

Role of Livelihood Platform in Adaptation and Poverty Alleviation Case Study of Turkana District, Kenya

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Abstract

This paper broadly explores the various socio-economic and political assets in Turkana District in North West, Kenya and how these assets have overtime enhanced successful adaptation and poverty alleviation for the Turkana people. Two issues in relation to assets are considered: access to assets as the key issue in the conceptualization of the livelihoods, and local people's own capability of transforming the assets to improve their existing livelihood strategies. It is argued in this paper that local people's vulnerability is closely related to asset ownership: the more assets people have, the less vulnerable they are and the greater the erosion of assets the greater the level of vulnerability. Furthermore, it is pointed out that assets owned and their productive diversity is strongly related with resilience, successful adaptation and poverty alleviation. The information in which this paper is built comes from an extensive review of several Turkana studies, observation and informal Interviews with key informants, case histories and mapping.

Keywords: *Livelihood, Adaptation and Poverty, Turkana District.*

Introduction

Most ethnographic studies of nomadic people in East Africa emphasize the importance of livelihood platform [1,2]. Gulliver [2] also pointed out that any study of the Turkana people to a certain extent is an ecological study, in that their culture centres on the management care of livestock, and must take advantage of all available resources. Gulliver [2] states as follows: "In the Turkana district, there is such a notably harsh and difficult environment that its effect on social life is all-pervasive, inescapable both for the people themselves and for the observer of their lives and activities. For a proper understanding of any facet of Turkana socio-economic organization it is necessary to begin with an appreciation of the livelihood platform [2].

Therefore, this paper analyzed the livelihood platform in the Turkana District as complement to the livelihood context in that region. The intention is to contribute to the understanding of the extent to which Turkana people sustain their livelihood

based on locally available resources. A livelihood platform is taken in this paper as based on the assets an actor has rights and access to. Ellis [3] states that assets could be natural, physical, human, financial, social, and political capital and claims that these assets can be used to produce outputs. Therefore, asset access thus strongly influences households in their decision making when pursuing livelihood activities. Bebbington [4] supports Ellis argument and affirms that: "a person's assets, such as land [cattle], are not merely means with which he or she makes a living; they are assets that give them the capability to be and to act. Assets should not be understood only as things that allow survival, adaptation and poverty alleviation; they are also the basis of agents' power to act and to reproduce, challenge or change the rules that govern the control, use and transformation of resources (1999:3)". The Analysis in this paper also considers Kabeer's [5] argument that access to resources is determined by rules and norms, and these rules and norms

give certain actors authority over other actors in determining the principle of distribution and exchange.

Natural Capital

Natural capital is the natural resource stocks, and environmental services from which resource flows and services useful for livelihoods are derived [3,6,7]. Natural capital is the basic source of livelihood in rural communities. The natural 'capitals' critical for Turkana community are grazing land, soil, water, and vegetation.

Grazing Land

Grazing land is a critical asset for Turkana people. For instance, the carrying capacity of the land may affect the resilience of pastoral households by placing limits on options with respect to size, diversification and dispersal of their herds. In the Turkana District, the general nature of land tenure, as elsewhere among Kenyan pastoral communities, is that land is communally owned. Land rights are reserved to communities rather than to individuals, and land is an undivided part of the social system where rightful use is determined by affinity, common residence, social status or these in common [2,8]. Turkana people do not perceive land as a limited resource, as they normally get access to graze their animals

Two important aspects of land tenure within the Turkana District are the system of *Amaire* and *Ekwar* [9]. The Turkana make optional use of the sparse vegetation by moving livestock between wet and dry season grazing, and by setting aside specific dry season grazing reserves called *Amaire*. The system of *Ekwar* mainly exists along riverine areas in central and some southern Turkana regions, where strips of riparian woodland are claimed by individual Households (*awis*), based on usufruct rights to the trees held by those households and handed down by their ancestors [10-13]. This system is of particular importance during the dry season, when the riverine areas are the main producers of fodder for livestock and the collection of wild fruits. Although the system is still widely in use, a growing concern is the alienation of this land through government intervention and its allocation to development projects, such as irrigation schemes. However, generally, the system of

Ekwar remains effective in conserving environmental resources in the Turkana District, where it is still applied [9,10].

Soils

The soils in the Turkana District are highly variable. They are shallow and generally of light and medium texture. There are either constraints of a chemical composition, or physical limitations such as rockiness, mantle, slope, and depth. They are subject to compaction and capping and are susceptible to erosion. Degradation exists along the base of Uganda, the lower portion of the basin east and northeast of Lokichar (one of the major towns in Turkana). A small section at the middle of the Kerio valley is fairly suitable for subsistence agriculture [14]. However, it is worth noting that three areas suitable for cultivation make up a very small part of the total land area of the district.

Water

Water is crucial to sustaining the Turkana pastoral livelihood. Water is predominantly used by their herds and for domestic purposes. The two main rivers in the Turkana District, the Turkwel and Kerio, which flow more or less continuously from April to September, receive the bulk of their water from the Kenya highlands, far south of the district [2]. Other rivers in Turkana include the Tarach, Kawalathe, Kosipir, and Suguta. According to Norconsult [15], these rivers have water from three to ten months of the year. The seasonal Tarach River in the northwest empties into the Lake Lotikipi plain; otherwise 80 per cent of the district drains into Lake Turkana. Many other water courses flow only during the rains, which may be from a few hours to a few weeks per year. Immediately after a storm, they rage in flood, flow for a brief period, and then cease leaving pools of water and deposits of silt and debris [2].

Clean drinking water is a limited resource in Turkana and this is not different with circumstances facing the Dinka pastoralists in southern Sudan. Operation Lifeline Sudan [16] reported that safe water is probably the most critical issue in southern Sudan. Three quarters of the Southern Sudanese people do not have access to safe water [16]. For the Turkana people, they collect their water from rivers, springs, rock

pools, and waterholes which they dig in dry river beds. During extreme dry seasons, waterholes (*akar*) may be dug up to 25 meters below the ground, from which water is passed up in containers by human chains of sometimes up to 10 people. Water fetching in Turkana has traditionally been the female's responsibility. Males fetch water only for their animals. The groundwater is generally good from having been filtered through sandy aquifers, but it can become contaminated with animal dung around waterholes. Sometimes the groundwater is salty and brackish. People are often required to drink brown coloured water with high silt content.

Vegetation

Vegetation is also critical, and forms the foundation for the pastoral production system. According to Barrow, vegetation provides important browsing for livestock, fruit and foods, medicines, as well as wood based products for pastoral people. Fundamentally, they are a vital safety net in dry and drought times [12].

In the Turkana District, vegetation distribution is determined mainly by water availability, but also by temperature and evaporation, topography, soils, and historical influences. A quarter of the district is devoid of trees and two thirds support only scattered trees [15]. Reliable sources of grass with high productivity are small in the area and widely scattered. Ellis and Dick (1986) point out that plant biomass is related to elevation except for riverine areas. The two main types of woody vegetation found in Turkana are riparian and non-riparian. They are acacia species.

Tree vegetation in Turkana mostly appears as riverine vegetation. Although the numbers of tree species are fewer than in a humid environment, they are well known and important to the Turkana people [17]. *Acacia tortillis* ("umbrella thorn," Turkana "*ewoi*," or "*etir*" when young) is the most valuable tree. Both the Turkwel and the Kerio rivers have thick belts of riparian vegetation on either side, with deep-rooted *acacia tortillis* forming a canopy forest with little understory. The seed pods ("*ngitit*") are a prized feed for goats and the crushed seeds are food for humans.

Moving away from the river, there is a sequence of thickets of *cordia sinensis* ('edome'), *salvadora persica* ('asekon' or 'toothbrush tree'), *balanites* species ('ebei', 'elemach'), *Acacia seyal*, and *dichrostachys cinerea* [17]. In areas distant from the water courses, the species vary, but include *acacia nubica* ('epetet'), *acacia mellifera*, *acacia reficiens* ('eregae'), *dobera glabra* ('edapal'), *boscia coriacea* ('erdung'), *commiphora africana* ('ekadel'), and *euphorbia cuneata*. Near the lake and lower stretches of the rivers, *hyphaena coriacea* ('eengol' or 'doug palm') is dominant [15-18].

The wood, fruits, leaves, bark, and gums from these trees are used by the Turkana people in many ways. Fruits, seeds and leaves are foods for livestock and people. The temperature difference offered by shade (Perhaps 10-15 degrees F) is another high value. The wood is used for fuel and making charcoal, and for building homes, fences, furniture (traditional stools; chairs; and beds), and fashioning many traditional utensils, containers for milk and oil, and watering troughs. Wood is made into toothbrushes, walking sticks, spears, bows, arrows, and a type of club used against wild animals. Fibre is woven into rope, baskets, packing carriers for donkeys, and thatched mats used for bedding. Medicines, ornaments, dyes, and perfumes are some of the other uses of tree products [12].

In relation to vegetation resources, Scoones [19] argues that in general, ecosystems in dry land areas do not follow equilibrium dynamics, but biomass production is highly spatial and temporarily variable. Therefore, in these so called non-equilibrium ecosystems, as in Turkana, pastoral production systems are designed to deal with high levels of spatial variability in resource production.

The environment of Southern Turkana was surveyed in detail by the south Turkana Geographical Expedition [20-24]. More detailed environmental and mapping studies include the Turkana District Resources survey [14], Ellis and Dick's Landsat analysis of Turkana vegetation, Norconsults Environmental study of the Turkana District [15], and Republic of Kenya [25].

Physical Capital

Physical assets are resources used in production of goods and services. Buildings, irrigation, canals, roads, tools, machines e.t.c are physical capital [3]. Traditionally, the Turkana did not have much physical capital, and the material culture of the people has been simple [2]. Even today, Turkana people do not have many tools and utensils, and when moving from one cattle camp to the other, the girls and women carry the family's belongings on their heads. In this paper, two main categories of physical capital are identified: private capital (houses) and public capital (infrastructure).

The sections and clans own the land, but houses and constructions on the land are privately owned. A house indicates that an individual or family has user rights of the land where it is located. Construction of houses is done by women while men are in the field taking care of the animals. Most Turkana men have more than one wife and it is common that each wife maintains a separate house.

Infrastructure

Roads and means of transportation are essential to diffusing knowledge and technology, which facilitate the development of communities (either rural or urban). In the Turkana District, the infrastructure is generally very poor. There is only one major road passing through Turkana to Sudan and when it rains this is impassable. In the interior parts of Turkana, most of the roads and bridges are either damaged or destroyed. There is no public transport system, and most people have only one option when travelling from one place to another: to walk. Some people have bicycles, but it can be hazardous to use them on bad roads. The problem of poor roads and public transportation has negatively affected the livelihoods of Turkana people, for example, it is hard to get supplies into rural areas, and this limits trade with other regions. The Turkana people have no tradition of using carts and animal power to transport commodities and goods, and rely on carrying everything themselves. There are some large trucks that bring food supplies to rural centres in Turkana during famine periods, and these trucks do take some passengers on top of their loads.

Women are the most negatively affected by the bad roads and transport problems. Traditionally, men should not carry loads on their heads; therefore, women should commute by foot carrying loads on their heads. When there are emergencies during child delivery, owing to the lack of qualified midwives, women have to walk long distances to available health clinics.

Human Capital

Human capital refers to the labour available to the household: it includes education, skills, and health. For demographic reasons, the human capital of households changes constantly. Serious losses of people in Turkana are due to persistent drought, famine, disease, and war with their neighbouring tribes. When a family loses the breadwinner, their livelihood platform is seriously weakened. Women, children and the old are usually the most affected during dry seasons because they wait at home for what has been brought by men.

The vast majority of people in rural Turkana District have no access to health services and secondary education. The exception is in areas around Lodwar (district headquarter), and Lokichogio town near the border of Kenya and Sudan. There are shortfalls in human capital relating to education (including training), health, and skilled labour.

Education and Training

Education is one of the most important factors that determine the quality of human capital. The current education system in Kenya is basic school (eight grades), followed by secondary school (four grades), and then university (four years). In the Turkana District, there are a total of 161 primary schools and eight secondary schools. Despite these numbers of schools, the enrolment rate is very low. The low enrolment rate is because the existing service provision in the Turkana District does not take into account the nomadic nature of pastoralism. Mobile schools could solve this problem, but so far these have not been delivered in sufficient measure.

It is argued that given the high dropout rate at both the primary and secondary levels, it

may be quite hard to find many formally qualified people amongst Turkana society. The Government of Kenya has also pointed out that there is a great shortage of teachers in the Turkana District, and that the teacher pupil ratio is 1:70 and 1:40 for primary and secondary schools respectively [25]. The few schools with classrooms are overcrowded since the rooms are too small. Consequently, most children learn under trees and sit on stones. However, staff shortages in schools are partly explained by the fact that Turkana is a hardship area, and that many teachers from other parts of Kenya are unwilling to take up a teaching position in that district. The climate is hot, and most teachers are not willing to lead a semi-nomadic life.

Health

The major diseases that have regularly been reported in the Turkana District are malaria, skin diseases, respiratory tract infections, and diarrhoea [25,26]. Malaria can be prevented by the use of bed nets, but not everybody has the financial means to acquire nets. These are similar to what Bonfiglioli and Watson [27] found to be common diseases among poor people throughout the World. Therefore, the interpretation could be that most Turkana people are generally poor.

According to documents at Lodwar District hospital (the best hospital in the area), one out of four children in the Turkana district is malnourished and undernourished. UNICEF has also tried to eradicate polio in many parts of the Turkana District through vaccination, but this has not been achieved in many parts of Turkana. It is argued that bad sanitation and hygiene problems contribute negatively to the health of the local population because only a few households have sanitary latrines. Furthermore, the solid human waste is disposed in fields close to homesteads, and can make the area also susceptible to diseases. Animals are slaughtered near homesteads, and the remains are left for the flies and other parasites.

Despite the fact that Turkana people are exposed to various diseases, there are very limited health centres in rural Turkana, and a doctor/patient ratio is estimated at

1:75,000 [25]. This is made worse by the fact that in Kenya, healthcare planning is centralised. Drugs and medical supplies sent to rural health centres are made centrally in Nairobi (Capital city) and don't always reflect the specific needs of the rural areas. The average distance to the nearest health facility in the Turkana District is 50 kilometres. Therefore, in cases where treatment is necessary, people have to travel long distances to hospital. As mentioned earlier, the infrastructure is very poor, and there is no reliable public transport system. The result is that many people who need assistance never reach the medical services and end up dead or disabled. Medical personnel at Lodwar District Hospital complained that people come too late to the hospital when they are sick, which makes it harder for doctors to treat the disease.

Children are especially vulnerable and susceptible to insect transmitted diseases; mainly they walk around naked and defecate in open places. Many children also die because they get treatment for malaria too late. Another problem for medical personnel is that people get treatment from the local doctors or magicians, and only go to the hospital when the local treatment fails. The kind of treatment offered by local doctors can often worsen the condition of the patient, and makes it difficult for the medical doctors to treat the illness. But Turkana people use indigenous medicines if what is received from the clinic fails or are perceived to be taking too long to work. They divide illness into those caused by God (*Ngidekesiney ka Akuj*) and those caused by witchcraft (*Ngidekesiney ka ekapilan*). According to Turkana people, illness caused by God is part of the everyday natural world and considered manageable. Illness caused by witchcraft is treated locally using traditional herbs. I argue that the introduction of cost sharing (fees) in public hospitals by the Kenyan government limits the entitlement of health services to many Turkana people, the majority of whom are poor, and that few clinics which are in the rural Turkana region are not effective as people can wait a whole day without receiving treatment. Therefore, poor health, nutrition, and medical services contribute to the perilous state of human capital in the Turkana District.

Labour

According to the 1999 population census, the figure for active labour rose from 264,242 in 2002 to 322,101 in 2008. The dependency ratio is 100:88 implying that in every 100 people, there are 88 dependents [25]. The high dependency retards the growth of the district economy as resources are diverted to consumption, and hence, there is less saving and investment. Furthermore, the majority of people in the district are engaged in pastoralism, fishing, and small business activities, whose returns have been greatly affected by unfavorable climatic conditions and lack of investment resources [25]. Therefore, there is need to create more employment opportunities for the labour force.

However, the actual situation on the ground is that household labour is organized in such a manner as to meet the demands of the pastoral economy. Polygamy has been a common practice and a man can marry as many wives as he can pay bridewealth. One reason for having many wives is that the family will become large, and thereby provide labour for herding and protecting cattle. In most cases, the first wife encourages her husband to marry a second wife when her workload became too much to manage. Women are married for both their productive and reproductive role; that is to say, for her labour, as well as for producing children. According to informants in Turkana society, the ideal wife is one who can work hard.

While discussing the labour situation in the Turkana District, it is necessary to briefly discuss the gender division of labour. The gender division of labour highlights the fact that both men and women play a critical role in the Turkana production system. This disputes the old stereotype that Turkana men tend to play a more important role than women. For example, by custom, herding of animals is done by male household members, but sometimes the practice is that the task of herding and watering animals, both small and large stock, greatly depends on the availability of labour within the household and is shared between men and women. While men have full control concerning grazing, sale, and slaughter, women control the products of livestock that

are allocated to them. In addition to performing their roles of fetching water and wood, caring for the family, watering calves, carrying loads on their heads, gathering wild fruit, child nurturing, milking livestock, constructing houses, skinning and cutting meat, grinding millet, making fat and butter, making and repairing clothes, bedding materials, and pots, and garden work, women also play the crucial role of cultural reproduction in socializing children especially girls, and participating in rituals and cultural ceremonies [2]. However, in view of the numerous and taxing roles played by men and women, the performance of these roles becomes even more challenging in a drought situation when basic resources are scarce.

In pre-colonial Turkana society, young girls assisted by fetching water, cooking food, making clothes, beadwork, baby-sitting, and herding of goats and sheep. Boys looked after young stock such as lambs and calves. They also hunted for squirrels, rats, and birds.

Financial Capital

Financial capital consists of a stock of liquid financial resources such as money, savings and access to credit, and less liquid resources such as livestock, food stocks, and reciprocal claims [3,6]. Financial capital discussed in this paper includes livestock, and reciprocal claims. Despite their high risks, these means of saving are preferred by Turkana people over banks, because they are not only a means of living, but also play a critical role in people's lives, including determining their status.

As pointed out by Galaty, Aronson, Salzman, and Chouinard [28] "one must remember that livestock, particularly cattle, are not merely a food resource; they are also capital, which is essential to all kinds of negotiations involving influence and alliance; and they are not merely savings, they are the only form of investment available to tribal pastoralists". As Deng [29] explains, "For Dinka pastoralists' in Southern Sudan, cattle are not only part of their life but they are the life". A recent study of African pastoralists also found that the number of livestock a household owns is usually the most significant asset determining its wealth [30,31].

Livestock

With an estimated livestock population in the Turkana District of over 143,000 cattle, over 800,000 sheep, over 1,000,000 goats and over 30,000 donkeys, livestock are a key factor in the livelihood platform for the Turkana District. A careful study sponsored by the Kenyan Government showed that livestock income still contributes over 56.6 percent of the total household income in the Turkana District [25].

Traditionally, livestock ownership and numbers in Turkana reflect wealth and prestige, help redeem from damage, and are a sacrificial gift [32]. Turkana livelihoods are based on livestock and according to key informants “The Turkana know each individual animal. It’s all they do. They don’t build houses, they don’t drive motorcars – they just have animals. Their life is animals”.

Turkana households also own livestock to provide meat, milk, blood, hides and skin, and other by-products. Cattle, camels and goats can be used as payment e.g. bride wealth and blood wealth [32]. Turkana people also constantly strive to increase the number of their livestock. When they attain certain numbers, and initiations, marriages and livestock exchanges may take place. Species composition is also manipulated to ensure that animals’ diets and water requirements are met. The sex composition of the herd is manipulated to maintain a higher ratio of female to male animals and thus, a higher level of livestock productivity. Surplus males are traded in town markets to buy non livestock goods (e.g. tobacco, beads, rubber tyre sandals, sugar, maize meal etc).

It is important to note that Turkana women have no control over the livestock despite the fact that they are responsible for the care of small animals. In terms of access to livestock, women have access through their husbands, sons, and male relatives, but very limited access to their own. In the Turkana District, men are the ones who are in charge of livestock. They make the decisions concerning their animals and control the financial capital. If a man wishes to divide his herds into several groups, he can do it without referring the matter to the women of the household. For women who spend most

of their time around the homestead in the villages, it can be quite difficult to keep track of herd changes. However, Turkana women claims that this scenario leaves them vulnerable to cheating if their husband dies and relatives take care of the cattle. When a woman becomes a widow, the family’s livestock is passed down to her elder son. If she does not have a son, or he is too young to take this responsibility, a relative of the late husband will take care of the livestock. Sons in the family will take over when they grow up. Though sometimes when a man dies, the person taking care of his livestock refuse to give the widow anything. In most cases, the herds are scattered to camps far away, to hinder her from reaching them.

In the Turkana District, there are also very limited veterinary services and the imposition of quarantine has become the endemic reaction to the outbreak of livestock diseases. Indeed, the Turkana district has been under permanent and rigorous cattle quarantine since colonial days. The quarantine policy provided the colonial regime with a means to confiscate much of the land with the highest agricultural potential for the settlers. However, this state of affairs not only restricts cattle sales but also encourages overstocking, and therefore overgrazing. Overstocking and overgrazing are serious ecological problems in the Turkana District at present [25].

Reciprocal Claims

Reciprocal claims are considered as a saving process. In many cases, Turkana people see their livestock as belonging not only to individuals, but also to the extended family. In some cases, the number of livestock paid as bride wealth is often much larger than one man can pay, and the size and composition of bride wealth depends on the wealth of the bridegroom and that of his extended family. Relatives, neighbours and friends (stock associates) will help and contribute an animal. Animals provided by others are not purely gifts, and those who give expect to get back at a later stage. The reciprocal claim can go from one generation to the next. Informants re-affirmed that the Turkana people traditionally regard the reciprocal system as part of risk management as it enables the community to

establish social bonds of mutuality between affiliated parties.

For instance, a Turkana man pays livestock to get a wife, the wife gives him daughters who will be married for bride wealth, and this bride wealth can be invested in new wives and social networks through reciprocity. It follows that a family that has lost livestock, but has daughters of marriageable age, can quickly recover from losses as the girls get married, but also, sons will grow up and get married, which will lead to payment of bride wealth and reduction in the number of cattle.

Political Capital

Political capital can be defined as the ability to use power in support of political or economic positions and to enhance livelihoods [33]. It is used to mediate access to capitals by influencing the stream of entitlements available through policies, institutions and processes – either to gain access legitimately or illegitimately, to such entitlements, or to deny others access to them [33]. Turkana people use their political capital, at national and local levels, to influence the stream of entitlement in order to improve the socio-economic status of their region.

Historically, Turkana people have been engaged in politics, in the form of resistance and small revolts, since time immemorial. These rebellions were protests against the imposition of new rules by colonial and post-independence regimes that subordinated the Turkana and rejected their preference to remain under traditional tribal rule [34]. In fact, from the colonial era to post-independent Kenya, the Turkana pastoralists were seen as having less to offer the state, especially resources for the export market, which meant they had less political influence either in or on government [35]. The colonial regime also assumed that the Turkana people, like other pastoralists in Kenya, should have less political influence, because they were seen as unwilling to modernize, entertained an emotional attachment to their livestock, lacked rules and regulations to manage their resources, and were attached to a traditional way of life [35]. Nevertheless, the British administration found it convenient to

establish a system of indirect rule. A hierarchy of chiefs was granted considerable juridical powers and was made responsible for taxation and labour mobilisation [36].

This political marginalization continued into the post-independence period. Turkana people are still denied a voice in decision making because they have little political representation at the national level. Although by territory alone the Turkana region is one of the largest districts in Kenya in terms of size, it has few representatives in the Kenyan parliament. These representatives have a very limited voice in policy formulation in a country dominated and ruled since independence, by major tribes from agriculturally productive areas. Thus the Turkana people have been consistently marginalized throughout history, and therefore have very little influence in the national arena.

In terms of gender, women have, in general, even less access to political capital. The few Turkana representatives in Kenyan parliament are all men. Women are also not allowed to address public gatherings, and even in cases referred to the council of men, a male relative of the offended woman must present her case for her. As women in general have less access to control over various assets, it becomes harder for them to achieve political capital through the accumulation of assets.

When it comes to political capital at the local level, the features of formal political leadership and hierarchy of offices among Turkana people is still debatable. One school of thought claims there is neither a formal system nor a hierarchy [37]. Mair [38], for example, claimed that if the Turkana have any government at all, then they have less than any other people in East Africa, and possibly anywhere in the world. The second school of thought argues that Turkana had a strong local political system. For instance, Apthorpe [39] established the existence of an effective leadership system. He stated as follows “there is an actual or a potential state within a state; not least with its own foreign relations and policy (indeed we have seen how Turkana and Karamajong ‘chiefs’ negotiated their own treaty of amity at the

end of the 1970s without aid from either [the Kenya or Uganda] government)”

I concur with Apthorpe’s conclusion, because Turkana local chiefs, clan elders, and cultural leaders have political power to varying degrees. Traditionally, the Turkana political system functioned through lineages, with each descent group being an autonomous unit. Spear-masters, witchdoctors and rainmakers have traditionally been able to influence society through their capacity to heal bewitched people, chase demons away, predict the future, foresee crises, and unite the people, and they would be consulted before people went into battles. Lamphear [40] emphasizes that “the [Great] Diviners were the ones who directed the Turkana warriors as to how it should raid. The elders merely prayed for the success of the warriors. Therefore, if warriors disobeyed the instructions for the raid, it was the diviner they disobeyed, rather than the elders”.

Social Capital

Social capital is one of the social resources upon which people draw when pursuing different livelihood strategies that require coordinated actions [3,6,7]. Social capital mediates resource flows that are often critical to household livelihood, consumption, health, and status. The most critical social activities that influence local people’s livelihoods in the Turkana District are family affairs and friendship.

Family Affairs

In the context of Turkana society, family affairs mean arranging marriages and divorces and managing widowhood.

Marriage

Marriage in Turkana society is a social institution which not only connects a couple, but also extends beyond the nuclear family to encompass the clan. Marriage is a passage into manhood and womanhood; it legitimizes children, and expands peoples’ social networks. Turkana people can only marry inside or outside of their section membership, but must marry outside their clan. The main reason for the prohibition of marriage between clan members is that clan members are considered brothers and sisters concerning reciprocal obligations and rights,

and incest is, therefore unacceptable. Other reasons include the desire to avoid problems within the same clan, and to avoid giving birth to ill offspring. The last reason is to bring more labour in from outside the clan. The mediums that connect the members of the marriage institution are the bridewealth. Turkana pastoralists refer to bridewealth as ‘stock of marriage’ or ‘*ngebarin Akortar*’ [32].

Marriages are not considered to be permanent and official until a ceremonial ox is slaughtered and livestock are handed over. In practice, the couple may not live together before all the bridewealth is transferred. Affinal kin (in-law) relationships are especially valued by the Turkana, and the selection of a bride is made with this consideration in mind. If indebtedness is allowed to linger, a sense of both obligation and this trust required to keep the in-law relationship vital may be placed at risk. The bride-wealth is widely distributed among patrilineal and matrilineal lineages to establish and strengthen kinship between affinals, as well as to establish bonds of marital status between the bride and bridegroom; and the legitimacy of the children conceived in and born out of the union [32]. Among Turkana, children born out of wedlock, in an arrangement in which the bridewealth has not been paid, are not recognized as ‘heirs’ in the patrilineal home [32]. It is also interesting to note that bridewealth in Turkana is among the highest recorded for pastoral people in East Africa. Gulliver [32] found that the bride price ranged from 30-50 cattle, 15-50 camels and 85-100 goats. These figures have changed slightly in the recent past. A study by Mc Cabe [41] established that a typical bride-wealth includes 10-30 cattle, 10-30 camels and 1-200 small stock.

Clan elders are consulted at times of marriage, as they are intricately involved in negotiations about the bridewealth animals. A man is a member of his father’s clan for life, whereas a woman joins her husband’s clan at the time of marriage. Even though a woman leaves her own lineage for that of her husband, her kin maintains an interest in her affairs and come to her aid according to need throughout her marital life, especially when a food crisis looms.

Polygamy

This is a very common practice among the Turkana community. The term co-wives in Turkana society also refers to two or more women married to one man. Co-wives are not necessarily living in the same compound or house. The first wife (not necessarily the eldest) is called 'the mother of the house' and she has control over other wives if they both live in the same compound. The husband delegates some authority. One reason for having many wives is that the family will become large, and thereby provide needed labour for herding and protecting the cattle. Ellis [3] argues that large rural households tend to be poorer, in per capita income, than smaller households, although no direction of causality can be inferred from this finding. The opposite seems to be the case amongst Turkana society, where a large household is a symbol of wealth and insurance at times of food crises. The Turkana case therefore concurs with what Toulmin [42] and Adams [43] found in Mali that large households are relatively wealthy and resilient and have the ability to avert or cope with crisis through labour substitution and livelihood diversification. A study by Nikola [44] also established that better-off pastoral households tend to be larger than poorer households.

Widowhood

In the case of the death of a wife, the husband marries another woman to continue the tasks of the dead. This usually involves caring for him and his children. If a woman becomes a widow, a male relative of her late husband will inherit her. For this marriage, she is not paid a bride-wealth. The man, who marries the widow, will take on the reproductive role, and take care of the livestock owned by the deceased. Even though he takes on the reproductive role, the children he produces together with the widow will not belong to him, but to the late husband. Turkana people do not only value social relations with their living relatives and friends, but also with those who have died. When a widow remarries out of the clan of her late husband, an equivalent of the value of her bride wealth is refunded to the family of the deceased husband. Furthermore, if she gives birth before she remarries or pays the first instalment of the

bride wealth, the child belongs to the deceased husband's family because she or he is considered 'born in his bride wealth'.

Turkana people believe that their spirit will live on through their names, and it is important that each man gets children who can pass the name on. All Turkana people fear dying without a son to continue his name and revitalize his influence in this world. From the time a boy is born, he is prepared for his role; and from the time he comes of age to the time he enters the grave, the main concern is that he himself begets children to do for him what he has done for those before him. This is also the reason why a family must marry wives to the sons who have died before the age of marriage. Sons will be married according to the order in which they were born. The eldest son will get married first, and when the family has gathered enough livestock, the next son will follow. If the first son dies before he gets married, the second son will marry a wife for the dead brother. These marriages are sometimes called 'ghost marriages', but are highly regarded by Turkana people.

Divorce

In the Turkana community, disputes between couples are resolved within the family. If the consultation fails to achieve positive results, then the issue is taken before a traditional council of men. The resolutions of the council of men are final, and rarely do the parties in dispute reject them. Divorces among the Turkana people are rare. Turkana people claim that one reason for this is the complexity of returning bride wealth. All the cattle have to be traced back, even from relatives who received a share of the bride wealth, a process which can be very complicated given that cattle may have also been invested in new marriages. When a divorce occurs, the children belong to the father and his family. This is also the case when a man dies. The process of returning the cattle and giving up children hinders widows from getting remarried. Therefore, the clansmen are very keen on the continuation of marriage.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the livelihood platform in Turkana district. The extent to which these assets could be used to sustain

the livelihoods of the Turkana people living in increasingly arid conditions in North-West, Kenya is discussed. This is an important discussion since Turkana pastoralists' livelihoods are affected to a large extent by the environment. It is argued here that the environment, in which Turkana households live, provides opportunities and limitations that influence their decision making.

As explored in this paper, the Turkana District is a region particularly suitable for understanding how pastoralists use their assets to survive in harsh environments. Turkana people live in an ecological zone that is arid. Much of the district is also characterized by low-lying plains with scattered elevated features. This provides a range of vegetation types, which are exploited between wet and dry seasons by Turkana pastoralists. Tree vegetation mostly appears as riverine vegetation and

acacia tortillis is the most valuable tree found along the banks of the Turkwel and Kerio rivers (the two main rivers in the Turkana District). Rainfall is unpredictable, the soils are poor, and water is scarce.

The Turkana people also tend to be both geographically and politically marginalized. The people live in remote places and are often disadvantageously excluded from political processes and associated development efforts. I argue here that, even though the Kenya government has made visible efforts to develop the Turkana District by introducing certain resources such as schools, health centres, and access to markets and infrastructure, they remain limited in scope. Therefore, this paper has shown that socio-economic and political assets are all important in maintaining livelihood in Turkana district.

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