



Pastoralist Parliamentary Group



Drylands Learning and
Capacity Building Initiative
for Improved Policy and
Practice in the Horn of Africa

DISCUSSION BRIEF: Information is power: the urgent need for improved information provision on critical policy and practice issues in remote dryland communities

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Introduction

Despite increased investments in Northern Kenya since devolution, there is still a huge vacuum of information at community level about critical policy and development processes. This inevitably leads to misinformation and manipulation often resulting in disillusionment and tensions within communities and inability to hold stakeholders to account.

The Drylands Learning and Capacity Building Initiative (DLCI) is a Kenyan registered NGO that promotes dryland voice into policy. In 2016 DLCI implemented a project that identified and addressed the critical information needs of remote communities in Isiolo, Marsabit and Turkana counties. DLCI has been synthesizing and disseminating information to policy makers and development practitioners for nearly 10 years now through commissioning studies, developing policy briefs, leaflets, journals on good practice and innovation, sharing documents and critical drylands policy information on its websites and organizing interactive events. Through experience, its communications have become more focused on the primary stakeholders: the communities themselves.

Consultations with CSOs, communities and government stakeholders in each of the target counties, indicated that there were huge information gaps and a great hunger for accurate information on a range of policy and practice issues. According to communities in the remote dryland areas basic information on weather and marketing information are still lacking in both quantity and quality, despite many government and NGO projects to provide. In other parts of the country huge resources have been put into civic education especially on the 2010 Constitution and devolution, however, confusion and gaps still remain in remote drylands on these issues. Even information about basic services such as health provision and how to secure national identity cards, is lacking. Understanding the legal requirements for public participation in government planning and budgeting was particularly poor in the Counties, despite citizen's rights to participation clearly outlined in the Constitution and the County Government Act and a general belief that it is widely promoted. How can genuine citizen engagement be realized when so little information is accessible or is provided to these communities?

Current information provision

The County governments' civic education and public participation departments, in the three focus counties, have limited resources and no strategies for information provision to the citizens. Development partners occasionally provide information on specific issues, but often as a one off activity with little feedback or follow up and little effort to reach remote areas. Information is not provided in ways that people understand – it is often generic and does not speak to the realities of communities in the drylands.

FM radio was initially suggested by stakeholder as the easiest and cheapest way of reaching many people, however some parts of the counties are still not reached by FM stations and it is not always in the local vernacular. It was also found that most stations have a very specific target audience and remote pastoralists are rarely serviced. In practice it was found that although village meetings 'barazas' are only attended by people from the immediate vicinity, the information shared at such events is disseminated through local and traditional channels and reaches a wide audience.



and online e-citizen portals and one stop shop services like *Huduma* centres that are based at the County capitals, yet due to distances and lack of internet and literacy, these services are not accessible to rural communities in the ASALs.

- 5. Conservancies:** There was considerable concern and confusion around the push from county governments to promote conservancies as a vehicle for wildlife protection, particularly in Marsabit County as communities view the protection of the rangeland and pasture for their core livelihoods as their key priority, while promoting wildlife and tourism as a secondary objective. General concern was expressed over rights in relation to human-wildlife conflict particularly the location of wildlife corridors and mechanisms for accessing compensation for wildlife damage.

DLCI intervention was limited to the first two priority issues Community Land and public participation. It developed a brief on the Community Land Act and a poster on county budgeting and planning and a Swahili guide, and conducted two pilot barazas in each of the county as well as live and repeat FM radio call-in shows in local languages. The intention was that other longer-term, better funded organisations would be trained alongside the county governments so that they could disseminate the information in their areas. However without payment of per diems and transport reimbursement support, not all county government officials nor CSOs are willing to attend the workshops and barazas and thus not able to disseminate materials to marginalized remote areas.

The Community Land Act, 2016

Community land registration is a hugely emotive and potentially conflictual issue, and although communities appreciated the fact that the Act had been passed and information provided on it, there are many concerns and clarifications needed. Communities want help and support in the process of registering their land and want to be consulted in the development of the regulations that will detail the registration process and the adjudication program development. The community land registration regulations are being finalised and gazetted. The regulation is expected to address the many gaps and confusions that exist in the land policy and the Act. In addition, community land registrars require to be appointed in each county and a land adjudication program and alternative dispute resolution mechanism need to be established before land registration process can take place.

Although the communities appreciated the intent of the legislation in protecting community land and interests, they were concerned about many issues including the likely hidden control of the process by both national and county governments, the likely misuse of the county government roles on unregistered land and how the community land registrars could use their ability to reference other land laws which are contradictory e.g. the Land Registration Act, the Physical Planning and Adjudication Acts. They were also concerned over county boundaries and the definition of community, and the process the government is using to convert the community land for public use, without consultation or compensation.

Public participation in county budgeting and planning

People are disillusioned with public participation in county budgeting and planning as they don't see how their engagement has influenced the previous county plans. The communities consulted said that public participation was carried out purely to fulfil auditors' requirements and the government officials manipulated the process to ensure that their input had no effect. 'Professional workshopers' were invited to consultation workshops off the streets to rubber stamp the process in exchange for per diems. The meetings on planning were never carried out in the same areas as those on done by the budget committee of the County assembly, so there was never any follow on and coherence in the processes of consultation and participation.

Communities in the three counties said they had never seen any material on the approved budget published by County Executive Committee member (CEC) for Finance in any form that is easily understood and accessible to the



members of public as required by law. In Turkana no one at the barazaas even knew the total county budget and the County Administrator became anxious when it was shared at the meeting, even though this is public information. When the participants were told, they expressed incredulity. It is felt that there is the need for an independent mediator to bring county government and communities together and ‘reset the relationship’ and to develop a process of trust and a system for genuine public participation.

Conclusions and recommendations

Accurate, trusted and comprehensive information is essential to promote public engagement and to dispel the current distrust and disillusionment in remote dryland areas where information access is very low. None of the counties visited had a comprehensive strategy on information provision to communities on development issues and policy processes nor adequate coordination between county government and development partners. Information was not easily accessible and often is seen and perceived to be politicized. Several development partners had promoted community awareness on specific issues but this was neither done comprehensively nor in response to community needs, and the impact of such initiatives had not been evaluated. Community information is rarely funded by donors and where it is, it lacks sustained support, co-ordination, impact assessment, and learning.

Remote communities require much more information on policies and practice issues that affect their lives. There is a serious distrust between communities and government which needs to be urgently bridged. Both the Community Land Act 2016 and public participation in county planning and budgeting are seen sensitive and contentious issues and require careful handling. The culture of per diems that is perpetrated by the governments and development partners and the lack of attention to literacy are major obstacles to public participation and genuine information dissemination.

It is strongly recommended that:

1. There is a **third party mediation process to improve the trust between remote communities and county governments** and support constructive models of engagement. This is a long term process that needs to be carried out by skilled and sensitive individuals and organisations.
2. There is an urgent need for **community interests to be protected in the development of the regulations on the registration of community land** and in-depth consultations. The role out of the community land Act needs to focus more on results of community land protection for enhanced communal use and reciprocal resource agreements, rather than a rush for land ownership registration that will pit one community against another and exacerbate tensions and conflict.
3. The county governments should **regulate and limit the use of per diems** for community members and government workers for attending meetings that respond to community needs. **Meetings and consultations should be carried out in communities under trees rather than in towns** to avoid professional “workshoppers” and carried out in ways that ensure genuine community input into government processes.
4. With female literacy as low as 6% in some ASAL counties and primary school enrolment around 40%, adult literacy and **improved educational reach should be urgently addressed** in these areas to enable people to access written information and understand the content of critical policy and practice issues.

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This brief and other DLCI documents can be accessed at: www.dlci-hoa.org

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