

## **Eco-Politics of Infrastructure Development in and Around Protected Areas in Kenya: The Case of Nairobi National Park**

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**Abstract :** On 7th June 2011, the government Minister of Roads in Kenya announced the proposed construction of a major highway known as a southern bypass to run on the northern border of the Nairobi National Park. The following day on 8th June 2011, the chairperson of the Friends of Nairobi National Park (FONNAP) posted a protest statement on their website, with the heading, 'Nairobi Park is Not a cake' alerting its members and conservation groups, with the aim of getting support to the campaign against the government's intention to hive off a section of the park for road construction. This was the first and earliest statement that led to a series of other events that culminated in conservationists and some other members of the public campaign against the government's plan to hive off sections of the park to build road and railway infrastructure in or around the park. Together with other non-state actors, mostly non-governmental organisations in conservation/environment and tourism businesses, FoNNAP issued a series of other statements on social, print and electronic media to battle against road and railway construction. This paper examined the strategies, outcomes and interests of actors involved in opposing/proposing the development of transport infrastructure in and around the Nairobi National Park. Specifically, the objectives were to analyse the: (1) Arguments put forward by the eco-warriors to protest infrastructure development; (2) Background and interests of the eco-warriors; (3) Needs/interests and opinions of ordinary common citizens on transport infrastructural development, particularly in and around the urban nature reserve and (4) Final outcomes of the eco-politics surrounding infrastructure development in and around Nairobi National Park. The methodological approach used was environmental history and the social construction of nature. The study collected combined qualitative data using four main approaches, the grounded theory approach, narratives, case studies and a phenomenological approach. The information collected was analysed using critical discourse analysis. The major findings of the study were that under the guise of "public participation," influential non-state actors have the capacity to perpetuate social-spatial inequalities in the form of curtailing the majority from accessing common public goods. A case in point in this study is how the efforts of powerful conservationists, environmentalists, and tourism businesspersons managed to stall the construction of much-needed road and railway infrastructure severally through litigations in lengthy environmental court processes involving injunctions and stop orders to the government bodies in charge. Moreover, powerful non-state actors were found to have formed informal and sometimes formal coalitions with politicians with selfish interests, which serves to deepen the exclusionary practices and the common good. The study concludes that mostly composed of certain types of elites (NGOs, business communities, politicians and privileged social-cultural groups), non-state actors have used participatory policies to advance their own interests at the expense of the majority whom they claim to represent. These practices are traced to the historically unjust social, political, and economic forces involved in the production of space in Nairobi.

**Keywords :** eco-politics, exclusion, infrastructure, Nairobi national park, non-state actors, protests

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