

Struggles without an end: Dispossession and Conflict among Maasai Pastoralists in Kajiado, Kenya

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Abstract

The challenges of land rights among the Maasai pastoralists in Kenya have been studied and debated for many years now. These challenges range from loss of land to the colonial government, dispossession by their own elites, loss of land through land sales other communities, and land theft. There are other challenges too. Climate change effects on pastoralism, the consequences and puzzle of group ranch subdivision, and the uncertainty of Maasai pastoralism owing to the changing landscape in rangeland management are adding to the complexity of problems. This paper draws on theoretical perspectives of power, and exclusion to highlight the mechanisms of land dispossession among the Maasai Pastoralists. This paper features historical as well as contemporary challenges of Maasai land struggles. Based on a recent qualitative study and empirical findings from Kajiado, the paper seeks to illustrate that the mechanisms of dispossession and conflict among the Maasai pastoralists have been dynamic in nature. I argue that new land law reforms to entrench communal land rights in Kenya has not prevented continued subdivision and individualization of Maasai pastoral land. Instead, new forms of exclusion have emerged entrenching exclusion and unending conflict and struggle over land. Ongoing subdivision is further arousing new mechanisms of dispossessions and conflict. The paper concludes that dispossession and exclusion of some individuals and groups explain the unending conflict and struggle for access among Maasai pastoralists.