

The impact of urbanisation on food systems: the case of land use trends in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) of Kenya.

Wellington A.Otieno

Foodlink Resources Institute, P.O. Box 74506 Nairobi, Kenya
(E-mail: foodlink@nbi.ispkenya.com)

Within the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) of the Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a general trend of change from traditional pastoral land use systems towards more agro-based ones, especially within key production areas. Quite often these changes have involved urbanization, the demarcation and fencing of game sanctuaries and individual land parcels arising from “de-gazetting” of protected areas and the introduction of freehold tenure to land (Mwichabe, S 1997). About eighty per cent (80%) of Kenya’s land is under ASALs. This trend has profound implications in long-term food security of the country.

It has been observed that in certain areas, the changes have deprived pastoralists access to pasture and created pressure on available resources. The traditional methods of land use practiced by pastoral communities were more ecologically viable. But with the current changes taking place, the balance has been affected because many outsiders now invest in livestock and the number of animals is increasing, while at the same time arable commercial land farming is increasing thus reducing the communal land in the ASAL.

Land use conflicts have increased in the ASALs. The most notable conflicts have been observed in areas where there is competition for resource allocation and utilization within the key production areas between the various production sectors including agriculture, livestock, wildlife, urban settlement and traditional pastoralism, and where wildlife dispersal corridors used for migration during alternating wet and dry season are being converted into agricultural fields which are then poached by wildlife. Wildlife in most cases are predators and spread diseases to domestic livestock.

The changes in land use are due to both external and local factors. These include international initiatives such as the Structural Adjustment Programmes (of the World Bank), national policy including the ASAL development programmes and wildlife management. The local factors include, immigration of farmers, economic opportunities in horticulture and tourism, population increase and revision of land tenure rules.

The paper advocates for an alternative holistic approach to land use planning especially for ecologically fragile ASALs across the Sub-Saharan Africa to guarantee sustainable food security for the population.