



Tropentag, September 11-13, 2024, hybrid conference

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A comparative analysis of rangeland governance among two pastoral communities of northern Kenya

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Abstract

Rangelands which cover up to 43% of Africa, are an important resource in pastoral livestock production that supports the livelihoods of millions across the continent. Harnessing rangeland productivity requires intricate resource governance and livestock grazing management to regulate access and use of resources that are highly variable across space and time. While previously, the rangeland management system was based on community governance structures, currently, the systems have been disrupted by neglect of the sophisticated community governance structures, inappropriate institutional frameworks, and investments such as unplanned water developments by NGOs. In combination with prolonged droughts, these factors contribute to pasture loss and constraints on pastoral mobility patterns, affecting both rangelands and pastoral livestock productivity. Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyse the similarities and differences in rangeland governance structures and practices between the Rendille and Borana Pastoral communities of Marsabit County, Northern Kenya. Data was collected using a mixed-method approach including net maps, participatory community mapping, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions over a period of six months. Results of this study showed that among the two communities, elders are tasked with governing and managing resources. Among the Rendille, ‘Eween’ elders are the main decision-makers around seasonal utilisation patterns and allocation of resources to different livestock, and among the Borana, ‘Jars dedha’ elders are consulted in decision-making and solving disputes of resource use. While certain parallels exist in the governance structure between the two communities, differences were observed in the roles of community elders in resource management decision-making. The study found among the Rendille, elders preserved the consultative nature and centrality in resource governance, whereas among the Borana it was seen to be shifting from a consultative nature to individuality such as Chiefs taking up decision-making roles. Hence, this study highlights the changes taking place, how different communities respond to changes in rangeland governance systems over time, and how the roles in management and use of resources are shaped by change.

Keywords: Community-based natural resource management, Eastern Africa, pastoral livestock systems, rangeland utilisation