



**Local Governance  
and Adapting to  
Climate Change in  
Sub-Saharan  
Africa (LGACC)**

# MULTILEVEL DIALOGUE AND PLANNING FOR IMPROVING RANGELANDS IN NORTHERN KENYA

EKTA PATEL (ILRI), LANCE W. ROBINSON (ILRI), IRENE NGANGA (ILRI)



## KEY MESSAGE:

Across Kenya, the strength and quality of governance at a local scale—the scale of individual group ranches, community conservancies, and traditional rangeland territories—varies. However, the challenges arise primarily from the weakness in communication, management, and governance at larger scales. One of the greatest contributions that policy and development programming can make is to facilitate communication and planning at various levels across community, ethnic and county divides.

## POLICY CHALLENGE

Promotion of community rangeland management in northern Kenya has resulted in several promising but sometimes short-lived local successes. Local planning and investment in management of rangelands has been undermined by lack of clarity around, and enforcement of, property and management rights, and weak to non-existent governance at larger scales that correspond to the reality of pastoralist mobility.

## NORTHERN KENYA: A COMPLEX PASTORALIST LANDSCAPE

Northern Kenya is characterized by scant and highly variable rainfall and forage, conditions that make much of the landscape ill-suited for cultivation agriculture and well-suited for pastoralism. However, conditions across northern Kenya are not uniform. Significant differences in rainfall, pasture conditions, social organization, and other factors create a complex set of challenges.

Many of these differences manifest as a series of coinciding gradients. In the southern part of the landscape, especially the Mt. Kenya area, rainfall is higher and slightly more reliable, herds are somewhat less mobile, and pastoralists are more likely to engage in secondary livelihood activities such as small-scale farming. As one moves further north and away from Mt. Kenya, generally rainfall is less abundant and less

reliable, herds are more mobile, and pastoralism is more likely to be people's sole livelihood (see Fig. 1). There is also a gradient in terms of social organization and land ownership. In much of Laikipia and areas on the slopes of Mt. Kenya, boundaries and ownership of land are well defined. Community organization at the level of group ranches and community conservancies is well developed and many of these communities engage in active rangeland rehabilitation and management. Further north, most of the land is former Trust Land with boundaries that either do not exist or are not well-known. Local level community organizations for management of rangelands tend to be less common and at earlier stages of development. Traditional institutions, where they still exist, tend to function quite differently than do the conservancies and group ranches of the areas further south.

These differences also result in different migration and grazing strategies and different perceptions of pasture resources around the landscape. Some areas with more reliable rainfall and forage are the permanent home of some people. However, herders from further away often see these same areas as drought fallback pastures, to which they and their fathers and grandfathers have always had a right to access. These differing perceptions create challenges for efforts aimed at managing rangelands and improving the quantity and quality of forage.

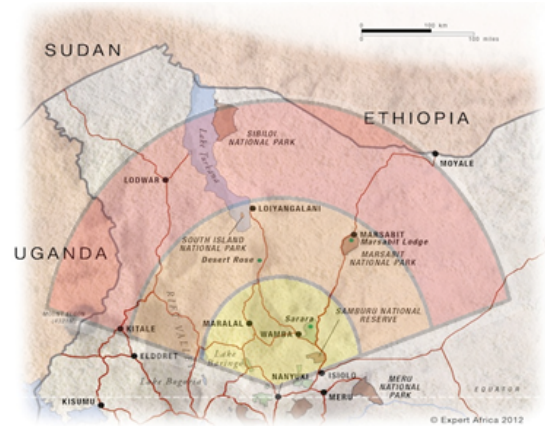
# MULTILEVEL DIALOGUE AND PLANNING FOR IMPROVING RANGELANDS IN NORTHERN KENYA

## SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Community-based rangeland management involves members of a community working together through a local institution that they control to manage how rangeland resources are used for increased productivity, sustainability, and resilience to droughts. The foundation of community rangeland management is a plan, developed by the members of the community, guiding when different pastures will be grazed and for how long. More elaborate interventions may include bunched rotational grazing, reseeding of selected pastures, controlling which livestock species may use different pastures, and setting aside some pastures for longer periods to serve as drought reserves and/or to allow them to recuperate from overuse.

One community that has had some success is Garba Tula in Isiolo County. Traditionally, for the purpose of management, Borana pastoralists divided the land into a number of rangeland territories known as dheedas, but the dheeda system had eroded over the years. A study carried out by ILRI (Robinson et al. 2017) describes how organizations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Resource Advocacy Program (RAP), and the International Institute for Environment and Development helped the community to revive the dheeda system and helped the dheeda council to develop a seasonal grazing plan. According to community members, re-establishing the traditional practice of seasonal grazing, so that pastures always have a rest period, resulted in noticeable improvements.

A community where rangeland management practices have been taken further and that has seen significant success is Il'Ngwesi Group Ranch and Conservancy. It has a vigorous strategy for managing and improving pastures. Pasture areas are zoned into wet and dry grazing areas, grass bank areas are reserved for droughts, the community engages in fodder production, and with modest support from organizations such as the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, activities have been undertaken to rehabilitate degraded pastures through rotational bunched grazing practices based on holistic rangeland management.



**Fig 1. Northern Kenya is characterized by a series of coinciding gradients. Further south and in the Mt. Kenya area (yellow shading), forage and rainfall are more reliable and property rights more clearly defined. In areas further north and away from Mt. Kenya (red shading), rainfall and forage are more variable and herd mobility is greater. (Note: the shading shown does not represent any precise spatial measurements and has been shown for illustrative purposes only.)**

However, successes have been quickly followed by challenges, as any improvements in forage created by local investment invariably become magnets attracting herders from elsewhere in northern Kenya. Current institutions seem to be ill-equipped to protect collective property rights for pastoralist communities or to manage livestock mobility and inter-community sharing of pastures.

During a dry spell in 2015, Il'Ngwesi saw an influx of large number of livestock belonging to pastoralists from elsewhere in northern Kenya. Armed clashes between the locals and migrating herders ensued, leading to death of herdsmen. Involvement of the national and county governments, including security forces, eventually helped to normalize the situation but the dry season grazing reserve was devastated (Robinson et al., 2017). Similar events took place again in Il'Ngwesi and elsewhere in Laikipia County in 2017. Garba Tula has faced similar challenges, finding it nearly impossible to enforce seasonal grazing plans when herders from other areas move in to benefit from improved pastures conditions.

# MULTILEVEL DIALOGUE AND PLANNING FOR IMPROVING RANGELANDS IN NORTHERN KENYA

The efforts of these communities to protect natural resources and to prepare for droughts have been undermined by such occurrences. Local people whose management systems include seasonal grazing schedules, bunched rotational grazing, and other kinds of restrictions find it difficult or impossible to impose their management systems on herders who have no such systems in their home areas. The security of communal property rights and tenure does need to be strengthened.

On the other hand, herd mobility is a vital part of livestock production in these highly variable climates, and improved security on its own cannot result in a sustainable solution.

The central challenges faced by communities such as Il'Ngwesi and Garba Tula are as much about weaknesses in communication, governance, and management of mobility across the larger landscape as they are about enforcement of local property rights.

## ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

Across Kenya, the strength and quality of governance at a local scale—the scale of individual group ranches, community conservancies, and traditional rangeland territories—varies.

The main challenges, however, do not relate to local-level decision-making, rule enforcement or grazing planning. Instead, the challenges arise from the weakness in communication, management, and governance at larger scales.

One of the greatest contributions that policy and development programming can make is to facilitate communication and planning at various levels across community, ethnic and county divides. A few examples of such interventions—spanning the local, inter-community level to forums for stakeholders for the entire northern Kenya region—are mentioned here.

- Regular forums among immediately neighbouring communities to coordinate season-to-season and year-to-year grazing planning.

- Bilateral meetings between community leaders of different pastoralist ethnic groups to address "larger" and longer-term issues of how pastures will and will not be shared and how grazing will be coordinated.
- Permanent and ongoing joint planning between adjacent county governments around how to support community-level rangeland management and integrate it with appropriate livestock migration and pasture-sharing.
- Occasional forums of community leaders and other key stakeholders at the scale of all of northern Kenya to address all of these challenges.

Equally valuable will be to involve women and youth. When conflict erupts over grazing, it is youth who are on the front lines. Women can bring a particular perspective to the pursuit of mutual understanding and peace. It is crucial that women and youth be involved in these kinds of processes as well as in negotiation, planning and peace-building activities in which they take centre stage. The overall aim should be to institutionalize these processes rather than to pursue a series of one-off meetings. Some can be embedded in existing institutional processes such as county spatial planning, and some should gradually be established as part of mandated land and grazing management systems.

Such an approach, drawing on and reinvigorating negotiation-based aspects of traditional pastoralist decision-making, would avoid two undesirable extremes: that of fragmentation into ever smaller, well-enforced parcels of land, and that of a free-for-all in which there is no communication, rules, or joint planning around movement of herds and in which access to pasture is determined through conflict.

Greater communication and mutual planning across communities would help to create the enabling environment that is needed—a foundation for the kinds of local efforts being implemented in places such as Il'Ngwesi and Garba Tula to spread across Kenya's rangeland communities.



# MULTILEVEL DIALOGUE AND PLANNING FOR IMPROVING RANGELANDS IN NORTHERN KENYA



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brief consolidates findings from two projects carried out by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF): the Local Governance and Adapting to Climate Change in Sub-Saharan Africa (LGACC) project, carried out by ICRAF and ILRI, with funding provided by the United States Agency for International Development, and the CGIAR Research Programs on Dryland Systems. Our thanks also go to the communities of Il'Ngwesi and Garba Tula.

## REFERENCES

Robinson, Lance W., Enoch Ontiri, Tsegaye Alemu, and Stephen S. Moiko. 2017. Transcending Landscapes: Working Across Scales and Levels in Pastoralist Rangeland Governance. *Environmental Management* v. 60(2):185–199. URL: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs00267-017-0870-z>.

Photo credit: Front page: University of Nairobi/ICRAF, Teresiah W. Ng'ang'a  
End Page: ILRI: Dave Elsworth