

# Beneath the Surface of Rangeland Governance: Examining Values, Norms, and Practices in Northern Kenya's Pastoralist Communities

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# Introduction

- In Northern Kenya, pastoral communities regulate resource use through adaptive governance systems
- Systems that are socially embedded in nature increasing the chances that they are respected
- Provides sufficient flexibility to consider what is morally standing over the shared codes of conduct
- Systems led by community elders, who influence how rangelands are accessed, used, and managed
- Limited understanding of customary systems, their moral bases, the processes and how they work



Cattle heading back home from grazing

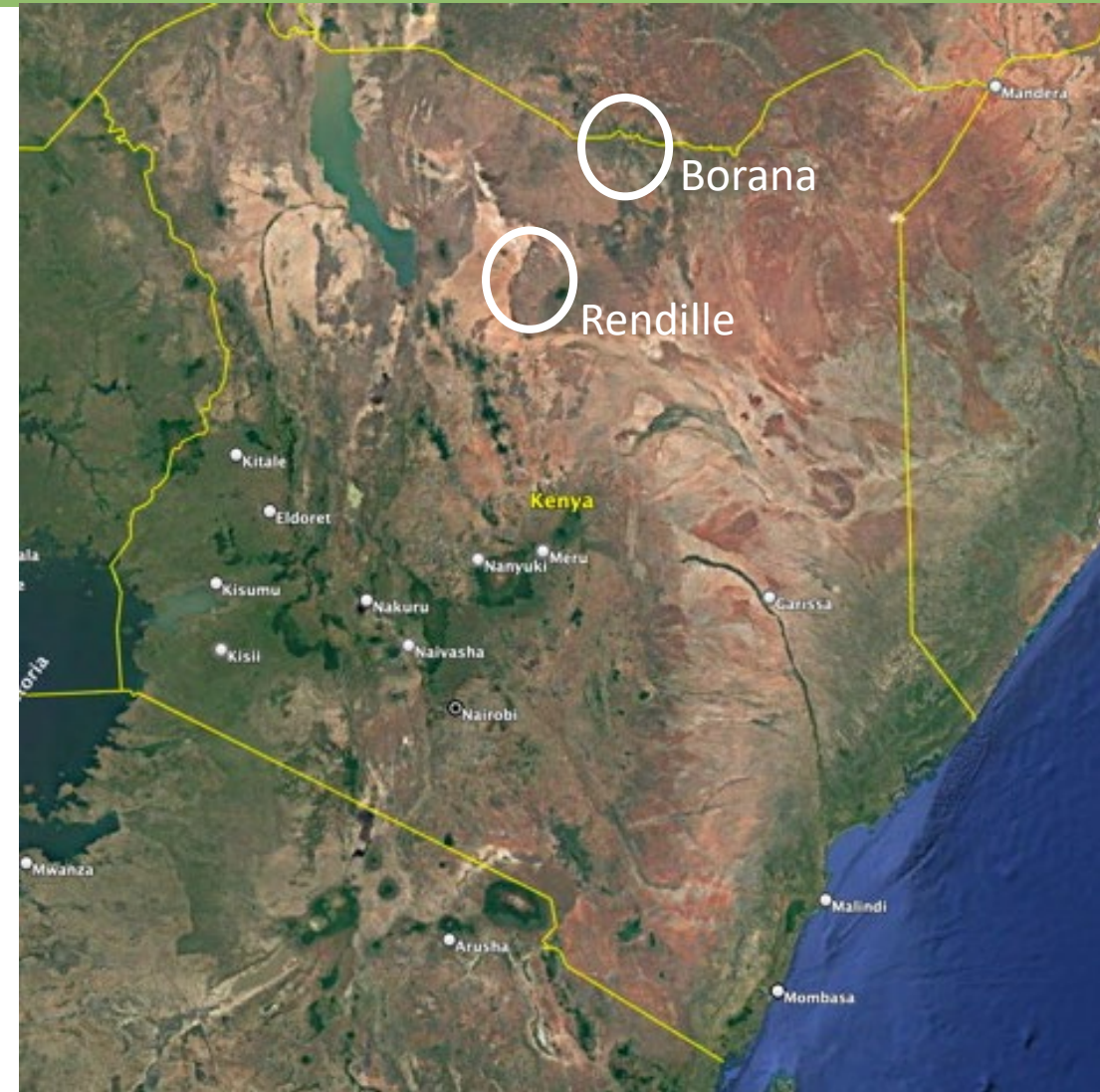
# Aims and Study area

## Aim:

To explore the **values, norms, and practices** underlying resource governance among the **Borana** and **Rendille** pastoral communities

## Study sites:

1. Sololo area, Marsabit county – Borana
2. Lower Laisamis, Marsabit County – Rendille



# Methods



AKA session with participants in Ngurunit (Rendille)

Data was coded using MAXQDA software:

Three themes emerged

- i) Customary Values,
- ii) Customary Norms &
- iii) Customary Practices

Table 1: Summary of evaluated interviews (March 2024- April 2025)

Method	Study Site	
	Rendille site	Borana sites
Narrative Interviews (NI)	7	7
Activity Knowledge analysis (AKA)	4	4
Focus Group Discussions (FGD)	4	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>



NI with Elder in Walda (Borana)



FDG with elders in Kargi (Rendille)

# Example of customary governance

Let me share how one real-life dispute during a drought revealed the strength of customary governance — not in policy documents, but through elders, oral agreements, and trust.

**Context:** Prolonged dry season in Ethiopia, Herders drive livestock into the grazing area of Borana Kenya

‘They come to us because they have a problem; we cant turn them away’

This is where values and practices meet: under a tree, orally, not written on paper

‘Will show them this, let them graze where we graze, and drink how we drink’

‘They should avoid areas where our home animals graze and we have preserved’

The outcome was a compromise which allowed access to neighbour herders while still preserving areas restricted for home-based animals

# Community Values in Customary Governance

- **Equity** – Moral obligation to equitable sharing; grazing areas opened during times of need
- **Reciprocity** – Mutual obligation to shared resources for the benefit of all
- **Collective responsibility and resource preservation** – Joint management and conservation
- **Respect for elders' authority** – Recognition of elders' leadership based on their wisdom
- **Peaceful coexistence** – Conflicts over resources are avoided, and socially unacceptable
- **Spiritual values** – Resources are gifts from God; nurturing a strong ethic of sharing



Herders' interaction with an elder near the water pan in Kargi (Rendille)

# Community Norms Guiding Resource Use & Interactions

Unwritten rules based on values regulating behaviours, interactions, and access to resources

- **Restrictions** – areas restricted for home-based animals, areas reserved for dry-season off limits
- **Access rules** – water rules, i.e, use of troughs, following watering order; pasture rules, i.e., use open areas
- **Access rights** – Ownership rights, clan-based entitlements
- **Sharing rules** – Negotiations and following protocols
- **Conflict resolution norms** – Elders' mediation
- **Enforcements** – Verbal warnings, force migrations
- **Sanctions** – Confiscation of animals, fines, exclusion from resource use (water), curses



Young camels on home-based grazing area



Water pan in Kargi



Herds from Mount Kulal and South Horr grazing in Kargi (Rendille)

# Governance Practices: Putting Norms and Values into Practice

- **Holding meetings** – Rendille elders' meetings held in the '*Naabo*', Community meetings, Intercommunity meetings
- **Closing and opening of grazing areas for dry season use** – Customary rituals, i.e., pouring milk and blessing the land for use
- **Selection of monitoring teams** – Choose people to take up monitoring roles to see how resources are used
- **Monitoring and compliance** – Regular patrolling and checking for compliance with agreed-upon rules
- **Developing water schedules** – Allocating days and times to water access for users
- **Communication and information sharing** – Regular communication and sharing of information between users



Community meeting in Lontolia village (Rendille)

# Water Pan Governance among the Boranas: Values into actions



Mado adhi community water pan



'Meeri' used by animals to drink water from the pan



Water manager 'Aba heerega' at Mado adhi water pan

## Guiding values

- **Equity:** Fair and equal sharing of water
- **Responsibility:** Taking responsibility for maintaining quality of water source
- **Respect for Authority:** Respecting elders' authority in water management

## Rules everyone follows

- All users must follow the established water schedule
- Animals drink from within the '*meeri*' (thorny fences)
- All users must clean up after animals
- New users are given access by the water manager/ elders

## Practices

- Herder's request for opening
- The elders hold a community meeting
- The water manager selected
- Herders build "*meeri*" (thorny fences)
- Elders may redirect animals

# Conclusions

- Pastoralists have **deeply held principles** that serve as a **moral foundation for resource governance**, shaping decision making and guiding management of shared resources
- Rules arise from values and guide behaviour within the community; **Unwritten but widely understood and enforced**, shaping how resources are accessed, used, and managed
- Pastoral communities **carry out actions and behave based on the values and norms**; therefore, operationalizing governance in daily pastoral activities
- Introducing **new rules and structures for common-pool resources conflicts** with embedded governance processes



A Rendille herder fetching water from a water pan in Kargi



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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