



Regional Learning &
Advocacy Programme
for Vulnerable Dryland
Communities

SUMMARY OF THE MEDIA EVENT ON IRRIGATED CROP AGRICULTURE IN THE DRYLANDS OF KENYA, 3RD December 2013

Introduction

A media briefing breakfast event to discuss irrigation in the drylands of Kenya was organised by REGLAP with the support of its Kenya Advocacy Group at the Hotel Intercontinental on December 3rd, 2013. The event was primarily intended to provide stakeholders with a forum to critically interrogate key government plans and processes that have far reaching consequences on drylands development. In addition the event was intended to broaden the debate around irrigation by promoting critical media thinking and reporting. About 57 people representing the major media houses in Kenya including the Nation Media Group, Royal Media, Standard Group, and Radio Africa among others, pastoralist community members from eleven dryland counties, parliamentary groups, international organisations and government institutions including the Ministry of Devolution and Planning and the Land Commission, attended the event.

The meeting was convened in response to questions that were emerging particularly for ASAL areas regarding the Jubilee government's 1-million hectare (acre) irrigation flagship project. In addition to this various technical and social studies had been undertaken by REGLAP and FAO-Kenya that raised concerns about potential negative impacts for the people and environment in the drylands of Kenya and the Horn of Africa. Please see the studies and powerpoints on the following links:

The Place of Crop Agriculture in the Drylands: an opportunity or a threat?, REGLAP, June 2013

http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/fileadmin/user_upload/drought/docs/1_FINAL%20REPORT_The%20place%20of%20crop%20agriculture%20in%20the%20drylands%20of%20the%20HoA.pdf

In addition, two background papers were prepared to inform the event:

Discussion Brief: Irrigating Kenya's drylands – food for thought, November 2013

http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/fileadmin/user_upload/drought/docs/REGLAP%20discussion%20brief_Irrigation_Dec%202013.pdf

The Turkana Aquifer discoveries and development proposals: A REGLAP discussion perspective, November 2013

http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/fileadmin/user_upload/drought/docs/1_Discussion%20paper%20on%20irrigation%20in%20the%20ASALs%20of%20Kenya_November%202013.pdf

The following questions were identified as critical for the discussion and shared with the presenters beforehand:

1. Is irrigation development in ASALs viable: economically, environmentally, and socially?
2. Is there adequate water for the target acreage from the rivers? Is there adequate hydrological data to base the plans on?
3. What proportion of schemes will be based on groundwater abstraction?
4. Have environmental and social impact assessments been done to establish damage or otherwise to the environment?
5. Has demand from the schemes come from the communities? What consultation processes are in place with all the land users particularly poor people, women and mobile pastoralists?
6. What is the average expected output per acre and have comparative studies been done to show that irrigated crop agriculture will be more profitable than the same investment in pastoralism?
7. What is the selection process for people to benefit e.g. own land, pumps etc?
8. Crop husbandry skills – have the capacity of “new” farmers been built sufficiently to run the schemes?
9. Where people want to practice agro-pastoralism what provision has been made for their animals in the development of these schemes?
10. Have communities been consulted and agreed to the proposed change of livelihood system?
11. Are there county land use plans to ensure that the areas earmarked for other economic activities are not swallowed up by the planned irrigation? Have issues of land tenure and ownership been addressed?
12. What are the examples of success on which these projects are premised?
13. Have assessments been done on impacts of existing schemes to demonstrate uptake? For example irrigated Pasture and Fodder Production in Mandera and the associated business has sufficiently excited many pastoralists; however, intensive production has not resulted. Water is not the main limiting factor.
14. Accruing benefits for community or only national GDP?
15. When do the schemes break even and begin to generate profits for farmers?
16. Can NIB provide examples of success stories that support the intentions?
17. Can NIB comment on the lessons to be learned from irrigation development activities in Lower Omo?

The keynote speaker was Engineer George Odedeh, Chief Engineer with the National Irrigation Board who presented on the government plans for irrigation in the ASALs. His presentation was followed with reactions from a panel that included Hon. Mohammed Elmi the Member of Parliament for Tarbaj and the former Minister of development of Northern Kenya and other arid lands, Ms. Mine Pabari an environmental expert with The World Conservation Union (IUCN), Mr. Michael Tiampati, the national coordinator for the Pastoralist Development Network of Kenya (PDNK) representing the CSO/Community voice and and Mr. Lucas Chacha representing Oxfam GB.

**Presentation – Engineer George Odedeh, Chief Engineer with the National Irrigation Board
(Please see link ??? for full presentation)**

Engineer Odedeh observed that irrigation in the ASALs was important:

- To support livelihoods by allowing communities to engage in reliable economic production.
- To allow for establishment and growth of settlements that can support women, children and the elderly while the men take care of cattle.
- To provide alternative means of livelihood thus reducing the need for cattle rustling.
- To allow for introduction of improved crop varieties and animal breeds.
- To allow for introduction of improved animal and crop husbandry practices.
- To provide a more reliable source of income.
- To provide employment to the youth and women.
- To provide for better nutrition.

He was noted that:

- Vision 2030 prioritizes irrigation development in the ASALs as a means of fast-tracking economic and industrial development of the ASALs.
- Under MTP1, Turkana and Tana River Counties were prioritized and now Kilifi and other counties in Northern Kenya have been prioritized under MTP2.

The Government had committed KShs 11 billion in the 2013/14 National Budget. He added that although the talk was for 1 million hectares, realistically the potential for irrigation in the five basins in Kenya, seven hundred and sixty thousand hectares broken down as follows:

BASIN	TOTAL POTENTIAL (HA)	DEVELOPED AREA 2010 (HA)	BALANCE (HA)
LAKE VICTORIA	297,213	15,094	282,119
RIFT VALLEY	101,753	9,587	92,166
ATHI	91,006	44,898	46,108
TANA	226,224	64,425	161,799
EWASO NGIRO NORTH	49,379	7,896	41,483
TOTAL	765,575	141,900	623,675

- Rushed implementation processes which may lead to inadequate community involvement.
- Inadequate financial resources leading to loss of faith by beneficiaries.
- Low or slow take up of good crop and animal husbandry practices.
- Inadequate commercialisation of activities in ASALs and other rural areas.

In conclusion and as a way forward, he observed that irrigation projects should seek to:

- Invest in processes and projects that empower communities to have a reliable and adequate source of income that is totally within their control.
- Invest in interventions that will have a good multiplier effect.

Plenary Responses, Questions and Discussions

The presentation then elicited a number of responses from a panel made up of parliamentarian, civil society organization representative, NGO representative and a representative from an environmental organization. The panel questioned whether the government had undertaken any comparative study on the livelihoods based on irrigation and similarly based on a dryland livelihood system like pastoralism to establish which one is more cost-effective. The presenter said this had not been done. The panel observed that rather than go for grand projects, it might be wiser to deal with impediments to growth in the ASALs such as insecurity, low school enrolment and high drop-out rates. They observed that perhaps if there was investment in infrastructure to enable the pastoralist communities to engage in economically viable activities within the context, it might give better results than experimenting with massive irrigation projects.

From the floor, a representative from the Commission for Land noted that the land ownership issues in the ASALs had not been conclusively dealt with. For that reason the grand irrigation projects will need to be undertaken carefully with due regard to the sensitive issues around land ownership.

Communities' members observed that although there may be benefits from irrigation, it is necessary to facilitate dialogue processes that involve all stakeholders – especially community members – before decisions are made regarding whether to implement irrigation projects and what roles the community members should play.

One person noted that although no objective impact assessment had been undertaken to establish if irrigation had improved the lives and livelihoods of pastoralist communities that had adopted irrigated crop production; the communities are doing better than they were before and that in future forums, members of such communities should be invited to present their side of the stories of change.

Conclusion

The event generated several articles in the media in the weeks that followed (see below) and created space for national dialogue around the issues of irrigation. It is imperative to note that the media representatives did not engage with the discussion, and some found it confusing that

development actors even questioned the idea of large scale irrigation. In particular, Xinuha news media report proposed that irrigation is the answer to dealing with underdevelopment in the ASALs of Kenya. However, other national key media (the Nation and the Standard) were able to provide a more analytical coverage.

Overall, although the event did not adopt one position on irrigated crop agriculture, participants noted that there was a case to be made for it but care needs to be taken as the projects are implemented to ensure that the projects do not repeat the mistakes of their predecessors such as Bura and Hola that have been riddled with problems.

Media coverage

http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000099296&story_title=Kenya-kenya-urged-to-be-cautious-with-irrigation-projects

<http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/article/2000099325/kenya-bets-on-irrigation-to-boost-food-production>

<http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-146028/765000-hectares-kenya-irrigation>