

## COMPETENT, BUT IGNORED: BRINGING MAASAI YOUTH INTO LAND TENURE DECISION MAKING

In an effort to safeguard rangelands from encroachment by neighboring ethnic groups, national elites, and the state, Maasai from southern Kenya have been privatising collective holdings. This has led to widespread land sales, exclusion to critical grazing resources and a disrupting of pastoral production systems. While reports from different communities focus on outside acquisitions by land speculators, national elites, and even foreign entities, privatisation has also given rise to a much more intimate form of exclusion: young Maasai, who are officially excluded from tenure decision making, grapple with enclosure in the wake of this dramatic tenure change. Young people's perspective on and experience with tenure reform has been neglected in local, academic, and policy debates. Historical and cultural assumptions of the child as incompetent and that young people lack interest in rural matters has contributed to a view that their participation in land planning is unnecessary.



### Youth fear land loss and social conflict

A study by Caroline Archambault shows however, that many young Maasai in the community of Elangata Wuas are not only interested in rangeland tenure issues but appear to be heavily vested in maintaining rangeland-based livelihoods. A series of essays on privatisation from pupils in Standard 7 and 8 revealed that while many view privatisation quite favourably and see it as an important means to facilitate a new, modern form of pastoralism, like most adults, they fear land sales, dispossession, and conflict.

However, their fears take a different form to adults who primarily worry about outsiders buying up lands and excluding them from pasture and water access. Adults are fighting against inequalities and (mis)allocations of land in processes of sub-division. Youth, however, harbour insecurities in relation to securing a place to live and having a (land) base from which to raise and support families.



Education is considered an important investment for securing rights to land

Their concerns over land sales and loss centre on inheritance. They fear that their parents (fathers mainly) will sell off their inheritance and they fight with their siblings over their shares. Such intimate levels of exclusion and conflict between parents and children, siblings, and spouses go largely unrecognised in debates over rangeland privatisation.

### Social differences influence views

Youth perspectives, however, are not unitary. Ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and different family characteristics (family size, birth order, and parents' background) are all important dimensions shaping young people's experience with and ideas about privatisation. For example, youth from wealthy backgrounds express less concern about possible landlessness or land scarcity than those from more modest or poorer positions. Similarly, those with smaller families appear to be far less concerned with inheritance practices and potential sibling conflicts than those from big families with many older, and more educated brothers.

Young males tend to focus on aspects of privatisation that relate to the technicalities of herding and the technological innovations in animal husbandry. They are also very focused on issues of inheritance as the recipients of land under the

customary patrilineal system. Females focus more than their male counterparts on the possibilities of permanent houses and settlement, new opportunities for cultivation and the selling of produce, and the implications on their workloads, such as firewood collection.

### Youth in decision making processes

Young people, from a diversity of backgrounds, should be brought into debates and decision making bodies around rangeland and natural resource management. Not only are they competent, interested, and invested, but they bring to the table a whole series of issues that do not feature prominently in the experiences of adults and so are rarely integrated in planning. Bringing young perspectives to issues of land tenure transformation deepens our understanding of the role of tenure change in development and social transformation and provides necessary insights for a truly integrated and informed land tenure debate aimed at identifying more socially equitable outcomes.

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