

analysis and focus on how the individual actor operates within this frame and tries to use interethnic conflict to improve his economic position and to enhance his social prestige.

## 2.1 Conflict over scarce resources

The argument that warfare is likely to result from or is intensified by competition over scarce resources is frequently voiced in reports on aggressions between East African herders. Dietz (1987: 187) says that Pokot-Karimojong, Pokot-Sebei and Pokot-Turkana raiding in the last century always intensified after droughts and livestock epidemics. Fukui and Turton (1979: 2) in their volume on warfare amongst East African herders state "...during the late 'sixties and early' seventies... intertribal fighting, exacerbated by some of the worst drought and famine conditions in living memory, was at a high level."

Critical resources within the Pokot pastoralist system are grazing and herds.

### *Grazing*

Grazing becomes a scarce resource when the number of livestock exceeds the carrying capacity of a given area. This may be due to an increase in herds or a decline of biomass production because of drought or overgrazing. It is mainly during the dry season or during droughts that grazing gets scarce<sup>2</sup>. Rough figures (Stolz 1989) indicate that limits of carrying capacity are not reached in a standard year with rains between 600 and 800 mm; but in a year of drought livestock numbers may be very well above carrying capacity.

However, warfare the way Pokot practice it does not bring relief to the scarce resource grazing as it is not aimed at territorial gains<sup>3</sup>. It rather brings further stress as raids eventually result in counter-raids of the enemy group. During the course of fighting Pokot had to evacuate about a third of their territory. Important dry season grazing areas were not used anymore by Pokot herders because they feared Turkana attacks. A zone of about 15 to 30 km on both sides of the district boundary became virtual no-man's land. Within only five years the plant cover within those broad stretches of no-man's land changed considerably. Data from LandsAT photographs show that acacia thornbush communities increased by ca. 30% and grassland communities de-

<sup>2</sup> In order to consider all important factors for biomass production we would need an analysis of satellite photographs, aerial photographs (both over a period of several years) and botanical on-ground studies. Such a study is under way at the moment. Of importance are further data on herd structure (males have higher metabolic rates than females) and herd diversification (rate of cattle against camels, goats and sheep).

<sup>3</sup> Precolonial warfare aimed at territorial gains. Between 1820 and 1870 Pokot conquered about 5000 sq.km of Laikipia Maasai land by means of aggressive expansionist warfare.