Changing Landscapes and Livelihoods in Turkana, Kenya

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Imagining Land: Significance of Land in African Economics, Politics & Culture

Friday 23 May, Africa Day Public Lecture, TCD

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
• In Kenya, land is a contested issue leading to violence and displacements.

• Like elsewhere, land in Turkana is becoming a valuable commodity with new frontiers of development—the recent discovery of oil and gas (2012) and vast water aquifers to supply Kenya for 70 years.

• Landscapes in Turkana are sites of struggle, convergence, negotiation and authority
About Turkana County

- Situated in north-west part of Kenya, borders Uganda, South Sudan and Ethiopia

- Covers **77,000 Km² (15%)** of Kenya’s landmass (582,650 Km²).

- Estimated **80% of land is arid**, 32% arable and 3% rain-fed agriculture.
About Turkana County

• **Soils:** only 30% are fertile
• **Population:** 1,036,586 (2012)
• **Pop. Density:** 2 people per Km².
• **Rainfall:** 300-400mm mean annual

• **Main economy:** Pastoralism(60%), agro-pastoralism(20%), fishing(12%) and casual labour (8%).

• About 12.4 million livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, camels and donkeys).

• Poorest among the 47 Counties in Kenya with estimated 95% of population living below poverty line.
Old Narratives About Pastoralists’ Rangelands

- Droughts are self-inflicted, bad nomadic pastoralism, backward and primitive, overstocking, environmental degrading, drain on the state, war-like
- Tying up precious resources in land
- Litany of failure and no ‘quick wins’
- Poor investments & wasted resources
- ‘Borderlands’, ‘margins’, dryland, peripheral hinterlands’ and frontiers
- In Kenya, central and peripheral mentality about pastoralists’ region

Scoones et al. (2013, p.10) argue that the solution has been to either abandon or impose radical new solutions.

The ‘civilizing mission of development’ associated with settlement projects, irrigation schemes, road building and provision of ‘modern’ services (Scoones et al. 2013, p.11).

Solution was improved kind of land use—controlled, taxed and provided with service (water, education and health).
• Ferguson (1994, xiv) identified development policies as simplistic and misguided, particularly in developing countries like Kenya and Lesotho, he writes: ‘development ‘experts’ generate ‘a particular kind of object of knowledge’ and ‘interventions’ are then organized on the basis of this structure of knowledge’, however biased or misconceived’.

• According to Ferguson (1994, p.73), development narratives shape not only the formation of reports and documents, but also the actions of organizations, institutions, and programmes.

• For example, policies towards pastoralists were often based on the view that they cause desertification, or bring about a tragedy of the commons (Leach and Mearns, 1996, p.17).
Meaning of Land in Turkana

- In Kenya’s arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), including Turkana, make up 84% of Kenya’s total landmass and supports up to 60% of livestock.
- In Turkana, it supports about 1 million people and 12.4 million livestock.
- It provides grazing areas, water points, food, shelter, religious and cultural sites, medicinal plants, wealth and prestige for Turkana.
- Land is communally-owned through kinship, lineage and clans.
- Historically, isolated and marginalised by successive governments. For 50 years, the church provided dev’t from education, water to health.
- Dry season grazing areas targeted for alternative land uses.
- Today, landscapes are sites of struggle, convergence, negotiation and authority.
New Frontiers of Development

• Today, there are new set of development, which are externally-imposed, top-down, techno-centric, non-participatory and problematic.

• Mega infrastructural projects such as Oil and Gas exploration (Tullow Oil Plc), Lamu Port and Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport corridor (LAPSSET), irrigated agriculture, mining and tourism resorts.

• Decision about their land is made by the Central Government in Nairobi, including oil and gas exploration licensing deals

• Lack of transparency and disclosure of signed contracts.

• Turkana pastoralists’ livelihoods are severely undermined by the new threats of declining access to resources resulting from insecure land rights, droughts, resourced-based conflicts and urbanisation.
Opportunities

• Devolution-County Government, County Assembly, funding

• Legislation of laws on land management and administration by the Turkana County Legislative Assembly.

• Proper implementation of the National Land Act No. 6 of 2012, including establishment of County Land Management Board

• Commodification of natural resources- value of land

• Much attention from the national, regional and international community.

• Vibrant civil society movement and media
Threats

- Removal of pastoralists in certain landscapes to develop new projects
- Lack of secure land administration-Trust land
- Intensifying urbanisation and population growth
- Inter-counties boundary disputes
- Resource-based conflicts among local communities
- Severity and intensity of droughts and floods
- Invasive *Prosopis* weed, locally known as *Etirae/Mathenge*
- Wrangling between Ministry of Lands and National Land Commission
- Lack of public participation
Acknowledgements

• Turkana People
• African Ambassadors in Ireland
• Trinity International Development Initiative (TIDI) at TCD
• University of Cambridge
• Downing College
• Department of Geography
• Dr. Liz Watson