The aim of this study was to investigate commercial handicrafts as livelihood option for the Maasai of Isinya Location, Kajiado District, Kenya. The study was prompted by the fact that ecological, political and socio-economic pressures have, overtime, denied the Maasai an affluent pastoral economy due to diminished grazing land. Part of the grazing land has been fenced to pave way for state and private conservation and for commercial cultivation. There is an increase of immigrants from other communities who have bought land in the Maasai rangelands, thus further subdividing and fencing off the previously communally owned land resources that sustained a pastoral economy. In response, the Maasai are pursuing non-pastoral income strategies that comprise agriculture, trade, formal and informal employment to buttress against these changes. Based on these challenges and resultant responses, the study investigated how the Maasai of Isinya have ventured into commercial handicrafts for their livelihood. The study’s objectives were: to examine the range of materials and products in the handicraft industry, to identify stakeholders and their roles in the handicraft industry, to determine the socio-economic benefits of commercial handicrafts on the livelihoods of the Maasai, and to establish opportunities, constraints and challenges of the Maasai handicraft industry. The study was carried out in Isinya Location and utilized both descriptive and analytical approaches. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires that were administered to 145 households, interviews were held with CBOs and MRTC officials, field observation and photography were done. SPSS was used for data analysis where descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the characteristics of respondents, handicraft material, processes in household-based commercial production and components of handicraft production. Chi-square ($\chi^2$) was also used to test relationship between commercial handicraft income and education, health care, improvement of housing and expenditure on food amongst the Maasai households at a significance level of 0.05. The opportunities, constraints and challenges of the Maasai handicraft industry were determined using SWOT analysis. The findings indicated that Maasai commercial handicraft is a cottage industry that comprises both individual and CBO/NGO based production. The handicrafts are ingrained in the Maasai culture; they mark their wedding and initiation ceremonies and also distinguish them along age groups and
sets. The commercial handicrafts income is used to finance their children’s schooling, health-care, improvement of housing, and food security. The Use of ICT, grouping/clustering of producers and cultural heritage are opportunities for the industry. However, the industry is also faced with challenges that include: inadequate capital, lack of ready markets, exploitation by middlemen, competition from replica goods, and lack of patent rights for owners, among others. The study recommends patenting and strengthening of Intellectual Property Laws so as to protect the Maasai’s creative genius. The government should also come up with ways of marketing the Maasai products locally and abroad. In addition, the Maasai households need to form groups which will enable them wade off exploitative middlemen, accumulate capital for bigger investments and share ideas as a way of improving the industry.