (73 percent) strongly disagreed with the stoppage of food aid provision and the people helped to start producing their own food. Their contention was that by so doing was sure death to the people of East Pokot. They could not imagine East Pokot without food aid. Nine (9) percent disagreed stating that there was not much that could be done as far as food production was concerned in East Pokot. Another nine (9) percent agreed that food aid should be stopped and people encouraged in producing and consuming their own foodstuffs through irrigation and businesses. There was 8 percent who strongly agreed and a final 1 percent who did not know whether the food aid should be stopped or continued. These results confirmed that provision of food aid has affected the majority of the people's attitude towards their own ability to produce and ensure food sovereignty in East Pokot.

Data on this objective was analysed under the research question: “What effect does Food Aid have on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot district towards their own Food Sovereignty?” The results are summarized in Table 4.1 above.

Food sovereignty of East Pokot: Since it was the people of East Pokot that ultimately would determine their own Food Sovereignty, it was imperative to find out what the people believed about their own Food Sovereignty (see Figure 4.3 below).

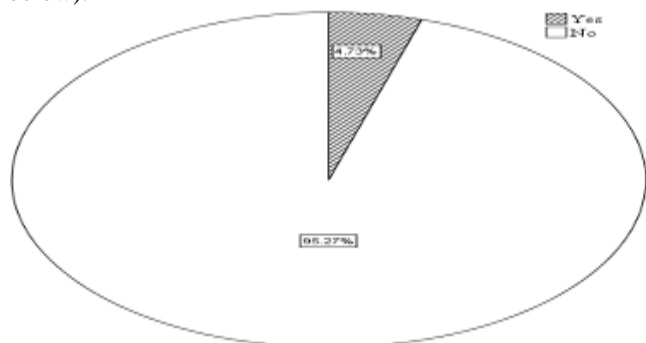


Figure 4.3: Can East Pokot be Food Sovereign from January to December without Food Aid?

The majority (95 per cent) of the respondents felt that East Pokot District was unable to be food sovereign. Only five

(5) per cent said that it could be food sovereign through irrigation. The majority could not even imagine East Pokot life without food aid and they were passionate that for people to live in East Pokot there must be food aid. This is a clear example of how perennial provision of food aid to the people has affected the way they view themselves and their environment. For a change in this kind of attitude to be experienced there must be a paradigm shift and re-socialization of the people about their own food sovereignty potentials/capacities. Such a paradigm shift is also possible through capacity building, training and support.

Reasons given why East Pokot could not be food sovereign: Figure 4.4 below shows that 40 per cent of the respondents said that climatic conditions do not favour them to do any kind of farming. About 29 per cent said that there was no land for farming. Twenty one (21) per cent insisted that Food aid was the only way to ensure availability of food/life in East Pokot. Four (4) per cent of the respondents indicated that irrigation was the only thing that could make them food sovereign and before that was done; East Pokot could not be food sovereign. Another four (4) per cent were of the view that the district could not be food sovereign because most people were too poor to be on their own. Some two (2) per cent felt that creation of employment opportunities would ensure food sovereignty in East Pokot (Figure 4.4).

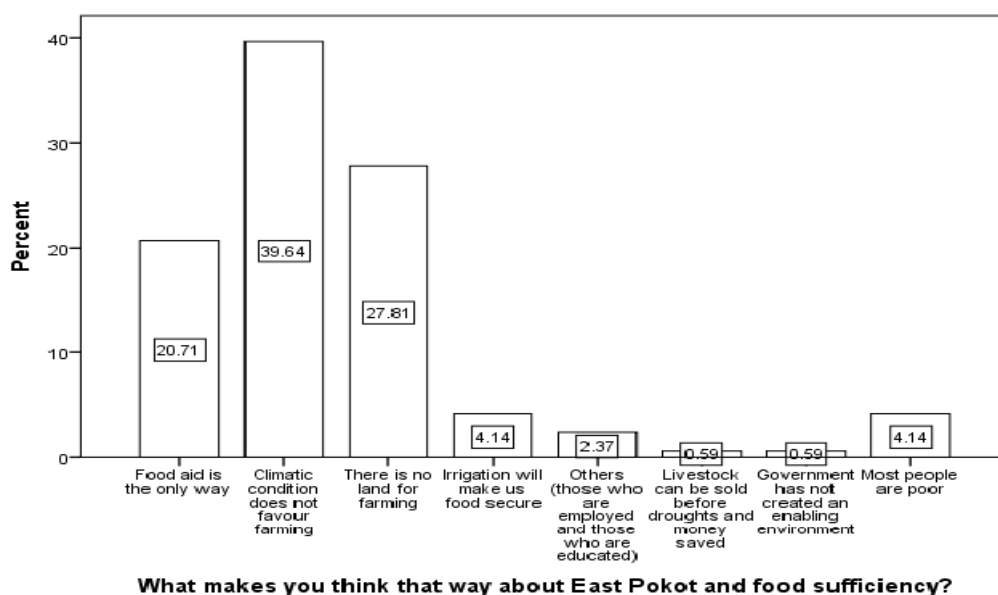


Figure 4.4: Reported reasons why East Pokot Cannot be Food Sovereign

Whereas all these views were valid to some extent, most of them were more or less justification for continued dependency on food aid. The District was very much capable of food sovereignty given the potential of livestock production and the alluvial soils along the river banks of river Nginyang and her tributaries.

4.1 Inferential Statistical Analysis

The objective of this study was to examine the effects of Food Aid on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot towards their own Food Sovereignty.

The effects of food aid on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot on their food sovereignty was defined in terms of what the people owned, their feelings about the food aid, their own assessment of their current and future food situation, the regularity with which they received food aid and their own views on the food for work projects. The attitude was measured by responses to stoppage of food aid and being assisted to produce and consume their own food. This was categorized in terms of those who agreed, agreed strongly, disagreed, strongly disagreed, those who did not know.

Data on this objective was analysed under the research question: "What effects does Food Aid have on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot district towards their own Food Sovereignty?" The results are summarized in Table 4.2 below.

The data was analysed using chi square to examine the effects of food aid on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot on their own food sovereignty. A Cross tabulation of the question "Food aid should be stopped and people helped to produce their own food" and the question "Can East Pokot be food sufficient from within from January to December without food aid?" were considered for analysis.

Table 4.2: Chi-Square Test for Food Sovereignty

Chi-Square Tests			
Explanation	Value	Df	Asymp.Sig (2-Tailed)
Pearson Chi Square	10.424a	4	0.034
Likelihood ratio	6.922	4	0.14
Linear-by-linear Association	4.701	1	0.03
N of valid cases	169		
Source: Field data			
a. 5 Cells (50%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.05.			

The Pearson Chi-Square was calculated as 10.424 which was found to be significant statistically at 0.05 degree of freedom. This chi square test was testing the relationship between attitude of the people towards stoppage of food aid as an independent entity and food sovereignty of the Pokot. This significant relationship indicates that the two are not independent, that is, according to the respondents it is not possible to stop food aid when food sufficiency is not assured. Thus it could be concluded authoritatively that the provision of food aid in East Pokot has affected the people's attitude towards their own ability to produce sufficient food for themselves. We can therefore answer our research question under this objective that: Yes. Food Aid has a debilitating negative effect on the attitude and practice of the people of East Pokot district towards their own food Sovereignty. The study thus states that direct provision of food aid should be gradually stopped and the people of East Pokot helped to produce their own food from within from January to December every year using appropriate schemes. Nevertheless, stopping provision of food aid for the sake of stopping before putting practical food production measures and capacity building would be tantamount to committing a crime against humanity on the people so affected.

Data analysis and interpretation of the interview and focus group discussions responses from the respondents revealed that prolonged provision of food aid negatively affected the people's attitude and practice towards their own Food Sovereignty. This finding is in agreement with Davey (2010:318) who states that attitudes are thought to develop through mere exposure. "Mere exposure effects" argues that people develop more positive feelings about objects or people the more they are exposed to us- the more we see something, the more we seem to like it.

For instance one 37 year old lady when asked what she could do as a person to ensure her family produces and consumes own food she said:

Not much. I am disabled by the environmental situation. It is impossible to do anything here. There is no rain. There are no goats and left on our own we will surely die. It is even hard for the government or NGOs to come up with ways of helping people to produce their own food. The population is also high. The most we can do is building a storage house then when the government and NGOs provide food aid we just put inside the storage house for future use. There is enough food (aid) at the moment and we are very thankful.

She indeed sees herself as disabled and is of the view that it is impossible to do anything by herself concluding that there is enough food aid. This view point is buttressed on the Rational Choice Theory that sees actors being purposive or as having intentionality- actors have ends or goals toward which their actions are aimed. By seeing impossibilities and thinking of building stores for the food aid received the person believes that this will convince donors to continue providing food aid, which they do not have to work for. However goats and camels were thriving in Mondri division However there were some people especially in Nginyang who had farms and there were those who were tilling their farms as data collection was going on. This showed that there is capacity for East Pokot to be food sovereign with some infrastructural input in agriculture.

One respondent when asked about what he was able to do by himself to ensure that his family has enough food said: East Pokot is not a hopeless district full of guns and violence as portrayed in the radio and newspapers. Since you came here have you seen guns everywhere? We only need irrigation project here and we will produce enough maize, pumpkins, and water melons here that can feed even the whole country. I do some farming of maize when it rains but the harvest is normally little (See Plates 4.2 and 4.3 below). I cannot rely on it so I still have to receive food aid. When the rains come we normally even harvest some *kiptanya* (or *amaranthusblitum* L.) for food here. Another thing that the government can do for us is to provide us with money instead of maize, beans and rice. If I get money I can start my own business of livestock or kiosk and be on my own.

The attitude of this respondent were held by the minority but it gives the illustration that people will choose their activities and behaviour as rational beings. The study found out that the farms in Nginyang were fertile and short rain crops could do well there. The place was also ideal for livestock production especially camels and goats (See Plate 1 below).

5. Conclusions

This study concludes that Food aid has also affected the attitude of the people of East Pokot District concerning their own food sovereignty such that the majority (95 per cent) believes that East Pokot district cannot be food sufficient or sovereign without food aid. Food aid as good and lifesaving as it is has affected the people's attitude towards their own ability to produce their own food as evidenced by the number who strongly opposed (73 per cent) the stopping of food aid and helping in self-reliance.

5.1 Recommendations

First, that the Food aid providers diversify the forms of food aid from direct cereals provision to self-sustaining programmes such as irrigation projects within the alluvial soil plains of river Nginyang and its tributaries. Also consider the rocky sides of the district like most parts of Mondri Division as sources of the best quality meat production for the nation. Thus any support to those areas be in form of livestock especially goats and a “one camel per household” basis through a revolving fund system, where the people get camels on loans and repay live female calves, which are passed on to others in need. These will not only provide food and employment opportunities to the local people but will also control soil erosion, which is acute in that area.

Second, that Social support system especially for the aged and vulnerable people be established by the government of Kenya to channel funds into that region so as to boost the people’s purchasing power hence spurring up economic activities within the district. Such a system would create an enabling environment for the establishment of many other small scale businesses with a great multiplier effect in the district and her neighbours.

Third, that the people of East Pokot be encouraged to domesticate cactus and *prosopis fujifloraas* commercial crops in the region and a jam processing plant established by the people in collaboration with other stakeholders for local and export market. This should be coupled with deliberate measures taken to domesticate other wild foodstuffs such as *sorich* and *loma*.

5.2 Suggestions for Further Study

First, that a participatory research methodology on resource mobilisation and prioritisation of the felt needs of the people of East Pokot be carried out so as to effectively address the emerging issues and comprehensively address the food sovereignty situation in the district. This study can be carried out by universities and other stakeholders. Secondly, that a study be carried out on value addition and economic viability of commercial production of wild foods such as cactus fruits and the possibility of manufacture of cactus jam for both local and international markets.



Plate 4.1: Camels foraging in Mondri Division (Photo by G. Ocarl on 29th March, 2012)



Plate 4.2: Some of the granaries at Donyasas, Nginyang Division (Photo by G. Ocarl on 21st April, 2012)



Plate 4.3: Land preparation for planting at Donyasas (Photo by G. Ocarl on 21st April, 2012)

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