

## ABSTRACT

Wildlife conservation plays a vital role in the preservation of biodiversity, maintaining ecological balance as well as enhancing sustainable natural resource use. Kenya is well endowed with a diverse and unique wildlife portfolio making their protection paramount. Land use contestation in wildlife conservation areas arises from a myriad and complex mix of factors. Using Imbirikani Group Ranch (MGR), 117 in Kajiado County in Kenya as a case study, the researcher investigated the land use contestations within the area. The researcher outlines that, the rapid growth of the human population has led to the exertion of pressure on the finite land resource. With this phenomenon ongoing, human beings have ended up encroaching into wildlife conservation areas as they seek to satisfy their inherent need for land. Some of the drivers are the use of land as a capital asset, agricultural expansion, grazing and pastoralism, security of tenure, resource extraction as well as infrastructure and development. Land use planning initiatives aimed at the conservation of these ecologically sensitive areas face huge challenges that have to be addressed to meet an agreeable level of sustainability in the existence of human beings and wildlife. Scenarios ensuing include uncontrolled and unplanned urban sprawl, unsustainable infrastructure development, inefficient zoning, weak enforcement, limited stakeholder participation, limitations in land tenure systems as well as inadequate capacity building on conservation awareness. The manifestation of these land use planning inefficiencies thus trickles down and results in human-wildlife conflict, disruption of ecosystems, environmental degradation, social unrest between conservation authorities and local communities, negative impacts on livelihoods leading to poverty, compromised agricultural productivity and other implications of climate change. Therefore, building from the findings of the research, this study seeks to assess land use contestation in order to inform land use planning. The outputs of the study recommends that by combining traditional knowledge, community involvement, and scientific expertise, sustainable land use practices can be achieved, benefiting both wildlife conservation and human well-being. Strengthening governance and enforcement mechanisms is vital in order to combat illegal activities and effectively implement conservation policies. Through successful urban planning efforts and collaborative initiatives, Kenya can work towards effective wildlife conservation, preserving its diverse ecosystems for future generations and contributing to local, regional, and global conservation objectives.