The following section of the book describes coping strategies which are applied during drought and disaster to prevent starvation and the loss of livestock. The change in dietary habits is an important strategy which is applied early on to cope with famine (Halstead & O'Shea, 1989; Mink & Smith, 1989; Colson, 1979; de Garine & Harrison, 1988; Amborn, 1994; Watts, 1988). More animals are slaughtered than usual, food is shared more intensively, and/or everyday food is substituted by less preferred food. Herders all over the world react to drought conditions with increased sales of livestock. When milk supplies fall short, market bought cereals make up the major part of the daily food. Intensified spatial mobility is a distinct strategy of pastoral people to cope with a crisis "by taking advantage of the spatial and temporal structure of resource failure" (Halstead & O'Shea, 1989: 3). Diversification is necessary in order to exploit resources that are not affected by drought, epidemics or violence. Diversification in pastoral households ranges from multi-species herding to so-called "ten-cent-jobs" such as brewing, charcoal burning, and the sale of traditional medicine (see for example Browman, 1987; Odegi-Awuondo, 1990; Legge, 1989). However, coping strategies during a disaster are not only tied to the material world. Many ethnographers observed that during a crisis people look for explanations of the misery and hardship (Scoones, 1996; Mink & Smith, 1989; Colson, 1979). They try to reduce unpredictability by oracles and attempt to influence the course of events by rituals.

5.1. CHANGING FOOD HABITS: SLAUGHTER, SHARING, SUBSTITUTING

Milk products and cereals are major components of the diet in all African pastoral societies. Sellen (1996:109) summarises findings on this aspect: 62 per cent
of dietary energy originates from milk among the Turkana, 64 per cent among the group-ranch Maasai, 66 per cent among the Ariaal and about 30 per cent among the agro-pastoral Ethiopian Borana. Meat in general only accounts for less than 10 per cent of the caloric intake. Wild plants add important vitamins to the otherwise simple diet: vitamins A, B2 and C are frequently found in berries, relishes, fruits and tubers (see Casimir 1991 for a detailed treatment of food adequacy in pastoral societies). Anthropologists have found major seasonal differences in nutrition in African pastoral groups (cf. Galvin, Coppock & Leslie, 1994:120): Turkana dietary intake relies on milk for 89 per cent during the wet season but for only 30 per cent in the dry season. Wealth-related differences in nutrition were observed too (Sellen, 1996:109). These differences can be balanced to some extent by an increased consumption of meat. During a drought the metaphor that livestock is food “stored on the hoof” (Clutton-Brock, 1989) becomes evident: as if from a larder, small stock is repeatedly taken to calm the severest hunger. Social mechanisms contribute to the distribution of available food. While flexibility in the adaptation of food-ways to seasonal constraints and social strategies prevent starvation, nutrition is not necessarily adequate all year round. Sellen (1996: 121/122) found in a comparative analysis that seasonal differences in nutrition lead to appreciable seasonal fluctuations of bodyweight (about 5 per cent), in significantly lower body weights (per height) in general and retarded growth during childhood. These are normal fluctuations which reflect a high degree of seasonality. What happens if lean periods are extended?

5.1.1. Pokot Foodways during Famines

The acquisition of food is a major topic in Pokot accounts of drought. Even in everyday conversation, food features importantly: one has been given a chunk of meat at a festivity, meat or milk has been denied to somebody, unusual food had to be tested to prevent hunger. Data on food sharing was mainly gathered during three periods of fieldwork in 1991, 1992 and 1993. An inventory of substitute food was gradually produced during the entire period of fieldwork.

5.1.1.1. Increased Slaughter

In 1992, in the midst of a serious famine, I interviewed 25 household heads from a sample of households I had worked with during the previous five years. I wanted to learn (a) to what extent they had slaughtered and sold livestock from their herds to prevent hunger in their homes and (b) whether they had appealed to other households for help or had assisted any of them. The increase in slaughtered livestock was notable.1 During the 1990/92 drought the number of healing rituals (tapa, kikatat, kolsyo), which always involve the slaughter of livestock, increased and the number of meat feasts (asiwa) rose. The number of goats slaughtered per household in a 12 month period ranged