

Land loss

Professor John Galaty and Dr Caroline Archambault discuss how policies on rangeland property in East Africa are impacting the traditional livelihoods and lifestyles of pastoral communities



Could you introduce yourselves and explain what sparked your respective interests in this area of research?

JG: I am based in the Department of Anthropology at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. I have long worked on the impact of social change and development on herding societies in Eastern Africa, where the largest concentration of semi-nomadic pastoralists in the world live.

Most pastoralists view grazing lands as common property, managed and owned by communities rather than individuals or the state. For that reason, the transformation of the southern rangelands of Kenya into privately-held property – originally as 'group ranches' and then as subdivided individual family holdings – set changes in motion that represent intellectually compelling and politically important challenges that we believe are vital to understand.

CA: I am an anthropologist currently working in the International Development Studies Group at Utrecht University's Department of Human Geography and Planning in The Netherlands. My interest in pastoralism and land governance first developed as an undergraduate student, when during a semester studying abroad in East Africa, I had the opportunity to stay with a family of pastoralists in Kenya. I was perplexed as to how this community could carve out a living from such a harsh environment and came to understand that extensive mobility, facilitated by communal resource management systems, was key to their success.

What is the main objective of the Pastoral Property and Poverty Research Program and the reason behind its inception?

JG&CA: The project's major objective was to shed light on the effects property systems have on the productivity and wellbeing of rural herding communities. The Maasai case in southern Kenya is liable to influence policies on rangeland property across Africa and beyond, making it particularly significant. In this sense, it is a bellwether of directions that will likely be followed elsewhere in the African rangelands, in eastern, western and southern Africa, all areas where pastoral land use faces increasing competition from farming, mining or conservation.

Your research has been undertaken in several sites. Why did you choose these locations?

JG&CA: We chose sites across the Maasai districts, firstly, in places where we had good contacts with local land rights activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs); and secondly, in regions that were extremely socially and economically diverse, incorporating highlands and lowlands, higher and lower rainfall, proximity to land with and without agricultural potential, and, finally, proximity and remoteness to the national capital. Our aim was to derive general principles by examining social and economic conditions across sites with greatly varying conditions.

What have been the project's greatest successes and how are you planning to maximise the impact of your findings? Are you in contact with decision makers?

JG&CA: The project's major successes lie in three areas. Firstly, it helped to draw a group of NGOs working on pastoral land rights into a broader network that has influenced policy on rangeland tenure

and community land rights. Most notably, this network has contributed to the strengthening of common property protection under the 2010 Constitution, the recently passed Land Bill and the Community Land Bill, which is currently under consideration by the national Parliament and the County Assemblies. Secondly, it provided empirical evidence of the drawbacks of individual land privatisation in very dry regions, and the value of maintaining community management of pastoral territories wherever possible. Thirdly, it strengthened the cadre of indigenous researchers with graduate training in the anthropology of development. The project has supported approximately 17 undergraduate internship and honours thesis projects, three MA degrees, two doctoral degrees and one postdoctoral project.

How important is collaboration in your line of research? Are there any key partners and organisations that you would like to mention specifically?

JG&CA: Collaboration was essential to the pursuit of this project, in which university-based researchers and graduate students worked closely with indigenous researchers and land rights activists. The team at each research site was formed through partnerships between local organisations, a university researcher and a group of local researchers, all of whom contributed to local investigations. A particularly central role was played by Joseph Ole Simel, the Executive Director of the Mainyoito Pastoralist Integrated Development Organization, who helped forge the partnership and served as coordinator for all NGOs working with us.



Transitions and transformations

Composed of a multidisciplinary team of university researchers and local civil society partner organisations, the **Pastoral Property and Poverty Research Program** was initiated to explore the implications of changing land tenure systems in Southern Kenya

FOR MILLENNIA, PASTORALISM has been the main livelihood strategy of many peoples in East Africa, including the Maasai in Southern Kenya. These pastoral communities have practised a highly mobile livestock-keeping system, moving according to the seasonal availability of fodder and water. Indeed, for livestock to survive and thrive in East Africa's vast and arid swathes of land, this freedom of movement is extremely important. Herd management strategies – such as livestock mobility, herd splitting and herd diversification – are most effective in the context of commonly held land.

However, the past few decades have witnessed a serious pastoral land crisis in the region. Extensive rangelands are being enclosed, moving from communally managed spaces to increasingly individualised and fragmented states of property. Land tenure reforms in Kenya are being driven by the government's donor-supported land policies, with the privatisation of communal land too optimistically seen as promoting prosperity, development and security, since it often results in land loss and poverty. Rangelands are therefore disappearing at an alarming rate as a result of state allocations or purchase by agro-industrial companies, foreign states, conservation groups or richer individuals.

In this context of land sub-division, pastoral communities themselves are seeking individualisation of the land in a desperate attempt to defend and expand their diminishing resources. Unfortunately, illegal encroachment, land grabbing and insecurity – all due to changes in land tenure – accompany increasing competition for land.

TAKING ACTION

The Pastoral Property and Poverty Research Program was launched in April 2007 in response to this crisis, headed by Principal Investigator Professor John Galaty. Funded by two major research grants, its overarching objective has been to identify the causes and consequences of the sub-division of communal rangelands into private holdings in Southern Kenya and to assess the continuing viability of community-held lands as a model for the future of the African rangelands.

The research was conducted in nine sites in Southern Kenya, with research methods incorporating in-depth field studies conducted by researchers, students and local research assistants. Rich, qualitative data was drawn from participant observation, interviews, focus groups and case studies, while insightful quantitative data was collected from household surveys administered in 2008/9 throughout all nine sites.

COMBATING CORRUPTION

Unfortunately, decision making around sub-division and changes to land tenure have been far from democratic, with corrupt practices rife and women and youth excluded from the debate at academic and policy levels. Pastoralists are losing land due to illicit allocations at the moment of enclosure and through sales after they have received land titles. Moreover, the changing paradigm of property ownership is leading to 'distress selling' whereby outside brokers are taking advantage of poor, desperate and uninformed pastoralists who are selling parcels of land in order to cover routine or urgent needs.

Community cohesion is also being threatened from within, with herding families facing a 'run' on the land bank: "When threatened with losing land through the disbursement process, they must seek individualisation of the land, even if this is unsustainable," explains Galaty. "In this way, collective norms are shattered as desperation leads families to seek their own private lands, albeit at sub-economic parcel sizes, lest they lose out as lands are allocated to others."

ENCOURAGING INCLUSION

Galaty and his team found that inclusive decision making and dialogue that considered the needs of those beyond the political elite could have a positive impact on tenure reform. The Program took a relational approach to gathering information about the perspectives of women and youths regarding land sub-division, demonstrating that different priorities and experiences are being left out of many official discussions and debates. One particularly interesting finding in this area suggested that the increasing accessibility of technology and social media among the Maasai communities is enhancing the political agency of women and youths.

Furthermore, the studies showed that when the threat of land sub-division is removed and trust is restored among community members, governance is likely to be much more effective and representative of social diversity. In line with this, the researchers suggested that communities in Southern Kenya could formally sub-divide while maintaining a common management system: "As the Nobel Laureate Eleanor Ostrom illustrated in her work on common property institutions, resources held in common can sometimes be better managed than under alternative property



MAASAI WOMEN SPEAKING AT A POLITICAL ASSEMBLY



MEMBERS OF THE PASTORAL PROPERTY AND POVERTY RESEARCH PROGRAM GATHER IN THE FIELD

INTELLIGENCE

PASTORAL PROPERTY AND POVERTY RESEARCH PROGRAM

OBJECTIVES

To shed light on the effects transformations of property systems have on the productivity and wellbeing of rural herding communities in Southern Kenya, more specifically, the impacts of group ranch sub-division on Maasai livelihoods, land governance, food security and identities.

KEY COLLABORATORS

Principal Investigator: **Professor John Galaty** (Anthropology) • Co-Applicants: **Dr Caroline Archambault** (Anthropology, Research Coordinator); **Professor Tim Johns** (Dietetics and Human Nutrition); **Professor Jon Unruh** (Geography); **Dr Joost de Laat** (Economics) • Graduate Researchers: **Stephen Moiko; Scott Matter; Stanley Kimaren Riamit; Julia Bailey; Jennifer Glassco; Corey Wright**

PARTNERS

Principal Partner: Mainyoito Pastoralist Integrated Development Organization (MPIDO) • **Joseph ole Simel**, Olmaa Pastoralist Development Programme (OLPADEP) • **Daniel ole Tenaai**, South Rift Association of Land Owners (SORALO) • **John Kamanga**, Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA) • **Stanley Kimaren Riamit**, affiliated with The Ethnography Unit of the National Museums of Kenya

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PROFESSOR JOHN GALATY is Chair of Anthropology and formerly Director of the Centre for Society, Technology and Development at McGill University and President of the McGill Association of University Teachers and the Canadian Association of African Studies.

DR CAROLINE ARCHAMBAULT is an anthropologist in the International Development Studies Group in the Department of Human Geography and Planning at Utrecht University.



Outstanding output

The Pastoral Property and Poverty Research Program has resulted in an impressive research output, including:

- The completion of four graduate theses, two by Maasai scholars
- A high number of publications in a range of high-profile academic journals, including *Nomadic Peoples*, *Critique of Anthropology*, *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, *European Journal of Development Studies* and *Sustainability*
- Chapter contributions to several books, including *Development at the Margins: Pathways of Change in the Horn of Africa; Rural Livelihoods, Regional Economies and Processes of Change*; *Pastoralism in Africa: Past, Present and Future*; and *Global Trends in Land Tenure Reform: Gender Impacts*, as well as compiling an edited volume on the processes of sub-division
- The presentation of research findings at a range of international conferences and meetings, of the American Anthropological Association, the African Studies Association, the Canadian Association for African Studies, the American Ethnological Association, the World Bank annual conference on Land and Poverty, the International Conference on Global Land Grabbing, and the International Congress on Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, among others
- The organisation of numerous student internships in Kenya in order to help disseminate the study's results across all nine sites in conjunction with the partner organisations

regimes," points out Dr Caroline Archambault, a Co-Applicant and research coordinator on the Research Program. "Institutional innovation in land governance structures, which could combine freehold security and communal rangelands, has great potential for sustaining pastoralism under sub-optimal conditions of mobility while providing opportunities for diversification." Indeed, economic diversification has become a traceable pattern in pastoral communities, with Maasai taking up agriculture, wage labour, business and trade in response to new opportunities.

DRIVING DIALOGUE AND DEVELOPMENT

While privatisation may have brought new income-generating possibilities to pastoralists, along with opportunities for families to settle and improve their homes, the Pastoral Property and Poverty Research Program found that the sub-division of communal land in East Africa is entrenching social inequalities by exacerbating vulnerabilities among the poor and marginalised. This is fuelling poverty and discontent, and increasing social tensions: "We have found that the so-called 'elites' with greater political influence will often acquire greater amounts of

land – whether to use or to sell – which they seek out in order to profit from their positive political vantage point," Archambault discloses. "Growing inequality in land holding is thus polarising the community, creating a few very rich families and many who are very poor."

As a result of their extensive findings, Galaty, Archambault and the rest of the team have proposed a series of policy recommendations for improving land management. Firstly, they refer to the necessity of including women and youth in conversations and debates about land planning and the management of natural resources. Secondly, they call for increased social and economic investment in pastoral communities, contributing to the strengthening of social services and infrastructure. Finally, they emphasise the need to generate institutional innovation in land governance systems as a means of seizing positive development opportunities, thus reducing the likelihood of negative consequences: "This may be the key to the real conundrum of how to prevent the pitfalls of privatisation and how to avoid the danger of leaving land with no formal status that is easily appropriated by the state," Galaty concludes.