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## “I’ll Be Home for Christmas”: The Role of International Maasai Migrants in Rural Sustainable Community Development

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**Abstract:** While the Maasai have to be among sub-Saharan Africa’s most mobile population due to their traditional transhumant pastoral livelihood strategy, compared with other neighboring ethnic groups they have been relatively late to migrate in substantial numbers for wage labour opportunities. In the community of Elangata Wuas in Southern Kenya, international migration for employment abroad has been very rare but promises to increase in significant numbers with the dramatic rise in education participation and diversification of livelihoods. Drawing on long-term ethnographic research and the specific experiences of the few international migrant pioneers in Elangata Wuas, this paper explores how community members assess the impacts of international migration on community sustainable development. It appears that international migration facilitates, and even exacerbates, inequality, which is locally celebrated, under an ethic of inter-dependence, as sustainable development. Particular attention is paid to the mechanisms of social control employed by community members to socially maintain their migrants as part of the community so that these migrants feel continued pressure and commitment to invest and develop their communities. Such mechanisms are importantly derived from the adaptability and accommodation of culture and the re-invention of tradition.

**Keywords:** international migration; community sustainable development; globalization; inequality; cultural adaptability; Maasai; Kenya

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## **1. Introduction**

Efforts to ascertain the impacts of migration on the sustainability of communities of origin enter a double challenge. Both the consequences of migration and the definitions of sustainable development are highly contested and have been the topic of much heated academic debate over decades. This paper does not set out to empirically evaluate the impacts of migration on sustainable development. It avoids this, not because of the daunting task of discerning a set of measureable criteria for assessment, but rather because this particular study would have severe sample size limitations as it draws from the case studies of the only six international migrants in the Maasai community of Elangata Wuas in Southern Kenya. Instead, this paper explores how local community members of Elangata Wuas themselves assess the impacts of international migration on community sustainable development.

Ironically, while the Maasai have to be among sub-Saharan Africa's most mobile population through their traditional pastoral livelihood strategy of traveling great distances in search of grazing and water, compared with other neighboring ethnic groups, Maasai were late to migrate in substantial numbers for wage labor [1]. There was comparatively less historical outmigration for the purpose of diversifying. Maasai have maintained a strong ethnic identity associated with pastoralism as a livelihood and central marker of identity. Leaving the community and leaving pastoralism was seen among the Maasai as a final act of desperation and destitution and resulted in a complete abandonment, often taking on a new ethnic identity [2]. In most recent decades this has changed dramatically as pressures have forced Maasai to diversify beyond pastoralism [3–5]. Population pressure, climatic instability, land tenure reforms, and continued state neglect of the pastoral sector have contributed to the concern that pastoralism is no longer an exclusively viable livelihood strategy for future generations. Subsequently, there have been increases in education enrolment and in outmigration for job opportunities elsewhere. International migration, however, is still a very rare phenomenon, with only six identified international migrants from a community that numbers approximately 15,000 [6].

Unlike the past where migrants were ex-communicated, today's migrants, especially those international migrants, are celebrated. In a community that both feels increasingly marginalized from economic and political life in Kenya and where a strong ethic of reciprocity and inter-dependence persists, these international migrants play an important role as persons of resource and as powerful nodes that connect the Elangata Wuas community globally and offer the potential for sustainable community development.

Drawing from the cases of the few pioneers of international migration, with a particular focus on the one and only long-term international migrant, and through interviews with community members about these migrants and this phenomenon more generally, this paper analyzes community perceptions of the connection between migration and community sustainable development. It highlights the heterogeneous impacts of migration but provides local interpretations of these impacts. The paper explores an often-neglected dimension of the relationship between outmigration and local development and that is the ability and strategies employed by members of the communities of origin to socially maintain their migrants so that migrants feel continued pressure and commitment to invest and develop their home regions. This paper highlights a number of these mechanisms of social control that are importantly derived from the adaptability and accommodation of culture and the re-invention of tradition. This paper also provides unique insights into local perspectives as to what constitutes

development. Interestingly, phenomena usually strongly associated with negative processes of underdevelopment stemming from migration (*i.e.*, inequalities, conspicuous consumption, *etc.*) are often locally perceived, in this context, as important markers of progress and opportunity. International migration facilitates and even exacerbates inequality, which is celebrated, under an ethic of inter-dependence, as sustainable development.

## 2. The Impacts of Migration on Sustainable Development

Much has been written on both the meanings of sustainable development and the impacts of international migration on communities of origin. Meanings of sustainable development have varied through time and across disciplinary approaches. Historically, it is well recognized that the original focus around sustainable development (as popularly introduced by the Brundtland Commission Report) was on environmental factors, global stewardship and responsible management of resources. Since then, however, the concept has grown and today it is quite common to view sustainable development with regard to three main dimensions: environment, economy, and society. In this light, sustainable development promotes the environmental, economic, and social capabilities of present people without compromising those capabilities for future generations [7]. With this broad definition in mind, how can international migration be seen as potentially impacting community sustainable development? Considerations need to be paid not only to the role of migration in economic development in communities of origin but also with regard to processes of social and environmental change. For example, does migration contribute to the production of healthy and livable home communities with an improved quality of life or does it create disruptions and changes that lead to burdensome inequalities, social tension, and increased poverty?

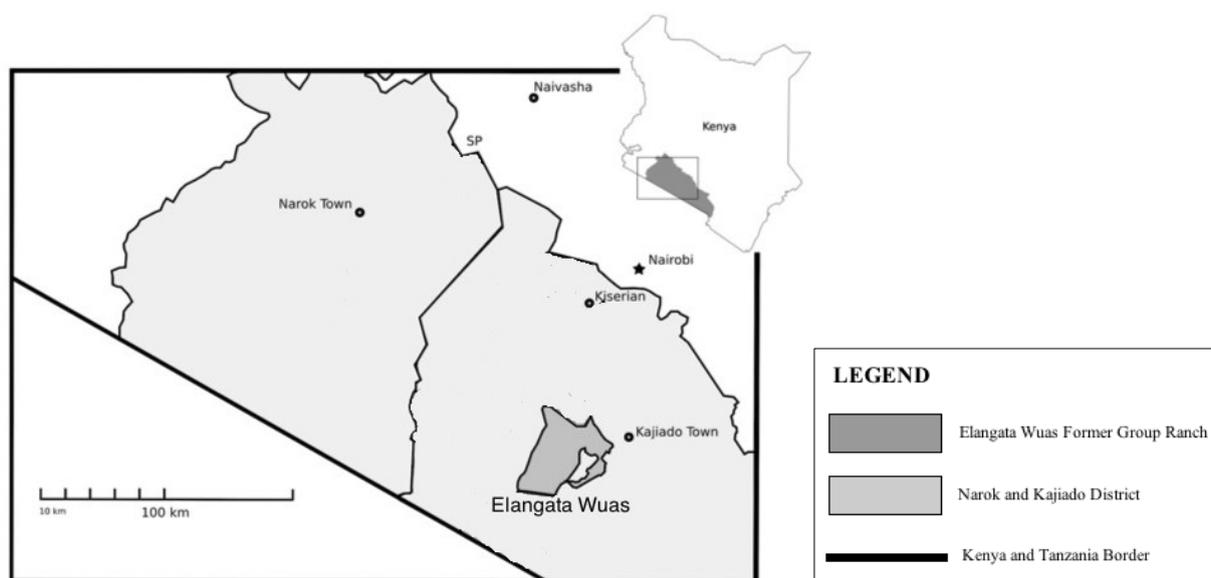
In a recent and comprehensive review on the development impacts of migration, de Haas [8] identifies three main paradigmatic shifts in social and development theory, which have influenced views on the relationship between migration and development. In the 1950's and 1960's neo-classical and evolutionary developmentalist theories viewed migration as an "optimal allocation of production factors" that would produce balanced growth in both sending and receiving societies. Optimistically, migrants were viewed as important agents of change and innovation, who would bring back home with them new knowledge, ideas, and entrepreneurial attitudes [9,10]. But the 1970's, under the influence of dependency theories of development, ushered in pessimistic views on the role of migration in development. Rather than decreasing spatial inequalities, migration was viewed as increasing inequalities and exacerbating poverty in communities of origin [11–13]. Concerns over brain and brawn drain, with the young, able-bodied, and skilled leaving rural areas, raised questions about the future of rural agriculture, traditional industries, and innovative diversification. Remittances were seen as benefitting already better off families, fuelling conspicuous consumption of foreign goods, and creating inflation. Migrants, many argued, rarely invested productively to the benefit of the larger home community. Thus, economically, socially, and environmentally it was argued that rural communities of origin suffered from underdevelopment as a result of migration. Until very recently, pessimistic views have pervaded both the scholarly literature and the policy views. De Haas [8] leaves to question whether the current and recently renewed optimism, especially around the important role of migrant remittances in development, is a product of a more nuanced and pluralist approach to

migration theory (following the approaches of the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM), livelihoods, and transnationalism) or is of a more general ideological and paradigmatic shift away from structure and towards neoliberalism. He makes an important concluding point that different valuations of migration and migration processes are fundamentally tied to ones a priori assumptions about what constitutes development, a point that guides the efforts of this paper to seek perspectives and assessments of the role of international migration on sustainable community development from local community members themselves.

### 3. Setting

Elangata Wuas, the predominantly Maasai community which features as the site of this study, is a former group ranch that has recently privatized into individual holdings that stretches over 200,000 acres in the southern district of Kajiado (See Figure 1). The region is ecologically typical of semi-arid rangeland. Low altitudes, variable and little rainfall, and poor soils combine to produce an environment with little agricultural potential. Consequently, the community depends largely on livestock husbandry as their primary economic activity. Residents keep cattle, goats and sheep, and a few camels. Although grazing patterns and practices are undergoing transformations due to privatization, families that keep relatively large herds still practice a form of transhumant pastoralism, in which during the wet season they graze their animals within the vicinity of a more permanent homestead and during the dry season members of the family will graze the animals at distant pastures.

**Figure 1.** Map of Location of Elangata Wuas, Kajiado District, Kenya.



The community of Elangata Wuas is going through dramatic change, not only in tenure. The community in which the adult generation came of age is far different from the environment inhabited by today's youth. While there is still little infrastructure in water provision, no electricity, and no paved roads, the growing commercial center of Mile 46 has a recently erected mobile phone network, dozens of new small businesses, churches, residential homes, and nursery schools, as well as an expanded health center and a new library, which was recently equipped with the first computer lab and

internet facility in the region. Mile 46 remains the site of the central weekly livestock and goods market attended by residents of the neighboring communities within at least a forty-mile radius. While it is still the central market for livestock, the range of consumer products available for purchase (including mobile phones and the latest fashions) attests to the degree to which Elangata Wuas is integrated into a national (and even transnational) cash economy and connected with outside, global tastes and trends.

Even though pastoralism is still the mainstay of economic life for most families in Elangata Wuas, with 80.7% of houses owning livestock, less than a third of houses (27.2%) rely exclusively on pastoralism as the only means of income generation. According to a 2008/9 survey, 62.4% of houses reported an income generating activity in the past one month that was not derived from either pastoralism or agriculture. These activities included salaried employment, small business enterprises, and petty trade. Only 17.3% of houses pursued some form of cultivation. There is a general recognition that as population increases, land becomes scarcer and resource competition increases, the younger generation will have to turn to other pursuits to gain a living. For this reason, among others, there has been a rapid and dramatic increase in school participation in Elangata Wuas with over two-thirds (66%) of children aged 6–15 at the time of the survey pursuing primary school compared with just more than a third (39%) of people having ever attended primary school among those aged 36–45 at the time of the survey [14].

Diversification of livelihoods has been accompanied by increases in outmigration. Elangata Wuas still offers very little by way of formal employment. The Kenya Marble Quarry companies are the only industry within the area but they employ only a few locals. There are also few positions for teachers and health care professionals. Most opportunities are self-employed small businesses, such as owning or working in a restaurant, bar, or shop or working as a herdsman or a house helper.

By the nature of the sampling strategy the surveys undertaken in Elangata Wuas in 2008/9 do not capture entire families that migrate outside of the community. Such movements, however, are rather rare. Families usually maintain a permanent residence in the area while members of the family migrate for work or schooling. Surprisingly, according to the 2008/9 household survey, of the 140 husbands sampled only two were migrants actually living outside of Elangata Wuas, although this may be underreported due to the nature of the survey questions used to capture this information [15]. Both were employed by the Magadi Soda Company, approximately 50 km away. However, the survey also captured information on absentee “children” [16]. The large majority of families in Elangata Wuas have at least one child reported to be living out of the homestead. The large majority are daughters married in other homes or communities (65%). However, the data also indicates a significant number of younger people moving out for the purposes of schooling (24%) and employment (12%). According to the survey, 23% of families have a child that is outside of Elangata Wuas for the purposes of schooling or employment. Much outmigration is fueled by the increasing demand for higher education. Until very recently Elangata Wuas did not have a secondary school so all students with the opportunity to pursue their secondary studies had to leave the community. This has changed with the recent arrival of the secondary school but, nevertheless, many young residents leave to pursue other secondary institutions or tertiary forms of education. Migration out of Elangata Wuas for the purposes of marriage or schooling, however, is considered very different phenomena than migration for employment with different sets of expectations. Marriage migrants, who are predominantly female, are

not really expected, according to popular discourse, to remit back home or to develop their home communities. A patrilocal system of marriage with bride-wealth sets up expectations that young brides move into the homes of their husbands and contribute to and develop their marital residences. In actual practice, young women continue to support their parents and larger natal families in various ways. Young schooling migrants are also not expected to support their families or communities of origin while pursuing their studies away. Secondary and higher education is a major expense for families. Their migrant role in developing their communities of origin begins only when they secure outside employment. Working migrants are expected to remit back home and to play a role in community development.

#### **4. Methods**

This study follows from long-term ethnographic engagement in the community of Elangata Wuas, starting in 2003 when the author pursued two years of doctoral fieldwork on the topic of education, gender, and social change. As part of the methods employed in that doctoral study, a survey of 49 homesteads, which included 135 families (157 wives and 119 husbands) was conducted in 2005. The survey collected a series of basic socio-economic and demographic characteristics, including some migration dimensions, along with a focus on education and attitudes toward schooling.

This period of doctoral fieldwork was followed by an 8-year inter-disciplinary research program investigating the causes and consequences of tenure change in nine communities, including Elangata Wuas, across the Maasai rangelands of Southern Kenya. This program was initiated in 2007 and is still on-going. A variety of methods of data collection have been utilized, including the use of a household survey administered in 2008/9. In Elangata Wuas this survey served as a second round longitudinal survey, tracking and interviewing families that were part of the 2005 survey. This resulted in the surveying of 87 homesteads, which included 168 families (199 wives and 139 husbands). Information was again collected on a series of basic socio-economic and demographic characteristics, including migration dimensions, with a focus on land dynamics.

A third research initiative in Elangata Wuas, initiated in 2010 and still on-going, looks specifically at gender dimensions of tenure transformation. Although a number of different research methods have been employed, this study has focused on developing case studies of 12 different families in the region, each representing different dimensions of diversity in the community.

Since demographic changes and residential mobility have been important themes throughout all three research programs, this study relies on insights since 2003. More specifically, however, this paper draws on some community census work, in which research assistants created comprehensive lists of different migrant families in the region. These lists were cross-checked with different members of the community from different regions to ensure comprehensiveness. The lists included not only international migrants but also migrants who resided outside of the locality but within the District and those that resided outside of the District but within Kenya. This exercise identified six current international migrants from Elangata Wuas, which became the focus of this study. Five interviews with the migrants themselves when possible, their spouses or other close family members were conducted, collecting a range of information on their lives, the circumstances that led to their migrations, and their perceived role in community development. Further to these interviews, 13 community members who are part of the family case studies in the gender and land tenure project were interviewed on a whole

series of questions on the role of migrants in sustainable community development. These interviews were conducted by a group of local research assistants over the period from October 2012 to March 2013.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1. *The International Pioneers*

There are currently only six identified residents in the entire community of Elangata Wuas that have migrated out of Kenya in pursuit of employment or schooling. A number of these migrants very recently left, such as Joseph, who got a job in 2011 in South Sudan as a refugee administrator or Lerali, who studied at Oxford in England but recently returned to Kenya to find a job in Nairobi [17]. Kossen moved with his wife and children in 2009 to Canada first for studies but then found work in a bank. Franklin left for the U.S. in 2007, where he apparently found work in a nursing home for the elderly. These recent young migrants have not been gone long enough to make any significant development imprints on the ground. Most of them have not yet returned to Elangata Wuas after their initial move. Members of the community anticipate the kind of role they, and the future streams of migrants, can or should play with regard to community development often in reference to the one veteran of international migration, Joshua. Aged 57, Joshua works in Germany in the hospitality industry for a major international chain of hotels. He started working there 14 years ago. In Elangata Wuas he has a wife, who is 40 years old, and seven children, ages ranging from 12 to 26.

Typical of migrant homes (not just international migrants but local migrants as well), Joshua's family lives in a large homestead with a large modern family home. Joshua's wife's sister and brother have houses in the homestead, as do two of his brother-in-laws eldest sons. An employee, who is responsible for looking after Joshua's livestock while he is away, occupies a sixth house in the homestead.

As also typical of migrants in Elangata Wuas, Joshua comes from a more privileged background. His father was a leader within the community and worked as a civil worker in the ministry of agriculture despite never having attended school. He was among the informed elite who requested and were given large plots of private land (in his case 1400 acres) at the time that Elangata Wuas was being created as a group ranch. It is noteworthy that most of the migrants have access to very large land holdings, usually through their parents, who were among the community elite and had connections and privileges. That migrants come from wealthy families is also evident in the 2008/9 survey results. Families of children who are working outside of Elangata Wuas have more than double the Total Livestock Units than the community average (a mean of 53 TLU compared to 23 TLU respectively). Their families also tend to live in more modern housing, with 70% of families with migrants living in improved houses (either iron sheet or brick) compared with the community average of 11%.

Joshua's family is clearly among the elite of the community. This is evident in the family housing, which is built with brick and adorned with modern furniture and equipped with solar electricity, supporting a stereo and a television. He also has well above the Elangata Wuas average for livestock holdings, with 105 cows, 250 goats, and five donkeys. He sits on and has access to 1,400 acres of land, which he will eventually have to share with only one brother and has two other plots of land that he purchased in another District in Kenya.

A prerequisite for successful international migration, Joshua is also highly educated. He was the first born of five children and the only one to be sent to school due to government directives. He attended primary school, enjoyed it very much and performed well but he decided to return for his ritual graduation and warriorhood rather than continue with secondary studies. After two years he decided to look for work in Nairobi where he found a job as a watchman. From there he enrolled himself in a college to study food and beverage management and received sponsorship from his future employer. Eventually, after marrying and starting his family in Elangata Wuas, he was hired for the position in Germany.

From Germany, Joshua returns home on average for six weeks a year. Usually he tries to take his home leave over Christmas and is known in the community for hosting a major Christmas/homecoming celebration.

### *5.2. Conspicuous Consumption, Christmas, and Community Development*

Unlike marriage migrants (women who marry and move outside of Elangata Wuas) and schooling migrants, working migrants are expected to play a leading role in community development. When interviewing migrants, their family members, and general community members there was a great deal of consensus on how migrant remittances are typically spent. The top listed expenditures were food and clothing for their families, school fees for their children and extended family members and friends, housing improvements, livestock investments, and salaries for employees. Most commonly, people felt that the large majority of remittances benefited only the migrants' family and did not make significant contributions to wider community development. However, when probed more specifically on the potential benefits of certain investments, some nuances were shared.

Some, mostly women, perceived the use of remittances to make housing improvements as not only personal development but as a contribution to local development.

“When someone improves his/her house it will bring development to the community because many will copy him/her and build good houses and I think the community will develop and have permanent good houses [18].”

Thus migrant investments in housing are seen as improving the community landscape of Elangata Wuas, showcasing development possibilities, and encouraging change.

Some residents also perceived migrants' investments in livestock to benefit the wider community. Several made the point that livestock is locally purchased, thus supporting local markets and bringing financial benefits to sellers and their families. One older widow made the additional point that livestock also are an important resource that the community can access in times of need.

“If you go to the migrants to ask for help as a community member they will give you a cow or a goat hence benefit you [19].”

The circulation of animals is quite common in Elangata Wuas. Families who are short on milk, for example, can be lent a lactating cow or goat from friends or neighbors. Livestock are also a common gift for occasions such as weddings, funerals, circumcisions, graduations, community fundraisers, *etc.* Prior to the introduction of Mpesa, a mobile phone banking service that allows for financial transfers from phone to phone, financial transfers were largely done through livestock. If migrants invest in a

herd they can still participate in such occasions in absentia by offering gifts of livestock delivered by their spouses or other family members. Owning a large herd of animals also often requires that migrants pay an employee to take care of these animals. In this way migrants are seen as contributing, albeit in a small way, to job creation in the community.

Land investments was not a commonly identified use of remittances but it is evident that migrants already own a disproportionate amount of land in the community and have considerable purchasing power. During the interviews residents were asked how they felt about migrants' investing in land. Much like with livestock, many people responded that when investing and buying land in the community, migrants were bringing benefits to the sellers and their families. A few people mentioned that by purchasing lands, migrants were also protecting that land from being sold to outsiders and therefore retaining access and potential benefits to the wider community. In other neighboring communities land sales to outsiders has been rather dramatic with severe consequences on livestock mobility and resource access [20,21]. There is great concern among residents that Elangata Wuas will undergo a similar fate now that the process of privatization is complete. A recent and preliminary finding suggests that approximately 15% of private land holdings in Elangata Wuas have already been sold (in whole or in part). Keeping lands in the hands of locals, even at the expense of equality in holdings, is seen as much more preferable to alienation of land by other ethnic groups. As with livestock, land is also a resource that many can make claims to. Through various social connections and alliances, residents can access the pasture or the resources on the land of the migrants.

“A community member might ask their help for a place to graze their livestock from the land they bought and the migrant will give them and that contributes to community development [22].”

The potential benefit of land holdings by migrants is well illustrated in the case of Joshua, who has access to 1,400 acres of land in Elangata Wuas, owned by his father. Joshua's families' residence is currently built on his father's land. While many land owning families in Elangata Wuas have fenced large portions of their land to mark their territory and prevent free access to all, Joshua's father's land only has a small section fenced for the paddocking of calves. Joshua provides his in-laws, who also reside in his homestead, with free access and claims to have never charged anyone for grazing their animals on his land.

Finally, migrants make some major expenses around their homecoming. Joshua, for example, tries to combine his homecoming with Christmas and holds a large Christmas party celebration for all who wish to attend. Relatives and friends come from very far. Preparations begin well in advance with the brewing of local beer. Several livestock are slaughtered for the occasion and massive amounts of food and drink are prepared. The party usually lasts at least three days with shifts of people from different areas attending on different days. Joshua will bring many gifts from Germany and visitors, close friends and relatives, will also bring homecoming gifts to his family, including cows, goats, milk, and sugar. He has managed to hold at least five such homecomings/Christmas parties since he moved to Germany. They are well appreciated, offering an important opportunity to socialize and celebrate.

Interestingly, most people interviewed did not consider such homecoming feasts and celebrations as contributing to community development, a term very exclusively reserved for economic dimensions of progress. “At parties people eat food and to me that is not development”, explains one mother [18]. Nevertheless, they recognized very well the important social function played by such occasions. Such

celebrations “bring unity” and allow for people to “interact.” Especially important is that such occasions re-immense the migrant in his/her social relations and provide an important occasion for gift exchange and maintaining social solidarity, discussed in more detail below. While such functions are clearly relevant to the social dimensions of sustainable community development, they often don’t feature as an obvious contribution to local perceptions of community development.

It is well recognized locally that migrants invest in their own families and that their work opportunities abroad exacerbate local inequalities by enriching an already wealthy family, as succinctly stated by a young teacher:

“Most of them [migrants] have modern houses, their children are in boarding schools, their families don’t go to bed hungry and they have large herds [18].”

However, many of these personal investments can be seen to have important community spill-over effects. Migrants are seen as supporting local markets. Remittances are used to purchase foods, goods, and livestock in the shops and local community markets. They pay employees to look after their herds and to help with domestic duties and they improve their houses, inspiring others to do the same. They invest in livestock that can be widely circulated to those in need or in support of local development initiatives. They can invest in land, keeping it out of the hands of outsiders and retaining local access. They also tend to support extended family and friends with school fees for their children. Many feel that, while not optimal, these indirect benefits do count for something.

### *5.3. Expectations and Accommodations*

Residents of Elangata Wuas have high expectations for the potential role of migrants in community development. By and large they feel that migrants are positive role models for the community, notwithstanding a number of specific personal critiques as one might expect (for example, concerns with alcohol consumption or suspicions of infidelities among certain migrants). While migrants are praised if they return to the community and if they remit to their families, there is also a lot of attention paid to the socio-cultural embeddedness of migrants. “They are not proud and do not boast”, many people remark, reflecting on their retention of cultural identity. It is not enough to return and remit if one doesn’t maintain a community identity and sense of social belonging. A migrant should act “normal” when s/he returns by visiting family and friends, attending community events, participating in the market days, and socializing and exchanging news. For this migrants need to retain their language skills in Maa and need to actively speak it upon their return. Many people interviewed raised this as criteria for being a good migrant role model.

To date, many people feel that migrants have made limited contributions to overall community development. There are strong assumptions, and probably very unrealistic ones, that migrants abroad make and have a lot of money. It is difficult for community members who have never left Kenya to understand that salaries abroad are relative to the cost of living in the country of work and the plane ticket home, for example, is a major expense for most migrants, even with well-paid jobs. Without such an understanding, they, therefore, expect that more remittances can be spent on larger-scale community projects, such as infrastructure or scholarship programs.

However, there is hope and prediction that as the young generation receives more educational opportunities they will be in a better position to obtain good and lucrative employments abroad and thus, be able to contribute more to the economic improvement of the community. Residents do share a concern, however, that the connections these future flows of migrants (including several of the very recent international migrants) will have to Elangata Wuas will be weakened and they will not return to the community or significantly invest in it. Their increased education plays an important role in producing such risk. The young generation is educated outside of the community, in English, and follows a curriculum that is biased against pastoralism as a livelihood. Dryland livelihoods are not the model of modernity they learn in school [14].

Although Maasai have great confidence that the youth will retain their love and commitments to home, they also have made many accommodations for migrants to increase their social embeddedness within the community. Such accommodations include coordinating important ceremonial occasions with the school calendar, for example. School holidays have now become the period in which to hold special events such as weddings and bridal showers, circumcisions, and other ritual promotions. This allows schooling migrants to participate in these major events and strengthens their role in the social system. During such events, migrants are reminded of their obligations and mutual inter-dependence with kin and other social affiliates (such as clansmates and age-mates). Similarly, a new type of ritual promotion has been created for school going boys to graduate into adulthood. Traditionally this graduation required a long period of residential exclusion with fellow age-mates and strict food and behavioral restrictions. For school going boys many have either been exempted from such rules or these restrictions have been shortened to accommodate a transition that lasts as long as a school holiday [14]. New celebrations and cultural ceremonies are also created as the community recognizes and celebrates migrants' school graduations or work promotions. These often involve celebratory expressions very similar to traditional ritual promotion ceremonies (ritual dress, traditional food and activities). Such occasions also ensure that migrants are continually well embedded and their achievements recognized and appreciated in their home community.

## **6. Conclusions: Acceptable Inequality under an Ethic of Inter-Dependence**

Significant contributions to sustainable community development by international migrants hinge on bonds of social solidarity that maintain an important ethic of sharing and redistribution in Elangata Wuas. The concept of sustainability orients the analysis to a long-term view of the impacts of migration not only from an economic perspective, but also from a social and environmental view. It raises concerns about the apparent inequalities fostered by processes of selective migration. Today's migrant remittances are seen as quite evidently first and foremost benefiting the already privileged families of the migrants themselves. Most remittances from migrants are spent on providing food, clothing, school fees, and other necessities to the migrants' family. They are also often used to make housing improvements, to purchase livestock, and to pay salaries for employees that take over responsibilities for the migrant (such as looking after the migrants livestock). Few remittances get invested in any new community developments, like infrastructure projects. Nor have international migrants, to date, introduced or invested in new creative enterprises. It would seem, therefore, that residents of Elangata Wuas would align themselves with the literature discussed earlier that critiques

the role of migration on rural development and argues that migration is an important factor in creating underdevelopment. This does not correspond, however, to local perceptions on migration. Contrary to this, migration is seen as having a growing potential to make important improvements in local economic development, especially as the flows of migration are predicted to increase significantly among the youth. Many view some of the direct benefits to migrant families as having important indirect spill-over effects on the wider community. Investments in housing, for example, has improved the landscape and provided models for improved housing that many hope others will emulate. Investments in livestock often get circulated through gifting or loaning to people in need. The accumulation of land may play an important role in protecting land alienation by outsiders and providing community members with access to grazing and other resources in times of need. And migrants often contribute to the welfare of other families by paying school fees for friends, families, or those in need, by buying goods (livestock, food, land, *etc.*) from local sellers and by generating some job opportunities by hiring domestic employees.

Such spill-overs will really only be realized and felt at the community level as long as the migrant maintains the ethic of solidarity, mutual inter-dependence, and resource sharing that has been fundamental to Maasai culture and livelihood security. A migrant who invests in livestock but keeps his animals all too himself will not be of benefit to the community. Nor will a migrant who fences his land and excludes all others from access. The migrants' newly acquired resources must be seen to enter a pool of community resources that others may successfully tap into in times of need.

Residents of Elangata Wuas, perhaps unconsciously, help foster this sense of continued social solidarity through various means. They create and express high expectations and put pressures on migrants by making requests for different types of support. They attend homecoming/Christmas celebrations, reaffirming their social ties to migrants, exchanging gifts and cementing notions of reciprocity. They plan and coordinate community events to take place in periods when migrants are most able to attend. They alter the restrictions and requirements of certain ceremonies and rituals to accommodate the schedules and capacities of migrants. And they create new celebrations to recognize the achievements, such as graduations or promotions, of migrants away. Such cultural malleability allows migrants who are physically absent to retain an important sense of belonging, to participate in community life and to reaffirm their place in the social order.

It is within such an ethic of solidarity and inter-dependence that the blatant inequalities between migrants and non-migrants are acceptable, even encouraged and celebrated. This raises an important question as to what will happen if such an ethic begins to erode and migrants are no longer trusted to redistribute their wealth? Will such inequalities be permissible? For now, however, particularly at this moment in time when Maasai in Elangata Wuas feel quite marginalized from broader developments in Kenya as a whole, migrants offer important connections to outside opportunities as facilitators of translocal development corridors [23]. They are seen as having far reaching access to resources needed by the community even if such resources are personally accumulated. This model of sustainable community development through translocal migration corridors is very specifically imagined as a channel or funnel, with migrants connecting this rural community to opportunities, knowledge, and resources in other localities abroad. Currently there is little imagining of migrants playing an active role as local catalysts for development, using ideas, skills, and connections to generate resources, opportunities, and new knowledge from within the community. This view of development coming

from beyond Kenya is importantly shaped by residents' lack of faith in the governments' ability and willingness to help create an environment in Elangata Wuas (with improved infrastructure and social services in health and education) conducive to greater local investment [24]. And thus, much of the responsibility for community sustainable development falls on the shoulders of the small migrant population with few means to meet such expectations. Perhaps this will change with the predicted new (and large) wave of migration among the youth, and as new perspectives emerge as to what constitutes sustainable community development.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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15. Wives were asked to report and list their husbands in the household roster section of the survey even if husbands did not regularly live in the home. Subsequently a question was asked whether this member of the household was a usual resident in the home during the school year. This may have caused some confusion among wives with locally migrating husbands, particularly those who return frequently, for example every weekend. This may have resulted in some underreporting of locally migrant husbands but should not have an impact on international migrants.
16. Children are defined through the relationship to the parents interviewed and not by age status. Thus, the majority of these “children” were 18 years or older.
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