

Being and Staying Pastoralists: In Search of a Sustainable Solution for Maasai

Displacement

Abstract

Maasai Pastoral economy has diversified due to loss of their livestock. However, this is taken as a positive change by conservationists and developmentalists who for many years have viewed Maasai as conservative, resistant to change and their economy as destructive to the environment. Their argument is however challenged by political ecologists and anthropologists who have showed that Maasai's indigenous knowledge has been a useful resilient mechanism for the changes in the semi-arid climate in which they lived, and that environmental degradation and lack of advancement are mainly caused by the fact that they have been denied their rights. This paper draws from interviews that were conducted by the author with pastoral Maasai in Northern Tanzania in 1999 and from existing literature. It first provides evidence of the causes of loss of livestock to the Maasai and then shows the trend in diversification of the Maasai pastoral economy. The paper questions the future of the Maasai pastoralists with the new forms of livelihood adopted and argues that the idea of sedentarization of the Maasai is not a sustainable solution to their economy.

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