



Regional Learning &
Advocacy Programme
for Vulnerable Dryland
Communities

Impending drought in Kenya's drylands: Will the crisis ever end?

Yet again, Kenya is facing impending drought, and the drylands are already bearing the brunt. Around 3 million people are currently affected, and it is likely the situation will get worse over the coming months. Water and pasture is already in short supply – and as livestock get weaker and their market value decreases, pastoralists have less income to buy food. Malnutrition is rising as families skip meals, take on debts to buy food, and weak cattle are unable to produce vital milk. Families are withdrawing children from school as they migrate with their cattle to find water.

But why does a regular and predictable event like drought always lead to disaster? It's because too often the response and the media coverage comes too late – after disaster has already struck, when people are hungry and cattle are dying – rather than addressing the issues that make people vulnerable in the first place. Exacerbated by a changing climate, drought is currently inevitable in Kenya. However it is not inevitable that people starve and thousands of animals die as a result.

Why wait until it is too late? *With the right action at the right time, hazards such as drought will not always result in disaster, and lives and livelihoods can be saved. The Kenyan government, aid agencies, donors and the media urgently need to re-assess how Kenya deals with drought.*

What makes the drylands so vulnerable?

It is not a coincidence that the drylands are the areas most affected by droughts. Negative perceptions and stereotypes of pastoralist livelihoods persist, with the result that many people believe pastoralism itself increases vulnerability. In fact, pastoralism is a highly adaptable and resilient way of living that makes use of limited natural resources in areas that receive little rainfall. However, there are five key underlying issues that undermine this livelihood. With the right political will, these can be addressed:

1. Failure to invest in the drylands' economy

The economic potential of the drylands – also known as the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) – is enormous. According to Kenyan government figures, the livestock sector contributes about 12 percent of Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 40 percent of the agricultural GDP, and employs 50 percent of the country's agricultural workforce.

The ASALs support around six million people, or 15 percent of Kenya's population, yet the government's budget allocation to the livestock sector is only around one percent of

the national budget. While Kenya's coffee and tea producers receive major support and subsidies, livestock keepers receive comparatively little help. The livestock sector receives only a fifth of agricultural investment, and even within the livestock sector, the ASALs are neglected: While 75 percent of Kenya's livestock are in the ASALs, they are served by fewer than 10 percent of livestock service staff. There is little money for development or opening the regions up for investment. Demand for meat and dairy products is increasing nationally and internationally, yet the ASALs are not benefiting from this opportunity.

2. A lack of development and basic services

The ASALs have suffered decades of neglect that have a profound impact on the situation today. These regions are the most under-served in terms of roads and basic services such as water, healthcare, education and electricity. This limits access to national and international markets, and makes people in the drylands more vulnerable to hazards such as droughts and floods.

The drylands are the poorest regions of Kenya. 95 percent of people in Turkana live below the poverty line, compared to a national average of 53 percent. Other ASAL regions such as Marsabit (92%), Mandera (89%) and Wajir (84%) are also far poorer than average. The stark discrepancies between life in the drylands and most of Kenya is clear from this table comparing services in North-Eastern Province to the national average:

<i>Service</i>	<i>North-Eastern (%)</i>	<i>National average (%)</i>
Access to safe drinking water	9.9	56.3
Electricity at home	3.2	16.0
Antenatal care for women	31.7	89.9
Vaccinated children (12-23 months)	54.3	92.6
Primary school attendance	36.3	78.7

3. Poor policies, and slow implementation of good ones

Pastoralist communities have adopted their own strategies for coping with the environmental challenges, such as communal land management, seasonal mobility, and the zoning of rangelands for dry and wet season grazing. However, these have been undermined by government policies that have tended to allocate pastoral land – particularly prime dry-season grazing areas – for other uses, such as agriculture, new settlements, game reserves and mining. This has had a devastating impact on pastoralists' ability to cope with drought.

For example, the Kenyan government has already given tenure rights and ownership of 40,000 hectares of Delta land to the Tana and Athi Rivers Development Authority (TARDA) and the Mumias Sugar Company, to convert the land into a monoculture sugar cane plantation. Over 25,000 people living in 30 villages stand to be evicted from their ancestral land as a result.

While on paper there has been an improvement in recent years in the policies and institutional frameworks for developing the drylands and building the resilience of pastoralist communities, in reality most have not been implemented and drafts have not been finalized. This begs the question, why not?

Some key policies that remain in draft form include: the proposed Disaster Management Policy; the establishment of the Drought/Disaster Management Authority and Contingency Fund; the ASAL Development Policy; and also flagship projects included in the government's Vision 2030. Without good policies and legal and institutional frameworks, government budget allocation to the drylands is constrained.

4. Late and inappropriate responses

Effectively dealing with drought is possible, but only if we are better prepared. Resources need to be pre-positioned in locations where they are likely to be needed – however this is rarely the case. Often, even when early warning information and contingency plans are available and the drought is predicted well in advance, the response is still late. Accessing government and donor funds in advance of the disaster often takes too long because of the overly slow and bureaucratic procedures – which ultimately costs lives.

Too often the response to drought begins when people run out of food. In fact, there are four phases (see table below) – by putting more emphasis and investment in phases 1 and 2, there is less chance of reaching the emergency phase. Long-term development and emergency aid are two sides of the same coin. This approach is known as *Drought Cycle Management*, and each of the four phases requires different actions:

Phase	Situation	Actions needed
1. Normal	Good rainfall. Pasture and water available	Development: Infrastructure development such as water points, grain reserves, roads and healthcare facilities; Building the capacity of local organisations to lobby and secure their rights
2. Alert/Alarm	Pasture deteriorates; depleted water levels	Preparedness: Livestock vaccinations and destocking (buying up animals before they get too weak); Stockpiling cereals/grains; repairing old water boreholes
3. Emergency	People struggling to find food and water, livestock dying	Relief: Food aid; emergency healthcare (for humans and animals); trucking in water
4. Recovery	Rainfall – improved pasture and water	Reconstruction: Repairing water infrastructure such as dams and boreholes; restocking animals

5. Poor co-ordination at local level

While it is vital for effectively managing drought that many different actors play a role – from the government to international NGOs, civil society to donors – the long-term responses are often uncoordinated. This leads to the duplication of interventions, a lack of accurate and comprehensive information sharing, and poor linkages between national and local levels. While local level structures are in place, currently in the form of the District Steering Groups, line ministries and sectors are often poorly represented and the groups are often not pro-active in communicating and advocating for the right assistance at higher levels. Contingency planning often lacks focus and prioritisation of needs, and

without local level contingency funds, ends up being an unattainable wish list rather than a guide to action.

Solutions: Recommendations to the government and donors

The government, donors and humanitarian agencies must tackle the underlying causes of vulnerability to disasters, particularly given the likely increase in frequency and intensity of drought due to climate change. Key recommendations include:

- The government should urgently increase investment in the livestock sector, including improving infrastructure and disease control.
- The government should redress the unequal provision of basic services and utilities in the ASALs, and ensure development in the region.
- The government should prioritise finalising and implementing key draft policies and institutional bodies that would help to better deal with the crisis and long-term needs.
- All actors should base their responses on the Drought Cycle Management approach, ensuring that priority is given to preparing in advance for droughts and building communities' ability to cope, not just responding to emergencies. Governments and donors need to provide long-term flexible funding to ensure this, and provide easily accessible contingency funds.
- NGOs should work closely with government and other agencies to develop models of good practice, and ensure these are used and implemented
- The government urgently needs to strengthen local level co-ordination, now and for the future, and ensure that government line sectors are engaged in focused and realistic joint preparedness and response planning.

About REGLAP: The Regional Learning and Advocacy Programme for Vulnerable Dryland Communities (REGLAP) is a regional project funded by European Commission for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) under the Drought Cycle Management Decision. It is implemented by a consortium consisting of Oxfam GB, RECONCILE, Cordaid, Care International, Save the Children UK and VSF Belgium. The project seeks to promote the integration of humanitarian assistance with development interventions through Disaster Risk Reduction among donors, civil society organisations (CSOs), and the government. The project works to increase CSO capacity to use lessons learnt for policy and practice change.

Note to media

REGLAP members currently operate in most parts of Kenya and may be able to assist with media trips, briefings or interviews, or contacts with local pastoralist groups and communities. For more information, contact:

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