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“Development on the margin”

Working Conditions of Self-employed Pastoralists and Employed Herders on Commercial Ranches in Northern Kenya

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Abstract

Decent Work promotes opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The aim of this study was to assess how livestock keepers in northern Kenya view their working conditions, and how they assess hardship and rewards in their daily work and their working life. Their perception is compared with ILO's concept of Decent Work.

Samburu pastoralists in Marsabit and Samburu district as well as herders on ranches in Laikipia district were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews (n = 30 pastoralists, 17 employed herders) were used to systematically record daily activities and to collect information about: income, freetime, education and social security. In open interviews 22 pastoralists and 13 employed herders told their life stories. Data were mainly analysed qualitatively using content analysis. Emphasis was placed on hardships and rewards and the reasons for the livestock keepers and herders' perception.

Pastoralists see it as important to have healthy and satisfied animals. Also the ability to provide food to the family members especially the children has a high priority. Hardships for the pastoralists are, if activities are exhausting (*e.g.* carrying heavy loads for long distances), challenging (*e.g.* digging water holes), dangerous (*e.g.* risk of getting hurt/killed), burdensome (*e.g.* disagreements). For employed herders decent conditions are if their wages are high enough to be able to provide formal education for their children and food for their family. It is further important to them to do work they are experienced in. Most herders on the ranch were former pastoralists, who had lost their animals due to drought, raid or disease.

There are parallels between the ILO 'Decent Work' concept and the perception of working conditions by pastoralists and employed herders. These are for example, that remuneration is of importance and the appreciation by the employer/the community is desired. Some aspects that are seen as important by the ILO such as safety at work and healthy working conditions only play a secondary role to the pastoralists, who see risky and dangerous tasks as part of efforts to gain a livelihood.

Keywords: Decent work, employment, Kenya, pastoralism, ranching, working conditions