



Carren Nasiaki Kirungu
Head of County Land
Reclamation Department

KENYA

Snapshot: West Pokot County

Climate Change and land degradation in West Pokot

In many areas of West Pokot County, the lands are rapidly degrading due to climate change and anthropogenic factors. The effects of overgrazing, deforestation and unsustainable agricultural are amplified by drought and flood cycles. These climatic conditions are in turn affecting human activity. For example, the severe drought drives overgrazing and pushes farmers to shift to riparian cultivation resulting in these areas becoming more prone to soil erosion.

Due to increased economic pressure, many households are burning and trading in charcoal and wood, leading to increased deforestation. Loss of tree cover renders soils more vulnerable to intense rainfall events. Coupled with overgrazing and increased pressure on the land, deforestation is leading to large-scale erosion with both surface soils and deep gully erosion.

The long rain season in the region traditionally begins in March, through to August. These reliable rainfall patterns no longer occur, as illustrated by the 2019 patterns where the rains were delayed until June, followed by very short rains between October and December.

In December 2019, West Pokot County experienced sudden torrential rainfall followed by flash floods which resulted in landslides. Many people lost their homes and livelihoods, and some even lost their lives. Infrastructure such as roads and bridges were also destroyed.

Incremental advancing land degradation is also driven by climate change, resulting in lower cropping potential and loss of other ecosystem services. **Severe cascading indirect impacts create issues of food security which in turn, contributes to the breakup of family units and puts pressure on education and health services.** Understandably these stresses result in increased conflict among neighbouring communities (Marakwet, Turkana Karamojong, and Sebei for example), between counties (West Pokot, Turkana, Elgeyo-Marakwet, and Baringo) and even between countries (Uganda and Kenya).

Funding challenges for adaptation efforts on the ground

The County Land Reclamation Department notes that there are many opportunities identified by communities for erosion control and reforestation, which would improve soil conservation. These measures should ideally be planned and implemented before the rains. However, one of the main challenges the county has to solve is the late disbursement of public funds. **Un-coordinated financial disbursement complicates the implementation of SMART climate projects** and makes it difficult to plan for harmonized, pro-active approaches.

Another challenge is insufficient funding. Many projects and important opportunities are identified and aligned with the County's Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) and in the Annual Development Plan (ADP). But only one in about twenty projects are implemented in a year due to **many competing priorities and shortage of funds** – noting that the County Land Reclamation Department is also responsible for water-related projects and is under financial pressure [1] as well as being “over-subscribed” with requests for capacity and funding.

Supported by:



Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Nature Conservation
and Nuclear Safety

based on a decision of the German Bundestag

SOUTH
SOUTH
NORTH
TOWARDS CLIMATE RESILIENCE



Climate & Development
Knowledge Network



West Pokot County designed a drought resilience solution to plant and harvest pasture and store the hay for pastoral communities during the drought season. But inadequate hay storage facilities precluded the strategy from being realized. Access to a mower and baler for harvesting have also posed a challenge. Currently, the county relies on the Livestock Improvement Project in Nasukuta region to assist with the necessary mower and baler for harvesting, but this creates delays for up to 2 years. This inefficiency makes proper harvesting a problem.

Severe gully erosion is becoming more common on public lands and several schools and health services are threatened by the advance of gullies towards their foundations. There are several instances where the county has identified opportunity to plant pasture and reverse gully degradation, but cannot access funding to do so. In the current financial year, one gully control programme, funded by the Land Reclamation Department, will go ahead at Emboasis Primary school, where 60 acres around the school are riddled with unsafe landforms. The project type falls within the CIDP pipeline, and despite the critical importance to address this issue (or face the consequent loss of infrastructure) this year’s funding will be insufficient to adequately address the issue.

Suffice to say, there are a myriad of interventions that have been identified across the county, many included within the CIDP which await finance. **When sustainable land reclamation solutions are so difficult to get off the ground, people become more concerned with immediate priorities, such as sinking boreholes for access to water.**

Integrated Solutions are required....

Building the technical capacity and awareness of officials is important because land degradation is a complex interdisciplinary subject and requires a myriad of interventions. Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) thus benefit from greater technical understanding. Communities would also benefit from education and capacity building on the impacts of climate change, the inter-related causes of land degradation, and opportunities for adaptation.

However, implementation projects and capacity building priorities can compete with one another for funding. While there are strong benefits to capacity building in the Department, there is an urgent demand for critical infrastructure to improve resilience on the ground and realise immediate and direct benefits (noting the proposal for pasture storage in West Pokot, for example, which is hampered by lack of finance for storage facilities, mowers and balers). Raising awareness at national level could also assist in the process of policy adjustment, where required, and enable the public expenditures and investments necessary to make land degradation intervention strategies more effective and transformative.

Opportunities for improved integration of climate governance

A clear **Climate Action Policy could provide a solution for West Pokot County to guide the county towards achieving national targets and, in turn, generating local benefits.** To date, the climate policy and bill has not been adopted by the county assembly. Broader solutions, such as funds for mainstreaming climate change in the counties, are not factored.

What is clear, however, is that **greater coordination amongst key players delivers improved results.** For example, once short term strategies are in place to support land recovery (through afforestation and pasture rehabilitation) the Land Reclamation Department shall seek to collaborate closely with the Livestock Department to improve breeds and mitigate overstocking and overgrazing — thereby attenuating one of the tangible drivers of land degradation. Technical workshops for MCAs would help sensitize and build understanding on climate change matters, as well as the impacts and opportunities to control land degradation.

In the short term, in order for West Pokot to attract more public and private investment in the long list of identified climate projects, the projects already included within the CIDPs should be included in the ADPs. This will help fast-track projects and avoid postponing important activities indefinitely.

Special thanks to the Technical Consultation Rapporteurs for their dedicated work to compile this information.

Ms. Eve Wandeto; Ms. Amanda Wangari; Ms. Doreen Abiero



For More Information:

SouthSouthNorth (SSN) - IKI Mobilizing Investment for NDC Implementation

Aligning County Integrated Development Plans to the National Climate Change Action Plan

Part A: Institutional Mapping Report

Part B: County Technical Consultation

West Pokot County Integrated Development Plan

West Pokot Presentations at the County Technical Consultation

Footnotes

[1] The budget for the Land Reclamation Department can go as low as Ksh 1,000,000 (+/- US\$ 10,000) for one financial year— which is extremely limiting. For example, this creates basic transportation challenges in the department, and makes it very difficult to properly supervise the implementation of projects.