



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
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RARE
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The Impact of Community-Based Conservation on Pastoralists' Climate Change Adaptation

POLICY BRIEF
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KEY TAKE AWAYS

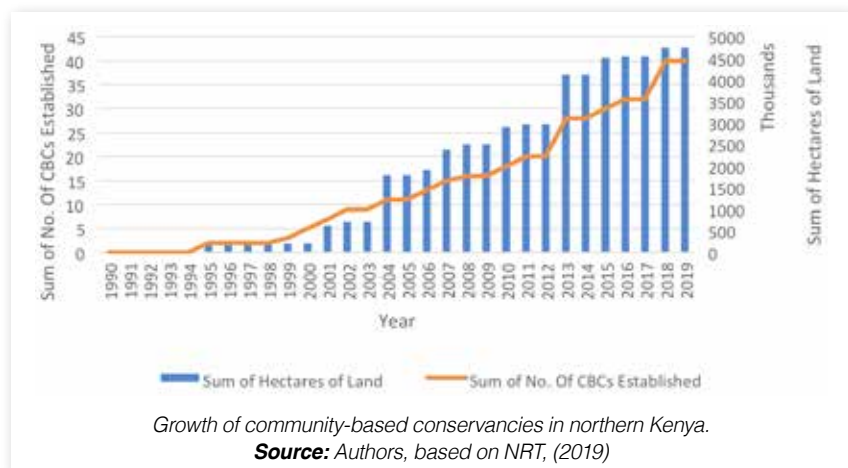
- Large conservation areas restrict access to pasture, hinder mobility, and aggravate conflict, with the risk of increasing pastoralists' vulnerability to climate change.
- Although conservation efforts promote community-friendly approaches, the legal and institutional frameworks overshadow or weaken local institutions.
- Community-based conservancies driven by NGOs play an important intermediary role in the management of donor and tourism funds that can enhance pastoralists' adaptation, particularly diversification and exchange. However, local politics shape the distribution of resources in ways that disadvantage the less influential pastoralists.

Background context

The Arid and Semi-Arid lands of Northern Kenya constitute about 80% of the country's land mass and are inhabited by pastoralists—communities that predominantly rely on mobile livestock production for livelihood and socio-cultural well-being. At the same time, however, pastoralists are among the communities in the world most affected by the adverse impacts of climate change, despite their negligible contribution to its causes. Pastoralists' high vulnerability to climate change's adverse impacts manifests in eroded livestock holdings and increasing hunger due to more severe and frequent droughts. The high aridity, climate, and resource variability characterizing Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) and marginalization by colonial and post-independence governments are some of the key drivers of vulnerability among pastoralists. However, pastoralists have, over the years, employed diverse autonomous adaptation strategies (e.g., mobility, diversification, and resource sharing) to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change (Herrero et al., 2016). Multiple developmental and humanitarian interventions aimed at reducing poverty and enhancing resilience have also been implemented by diverse actors in pastoral areas, often aggravating pastoralists' vulnerability to diverse shocks because of an inadequate or biased understanding of pastoral production systems (Akall, 2021). That is, despite proven invaluable contributions to local, national, and regional economic well-being (Nyariki & Amwata, 2019), pastoralism is often seen as a retrogressive practice that needs to be changed towards practices of sedentary farmers or ranchers (Catley et al., 2013).

In recent years multiple community-based conservancies covering vast amounts of land and capital, contributing to one of the most fundamental social, economic and ecological changes in Kenya's Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (Bollig & Lesorogol, 2016). Between 2000 and 2019 thirty-nine community-based conservancies covering 4.7 million hectares of land were established, representing a 700% growth in CBC numbers in two decades (NRT, 2019). The cumulative commercial income of KES 672,588,362 (approximately 5 million USD) was managed by community-based conservancies in this region between 2011 and 2019 (NRT, 2019). The Northern Rangeland Trust, a conservation NGO based in this region, spearheads the establishment and management of community-based conservancies to eradicate poverty through tourism-based income, developmental projects, and climate adaptation and mitigation interventions (NRT, 2019).

Because of the vast amounts of land and capital involved, community-based conservancies can shape diverse social, economic, and political processes, including climate change adaptation.





Pastoralists' migrating along Rumuruti-Mararal road reserve during 2021-23 severe drought. | Photo credit. Jackson Wachira

Main ways in which community-based conservation impacts pastoralists' climate change adaptation

Ongoing research under the RARE Project points to three main ways in which community-based conservancies add to the pressures that many pastoralists already face in their efforts to adapt to climate change (Wachira et al., in review). First, the areas selected for conservation are often the most ecologically vibrant, with an abundance of key resources instrumental in pastoralists' herd management during drought. This leads to multidimensional conflict, as pastoralists and conservation promoters pursue different visions of land use. Such conflicts can exacerbate the impacts of and vulnerability to environmental change through power relations that secure material means of survival for some while denying them to others (Eriksen & Lind, 2009). Community-based conservation promoters advise pastoralists to reduce their livestock to fit within reduced grazing land, with the risk of further erosion of their food security and asset bases, making pastoralists more vulnerable to climate change, particularly droughts.

Second, the legal and institutional framework governing community-based conservation can inadvertently result in the alienation and marginalization of pastoralists. This occurs through the criminalization and sanctioning of traditional livestock production and rangeland management practices, which pastoralists have historically relied upon to manage the inherent variability and risks associated with pastoral rangelands. This includes, for instance, the use of cash and livestock-wealth-based penalties to prevent pastoralists

from accessing grazing zones that are converted into core conservation areas. Although this strictly enforced legal-institutional framework may improve vegetation growth and, therefore, livestock productivity, the implementation of such rules and regulations can be overbearing akin to fortress conservation practices that characterized many colonial and post-independence conservation practices, resulting in indifference and apathy among community members.

Third, conservation NGOs play a significant role in managing funds for community development in NGO-led Community-Based Conservancies. However, their involvement overshadows or weakens the Community Land Management Committee, the community institution established by the Community Land Act, to oversee land and broader resource management processes at the local level. In recent years, for instance, the Community Land Management Committees have also served the role of the Community Conservancy Board, with the risk that their involvement in resource-intensive conservation practices compromises their ability to fairly protect community land for all pastoralists. Moreover, although the resources generated from community-based conservation can enhance pastoralists' autonomous adaptation strategies such as employment, trade, and education, there are concerns that these resources are not equally shared due to local politics.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In conclusion, the establishment of numerous community-based conservancies in northern Kenya has resulted in radical changes in the use, access, and ownership of land and land-based biodiversity. For community-based conservation promoters, this leads to reduced poverty and enhanced resilience to diverse shocks. Research findings, however, show that community-based conservation aggravated pastoralists' vulnerability to climate shocks by reducing the amount of land available for grazing, constraining adaptation through legal-institutional sanctions on traditional coping strategies, such as grazing fallback areas, and through benefit-sharing arrangements that may disadvantage the more marginal and less influential pastoralists.

The following recommendations are made to reduce the adverse impacts of community-based conservation on pastoralists' climate change adaptation:

1. The enclosure of expansive land on which pastoralists rely for dry-season grazing should be avoided to prevent further loss of critical pastoral resources.
2. Pastoralists should be provided access to enclosed lands for conservation during extreme droughts to reduce conflicts and enhance access to dry-season grazing lands.
3. Local institutions should be consulted and empowered to meaningfully participate in the management of community-based conservation to enhance sustainability and local ownership.
4. Promoters, the Kenyan government, and donors should emphasize and track the transparency and accountability of local institutions in the management of community-based conservation resources to enhance equitable benefit sharing.

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