



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

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There has recently been an increase in the adoption of community-based approaches to the management of natural resources in Africa. This study describes some of the opportunities and challenges presented by taking such an approach in the pastoral areas of northern Kenya. The experience of the Marsabit Development Project of GTZ is described in detail. What began as a program to form environmental management committees evolved over time into a program that addressed both environmental management and conflict management. This occurred because reducing insecurity was identified by communities as a precondition for sustainable natural resource management.¹

Background

Environmental degradation in pastoral areas has long been viewed as arising from the common property nature of land tenure in such areas. The basic logic of this argument is captured by Hardin's metaphor of a village commons. Each individual only considers private benefits and costs of placing livestock on common land and does not take into account the cost these animals impose on other herders. From a natural resource management perspective, the imposed cost takes the form of environmental degradation. This perspective influenced the design of what de Haan (1994) terms the "ranching phase" of pastoral development efforts. The objective of these efforts was to transform pastoral production into commercialized ranching. As has been noted elsewhere (Sandford, 1983; Scoones, 1995) the failure of this approach became evident by the mid 1980s. Frustration with this record of failure led to a new emphasis on involving pastoral producers in development project design (de Haan, 1994; Sylla, 1995). This approach reflects both the overall movement in development policy to increased participation by communities and a growing appreciation by researchers and practitioners of the logic of traditional management practices.

One difficulty in adopting this approach in the pastoral areas of northern Kenya is that specifying the relevant community to manage a given natural resource is a formidable task. There are multiple levels of social organization that can legitimately claim the right to make decisions about natural resource use. Decisions about natural resource use are made at the household level, at the camp level which is a collection of households, at the neighborhood level which is composed of multiple

camp, and at the level of a grazing area which represents a collection of neighborhoods. In addition, strict definitions of geographic boundaries are not emphasized by pastoral groups. So not only can a given natural resource have multiple levels of social organization claim authority to manage it, but also multiple groups at a given level of social organization can claim authority to manage it as well.

These multiple claims can be particularly problematic when the multiple claimants are from hostile groups. Large areas of the rangelands of northern Kenya are unused due to the possibility that use of these areas will expose oneself and one's family to violent attack. In the northern Kenyan rangelands such attacks are an ever-present threat (Galaty 2002; Kenya Human Rights Commission 2000; Kratli and Swift 1999; Lind and Sheikh 2001).

Major Findings

The GTZ effort in this area built on efforts of the UNESCO-funded Integrated Project for Arid Lands (IPAL) that operated in Marsabit District from 1976-86. The IPAL work culminated in an integrated resource assessment and management plan produced in 1984. The plan did not have a major impact on natural resource management in the area, and only a few elements were implemented. GTZ began the project in this area in 1990, and one objective was to improve natural resource management. They began by commissioning a study of traditional grazing systems and using this study to develop

an extension and education plan to achieve the goal of improved natural resource management (Oba 1992).

Following completion of the study and development of the plan, the project began targeting local administrative and civic leaders, traditional leaders, and primary schools that would influence neighborhoods to form environmental caretaker committees. This approach was reassessed in 1995, as the targeted individuals were often unable to persuade communities of the need to form natural resource management plans because there were questions about who in the neighborhood had a legitimate right to make such management decisions and what resources belonged to a given neighborhood. From 1996-98 a new approach of project-supported environmental management committees formation was adopted where these neighborhood committees were explicitly designed for managing natural resources using traditional definitions of neighborhoods. While these groups met with some success, they faced problems due to ambiguity about which natural resources belonged to which neighborhood, and also due to the fact that different neighborhood committees developed rules so that rules were often inconsistent. In 1998-99 the project brought together representatives from the different neighborhood committees to harmonize management rules at the level of traditionally defined grazing areas.

When these representatives met, they were able to develop a harmonized management protocol that defined rules and sanctions. Notable elements of this protocol were measures to:

- Manage water resources
- Manage grazing land use by local residents
- Manage grazing land use by non-residents
- Manage use of tree species
- Establish rules over charcoal making
- Manage wild fires
- Manage movement of diseased livestock
- Develop communication mechanisms and dialogue with the local community
- Develop communication mechanisms and dialogue with neighboring communities
- Develop communication mechanisms and dialogue with formal administrative structures, and
- Protect wildlife.

However, participants in these meetings argued that this protocol left out measures to address one of the key factors leading to unsustainable resource use—that of insecurity. They argued that they were overusing some resources in the rangeland because vast areas in the rangeland were not used due to insecurity. While the rules and sanctions contained in the protocol would help, they argued that ultimately they would not work as rest and rehabilitation of currently overused areas would only be possible if currently underutilized areas were made accessible.

In response, from 1999-2002 the project supported consultative meetings that brought together representatives from different grazing areas together with governmental and non-governmental authorities. The representatives of the grazing areas were brought together regardless of ethnic identities and administrative boundaries. They were asked to describe the causes of conflict, define measures to reduce conflict, and develop rules to manage conflict when it occurred. These were each discussed, and after agreement was reached, the consensus view was translated into local languages and distributed to all relevant resource management units. Members from the environmental management committees were selected to oversee the implementation of the agreement.

Currently, the environmental management committees continue their work. Tree protection and regeneration have been particularly successful accomplishments in many areas. In addition, efforts at reserving dry-season grazing areas, protection of wildlife, and waste management have all been successfully implemented in certain communities. Coordination across communities and underlying questions about the legitimacy of these committees continue to be challenging.

Conflict management efforts have also met with some success. Inter-ethnic grazing cooperation has increased. Project workers estimate that up to 35% of the district that was formerly unused due to concerns about insecurity was in use after the conflict management meetings were held. Two murders across ethnic lines were dealt with through the agreed-upon protocols, thus preventing an escalation into the spiral of violence of attack and counterattack that such murders can trigger. While these accomplishments are important to note, it is also clear that the peace is fragile. Maintaining the peace will be a major challenge given the history of mistrust across groups, the inability to control individuals from one's own ethnic or language group who come from outside the area and attack neighbors, and the presence of local residents who, for various reasons, find benefits when conflict occurs.

Practical Implications

Improvement in the well-being of residents in pastoral areas is possible by working with pastoral communities and allowing them to define their own plans. This does not lead to a major transformation of pastoral society, but rather allows people to build on the existing structure of society to improve their lives. However, as the GTZ experience in Marsabit District illustrates, it is not easy. It requires coordination that can only come from working at multiple levels of social structure simultaneously as well as from working in multiple areas at once. This allows coordination across units when there is ambiguity about who has the legitimate right to make rules over a given

resource. It also requires adaptability by development agents, as what began as an environmental management program transformed into a conflict management program. And finally, it must be recognized that accomplishments can be fragile. Environmental management committees have had

visible impact on the environment, but it remains to be seen how sustainable such efforts are. Likewise, while there has been some initial success in the conflict management efforts, it also remains to be seen how sustainable these efforts have been.

Footnote

¹This brief summarizes the findings of a paper with the same title by the same authors published in *World Development* 33(2):285-299 (2005).

Further Reading

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The GL-CRSP Pastoral Risk Management Project (PARIMA) was established in 1997 and conducts research, training, and outreach in an effort to improve welfare of pastoral and agro-pastoral peoples with a focus on northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia. The project is led by Dr. D. Layne Coppock, Utah State University, Email contact: Lcoppock@cc.usu.edu.



The Global Livestock CRSP is comprised of multidisciplinary, collaborative projects focused on human nutrition, economic growth, environment and policy related to animal agriculture and linked by a global theme of risk in a changing environment. The program is active in East Africa, Central Asia and Latin America.

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