

PASTORALIST / RANCHER CONFLICT IN KENYA

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Abstract:

In March this year, the Laikipia area of Kenya made the international news when during the severe drought which hit the Country, the mainly Samburu pastoralists invaded the large ranches to the South by cutting fences and bringing on large herds of cattle, sheep and goats accompanied by well armed herdsmen. In a process of intimidation some houses and a tourist lodge were burned, a few ranch employees killed or injured and even senior police shot and injured when they attempted to restore order. . Their weapons were no match for those of the invaders. Large game animals were slaughtered on the pretext that they are consuming forage which should be for domestic stock. How has this serious situation developed? Firstly drought cycles are a regular occurrence in the northern arid and semi arid areas of Kenya. However as populations of humans and animals increase and apparent climate change takes effect the droughts become ever more serious. Secondly 2017 is the year for national elections in Kenya which will take place in August and it already appears apparent that there is a political undertone to the current unrest. The long rains should have arrived within a matter of weeks so how the situation unfolds may depend on their reliability.

By the time of the IFMA conference in July the picture may be clearer.

In 2016 an excellent conference was organised by ECHO in Nanyuki with the theme of pastoralism. Unfortunately it was poorly advertised and attracted less than 100 participants as compared to the meeting held in Arusha this year on Conservation Agriculture which had over 260 attendees. At this point the extent of the drought throughout East and the Horn of Africa should be emphasised. The writer whilst in Tanzania made an excursion into Masai country just 2 hours drive from Arusha and was appalled by the denuded landscape due to overgrazing and the cutting of trees for firewood.

ECHO are due to hold their biennial pastoralist conference on pastoralism in early 2018 and it is the writer's hope that it can again be held at the same venue as last year. It is certain that with better promotion it can attract several hundred 'players' to make it financially viable. This of course assumes there will not be a complete breakdown of security in the area. If ranchers and pastoralists can be brought together for dialogue rather than conflict, this must surely be the way forward. This is the objective of the 'Laikipia Wildlife Forum', the 'Northern Wildlife Trust' and other bodies which made such excellent presentations at last year's meeting. They deserve to be heard by a wider audience.

Keywords: *pastoralist; ranchers; conflict; resolution; drought*