

Climate Change, Social Stress and Violent Conflict
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Abstract

**Climate change and resource use conflict:
the case of Northern Kenya drylands**

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Frequent droughts and resource use conflict are key features of northern Kenya drylands but little is known about alternative livelihood that would minimize local communities' dependence on livestock. Also there is no documented information on the role that dryland hilltop forests play in both biodiversity conservation and strengthening adaptation to climate change. This paper takes a review of plant gums and resins as possible sources of alternative livelihood in northern Kenya drylands in an era of climate change and violent conflicts over grazing and water resources and highlights the importance of the isolated hilltop forests as water sources and wild food plants repositories. Traditionally, pastoralism constitutes the dominant system of land use, and the mainstay of the economy in northern Kenya. The pastoral production system operates by independent family unit exploiting a common resource (water, grazing land) through privately owned and managed herds. Among the pastoralists, frequent daily movements of herds between pastures help prevent overuse of a single area's biomass and help avoid disease in their livestock. Herd diversification (cattle, camels, sheep, goats, and donkeys) ensures that both browsers and grazers are present and that an extended dry spell or a single disease is less likely to wipe out an entire herd. This is a highly flexible system, which has evolved over time as the most efficient means of exploiting transient water and pasture under ecologically marginal conditions, available technologies, and the prevailing economy. However frequent, prolonged and severe droughts are posing great challenges to survival in northern Kenya. Dams and wells are drying up and cases of loss of life in both human and livestock are becoming more and more frequent. Resource use conflicts are taking place as pastoralist herders migrate to areas where they can access pasture and water. This has resulted in bloody confrontations between various pastoralist communities and among clans of the same community. Conflicts have even crossed borders creating serious diplomatic feuds between Kenya and its neighbours, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. Human wildlife conflicts are also common. Gum collectors were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaire.