

# Being and Staying Pastoralists: In Search of a Livelihood Security for Maasai Displacement

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#### **Abstract**

Pastoralism economy has diversified due to loss of their livestock. However, this is taken as a positive change by conservationist and developmentalists who for many years have viewed Maasai as conservative, resistant to change and their pastoral economy taken 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 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, especially cultural rights. This paper base on the argument of the political ecologists and anthropologist and drawing from interviews that were conducted with pastoral Maasai in Mnduli and Simanjiro districts and in urban Dar es Salaam provides evidence of the causes of loss of livestock to the Massai, and reviews literature on the trend in diversification of the Maasai pastoral economy. Ten years after the author conducted a study on migration of the Maasai, new literature (see from example Homewood et al 2009) shows that Maasai are still aiming at the same, which is, restoring their lost cattle economy. Thus, this paper emphasizes the need to consider livestock keeping for a sustainable Maasai economy as one of the solution.

### Introduction

Maasai are part of Maa speaking people of eastern Nilotes of East Africa. In Tanzania up until early 90s they form the largest pastoral group. Other pastoral groups are the Baraguyu and Barabaig. Pastoral Maasai live in the rift valley of Kenya and Tanzania. In precolonial times, the Maasai controlled a vast area of land extended from central Kenya down to Lake Natron in Norther Monduli, Dodoma (Gogo) and Iringa Hehe) regions in Central Tanzania. However, in 1990s, Maasai occupy less than two thirds of their former territory. They were divided into numerous autonomous political sections which then formed a larger alliance. These sections include Kisongo, the Lotai, Kaputei and Purko clusters.

In Maasai land is invested with cultural values and social meanings. Land is not owned by any man but in a sense belongs to all (Arhem 1985). Livestock keeping in Maasai is largely transhumance, which means grazing areas are seasonally kept to fallow for grass regrowth and reduction of grazing pressure. Under this system rich grazing land was used during the dry season and left to recover during the wet season, when people and livestock move to lower potential areas. This mobile grazing made the best use of seasonably variable dry land pasture. The Maasai traditional system of land use were resilience to climate change for it allowed for periodic contraction, expansion and reorganization of herding unit and social groups. By keeping their population low and practicing transhumance pastoralists were able to sustainably use pasture, and water resources that are scattered meagre and variable.

Maasai social and economic life centred on livestock. Livestock are valued as a source of protein, capital investment, labour prestige and respect. To Maasai livestock means more than food and economic security. It is used a symbol of culture and all rituals are performed around the cattle economy. Maasai control of land was justified by the number of cattle they have (Arhem 1985). Because of this unique attachment to livestock and natural resources, Maasai have similar characteristics to that of indigenous population. Today however, many of the Maasai have lost their right to land and their cattle and are displaced in urban areas looking for wage labour or other non-livestock means of livelihoods.

Recently, Maasai pastoralists specifically on the Ngorongoro conservation area have been forced to move on the claim that they are degrading the environment by conducting cultivation, cutting trees and building permanent bomas (Mwami 2009). As such the United

Nations Education and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) have threatened to remove Ngorongoro from the world heritage site if these activities are allowed to continue (Ihucha 2009). As a result, Maasai bomas have been burnt a situation that led to loss of 200 bomas and properties worth millions, and crops in farms. A total of 20,000 Maasai were displaced (Mwami 2009). Rape and other forms of psychological problems were reported in 8 villages in Loliondo division in Ngorongoro district in an effort to relocate them. However, Maasai are required to give way to a foreign hunting company called OBC (Ortello Business Corporation) from the United Arab Emirates. Maasai and this company have been in conflict for 17 years in which many have lost their lives.

Following this fiasco, the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, announced his plan to send a group of Maasai to Uganda to learn zero grazing from the Banyankole Society (Ihucha 2009). However, evidence from the interviews and other studies show that sedentarization of the Maasai is not sustainable (Mwamfupe 2007, Homewood et al 2009, May and Ikayo 2007). He also said he is "of the opinion that the Maasai residing in Ngorongoro Conservation Area should embark on growing pasture for their cattle during drought phenomenon rather than fighting for subsistence farming". This statement shows that there is an assumption that drought which is experienced on the Maasai land today is brought by the Maasai pastoral way of living despite the fact that there are many land uses conducted in the area.

## Methodology

This paper draws from interviews which were conducted with the Maasai in Monduli and Simanjiro districts and urban areas of Arusha and Dar es Salaam in 1999. A total of 150 individual Maasai were interviewed in three villages Longido, Selela, and Lolkisale. The three villages were chosen to represent different planning zones in Monduli district. These three villages are Longido which is in the North, Selela in the South west and Monduli in the middle. Some parts of Simanjiro were included in the study due to the fact that they belonged to the Lolkisale locality. Monduli was chosen because that is where most of the Maasai migrants in the urban areas reported to have come from, also there were significant land use changes from pastoralism according to the Monduli district land use planning reports. Respondents were identified with the help of Maasai traditional leaders and the village executive officers. A head of a household, in this case a boma, was interviewed. Out of the 150 only 13 were women. A boma house is made up of many small houses surrounding a place in which livestock are kept which is fenced by thorns.

In the urban areas, 25 individual interviews were conducted and two focus group discussions with Maasai men were held. Initially, the plan of the study was to interview migrants Maasai in urban areas but due to the sensitivity of the issue, that is, the then Monduli member of the Parliament, required all Maasai migrants in urban areas to go back to their places of origin, it was not possible to get the required sample, thus interviews were done in Monduli to get information on migrants as well.

# Conservationists and developmentalists versus political ecologists and anthropologists views

For years pastoral economy has been condemned by conservationists as being destructive to the environment. This claim has been justified by the large number of cattle Maasai used to have and the poor ecological capacity of the semi-arid pastoral grazing land. The pastoral Maasai of Northern Tanzania have not been left out in this claim. Today evidence of climate change are drawn from the pastoral grazing land that have been left due to the fact that there is loss of livestock and the areas are not conducive for cultivation and the pastoral way of living regarded as the major cause of climate change in the area.

On the other hand, changes in the Maasai economy that are observed by decreasing number of their livestock are taken as positive changes by developmentalists. However, political ecologists have pointed at the loss of common property, increase economic differentiation and social stratification and impact of different state policies as negatively affecting the Maasai economy (Fratkin 1997). The future of the Maasai therefore, as Fratkin argues, can not be discussed without looking at the ways of restoring and protecting pastoral rights including traditional, legal, water, pasture and resource rights. In other words

citizenship rights of the Maasai (Shivji and Kapinga 1998, Kagwanja 2003). Citizenship rights defined in broadly by Castle (2000) as political, economic, social, and cultural and gender rights. This paper based on political ecology approach and using empirical evidence from the interview with the Maasai pushes the idea that Maasai security of livelihood is in the livestock economy.

Although recent discourses about displacement of the Maasai have only attributed this change to "climate change" in general and "drought" in particular, the literature on the Maasai suggests that it is the changes in the global economy from colonial to today's neoliberal era which are influencing the pastoral economy. These are as discussed below. Maasai land is also a semi-arid land. Farming and activities related to tourism are the major contributors of degradation and desertification in the semi arid lands today (Campbell 1986). Climate change and drought are rather the outcomes of a number of policies that have been imposed on Maasai land (Turner 1993) they contribute to their displacement. Thus Maasai displacement can not be attributed to climate change only (Shroeder 1997).

Attributing today's Maasai displacement to climate change only, largely undermine other factors that are central to their displacement and thus the argument falls under the same trap of conservationists, and developmentalists of seeing the Maasai ways of lives as "backward", "unsustainable" and "need to change". Ironically, these arguments are the ones used by politicians and policy makers and have implications on how solution for the displacement of the Maasai is handled. Drawing from both political ecologists and works of anthropologists one can argue that Maasai can also be considered as indigenous people and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007) can be use to protect the Maasai pastoralists.

### **Causes of Maasai Displacement**

Changes in the pastoral economy and displacement of the Maasai begun during the colonial period with the construction of national parks and continues in the neoliberal period with privatization and foreign direct investment. One of the major causes of Maasai displacement is the change in the pastoral land use by creation of national parks. A large number of game reserves and national parks have been established on the Maasai land. These are the Serengeti, Manyara, Ngorongoro, Tarangire, Arusha, Kilimanjaro national parks. National parks have paved a way for global tourism in the area but all kinds of human habitation and subsistence activities were excluded in the game reserve. While the wildlife is being protected for the sake of tourism, Maasai population and their livestock have suffered (McCabe et al 1992) the protection of wild animals for global tourism at the expense of local population is seen in many parts today (Neumann 2001). This was the beginning of land loss and displacement of Maasai pastoralists in the country.

The second cause of Maasai displacement is the promotion of agriculture in Tanzania as the main economic activity and recognition of security of ownership of land by individual farmers and commercial farming and less recognition of communal grazing land by pastoralists. In 1970s large tracts of land on Ardai plains in Lenkijabe Hills near Monduli were taken for the Monduli military camp and establishment of national wheat scheme. In 1980s, an area of about 19,500 square kilometres in Lolkisale, East of Tarangire National Park was leased to a private multinational agribusiness company. Since then massive encroachments by cultivators have continued into the Sinya plains, the Monduli Mountain, the Loliondo Highlands and the Kijungu Kibaya area. Cultivation now extends far beyond Monduli and deep into Simanjiro and Shambari areas. Maasai who have become landless and poor were pushed into the marginal lands away from permanent water sources (Arhem 1985). National land policies and land tenure policies have worked to discriminate pastoralism leading to conflicts over use of resources in some places such as Morogoro (Benjamin et al 2009) and Mkomazi game reserve (Mbonile 2005) where some of the Maasai had migrated to.

The third cause for Maasai displacement is the in-migration of farmers from overpopulated areas of Meru and Waarusha into the Maasai land (Tabolt 1986). Maasai people generally have low fertility rate (Doenges and Neuman 1989) and thus their land was not as overpopulated as their neighbouring Waarusha (sedentary agricultural Maa speaking people) and Meru. The borders of Monduli district originally set to secure Maasai rights in

grazing land were changed to allow for the rapidly growing numbers of Waarusha, to take over pastoral land. In the interviews with the Maasai in Monduli districts in both Selela and Lolkisale villages, half of the respondents were not born in the place. A half of those not born in the place came before 1970s and 20% came after 1980s. This is with an exception of Longido (dry area) were only 6% were not born in the area. Longido which has fewer migrants is one of the driest parts of the Maasai land that has been facing hunger and receiving food aid from time to time. It was clear that migrant farmers were attracted by water points on the Maasai land thus occupied Maasai grazing land and squeeze them to marginal land

The fourth factor is the introduction of wildlife migratory corridors into the Maasai land (Meirnderseman and Kesler 1997), despite the fact that Maasai traditional system of grazing was compatible with the migration of wildebeest, creation of national parks and corridors restricted Maasai pastoralists into these areas. Maasai had the best knowledge on when wildebeests are on the move and they were never in clash with them (Goldman 2007). Maasai culture does not allow hunting or eating of the wildebeest meat (Goldman 2007). Creation of wildlife corridors added to the loss of grazing land and restriction of Maasai to graze on wildlife corridors led to squeezing them into a small land for grazing.

The economic restructuring efforts adopted in 1980s, and subsequent policies which were adopted by the government of Tanzania which include cut in subsidies, privatization and increasing foreign direct investment during the neoliberal mark the fifth cause of Maasai displacement. These policies negatively affected the Maasai livestock economy. Today privatization of land led to increasing expansion of agriculture into the best watered land locations of the pastoral land, continue to marginalize pastoral form of land use. In addition, privatization is based on individual ownership of land but in Maasai land is a common resource. Privatization of land therefore has not considered Maasai culture thus leading to land alienation (Shivji 1998) and loss of Maasai grazing land to private investors.

Cuts in government subsidies in terms of dips and veterinary services following economic changes in 1980s led to increase in cattle diseases. A combined effect of small grazing land left for the Maasai, and the lack of water, dips and veterinary services led to diseases of their cattle contributed to their displacement. As reported during the interviews, pastoralists were forced to use same smaller areas they could not control the diseases spread by separating the sick animals from the non sick, on different gazing grounds. The increasing scarcity of grazing land as a result of land alienation and agriculture encroachment and the uncontrolled cattle diseases led to loss of cattle and the beginning of Maasai displacement.

As a result of these forces many Maasai pastoralists have lost their cattle beyond replacement and are displaced both in the rural and urban areas searching for other forms of livelihood. Although some Maasai were able to combine subsistence farming with their livestock keeping as part of their diversification, this is condemned as an activity which destroys the environment, and Maasai are required to stop, despite the fact that other land use activities such as tourism also put pressure of the land (Cater 1995). Maasai in Ngorongoro are restricted from farming, one of the activities which has been useful adaptation mechanism to climatic changes in the semi-arid areas, thus subjected to vulnerability and displacement.

# Being and Staying Maasai

The main method of Maasai copying with displacement has been mobility in the rural areas with their cattle commonly referred to as transhumance. However, the new form of mobility that started in the end of 1990s involved movement to urban areas with no cattle can be termed as displacement. During the interview in urban areas 56% of the Maasai worked as watchmen in big houses and hotels in urban areas, 16% were traders in livestock, traditional medicine and Maasai artwork and 28% did not have any job. Maasai migrants in urban areas were facing problems of food and were robbed and sometimes beaten. They did not have houses, they slept where they worked, or in corridors of the hotels or shops or stayed in unfinished houses. Because of their low level of education, therefore they could not secure well paying jobs. They were underpaid – an average income was about 30,000 Tanzania shillings per month - which they used for food and for maintaining their families at home.

However, outmigration increased as those who have moved to town already and had jobs accommodated the new comers who did not have jobs. Interviews which were done by Maasai in urban areas show that about 60% of the migrants sent remittances home in terms of food, clothes, money and home utensils and the money was mainly used for buying cattle to restore their economy. Group interviews that were conducted by the Maasai in urban areas showed that most of them were aiming at restoring their cattle economy. A more recent study by Homewood (2009) and May and Ikayo (2007) also documented that Maasai have been acquiring livestock to restore their pastoral economy, which seems to be more useful to them than agriculture and other forms of livelihood.

Moving to urban areas has negative consequences in Maasai livelihoods. Apart from the economic hardships, Maasai in urban areas experienced social—cultural changes as their culture was tied to the cattle economy. Their identity as people of cattle controlling communal grazing land and water sources changed, this in turn led to livelihood insecurity. Usually, in Maasai community cattle is paid as bride price. The decline in number of cattle led to delay marriages as many youth find it difficult to pay. This also triggered out-migration. As Maasai food used to be mainly meat and milk there has been a change in the type of food and increase need for cash to buy these foods. Malnutrition and diseases have been reported (Meirndersema and Kessler 1997:29). Famine also acted as a push factor for more migrants. Maasai are also famous for traditional medicine but many of the medicine are supposed to be taken with meat. With decline in cattle economy many of the medicine were no longer used and the Maasai have to look for cash for buying alternative medicines. The decline in number of cattle also brought about uncertainties to the younger ones who were hoping to inherit their father's wealth.

Homewood et al (2009) show despite the fact that Maasai have adopted a wide range of livelihood activities, livestock is the single most important source of income for both rich and poor. An average 40% mean annual household income is from livestock (ibid). Despite poverty some Maasai engaged in livestock purchase because of the livelihood security it offers. However, diversified Maasai wants to remain pastoralists and people of cattle (ibid). Poverty in the area is associated with lack of livestock. For example the poorest site, in this case, Longido is also the site with less livestock (ibid). They also found out that other forms of livelihood for example agriculture, though had poor returns and did not guarantee livelihood security, was done to prevent selling of livestock.

Maasai complained to have limited knowledge on farming (Kweka 1999, May and Ikayo 2007). Even if they learn farming and become sedentary, as the current suggestion by the President, they will not have a sustainable livelihood. This is also true because since most of the better watered locations are occupied by permanent settlers, in this case, farmers, plus lack of reliable rainfall and irrigation services this will lead to high risk of crop failure. Cultivation in better watered locations is driven by non local Maasai but it occurs at the expense of formerly Maasai's pasture and livestock (Homewood et al 2009). Due to limits posed on agriculture in the rangeland, lack of non-farm activities and failure of the government to consider them as a priority group to benefit with wildlife/tourism related activities, livestock remained the most important activity (Homewood et al 2009). Other activities were therefore used to support rebuilding of livestock economy.

Homewood et al (2009) also went further and compare the usefulness of livestock keeping and farmers and found out that livestock holders are better off than agro-pastoralists. However, due to lack of razing land some have devised strategies to relocate herds in different locations to ensure their survival. These observations show that land for grazing is the most important need for the Maasai. It also shows that it is impossible to make them sedentary if the water points and the best grazing land have been taken.

Other ways of staying Maasai that were important for livelihood security were to keep their identity (May and Ikayo 2007). Although movement to urban areas had negative consequence on their social life, May and Ikayo (2007) described how important the Maasai red cloth was for identity, trust and access to employment. Maintaining of the identity was not just through clothing but also for maintaining their culture which they consider to be useful for their survival. They also maintain their culture by constantly moving physically back and

forth between their place of origin and destination. Some of the youths explained that they move to town to get some money to buy cattle and back to get married in the village according to the Maasai customs. They however, hope in the long run to restore their cattle economy and move back to the place of origin than become permanent migrants in urban areas

Maasai culture has also changed; they talk of a reasonable number, with family and business as their livelihood security instead of large numbers of cattle they used to have (May and Ikayo 2007). Not only have Maasai lost their land by not having cattle, but their culture of assisting each other have also changed as they hardly embrace modernity in urban areas. They talk about having a house that is not in conflict with their culture and that migration to urban areas gives them exposure, but they are anxious to return and restore their lost economy (May and Ikayo 2007). The lost of their cattle is attributed to cultural loss and vice versa.

Changing of Maasai culture as a result of displacement and the threat to livelihood is also seen with changes in gender relations and increase in food insecurity. As Hodgoson (1999) found out that the gender division of labour in the Maasai cultural system allowed women to control production of milk and preservation of meat and distribute food to their families. Relationship between men and women in the Maasai differ depend on their age, kinship, clan and age set affiliation (Hodgson 1999). Women achieved varying degrees of respect according to their order of marriage and their ability to manage their household property. Women were trusted with large number of cattle and cared for, for example they were decorated by different ornaments and clothes bought by their husbands. Adult women cared for calves, and sick animals, they milk the cows and control distribution of milk in the family and had the right to sell any surplus milk. They also possessed hides and skins where they make sleeping mattress or sell them. Husband and wives shared property contribution during ceremonies, feasts and bride wealthy. They exchange goods.

Loans were given and ensure fine payments. Husband and wife agreed on decision to sell, or slaughter or give cattle. Women also will give cattle to each other e.g. small cattle given to second wives etc. Women ensured availability of grains in time of low supply of milk and meat so they traded with agriculturalists and maintain links with them. Therefore the displacement of the Maasai has left many Maasai women in the rural area and unable to move. Some women who were found in urban areas were only selling Maasai traditional medicine, artefacts, cloths and some engage in Maasai dances in big hotels. Displacement of the Maasai has not only robbed women of their economic activity but due to the fact that many of these are unable to migrate, has rendered them poorer than men (May and McCabe 2004). These changes have reduced the nutrition of the society (Fratkin 1997) and increase food insecurity.

### **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

It is more than ten years now since Maasai first major displacement to urban areas occurred; however, many still intend to restore the livestock keeping as it provides livelihood security to them. Many have not succeeded in restoring their economy and remained in urban areas where life is miserable to them due to low education. Making Maasai sedentary without ensuring access to land and water will not help because they do not have a place to graze of farm in the first place. Their return may trigger conflict with farmers and investors who are settled on Maasai land. In addition, Maasai do not have knowledge of cultivation. They used to exchange maize with their neighbours Waarusha. Besides nature of their land, that is semi-arid, is only suitable for transhumance system of livestock keeping for sustainability. Their livestock ownership also justifies their access and ownership of land. In Maasai, culture cattle economy is tied to other basic needs such as clothes, food, medicine, and gender equality. All of these guaranteed them livelihood security. Thus restoring the Maasai land and livestock economy will be the only sustainable solution.

Despite the fact that Maasai were considered "backward" by development agencies and there are forced to change them, Maasai culture is produced and consumed by the global tourism together with the wildlife economy in terms of arts, dances and clothes (May and Ikayo 1999). Their identity is used in the media for advertisement, in tourism industry, hotel and expensive gift shops selling Maasai's artefacts. Maasai attires and hair styles are also

used to symbolize African culture in general and Tanzania specifically (e.g. in the national Geographic magazines and commercial advertisements). All of these resources are found on Maasai land and originally preserved by the Maasai. Therefore, respect for intellectual property right (Kabubo Mariara 2005) by paying for it, will restore the Maasai rights and thus their livelihood security.

Following the displacement of the Maasai, a group of human rights activists and non government organizations working in Maasai areas have urged the government to stop the violation of human rights and citizenship rights (FEMAct 2009). Responding to these accusations in the parliament, the Tanzania Minister for Tourism first denied the occurrence of these violations and then argued that these Maasai have recently moved from Kenya so they are "not Tanzanians". The minister also pointed out that favouring Maasai for employment in the NCA will be interpreted as tribalism and that villagers were required to move for the security of the investors (Ihucha 2009). Promoting Maasai tourism (Kabubo-Mariara 2005) similar to Sami tourism in Northern Scandinavian and European countries is also another good example that can be use as a solution to the Maasai's displacement.

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