

THE DYNAMICS OF ANCIENT *TULA* WELLS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY

Tula wells

- One of the ancient water systems in Eastern Africa
- Nine *tula* well complexes-*Tula salan*
- Main source of permanent water during dry season (about 90 %)
- Important culturally, politically, socially, religiously, and economically
- Key resource in Borana pastoral production



A



C



B

cont

- ❖ Connected by limestone basement, *Bisaan qa'a biyee adii* (water of white soil)



Borana perception of the wells

- Pivotal roles of wells explained by linking to family, cattle economy, and peace of Borana(Nagaa)
- *Elli loon* (the well is cattle)
- *Elli Niitii* (the well is wife)
- *Elli warra* (the well is a family)
- *Elli handhura* (the well is nuclear, inherited)

The Dynamics of wells reflect:



- Historical imprints of natural disasters like floods, droughts, and epidemics
- Socio-political disturbances that disrupted the system and influenced the operation of wells

What influence the operation of the wells?



Impacts of flood

- Collapse many wells
- Influence water availability and hence livestock production
- Re-excavation demand huge cattle investment

Droughts



- Collapse cattle economy
- Collapse in cattle economy resulted in famines, causing human demographic decline
- Force pastoralists to abandon the well, resulting in disuse
- Re-opening require investment and human labour

Some of the droughts remembered by folklore Songs (1768-1776; 1808-1816) as:

Oolaa Bulee Dhadacha

drought of *gada* Bule Dhadacha

Oolaa Saaqoo Dhadacha
Dhadacha

drought of *gada* Saaqoo

Oolaan abbaa fi ilmaa

the droughts of fathers and sons

Duuti haadhaa fi ilmaa

death is that of mothers and
offsprings

Climatic variability and water availability

- Change in water table reported
- Forced pastoralist to dig down, and modify use rules
- Concentrate on few, abandoning the less productive wells

Recent changes

- Land use changes
 - ▣ Settlement in dry season grazing
 - ▣ Expansion of cultivation
 - ▣ Increased private ownership of land and shrinkage of grazing land
 - ▣ Abandonment of wet-dry season grazing system
 - These threatened the operation of the wells

Conclusion

- The dynamics of the well is connected to pastoral economy
- Climatic variation influence the operation of tula wells (use, disuse), and hence pastoral production
- Status of tula wells is related the health of pastoral production and hence livestock marketing