

Environment, Culture and Adaptation: Dynamics of Change among the Maasai

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Thesis: Field research and ethnography conducted in both the regions of Maji Moto and Samburu, Kenya, have demonstrated that the intersecting relationship between environment, subdivision and conservancy politics have posed a continuous challenge for pastoralists. While these factors mutually exacerbate one another however, the Maasai have demonstrated their timeless affinity toward adaptation and rightly makes them the true keepers of the land.

Ethnographic methodology: Field interviews and participant observation in Maji Moto and Samburu, respectively, with a team of interns, professors, PhD applicants, NGO facilitators, and translators over a two week period

The Environment Factor

- Climate change has been an increasingly problematic issue for the pastoralist Maasai
- Activities are dependant on ample space and resources for livestock grazing
- Subdivision has worsened this issue by:
 - Reducing land area to graze,
 - Land is at a greater risk of degenerating due to over grazing and harsh weather conditions
 - Borders and fences reduce mobility to water points and more fertile grass

Subdivision, What?

- Subdivision is the systematic or arbitrary division of land into separate parcels for the purpose of development and control.
- Subdivision took place in Maji Moto Group Ranch (GR) in 1999 and was implemented according to a land owner registrar and area list
- GR members presented subdivision with a narrative of 'land protection' from government interest, degradation, and greater profitability for pastoralists
- On the contrary pastoralists have expressed a deep sense of loss, denigration, and poorly done by as many have had to decrease their herd size, uproot and relocate, and worst case have found themselves landless
- All of these issues are further exacerbated by the tensions between locals and conservancies and the increasing occurrence and duration of drought brought on by climate change

Conservancy Politics

- Conservancies have a large presence in both Maji Moto and Samburu as tourism hubs
- Pastoralists are at heads with conservancies over issues of land grabbing, resource management and prioritization of animals over humans
- Restrictions posed by subdivision now amplified by those created by conservancies, building over essential water points and more fertile and abundant land

Speaking for Themselves: Both Sides

- Group Ranch Officials decided to subdivide and reallocate with the promise of better living, but when reflecting on this decision an elder repeatedly said "We're being controlled now... you've done this for our wellbeing, and yet we're crying, why are we crying?"
- The GR Chairman shared his feelings about the plan to subdivide decision, one echoed by very few: "the fool is the most disadvantaged" referring to those who do not see the business opportunity of subdivision

Indigenous Livelihood Enhancement Partners (ILEPA)

- ILEPA is a grassroots organization established in 2008 by a local Maasai and McGill Alumni, Kimaren Raimit, in Narok North, Kenya.
- Focuses on environmental management and livelihood enhancement of the local Maasai pastoralists in the region
- Interns were stationed at the office during the peak of land right dispute that had been carrying on since the decision for the Group Ranch (GR) in Maji Moto to subdivide
- GR officials and governing bodies were allocating themselves a greater number of parcels than what their constituents received (one person, one parcel).
- This led to forced reallocation, moving individuals further from schools, the city center, markets, water access points and from their families and friends
- ILEPA has fought for legal action, and has informed pastoralists of the issue, ensured they are assigned to the right parcels and has effectively helped to remove the current GR representatives and has elected a new Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer (the latter two of whom work for ILEPA)

Masters of Adaptation

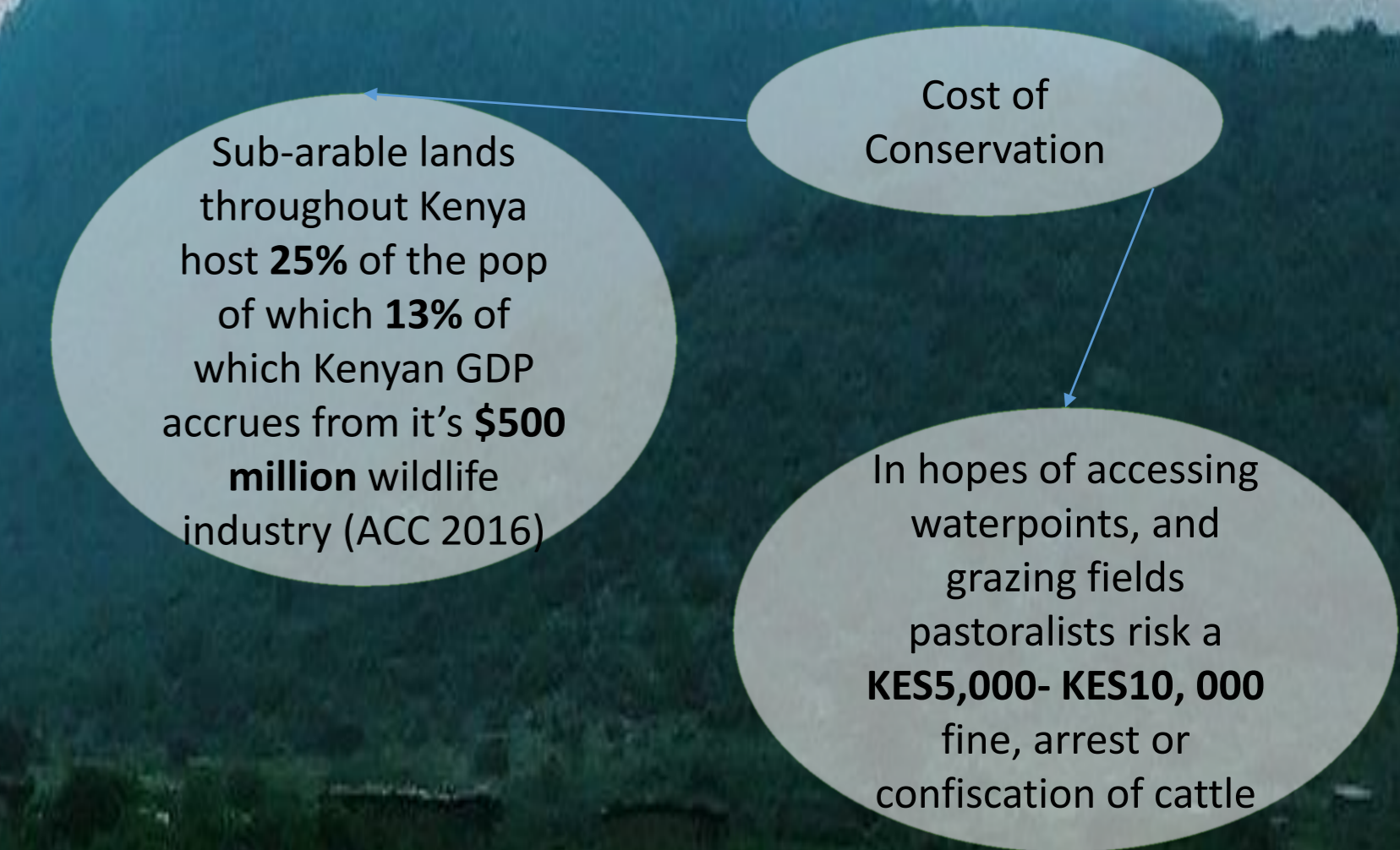
Data collected in the interviewing process revealed the pastoralists perseverance and innovation to adapt to environmental change, subdivision and conservancy encroachment

Previously, hillsides were reserved for times of drought, and plains for regular grazing during rainy seasons but worsening conditions have produced the following adaptive methods:

- Reduction in herd size led some pastoralists to sell their excess grass in exchange for money or livestock
- The introduction of payment to access fenced off areas that held extensive pasture or water resources (i.e. an arranged payment of KSH47,000 over a 10 month period of access) * a very new development
- Grazing at night in conservation areas, risking fine and confiscation of livestock
- Selective breeding to produce more durable and productive livestock
- Trade markets vital role in building up depleted herds
- Increased use of veterinary medicine
- Urban employment (slow shift into the 'modern' sector)

Conclusion

Environmental degradation and while life conservation are important issues to be addressed in Kenya and are not going away for sometime. With this in mind, pastoralists in Maji Moto and Samburu have had to adapt to changes brought about by and exacerbated by subdivision, climate change and the politics of conservancies and have done so in a smooth and innovative way that has allowed them to maintain their livelihood practices, flexing their endurance in these changing times.



Costs of Drought

Paying to cross parcels to access water and grazing areas
Est. KES15,000- KES30,000 (+/-) per parcel

Loss of income as sick or thin livestock sell for as little as KES 1000 (= USD\$9)

School fees for children: E.g - KES 1000/term per child
Ave cost of food and medicines incurred can not be sustained during drought



Formally subdivided land, Maji Moto - Google Maps



MMGR meeting to reappoint committee heads - MMGR 2016

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