

Longitudinal Analysis of the Impact of Land Privatization on Samburu Pastoralist Livelihood Strategies: 2000-2005

Carolyn K. Lesorogol, PhD

Introduction

Extensive pastoralism as practiced by East African pastoralists such as the Samburu of Northern Kenya, is premised on access to relatively large tracts of rangeland. Most pastoral land has been communally managed by groups of pastoralists who have, over time, developed rules and norms for regulating access to and use of the resources. In recent years, however, a number of pastoral groups have begun to privatize land, raising questions about the implications of this shift for pastoral livelihoods and the future of commonly held rangelands.

A school of thought prevalent among rangeland scholars suggests that maintaining pastoralists' mobility is critical to enabling them to remain successful herders. Accordingly, privatization of pastoral lands and the trend toward increasing sedentarization of pastoralists appears to be a threat to the continued viability of pastoral production and livelihoods. However, there is little empirical data demonstrating the effect of a shift from communal to private rangeland on pastoralists' well-being or economic survival strategies. The study summarized here offers some evidence on the effect of land privatization. A longitudinal analysis compares the changes in welfare across two relatively similar Samburu communities, Siambu and Mbaringon, that differ in the land tenure systems they follow. While land continues to be considered as communal in Mbaringon, land in Siambu is privatized.

Samburu Pastoralism and Land Privatization

The Samburu are semi-nomadic pastoralists who live in the semi-arid Samburu district in north-central Kenya. During the process of land adjudication following independence, the semi-arid and arid lands were exempt from the titling of individual land due mostly to the unproductive potential of the land and the mobility required by its largely pastoralist inhabitants. Titles were instead distributed to groups as a formality required to lay claim to land.

However, a small group of Samburu who saw an investment opportunity in privatized land, began agitating for individual titling and petitioned the government for land in the late 1970s. A conflict between the two factions ensued that was finally settled in 1986 when the government decided to sub-divide part of the land under dispute, known as the Lorroki plateau, to the petitioners. This area of privatized land constitutes the community of Siambu. The other sample community, Mbarigon, is located 40 km southeast of Siambu.

Data for this study was collected in detailed household level surveys fielded in 2000-2001 and again in 2005 when the initial households were revisited. A total of 159 households, 70 from Siambu and 89 from Mbaringon participated in the survey.

Wealth, Inequality and Livelihoods.

As the initial survey was conducted just after the prolonged drought of 1999-2000 that led to large losses of livestock for many households in both communities, the ensuing period is likely to have been one of recovery. However, while both communities post an increase in the mean Tropical Livestock Units (TLU) per household, an increase in average per capita income over the sample period only occurred in Mbaringon. In fact, as the table below reveals, average income in Siambu decreased. By this metric, Mbaringon, which was worse off than Siambu in 2000, becomes better off by 2005. This may be explained by the fact that being nomadic pastoralists, livelihoods in Mbaringon are more centered on livestock which faced high rates of mortality due to the drought. Nevertheless, the slight increase in median income suggests that the welfare improvement in Mbaringon was limited to a few households. It also appears that crop production in Siambu was less effective in supporting household well being in the latter period than in the earlier one. Indeed, inequality analysis reveals a significant degree of stratification. Across both communities, the wealthiest quintile owns more than 50 percent of the livestock while the poorest own less than two percent.

		TLU		Income (Ksh)	
		2000	2005	2000	2005
Siambu	Mean	3.28	3.69	21,658	20,622
	Median	2.47	2.39	16,936	16,262
Mbaringon	Mean	2.71	4.28	16,311	22,056
	Median	2.39	2.74	14,524	14,704

An analysis of livelihood portfolios suggests considerable differences, both between and within the two communities. Wealthier households derive the bulk of their income from livestock, largely from sales and home consumption of milk. While livestock continue to be a key source of income for the wealthy in Siambu, the livestock share of total income is declining as households diversify into trade, agriculture, and wage labor. Poorer households in both communities receive the bulk of their income from wage labor and trade.

Land Inheritance: Emerging Norms

As privatization of land in Siambu created a need for new rules regarding inheritance of land, the authors sought to investigate the emerging norms of land inheritance. This is an important question as the pattern of inheritance that is ultimately established will have important effects on access to key resources for the next generation and is of significance to policy formation on pastoral or mixed use land tenure regimes. In-depth interviews

were conducted with those involved with the 10 cases of inheritance that had thus far occurred in Siambu.

No single pattern or norm for inheritance seems to have emerged though there was evidence for several competing rationales proffered as the “right” way for inheritance to occur. On the one hand, there were those who believed that inheritance of land should follow the norms of livestock inheritance among the Samburu where the oldest son inherits his father’s remaining livestock (and other possessions) upon his death. Other proposals, based on concerns for equity, suggested that either land should be divided among all sons, or among younger sons, excluding the eldest who lays claim to other possessions. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority felt that oldest son should also inherit the land.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Understanding the survival strategies of pastoralists is fundamental to designing policies that aim to reduce poverty. The results of this study have a number of policy implications. Interventions that do not take into account the high degree of inequality among pastoralists, and the fact that most of the livestock are held by wealthier pastoralists, may fail to address problems felt by poorer households. For example, many recent development programs in northern Kenya have emphasized the development of livestock marketing infrastructure and improvements in the provision of animal health services. While these are important interventions, they disproportionately favor the relatively wealthy. Poorer pastoralists relying on wage labor and trade would benefit more from support in terms of education and job skills.

Land tenure policy is another area of practical application of this research. Much research and advocacy work has focused on securing pastoralists’ rights of access to rangelands and in preserving mobility, which are extremely important. However, in some pastoral areas (especially in higher rainfall areas), internal pressures to privatize are a reality and need to be addressed. By providing empirical data on the actual outcomes of privatization in Samburu, this work can contribute to informed policy making. The examination of emerging social norms demonstrates the malleability of social institutions, often accompanied by social conflict and differential gains by various social actors. As such, good land policy needs to be sensitive to the likely effects of legal changes, especially for more vulnerable groups such as women and poorer pastoralists.

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