

ETHNO-ECONOMY OF CONFLICTS AMONG PASTORALISTS OF KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Ethnicity is a powerful recipe for economic competition among pastoralist groups and with their neighbours. Ethnicity is often capitalized in the struggle for power which is directly related to control of scarce resources. Pastoralists attach a lot of value to their livestock which entirely depend on the land for survival. In the colonial era, pastoralists were pushed to marginal areas to create room for white settlers; this has led to the cry for the correction of historical injustices in the post-colonial Kenya. Wildlife conservation has become a controversial venture in pastoral areas, because revenue collected seldom reaches the communities who happen to live side by side with the wild animals partly because of pastoral elites. This has led to resistance to conservation measures instituted by the government and thus causing conflicts between pastoral groups and the government. Pastoralists often tend to think, the government attaches more value to the wild animals compared to them. Pastoral lifestyles often require large tracts of land to prosper, with the diminishing land size and increased population pastoral livelihoods are threatened and therefore leads to more conflicts related to land use. This paper therefore elaborates on the correlation between ethnicity, land and wildlife resources with ethnic conflicts in Transmara District of Narok County, Kenya.

Keywords: ethnic conflicts, ethnicity, human wildlife conflict, land based conflicts

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic identity is powerful motivators of behaviour among pastoralist in Africa (Eifert *et al*, 2010). Ethnicity is said to be salient in political and social affairs because it is functional, the world is a competitive place and thus ethnicity serves as a useful tool for mobilizing people, policing boundaries and building coalitions then can be deployed in the struggle for power and scarce resources (Bates, 1983).

Because ethnic identification may be tools that people use to get access to political power, then they are likely to be rendered most salient when political power is at stake - that is at election time (Horowitz, 1985). The ethnic card is played at election time by politicians and voters since allocation of resources in Africa tends to follow ethnic lines and that elections are the time for deciding who will allocate those resources. Ownership and distributional issues lie at the heart of violent aggressions; war typically spurs radical changes in the allocation of resources and activities among sectors and institutions, and among households and social groups (Young, 1976). As a result a small minority group of people often acquires vested interest in the continuation of conflict, while the vast majority slides towards poverty because the minority become conflict entrepreneurs and thus derive economic satisfaction from what calls the war economies in his theory of predation (Collier, 2001).

Even if war is costly and seems irrational with regard to society as a whole, it is usually a very profitable business for the particular groups who can secure control over resources and draw benefits from them. some analysts have recently suggested contemporary conflict can

better be understood if considered as a logical outcome of the struggle between different social groups for access to and control over resources such as land, capital, humanitarian and as well as trading routes and activities around Fierce fighting takes place in and around strategic areas as opposing groups try to secure territorial control over key resources. The main resources around pastoral territories in Kenya are mainly wildlife related and more land (Chandra, 2006).

Wildlife is a key natural resource that is currently being utilized to generate income through tourism. Pastoralists are of the opinion that since most of the negative impacts of the co-existence with wild animals befall them, they should be given priority during revenue allocation as primary beneficiaries. Any death of a human being resulting from a wild animal attack the compensation is ksh. 200,000, an injury from a wild animal attack attracts compensation of ksh. 50,000, but any damage to livestock or crops is not compensated. This kind of arrangement only shows the insensitivity of policy to the plight of pastoralists (Star Newspaper, 23rd April 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Primary and secondary sources were utilised mainly from published and unpublished sources that is; books, journal articles and internet sources. Primary sources mainly comprised household interviews with pastoral groups in Transmara District of Narok county of Kenya on the subjects of wildlife resources, land ownership and ethnicity and their roles in pastoral conflicts. A total of 384 pastoral households in Transmara district were interviewed.

Wildlife Resources

Pastoralists have co-existed with wildlife in the African Range land for many hundreds of years. There is an increased human/wildlife conflict resulting from; competition for scarce grazing and water resource due to demographic pressure and the expansion of cultivation to supplement any revenue got from wildlife if there is any at all (Diamond, 2008).

This view is contrary to finding by Olindo & Talbot (1990) who indicated that the Maasai were heard saying “wildlife has become as important as cows” if not more assuming that wildlife revenue confirmed to flow in times of drought. There is now a large literature on empowerment of communities to enable them to manage their natural resources in sub-Saharan Africa (Collier, 2001).

In 2001 the Mara triangle on the side of the Maasai Mara game reserve in trans-Mara district in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya was put under the management of the Mara conservancy a non profit making organisation and in its arrangement with the Transmara county council revenue sharing was agreed at 50-50. The surrounding un-protected areas of the ecosystem were a mixture of private and communally owned land (Homewood & Thompson, 2002).

Historically the area was inhabited by semi-nomadic pastoralist Maasai communities is stated as 19% of Park entry fee and bed occupancy all of which is calculated without the involvement of the local community, this kind of arrangement has seen the pastoral groups become too hostile to the wild animals that share the same ecosystem, it is not any different in Amboseli and Samburu National Parks. The ethnic inequalities within Kenya in terms of extraction and distribution of the scarce resources has been a source of negative competition between those who control power and those who perceive themselves to have been marginalized (Western, 1993).

Much of today's park land was formerly used by pastoralists for grazing livestock. The alienation of land for parks, the spread of agriculture and migration of agricultural

communities have reduced land available for livestock keeping and thus forcing the pastoralists to increasingly engage in agriculture and other forms of livelihood to supplement pastoralism. This kind of arrangement has contributed to problems of pastoral management and environmental sustainability, both outside and inside the parks, this situation has led to overuse of pastureland in some areas and a regular livestock invasion into parks (Collier, 2001).

In Amboseli for example the government has been unable to fulfil its promise to provide water for the Maasai outside the park made with the declaration of the park in 1976, consequently livestock continue to graze and water inside Amboseli a situation that has created conflict and poor relations between the government and livestock keepers with a potential to substantially damage the ecosystem and blow human-wildlife conflicts out of proportion. The origins of these conflicts are grounded in the historical legacy of the conservation movement in Kenya, official policies and attitudes have been inherited from a colonial era, when the needs of inhabitants in wildlife areas are overlooked and thus, make it look like the government places more value to wild animals than to the pastoral groups that co-exist with the animals (Berger, 1993).

This scenario has created resistance from pastoralist because the elites are taking over management of proceeds from wildlife with their cronies being members of fund management committees and allocating funds to their friends and supporters. The result of the arrangement is always conflicts over resources owing to the impact of wildlife conservation on other activities especially agriculture and thus reducing food security (Bossuroy, 2008).

Land

Writing of the Basseri pastoral nomads of Fars, South Persia, Bartha stated that a pastoral nomadic substance is based on assets of two main kinds: domesticated animals and grazing rights. The recognition by the sedentary authorities of the colonialist made it worse instead of spreading the resource they began to alter their distribution they in addition sponsored commercial development, imperfectly intervening decisively in the internal debate between the generations (Tignor, 1976).

Land is source of ethnic conflicts in Kenya, both in the long term and in the short term. For a long time in the history of this country, land has remained a thorny economic and political issue. Various attempts to provide explanations as to why land has been a major source of ethnic conflicts has its origin in the colonial history of Kenya, where the colonialists dreamt of making Kenya a white man's country, they established a protectorate and later a colony with the finance that was to be generated from the white settler plantations which covered the highly potential areas of the country (Leo, 1984).

History has it that large tracts of agriculturally potential land were alienated by the British colonial administration from pastoral groups who were seen to be underutilizing the land, or the popular claim "idle land" that is still used by agricultural communities neighboring the pastoralists (Van de Waal, 1989). As a result of the massive land alienation activities in the early period of colonialism, many of the hitherto pastoral and cultivating populations were pushed into the 'infertile' native reserves that were not conducive for rotational grazing and arable farming. The displaced populations lived as farm laborers, casual workers, tenants as well as squatters. The process of land alienation was also extended to the pastoral ethnic groups like the Maasai and Samburu communities (Oloirithmaa, 1991).

Like their agricultural counterparts, the pastoralists were pushed to the less conducive reserves. During the period of nationalism and decolonization, land grievances were central to all ethnic groups that actively participated in the struggle for independence. The land question is one of the main factors for the Mau Mau rebellion of 1952 to 1956 in Kenya and the subsequent declaration of the state of emergency by the British. After this historic resistance of land alienation by the Africans, the British became very conscious in dealing with the issue of transferring power to the Kenyans at independence. Indeed, the colonialists were afraid that if the land issue was not handled properly, it could degenerate to civil strife as numerous ethnic groups engaged in the scramble to recover their alienated pieces of land (Wrong, 2009).

The British administration, on the eve of independence, worked out a formula of handing over land to the indigenous ethnic groups in Kenya. They established a grant that was aimed at facilitating the re-distribution of the former white highlands. The transfer on land took various forms, starting from small holdings to medium and large holdings. The expectation during the struggle for independence was that the land would be freely distributed to the people since it had been forcefully taken away from them. But under the independence agreement with Britain, the Kenya government was to buy the land from the settlers from the British advanced loan to Kenya to facilitate this purchase (Nelson, 1984).

Ethnicity

In many countries, a person's ethnic identity has profound consequences for his physical safety, political status and economic prospects. Violent confrontation along ethnic lines is the most apparent form of ethnic violence and claimed many lives in places as the Balkans, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan and the Middle East. Less news making, but even more widespread, is the non-violent ethnic conflict whereby ethnic cleavages form the basis for political and economic exploitation (Barasa, 1997).

In pastoral areas the biggest asset with high levels of income is tourism as a result of the coexistence of pastoralists with wildlife, most often than not there arise a class of elites from amongst the pastoral groups, who ethnicise the control of the wildlife resource and finally taking over the incomes from the tourism for themselves and their cronies and using the ethnic group as a shield against elites from outside the ethnic group, thereby minimizing external competition. Pastoralists allegiance are not always to the state, often the state must compete with the ethnic group for the allegiance because the pastoral sense of self is intrinsically attached to such factors as kinship ties, language, locality, religion, and tradition (Miguel and Daniel, 2006).

Afrobarometer (2008) supports the above argument and states that, African interethnic conflicts are not a result of the mere fact that the continental and national boundaries are brackets enclosing multi-ethnic groups. To him, the question of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts are issues of ethnic grudges. A case in point is the continued land problems resulting from the colonial legacy. Pastoral ethnic groups blame their agricultural counterparts for their present predicaments with regard to the state of the lands they currently occupy.

Bienien (1974) advances that, communal solidarities in Kenya have yet to be destroyed and it is clear that economic development and social change seems to have given greater salience to ethnic considerations. This partly explains why the issue of ethnicity and land ownership has remained a very sensitive and explosive aspect of Kenya's contemporary political economy (Barasa, 1997). The solidarities are often used to fragment the state and give prominence to ethnicity and this if not properly managed, has the potential to balkanize the state. In the colonial time districts were formed almost along ethnic lines, and habitation was almost

strictly along ethnic lines, on the review of the Kenya's New Constitution, County boundaries were based on the colonial districts (Constitution of Kenya, 2010).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the role ethnicity plays in the conflicts between pastoral groups and their agricultural neighbours, the paper has highlighted some critical economic resources that are responsible for the conflicts within pastoral groups. The conflicts at times turn bloody with extreme economic losses to the communities. The main effects of pastoral conflicts include; loss of livestock to the adversaries, loss of life, too much expenditure on medical bills for the injured, schools temporarily close and even markets for products. It is thus clear, that, pastoral conflicts have great negative impact on the communities.

Land ownership has often been a very sensitive matter among pastoralist; traditionally land among pastoralists was communal with scheduled grazing patterns. With new legislations in Kenya, pastoralists still struggle to keep up with the new ways in land ownership, with a big disruption in their grazing patterns. It would therefore be imperative if the pastoral areas are left to pastoralists without subdivision.

Wildlife forms an integral part of pastoral life. They therefore should have direct benefit to enhance their desire to conserve and thus maintain ecosystem balance. Legislations should be put in place to ensure that communities living with wildlife have a clear arrangement for revenue accrued from the wildlife to reach them without having to pass through non trusted elites from within the communities.

More studies need to be conducted in the area of human-wildlife conflict and the impacts of interaction of pastoralists with wildlife.

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