

The Nexus Between Climate Change and Land Conflict in Turkana County

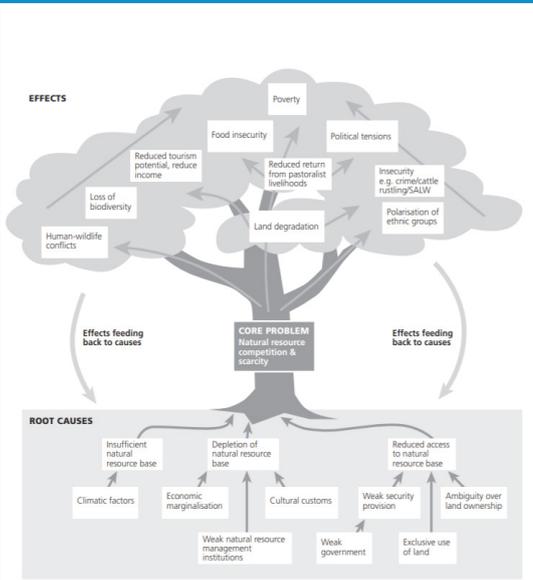


Figure 1: Conflict tree for natural resource conflict dynamics in northern Kenya. Source: Campbell et al., 2009

1. The Context of Climate Driven Conflicts in Turkana County

Many studies have observed the linkages between climate change, land resource and conflicts; they have established that the relationships are non-linear and complex (Froese & Schilling, 2019). Climate change or extreme weather events have been described as ‘threat multiplier’ that cause or exacerbate stresses, vulnerabilities and effects of non-climatic drivers of violence such as social, political and economic instability (Peters et al., 2020). Figure 1 depicts effects of climatic and non-climatic drivers on natural resources, loss of livelihood and increase in risks. Food insecurity, water scarcity, altered disease patterns, displacement of communities, migration, population growth, and human conflicts remain common among climate vulnerable communities (Waila et al., 2018).



Figure 2: An armed herder drives his cattle to grazing fields. Source: Anthony Langat/AI Jazeera

Key Messages

1. Climate change has a complex relationship and acts as a key ‘threat multiplier’ that leads to or exacerbates resource based conflicts by aggravating effects of non-climatic drivers such as population growth, infrastructural and industrial development, expansion of cultivated crops and increasing land privatization
2. Shrinking access and increasing degradation of land resources, mainly water and grazing resources, are the main cause of resource based conflicts in Turkana County
3. Policy gaps and institutional inadequacies remain key limiting factors to finding lasting solutions to resource-based conflicts in Turkana County
4. Gender norms, roles, responsibilities, behaviors and power structures determine how different gender categories experience and manage such conflicts. Understanding and meaningful consideration of these varied experiences are key in defining gender responsive peacebuilding.
5. Addressing land based conflicts in Turkana County need to take integrated multi-stakeholder approaches, guided by evidence and take into account diverse and completing priorities of all stakeholders

Within context of pastoral setups in northern Kenya, including Turkana County, studies have established higher intensities of livestock raids during drier months and drought years. This has been attributed to migration and herd mobility, which is triggered by decline and loss of pasture and water resources. Migration brings pastoralists closer to the territory of hostile groups, increasing the likelihood of violence (Froese & Schilling, 2019). Pastoral communities in Turkana County have witnessed such drought-exacerbated conflicts. These have been observed in the cross-border armed conflict over resources among Turkana pastoralists in northeastern Kenya especially along the borders of Uganda, South Sudan and Ethiopia. Such conflicts are observed among pastoral groups, as well as between pastoralists and other land resource users.

Studies have established that each year hundreds of people lose their lives in violent attacks, called raids, executed to acquire livestock or gain control over water points and pasture resources in the county (Schilling et al., 2015). Within Turkana the conflicts are particularly violent in southern Turkana, where the Pokot of Kenya and Uganda raid the Turkana and vice versa. Conflicts also have been found to increase exposure and vulnerability to climate-related disasters as they lower capacities and capabilities to cope with current impacts and anticipated risks. They hinder access to livelihood opportunities, putting people at higher risk of experiencing more resource-driven disasters (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2019). Adverse societal factors such as poor land-use practices, poverty, poor communication infrastructure and lack/poorly implemented of traditional coping mechanisms are also major catalysts of drought disasters in the County (Wanjohi, 2010).

2. Change in Livelihood Systems and their Implications on Resource-based Conflicts



Figure 3: Achukule members weeding their crops in Lokichar, Turkana county Kenya. Source: USAID, 2016

Livestock production in pastoral approach is the most appropriate land use practice, and main source of livelihood for over 60% of the population in Turkana County. Alternative livelihood strategies for households and communities in the county include agro-pastoralism, employment, crop cultivation and fishing (NDMA, 2016). The changing climate patterns and non-climatic drivers have influenced shifts in livelihood systems. Households have also increasingly embraced firewood selling and charcoal burning to supplement their livelihoods. The increasing shift in livelihood systems in Turkana County is attributed to land fragmentation and degradation, boundary formation, increased droughts, violent conflicts, as well as political marginalization and forced settlement schemes. Crop cultivation has increasingly expanded leading to conversion of formerly dry season grazing lands into croplands. This has led to violent encounters between pastoralists and crop farmers in the county. Also, conservation and large-scale infrastructural developments create key obstacles and rise in resource competition among diverse users – who have varied and conflicting land use priorities (Pas, 2018).

3. Land Degradation as a Major Driver of Resource Conflicts in Turkana County



Figure 4: A picture showing a severely degraded area by soil erosion in the rangelands. Source: Lawrence Kiage

Land degradation the most significant driver of natural resource scarcity and therefore increasing competition. It is poised to diminish land productivity, especially in dry areas, and can also lead to loss of vegetation cover thus increasing susceptibility to climate risks, particularly droughts. It is driven by poor land management which includes destruction of natural forests for timber, charcoal production, expansion of cultivation, overgrazing, mining and infrastructure projects, leading to increased runoff, flash flooding, soil erosion, reduced infiltration and siltation of rivers.

These have adversely affected livestock and other land-based livelihood systems. About 50% of land in Turkana County is highly degraded; thus threatening food security, water quality and quantity and grazing areas leading to huge economic losses and destitution of pastoral communities in the county (CIDP, 2018). Rise in intensity and frequency of extreme weather events will combine with land degradation to increase the risk of floods and drought across the county. Land degradation has been considered to be of high significance in negatively impacting human livelihoods. Climate change amplify land degradation, exacerbating resource-based tensions.

4. Gender Perspective of Resource Use and Conflicts in Turkana County

Climate related security risks and conflicts disproportionately impact men, women, boys and girls. The capacity of individuals to cope with physical and food insecurity, displacement, loss of livelihood assets, social exclusion and other impacts of conflict is strongly influenced by their gendered roles and responsibilities (Women, 2013). Evidence suggests that the impacts of climate change cause significant socio-economic shifts, including transforming the traditional gender norms that determine economic activity, social relationships and leadership. The ability to access, control and own productive assets such as labor, land, finance and social capital enables people to create stable and productive lives (Omolo and Mafongoya, 2019). However, the access, use, ownership and the overall governance systems of land and land resources differ among various gender categories, particularly between men and women. While it is evident that women's control of assets is associated with positive development outcomes at the household and individual levels, they however, have comparatively fewer options for participating in land governance and natural resource management. Women thus are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men. This result from various factors including the fact that they constitute the majority of the world's poor and are more dependent for their livelihood on natural resources that are threatened by climate change. Secondly, they face social, economic and political barriers that limit their coping capacity. Further, when coupled with unequal access to resources and to decision-making processes, limited mobility places women in rural areas in a position where they are disproportionately affected by climate change. Women are particularly vulnerable to insecurity and violent conflict. This is because they are responsible for their children making it more difficult for them to flee during periods of raiding.

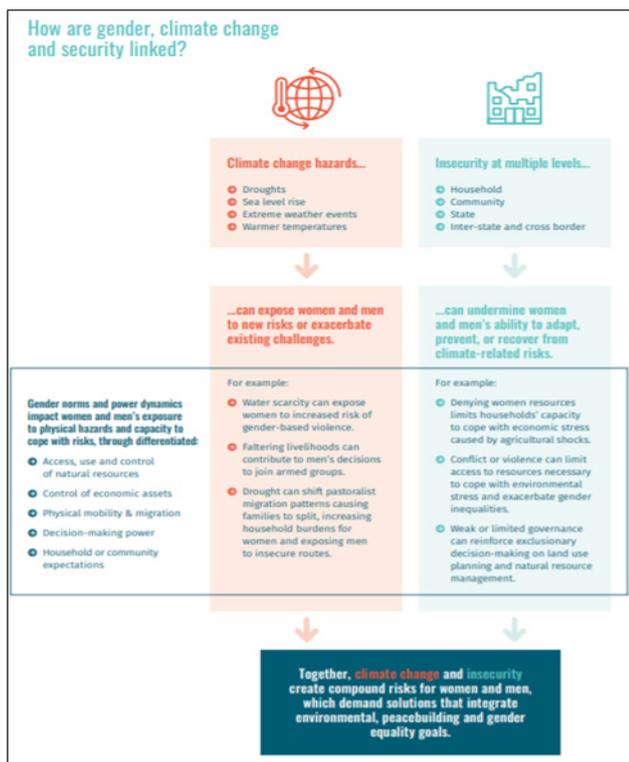


Figure 5: Gender, climate change and security linkages. Source: Nagarajan et al., 2020

It is clearly understood that women’s vulnerability to climate risks is attributed to the gender differentiation between women and men, which is affected by availability of natural resources, access to assets and legal policy frameworks. Women pastoralists in Turkana County, are vulnerable due to a number of factors: cultural restrictions, poverty, conflicts, unfavourable national legal frameworks. This implies that understanding gender differentiation in adaptation to climate change is very important. Prioritizing gender issues therefore involves focusing on the inequalities between women and men as well as youth. Applying a gender lens contributes to a better understanding of the different experiences of disasters between women and men, and different groups in terms of ethnicity, race and age. There is a need to mainstream gender climate change policies because women and men have different roles in the community and because climate-induced conflict impacts on women and men differently.

5. Addressing Climate Driven Resource Conflicts in Turkana County

Resource based conflicts adversely affect livelihoods and have a compounding effect on occurrence and impacts of climate change. This implies the need for actions that address the underlying causes of resource-based conflict and formulate long term solutions to the perennial conflict within and beyond the county borders. Addressing such conflicts in the county requires understanding of the status, drivers and conflicts situations in the county to inform suitable and effective interventions and strategies. This needs to take into account the widely diverse interests and conflicts involve n wide category of interest groups: community, investors and government.

Customary Access and Management Regimes: The role of the community and customary structures remain key in resource management and conflicts resolutions. Indigenous knowledge provides unique insight that can supplement the scientific knowledge for effective resolution of conflicts. Binding peace agreements through customary processes have proved effective among communities over the years across many communities in Kenya.

The Role of Turkana County Government in Addressing Resource-based Conflicts: The role of County Government of Turkana remains fundamentally important in establishing lasting solutions to resource-based conflicts within and at cross border levels. Recognizing the fact that conflicts are largely driven by the impacts of land management, drought incidence, increasing competition for limited grazing lands and diminishing water resources, the county government has been leading various conflict resolution actions across the county that involve community dialogues, cross border consultations and monitoring of conflicts in pastoral areas. The county government has embraced integrated approaches in addressing conflict, with particular attention to rehabilitate degraded of natural resources, enhancing soil and water management, promoting sustainable grazing lands management and food security planning.

The county government has continuously invested in Peace Building and Conflict Management programs that are aimed at promoting peace within the county and among neighboring communities, as well as to enhance peaceful coexistence and sharing of cross border resources. These investments range from: cross border peace initiatives, development of the County Peace Policy and Strategy, internal peace initiatives, resettlement activities, support establishment and renovation of security infrastructure such as Kibish, and Lokitaung security facilities. The county government also coordinates and works closely with regional bodies and development partners including in resource mobilization to support peace initiatives.

6. Conclusion

Land resources remain important socio-economic and livelihood drivers, and are closely linked to identity, history and culture among communities in Turkana County. Resource-based conflicts in Turkana County mainly revolve around grazing and water resources, boundaries, urban expansion, and the fencing of livestock passage routes, conservancies, and refugee camps. Climate change events are not the sole cause of resource-based conflicts, rather, acts as a ‘threat multiplier’ and exacerbates existing stresses to increase the likelihood of violent conflict. Resource-based disputes trigger violence and destruction, particularly in cases of weak local institutions, disregarded traditional role of communities’ participation in resolving resource-based conflicts, ill-informed interventions that address the symptoms instead of the root cause of the problem, inadequate policies to address complex land tenure issues in pastoral areas and existing ethnic and political divisions. Both the community members and county government have critical roles in addressing resource-based conflicts in the county. Peace building action need integrated approaches supported by strong and responsive legal and policy environment.

7. Recommendations

- i) Fast-track formulation of the County Peace Policy and Strategy and other legal frameworks that integrate customary institutions to guide secure land tenure, promote sustainable resource management and conflict resolution among competing land user groups in the county
- ii) Conduct county specific situational analysis on the status, trends and drivers of climate driven land conflicts to inform landscape and livelihood planning and decision-making built upon evidence
- iii) Strengthen research, technical knowledge and institutional capacities on early warning systems, climate information services, conflict resolution, resource management and climate change governance for reduced climate risks and violent encounters over land resources within the county and at cross-border levels
- iv) Strengthen coordinated and cross-sectoral approaches on land and development planning that enhance multi-stakeholders dialogues, lesson-sharing and scalability of best practices on inclusive resilience building, disaster risk management and climate driven resource conflict
- v) Support community to register, own and control their community land
- vi) Generate and utilize gender-disaggregated data to inform gender responsive actions plans, policies and strategies on climate resilience, conflict management and land resource access and utilization

Further Reading

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