

Land use planning in the arid and semi-arid areas- a Case study of Nguu settlement scheme in Makueni District

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Abstract:

Land constitutes the most important economic, cultural and political issues in Kenya today. Approximately 80% of Kenya's population lives in the rural areas having agriculture, which relies directly on land for their livelihood. For many years Kenyans living in the rural areas have experienced problems of unplanned settlements, low agricultural productivity, inadequate infrastructure and community services and increased environmental degradation. Land subdivision and resettlement in arid and semi-arid areas have been undertaken without due consideration to the economic units of land that can support family units, provision of infrastructure and facilities in the schemes and the possible negative environmental consequences. This study considers the process of land subdivision and resettlement in Nguu Settlement scheme in Makueni district, a former ranching farm which was subdivided into small plots. The area is considered a low potential area with low rainfall, high temperatures which lead to low crop yields and occasionally crop failure. The study identified small farm units of 1 to 4.5 hectares as opposed to the recommended 50 hectares as a constraint to increased productivity. Most of the settlers come from high potential areas where, due to rising population the land has become inadequate for household livelihood. The settlers who have come into Nguu settlement scheme have brought with them technologies which are not suited to the low potential areas. Inappropriate technologies combined with poor climatic conditions make the living standards of settlers low. Infrastructure and facility provision in new settlement schemes is inadequate as communities take time before they can organize themselves to provide the services that they need. Facilities that existed in the ranch before the settlers moved in were vandalized before the community could take control over such facilities. The natural environment of the semi arid area is as fragile one and the high densities of land use have caused high rates of environmental degradation. New policy guidelines have to be put in place to reduce environmental degradation and high levels of poverty. Appropriate technologies for the ASALs are needed and aggressive environmental conservation measures adopted by the settlers. It is recommended that new technologies suitable to the ASALs be adopted