

Attitudes of Maasai Pastoralists Towards Amboseli National Park

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Abstract

Since 1946 when the first national park was established the Maasai people have experienced a continual loss of huge tracts of their ancestral lands to protected areas including the Amboseli National Park (ANP). The situation has created conflict between conservation interests and the Maasai pastoralists and funnels the economic benefits of wildlife away from those who bear the cost of lost land rights. A shift in thinking about wildlife conservation continues to shape local attitudes towards the park, with the traditional method of protecting conservation areas through punitive policing and paramilitary approach being questioned. This paper presents data collected among rural Maasai pastoral communities living adjacent to ANP over a period of one year. The results show that unless local communities support the conservation area it will become increasingly difficult to defend it.

Key words: Tourism, Attitudes, Maasai people, Kenya

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Introduction

Much of the tourism in Kenya is wildlife tourism. The country's tourist industry, which accounts for 11% of its Gross Domestic Product and 18% of all wage employment (Ondicho, 2003, 2000a, b and c), depends almost wholly on wildlife attractions, but this success hides many problems. Kenya is a wildlife paradise, home to a wide variety of wild animals, including the big five: rhinoceros, hippopotamus, elephant, lion and cheetah (Akama, 1999). These animals are found in protected areas mainly national parks and reserves. However, more than 75% of Kenya's wild animals occur in the dispersal areas and corridors adjacent to the protected areas where animals from the parks and reserves seasonally migrate onto. In this respect, they act as wildlife 'spill-over' areas and hence play a vital role as wildlife habitats complementing ecosystems of the associated national parks and reserves. However, in

contrast to the national parks and reserves they are privately owned.

The land occupied by parks and reserves was once also home to indigenous people. When protected areas were established in Kenya, as elsewhere in Africa, indigenous communities were not only displaced from what had been their traditional lands but also their nomadic movements were greatly restricted (Sindiga, 1999; Reid et al, 1999). The local people who were moved out of protected areas were denied any share of the park revenues (Talbot and Olindo, 1990:70). This policy was later relaxed to allow for some land uses such as fuel wood collection, herding, *et cetera*. and sharing of revenues from national reserves. However, these activities were not allowed in national parks such as Amboseli. As a result local communities, particularly the Maasai clashed with the authorities over a range of issues. One being that wild animals from protected areas regularly forage on local people's land competing with their domestic animals for grazing, using essential water supplies and sometimes contributing to soil

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erosion and degradation. Many of the local people were also disgruntled with decades of being not only ignored and excluded from the planning and development of protected conservation areas but also had to adjust their traditional living patterns to accommodate this national initiative. Consequently, they became enemies of the protected areas. "To vent their anger, the Maasai started to spear wild animals" (Talbot and Olindo, 1990). This has often produced various types of conflicts with the conservation authorities and hardships for the local people.

History of Conservation in Kenya

Kenya was the first East African country to enact laws for the conservation of wildlife (Ouma, 1970). British colonial power brought conservation to Kenya early with a concern for rapid loss of game through hunting pleasures. Consequently, the colonial government felt the need to pass laws to regulate hunting. This resulted in the creation of national parks or permanent wildlife sanctuaries emulating the world's first national park, Yellowstone in the United States of America (Lusigi, 1981). Since 1946 when the Nairobi National Park was established, both the colonial and postcolonial governments adopted a policy of game protection and opened up new areas for wildlife conservation in order to prevent the decimation of wildlife and ensure better management of wildlife resources. National parks came under the authority of the National Park Service, with mostly European wardens and external funding while national reserves in areas where human activity could not be excluded came under the Forest Department. Because Kenya parks were established with little regard for local need, the reaction to park designation has been described as 'baffled and angered' (Berger, 1993). With the perception that subsistence hunting was decimating wildlife, game patrols jailed Africans hunting without permits. Early conservation policy saw the Maasai as

somewhat compatible with wildlife not excluded from national parks. The prevailing attitude was one of separation between people and wildlife.

With independence the new government's strong aspirations for growth began a period of wildlife utilization without management (Berger, 1993). Few facilities or funds were available for monitoring wildlife ecosystem impacts or for development and maintenance of park facilities. Attitudes of the regime were in strong contrast with the British values for wildlife, introducing utilization as part of conservation management. Because hunting safaris and increasing wildlife tourism were such significant earners of foreign exchange, the economic value of hunting was perceived early on. Attempts were made at consumptive utilization of wildlife outside established parks, beginning the idea of wildlife management as a legitimate land use on par with livestock or development alternatives. The Wildlife Act of 1976, governing the now unified national park Service and Game Department proposed that landowners should receive sufficient remuneration to enable sustainable wildlife utilization. Compensation for loss of life and damage to property began with the wildlife act. Unfortunately, political and administrative problems failed to implement rural development of wildlife utilization.

In the light of declining game population and increasing poaching for ivory and rhino horn trade, a comprehensive ban was instituted by a presidential decree in 1977. All legal forms of consumptive wildlife utilization ended, and with it hunting safari income was lost. It appears to have been a necessary step for viable conservation in a system lacking sufficient capacity to regulate hunting. Anti-poaching efforts were stepped up tremendously. Wildlife is now singularly utilized through tourism, exacerbating the gap between who pays for wildlife and who benefits from it.

Since independence the government of Kenya has taken several major initiatives to tackle these problems and recently efforts are being made to ensure that benefits from national parks and game reserves reach the local people. The Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) was set up in 1989 and is responsible for managing the country's 59 reserves as well as wildlife outside protected areas (KWS, 1990). A radical approach was proposed to end the ever-increasing conflicts between the park management and the local communities. The main aim was to encourage local participation in conservation and tourism development, to ensure communities benefit from tourism and to attract tourists from overcrowded parks and reserves. KWS has organized training courses, including management and tourist handling. The response from tourists has been positive. KWS believes that if these initiatives are widespread, the attitudes of the local people towards the park will be positive.

Background

Amboseli National Park (ANP) is situated approximately 240 km to the southeast of Nairobi, Kenya's capital. The park lies at the northern foot of Mt. Kilimanjaro, which enhances the background of the park and is an additional tourist attraction for the area. The area covered by the park falls within Kajiado district of the Rift Valley province. Administratively the district is divided into four administrative divisions namely: Central; Ngong; Magadi and Loitokitok. Loitokitok which is situated at the southern end of Kajiado district and recently upgraded to sub-district level, is the administrative unit covering the Amboseli ecosystem. A district officer based in Loitokitok administers the division with the help of chiefs and sub-chiefs at the locational and sublocational levels respectively. The local authority for the area is Kajiado county council.

Amboseli National Park (ANP) lies in a dry climatic zone, which has a two-phase weather

system with a prolonged and often severe dry season. The Amboseli region is believed to have been a lake in the past. It is dotted with several swamps, which are fed by subterranean springs originating from Mt. Kilimanjaro. These swamps are the most important permanent water source in what is otherwise a semi-arid region, and are especially important during the long dry season (Nzioka, 1994).

The varied rangelands in the region combined with the arid and semi-arid climatic conditions enable the region to support a variety of wildlife outside the ANP. Wildlife has migrated in and out of ANP for hundreds of years. The larger Amboseli ecosystem is defined by the rainy season migratory range of large herbivores from the park into the dispersal areas adjacent to the park and returning at the onset of the dry season. Ranch members have established wildlife sanctuaries, which together with ANP, are the focus of tourism economic activities.

The majority of the people who live and use the lands surrounding the park are mainly members of the Maasai community, a semi-nomadic group that has for centuries used an extensive part of this dry belt, roaming with their herds in search of pasture and water. Today they share the resources of the area with wildlife, tourists and members of other ethnic communities, majority recent migrants living in the area and practicing both commercial and subsistence agriculture. The Maasai have traditionally kept large herds of cattle as a form of insurance policy. The cattle are necessary to provide adequate supplies of milk--the most important food for the pastoralists--and are strongly tied to status within the community. As a result, cattle numbers are more important than cattle quality.

Formerly, land was in plentiful supply, and agriculture and intensive farming were largely unpracticed in the area. Nothing prevented the free movement of the pastoralists as the land

was neither enclosed nor under individual ownership as is the case today (Rutten, 1992). During severe droughts, the pastoralists would concentrate around sources of permanent water, where good pasture persisted longer than anywhere else. Among the most important dry season refuges were the Amboseli swamps and Ol Tukai wetland.

The declaration of 27,700 sq. km. of the Amboseli region first as the Southern Game Reserve in 1906 and then reduced to 3260 sq. km in 1948 before being renamed Amboseli National Reserve had little real impact on land use in the area by pastoralists, as it only regulated the use of game animals. Protected area status imposed no control on natural resource utilization; it merely regulated the use of game animals. Game reserve status prevented cultivation and habitation, but the law in Kenya at that time allowed residents within or adjacent to reserves at the time of gazetting to continue utilizing the natural resources within them (Nzioka, 1994). This meant in effect that use of the Amboseli game reserve by pastoralists continued. Indeed, it increased as population increased and as more and more of the land around the reserve was enclosed and taken under private ownership of government management. Increasingly, Amboseli game reserve became the only open land available to the pastoralists, and was viewed by those as common grazing land.

In 1974, the game reserve was gazetted a national park. Conscious of the problems national park status would cause an agreement was made with the Maasai to vacate the ANP in exchange for a guaranteed water supply outside the park. A pipeline to provide alternative watering points for livestock outside the park was completed in 1976 and the Maasai were formally excluded from the park in 1977 by a government decree without compensation and since then they have been excluded from utilizing the resources within the park

(Ecosystems, 1982). However, the inefficiency of the pumping equipment and occasional breakdowns, caused watering points to run dry for days at a time, resulting in livestock concentration at the other functioning watering points. This resulted in the occasional watering of livestock within the park by the local Maasai residents.

The most important loss for these people was access to their season grazing area and permanent sources of water leading to widespread resentment against the park among the pastoralists. Forced out of their traditional dry season grazing grounds and watering points in the Amboseli swamps, restricted from the natural resource base in ANP and left with little or no support from the government, the Maasai became increasingly marginalized. Alienated from their main economic activity, pastoralism, and disadvantaged from job opportunities in tourism by lack of education and isolated from any information about the tourist industry and its track record that would make effective lobbying or community innovations possible, the Maasai were subjected to poverty.

Indiscriminate killing of the wild animals began as the pastoralists identified the presence of wild animals and the creation of the park as the main cause of their eviction. To diffuse this very negative situation, the government was determined to examine and address the problems caused by the park to the pastoralists and by the pastoralists to the park. It quickly became apparent that the problems could not be treated in isolation and that the general land use pattern that had been established in the 1960s and 1970s was an important factor. It was found that the majority of the pastoralists were landless because the land they had traditionally used and which might have been considered as theirs had been enclosed and was now largely owned by government departments or group ranches or individuals, or was under long leases. The ranchers around the park were also

experiencing the problems being experienced by the park. The large numbers of pastoralists with their cattle made water and land management on the ranches impossible, and conservation management in the park very difficult. Neither could be solved unless the land problem was solved.

In order to solve the land conflicts the government in late 1960s embarked on an ambitious program of land reform and investment in the region. This program led to the formation of group ranches where a number of families came together to jointly register title to land (Rutten, 1982). Consequently, most of the land around the park was subdivided into seven group ranches namely: Olgulului, Olgulului/Ololorashi, Eselengei, Mbirikani, Kuku, Rombo and Kimana. Although the Maasai view water and pastureland as communal rather than private property, grazing now is confined to ones group ranch. These group ranches are currently being sub-divided into individual holdings. The pastoralists are increasingly being boxed-in, as government and individual landowners have enclosed the bulk of their former rangeland. Agriculturalists are also effectively taking over the more humid and fertile areas, which are important for pastoralists as dry season grazing reserves. Due to the fluid land tenure situation, pastoralists cannot claim ownership of their traditional grazing grounds, while agriculturalists can claim effective land use rights merely by cultivating it.

The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) recognized that Amboseli National Park (ANP) has special problems with relations with the local pastoralists and established a project to work with these communities to improve their attitudes towards the park (Western, 1982).

Data and Methodology

Data used in this paper were obtained from two sources. The first set is from library research in which analysis of government policy and

planning documents and non-governmental organizations strategy papers was done.

The second set of data was obtained through participant observation, key informants and informal discussions with selected leaders from the community—the Chief, group ranch leaders and local tourism entrepreneurs.

Attitudes towards the Park

The history outlined above gives some indication of the problems faced by pastoralists. As has so often been the case elsewhere, development has resulted in them being largely disenfranchised. It would not be surprising, therefore, to find negative attitudes towards tourism development in general and the park in particular. Although, my research is still ongoing it is clear that this is largely the case.

To the majority of the pastoralists who are living a largely traditional life, subsisting on milk and selling occasional cows to meet specific cash requirements, the park is perceived as a considerable problem and is viewed in negative terms. In almost all cases, the negative attitudes arise from real conflicts between the demands of cattle and the demands of the park. The conflicts threaten to undermine wildlife tourism as wild animals outside the park receive only partial protection. In the Amboseli region, tourism can broaden the base of rural development, however, the reality is that the Maasai who share their resources with wildlife rarely benefit from the tourist revenue. Most revenue goes to the central government and a small proportion to the local authorities to support community development projects.

The pastoralists view the park as a large reserve of lush grazing, a contradiction of the park management objectives. The pastoralists regard the game warden as a defender of wildlife while the warden looks at the pastoralists as destroyers of wildlife. The interests are pitched against each other, to put it simply: cows versus wildlife. For instance, the park prevents access to grazing resources contained

within it. This is particularly problematic during the dry season when pastures around the swamps and Lake Amboseli within the park persist longer than anywhere else. However, the concentration of pastoralists and their herds in the area has resulted in extreme pressure on the grazing which in turn results in more pressure on the park and thus increased conflicts. The pastoralists would wish to have unrestricted access to the park's grazing land and park management authorities' attempts to restrict this access causes conflict and worsens already strained relations. When land and grazing pasture are perceived to be in short supply anyone or anything that holds these resources and enforces exclusive access is likely to be viewed negatively. When exclusive access is being enforced, apparently for something considered as unimportant in the eyes of the average pastoralist as wild animals, the resentment is stronger.

The Maasai often see wildlife as belonging to the government and they see the government alone as being responsible for its care. The Maasai are hardly compensated for the losses of land, property or human injury incurred due to wildlife. It is therefore not surprising that local people often support poaching and are indifferent or hostile to wildlife conservation policies, and by extension tourism. To many local people, conservation authorities are more interested in the protection of wildlife than the loss of human lives, bodily injury, damage to crops and livestock. The Maasai often claim that the government values wildlife more than it does humans' well-being. One resident actually stated his belief that the government priorities were arranged in the following order decreasing in importance, wildlife, tourists and citizen.

The question of access to water is even stronger conflict since the park contains much of the area's permanent water and pastoralists would like unrestricted access to these re-

sources, especially during the dry season. The silting up of many of the wells and boreholes around the park has aggravated the problem, and it is a fact that these sources are not adequate to supply the demand for water throughout the year. Lack of access to water is probably the single most important cause of conflict and resentment against the park authorities. To some extent, however, the water issue is used to as an excuse by some pastoralists enter the park. There are permanent water sources outside the park but pastoralist who use them are soon forced into the park in search of pasture.

The Maasai believe that the park has taken all of the best areas—those that contain the best grazing and the permanent water sources. This is viewed in a negative light. Of course, the perception of the pastoralists in this regard is real enough, although the conservation reasons for selecting the area are not understood and would probably not be accepted as of sufficient importance even if they were.

The Maasai perceptions of the park as being very large is also cause of negative attitudes because although in conservation terms the park is small, in terms of grazing area, is large. Pastoralists often ask that if the government's intention is to keep wild animals for people to see, why do they not just have a zoo, or at least a much-reduced area? If the park were reduced in size, more land would be made available to the pastoralists.

The attitude of the pastoralists towards wild animals is ambiguous. Traditionally, these people were not hunters, and they were prepared to tolerate most wild animals with the exception of large carnivores. However, they do not seem to have any special attachment to wildlife. Today, this ambivalent attitude has changed to some extent because firstly, the wild animals became clearly identified as the cause of the creation of the park and eviction of the people. Secondly, as pressure on grazing

increased, due to the compression of the pastoralists and their herds, wildlife were increasingly viewed as competitors. Elephants, zebra and buffalo in particular are viewed in this negative light since they move out of the park to graze in the adjacent group ranches while the pastoralists are not allowed to enter the park with their cattle for water. It is frequently suggested that the park should be fenced to keep the wild animals in.

The widely held perception that wild animals bring tick borne diseases to the cattle also contributes to the conflict. Pastoralists are required by law to spray or dip their cattle regularly to control ticks, a venture involving significant costs which they believe are made necessary by the wild animals crossing and using their lands.

Cattle are the traditional and actual source of wealth for most pastoralists, and the source of most of their food. It is clearly perceived that the expropriation of park area means that less cattle can be owned, thereby reducing the people's wealth. The pastoralists do not understand why the government should apparently value wild animals more highly than cattle, when it clearly has such negative effects on the people. The potential importance of the park as a revenue earner through tourist development has little if any significance to the majority of pastoralists who have little apparent interest in things that money can buy.

All these negative perceptions of the park held by the Maasai lead to poor relations with the Kenya Wildlife Services authorities that are believed to own the park, and are therefore the target of resistance. As executors of government policy, the park staff are continually in conflict with the pastoralists, a position, which is exacerbated by the ambiguity of the situation as far as the government's position is concerned. The government is promoting community participation in conservation but the people are conservative and their current

life is closer to their traditional existence. Thus, all actions by KWS to increase their level of control over the park are viewed with misgivings and conflict is frequent.

Summary

It can, therefore, be said that the pastoralists who live around the park at the present perceive the park and park authorities in a negative light. The reasons for this are clear and understandable and stem from the area's recent history, government policy and the real conflicts of interest that exist between the park authorities and pastoralists.

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