

Declining Grazing Resources, Pastoralist Innovations and the Changing Political Economy of The Orma Pastoralists, Tana Delta, Kenya

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Abstract

This study examines the various innovations by the Orma pastoralists as responses to the land deals in the area and the emergence of the opportunities in marketing of livestock and livestock products as well as in other commodities in the emergent new trading centres. The dynamics of the political economy of the Orma pastoralists in the Tana delta is analysed by identifying the responses that they are making in the face of the restricted access to grazing resources and the opportunities that are coming up in trade in livestock and other market opportunities in their area.

The research is a case study that examines the changing grazing patterns associated with new land use arrangements necessitated by the declining availability of grazing land. Huge tracts of land within the Tana delta, critical pasture resources for the pastoralists, have been set aside for large irrigation schemes to develop industrial scale farming such as the Tana and Athi River Development Authority (TARDA) and Mumias project in Garsen. Thus, government agencies and private corporations as well as foreign agencies are scrambling to exploit the riches of the delta for export crops, bio-fuels and minerals, among others. In addition, settlement schemes have taken up some of the most important dry season pastures within the delta and communities from outside the pastoral areas were settled to undertake crop farming. Most of the said lands are currently being fenced in readiness for use and the pastoralists are kept away. This has in turn prompted the local pastoralists to 'grab' their own grazing corridors and carve out ranches for themselves as safeguard measures against the encroachment and grabbing of the same by 'foreigners'.

As grazing resources become more constrained because of these and other related developments, new tenure, institutional and marketing arrangements and social organizations are emerging as pastoralists seek new ways of accessing high value fodder for their animals and innovative ways of ensuring the survival of their herds and the continuity of their production systems, and hence their livelihoods.