



Tropentag, September 17-19, 2013, Stuttgart-Hohenheim  
“Agricultural development within the rural-urban continuum”

## Use of Wild Medicinal Plant Resources and Threats to their Conservation in Kajiado County, Kenya

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### Abstract

Maasai pastoralists in southern Kenya are known for their knowledge on and use of wild medicinal plants (WMP) to treat human and animal diseases. However, wild plant resources are increasingly under pressure because of land conversion, as witnessed in rangelands close to urban centres. This poses a major threat to the sustainable use of WMPs and to overall biodiversity conservation. There is however little information on the extent that specific WMP are used by the Maasai pastoralists and whether those priority species are affected by the current pressures. We therefore conducted a study to assess the contribution of WMPs to human health care in pastoral households and to learn about the change in availability of the priority species.

The study was conducted in pastoral areas in Kajiado County of Kenya in four locations, two being close the urban centre and two further away. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Using semi-structured questionnaires the treatment history of over 120 disease cases in pastoral households was determined. Focus group discussions and resource maps together with key informant interviews were used to determine the current and past availability of the plant species. Direct observations through guided transect walks and photography complemented the data collected.

The results give the incidence of human diseases in the pastoral households under study, the percentage of use of the different WMP for their treatment and the rate of successful treatment disaggregated for the different diseases. This permits quantification of the contribution of the priority WMP to household health care compared to conventional medicine. For the priority WMP, details on the use are given, including plant parts used, harvesting methods and drug preparation. In addition, For these plants, the availability and the specific threats have been identified. Based on the results we provide suggestions on the way forward for sustainable exploitation of the priority wild medicinal plant resources and further research needs.

**Keywords:** Availability and threats, contribution to household healthcare, Kenya, Maasai, medicinal plant species, pastoral areas