

# Kajiado : Improve land registry maps to avert frequent disputes

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## Kajiado a challenge for surveyors

Most serious surveyors dread taking up survey tasks in Kajiado County, professional fee notwithstanding. Yet such tasks relate to mundane issues like incorrectly stated sizes of parcels, absence of parcels on official registry maps, identifying parcels for valuation or resolving simple encroachment issues. I am sure this sounds familiar to those with land around Kitengela, Isinya, Kiserian, Ongata Rongai, Ngong and other parts of Kajiado. This isn't so in most other Counties where surveyors easily use available maps to resolve such basic issues. So what makes Kajiado so frustrating and peculiar? Why are serious Licensed Surveyors uncomfortable taking up tasks in Kajiado County, leaving it to the mercy of many unregistered and unqualified surveyors who have made matters a lot worse?

## Intense peri-urban development

Before discussing the details, let's put the affected zone into perspective. The boundary between Kajiado and Nairobi Counties forms the peri-urban zone to the sprawling Nairobi City. It has perhaps been Kenya's hottest property destination for the last two decades. Massive amounts of cash have gone into purchase of property within this rim. Many Kenyans, from diverse regions and classes, have set up homes and businesses here. The race to own a piece of this zone has seen such a high and unplanned influx of people and institutions that it will perhaps present a planning nightmare for the country and county for the next few decades. The residential, educational and commercial activities and assets within this highly cosmopolitan Nairobi-Kajiado boundary belt stretching from Athi River to beyond Ngong influences a major proportion of the capital city's GDP and traffic patterns. It should therefore be treated as a priority zone by every policy planner, infrastructure provider, social worker, security officer and political leader.

The country and county cannot afford to have land and boundary disputes within such an important zone. Disputes undermine property values, peace and development. Property owners within this prime zone need to enjoy secure tenure of their land parcels. This can only be if supported by reliable registry maps which surveyors can use to distinctly identify any property or feature. But this isn't so. Kajiado District, now County, used to be sparsely populated with its people primarily engaged in pastoral activities over the available communal land. Many parts of it comprised of vast ranches. The case for very accurate property maps, unlike in the highly settled parts of the country, wasn't compelling. Why?

### **Parcels missed out or distorted on registry maps**

Appreciate that a very small scale, where one millimeter represents a number of kilometers, is used to represent large zones such as the World or the African continent on a map. Any attempt to measure distances on such a map therefore means that any approximation results in kilometers of variance on the ground. Being vast and scantily settled, Kajiado was committed to small scale property maps by Survey of Kenya to particularly represent the large ranches. Technically, this was right. But, as the demographics and the property market changed, decisions weren't made to review and upgrade this mapping. You can therefore imagine trying to plot the small parcels derived from the subdivision of ranches to tie up to the original maps. Some disappear in scale and some get distorted because of cumulative scale errors. This is why no surveyor can later identify them on the ground with reasonable certainty! The registry map base for Kajiado County is precarious and something needs to be done about it urgently!

Talk to all experts who have had to provide infrastructural services like roads, water and power and the problem will be recounted repeatedly. I recall that when road widening was mooted for Namanga road, it became extremely difficult to resolve encroachment issues. KERRA surveyors have also gone through great difficulties setting road alignments and recommending compensation of properties for rural roads. Even where most willing, Physical Planners cannot deal effectively! Valuers too have difficulties identifying properties for lending institutions. The Survey of Kenya offices in Nairobi and Kajiado are piled up with heaps of subdivision survey documents that cannot be charted onto the official registry maps because they can't technically fit onto the original map base. But the owners, who cannot understand the problem, continue to wait endlessly. Narok County faces a similar problem. Luckily for Narok, urbanization and population pressure have been slower.

This problem is soluble given today's technology. But human and financial resources must be committed. The national and county governments need to get together and address the challenge soonest.

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