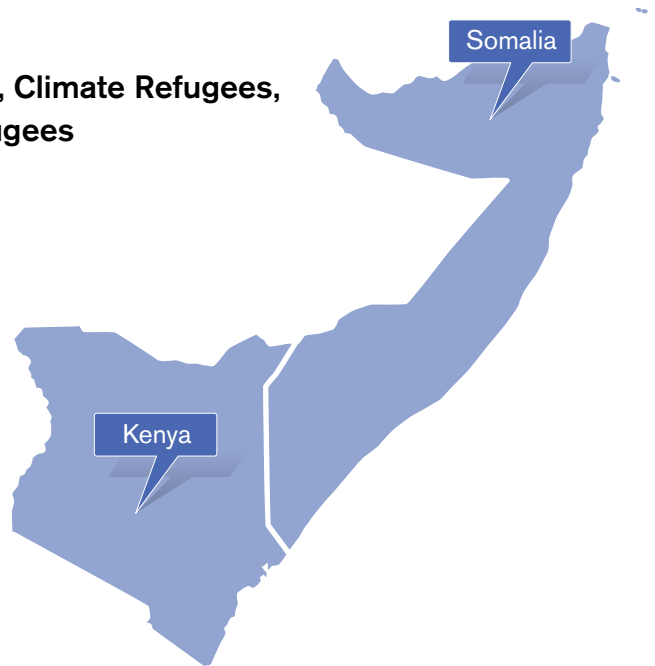


Social disruption (migration and displacement)

Secondary categories: loss of cultural heritage; loss of quality of life; mental and physical health impacts

“Climate change is controlling everything — let them compensate us”: addressing the climate displacement of Indigenous, marginalised populations in Kenya

Amali Tower, Founder and Executive Director, Climate Refugees, and Ryan Plano, Project Officer, Climate Refugees



Location	IDP camps and locations in Kenya; IDP camps in Hargeisa, Somaliland and Mandera, Somalia
Climate hazards	Rising water levels; flash floods; drought
Non-economic loss and damage	Particularly affected groups include: women and girls (poor access to maternal healthcare; gender-based violence and FGM in IDP camps); Indigenous Peoples (cultural loss; displacement); and children (loss of education)
Coping measures	Increasing dependence on external support or humanitarian services

Context

Kenya's Great Rift Valley stretches from the border with Ethiopia and South Sudan in the north to Tanzania in the south. It is home to over 12 million people, making it the most populous region of Kenya.¹ The natural environment is the area's primary source of livelihoods and economic activity, but climate change is profoundly affecting the region, notably the onset of severe drought and devastating lake-rise flooding.

The Horn of Africa at large is experiencing an unprecedented drought, the worst to strike in 40 years.² There have been five failed rainy seasons since 2020 in parts of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Researchers contend this phenomenon would not have happened without human-induced climate change.³ Elsewhere, the opposite problem is occurring: significantly increased rainfall since 2010, as a result of climate change, is primarily responsible for the rise and expansion of the Rift Valley lakes.⁴ As the climate crisis continues, it is expected that the region will continue to experience these catastrophic extremes, which have produced their own impacts while also exacerbating and intersecting with existing inequalities and vulnerabilities.

This case study, which highlights impacts on Indigenous and ethnic minority communities and households, is based on research visits to ten locations, some of which are expounded upon: Kiwanja Ndege internally displaced persons (IDPs) camp (Marigat, Baringo County), Kokwa Island (Lake Baringo, Baringo County), Rugus (Lake Baringo, Baringo County), Lake Bogoria (Baringo County), Loya Village (Turkana County), Lokirama (Turkana County), Lorengippi (Loima sub-County, Turkana County), Kakuma Refugee Camp, (Turkana County) and Kibera informal settlement (Nairobi).

These locations differ widely in their geographic features and climatic conditions — from arid and semi-arid (ASAL) to sub-tropical — but all are experiencing climate change impacts, which are in turn driving loss and damage, notably non-economic loss and damage (NELD).

Impacts

Local communities tell us that increasingly unpredictable climate shocks and extreme weather events are creating “cascading effects of climate change” from which they “cannot recover”. This is resulting in situations of forced displacement, as well as a loss of quality of life and cultural heritage for millions of people.

The prolonged and severe drought, which has left 23.8 million people in hunger in the Horn of Africa,⁵ is driving food insecurity in Kenya's ASAL areas, affecting 4.4 million people across 23 counties.⁶ Northern counties like Turkana are expected to reach emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC4), while particularly vulnerable agro-pastoralists and IDPs remain at risk of famine (IPC 5) if assistance fails to reach them.⁷ In addition to food insecurity, the drought has forcibly displaced people across the region, with the United

- 1 Nyawira, L (4 November 2019) Census 2019: Rift Valley most populous region. *The Star*. www.the-star.co.ke/news/2019-11-04-census-2019-rift-valley-most-populous-region/
- 2 World Meteorological Organization (30 May 2022) Meteorological and Humanitarian Agencies Sound Alert on East Africa. <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/meteorological-and-humanitarian-agencies-sound-alert-east-africa#:~:text=Meteorological%20agencies%2C%20including%20WMO%2C%20and,the%20%E2%80%9Cshort%20rains%20season.%E2%80%9D>
- 3 World Weather Attribution (27 April 2023) Human-Induced Climate Change Increased Drought Severity in Horn of Africa. www.worldweatherattribution.org/human-induced-climate-change-increased-drought-severity-in-southern-horn-of-africa
- 4 Herrnegger, M, Stecher, G, Schwatke, C, Olang, L (2021) Hydroclimatic analysis of rising water levels in the Great rift Valley Lakes of Kenya. *Journal of Hydrology: Regional Studies* 36(1) 23–24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejrh.2021.100857>; Herrnegger, M (16 January 2023) Kenya's Rift Valley Lakes are Rising, Putting Thousands at Risk – We Now Know Why. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/kenyas-rift-valley-lakes-are-rising-putting-thousands-at-risk-we-now-know-why-194541>
- 5 Oxfam (22 May 2023) NGOs Call Out Climate Injustice and Urge Global Donors to Fully Fund the Humanitarian Response in the Horn of Africa Now. www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/joint-statement-ngos-call-out-climate-injustice-and-urge-global-donors-fully-fund
- 6 National Drought Management Authority (2023) National Drought Early Warning Bulletin – May 2023 (pp. 2). <http://knowledgeweb.ndma.go.ke/Public/Resources/ResourceDetails.aspx?doc=8bd256e5-146b-4918-ac6b-07822ec1351>
- 7 Danish Refugee Council (2023) Horn of Africa Drought Situation Report #8: 1 March to April 30 2023. [via reliefweb] <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-drought-situation-report-8-1-march-april-30-2023>

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reporting that nearly 200,000 people have crossed the border from Somalia and South Sudan into drought-stricken refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia.⁸ Region-wide, in 2022 more than 5 million IDPs lived in drought-affected areas, with more than 2 million displaced by drought and over a half million forced to move between drought-affected areas,⁹ highlighting how limited the options are for many in this region. A third major impact of drought in the region has been loss of livelihoods, notably pastoralism. With nearly 10 million livestock dead, including 2.5 million in Kenya, more than \$US1.5 billion of economic losses were inflicted on the region. In addition to making food insecurity worse, loss of livestock has forced some to abandon pastoralism altogether — a livelihood that is rooted in cultural heritage — either because they have lost their entire herd in the current drought or because they simply cannot afford to wait the five years it generally takes to rebuild herds after a drought event.¹⁰

Water scarcity from drought has had devastating consequences for communities throughout the Rift Valley, but most acutely in the ASAL regions. The advance of climate change has been so swift here that residents have seen the environmental changes occur within their own lifetimes. One man explained: “Here, droughts are almost inevitable because rain is becoming so irregular, and when they do come, they are short rains that do not penetrate the soil. But we have never seen a drought like this before.”¹¹ In Loya village, nearly all livestock have died, destroying the livelihoods of pastoralists and contributing to widespread food insecurity.¹² In Lokiriyama, one nomadic pastoralist described the twin effects of the drought and locust infestation on crop yields in the 2019–2022 period as “missiles sent from the skies”.¹³ Due to this increasingly untenable situation, some households have migrated elsewhere, with no guarantee that water will be easier to find on arrival. Pastoralists are having a particularly difficult time given their reliance on accessible grazing land and adequate water supplies to maintain their herds.

The flooding of lakes in Kenya's Great Rift Valley since 2010 has resulted in dramatic consequences. With each flooding event, freshwater Lake Baringo is moving closer to saltwater Lake Bogoria, threatening an ecological disaster, a loss of lake-based livelihoods and displacement. Communities say the lakes are now just six miles apart, which is similar to reports in the media.¹⁴ The risks posed by rising waters continue to threaten ever-larger populations in an immediate way. Indeed, Baringo has doubled in size in the last decade, with a water-level rise of 12 metres.¹⁵

The islands of Lake Baringo are a veritable ground-zero for the loss and damage caused by flooding. One of these islands, Kokwa, is home to around 2,000 minority-group residents of the Ilchamus tribe, as well as the Tugen and Turkana people. Due to lake level rise, communities here live right at the water's edge, deeply impacted by both flooding and drought. With pastoralism less viable on the island, residents have become reliant on fishing, but say “the fish can't be found anymore”. Residents could historically rely on the local tourism industry for their main economic security, but the lake rise has submerged several hotels, taking away a critical source of income for many Kokwa islanders.

8 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (28 February 2023) The Horn of Africa Drought Appeal (January – December 2023). [via reliefweb] <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-drought-situation-appeal-january-december-2023#:~:text=The%20Horn%20of%20Africa%20region,raise%20livestock%20and%20buy%20food>

9 International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2022) Horn of Africa Drought 2022: Human Mobility Snapshot (January – December 2022). [via reliefweb] <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-drought-2022-human-mobility-snapshot-january-december-2022>

10 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2022) Horn of Africa Drought: Regional Humanitarian Overview & Call to Action (Revised 28 November 2022). [via reliefweb] <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-drought-regional-humanitarian-overview-call-action-revised-28-november-2022>

11 Field visit. “Climate Change is Controlling Everything, Let Them Compensate Us”: Stories of Loss and Damage in Kenya climate-refugees.org”

12 Field visit. “Climate Change is Controlling Everything, Let Them Compensate Us”: Stories of Loss and Damage in Kenya climate-refugees.org”

13 Field visit. “Climate Change is Controlling Everything, Let Them Compensate Us”: Stories of Loss and Damage in Kenya climate-refugees.org”

14 Baraka, C (17 March 2022) A Drowning World, Kenya's Quiet Slide Underwater. *The Guardian*. www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/17/kenya-quiet-slide-underwater-great-rift-valley-lakes-east-africa-flooding

15 Baker, A (22 April 2021) Environmental Crises Are Forcing Millions into Cities. Can Countries Turn Climate Migrants Into an Asset? *Time*. <https://time.com/5953402/climate-migrants-kenya-floods>

According to a 2021 Kenyan government report, the flooding of Lake Baringo has severely impacted over 3,000 households,¹⁶ with many forced to abandon their homes despite having strong cultural or ancestral ties to the land. On Kokwa and surrounding regions of Lake Baringo, some residents have been dealing with displacement since 2008, when conflicts with local Pokot tribes forced them to seek safety away from the mainland, and are now being displaced due to the impacts of climate change. As the lake has risen, it has submerged homes and land owned by residents. Islanders with resources have moved to higher ground on Kokwa or to surrounding islands, with some even leaving the region altogether.

The losses and damages faced by Kokwa residents are seen elsewhere in the region. For example, in Kiwanja Ndege IDP camp in Baringo County, residents identified themselves to us as 100% climate-displaced.¹⁷ We spoke to the former residents of ten villages surrounding the lake that were submerged in 2020 when water levels rose, and when we asked them what had displaced them, they replied with one simple word: “water”.

Residents in one area of the lakeshore region, Rugus, are being impacted by both flooding and drought. They are increasingly trapped between an expanding lake on one side and conflict with cattle raiders on the other, which is being exacerbated by the prolonged drought and resultant conflict over resources.¹⁸

In addition to the loss of homes, land and livelihoods, some communities are facing devastating and permanent losses to their culture and heritage. In Turkana County, the El Molo community has seen hundreds of its homesteads submerged, including family burial sites. This is in addition to water-borne illnesses¹⁹ and acute food insecurity, the latter being reported by some 2,500 residents.²⁰

Compounding risks/impacts created

The impacts of drought and flooding in Kenya interact with and exacerbate existing issues, such as underdevelopment, marginalisation and poverty.

Drought and resultant water scarcity are making existing issues worse in many areas. Pastoralists in Kenya have long struggled to access the best grazing lands due to the colonial legacies of land tenure. Particularly in Laikipia and Baringo countries, British rule saw large tracts of fertile land reserved for settlers, private land ownership and conservancies, while pastoralists were forcibly pushed onto non-arable lands.²¹ The inherent conflict for resources created by such a system is now greatly magnified in the face of climate change. In Turkana and Baringo counties, migration internally and across borders to Uganda in search of water and better land is increasingly being met with resistance from other tribes, due to resource scarcity. This in turn further contributes to the pastoralists' food insecurity: many residents told us they had not eaten for days.²²

16 Ministry of Environment and Forestry (2021) Rising Water Levels in Kenya's Rift Valley Lakes, Turkwel Gorge Dam and Lake Victoria: A Scoping Report (pp. 26). Republic of Kenya and UN Development Programme (UNDP), Nairobi and New York. <https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/123456789/22851/Rising%20Water%20Levels%20in%20Kenya%e2%80%99s%20Rift%20Valley%20Lakes%2c%20Turkwel%20...pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

17 Field visit. "Climate Change is Controlling Everything, Let Them Compensate Us": Stories of Loss and Damage in Kenya climate-refugees.org"

18 Field visit. "Climate Change is Controlling Everything, Let Them Compensate Us": Stories of Loss and Damage in Kenya climate-refugees.org"

19 Rwothungeyo, B (6 September 2022) Climate-linked lake rise frustrates indigenous Endorois health volunteers. Minority Rights Group International, London. <https://minorityrights.org/2022/09/06/climate-endorois>

20 Field visit. "Climate Change is Controlling Everything, Let Them Compensate Us": Stories of Loss and Damage in Kenya climate-refugees.org"

21 Odhiambo Makoloo, M (2005) Kenya: Minorities, Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Diversity (pp. 27). Minority Rights Group International, London. <https://minorityrights.org/publications/kenya-minorities-indigenous-peoples-and-ethnic-diversity-april-2005>

22 Field visit. "Climate Change is Controlling Everything, Let Them Compensate Us": Stories of Loss and Damage in Kenya climate-refugees.org"

In the Turkana village of Lorengippi, residents shared alarming details of several community members who had died in recent years at community water holes, showing how climate change, underdevelopment and poverty can have deadly consequences, especially in one of Kenya's poorest counties.²³

Extreme drought and temperature increases have forced residents to dig new and deeper water holes so that water can be retrieved for daily use. For many, this is their only source of water. This activity has progressively required an increasing number of people, as water must be passed from source to surface in an assembly line. During these collections, several water holes have collapsed, killing multiple people. At Nakanjakal water point, three people died in 2021 when the water hole collapsed on them. Kapesa water hole collapsed in 2020, killing eight people. At Lowsobani water hole, two people were killed in 2014. These deaths even inform the name of the village. In the Turkana language, community members told us, "Lorengippi" literally translates as "red water." As water scarcity worsens, the deaths continue. This tragic situation is the outcome of underdevelopment, namely a lack of infrastructure to bring potable water to the community, but also its intersection with climate change-driven drought and water scarcity.

Increased rainfall and flooding are exacerbating the existing situations of vulnerability and inequality in many areas. Lake Baringo's once highly lucrative tourism industry is now devastated by climate-driven flooding and lake expansion. In 2021, Baringo County suffered tourism and infrastructure-related losses of 95 million shillings (nearly \$US700,000) largely due to flooding.²⁴

Communities who depend on the tourism industry are now facing loss of income and financial security as flooding turns hotels into a submerged wildlife habitat.²⁵ The impacts are most severe on the poorest residents. In Kokwa, some lack the financial means to migrate or relocate, even if they want to. As the lake creeps closer, they are increasingly vulnerable to wildlife attacks and other dangers because they have been rendered immobile by poverty. This is a phenomenon that is gaining attention from scholars and practitioners alike.²⁶ It shows how discussing climate displacement as only a form of migration leaves out entire households and communities who simply cannot move.

Flooding has also made transport, pursuit of livelihoods, and access to education and healthcare more challenging for Kokwa islanders, especially for the poorest households. Swelling lakes have inundated educational institutions, forcing schools on the island to shut down for over two years. The small locally-made balsa wood boats, on which poor communities have long relied, are no longer adequate in rising waters. This makes fishing more difficult and therefore less remunerative. It also means that residents who must travel to the mainland for healthcare – where the nearest hospital is – are often unable to do so.

Elsewhere, flooding has placed entire communities in fragile situations with limited access to support. At the Kiwanja Ndege camp, the flood-displaced residents have been made more vulnerable by a lack of humanitarian services and protection programming, both from the government and outside groups. Given the trend of increased rainfall and continued lake level rise, it is likely their situation of marginalisation and displacement will become protracted.

23 Otieno, R (2014) Report lists counties with highest levels of poverty. *The Standard*. www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000110595/report-lists-counties-with-highest-levels-of-poverty; Data Science Limited, Poverty Levels in Kenya: How does it correlate with Election-related Matters? [www.datascience.co.ke/poverty-levels-in-kenya-how-does-it-correlate-with-election-related-matters/#:~:text=Poverty%20level%20per%20county%20in%20Kenya&text=The%20counties%20with%20the%20highest,%2C%20and%20Bungoma%20\(643316\)](http://www.datascience.co.ke/poverty-levels-in-kenya-how-does-it-correlate-with-election-related-matters/#:~:text=Poverty%20level%20per%20county%20in%20Kenya&text=The%20counties%20with%20the%20highest,%2C%20and%20Bungoma%20(643316))

24 Cherono, C (11 August 2021) Baringo Lost Sh95 Million Revenue Due to Floods. *Kenya News Agency*. www.kenyanews.go.ke/baringo-lost-sh95-million-revenue-due-to-floods

25 Baker, A (22 April 2021) Environmental Crises Are Forcing Millions into Cities. Can Countries Turn Climate Migrants Into an Asset? *Time*. <https://time.com/5953402/climate-migrants-kenya-floods>

26 Rikani, A, Otto, C, Levermann, A and Schewe, J (2023) More People Too Poor to Move: Divergent Effects of Climate Change on Global Migration Patterns. *Environmental Research Letters* 18 no. 024006. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/aca6fe>; Balasundaram, R and Plano, R (20 February 2023) Climate Change and Immobility: New Study Highlights Some Too Poor to Migrate. *Spotlight: Climate Displacement in the News, Climate Refugees*. www.climate-refugees.org/spotlight/2023/2/20/climatetraps

Vulnerabilities/impacts by compounding risks

Certain groups of people are disproportionately affected by the above events. These inequities in turn fuel a vicious cycle of vulnerability during subsequent instances of climate impacts.

Women and children

Women and girls often bear the brunt of drought and flood impacts, as well as the existing issues they exacerbate. In Kiwanja Ndege camp, the needs among women and girls are acute, with gender-based violence (GBV) being a key concern. Additionally, with displacement, women leaders have reported that previously curbed practices of female genital mutilation (FGM) are returning. This unfortunately tracks with what humanitarian agencies and UN bodies have observed in displacement contexts,²⁷ but Kiwanja's lack of support means the women and girls there are largely left to fend for themselves.

For Kokwa Island's women, the flooding of Lake Baringo is having serious impacts on their access to healthcare. As the traditional balsa wood boats are ineffective in high waters, it has become exceedingly difficult to reach the healthcare facilities on the mainland for receiving appropriate maternal health services. One woman we talked to recounted her harrowing experience of having to give birth on one of these boats in the middle of the night after it became clear that a crossing would not be possible.²⁸

In Rugus, which is being impacted by lake rise and drought, women are seeing their economic prospects literally dry up, with grazing land hard to come by and fishing becoming increasingly difficult, reducing their portion of the daily catch. Girls are having to travel further in search of potable water, a cruel irony as the lake creeps closer with each heavy rainfall. This search is causing some to forgo schooling, and is exposing them to GBV along the way. Some women have been widowed by the drought-exacerbated conflicts with neighboring cattle raiders or the capsizing of boats as many men switch to fishing. Others have lost husbands to deadly contact with wildlife as it encroaches with lake level rise. With no man at the head of household, in a mostly patrilineal system, these women are left to fend for themselves and their families, all in an environment of shrinking livelihood options.²⁹

In Turkana County, drought is particularly impacting women and girls, but also children in general. In Loya, where drought has made keeping livestock alive a nearly impossible task, households are facing malnutrition — with obvious implications for child development — as well as difficulties in ensuring their children are educated. It is common for communities to sell livestock to pay school fees, but this is no longer possible. Instead, children are forced to forage for berries and travel further for water.

Children are also dealing with challenges due to climate change in Lorengippi. The collection of water from community-dug water holes is often done by children, especially girls. One of the water holes is even named "Akinpipu" or "girls", so named because the water point is used by many young girls who come to fetch water for their families, some of whom have lost their lives in the process.

As drought and flooding continue to impact these communities, it is clear that an entire generation of children, especially girls, are suffering major development setbacks and losses due to climate change.

27 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (n.d.) Gender-based violence. www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/protection/gender-based-violence

28 Field visit. "Climate Change is Controlling Everything, Let Them Compensate Us": Stories of Loss and Damage in Kenya climate-refugees.org"

29 Field visit. "Climate Change is Controlling Everything, Let Them Compensate Us": Stories of Loss and Damage in Kenya climate-refugees.org"

Indigenous Peoples and marginalised communities

Indigenous Peoples and other minority groups are often some of the most marginalised in societies across the world, given their lack of access to political power and exclusion from service provision.³⁰

All the climate displaced communities we spoke to are Indigenous, marginalised populations. At Kiwanja Ndege camp, the residents — who were displaced due to flooding — are ethnically marginalised Ilchamus people, an Indigenous group that likely accounts for why the camp receives so little government attention and support. This traps them in a vulnerable position during subsequent climate shocks.

The Indigenous Endorois people in Bogoria County have a similar story. Forcibly dispossessed of their land in the 1970s,³¹ the community is now facing displacement due to flooding of Lake Bogoria. In addition to generalised impacts like increased wildlife contact, the Endorois told us about the difficulty they have faced in pursuing compensation claims for lost homes, farms and cultural assets, no doubt largely due to their status as Indigenous Peoples.

Repeatedly, Indigenous and other minority groups in the region face further marginalisation in the wake of climate change. Support from the government, as well as external aid groups, are slow to reach these historically marginalised communities, leaving them in progressively vulnerable situations as flooding and drought continue to wreak havoc.

Coping measures

In the face of these climate impacts and intertwined challenges, the people and communities we visited have employed various coping strategies. While these measures vary in efficacy, taken together they provide a clear message that climate-impacted communities are struggling to survive, let alone thrive. Many affected communities are grossly overlooked outside a declared humanitarian emergency or disaster context, and are consequently left to fend for themselves. There is a concerning lack of agency demonstrated by many of these coping measures — where individuals and households are essentially left with no other choice but to adopt what can be called enforced resilience — which only further marginalises these often-forgotten communities.

Despite their pastoralist roots, many Endorois pastoralists in Lake Bogoria have had to switch to farming, an imperfect solution in the face of water scarcity and risk of inundation. For the farms that are able to still operate, communities are planting drought-resistant crops and tubers to conserve water while addressing food security concerns. Unfortunately, some coping measures taken as last-resort mechanisms are exacerbating social disruption, such as the rise in sex work, early marriage and family break-up.

Communities around Lake Baringo have similarly limited options. With the collapse of the local tourism industry due to lake expansion, locals have attempted to fill the gap with subsistence fishing, but are forced to depend on the kindness of donated nets and fishing hooks to survive. One leader on Kokwa Island said that as fishing becomes more difficult, he is encouraging a switch to farming, but that this requires the capacity to obtain seeds, generators, water pumps and other costly items.

Unfortunately, as climate change impacts worsen, the limits of local and long-standing coping measures will be tested. One common strategy among pastoralist communities is resource sharing during dry spells and lean periods, where wealthier families share with poorer ones. But as was described to us during one

³⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (n.d.) Minorities and indigenous peoples. www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/protection/gender-based-violence

³¹ Kiburo, C (2 March 2022) Impacts of Climate Change Among the Endorois Peoples in Kenya," *Cultural Survival*. www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/impacts-climate-change-among-endorois-peoples-kenya

visit, “with climate change, our entire community is affected all at the same time ... Everyone is poor at the same time and none of us have anything to share with one another.”³²

Support needed in future

As is the case in all situations of loss and damage from climate change, support and solutions will need to be realised at multiple levels and be sustainable for years to come, especially given that individuals are using last-resort coping measures.

While some solutions are difficult — particularly the operationalisation of adequate climate finance — we should not overlook the fact that some solutions are quite simple. For Kokwa islanders who are unable to leave the island and are increasingly finding their handmade balsa wood boats ineffective, small external grants can quickly provide adequate vessels in the short-term while ensuring community members have the materials to maintain them in the longer-term. Better vessels will not solve everything, but would allow residents to build resilience more effectively in the face of flooding and rising lakes by improving transport, with positive effects on healthcare access and livelihood options.

Investment in early-warning systems is crucial when providing useful and potentially life-saving information regarding droughts, high tides, polluted waters and other issues related to climate impacts.³³ This mirrors the request of many developing countries during multilateral climate talks, providing an area of synergy between local actors and national authorities, if financing is made available.

In drought-affected Turkana County, the climate-conflict-migration nexus is a complex issue, but there are possible ways forward. The Kenyan government could focus on facilitating internal migration agreements between pastoralists, herders and landowners,³⁴ rather than taking a reactive approach to conflicts when they arise. Thankfully, policymakers already have a regional model to draw upon: the 2020 Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Protocol on Free Movement was signed by several states in the region to facilitate temporary and circular migration, including in the context of climate change.³⁵

There is an urgent need for the Kenyan government to provide water tankers in Turkana County and elsewhere as a short-term measure, while working with international partners to invest in water security through the installation and massive scaling of climate-resilient boreholes and solar-powered water systems. The international community must meet its obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals and international human rights law by granting adequate climate finance to address the gross losses and damages that marginalised Kenyan communities are suffering in the climate crisis.

As options dwindle and climate-vulnerable countries like Kenya struggle to maintain development gains in the wake of climate impacts, the COVID-19 pandemic and global inflation, there is an urgent and substantial need for developed countries to operationalise the loss and damage fund to which they agreed at COP27 in Sharm-el-Sheik.³⁶ Critically, this fund must be new and additional to existing commitments, administered via the UNFCCC, and in line with the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities

32 Field visit. “Climate Change is Controlling Everything, Let Them Compensate Us”: Stories of Loss and Damage in Kenya climate-refugees.org”

33 Field visit. “Climate Change is Controlling Everything, Let Them Compensate Us”: Stories of Loss and Damage in Kenya climate-refugees.org”

34 International Crisis Group (2023) Absorbing Climate Shocks and Easing Conflict in Kenya’s Rift Valley (pp. 1). International Crisis Group, Nairobi/Brussels. https://icg-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-04/b189-kenya-climate-shocks_1.pdf

35 Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) (26 February 2020) Protocol on Free Movement in the IGAD Region. IGAD, Djibouti. <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1411/files/event/file/Final%20IGAD%20PROTOCOL%20ENDORSED%20BY%20IGAD%20Ambassadors%20and%20Ministers%20of%20Interior%20and%20Labour%20Khartoum%2026%20Feb%202020.pdf>

36 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (20 November 2022) COP27 Reaches Breakthrough Agreement on New ‘Loss and Damage’ Fund for Vulnerable Countries. UNFCCC, Rio de Janeiro and New York. <https://unfccc.int/news/cop27-reaches-breakthrough-agreement-on-new-loss-and-damage-fund-for-vulnerable-countries>

and respective capabilities" (CBDR-RC).^{37,38} There must also be mechanisms that can be accessed at the local level, such as within communities in Kenya's Great Rift Valley, who continue to suffer losses and damage as a result of climate change.

Lessons learned

Our visits to these climate-impacted communities provide a few key lessons when it comes to addressing climate-induced NELD and related effects.

Perhaps the most important is the need to speak with impacted communities. This not only allows us to better understand their reality; it also provides more useful information to the discussion on localised solutions than those that often come from actors at higher levels. Turkana pastoralists have significant experience in dealing with heavy rainfall and dry spells. Negotiators in the UNFCCC will never address the NELD of climate-impacted communities if they do not meaningfully engage and listen to local solutions. Despite recent greater attention to this issue, some of the individuals we talked to during our visits told us it was the first time any external actor had asked them how climate change was affecting them.

This case study also shows the importance of designing locally specific solutions to address the needs of the most vulnerable within impacted communities, notably women and children, Indigenous Peoples and other marginalised groups. One-size-fits-all approaches will only serve to maintain existing inequities, at best.

Finally, it is important to recognise that solutions to NELD as a result of climate change must be innovative and targeted if we are to truly prevent widespread development setbacks and contribute to climate justice. Communities should not have to rely on humanitarian aid, which is channelled irregularly and often at levels too high to be effective in climate-impacted and vulnerable communities.

Synopsis

A record-breaking prolonged drought and catastrophic flooding — especially of lakes — is driving severe losses and damages, especially those that are non-economic, as a result of climate change in Kenya's Great Rift Valley. Beyond the more obvious impacts, such as inundation and crop failure, these increasingly severe weather-related events are exacerbating existing inequities and marginalisation, which have plagued frontline communities throughout the region for decades. The result is a myriad of negative impacts, including loss of livelihoods, displacement, immobility and various development setbacks. Support is needed at all levels and must be designed and implemented in a way that addresses existing inequities and meaningfully includes impacted populations.

³⁷ CBDR-RC refers to a principle within the UNFCCC — enshrined in the 1992 treaty — that recognises the different capabilities and differing responsibilities of countries to address climate change and its impacts.

³⁸ climatenexus (n.d.) Common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC). <https://climatenexus.org/climate-change-news/common-but-differentiated-responsibilities-and-respective-capabilities-cbdr-rc>