



Linkages Between Community, Environmental, and Conflict Management: Experiences from Northern Kenya

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Summary. — There is increasing interest in community-based approaches to the management of natural resources in Africa. Pastoral areas present particular challenges and opportunities to community-based management programs. We consider an example where there are multiple definitions of the community that uses a resource, and these definitions are both nested and overlapping. Working at multiple levels of social organization and in multiple sites was critical for overall program success. We find addressing conflict can be a measure to address resource scarcity. We conclude noting signs that reduced insecurity has established the preconditions under which sustainable resource management can be accomplished.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There has recently been a great deal of attention paid in the literature to the issue of local participation in natural resource management in Africa (Barrett, Brandon, Gibson, & Gjertsen, 2001; Environment & Natural Resources Team, 2002; Ingles, Musch, & Qwist-Hoffman, 1999; Kellert, Mehta, Ebbin, & Lichtenfeld, 2000; Moore *et al.*, 2000; Ribot, 2002; Turner, 1999). These studies illustrate that community participation is a critical component of efforts that attempt to cause positive economic and ecological change in African communities. This study contributes to the growing literature on community management of natural resources by presenting information on such a program

in a pastoral area of northern Kenya. It illustrates how local participation led the natural resource management project to take an unexpected route to achieving positive economic and ecological change by encompassing issues of conflict management.

This study also contributes to the literature on common property management in risky

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production environments. As is increasingly understood, the finding that common property management regimes function best with clearly defined boundaries and membership (Ostrom, 1990, 1992) is in conflict with the finding that such clear definitions can be welfare reducing in highly variable environments (Goodhue & McCarthy, 2000; Nugent & Sanchez, 1999; van den Brink, Bromley, & Chavas, 1995; Velded, 1998). This has led to a recent and growing interest in pastoral development efforts that strengthen management structures while still providing for flexibility in land use patterns (Fernandez-Gimenez, 2002; Niamir-Fuller & Turner, 1999; Turner, 1999). This study identifies some of the promise and notes some of the challenges of conducting such an effort to build land use management plans on existing social structures.

This study also contributes to a growing literature on the relationship between environmental variables and conflict. It is recognized in the literature that natural resource management and conflict management are closely related (Castro & Nielsen, 2003; FAO, 2000, 2001; Lind, 2002; Lind & Sheikh, 2001). The literature to date has largely focused on how environmental scarcity leads to increased conflict and how natural resource management plans can be designed to manage conflict (Homer-Dixon, 1991, 1994; Lind & Sturman, 2002). The current study provides a different perspective on the relationship between environmental variables and conflict as it illustrates how conflict management can be a precondition for implementing a resource management plan. This approach also reflects some of the findings in the recent literature on development efforts in insecure pastoral areas. It is increasingly recognized that addressing insecurity is a critical first step for any development efforts designed to improve pastoral welfare in such areas (Galaty, 2002; Kenya Human Rights Commission, 2000; Kratli & Swift, 1999; Lind, 2002; Odhiambo, 2000). As we will illustrate below, what began as a program to improve the well-being of pastoral populations through improving resource management evolved to become a program that focused on reducing insecurity, thus both enhancing well-being and allowing the potential for improved environmental management.

An important element of the case study we present is that adoption of a community driven approach led the implementing agency to confront issues of conflict management that they

had not anticipated in their original program design. The study illustrates that flexibility and adaptability are not only relevant to understanding the behavior of pastoralists, but also critical to designing effective participatory approaches for community natural resource management.

In the following section we briefly describe the study area. This is followed by a section that places community management of natural resources by pastoral populations in a historical context. In section 4 we describe the management structure of natural resources in the study area, with specific emphasis placed on ambiguities arising over geographic boundaries. Section 5 discusses insecurity in the study area. In section 6, we focus specifically on environmental management efforts in Marsabit District, and place specific focus on the evolution of a German Donor agency (GTZ) funded project in the area. We close in section 7 with a discussion of the prospects for the future with this effort, and also summarize the larger themes of policy relevance illustrated by the case study.

2. THE STUDY AREA

Marsabit District is in the Eastern Province of Kenya. It borders Ethiopia and Moyale district to the north, Lake Turkana and Turkana District to the west, Samburu District to the south and Wajir and Isiolo Districts to the east. The District is the second largest in the country after Turkana District. The estimated population is 125,000. Approximately 75% of the district is classified as rangelands and main mode of land use is extensive grazing. The district is a home to a number of ethnic groups such as Boran, Gabra, Rendille, Samburu, Ariaal, Turkana, Burji and Dassenetch. Alliances and hostilities vary from community to community and change over time.

The pastoral groups considered in this paper live in the arid and semiarid areas of this district and are interrelated in a variety of ways. Rendille and Gabra tend to specialize in camel, goat and sheep pastoralism, and their livestock are highly mobile. Boran, Samburu, and Ariaal focus more on cattle production in higher rainfall areas, and are less mobile than camel based pastoralists. Gabra, Rendille, and Boran are Cushitic languages and Samburu and Turkana are Nilotic languages. Rendille and Gabra share cultural practices and clan histories.

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