

# **The Socio-economic and Ecological Impacts of Small-scale Irrigation Schemes on Pastoralists and Dry lands in Northern Kenya**

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## **Abstract**

Northern Kenya, as in other sub-Saharan arid and semi-arid regions, has faced challenges related to the prevailing socio-economy, ecology and polity in the last quarter of last century. In some of these areas, pastoralists have been settled on the peri-urban fringes of towns and have been exposed to flood-retreat cultivation; a culture that has been traditionally practised by the riverine Bantu communities. From the late 1960s these pastoralists started irrigation agriculture with assistance from the government and nongovernmental organisations. The outcome has been the mushrooming of irrigation schemes along rivers. This paper looks at the development of small-scale irrigation schemes and their sustainability. It also analyses their socio-economic and ecological effects on pastoral households and the drylands, taking Garissa District as a case. Interviews, a questionnaire and existing literature on irrigation schemes were used to collect data. Logistic regressions were carried out to assess the socio-economic effects of irrigation on the pastoral households. The results show that irrigation farming plays a supplementary role in pastoral economies, takes away child labour from pastoralism and reduces pastoral mobility. The implication is that irrigation farming in arid areas does not seem to offer a long-term sustainable economic livelihood.