

## **The Politics of Livestock Marketing Among Pastoralist Communities in Kenya: A Case study of the East Pokot pastoralists and the Kimalel Culture Fair and Goat Auction in Marigat, Baringo County of North Western Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

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The drive to get pastoralists to destock as a way of rejuvenating the degraded environment has been part of the Kenya government planning for long but with very little or no success. Similarly pastoralists were overly opposed to it since to them what matters was the number of livestock (especially cattle) owned but not the quality. This paper discusses the Kenya Government interaction with the East Pokot pastoralists in the context of overstocking and attempts to market "excess" livestock as well as the East Pokots' obsession with cattle that is key to decision making. Finally the paper presents the dynamics, challenges and uniqueness associated with the annual Kimalel Goat Auction as a case study of East Pokot pastoralists marketing of livestock, but cattle still remains out of the picture.

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**Keywords:** East Pokot, overstocking, livestock ,marketing, Kimalel, Goat, Auction, price

### **Introduction**

The problem of what to do which livestock related challenges in Kenya has a long history, certainly predating political independence.

For instance, as the Second World War came to its close in the 1940s the colonial government in Kenya identified overpopulation in Africans inhabited areas and critical environment degradation caused by soil erosion as key factors in rural areas (Adholla and Little, 1981).

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Consequently the government formulated a Ten Year Development Plan (1946 -1955), which was categorical that the problems of agriculture and pastoralism could once and for all be rectified through resettlement of people in the then unoccupied lands and in the process rehabilitate the degraded African areas. The African Resettlement Land Development Board (ALDEV) was created in 1946 as the organizational framework to implement the Ten Year Development Plan. ALDEV focussed mainly in semi arid areas where diverse livestock management projects ranging from vaccination against rinderpest, grazing schemes, boreholes and dam construction, afforestation, tse tse fly eradication, soil erosion control, locust control and small scale irrigation projects were undertaken. Marketing of livestock and livestock movement routes were to be opened up to create an easy link with urban areas. The Swynnerton Plan of 1954 was eventually developed to implement the identified priority areas under ALDEV. The plan recognized that semi arid areas required much more specialized attention because of the unique aspects of pastoralism.

The problems in semi arid areas in particular were overstocking and uncontrolled grazing that led to increased desertification. The problem of overgrazing was so serious that the Governors Committee on African reconstruction was compelled to investigate it. Subsequently, culling of stock on the range was the first and most feasible alternative in a range of possible solutions. However, it was soon realised that culling could only be done by providing regular markets to absorb the so-called excess livestock. While this was found workable, a new problem was confronted, that of low grade livestock. The government realised that livestock quality could be improved by enforcing controlled grazing, improving water supplies and eradication of the tse tse fly menace, all of which undermined the success of the whole control-based initiative. Ultimately, the colonial government chose to undertake this measure by implementing specific measures including introduction grazing schemes, which we now discuss.

### **Introduction of Grazing Schemes**

In order to further bolster government resolve to improve the quality of livestock for marketing, forty special development schemes covering diverse areas of the semi arid ecosystem were launched. The schemes targeted the following areas: livestock limitation per area, controlled grazing, livestock marketing, water development and tse tse fly eradication.

These projects were particularly implemented in the following counties, (then called districts) Elgeyo-Marakwet, Laikipia (initially Mugokodo), West Pokot, Lamu, Kwale, South Nyanza, Taita, Kitui and Machakos. Other districts were Kajiado, Baringo (East Pokot), Narok and Samburu (Ngutter, 1979).

However, the grazing schemes were the most unsuccessful and were the first among government initiatives to collapse mainly because the initiative went contrary to pastoralists' ownership cultures that put a high premium on numbers rather than the quality of cattle owned. The government did not also consider the different seasonal dictates, tastes and preferences for different livestock species. From the pastoralists' point of view, free movement was the basis of survival, not the constriction that was the basis of grazing schemes. As Helland (1980) observed in the case of the Samburu, the scheme was so unpopular that elders collectively resolved to abandon it wholesale. Hence, the disconnect between government policies and politics on the one hand, and the pastoralists' cultural politics of cattle ownership on the other, clashed due what can now be understood as attitudinal preconceptions by both parties regarding cattle and what it meant to the respective entities.

In 1963 the Livestock Marketing Division in the Ministry of Agriculture was created with the core function of facilitating the sale of 'surplus' cattle in pastoralists' hands. Although this programme was mainly concentrated in North Eastern region, it was later rolled out to other districts including Baringo. The publication of the East African Livestock Survey in mid 1960s, however, created renewed interest, this time into the positive aspects of pastoralism. For the first time pastoralist areas were looked at in terms of producing livestock for the export market. However, this initiative was also met by the resistant force of pastoralists' cultures of cattle ownership and the social capital that could not be apprehended within the government's logic of controlled animal husbandry.

The significance of these pastoralists' cultures was such that until they were contextualised and understood, government initiatives would surely come to fail. This is why we attempt, in the next section of this paper, to discuss the Pokot pastoralists' cultures and their impact on the moral and political economies obtaining then.

## The East Pokot Culture and Economy

Stewart (1950, quoted in GOK, 1951) terms the people of East Pokot as the Suk and that they were roughly 60% pastoral and 40% agricultural. They broke off from the original Nandi settlement on Mt. Elgon and could be viewed to represent the most primitive form of Nandi. Their language is Nandi in structure as well as much of their vocabulary. The Suk call themselves Pokot (*pronounced Pokaut*). Suk is the name given to them by the Maasai because they lived in the hills and carried a "*chok*" which is a short curved bill-hook, probably for cultivation. Suk is also a Maasai name for "ignorant" people who were living in the hills that time. This shows that one time they were agriculturalists, but now turned entirely pastoralist. Initially they lived in the territory towards the Western end of Cherengani Hills at Mt. Sekerr. After some experience of the Karimojong and Turkana they acquired many of their customs including singing, baboon dance and *sapana* rite of passage before they moved to the lowlands. Their diet consisted of finger millet, honey and game. But then, they dared not come to the plains because the Samburu would not allow them in the Kerio Valley and the Turkana to the north west. Later the Samburu left Kerio Valley and moved eastwards. This allowed the East Pokot to descend from the hills and occupy the land vacated by the Samburu. They eventually pushed as far as Tiati Hills but were prevented from going further by the Maasai.

Beech (1910, quoted in GOK, 1951) describes the Pokot as "intelligent but surprisingly honest, exceptionally vain but very generous. They are suspicious of one's motives, selfish and without affection. A savage and uncivilized people to whom death is the greatest evil and who have but a short span of life." Later on an anonymous colonial District Commissioner wrote that "The East Pokot are very backward and conservative to a degree and it will be a long uphill task to win their confidence and secure any active interest and support from them to any scheme which may be inaugurated for their benefit" (n.d).

Certainly, these comments were all made within the context and logic of colonialist attitudes towards the colonised Africans, but they may also explain the subsequent failure of government initiatives aimed at culling pastoralists' cattle, though "inaugurated for their [East Pokot] benefit."

The Pokot are divided into two sections, the agricultural and pastoral – the latter being the focus of this paper. The difference between them is clear including their customs and physique. The pastoralists (now the East Pokot) are rich in cattle, goats and sheep and look with disdain upon the agriculturalists to whom they refer as “the men of the seed”. The agriculturalists (the West Pokot) have infused crop based cultivation with livestock husbandry hence pass more accurately as the agro-pastoralists. The agriculturalists are generally inferior to the pastoralists in physique due to the fact that their diet consists almost entirely of sorghum (and now maize) varied occasionally with little goat meat (GOK,1951) The pastoralists (East Pokot, in Baringo District) are in the plains. Their mode of living is simple and befits a people who are constantly moving with families and herds in search of water and grazing. Their food consists of blood and milk varied by a little grain. GOK (1951) reports of the East Pokot that their wealth of cattle makes them rank high among pastoralists as the most opulent Africans and their wants outside their cattle are negligible (Mutsotso, Kimaiyo and Gaciuki, 2014). The East Pokot are divided into four main clans: the Talai/Kasait clan is predominantly in Churo area, Cheprai/Kaprai occupy the central part including Chemolingot/Nginyang region, the Kolowa clan is in Kerio valley while Cheman clan in Chepkalacha region.

### **Cattle in East Pokot Culture**

To the East Pokot a cow (*tany or tich* in plural) carries all that they need to survive – milk, blood, meat, horns used as drinking cups, payment of bride wealth, pay fines, hides and also given as presents hence one’s wealth is measured in terms of numbers of cows that they own . Cattle is everything for livelihood and existence for even day to day experiences are expressed in the context of cattle. For a Pokot *tany* is everything. It features prominently in *sapana* ritual, sex, marriage, circumcision, milk, moranism, war, rain and pride.

That this issue has a historical context can be seen in the fact that in the 1960s, the colonial government came up with the idea of setting up an abattoir in Marigat, Baringo, where the East Pokot were encouraged to sell “excessive” cattle. The East Pokot were, however, too worried of the possibility of being forced to sell and in the process lose their cattle. Consequently they did not sell them. The abattoir did not take off since the envisaged source of cattle did not materialise.

When it failed they were so happy that they composed a song in praise of the then political representative for Rift Valley who had initially opposed the abattoir project. The "*Kongoi Legco*", Pokot for "Thanks to LegCo" (Legislative Assembly), song was so popular in the 1950s-1960s until after independence.

Owe x2  
 Owe chorewenyutany  
 Kongoi Legco nya kicham  
 Kwaketa tany  
 Were kimoi-ee

The English equivalent is

Welcome x2  
 Welcome my friend cow

Thanks to Legco which has agreed that the cattle will continue to graze

Welcome Moi x2 (Sang to me by elders at Tangelbei in 2010 and 2013 and translated into English by Mr Henry Losikiriatum, an educated East Pokot elder very conversant with the abattoir issue).

Among the East Pokot, many proverbs and sayings use a cow as symbol of learning and the most important element in their existence. Such proverbs include:

*" anyin tany aki ngwan "* – a cow is sweet and sour.  
*anyin la chepo roryon "* – as sweet as the milk of a cow that has just calved.

The proverbs demonstrate that a cow is the focus of life and life rotates around a cow. A cow is sweet and everything that a cow has is sweet.

Visser (1983) accurately captured the value of cattle to the East Pokot as follows, their life centres around cattle. The ideal of every East Pokot is to keep cattle. A man without cattle is looked upon as dead. Cattle are in the first place a means of subsistence. Blood is taken from them every month, cows are milked, the male ones give meat. The Pokot make clothes, blankets and shoes from the skins.

The cattle play a role in social relations, especially marriage which is not only a union of individuals but also families. They also have a great ritual value, for one needs their skin or chime for rituals or ceremonies. At a certain age every boy is given an ox – a prize ox about which he composes songs and after which he is named. One is known by his ox name, which is shouted in war when one is spearing the enemy. Cattle are the objects of raids on the neighbouring tribes. They are a form of legal tender and considered a mobile bank. They give a man prestige and wealth. They give him meat and clothes. They are the means for blessing and purification.

As shown, cattle is everything for the East Pokot and all relations are conceived, maintained and may be dissolved around cattle. Cattle is the basis of living. It is the mirror with which they see life. Therefore to the East Pokot all decisions or petitions made put cattle welfare at the core. In the next section we now focus on how the welfare of cattle greatly informed their claim to territory in the colonial period.

### East Pokot Submissions to the Land Commission (1932)

The East Pokot evidence was presented on August 30, 1932 by a Mr G.R.B. Brown, District Commissioner for Baringo. The East Pokot case for more land was centred around cattle as shown by their presentation to the commission: Some relief is required by the Suk if the country is ever to recover. Churo area would be suitable as a controlled grazing area otherwise the Suk country would never be sufficient for Suk needs. They have more cattle than is sufficient for their economic needs. Table 1 below shows the extent of their cattle ownership vis a vis their area and other neighbouring communities.

**Table 1: Extent of East Pokot Ownership of Livestock vis a vis other Communities in the Former Reserve**

Variable	Kamasia	Njemps	East Suk ( Pokot)
Population	20,000	2,250	7,300
Area	600,000	180,000	1,000,000
Area fit for agriculture	160,000	0	0
Number of cattle	20,000-25,000	12,000	100,000
Sheep and goats	200,000	30,000	275,000
Acres per head, cattle	25	15	10
Acres per head, sheep and goats	3	6	4
Sheep and goats per head	10	15	37
Cattle per head	1	5	14

**Source:** Kenya Land Commission Evidence, 1933

Drawing from Table 1 above, it is observed that the East Pokot had over 300% more cattle than the Kamasia whose human population was about 300% more than the East Pokot in 1933. The high livestock numbers were the cause of land degradation which was a subject of concern for government for a long time. The failure by government to extract East Pokot cattle following their snub of the project certainly infuriated government and enhanced its negative view of them. According to Maher (1937) THE East Pokot openly defied destocking leading to overgrazing which did not please government.

The East Pokot also owned 1,000-1,500 camels and 6,000 donkeys. Water was scarce in the centre of Tirioko and Korossi, hence the concentration of cattle in Churo.

The East Pokot of Tirioko and Loyamoruk regions were also dissatisfied with their boundary with Turkana. Turkana boundary had allegedly engulfed some of the East Pokot traditional grazing grounds around Mt. Silali but this was not accepted by the Commission. The Commission dismissed this claim, noting that "it is obvious the Suk will never be satisfied with the present boundaries as long as they own excessive cattle"

### **Government Attempts to Market East Pokot Livestock**

In 1961 an abattoir was established at Marigat to tap on East Pokot livestock but the East Pokot sold far too few cattle or were overly reluctant to sell. The colonial agents interpreted this reluctance to mean resistance to modernization and destocking. The abattoir thereafter functioned irregularly due to lack of livestock and by September 1961 operations were scaled down to care and maintenance. The Veterinary Department immediately moved most of the machinery to Archer's Post where it was in great need (GOK, 1961). The refusal by the East Pokot to sell cattle strengthened the view, one of the misperceptions about pastoralists culture, that they exhibit a perverse response to price incentives. Failure to capture the market advantages was taken to mean irrational attachment to cattle of no economic value. The great attachment to cattle partly helped to buttress the cattle complex concept that had earlier on been propagated anthropologists to explain the seemingly illogical attachment to cattle by the pastoralists.



For much of the colonial period government reports consistently blamed the East Pokot for having too many cattle which was the cause of land degradation but also acknowledged that crop production was not possible because of the aridity and lack of water ( GOK,1932; GOK, 1933; Maher, 1937; GOK, 1950; GOK, 1951,). The reports also consistently presented the East Pokot as living on the precipice of survival due to the state of aridity, lack of water, severe land degradation and conflictual relations with neighboring communities.

These conditions of aridity, overstocking and resistance to de-stocking eventually outlived the colonial regime, and subsequently met new attempts by the post-independence regimes to address them. Ironically, such new initiatives were launched during the presidency of Daniel Arap Moi, the same LegCo member who had opposed the abattoir initiative in 1961 to much acclaim by the East Pokots. Perhaps knowing the pitfalls awaiting any initiative that targets cows, the Moi regime sought to address the problem of over-stocking by targeting the relatively less emotive goats, by way of the annual Kimalel Goat Auction, that we now turn to.

### **Battling Over-Stocking in Post-Independence Times: The Annual Kimalel Goat Auction**

The post-independence Government of Kenya (GOK) recognized that Baringo District is semi arid and livelihood is largely dependent on livestock. This fact prompted it to intervene. Low quality livestock, high mortality rates, persistent livestock rustling, perennial and prolonged droughts affected many livestock keepers in the district. Limited market for livestock significantly contributed to the rising levels of poverty. In view of this fact, the government initiated the famous Kimalel Goat Auction (KGA) in Marigat Division in the mid 1980s. The KGA took on the goat identity since it was the principal livestock type constituting over 95% of all the livestock sold. However, in 2002 it closed following the retirement of the then president and no attempts were made for its revival until its revival in December, 2013.

The initial aim of the auction was to raise funds to help in the construction of workshops for primary schools in the region following the introduction of 8.4.4 system of education. The aim was therefore not meant to augment pastoralists household life or investment into other productive enterprises, hence anti-pastoralists in spirit.

Later the aim changed to a strategic livestock market for pastoralists and potential buyers from within and outside the administrative unit. This change of heart now turned the auction into a poverty alleviation tool to enable farmers to pay school fees and invest in other enterprises. The *People Daily* (January 29, 2008), reported that at its peak a single livestock keeper could earn as much as KShs.150,000 (USD, 1744). To the County Council of Baringo under whose auspices the KGA was held, the auction was a noble forum which mobilized potential goat buyers and offered good market prices to pastoralists. The auction was also environmentally friendly. It helped to destock thereby maintain balance in the ecosystem and control overgrazing and environmental degradation. The KGA was a project that guaranteed constant annual income to the pastoralists. The KGA's economic importance became manifest over the years and local pastoralists reportedly earned KShs.50 million(USD, 581,396) from the sale of 31,863 goats, 2518 sheep and 172 cattle in the 14-16 year period of its life(The People Daily, Jan, 29,2008).

A goat weighing about 30 Kgs was sold at KShs.1, 500( USD,17.4) in the local markets but at the KGA it fetched between KShs.1,800 – 2500 (USD,20.9-29.1) Most of the livestock came from East Pokot – Tangelbei, Nginyang, Kolowa, Mukutani, Salawa and Barwesa divisions. Despite the abundance of livestock, most East Pokot wallow in poverty largely due to lack of reliable market for livestock.

The KGA used to be conducted at the Shadrack Kimalel Boarding Primary School in Marigat. Several government departments would compete to spend money on the auction preparation for political expediency. For instance the Ministry of Roads and Public Works spent KShs. 250,000 (USD, 2900) in 1994 to renovate the presidential pavilion as part of the preparations. The event used to be presided over by President Moi annually. Other government departments and projects – Arid Lands Resource Management Project (ALRMP), Ministry of Education, Ministry of Roads and Public Works, District Veterinary and District Agriculture Offices, County Council of Baringo, Kerio Valley Development Authority (KVDA), Ngata Farm, Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC) contributed in various ways to stage the auction since it was not sustainable on its own because all the funds raised were given to the owners of livestock and no retainer fees was maintained.

The auction was so meticulously organized and executed that goats sold were only of high quality. Respective divisional officers and chiefs thoroughly vetted all the goats to the auction beforehand.

All chiefs kept records of all livestock and their owners to be used as a guide for payment to the rightful owners as well as avoid complaints from the public. President Moi was the patron of KGA, hence the KGA attracted the political and economic high and mighty – most of whom were ministers, senior government staff and businessmen who formed a strong market base.

In the auction held in the year 2000, KShs. 5,883,436(USD, 6,841) was realized from 2, 787 goats. This shows each goat on average fetched KShs. 2, 073 (USD,24.1). Each division was allocated the number of livestock to bring for the sale. In 2000 the highest was Marigat with 450 and fetched KShs. 932, 840(USD, 10,847) while Sacho brought 33 and fetched KShs. 68 409 (USD, 795.5). The KGA concept was a noble idea for assisting pastoralists offload some of their stock. However, its initiation lacked sustainability and depended on the benevolence, willingness and goodwill of others and political expediency. It was Moi's initiative and after his retirement it did not proceed on .

The KGA had no consideration on how it would run on its own. The project beneficiaries were not required to pay any charges while the Baringo County Council proposal to take over its management was not approved. Those with political interest used it as a stepping stone to politics.

The KGA was bedevilled with several operational difficulties and lack of transparency. For instance it was expensive and time consuming but not cost effective. On payment of individual livestock owners key informants in this study provided divergent information on the timeliness of payments. One group showed that there was also undue delay in paying the livestock owners. The other group said that the auction was usually done before Christmas but payments were made in February – March the following year hence demoralizing livestock owners and the chiefs were solely blamed for the delays. Hence there is not clear consensus on this fact even though all key informants agreed that those who sold their livestock received the full payment irrespective of the time. Other organizations besides individual farmers were equally affected by the delays. For example on May 30, 1989 the Baringo Sheep Goat and Cattle Cooperative Society Ltd (BSGCCS) wrote to the Baringo District Commissioner claiming their dues not paid from the previous year's sale. The location of the KGA was also not well considered as it overshadowed the more permanent Marigat animal auction yard, the biggest in Baringo District.

The KGA did not also have enough water to hold the animals there a day before the auction.

The Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, in one of its KGA Sustainability Report (n.d.) observed that the facility was not sufficiently used. It recommended that the auction be on monthly basis and the facility structures be maintained by the Baringo County Council. A KShs.100 levy was to be charged on every livestock sold and accrued revenue used to fund subsequent auctions instead of depending on benevolence.

### **Revival of the Kimalel Culture Fair and Goat Auction in 2013**

After a 14-16 year lull, the Kimalel Goat Auction was finally revived under several changed circumstances. The most notable was that it acquired a new name, Kimalel Culture Fair and Goat Auction. The second is that the chief guest was a new president and the then president was in attendance this time as a private citizen.

The third is that the 'chief auctioneer' was to be permanently absent having passed on a few days earlier. The idea of its revival was first announced by the Governor of Baringo County that his government had resolved to revive the Kimalel Goat Auction and hold its first auction between December 19-23, 2013 as part of the wider "Cultural Week" celebrations. In the inaugural auction about 2,000 goats were sold. The original idea behind the auction was to provide a fair market for pastoralists to sell goats at a good price devoid of middlemen, an idea which was soundly achieved. The new impetus behind its revival was part of the roadmap by the county government to revamp economic activities in the county and open a new revenue stream.

It was a show case event in which thousands of goats were auctioned at Kimalel Primary School, just before Christmas celebrations to enable livestock owners have a merry Christmas and pay school fees at the beginning of the new year 2014. It was an event that touched the lives of many residents. A resident of Loruk who had attended the auction annually from 1986-2002 and was present in the 2013 auction nostalgically remembered it: "we were very rich by then. Besides enjoying a good Christmas, we would easily provide for our family needs like school fees without stress and we would also save some money for future use and even buy more goats to rare for the next auction."

The KGA was not devoid of its own uniqueness. It was perhaps the only informal event that brought together top government officials and the private sector elite who together competed to outdo each other in making the highest bid. One intriguing concern about the livestock statistics at the KGA is too few cattle yet the East Pokot are known to rank high among the leading cattle owners in East Africa. One plausible explanation is that the East Pokot, given their ever-present interest in cattle, would and are more willing to sell goats since there is little cultural attachment to them unlike cattle. The originators of the auction must have been well aware of this fact from the beginning, hence tapped on the livestock that would be readily available annually.

On December 21, 2013 the Kimalel Culture and Goat Auction opened its doors once again this time with a new president. It rekindled the memories of the auction although things went on in a less characteristic style.

In less than one hour more than KShs 24 million (\$280,000) was realised from the sale of about 2,000 goats. The auction, like its predecessor, did not disappoint the livestock owners since the bidders were in plenty. It attracted the political, administrative and business elite including President Uhuru Kenyatta, Deputy President William Ruto and the retired former president Daniel Arap Moi. The climax of the auction was the presidents' bid for 200 goats at kShs 1.6million (\$18,500) and the Deputy President's bid was 150 goats for KShs 1.2 million (\$14,000). The price translated to an average of KShs 8,000 (USD 94) per goat head, a very good price by any standards and way above current market prices of about kshs 3500 (USD 40.1).

However, one noticeable absentee at the auction was the agile, talented and jovial auctioneer, Ezekiel Barngetuny, who had passed on three days to the date of the auction. For the 14-16 years the auction was on, he was the crucible for it all through his antics and manouevres that energized and gave humour to the auction.

In the context of East Pokot pastoralism, the auction provided and now provides an important avenue to profitably offload livestock. However the attempt at including cattle may not be successful due to their cultural value and attachment.

Although there are nascent calls to increase the auction's frequency it would not be reasonable to adopt it as it would fatigue its most important buyers who cause it to have good annual prices. Nevertheless, it still remains an important innovation for East Pokot pastoralism and so far does not touch their prized cattle.

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