
Socio-ecological implications of a green economy on pastoral landscapes in central Rift valley, Kenya

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Abstract

Environmental concerns have called for adoption of "green economy", for instance to reduce CO₂ emissions to curb global warming and subsequently climate change. One such 'green economy' component in Kenya is represented by geothermal industry. In as much as green industries have been widely marketed for environmental protection, their socio-cultural and economic implications on biodiversity and local inhabitants are often overlooked. The geothermal industry in Kenya, since early explorations in early 1970s and commissioning of the first plant in 1982, has contributed significantly not only to the county's GDP but also eased pressure on overreliance of hydropower. Currently, with the unveiling of Kenya Vision 2030 whose goal is to "transform Kenya into a newly industrialized middle income country, providing high quality of life to all its citizens in a clean and secure environment", plans have been drawn to expand this industry. The target is 1130 new wells by 2018 and 1260MW/day by 2030. The government and independent power producers are ensconced in promoting geothermal development as part of a green economy, expected to save 906008 tones of CO₂ /year and further reduce use of fossil fuels in electricity production. The value of biodiversity and inhabitant populations in these project areas has been forgotten. Inevitably, this population of pastoralists dependent upon livestock as the backbone of their livelihood are bound to contend with social, cultural, economic and ecological consequences of this green development. Shrinking pastoral lands and grazing areas, as a direct consequence of this "green economy" not only threatens livelihoods and food security of these Maasai pastoralists but also play on the meat supply at the national level. Pastoralists contribute more than 70% of meat demand in Kenya.

This poster will explore the social and ecological consequences of promotion, adoption and implementation of a 'green' economy - geothermal development in Kenya. Through this communication, we will understand how the local Maasai pastoralists have struggled to retain their ancestral lands, livelihoods and conserve biodiversity, and how the expansion of geothermal exploration is a potential concern for food security in Kenya.

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