ABSTRACT

Beads have played an important role in the personal lives of Africans. They have been valued as currency, identification of status and as an artistic medium. Beads form an integral part of the Samburu culture and have many uses and symbolic meanings. The first periodic beads market in Samburu District was established in Maralal town in 1991. The aim of this study is to clarify how the Samburu pastoralists reacted to the emergence of the beads market that provided them constant opportunity for trade. Equally it analyses the economic utility of this trade to the cultural systems and beliefs among the Samburu. The method applied in the study was largely qualitative research. This was done through library search, interview schedules and observation. Based on the findings, beads are used in all aspects of the Samburu lives and actually vibrate the culture. This study will be of help to historians, artists, ethnographers, anthropologists and the general public as a body of knowledge and reference material of the uses and symbolism of beads among other communities.

Keywords: Beads, Symbolism, Culture, African

JEL Classifications: F18, F19, L81.