



Strengthening Community Based Natural Resources Governance through Local Institutions and Building Capacity of Pastoralist Communities in Garba Tula, Kenya

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Background

The Garba Tula district, covering a vast area extending over 10,000 km² in Northern Kenya, features several challenges and opportunities that are typical of African dryland environments. It is home to some 40,000 predominantly Boran peoples whose daily livelihoods depend on pastoralism, a production system which critically depends on herd mobility and access to strategic seasonal resources, such as water and dry season grazing.

Garba Tula is adjacent to the Waso-Ngiro River, Meru National Park, Bisan Adhi Game Reserve, and the Chaffa Wetlands where the Waso-Ngiro terminates – clearly an area full of extraordinary biodiversity hotspots. However, human-wildlife conflicts (resulting among others from the competition for water, and the pasture and blockage of migratory corridors) have continuously threatened people's livelihoods and the government has generally placed higher value on the protected areas than on the local population. This is one of the main reasons why conservation of biodiversity has not been fully successful and is not benefitting communities.

In theory, Garba Tula's rangelands have the potential to generate food and incomes as well as to provide many vital and valuable ecosystems services such as water supply and carbon sequestration. In practice however, those services are being degraded through misguided rangeland investments (such as the conversion of land into exclusionary conservation areas as well as large-scale agricultural land uses), and policies which have halted movements, promoted sedentarization and led to the demise of crucial traditional governance structures and pastoral institutions. Although some countries now recognize pastoralism as a legitimate form of productive land use upon which protection of land rights is conditional, in Kenya still negative perceptions pervade pastoral policy and management. Progressive pastoral legislation is quasi non-existent and the few exceptional laws have barely been put into practice in reality.

In fact, weak land tenure has been identified as one of the key underlying issues that have held back sustainable livelihoods and development in the area. Land in Garba Tula is legally held in

trust by the County Council, but County Councils generally exercise strict control over allocation of land and are often poorly accountable to local communities, who in turn are poorly informed of their rights. In this context, sustainable pastoralist management of vast areas of land is being undermined by laws and policies that promote the individualisation of land tenure. As a result, dry-season grazing reserves have been lost, livestock movements have been restricted, land tenure has been rendered insecure and land degradation has increased, consequently undermining the sustainability of the pastoral livelihood system.

The interventions

To address the underlying causes of those challenges in the district, since 2008, IUCN has been implementing the 'Improving Natural Resource Governance for Rural Poverty Reduction' project with funds from UKaid from the Department for International Development (DFID) and counterpart funding from Catholic Aid for Relief and Development (CORDAID). This initiative was inspired by meetings of community elders in 2007 and 2008 and is being spearheaded by a community task force, consisting of elders and educated community members who took it on them to consolidate community concerns into a coherent concept, manage fundraising and implement the governance work in Garba Tula. Among other things, the community task force set up the locally-developed Wildlife Resource Advocacy Programme (WRAP). The initiative is based on multi-stakeholder dialogue, strengthening of local traditional institutions and capacity building of local government for community based natural resource management (CBNRM) among the pastoralist community. Invariably, a pastoral policy framework faces the challenge of providing a sound basis for guaranteeing access to resources, services and facilities; ensuring their sustainable management; in facilitating investment and generation of economic opportunities., This project is contributing to demonstrating that a framework that promotes transparent, participatory and consultative approaches to policy formulation and implementation can produce strengthened land rights, greater sustainability of land management, and investments that mutually benefit the environment and the communities.

Livelihoods Diversification through Biodiversity-Related Investments

Together with IUCN, WRAP is managing the process of developing community natural resource management plans, and improving biodiversity management through participatory rangeland planning and recognition of indigenous knowledge and resource management practices. The communities have mapped their resources, including wildlife dispersal routes, and in planning possible business ideas and "biodiversity-related investments" which will be enhanced through increased tenure security. The residents of Garba Tula have seen the benefits of conservation-related work in neighbouring districts and are highly interested in capturing similar benefits and investments - in particular they are hoping to attract eco-tourism. As WRAP develops, it is likely to play a role in encouraging investments within the district, representing the community

interests in the County Council and district government, and channeling financial resources to communities. WRAP will work closely with the Kenya Wildlife Service which manages the neighboring Meru National Park, and in return will seek support, for example from park fees and taxes, to strengthen WRAP and reinforce Community Based Natural Resource Management.

Developing a Rangeland Plan to Enable Mobility of Herds and Trade

Through participatory community planning, WRAP and IUCN expect to identify rangeland resources and users, seasonal calendars and rangeland conditions, as well as priority activities for the Garba Tula community. Although the rangeland plan is still in the process of being developed and exact activities will only be selected after its completion, it is likely that infrastructure-related interventions such as developing market links for high value biodiversity opportunities in the area as well as support to rehabilitation of water points to enable pastoral mobility will be included.

Self Organisation through Community Based Natural Resource Management

Contrary to popular perception, trust land is not government land, and it can provide a strong form of tenure if a community understands both its rights and the legal mechanisms to assert them. CBNRM entails the process of transferring some of the decision-making powers and responsibilities (fiscal, administrative, legal and technical) to the local community at district and village levels. Although no ownership rights are transferred to the community, CBNRM gives rights to manage and benefit from the natural resources within their trust land.

Spearheaded by a Community Task Force and strengthened by expert-facilitated consultations, the community arrived at a common understanding of CBNRM as “a way to bring local people together to protect, conserve and manage their land, water, animals and plants so that they can use these natural resources to improve their lives, the lives of their children and that of their grand children”. The strategy should improve the quality of people’s lives “economically, culturally and spiritually”.

Among others, CBNRM offers an unprecedented opportunity to formalize limited rights over extensive rangeland on communal level. This is important especially in pastoral areas where communities depend to a large extent on natural resources for their livelihood. What is critically needed is respect for community/indigenous knowledge and decision making for sustainable land management. This includes both CBNRM and empowerment of local and customary institutions for resource allocation and decision making.

IUCN and WRAP are helping the pastoralist communities in Garba Tula to strengthen community land rights by documenting their customary law and encouraging the County

Council to adopt them as bylaws. A Community Task Force is setting up a local trust to manage the process and the painstaking procedure of ensuring community and local government buy-in is supported by a number of development, conservation and wildlife agencies (among them the African Wildlife Foundation, the East African Wildlife Society, the Kenya Land Conservation Trust, and the Northern rangelands Trust).

Linking traditional knowledge to capacity in rangeland management opportunities

IUCN is building natural resource governance capacities at the community and community trust (WRAP) levels. For the Garba Tula community, rangeland plans skills which factor in the local pastoralists' deeply engrained cultural practices of mobility, rangeland zoning and seasonal calendars are being developed. For WRAP on the next level, IUCN is developing capacity and training skills in both community engagement and participatory management. WRAP is also being equipped with biodiversity-related technical skills to enhance the whole initiative, to build knowledge to manage rangelands in modern times, as well as with skills to strengthen their fundraising capacities and to effectively manage the project after the IUCN support will run out in 2013.

The road ahead

As the vast majority of Kenya's drylands are legally Trust Land, the Garba Tula experience could set a precedent for securing land tenure and improved governance that leads to better natural resource management and equity in pastoral lands. It is also viewed as a test-case that can demonstrate how pastoral communities can more effectively engage in dialogue on the national policy on Community Conservancies.

Through providing space for the participatory engagement of pastoral communities, policies and institutions must empower pastoralists to take part in policymaking that effects their livelihoods. This will also promote equitable access to resources, facilities and services, and guarantee sustainable land use and environmental management. In addition to addressing issues related to livestock production, health and marketing, pastoral policies should also tackle critical issues such as healthcare, education, land rights and women's rights as well as governance, ethnicity and religion. An important lesson from Garba Tula is that the policy environment may be more supportive than imagined, and what is missing might not be the policies so much as the capacity for taking advantage of them. Published research on African pastoral systems has steadily overturned many of the misconceptions about pastoral systems, highlighting the importance of appropriate strategies to manage the variability of the climate in dryland environments. Effective management strategies will allow for diverse herds of variable size and keep them mobile. There are increasing opportunities for pastoralists to capitalise on environmental services such as the maintenance of pasture diversity, vegetation cover and

biodiversity through ecotourism or through Payments for Environmental Services. The Kenyan example shows that even in Africa, where competition over public funds is tough and such schemes are poorly supported, the situation can be changed through community empowerment and government accountability. The Garba Tula experience provides important lessons which could be replicated in other drylands areas in Kenya and other parts of Africa, in an effort to promote more effective, sustainable and equitable drylands governance.