

RESEARCH BRIEF

APRIL 2022

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN TURKANA WEST, KENYA

RESEARCH BRIEFING: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Introduction

Turkana West is a sub-county of Turkana County. The area is also part of the wider cross-border Karamoja cluster which is dominated by pastoralists. Pastoral communities are among the most marginalised in the world. This holds true in Kenya, where regions inhabited by pastoralists have experienced decades of marginalisation, rendering them some of the nation's most underdeveloped and frequently recording socio-economic indicators below the national average. Turkana County is one of these regions, with a population of close to 1 million people – mostly nomadic pastoralists. The county is part of the arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) regions of Kenya, where desert-like conditions compound the area's prevailing socio-economic development challenges. Yet Turkana County plays a significant international role in advancing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus as it is the home of Kenya's second largest refugee settlement: the Kakuma Refugee Camp and the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement (Kakuma-Kalobeyei) in the sub-county of Turkana West. Of all of Turkana's sub-counties, Turkana West has the largest population, reported as 239,627 persons during the 2019 census period. However, these official figures do not include refugee populations. According to UNHCR, the refugee population in Kakuma-Kalobeyei at the end of May 2021 was 211,337 persons. When factoring in a net increase in the host community population since the 2019 census, the combined Turkana West population is in fact closer to 500,000 people – double that of the official census. If the Kakuma-Kalobeyei cluster were identified as an urban area, it would be among the 10 largest urban centres in Kenya. This relatively high population presents significant socio-economic and environmental challenges and opportunities to the local area. While the presence of refugees has contributed to the growth of the local economy, poverty levels are high and the provision of basic services is inadequate, while environmental resources are becoming increasingly strained, especially water and vegetation.

Most of the research into the prevailing socio-economic conditions in Turkana West has focused on the refugee population. There has been very little integrated research that simultaneously studies both the refugee and host communities, either in the Kakuma-Kalobeyei cluster or beyond. This survey addresses this lack of integrated and interlinked analyses of the prevailing conditions and can inform the design of future interventions. It should be noted that the Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Programme (KISEDPP) follows this more integrated area-wide approach to interventions, however, it is spatially confined in the Kalobeyei area, thereby excluding the opportunity for a broader local area approach.

While most of the population of Turkana West is concentrated in the Kakuma-Kalobeyi cluster and Lokichoggio town, there are many households in sub-county rural settlements. These rural areas have very underdeveloped infrastructure networks and often face significant connectivity challenges. Currently, the A1 Kenya-South Sudan Road links the Kalobeyi-Kakuma cluster to Lokichoggio and the centres in between. After decades of poor conditions, the road is now being improved, which will significantly transform the connectivity of Turkana West with the wider Kenya-South Sudan region. However, the benefits of this will only be felt at local and household levels if investments targeting socio-economic improvement and basic infrastructure are made in Turkana West. The design of appropriate interventions requires data and information about the prevailing socio-economic conditions and insight into the issues affecting the socio-economic development of the area.

Responding to this need, this research was designed to produce crucial data about Turkana West's households (both refugee and host community), beyond the spatial boundaries of the Kakuma-Kalobeyi cluster. It was undertaken between September and November 2020, targeting the main centres in Turkana West and employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. This involved conducting interviews and focus groups with key informants, household sampling, and data/findings feedback sessions. The findings revealed that the socio-economic conditions of the Turkana West population are mostly below the national average, though some variations occur when compared locally between refugee and host communities, and between settlements. The report provides important data and information for deepening the understanding of the prevailing socio-economic conditions in Turkana West, and aims to contribute to the design of better-informed interventions for the area's humanitarian-development programming.

Summary of findings

Population and Demographics

Most of the population in Turkana County live in rural settlements. The urban population is mainly concentrated in Lodwar – the largest urban centre – as well as other small towns, including Kakuma, Kalokol and Lokichoggio. Kakuma-Kalobeyi is the largest clustered human settlement in the county due to the co-existing refugee (Kakuma and Kalobeyi) and the host community settlements. As aforementioned, the sub-county of Turkana West has the largest population in the county comprising an estimated 500,000 people when both refugee and host communities are included. This population is predominantly young, with children, youth and working-age adults making up the largest demographics. This presents both opportunities and challenges with regards to development planning. The demographic breakdowns of Turkana County and Turkana West both correspond to Kenya's national demographic structure in both their refugee and host community populations, i.e. children, youth and those below 50 years old constituting the majority of the demographic composition.

Household Composition and Heads of Households

A significant number of Turkana West's households are headed by women. Households also tend to be larger than the national average. The survey showed that the average household size across both refugee and host community populations in Turkana West is 5.5 persons. Kenya's 2019 census data had previously reported Turkana County's household size as 5.3, and Turkana West's as 5.4. World Bank studies in 2019 and 2021, however, indicated that the current average household size for the refugee population at Kalobeyi Settlement is 5.8, while that of Kakuma Camp is 6.3. All these household sizes are above the national average, reported as 3.9 persons in the 2019 census. The survey also revealed that people aged 0-19 years old account for 68% of the overall population, followed by the working-age adults. This signals an increasing in demand for education and other social amenities and services. An increasing population of working age adults point to a rising concerns for job and livelihood opportunities, which are currently scarce, as well as issues of affordable housing.

According to the survey data, women make up most of the population in both host and refugee communities in Turkana West, comprising 56.8% and 58.5% of the population respectively. The 2015/16 Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey (KIHBS) indicated that 52.1% of Turkana County households are headed by women. The 2019 World Bank study echoed those findings at a county level, finding 52% of households were headed by women, with that number rising to 56% when considering only Kakuma. Women in Turkana County's main settlements, particularly within host communities, were found to take an active role in supplementing family income by engaging in alternative economic activities, while men focused on herding and seasonal movement with livestock. This has resulted in a hybrid lifestyle that combines sedentarism and nomadic pastoralism. The high prevalence of women-headed households in host communities is caused by men's absence due to nomadic pastoralism, loss of life during conflict, or through loss of livestock, leading to women taking up the role of income generation through alternative livelihood strategies.

Incomes and Poverty

Incomes tend to be low in Turkana West and there is high prevalence of poverty in both refugee and host communities. Financial aid is the main source of income for refugees, while for the Turkana host community it is livestock sales. Although both communities are actively involved in Micro and Small-Scale Enterprises (MSEs) to supplement livelihoods, and a growing number of youths are

seeking livelihoods other than keeping livestock, there are limited opportunities for them to pursue their aspirations. According to the 2019 census, 58,378 people in the host community are actively looking for jobs, while Turkana households are among the most financially excluded in Kenya at 29%. The survey established that a sizeable proportion (45%) of both refugee and host community households in Turkana West are undertaking some sort of business as a source of income. But while 75.7% of host households indicated that they were reliant on some form of businesses to generate income, including livestock sales, all refugee households ultimately indicated their reliance on humanitarian support. The dominant form of formal employment in the region is in the humanitarian-aid sector. This is because many NGOs operate from Kakuma-Kalobeyei, offering support primarily to the two refugee camps, and some to the host community.

The income levels exhibited in the broader region are affected by levels of education, the local economy, pastoralism and policy frameworks. Just under half of households (41%) earned a monthly income of less than KES 5,000, with most of the households (90%) sampled in Lopur ward reporting this level of income. Only 5% of the households in the sub-county of Turkana West registered a monthly income greater than KES 20,000. The business community highlighted that the local business environment is determined by the purchasing power of households, who typically have low-incomes and are living in poverty.



The survey indicated that 46.7% of households had their primary source of income negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This figure mainly consists of host community households who reported disruption to their businesses and livelihood strategies. Most refugees noted during focus group discussions that their primary source of income is humanitarian support, and therefore were not as negatively affected.

Education

Education levels and transition rates are low in Turkana West compared to the national statistics. The survey showed that 36% of the respondents lacked any formal schooling, while only 15% have pursued a post-secondary education. Refugees were found to have better education and training opportunities than the host community as well as a higher transition rate. This is largely due to the support provided to refugees by humanitarian organizations.

The combined transition rate among host and refugee communities from Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) level to primary school is 57%, whereas it is 98% from primary to secondary school, and 27% from secondary to tertiary. Overall, low transition rates were attributed to poverty, nomadism, accessibility, insecurity, child labour and cultural practices that act as barrier to education. For both refugee and host communities, access to specialised training and skills development is a major challenge among the youth.

Some of the areas where access to education is strained include Lokipoto, Nawountos, Nadapal, Kangitesiro, Oropoi, Kaenyangaluk, Loritit, Lodakach and Nanaam. Local administrators cited several challenges including understaffing, overcrowding, inadequate school facilities, declining interest in formal education, and insecurity leading to the underusage of some facilities. However, access to schools in urbanized areas such as Kakuma, Kalobeyei and Lokichoggio was found to be comparatively good, but faced the challenge of class congestion. While some schools situated within refugee settlements are accessible to the host community, there are still barriers preventing integration. These barriers are largely related to socio-economic factors and 'biased' support from some organizations. For instance, some members of the host community living around Kalobeyei New Settlement said they could not afford basic

school supplies, yet support organizations tended to overlook their needs in favour of refugee children at the same school. Refugee children enjoy the full support of these organizations, including stationery and uniforms, making the host-community children attending those schools feel discriminated against and 'feeling out of place'. Some were reported to discontinue learning due to such sense of humiliation, especially when the parents/guardians are totally unable to provide those learning needs.

Low levels of education and training have disadvantaged many local youths in actively participating in the formal job market created by the NGOs and INGOs operating in Kakuma-Kalobeyei. These jobs tend to be outsourced elsewhere, which also means that a significant share of the incomes associated with these jobs is spent outside Turkana West. At the same time, this gives rise to the possibility of in-migration, as people seek access to opportunities requiring higher levels of education and technical capacity. The host community is increasingly embracing formal education with the hope that upcoming generations will be able to pursue alternative livelihood strategies. This has been prompted by dwindling returns from livestock, as well as climate change concerns about droughts and the resulting loss of herds. If this shift in the host community is to result in meaningful socio-economic transformation, it must be underpinned by investments.

Healthcare

Most of the households (86%) indicated that they had good access to basic health services, through variations exist between communities and locations. While most health services are rendered free of charge to both host and refugee communities, most health facilities are located within refugee settlements, and refugees generally experience better care compared to members of the host community. Access to specialised healthcare remains a major challenge for both refugee and host populations, as these services are not available locally and require travel to major cities, which can be difficult and costly. Of the households surveyed, 42% described the provision of health services as remaining the same over the last five years. The common diseases affecting the population include cholera, typhoid, malaria and diarrhea¹. After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, health conditions deteriorated because patients avoided health clinics for fear of contracting the virus, according to the health officer at Kakuma Mission Hospital.

¹ These diseases cause the most deaths in the county and are associated with poor hygiene (i.e. water and sanitation) and malnutrition, according to a 2020 study by Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation



Food Security

Apart from red meat, Turkana West relies heavily on externally sourced and produced food. This food is mainly sourced from Kitale County and accessed locally from public markets. The average household monthly expenditure on food is KES 4,082 across Turkana West Sub-County. Of the households surveyed, 35% admitted having missed a meal or two in the past two weeks due to lack of food in the household. Lunch was the most frequently missed meal for both refugees (69%) and host communities (67%). Severe food insecurity at a community level stands at 41% for refugees and 21% for host populations. When asked about how the COVID-19 pandemic had most affected them economically, 60% of households pointed to the deterioration of the food situation. The survey indicated that 46% of the households reduce their daily food consumption in response to food insecurity, while many others engage in additional economic activities to increase their household income. Approximately 35% of households were dependent on humanitarian assistance.

It was also noted that some refugee households from Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have begun small-scale food gardens, while some households within the host community also practice small-scale crop farming. Unfortunately, small-scale farming is unreliable due to persistent water scarcity in the area.

Communication

Mobile phones are the main tool of communication in Turkana West, although service coverage is largely limited to the Kakuma-Kalobeyei area and Lodwar town. Most households possess a mobile phone (79%), but low ownership was reported in the Lopur and Songot areas. Ownership of mobile

phones among the refugee and host communities was high, at 80% and 74% respectively. Mobile phone services are crucial in Kenya, as they significantly enhance access to internet services and facilitate financial inclusion through mobile banking and money transfer services, such as Mpesa and Airtel Money.

Housing Conditions

A variety of housing typologies are available for refugee and host communities. Though the adequacy of housing varies, most households own the shelter they live in (74%). While many households lack formal tenure, de facto tenure provides relative security for households and the risk of eviction is low.

Refugee settlements have a relatively standardised forms of shelter, predominantly the Temporary-Shelters (T Shelters) and recently a module for durable housing in Kalobeyei, which are mainly provided by UNHCR and its implementing partners. Over time, households have consolidated their shelters by gradually investing in more durable options. This consolidation is most evident in Kakuma Refugee Camp, whereas in Kalobeyei New Settlement the transition to durable shelter options is programmed as part of ongoing cash-based interventions. While housing design transformations are common in refugee settlements, they are limited by other factors such as land availability and finance. The need for shelter transformations are evidence of inadequate shelter designs and spaces provided by support organizations.

For the host community, the increasing need for housing space is not constrained by land availability, but rather by financial limitations. Indeed, any kind of market for providing affordable housing improvements is circumvented by organizations'



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tendency to build their own accommodation facilities for staff. The study also indicated that in the main urban areas, such as Lokichoggio and Kakuma, a commercial housing sub-sector is almost non-existent.

Adequacy of housing varies considerably across groups, with only 42% of refugee respondents indicating that their shelters were adequate. The challenges of housing are compounded by the inadequacy of efficient water and sanitation services, as well as a shortage of well-planned open spaces, especially in Kakuma town and refugee settlement.

Water and Sanitation

Turkana West is a very dry area and lacks a strategic water source for the growing population. While water stress affects both refugee and host communities, this study shows that refugees have relatively better access to tap water. A majority of refugees could access drinking water through a shared tap (72.5%), while only 27.5% of host community respondents could access water through taps. Because the new refugee settlements at Kakuma-Kalobeyei have not been accompanied by investments in a strategic water supply, the influx of refugees to the area has exacerbated water challenges. The main source of clean water remains boreholes, which are unable to maintain an adequate domestic supply, let alone support agriculture or other commercial needs. Domestic water service is free for refugees, while 51.2% of the Turkana host community, and 66.7% of the migrant host community pay for this access. It should be noted that the host community are primarily pastoralists, who are compelled to rely on seasonal movements in search of water and pasture.

While efforts have been undertaken to ensure that only clean water is dispensed at the standpipes and public taps, contamination can still occur during collection and storage at a household level. Indeed, in Turkana West, water-borne diseases are a major public health and socio-economic problem, which are compounded by inadequate sanitation systems. While the use of dry sanitation systems is common, open defecation in the host community area remains a major public health problem. Solid waste management is also of great concern, particularly in the Kakuma-Kalobeyei settlement cluster. The survey established that many households in Turkana West used burning as their primary disposal method, including 52.7% of refugee households and 44.3% of the host community households. There is no solid waste management facility in the area, despite the high concentration of people.



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Energy Sources and Services

Firewood and charcoal are the prevalent sources of energy used by both refugees and host communities. These sources are linked to health concerns (risk of indoor pollutants) and environmental concerns (loss of vegetation cover). Among the host community, charcoal energy (52%) and wood energy (51%) were the primary fuels used for cooking. The continued reliance on these resources has sustained a business supply chain involving both host and refugee communities. The survey noted that various small-scale interventions are taking place in refugee settlements to address the problems associated with firewood and charcoal. Such interventions include the promotion of alternative cooking energy, such as Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), ethanol stoves and briquettes.

With regards to lighting, the survey found that the primary source of light energy was tin lamps, used in 20% of the households. Other light sources included solar powered lamps (16%), pressure lamps (12%), kerosene lanterns (10%), torches (10%), phone torches (7%), electricity from portable generators (4%) and gas lamps (3%). Most households earning a monthly income of less than KES 5000 used tin lamps as their major sources of light (52%), and wood as their cooking energy (64%). This indicates that low incomes and poverty are a major barrier to alternative and clean energy services. Meanwhile, solar energy has great potential in Turkana West, and ongoing interventions ought to increase investments accordingly.

Mobility

Households in Turkana West have a varied experience in terms of mobility. At a regional level, decades of marginalisation had resulted in Turkana West being disconnected from the national road and transportation network until the national government recently embarked on the construction of the A1 Road linking South Sudan and Kenya through Turkana County. However, rural villages far from this main road remain largely 'cut-off' because secondary and tertiary roads that feed traffic to and from the hinterlands are dilapidated. This means that people residing in those areas incur an extra mobility burden when accessing certain services and amenities. Households in towns and refugee settlements have relatively better access to facilities and functional nodes, but still face various challenges related to the poor condition of the infrastructure. Walking and use of motorcycles (*bodaboda*) are the main modes of transport in the area.



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Recommendations

Based on these findings, the research has recommended a set of policy and programmatic interventions that can stimulate enhanced socio-economic development in Turkana West.

Leveraging Ongoing Interventions to Enhance Turkana West Socio-Economic Development

- Adopt an area-based approach to humanitarian and development programming. The Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-economic Development Program (KISED) is a particularly visible institution in the sub-county and is an integral part of County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP). It is critical for both KISED and CIDP to focus resources on programmes that enhance socio-economic conditions, especially education, energy, healthcare, livelihood strategies, water and sanitation.
- Emphasise programming through CIDP, as this affords the opportunity to address the long-term needs of the local area by linking humanitarian and development interventions. This is especially important in the wake of the Kenyan Government's announcement to close all refugee camps in the country.

- The completion of the A1 Road will significantly improve connectivity in Turkana West. It will provide households with opportunities linked to improved transportation between the area and the rest of the county, and to other regions of Kenya. However, for the communities to leverage the benefits of this, it is important to invest in the improvement of local transportation networks and the enhancement of livelihood strategies such as livestock keeping.

Humanitarian-Development Planning and Decision Making

- Establish a local municipality where the integrated and sectoral planning of KISED P can be institutionalised. A similar governance structure is needed for Lokichoggio, as well as an overall strengthening the sub-county's administration.
- Strengthen public participation with regular consultative stakeholder engagements in humanitarian-development programming. Both host and refugee communities need to be effectively included in public participation, especially in development planning, budgetary processes, project implementation, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of CIDP projects. This will allow for the prioritisation of development projects that have the highest impact on the most pressing challenges in the sub-county.
- Design policy and governance frameworks and provide the necessary infrastructure to attract potential investors and support agencies to access land and invest in the sub-county. This will enhance the local economic development and improve opportunities available to the youth.

Infrastructure and Access to Basic Services and Amenities

- Increase investments in road infrastructure with attention to Non-Motorist Transportation and increased local connectivity.
- Develop a sustainable water supply system for the sub-county, including considerations for attaining reliable municipal water systems for Lokichoggio and Kakuma-Kalobeyei areas.
- In the main clustered settlements, design and invest in a reliable storm water management infrastructure.
- Improve waste management and sanitation conditions by increased investments in infrastructure, low-cost sustainable technologies, and social programs to support uptake of solutions.

- Establish more recreational facilities to increase opportunities for integration between the refugee and host communities.
- Install more health infrastructure in strategic locations in wards for ease of access, e.g. along the A1 road.
- Establish a 'one-stop-centre' for government services in the sub-county, e.g. a Huduma Centre. Services would include the acquisition of IDs, passports, and other relevant government documents.
- Enhanced investments in communication infrastructure to provide households with better and more reliable mobile phone services.
- Provide more education and training facilities and social programs that target increasing enrolment.

Addressing Poverty and Inequalities

- Diversify livelihood strategies for pastoralists by supporting the establishment of alternative livelihood means, and for refugees by shifting from an over-reliance on financial aid. This will require a combination of policy reforms and significant investment in the development of the area.
- Strengthen the economic benefits derived from pastoralism. Design and promote sustainable livestock and crop farming value chains. Provide support services, such as infrastructure and financial support, to promote small stock livestock farming, e.g. poultry. This involves considerations of value-addition and improvement to the livestock market system, providing support infrastructure, such as a modern abattoir, and organizing pastoralists to strengthen their niche in the value chain system.
- Improve financial inclusion for both refugees and host communities.
- Support households engaged in business-incubation and entrepreneurial training with seed capital and economic empowerment. Though many people are interested in starting a business or upscaling an existing business, most face challenges in accessing formal capital. To address this, better financial opportunities are needed for local businesses and industries.
- Work with both refugee and host communities to develop housing solutions. This will ensure adequate and affordable housing is accessible to the diverse needs of the populace, with attention to the local adaptiveness of shelters. Housing interventions are particularly needed in the main towns and settlement areas.

Safety and Peace Building

- Enhanced safety in the area is imperative for achieving improved social-economic conditions. It ensures children can access education facilities in places where learning is often interrupted by conflicts or attacks, and to prevent loss of life arising from such conflicts. This requires the sources of the conflicts to be addressed, e.g. tensions and conflicts between communities regarding access to scarce water and pasture resources. Development interventions will be required to ensure equitable sharing of these resources, as well as programmes to diversify livelihood strategies and address the challenges created by the area's historical marginalisation.
- Equitable allocation of resources to refugees and host communities is crucial for reducing tension and strengthening cohesion. This promotes peaceful coexistence.
- The national governments in the Turkana West border region must strengthen regional interventions for cross-border peace building. Enhanced peace in the region will facilitate a good economic environment where cross-border economic activities can flourish.

Conclusion

The research has demonstrated multiple socio-economic challenges as prevalent in Turkana West, with indicators that are largely below the national average in most of the indicators analysed. It is also evident that while these challenges are prevalent among the refugees and host community, the degree of their severity vary between the groups. Fundamentally, to comprehensively address these issues, it is important to adopt and strengthen existing integrated and local area approaches such as KISED. This demands interventions at strategic level such as addressing the prevalent water scarcity, poorly developed local infrastructure and inadequate basic services, low education and literacy levels, low incomes, poverty and marginalization, and addressing a local economy that is over-reliant on humanitarian financial

streams. Without addressing these core issues, attaining self-reliance in Turkana West can be far-fetched. Furthermore, with the pending closure of the refugee camps, following Kenya's directive on the same, it is critical to re-imagine Turkana West, notably Kakuma-Kalobeyei, beyond the status of hosting refugees. This requires learning from the case of Lokichoggio, where the town has since declined following withdrawal of refugee-based programming in the area. It means undertaking a deliberate effort to plan and strategize the future of Kakuma-Kalobeyei, including shifting the current programming from humanitarian assistance to humanitarian-development focus (short-term and mid-term) and a development focus for the long-term.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This report is available from <http://www.unhabitat.org>
First published in Nairobi in October 2021 by UN-Habitat.

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Produced by Urban Planning & Design Section

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This brief was produced by UN-Habitat in partnership with the County Government of Turkana for the two-year project title "Sustainable Economic Development Along Turkana West Development Corridor Through Enhanced Connectivity" as part of the Cities Alliance Global Programme on Cities and Migration financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

This study could not have been possible without the efforts of our partners, community research assistants and local leaders, and all other persons and organizations that took part in this research.

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