ABSTRACTS FOR ST. PAUL'S UNIVESITY RESEARCH CONFERENCE ON 23rd & 24th NOVEMBER 2017

THEME: Strengthening Research and Innovations for Climate Adaptation and Sustainable Development

Degradation of Grassland Ecosystems, Climate Change and Impacts on Pastoral Communities in Kenya

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Abstract

Grasslands are some of the most diverse ecosystems distributed all over the world. They provide diverse resources to billions of people. Grasslands however threatened by a range of anthropogenic activities that include overgrazing, conversion to farmlands, urbanization, climate change and alien invasive species. In this paper we explore, i) the trends of degradation of grasslands in Kenya, ii) how grassland degradation drives climate change versus how climate change exacerbates degradation of grasslands, and iii) how degradation of grasslands exacerbates the vulnerability of pastoral communities to extreme climate events such as droughts. Our study is based on review of literature complemented by secondary data from Kenya's leading media papers, the Daily Nation and Standard. Preliminary results reveal that the pastoral community is undergoing serious challenges due to climate change. Some of the challenges include loss of animals due to drought, loss of land or even change from pastoralism to other forms of livelihoods like farming, business among others. This also means that proliferation of cash economy has pushed pastoralists to selling land than ever before. As a way of coping, the pastoralists have undertaken alternative livelihoods such as crop production, entrepreneurship, while some women have turned to prostitution. In addition, some pastoralists have employed strategies such as introduction of diary animals, reduction of herds, and reduction of household food consumption while others have migrated to towns. Proposed future research needs includes information literacy on pastoral communities on the impact of climate change on pastoral livelihoods and the place of policy on pastoral livelihood protection.

Key words: Grasslands, **e**cosystem services, pastoral communities, livelihoods, degradation