

A Ground Truthing Analysis of Climate, Livelihood, and Conflict in the Turkana and West Pokot Regions of Kenya



INITIATIVE ON
Climate Resilience

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15 April 2023



Contents

Resilience Amidst Adversity	3
Findings.....	3
Climate profile.....	3
Livelihood profile and gender.....	4
Climate risks and movement	5
Conclusion.....	6

Resilience Amidst Adversity: A Ground Truthing Analysis of Climate, Livelihood, and Conflict in the Turkana and West Pokot Regions of Kenya

The Karamoja-Turkana/Pokot-Eastern Equatoria-SNNPR Region is found in the heart of the horn of Africa and traverses four countries. The region is predominately arid and semi-arid (ASAL), with high temperatures (16.7°C - 40°C) and low rainfall (188 mm - 1200 mm) on average annually. More than 70% of the inhabitants of this region live in absolute poverty. The region being a transboundary cluster, there exists mobility of nomadic communities across borders and share common natural resources, exchange of culture and intermarry. The effects of climate change are expected to be particularly pronounced in the horn of Africa, where rising temperatures, unpredictable anomalous rainfall and high vulnerability to extreme natural hazards will continue to affect livelihoods and exacerbate human conflict and harm local and regional human, economic, and environmental security. Based on this, a situational analysis of the region was carried out to get a better understanding the baselines, and the extent of the challenge in the region with an aim of developing sustainable projects/programs, based on a multi-stakeholder approach that will intrinsically tackle the main issues surrounding, livelihoods, economic development and conflicts.

One of the main purposes of this trip was a ground-truthing mission to collect primary data that supports the findings of the situational analysis of the region based on desk review. The data collection methods used to collect primary data included observation and interviews. The ground truthing mission was conducted for 6 days coverings West Pokot and Turkana counties (Kenya). The trip included West Pokot County towns like Morkwijit, Kapenguria, Chepareria, Sebit, Ortum and Orwa; Turkana county towns included Kainuk, Kakongu, Kalemngorok, Lokichar, Changamatak and Lodwar. Observations were made throughout the mission from Kapenguria through to Lodwar, and interviews (Unstructured) with county officials and locals were made only in Kapenguria and Lodwar (the capital of the two counties). The focus of the ground truthing study was based on the following topics: Climate profile, Livelihood profile, climate risks, gender relations, refugee relations and conflict.

Findings

1. Climate profile

There was a clear transition from a semi-arid climate with a number of green zones towards a more arid and drier climate, as we moved through Morkwijit through Kapenguria towards Kainuk (Border town between West Pokot and Turkana Country). The transition was marked by a change in temperatures (temperatures increased as we went on), and a change in vegetation (From green grass, trees and farms to scares trees and shrubs). The transition from Kainuk to Lodwar was largely steep, moving from a highland and hilly range of Orwa to relatively flat lowlands. The temperatures peaked at about 36 °C in Lodwar. Regarding vegetation, the transition was largely uniform with patches of shrubs dominated by bare land.



Figure 1: Shrubs and thatches along Kainuk and Lodwar Road

These findings align with the climate profile based on the desk review. However, there were more green zones (zones that support agriculture) in the highland region of West Pokot than previously anticipated. From observation, West Pokot is better primed for agricultural interventions. For Turkana County, the desk review showed the possibility of green zones especially along river Turkwel, however, due to the prolonged drought in the county very few of these zones exist.

2. Livelihood profile and Gender



Figure 2: West Pokot woman selling stone crafts



Figure 3: Cattle (Including camels) kept in Turkana

In most parts of West Pokot County which is predominantly Semi-Arid the primary source of livelihood is agro-pastoralism. The county has greater potential for agriculture with pastoralism also being a key livelihood activity. There are a number of alternative livelihood activities within West Pokot, this includes sand mining, trading, poultry, beekeeping, and stone craftsmanship. Tourism was suggested as a possible alternative livelihood source because of the number of nature sites including a number of forests for bird viewing.

In Turkana, The major livelihood activity is pastoralism, which includes herding cattle, goats, and camels among others. Alternative sources of income include trading (especially in city centres), beekeeping, fishing and irrigation farming. Most irrigation projects are struggling because of the prolonged droughts in the region and importantly the drying up of River Turkwel, which is the main source of water for these farms.



Figure 4: Fishing along the shores of Lake Turkana



Figure 5: Fish drying along the shores of Lake Turkana

Women's participation in livelihoods was evident in both counties, particularly alternative sources of income such as agriculture, trading, and crafting, in the fishing supply chain (fishing, drying and selling of fish and fish products). Important to note is most capital to start these alternative incomes is provided by the men. Women are more often involved in decision-making at the household level and are becoming providers alongside the men. Therefore with regards to livelihoods, the primary information we received while undertaking the ground truthing process reflects the findings on the desk review situational analysis. With regard to gender analysis, the desk review underestimated the role of women and their involvement within these communities.

3. Climate risks and movement

The climate profile of the region is consistent with the secondary data collected during the situational analysis. The climatic risks that arise from the climate conditions include prolonged droughts (approaching 5 seasons which is about 2 years without rain), flash floods and landslides especially in the highland regions of West Pokot are prevalent. Drought is the main climate risk within the two counties, this has created water and pasture scarcity and has led to frequent mobility in search of water and pasture. This mobility especially between west Pokot and Turkana has led to armed conflict that has resulted in killings, especially between the borders of Turkana and West Pokot counties. An example of this happened while we were in Turkana, where we got a report of a raid allegedly by West Pokot in Turkana leading to deaths. It is therefore evident that the changing climate is, directly and indirectly, leading to conflict in this region.



Figure 6: Shrubs and thatches along Kainuk and Lodwar Road



Figure 7: The drying river Turkwel

The climate risk and conflict analysis in the situational analysis is consistent with the findings on the ground. However, the analysis doesn't emphasize the extent of the raiding. Firstly, most movement of pastoralists is towards Uganda, this is consistent with the finds during our desk review. Additionally, Contrary to our findings, there is the movement of pastoralists following inter-county routes between West Pokot and Turkana. Therefore conflicts as a result of pressures on natural resources (driven by climate change) were underestimated in the desk review. The reality being, there is as much conflict between the counties as compared to between countries (Kenya, Uganda, S. Sudan and Ethiopia). One thing that is evident is that pastoralists have been forced to move further and more frequently not only on the traditional route they have been taking but also taking new routes in search of water and pasture resources.

4. Conclusion

The findings collected during the ground truthing activity largely underpin and support the analysis in the desk review report. However, it is important to note that there exist complexities and a deeper extent of the ongoing climate change risks in West Pokot and Turkana. The design of sustainable projects within this region will require a further in-depth problem analysis before recommending solutions. One way this can be achieved is through multi-stakeholder involvement throughout project development and execution.



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We would like to thank all funders who support this research through their contributions to the CGIAR Trust Fund: www.cgiar.org/funders.

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