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“Development on the margin”

## Conservancies and Conflict: Perspectives on Pastoral Borderlands in East Pokot, Kenya

CLEMENS GREINER

*University of Cologne, Institute of Cultural & Social Anthropology, Germany*

### Abstract

Community based wildlife conservancies in Africa are often portrayed as participative and adaptive solutions to prevent ecological degradation and inter-community tensions. They presumably conserve biodiversity, create a natural buffer between hostile groups and by sharing the revenues from tourism, enable sustained peace building processes in formerly contested terrains. A growing number of globally acting agencies and donors support and encourage local communities in establishing their own conservancy, particularly among pastoralists in arid and semi arid areas. The Baringo/East Pokot area in Kenya, stretching from Lake Baringo on the floor of the Great Rift Valley up to the edge of the Laikipia Plateau, has seen the planning and establishment of several community-based conservancies in the recent past. This presentation will concentrate on two of them, one recently established, the other still in the process of negotiation. Located in contested borderlands between the Pokot and neighbouring pastoralist groups, both conservancies need to function as catalysts for inter-ethnic conflict resolution to ensure their long-term success in wildlife conservation and economic viability. Ongoing ethnographic research in the area, however, reveals tremendous difficulties and challenges: Persistent demographic growth, scarce pastures, the privatisation of communal rangelands and unpredictable climate lead to serious controversies over resources that are habitually resolved with the use of modern firearms. Embedded in the national trend of ethnicizing access to resources and politicizing ethnic boundaries, the (planned) conservancies are highly fragile constructions and extremely conflict sensitive. Against this backdrop the question arises if the conservancies are solutions to or causes for conflicts in pastoral borderlands?

**Keywords:** Kenya, pastoralism, violent conflict, wildlife conservancy