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Leiden**  
The Netherlands

## **Do geopolitical and historical contexts in explaining conflicts over natural resources really matter? An example from Africa**

Rutten, M.M.E.M.; Mwangi, A.

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## Do geopolitical and historical contexts in explaining conflicts over natural resources really matter? An example from Africa

### *Disentangling conflicts over natural resources*

Understanding conflicts over natural resources requires a thorough analysis of biophysical and societal subsystems, a clear definition of the natural resources involved, the various ecosystem services available, the values attached by stakeholders, the management system in place at different geographical levels and the key power relationships at stake in the arena of resource allocation. An historical analysis will add to the understanding of the causes and effects of conflicts over natural resources. This infosheet provides an example of an apparently simple conflict over natural resources that, however, can only be fully understood if the local set-up of geographical and historical perspectives is studied.

### *Politics and conflicts over natural resources*

Battles for political power and economic wealth often impact on claims to natural resources. An understanding of these power dimensions is, therefore, essential in disentangling and recognizing the motives of the stakeholders involved in such a conflict. What at first glance may appear to be a conflict over natural resources may in fact have far deeper roots.

The complexities of time and space are illustrated here by considering a conflict between local Maasai pastoralists and their Kamba neigh-

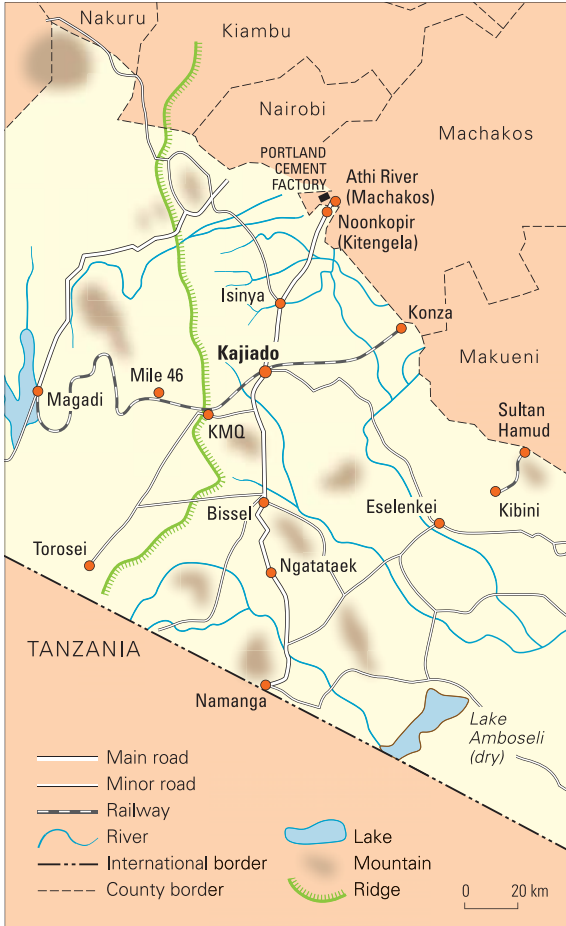
bours over extractive minerals (marble and gypsum in this case).

### *Setting the scene*

On 23 January 2012, a group of young Maasai stopped a lorry carrying marble in the small town of Isinya in Kajiado County. The driver from the Kenya Marble Quarries Company, a subsidiary of the East Africa Portland Cement Company (EAPCC) whose main factory is located 30 km to the north on the road to Nairobi, was told to unload his freight. He was informed that the marble from the Mile 46 Quarry belonged to the Maasai and was not to be taken out of the county. He had no option but to deposit it at the side of the road. Other drivers have experienced similar problems and another Portland quarry (Kibini) in Kajiado saw its feeder road blocked so that no limestone could be transported to the Athi River cement factory.



Marble being offloaded by the local community  
[Photo: M. Rutten]



Location of the Portland Cement Factory near Athi River Town and quarries in Kajiado County

**Minerals in Kajiado County**

There are over 18 different types of minerals in Kajiado County, some of which are of considerable economic importance, particularly gypsum, limestone, salt and soda ash. Gypsum, which is often used in cement, paint and fertilizers, is mined at Isinya and limestone is found at Kibini, Toroka and Ngatataek. The Kibini and Ngatataek limestone is exploited for the manufacture of Portland cement while the Toroka limestone is used for ornamental stones and lime products. There are large deposits of soda ash in Lake Magadi and small amounts of quartzites, graphite, mica and other metals elsewhere.

Is this a conflict over natural resources or is something else at stake?

**The political and institutional context**

The EAPCC has been in operation since 1933. It recently became a private company, although the Kenyan Government still holds a 27% stake. The Managing Director and the Chairman of the Board of Directors are from the Maasai community and affiliated to President Kibaki’s PNU party. Their position was openly challenged in 2011 by two Kamba ministers from neighbouring Kitui and Kathiani who are associated with other parties. Their action was said to have been triggered by the upcoming implementation of a new administrative set-up as laid down in the new Constitution (2010). Power was to be devolved to newly formed counties that would derive benefits from revenues raised in these regions. The Minister for Water is said to have sought a bigger influence over the EAPCC management claiming the plant was within Kamba County boundaries. But the Kamba do not control the company’s board and Kamba accusations of the misuse of funds resulted in the Maasai management being sacked.



The EAPCC plant near Athi River Town on the Nairobi-Namanga road [Photo courtesy of Google]



A car set on fire by protesting EAPCC workers  
[Photo courtesy of *The Star*]

Tensions between employees on the work floor then began to increase. Cars belonging to the Maasai were damaged and Maasai managers were prevented from entering the premises.

The Maasai demanded that (i) the Maasai officials should be reinstated, (ii) the damage to cars was to be paid for, and (iii) the original boundary separating the two counties should be restored.

### **Historical context**

This final condition was surprising but was the result of the Maasai delving into archival records. The then Kamba spokesmen, Paul Ngei, had approached President Jomo Kenyatta and requested a boundary shift so that the EAPCC factory would fall within Kamba territory. The Maasai, Ngei argued, had a wealth in wildlife (Amboseli and Maasai Mara) and minerals (Magadi Soda, Kenya Marble and Kibini limestone) among others, unlike the Kamba. Apparently Kenyatta agreed, but at a price. The Kamba would have to hand over Oldonyo Sabuk to Central Province where the President lived. The Maasai stated that the boundary between them and

Kamba near Athi had been secretly tampered with in 1965 without their knowledge.



Boundary separating the counties of Kajiado (left) and Machakos (right) [Photo courtesy of Google]

### **The conflict**

The Maasai youngsters that stopped the lorry insisted that if their demands of recalling the sacking of the Maasai managers were not met, the Kamba would have to look for raw materials elsewhere.

On 9 January 2012, the court ordered that the two Maasai officials be reinstated. Vice President Musyoka and Minister for Internal Security Saitoti wanted the leaders from Kajiado and Ukambani to hold peace talks in Athi River Town to iron out the problems that, according to a local newspaper, had taken on a political dimension (*The Star*, 19/01/12). On 10 February, President Kibaki fired one of the officials once more, appointing another Maasai person instead. Five days later the High Court annulled these steps as the government was no longer a majority shareholder. The Maasai officials kept their positions while others, who were allegedly involved in instigating the turmoil, were sacked in mid-2012. In

late October the company announced a record loss of EUR 8 million, which resulted in a 40% drop in EAPCC's stock-market value.

### *EAPCC social responsibility*

The EAPCC has supported the local community with school bursaries, afforestation, water and health programmes in Kajiado and elsewhere. The company has also assisted the tree-planting campaign spearheaded by the late Prof. Wangari Maathai. The signing of a Carbon Credit Trading Agreement helped the EAPCC reduce its carbon-dioxide emissions by over 105,000 tons per year. This reduction has in turn seen the company realize more than Ksh 80,000,000 annually from carbon sales. It should also be noted that the *jatropha curcas* trees grown on company land will be harvested and used for biodiesel. [Source: EAPCC]

### **Solutions**

Guidelines to promote the prudent use of natural resources have been laid down in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, but Kenya is not a signatory to these initiatives (see: <http://eiti.org/eiti/principles>).

The EAPCC case highlights the need to study sub-national levels. EITI Principle 12 – *all stakeholders have important and relevant contributions to make – including governments and their agencies, extractive industry companies, service companies, multi-lateral organisations, financial organisations, investors, and non-governmental organisations* – should include local communities and industry workers alike. A geopolitical perspective is needed to explain the diverging interests of those hosting the quarries and those producing the end-products. Likewise, the Natural Resource Charter ([www.naturalresourcecharter.org](http://www.naturalresourcecharter.org)) has five guidelines concerning the exploitation of natural resources concentrating on national and (non-local) inves-

tor interests. It stresses the need to secure benefits to the people but fails to detail guidelines how to differentiate between communities at sub-national level.

### **Conclusion**

Local Maasai stopping and offloading a marble lorry appeared to be a straightforward conflict over natural resources between a local community and a mining company. This action was, however, a response to an upheaval that resulted from a combination of organized and spontaneous actions. The Maasai blockage of raw material deliveries and the Kamba workers' complaints about corruption and favouritism had political undertones because of the impending introduction of a new national administrative structure. Earlier non-transparent deals concerning boundaries of provinces and districts dating back several decades contributed to the dispute. The EAPCC conflict illustrates how politics and natural resources can become intertwined and calls for an examination of the historical and geopolitical dimensions that go beyond a simple explanation along the lines of ethnicity and/or imbalances of power.

### **Publication**

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### **Contact information**

On the project: visit the Cocoon-Initiative Kenya website: [http://www.iucn.org/wisp/our\\_projects\\_in\\_wisp/cocoon\\_initiative\\_kenya/](http://www.iucn.org/wisp/our_projects_in_wisp/cocoon_initiative_kenya/)

On the Infosheet:

Dr Marcel Rutten, African Studies Centre  
P.O. Box 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, Netherlands

[RUTTEN@ascleiden.nl](mailto:RUTTEN@ascleiden.nl)

Dr Moses Mwangi, SEKU, Kenya  
[mnmwangi2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mnmwangi2000@yahoo.co.uk)