

Livelihood Dynamics in Tropical Drylands: Mixed Farming, Water Management and Market Integration in Laikipia, Kenya

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Livelihood Dynamics in Tropical Drylands: Mixed Farming, Water Management and Market Integration in Laikipia, Kenya

By Anne Ulrich. Heidelberg, Germany: Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2015. vi + 154 pp. € 19.90. Available from <http://www.geog.uni-heidelberg.de/institut/hga.html>. ISBN 978-3-88570-135-4.

The author of *Livelihood Dynamics in Tropical Drylands*, Anne Ulrich, is a member of the Heidelberg Center for the Environment. Although she offers readers a solid analysis of livelihood dynamics in Kenya, her insights are applicable to a broad spectrum of developing societies. Ulrich emphasizes the activities and interactions of smallholder farmers, who are constantly responding to challenges and opportunities to adapt and adopt. At the same time, she identifies the need to inject a more thorough political analysis into the center of the livelihood perspective. Her study provides a longitudinal perspective on smallholder households to enhance understanding of livelihood strategies in drylands and identify intervention options for poverty reduction and sustainable regional development. The book is an excellent resource for students, educators, and socioeconomists.

The book's organization into 7 chapters enables readers to easily follow the evolution of livelihood dynamics. The book opens with the challenges presented by the dynamic socioecological conditions and low adaptive capacity of livelihood security and wellbeing in rural areas of Africa. It then progresses through theoretical approaches (sustainable livelihoods, natural resource potentials, and socioeconomic

transitions in Laikipia) and methodological approaches (repeat surveys and participatory approach, development of an asset-based index to measure of relative wellbeing and livelihood dynamics between 1992 and 2013 in Laikipia). The book concludes with a discussion of constraints on rural development and implications for development interventions.

The majority of small-scale farmers rely on rainfed subsistence agriculture. The author stresses the need to reevaluate the understanding of rural livelihoods so as to make better informed decisions for poverty reduction, and the importance of focusing on smallholder farmers as opposed to large-scale agricultural enterprises, as this represents both a pro-poor and more equitable approach to development and serves to improve national economies.

Ulrich highlights that, under globalization, the agricultural food sector does not benefit the poor, particularly because of the increasingly stringent product and process standards that act as new nontariff barriers and the unfair exploitation of farmers by multinational food companies. She states that research on longer-term solutions that sustainably foster livelihoods and increase people's resilience has failed to address internal dynamics and long-term changes in livelihood conditions. She also critiques the livelihoods approach, including the absence of theory and understanding of values, inadequacy in addressing politics and the poor, subjectivity, the lack of consideration of long-term changes and dynamics, and analysis focusing on material instead of social and cognitive value. Further critiques are leveled at the framework for not considering the relationship between subjects and society and the lack of engagement of the sustainable livelihoods approach. Thus, she emphasizes the need to integrate other theories into the sustainable livelihoods approach and to better

understand structural determinants and power relations.

The strengths of these chapters relate to the paradigm shifts in the concept of "livelihood analysis" through the general development of the sustainable livelihoods approach and its adaptation by multilateral organizations and research institutions. Ulrich also discusses the use of theories and models to explain livelihood thinking and better understand social, economic, and cultural backwardness. However, she does not greatly emphasize the issue of structural constraints and opportunities as influenced by external policies and institutions; as noted above, there is a need to inject a more thorough political analysis into the center of the livelihoods perspective that should not be underestimated.

The construction of the book lends itself well to the study of different periods. Each chapter is broken down into sections, which generally fit logically into the topic of the chapter and maintain a sense of continuity throughout the book. Figures and diagrams provide evidence to support the theories or information about livelihood dynamics. Each chapter is completed by a thorough set of references and a timeline augmented by reference to specific events. There is skillful use of first-person sources, and photographs and qualitative data from the participants are included. These firsthand accounts provide deeper insights.

Ulrich highlights lessons from this study that may be used to improve poverty reduction measures, by exploring asset bases, livelihood options, and future trends. These are corroborated by other studies on rural Africa. She further stresses the need to promote capacity building to support smallholder farming and sustainable land use management practices where resources are scarce. However, there are also other challenges: a decline in livestock

numbers resulting from reduced access to pastures for grazing, in addition to more usual reasons such as drought, diseases, and cattle rustling, and the lack of, and limited access to, markets that affect smallholder agriculture. Despite renewed interest in rural development and a greater policy focus on an agriculture-powered poverty reduction strategy in Kenya, responses from the farmers highlighted several structural limitations. On the issue of challenges facing participatory water management, Ulrich states that integrated water management is one way to promote sustainable

water use, with the establishment of water resource user associations to alleviate water shortages and conflicts between different users. She concludes by stating that capacity building and collective action are essential to support and strengthen smallholders' livelihood security.

Ulrich's enthusiasm for the topic is obvious throughout the book. Her use of longitudinal studies, as well as theoretical and methodological approaches leads to discussion of constraints on rural development and implications for development interventions. This book remains relevant despite the fact that the

research concluded some years ago and new developmental changes or interventions may have occurred since.

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