

Research Update

Pastoral Innovations and Changing Political Economy of The Orma Pastoralists, Tana Delta, Kenya

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Summary

- Huge tracts of land in the Tana Delta, critical pasture resources for the pastoralists, are being set aside for large industrial scale farming for export crops, bio-fuels and minerals
- More than 25,000 people living in 30 Delta villages stand to be evicted from their ancestral land in favour of corporations and foreign governments
- In the 2009 drought, there were 3 million heads of cattle in the Delta, coming from as far as Wajir district in north-eastern province.
- The pastoralists response to the Delta 'land grabs' is desperate but some aspects are inspiring

Background

Huge tracts of land within the Tana Delta, critical pasture resources for the pastoralists, have been set aside for large industrial scale farming by the government (the establishment of TARDA project in Garsen).

In addition, settlement schemes have taken up some of the most important dry season pastures within the Tana delta and communities from outside the pastoral areas were settled there to undertake crop farming. As grazing resources become more constrained because of these and other related developments, new social organizations and marketing arrangements are emerging as pastoralists seek new ways of accessing high value fodder for their animals and innovative ways of ensuring the survival of their herds and the continuity of their production systems. Thus the political economy of the Orma pastoralists in the Delta is increasingly getting linked to the market economy, and this is giving rise to new social organizations and land tenure arrangements. The various land deals and the establishment of settlement schemes in the delta have led to restricting access to key resources for pastoralists; and these have in turn led to innovative ways of pastoralists accessing such key resources – taking up grazing corridors as well as purchasing hay and farm residues for their weaker livestock.

Methodology

This study examines the various innovations by the Orma pastoralists as responses to the land deals in the area and the emergence of the opportunities in marketing of livestock and livestock products as well as in other commodities in the emergent new trading centres. In order to understand the dynamics of the political economy of the Orma pastoralists in the Tana delta, it is important to identify the responses that the Orma pastoralists are making in the face of

the restricted access to grazing resources and the opportunities that are coming up in trade in livestock and other market opportunities in the area.

The study employed a mixed methodological approach in order for a deeper understanding of the land deals in the Delta and how the pastoralists are responding to the same. Among the methods used were key informants interview, focus group discussions, questionnaire surveys and participant observation.

Analysis

The changing political economy of Kenya's drylands

Among the Delta's prominent land deals are plans by the Tana and Athi Rivers Development Authority (TARDA - a government agency), and deals with corporations and foreign governments are sizeable: 40,000 ha, 90,000 ha and 120,000 ha are on the table.



Photograph: Abdirizak A. Nunow

A bus carrying milk from pastoralists in the Tana Delta

Unfortunately, more than 25,000 people living in 30 villages stand to be evicted from their ancestral land that has now been given to TARDA.

Individually titled lands in the settlement schemes are now being newly fenced, hence denying grazing access to the Orma pastoralists who utilized these lands for many years.

According to the officials of the Ministry of lands in Tana River district, such settlement schemes should have been distributed in the proportion of 70% to local communities and 30% to Kenyans from other parts of the country. However, the reality on the ground indicates that less than 5% of the farms were actually allocated to local pastoralists.

One of the reasons given by the officials is the fact that pastoralists did not see it important at the time to get the farms. However, with the fencing of the farms, the pastoralists have lost a critical grazing pasture in the delta, and conflicts between the pastoralists and the farmers are likely to intensify – particularly during the dry seasons or droughts.

The Delta is becoming increasingly absorbed into the national and regional economy. This presents new pressures and opportunities for the Orma pastoral economy that is developing many market linkages, and which are intensifying. Emergence of markets and the opportunities for commercialization – have given rise to women entrepreneurs – who trade in livestock and livestock products, and women having and controlling their own incomes. Women are increasingly gaining control of their own incomes from the sale of livestock, milk and value addition to milk in the form of 'labania'.

The intensifying commercialisation of the livestock sector is playing out in pastoralist societies in multiple ways, and the pastoralists are responding to the emergent scenarios in several ways, including changing herding strategies and livestock preferences to respond to markets; seeking high value fodder to fatten animals; communications and transport to deliver animals and livestock products to markets; creating more decentralised livestock sale yards to supply itinerant traders that are seeking animals for urban and regional markets; cross-breeding and improving breeds, among others.

Case study of Orma in the Delta

The Orma graze from the edge of Tsavo, to Garsen, all the way to Witu in Lamu West in the delta region. So, on one side they neighbour the Tsavo National Park and an Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC) Galana ranch.

- Land deals

Corporations and foreign agencies scramble to exploit the riches of the Delta for export crops, bio-fuels and minerals. Planned developments are poorly conceived and will result in tens of thousands of people losing their livelihoods.

- Restricting access to key resources

The appropriation of key land-based resources in the delta through various land deals, has led to the restriction of access to high value grazing resources for the pastoralists.

- Fencing corridors

Pastoralists are marking off corridors to save from land grabbers – in essence 'grabbing' the corridors for themselves as a grazing/land protection strategy.

- Purchasing hay and Farm residues

Purchasing of hay for animals and renting of farm residues for livestock feed is gaining more currency as a means of accessing high value fodder for the livestock. Livestock auctions are providing economic opportunities for transporters to provide services to livestock traders to take the animals to the various end markets such as Mombasa and Mariakani abattoirs.

The resource tenure implications of these dynamics are such that individual/private ownership of land is increasingly replacing the communal ownership of land and land-based resources – with serious negative implications for poorer pastoralists who can neither join socially organized groups nor own their own pieces of land.

Looking ahead

The future of the Orma pastoralists is increasingly linked to the political economy of the coastal region as well as the national economy. The area is facing multiple pressures from the ongoing projects by government and the other land deals.

The new Kenyan constitution will create a National Land Commission which could provide some reprieve from the land 'rush' currently taking place in the delta, but the commercialization of the Orma pastoral economy is not expected to reduce but rather intensify in the coming years.



Photograph: Abdirizak A. Nunow

Pastoralist in Mwa milking her cows

This **Research Update** was written by **Abdirizak A. Nunow** of the **Future Agricultures Consortium**. The series editor is David Hughes. Further information about this series of Research Updates at: www.future-agricultures.org

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