

Beyond Group Ranch Subdivision: Collective Action for Livestock Mobility, Ecological Viability and Livelihoods

S. BurnSilver and E. Mwangi

Introduction

Recent developments in ecological and common property theories suggest that mobility is crucial for livestock production in areas where rainfall is low and variable, conditions that dominate throughout Kenya's rangelands. However, a combination of government policy and internal drivers has resulted in the privatization of communal rangelands in most of these areas. In Kajiado District of southwestern Kenya, for example, Maasai pastoralists now face a critical dilemma. They are caught between new land tenure rules associated with the subdivision of communal rangelands, and an unchanged ecology. The trend towards subdivision implies dramatic change in pastoral land use and fewer options for mobility.

This paper examines emerging collective arrangements and mechanisms for re-aggregating subdivided parcels, and asks why herders are adopting these strategies in a post subdivision setting. We argue that re-aggregation is crucial for maintaining the flexibility that is necessary for livestock production in variable environments, rendered even more risky after subdivision. However, official policy at different governance levels has not kept pace with these ongoing developments.

Data

This paper leverages data and results from two PhD studies carried out across eight Kajiado group ranches from 1999-2005. BurnSilver looked at land use and land tenure change and its effects on economic strategies in four group ranches in southern Kajiado district. These included one recently divided ranch (Osilalei) and three Amboseli area group ranches that are largely unsubdivided (Imbirikani, Olgulului/Lolarrashi, and Eselenkei). 184 pastoral households were interviewed in order to gather data on socio-demographic characteristics, economic strategies (e.g. livestock, agriculture and off-farm activities), animal numbers, livestock management, and verbal descriptions of monthly movement patterns for 24 months across a good year (1999) and a bad year (2000).

Mwangi examined why Maasai in the central Kajiado District group ranches of Enkaroni, Meto and Nentanai supported group ranch subdivision, how group land was allocated amongst registered members, and the distributional outcomes of subdivision. The data presented in this paper are a subset of 154 drawn from a wider set of 334 interviews with elders, youths, married women and widows from the three study sites. It is used to provide insights into the nature of collective activities that individuals pursue after subdivision and the emergence of pasture sharing arrangements.

Subdivision and Forage Access

In general, forage options for individual herders decrease dramatically under privatization. If households share their parcels with other contiguous households within a

5km² area, however, access to forage increases. Grazing options further expand through sharing of 1km² pastures that are distributed randomly.

Emergent Re-aggregation Mechanisms

A range of post-subdivision mechanisms have emerged in Nentanai, Meto and Enkaroni group ranches that act to re-aggregate household access to forage outside of private parcels. Households redistribute portions of their herds and swap/share pastures. Movement of animals occurs between parcels owned by members of extended families (sons, fathers, in-laws) and between those of friends (age-mates, clan-mates and stock associates). Sharing is reciprocal in time and reflects efforts at rotational grazing. Some leasing arrangements based on monetary exchange also occur but these are rare.

Grazing Movements

Herders in Enkaroni, Meto and Nentanai moved their livestock to neighboring parcels, to neighboring group ranches, and to other group ranches and Tanzania during the course of the year. Most (93%) respondents moved their livestock during the dry season and during drought, and those with larger cattle herds were more likely to move. Parcel size did not affect mobility. Although only two surveyed Osilalei households moved off their private parcels in 1999 – the year of normal rainfall, 75% (n=21) of surveyed households migrated in the drought year of 2000..

In the unsubdivided Amboseli area of southern Kajiado, sixty-one percent of households moved at least once in 1999; this figure rose to 85% in 2000. Mobility was significantly different between study areas in both years. Households in subdivided Osilalei and agropastoral S. Imbirikani were less mobile overall. Households in the group ranch areas were mobile regardless of herd size.

Post-Subdivision Collective Action

Collective action mechanisms that govern access to shared resources continue to occur in Meto, Enkaroni and Nentanai. Individuals continue to work together to maintain the earth dams, boreholes, roads, schools and health clinics that were constructed when their group ranches were established. These maintenance activities are facilitated by an elected committee, which functions to mobilize labor and finances for the various maintenance activities.

Critical Issues

The results of 14 focus groups carried out in Amboseli indicate that subdivision, economic diversification and herder efforts to cross breed their animals (particularly zebu cattle) with improved breed Sahiwal and Boran animals were the most critical issues raised. Herders believed subdivision to be “unstoppable”, and were concerned that privatization would lead to less flexibility. While subdivision was expected to give people the security of a title deed, they feared it could force a decrease in the numbers of livestock held by households. Pastoral households expect to pursue a range of coping strategies in response to subdivision. They also anticipate limitations on livestock mobility. Economic diversification and intensification of livestock production strategies are actions that households perceive will mitigate the impacts of subdivision. Leasing

and continuing to use subdivided parcels communally to some degree are seen as potential coping mechanisms.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Parcel sharing translates into more grazing flexibility, particularly when it occurs between households in different locations. “Sharing” in a post-subdivision environment takes many forms; whether based on redistribution, agreements, pasture swapping, or leasing of pastures based on monetary exchange. The most commonly used sharing/swapping mechanisms are those that are based on pre-existing social relationships and norms, e.g. familial ties or friendships.

New economic norms of pasture leasing are present, but are not the dominant mechanism of maintaining mobility. Individuals also organize around water and infrastructure provision. Those pursuing collective strategies do so both for economic expediency and for productive reasons - in an effort to access additional forage resources and re-create access to a full compliment of pasture types.

These efforts by Kajiado pastoralists to reinstitute mobility and maintain flexibility in the face of subdivision are instructive to policy on several counts. First, contrary to dominant policy and research narratives, *privatization does not signal the end of pastoralism as a livelihood strategy*; collective action strategies that seek to maintain mobility are emerging in many areas that have privatized.

Second, the drive to subdivide among pastoral households arises largely from the perceived need to defend land against external (in-migration) and internal (land grabbing) threats. The fact that parcel re-aggregation is occurring provides a strong case for subdivision as a defensive strategy. There is critical need for policy to recognize group or collective rights, providing them the same measure of protection as it does private, individual rights, especially in circumstances where groups and collectivities continue to use and prefer such arrangements.

Third, the ecological exigencies of the semi-arid to arid pastoral environment have not changed. Pastoral households in a post-subdivision environment are seeking ways to enhance the viability of their production system through re-aggregation mechanisms. A policy dialogue between land managers and herders that is supportive of mechanisms to maintain mobility in this setting is crucial.

Fourth, group ranch subdivision does not preclude individuals from seeking common solutions to shared problems. There is wide scope for actors in both government and non-government agencies to explore innovative measures to enhance collective action.