

PASTORALISM: A LIVELIHOOD SYSTEM IN CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

Pastoralism is a subsistence in which people make a living through tending livestock. Under colonial rule, the life of pastoralists changed, their grazing grounds shrank, their movements were regulated and the revenue they had to pay increased. To colonial authorities, all uncultivated land was unproductive hence viewed as wasteland. Independence African governments viewed pastoralism with scepticism and pastoralists suspicious. With dwindling resources pastoralists were easily dominated by their agricultural neighbours both economically and politically. With the ever reducing land size compared to the ever increasing human population, there is a considerable pressure on available land and therefore pastoralism gets into conflict with itself and the world order. Matters attributable to the pastoral predicament include; porous international borders where communities sit astride international borders and yet are forced to belong to one state, interaction with cultivation is a major challenge to pastoralists as cultivation is highly favoured by modern land policies, in their immediate environment pastoralism is in direct competition with wildlife and often wildlife is more favoured and yet benefits accrued do not directly benefit pastoralists and the changing land tenure systems threaten to wipe out traditional pastoralism. This article is a product of a desk review and analysis of secondary data, and primary data from informal interviews to validate data from secondary sources. The article is grounded on the scarcity based theory and land use change. It aims at elaborating the pastoralists' predicament in modern times.

Keywords: Pastoralism, transhumance, environment, colonialism, land conflicts

INTRODUCTION

Pastoralism is a subsistence pattern in which people make their living by tending domesticated animals. The species of animals vary with the regions of the world, but they are all domesticated herbivores. In East Africa it is primarily cattle, sheep and goats. Among the Saami people of northern Scandinavia it is the reindeer. Pastoral systems are complex and dynamic as pastoralists seek to adapt to evolving social, political and economic conditions at local, national and regional levels. It is clear that pastoralists depend on livestock as a source of livelihood at all times (Hesse and Macgregor, 2006).

The two forms of pastoralism are; nomadism and Transhumance. Pastoral nomads follow a seasonal migratory pattern that can vary from year to year. The timing and destinations of migrations are determined primarily by the search for water and fodder. These nomadic societies do not create permanent settlements, but they live in temporary dwellings all year round (Jahnke, 1982). Transhumance pastoralists follow a cyclical pattern of migrations. This is seasonal migration between locations in which they have regular settlements with permanent houses. Transhumance pastoralists usually depend somewhat less on their animals for food than do nomadic ones; they often do small scale vegetable farming at their permanent villages (Hesse and Odhiambo, 2006).

Pastoralism is often an adaptation to semi-arid open country in which farming cannot be easily sustained without importing irrigation water from great distances. Pastoralism is usually the optimal subsistence pattern in these areas because it allows considerable independence in any particular local environment. When there is a drought, pastoralists disperse their herds to new areas. With pastoralism being eliminated by cultivation at policy level, future adaptability to the arid and semi arid areas becomes impossible and the pastoral groups will be forced to resort to unlawful means to earn a living and become casual workers in town centres, this assertion has been observed among the pastoral Maasai of Loita in Narok county of Kenya where most young men have resorted to trading in herbal medicine in urban areas of Kenya during the day and work as security guards at night to eke a living after they lost large sizes of the herds to the 2006 droughts that hit most of Kenya (Fratkin, 1994).

Young men in pastoralist societies usually acquire prestige by being brave and successful in predatory raids and accumulating large herds of animals. The individual livestock owner has a continuous incentive to increase the number of his own livestock even when this increase damages to communal grazing land, because the damage is communally shared. This supposed inherent contradiction between private and public interests and the consequential overgrazing has been termed the tragedy of the commons (Hardin, 1968). Young men are the community's warriors bestowed with the responsibility to protect and acquire property for the community. This is especially the case among the Maasai of Kenya. This kind of socialization prepares pastoral youths for the harsh tasks ahead of them in the unfriendly environments and this makes them hostile in order to survive in the harsh surroundings (Blench and Dendo, 2003).

Under colonial rule, the life of pastoralists changed dramatically, their grazing grounds shrank, their movements were regulated, and the revenue they had to pay increased. The colonial state wanted to transform all grazing lands into cultivated farms. Land revenue was one of its main sources of finance, by expanding cultivation it aimed to increase its revenue collection. It could at the same time produce; jute, cotton, wheat and other agricultural produce required in England as raw materials for the industries. To colonial officials all uncultivated land was unproductive since it brought no revenue; it was seen as wasteland that needed to be brought into usefulness through cultivation (Keiwua, 2002). The colonial attitude dispossessed the Maasai of their dry period grazing lands, Pastoral lands shrank and with it the opportunity to make viable living resulting in reduced coping capacities to the harsh climatic conditions. Political and economic factors are combining to replace pastoral grazing lands with other allegedly more beneficial land uses (Hesse and MacGregor, 2006). The hostility pastoral groups have towards their agricultural counterparts is attributable to this biased treatment by authorities. In the 2006, a conflict ensued between the pastoral Maasai of Narok and the agricultural Kikuyu of Naivasha over water in the areas around Mahi-mahiu and the government ruthlessly struck the Maasai using helicopters and government security agents, the pastoral Maasai blamed the biased response to the conflict by the government to its insensitivity to the needs of the pastoralists, tendencies borrowed from colonial times (Little, 1996).

The pastoral Maasai of Transmara attribute most of the problems currently encountered such as intra-ethnic conflicts, competition for water and pasture as well as the cut throat competition for water and pasture with wild life to the colonial time displacements from areas around Eldoret currently occupied by the Nandi and Kikuyu tribes. By the mid 19th C various forest acts were also being enacted in different provinces. Through this Acts some forests which produced commercially valuable timber were declared reserved. No pastoralist was allowed access to these forests. Mau forest for example was a useful dry season grazing area

for the Maasai of Narok; Embobut forest was equally useful for the Pokot pastoralists in times of scarcity, the usefulness of the forest areas as grazing areas has caused considerable conflicts with the government conservation laws. It is therefore useful to explore possibilities of harmonizing existing policy issues to accommodate the pastoralist plight and by extension enhancing the role pastoralism will play in the national economy (Hesse and Odhiambo, 2006).

British officials were suspicious of nomadic people. They distrusted pastoralists who changed their places of residence every season. The colonial government wanted to rule over settled populations, they wanted rural people to live in villages, in fixed places and with fixed rights to particular fields, such a population was easy to identify and control. Those who settled were seen as peaceable and law abiding while nomads were seen as criminals (Montero, 2009). In essence the colonial authorities never understood the way of life of pastoralists; it is unfortunate that independence governments still maintained the same fallacy (Small Arms Survey, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

This survey study aimed at elaborating the causes of the pastoral predicament in Kenya and was conducted in Narok and Kajiado counties of Kenya. Secondary data was collected from publications in the Central Government departments, books, magazines and newspapers. Primary data was collected from; focused group discussions, alongside key informants and household interviews.

DISCUSSION

Pastoralism in Africa

Most pastoralists live in the semi arid grasslands and arid deserts where rain fed agriculture is difficult. Before the colonial times for example the Maasailand stretched from north Kenya to the steppes of northern Tanzania, this stretch was however cut into two by colonial administrative boundaries and has remained as such even after independence. This has however led to the division of the Maasai nation state into two and the two sit astride the national boundary between Kenya and Tanzania (Keiwua, 2002).

In the late 19th C, European powers scrambled for territorial possession in Africa, slicing up the region into different colonies because of Capitalism (Chamberlain, 1974). The end of European trading in slaves left a need for commerce between Europe and Africa. Capitalists may have seen the light over slavery, but they still wanted to exploit the continent therefore, new 'legitimate' trade would be encouraged. Explorers located vast reserves of raw materials; they plotted the course of trade routes, navigated rivers, and identified population centers which could be a market for manufactured goods from Europe. It was a time of plantations and cash crops, dedicating the region's workforce to producing rubber, coffee, sugar, palm oil, timber for Europe. And all the more enticing if a colony could be set up which gave the European nation a monopoly. In the second half of the nineteenth century, after more than four centuries of contact, the European powers finally laid claim to virtually all of Africa. Parts of the continent had been "explored," but now representatives of European governments and rulers arrived to create or expand African spheres of influence for their patrons. Competition was intense and spheres of influence began to crowd each other. It was time for negotiation and in late 1884 a conference was convened in Berlin to sort things out. This conference laid the groundwork for the now familiar politico-geographical map of Africa. In November 1884, the imperial chancellor and architect of the German Empire, Otto von Bismarck, convened a conference of 14 states (including the United States) to settle the

political partitioning of Africa. Bismarck wanted not only to expand German spheres of influence in Africa but also to play off Germany's colonial rivals against one another to the Germans' advantage. Of these fourteen nations, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Portugal were the major players in the conference, controlling most of colonial Africa at the time. The Berlin Conference was Africa's undoing in many ways. The colonial powers superimposed their domains on the African Continent. During this scramble the European colonists dispossessed the pastoral Maasai all their land in the more watered areas of their territory (Behnke and Scoones, 1993).

The African politico-geographical map is thus a permanent liability that resulted from the three months of ignorant, greedy acquisitiveness during a period when Europe's search for minerals and markets had become insatiable (De Blij and Muller, 2003). Out of the scramble for Africa no single African group was spared disruption. The interest of the colonists interfered with all socioeconomic and sociopolitical arrangements of most African communities. Pastoralists felt the biggest impact since the livelihood pattern was not very popular with the colonial powers. The Maasai had to be tricked into dubious agreements whose content they never understood. Through the agreements the Maasai unknowingly signed off the fertile and alternative dry season grazing lands. It is apparent the generational transmission of knowledge indicated the Maasai laibons (Seers) were mistaken for Maasai chiefs, yet they had no moral authority to speak on behalf of the community leave alone enter into agreements with anybody as their role was purely spiritual (Oba, 1992).

In 1885, Maasai land was cut into two halves by an international boundary that separated British Kenya and German Tanzania. Subsequently the best grazing lands were gradually taken over for white settlement and the Maasai were pushed into a small area in south Kenya and north Tanzania. The Maasai lost about 60% of their pre-colonial lands and were confined to an arid zone with uncertain rainfalls and poor pastures (Keiwua, 2002). In addition to the fact that the Maasai pastoralists occupy arid areas, the additional burden of hosting game parks and game reserves makes the livelihood system more problems ridden (Ndaskoi, 2006). To mitigate these, pastoralists should be actively involved in the management of the ecosystem including wildlife and revenue accruing. It is actually notable in most pastoral areas that private conservancies are coming up to supplement pastoralism. Pastoralists keep domesticated animals but are friendly to the wild animals as well. This makes them more competent to tend to the two categories of animals and at the same time balance the management of the ecosystem. The British colonial government in East Africa also encouraged local peasant communities to expand cultivation. As cultivation expanded, pasture lands were converted to cultivated fields and hence reduced available space for pastoralists. In the pre-colonial times, the Maasai pastoralists had dominated their agricultural neighbors both economically and politically. By the end of the colonial era the situation had changed as the agriculturalists gained preference in the new order by the new governments (Rutten, 2002).

In some instances pastoralists are prevented from using their traditional pastures, because these were declared nature protection areas (Köhler-Rollefson, 1992). In Tanzania, the Maasai have been evacuated from the Serengeti Plains but have been given joint use of the Ngorongoro Conservation area (Mc Cabe, 1997). Large areas of grazing land were also turned into game reserves like the Maasai Mara national park in Kenya and Serengeti in Tanzania. Pastoralists were not and are not allowed into the parks for grazing. It is notable that Serengeti comes from a Maasai word "siring" meaning "endless plain". The establishment of the conservation areas further shrunk the pastoral grazing lands and thus enhancing competition for the limited resources in their environment (Hussain *et al.*, 1999).

African Porous Borders

In the 19th C, African pastoralists would move over vast areas in search of pastures, when the pastures were exhausted in one place they moved to a different area to graze their cattle. Mobility is a necessary feature of pastoral production systems: it ensures access to scattered pastoral resources and helps avoid risks such as disease and conflicts (OCHA, 2008). From the late 19th C, the colonial government began imposing various restrictions on their mobility, pastoralists often had difficulty with state borders which were drawn without consideration of pastoral needs. Movement sometimes extends beyond multiple state borders. New territorial boundaries and restrictions imposed on them suddenly changed the lives of pastoralists. These boundaries according to the Maasai interviewed are purely political restrictions without much relevance to the pastoral economy (Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson, 1980).

Private ranching has taken up a lot of pasture land and reduced trekking routes. This has also led to shrinking of livestock holding areas thus making animal populations compete with humans for space. It also means diseases spread easily among the livestock. Pastoralists being a people mainly dependent on raising domestic animals for their livelihood, live in environments with marked seasonality and as a strategy for providing year-round food for their herds, they choose to move livestock to pasture rather than bringing fodder to herds (Chang and Koster, 1994). Private ranches thus became an obstruction to this free movement, leading to pastoralists moving to zones beyond their national boundaries in search of the pasture that is becoming rarer and scarcer with increased privatization. Among the factors fuelling cross border conflicts among the pastoralists in Kenya include; lack of food, water, health, inadequate security and education (*The standard News paper*, 15th may 2011).

Major causes of conflict among pastoralists in Kenya are; competition for scarce water and pasture especially during the dry season forcing locals to migrate to neighboring countries. Livestock mobility is the most important strategy that pastoral communities utilize to cope with devastating effects of drought (Behnke, 1997).

Pastoralist Interaction with Cultivation

Former pastoral grazing grounds are being alienated for crop cultivation. For example the Barabaig, semi-nomadic cattle breeders in Tanzania, have lost more than 40,000 hectares to a wheat-growing project funded by the Canadian government (Lane, 1994). In former times, fields were often left fallow for at least part of the year and pastoralists were welcomed by farmers for the fertilizing effect of the manure of the animals. With the arrival of irrigation, making more than one crop possible, as well as of chemical fertilizers, pastoralists are pushed out of the farming areas (Cincinotta and Pangare {eds}, 1993).

Building dams to generate power or to increase agricultural productivity of low rainfall areas is a favorite policy that usually deprives pastoralists of their traditional grazing areas. A current example is provided by plans of the government in Angola to dam the Kunene River for generating hydroelectric power. This will be at the expense of the Himba, semi-nomadic cattle herders who will lose 200 square kilometers of land. Pastoralism was a traditional coping mechanism suited to arid and semi-arid lands. Technology is however threatening pastoral dominance and survival in the arid and semi-arid areas (Lane, 1998).

In traditional pastoral societies, land is not owned individually, but represents communal property. In Kenya, a "group ranch" programme was imposed on the Maasai that conferred individual land ownership to groups living together. This has now resulted in most of the land being owned individually and being used for maize cultivation at the expense of pastoralism

(Galaty, 1992). Well-intended interventions such as food-aid and drilling of wells, seduce pastoralists to give up their way of life and remain in one spot. However, settled pastoralists are more likely to suffer from malnutrition than their nomadic relatives, although they have better access to health care facilities. The reason being minimized supply of animal proteins and overdependence on food aid (Fratkin, 1997).

The pastoral groups in Kenya have often been sidelined in favour of their agricultural neighbours whenever there is competition for scarce resources such as water. For example in Kenya, the conflict of the Maasai of the Suswa area in Narok and the Kikuyu of Maai-Mahiu area of Nakuru in 2005 over water access and use, where the kikuyu harnessed water from the only common water source in the area for irrigation and ultimately denying the pastoral Maasai living downstream access to the essential commodity, a bloody battle erupted and the government of Kenya came in favour of the agricultural Kikuyu and used full government security machinery against the Maasai pastoralist who were assumed to be armed. This example suffices to the so-called contributions to national economy of the two livelihoods where cultivation is favoured more than pastoralism (Dyson-Hudson, 1966).

Pastoralists' Environments

Indigenous resource tenure systems in Africa have evolved to meet the constraints and opportunities of often difficult biophysical environments. While facilitating the operations of complex spatial and temporal land use patterns, traditional systems provide security of tenure in culturally relevant ways that permit adaptation to new circumstances (Unruh, 1995). On the other hand imposed tenure structures in Africa have often not strengthened individual rights and have blocked indigenous tenure development and adaptation in response to new situations. Pastoralism in Africa have particularly been negatively affected by imposing rational tenure systems which in many cases have served to marginalize nomadic populations with repercussions in land degradation, food security and instability (Subow, 2002).

Environmental degradation of rangelands contributes to increased communal competition and pastoral conflicts over water and rangelands. Increased population, large livestock herds and inappropriate distribution of water sources have for decades resulted in severe overgrazing in some areas (Bolton, 1948).

Harvesting of acacia trees for commercial charcoal as an alternative source of livelihood after severe droughts that decimate livestock has led to heavy erosion and rangeland degradation. Disputed claims by pastoral nomads and settled people to pastures have been a key to civil wars in countries like Sudan and Somalia. Disputes between nomads and sedentary populations in grazing zones exist in countries which have not gone to war with themselves, prominently in the Sahel and East Africa (Wily, 2009). Political agitation exists within the ranks of leaders of the pastoral groups occupying the southern parts of Kenya over the importance of the Mau forest complex for the survival of the pastoralists. The Mau forest despite being an important source of the permanent water bodies that provide a lifeline to the communities downstream and is also an important alternative grazing ground for pastoral groups during droughts (*Daily Nation Newspaper*, 2008).

Conflicts over pastures and wells have been endemic since independence when the government lifted old colonial clan boundaries for rangelands introducing an era of unclear tenure on land that is formally government trustland and hence open to universal use, but in practice informally understood to belong to one clan or another. The lack of clarity over modern land tenure systems and breakdown of old tenure systems, has led to large clans trying to expand the land under their territorial control by attacking and terrorizing their weaker neighbors (Abdi, 1997). African pastoral ecosystems have been studied with the

assumption that these ecosystems are potentially stable systems which become destabilized by overstocking and overgrazing. Pastoral ecosystems may better be supported by development policies that facilitate the traditional pastoral strategies rather than constrain them (Ellis and Swift, 1988).

Pastoralism as a livelihood depended on a certain way of utilizing resources in their environments in a way that is sustainable only to pastoralist. With the incursion of cultivators and the colonial settlers, pastoral lands shrank to uneconomical levels among pastoralists. Settled pastoralists lose their resilience to environmental shocks associated to drought and famine compared to nomadic pastoralists; this indicates the problem pastoralists were exposed to with the introduction of cultivation by the coming of colonialists and the adoption of the same as an alternative livelihood system in the pastoral areas. In Narok for example, in the 1980s and early 1990s nomadic pastoralists would move their livestock to Transmara in time of drought, but the increased engagement of the Maasai of Transmara in agriculture has made this old practice impossible and the effects are profound (Ndaskoi,2006).

Pastoralists' Land Tenure Changes

The relationship between indigenous pastoralist's tenure and state imposed tenure has in many locations decreased the ability of pastoralism to reproduce itself, thereby compromising the rational utilization of very large areas of rangeland interior, which have very few alternative uses. Population increase would not allow sustainable practice of pastoralism because land size does not correspondingly increase. It therefore follows that with each land subdivision for individualization the potency of the pastoral way of live is reduced. In Kenya the registration of Group ranches following the enactment of the group's representative act of 1968, marked the beginning of the decline in viable pastoralism among the Maasai (Rutten, 1995).

Supporters of individual subdivision argued that the same would raise living standards, boost the ability to procure loans, minimize exploitation of the poor by the rich households and facilitate better maintenance of existing infrastructure while those who were opposed to it argued that it would ultimately result in land alienation to non-pastoral groups, the creation of severe erosion in areas where cultivation is to start and the restriction of the movement of livestock. From the arguments it is evident that individual land owners can commoditize their parcels of land and can even sell them in exchange for livestock especially after catastrophes such as drought, which ultimately lead to acquisition of large herds of animals that would not be sustained by available parcels of land (Abdi, 1997).

CONCLUSION

Pastoralists are continuously being encouraged to settle as their way of life is viewed as outdated. With the changes in the world, pastoralism as a way of life faces many challenges and leaves pastoralist at the risk of inability to cope with their harsh environments. Many pastoralists have a history of strained relations with central authorities, sometimes leading to outright hostilities. They have little political clout and influence since they inhabit remote areas and are widely dispersed. International borders have interfered with their traditional migration patterns. Government policies usually favor settled farming and crop production and are implemented at the expense of pastoral existences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is urgent need to mainstream pastoral livelihood needs into national policies and provide support to the livelihood pattern at all levels. Pastoralists can be

supported like their cultivator colleagues to realize the potential there is in pastoralism.

2. Encourage pastoralism as a conservation measure in the arid and semiarid areas in Kenya. This will enhance sustainable utilization of resources in those areas. Pastoralism as a way of live has survived the harsh climatic conditions for many years. Kenya being more than 60% semi arid can fully utilize its land mass by encouraging and supporting pastoralism. This may achieved by supporting and promoting modern techniques in pastoralism that may include provision of fodder for the animals in dry periods, provision of water in the arid areas either by sinking boreholes, constructing water pans and water tankering in severe outbreaks.
3. It is becoming obvious that pastoralism and wildlife conservation are the only compatible systems. Pastoralists can comfortably coexist with wildlife. It is therefore apparent that the two systems have to lead a symbiotic relationship, where pastoralists must benefit from wildlife in their neighborhood and vice versa. Establishment of communal conservancies around protected areas be encouraged and professionally designed. Benefits of wildlife to pastoralists be made considerable to minimize their temptation to engage in other activities such as poaching for meat and other wildlife valuables that are not compatible with wildlife conservation.

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