

Agro-pastoralists concerns over the *Prosopis* tree: the case of the IlChamus of Baringo District, Kenya

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Introduction The *Prosopis* tree was introduced to the arid and semi-arid lands of eastern Africa in the 1970s, through governmental forest development agencies to curb environmental degradation and provide fodder for small stock. A number of other benefits were also then attributed to the tree. However, the *Prosopis* tree has turned out to be a cause of serious concerns, as it has invaded, dominated and almost totally removed all grass and short vegetation species from pasturelands. In Baringo District of Kenya, *Prosopis* has been the worst enemy of the local IlChamus agro-pastoralists (Lenachuru, 2003), who have now raised much concern over the species, calling for its complete eradication, and threatening to sue the government for damages caused by the tree. This paper examines the case against *Prosopis* species, based on the agro-pastoralists' perspectives, and the numerous benefits of the tree that the agro-pastoralists apparently unaware of, or simply refuse to attach value to.

Materials and methods An exploratory survey solicited knowledge, opinions and attitudes on the merits and demerits associated with the *Prosopis* tree. This used 73 key informants and resource persons among the IlChamus. The findings of the survey were presented at a workshop held to discuss and generate recommendations on integrated management of the *Prosopis* tree in Kenya. A total of 65 participants, including agro-pastoralists, researchers and scientists, and other stakeholders, attended the two-day workshop to share knowledge and experiences, and to develop approaches for effective management of the invasion, spread and control of the tree, and its sustainable utilisation by the pastoralists. This paper is concerned with the demerits, as argued by the agro-pastoralists, relative to the merits as presented by the experts.

Results While the IlChamus' perception of the demerits of the species is clear and detailed, their perception of the merits are less so. The numerous merits of the species, as advocated by the experts, include the fact that the tree provides nutritious fodder for small stock, flowers vigorously and continuously making it ideal for bee pasturage, (since the nectar makes good white honey), and provides good wood, timber and numerous products that offer commercialisation opportunities for socioeconomic improvement of households. Ecological benefits and various beneficial domestic uses were also listed. On the other hand, the agro-pastoralists strongly argued against the species, as evidenced by their opinions, listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Agro-pastoralists' opinion about *Prosopis*

Opinion about <i>Prosopis</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It is fast spreading and invasive	72%	26%	1%	1%	-
It eliminates other plants	81%	19%	-	-	-
Its creates bare ground	83%	16%	1%	-	-
It is injurious to livestock	64%	28%	5%	2%	1%
It is injurious to humans	35%	13%	26%	17%	9%
It should be totally eradicated	87%	11%	-	2%	-

Conclusion Despite the array of merits in favour of the *Proposis* tree presented by the experts, the IlChamus agro-pastoralists seemed adamant and were not persuaded. This is probably because of their bad experiences with the tree and the realisation that the associated economic and the ecological benefits are unachievable in the short term. Hence their call for complete eradication of the species from their pastures, farmlands and homesteads. In essence, they seem to concur with Cable (1977) who concluded that *Prosopis* roots exert a stronger "pull" on the soil water than do the grasses. This, presumably is the fatal characteristic that makes *Prosopis* a killer plant and a serious threat to the existence of the IlChamus community.

References

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