

The Influence of Water Availability on Pastoralist's Resource Use in Mwingi and Kitui Districts in Kenya

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ABSTRACT Understanding where pastoral livestock grazing takes place and how water availability and distribution influences resource use, is critical in planning and management of arid and semi-arid lands. This study was carried out in Mwingi and Kitui districts in Eastern Kenya. Semi-structured questionnaires were used for data collection for five months. Watering points were established through cluster sampling by considering each administrative sub-location with the help of topographical maps. Three ethnic communities, namely, the Akamba, Oroma and Somali, utilize resources in the area. The distribution of dry season water in the area influence the distances livestock herds traveled from their homelands. There was a significant difference between number of wells and the number of households, with an overall mean number of five to eight households per well. The population of goats and camels was highest for the area, and that they walked longer and their watering frequency was low. However, diseases, predators and frequent droughts occasioned animal's losses, with goats having the highest death (6.0%) and birth (44.8%) rates. The dry season water availability may explain why livestock routes changed over the seasons and highlight the importance and ubiquity of common utilization of the range by these communities. Therefore, common rights of access prevail, although the control and organization of shallow wells is the responsibility of the Akamba 'well owner'. Water constraints and property right issues in the study area limit exploitation of the resources for livestock production. This paper highlights the need to integrate water development and improved livestock management in the arid and semi-arid areas to reduce poverty.