

News

Climatic changes and land tenure

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Last year, I took a course lectured by Per Knutson and, in the context of this, got to know about the Drylands Transform Project. The project with its different objectives and interdisciplinary approach caught my attention and interest and I started to assist on the research on land tenure reforms and governance. Through my work as research intern, I deepened my knowledge on the dryland context in East Africa.

My name is Theresa, and since mid 2020 I am a MSc student at the School of Global Studies at Gothenburg University. My study focus is on development studies with special regard to causes and consequences of climatic changes.

Deepened knowledge with field experience

Since the beginning of 2022, I am involved in the project with my thesis research. I am conducting a study of the impacts of changing land tenure systems on the climate resilience of pastoralist communities in West Pokot. In this, I am developing a climate resilience framework that is sensible to the pastoralists' and agro-pastoralists' context and determine the impacts of the currently occurring changes in land tenure.

During February and March, I conducted my field work in West Pokot. Working in this environment that was previously foreign to me made me much more aware and respectful to the lived realities of indigenous communities and how they are affected by external change factors, such as climate change and governance. I experienced my stay in West Pokot as very enriching thanks to the welcoming atmosphere that my interviewees and research assistants created. Their openness and helpfulness with which they engaged in my questions enabled me to gain many insights.



View of the West Pokot area in February 2022. Photo: Theresa Sänger

Rapid transition towards private land ownership

In my work I realized that the local communities decided to transform towards a system of private land tenure, mainly to secure the evolving benefits resolving from privately owned land. Land turned into a financial security that helps to cope with increasingly monetized society structures that also come into play when mitigating environmental impacts. Simultaneously, land privatization is speeding up the transformation process of traditional livelihood systems which used to be well adapted to climate variabilities.

Thus, new dependency structures are evolving that seem to enjoy little attention so far. Access to land might slowly turn into a privilege. Especially under the aspect of a growing population and continued land subdivision, it becomes increasingly important to be part of the wage economy to sustain basic needs. The privatization of land appears to manifest the trend towards the monetization of local key resources such as grazing land and trees. Such action taking might be cause but could also be a consequence of limited regional climate resilience. Hopefully the causes to this will be clearer with continued analysis of my data.

Mutual learning opportunities within Drylands Transform

For me, it was a challenge to adopt to the contrasting everyday life in West Pokot in the beginning. However, the people that I encountered made my stay very pleasant and memorable and I am enjoying and looking forward to mutual learning within the interdisciplinary team in Drylands Transform, including the supervision of Per Knutson at Gothenburg University.

Facts:



Drylands Transform

Drylands Transform is a 4-year research project funded by Formas that started up during the Covid-19 pandemic in October 2020. It includes an interdisciplinary research team representing SLU and seven other universities and international organisations from Sweden, Kenya and Uganda.

[Visit the website for Drylands Transform.](#)

Project supervisors for Theresa

[James Drew](#), Postdoctor
School of global studies, Gothenburg University
james.drew@gu.se

[Per Knutsson](#), Senior Lecturer
School of global studies, Gothenburg University
per.knutsson@globalstudies.gu.se, +46 31 786 42 14