

SOCIAL POLICY AND THE UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF MARGINALISED
PASTORAL COMMUNITIES IN KENYA

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Social Policy, Development, and Rangeland Security

On 18 February 2002 shortly after the NARC government came into power when president Kibaki made a major policy address implying that the government will undertake extensive reforms of the livestock sector such as rejuvenating market arrangements, range lands and rehabilitating facilities. Many people in the administration saw this as a symbol of the new government's commitment to people in Kenya in the sector that had faced decades and decades of isolation, marginalization and post independence social exclusion.

Although there was a lot of pessimism, even in the minority groups supporting NARC before the elections, there seemed to be a change of heart after they were elected.

There are three hypotheses one can pose to explain the change in priorities. The first notes that the policy initiative was intended to facilitate the penetration of capital and to generate tax revenues. Most of the agricultural economy in Kenya is fully commercialized and enjoys a level of intensification indicating that margin returns to investment in this sector would be minimal. Previously ignored economic resources such as rangelands, fisheries and other neglected sectors could be more productive if the government invested in them. The second hypothesis explains it as a response to the political demands and ethnic coalitions, where now some of the previously ignored small communities play a role in producing swing votes by rearranging themselves across the political landscape. The third hypothesis regards it as a response prompted by the recognition of how long-term neglect leading to the militarization of the region.

There is nevertheless something strange about this policy initiative. All policy statements, for example refer to the initiative in the context of North Eastern province. Logically however, one would think that the policies should refer to all of Northern Kenya, which is the central focus of the discussion, although there has also been little reference to the coast north of Tana River and its hinterland.

The reason behind the hiatus, as explained to me by one Member of Parliament from Samburu, is that "the position of Eastern Province in the society is not exactly one that sends chills down the spine of the government." That is to say, peoples like the Samburu, Pokot and Turkana, as opposed to the Somali of Northeaster Province, do not represent the kind of force within geographical region warranting attention from the new government. The implied nexus between security and the general prosperity of the nation provides the departure point for the following discussion.

Social policy refers to the policies governments use for providing welfare and social protection for their citizens, that is, the humanistic side of governance. In the current Kenyan context, social policy can be viewed as policies allowing people to provide for their own welfare due to the government's inability to comprehensively provide for its citizen's needs. Since the mid 80's there has been a heated debate about market forces and donor driven development. Kenya has always operated a capitalist economy.

Most of the current policies defining development are based on market, privatization, and private sector initiative. This ignores the fact that the state provided critical services such as education, health, and others in the highland agricultural regions that enabled the population to benefit from capitalist forces—so much so that these areas would not have developed without social policy. In other words, these areas have commercialized because there was social policy. Other areas suffered from a lack of corresponding services and inputs for elevating production in their respective economic sectors.

In the post independence era, investment continued to go to the high potential areas that were already developed economically because of previous state support for the institutionalization of the modern economy and research into agricultural production. Research centers and marketing boards were set up to support commercial crops, and producers also benefited from loans and other facilities. This did not happen on the coast or in the northern region of Kenya and other undeveloped areas. Despite the gap that emerged, the neoclassical economic orthodoxy remains the policy regime in areas inhabited by marginalized minority groups, even though the kind of service and policy infrastructure contributing to development in high potential regions are absent.

This is now a national problem because the instability and violence incubating in peripheral areas of Kenya is largely a function of regional and communal differentials in social development.

The situation is not without precedent. The major difference between Eastern and Western Europe other than commercialization, for example, is the disruption caused by the repeated waves of invasion the East absorbed over two hundred years. The impact can be seen up to the present: Eastern Europe encompassed peasant societies that made it susceptible to dictatorship and radical socialist movements over the past century that continued to retard economic progress in contrast the developed societies Western sphere.

During the pre-colonial era, pastoralists and the Swahili city-states were the center of regional political economy. The difference in ecological and spatial circumstances of the contiguous areas promoted processes of adaptation so that production specialization was attained across different climatic and environmental conditions. In the hinterland, local adaptations and specialized production fed the exchange networks that in the 18th century began to expand and link communities across regions. Social structure was fluid; in the pre-colonial period it was difficult to consider minorities since everything was based on clans. In fact, most African languages do not have a word for tribes.

Pastoralist monoculture dates back to about 1000 AD. It merged as a response to environmental conditions, while Bonte says that this was an ecological specialization that spread because it generated higher returns to labor than other sedentary strategies. The networks of exchange between agriculturalists and herders in fact debunk the idea that pastoralism is just a subsistence mode of production. Livestock acted as the currency in pre-colonial economies in Kenya and the larger region. In the pre-colonial era, pastoralists were just like the high-risk entrepreneurs in today's economy. The pastoralists owned capital in the form of livestock, while animal protein was a critical resource in any society. Livestock also played a major role in rituals and rites of passage.

Pastoralism was interactive by definition. Its influence on the culture of other communities was substantial in the last half of the 19th century where a process of exchange, interaction and accumulation that was promoting proto-state formation occurred. This process was cut short by the imposition of colonialism. As a result, the regional pathway as it was unfolding prior to intervention was interrupted by this imposition; an entirely different logic of production based on the agro-European logic of agrarian capitalism was instituted in place of the indigenous multi-sectoral production model already in existence.

Modern economic conditions, in contrast, accentuate the critical difference between structural and conjunctural poverty. Illife defines poverty as either conjunctural, which is episodic and temporary, or as structural, which is permanent and propagated by embedded structures and policy biases.

The northern rangelands experienced the conjunctural form of poverty that was caused by epidemics, extended drought and other climatic and political events in the colonial era. The beginnings of their current structural poverty, however, lay in the imposition of a colonial administration's system of ethnic blocks. Ethnic groups emerged as rigid entities reinforced by colonial policies governing labor and native reserves. This insured that relationships between

pastoralists and agriculturalists were no longer mobile and fluid; relations based on exchange came to be replaced by separation and enmity.

Under the colonial regime pastoralist isolation was not so much intentional but a consequence of barriers erected to separate communities from each other and from the areas of European settlement. In the post independence period, however, the situation deteriorated. Isolation, and other demographic, environmental, and structural factors resulted in their episodic poverty becoming a permanent condition during the post-independence era.

While highland cultivators also suffered from episodes of conjunctural shortfalls, the large-scale agricultural sector developed a symbiosis with the small-scale sector over time. Also, individuals in the private sector and the civil service, especially those who had access to state resources tended to reinvest in their home areas. Groups that did not enjoy access to these resources, on the other hand, eventually became marginalized, isolated, and cut off from the growing prosperity and progress in the highlands.

The relationship morphed into systematic social exclusion after independence: social exclusion can be described by the metaphor of someone 'paddling a canoe upstream'. For the excluded, if once one stops paddling, they get swept backwards. For the socially excluded, progress is often temporary or ephemeral. An individual from an excluded community may ascend to a certain class status, but falling out is much easier than attaining such a position in the first place.

There was also a kind of antipathy that overtook many minority communities who could not forcefully respond to modern developments. On the coast, for example, the systematic dismemberment of the maritime economy in Lamu and the dhow trade that had operated for 2000 years was met with passive resignation. Lamu sank into poverty as the dhow trade and other traditional economic sectors were controlled and sometimes squeezed to death. Suspected bandits in Northeastern province were dragged behind land rovers and forced to confess crimes they did not commit. Other Kenyans viewed their passivity as an aspect of their traditional culture, and a rejection of modernity.

Three case studies help illustrate the marginalization of peoples in Kenya; the stasis of coastal fisheries, degeneration of the range livestock economy, and the skewed benefits from tourism and wildlife. The irony here in the latter is that despite the alienation of land for parks and reserves, the locals benefit the least; people and interests from outside these areas end up expropriating most of the profits and surplus accruing from tourism and wildlife. The

problems in these sectors can be attributed to political decay as well as the poor government policies predominating in pastoral and Coastal areas.

In the North, problems such as increased population and changes in climate leading to more severe droughts made people increasingly dependent on relief food. The way relief food is distributed in Kenya is rudimentary. Relief can be diversified so that people in needy situations can be given cash as well. The implications of dumping food for instance in Marsabit is the evident death of agricultural activities despite the amounts of maize formerly planted in the area.

The way out of this quagmire does not lie in producing more strategy papers at this point in time. Instead, the government should institute specific social policies targeting basic issues such as water availability, health, security, and the infrastructure needed to reduce the high transaction costs in these regions. At the moment the kind of policy recommendations to be put in place must recognize the fact that any set of policies require the allocation of sufficient resources needed to reverse decades of neglect.

The barriers that were erected at the onset of the colonial period and intensified by social exclusion have been slowly melting, in part due to the efforts of civil society to highlight the common interests and shared motivations uniting most Kenyans. Kenya's political culture is evolving apace with the realization that it is in the national interest to bring all citizens into the fold. In this sense the question social policy is not as difficult to address as it was in colonial times.

In the meantime, however, security has emerged as a major constraint in many areas of the north, coast, and informal urban settlements. This is a national-level policy challenge because lack of stability in these parts of Kenya may prevent social policy from bearing fruit. Improving security at this juncture is much more than a question of policing, and extends to the provision of social and economic justice.

We can use security as a focal point for a number of recommendations:

To begin with, legal rights and constitutional reform is a major prerequisite for upgrading economic conditions in these areas. As is at the moment investment in these areas without protection of the indigenous peoples' rights and land tenure, have negative results. This exacerbates the problem of insecurity.

Secondly, there has to be a curriculum reform for education to have positive results for human development in these areas. In standard four books for instance, the Bajuni are depicted as foreigners from Oman. This influences relationships between citizens later in life. Moreover, education case studies presented to pupils about the development of arid lands is distorted. Textbooks addressing issues in Northeastern Province feature chicken production, yet nothing about range livestock and mobility even though livestock production is the spine of the economy of these areas.

Thirdly, early warning and response systems have to be created in order to deal with natural disasters in a timely manner. This will avoid waste of resources diverted provide relief, while stabilizing the economic conditions in secluded and vulnerable areas. The single most important factor here is to the provision of good infrastructure, which will also reduce the cost of inputs needed for commercialization and diversification.

Another general factor is the absence of a comprehensive blueprint for developing marginalized areas. We can take lessons from other sectors in respect to this. The idea of economic symbiosis is exemplified by the phenomenon where a lot of development achieved by large scale was transferred to the small-scale in terms of technology and capital of markets. Livestock and wildlife sectors need to be harmonized in a similar manner. The harmony that existed in pre-colonial times can be reestablished through a ranch-range symbiosis similar to the one empowering small-scale agriculture. The Laikipia land raids are a sign of lack of the current lack of symbiosis between the ranching sector and traditional pastoralism.

In conclusion, security is a special problem that has been caused to a large degree by the lack of adaptive social policies. The aims and aspirations of Kenya's disadvantaged minorities are no different than those of other citizens, but they still lack the basic services, facilities, and amenities that allowed other regions of the country to progress.

Overcoming these fundamental impediments by instituting a social policy infrastructure, supported by civil society advocacy, and a broad-based ideological commitment to problems on the ground is fundamental for increase security in the diverse areas of the country. Security is supposed to be a public good that is the primary responsibility of the state. However, this good is provided on preferential basis in Kenya—while the conditions of marginalized communities in Kenya mirror that of those in the larger region.

This is why, as argued by Musambayi, cross border raids and reactions provide an opportunity for a popular ideologically driven campaign for regional integration. Collectivized fears and shared problems is better motivation than mutual benefits promised by cooperation. He argues that the dangers in this region can provide a base for thriving integration.

However, integration also has its problems. Musambayi notes that integration faces challenges such as poor communication, mutual fear and distrust, and absence of transparency amongst both governments and civil society organizations. Insofar as the issues often become politicized on the national level, the regional approach may be the best platform for operationalizing the social policies that promise to be more adaptive over the long term than current initiatives like the donor-supported programs to promote pastoral disarmament.