REACH

Improving water security for the poor

Women walking on the old Kawalassee river bridge to sell dairy. Image credit: M. Korzenevica

Addressing socio-economic inequalities in Lodwar and broader Turkana

Workshop Report "Socio-economic aspects of flash floods, water and climate" February 23, 2022

Lodwar, Kenya

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Who we are

REACH is a global research programme funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to improve water security for the poor by delivering world-class science that transforms policy and practice. REACH is led by the University of Oxford in partnership with UNICEF and a global network of collaborators:

- Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology
- International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh
- International Food Policy Research Institute
- International Water Association
- University of Nairobi
- IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre
- Skat Foundation hosting the Rural Water Supply Network
- University of Dhaka
- University of Nairobi
- Water and Land Resource Centre, Addis Ababa University

The REACH Programme held a workshop entitled "Socio-economic aspects of flash floods, water and climate" on Wednesday 23rd February 2022 at the Cradle Tented Camp Lodwar, Turkana County. The risks around flash floods, water and climate are among the top worries among the poor population of Lodwar. These risks are experienced differently depending on multiple socio-economic factors. Several organisations have been enabling people's survival while planning strategic and sustainable solutions to improve people's lives. However, it is a process with many uncertainties, challenges, unexpected trajectories and undesirable consequences. This meeting aimed to discuss how water and flood risks relate to socio-economic inequalities. There were presentations on critical gender and intersectional considerations on what to think about at the time of interventions, socio-economic aspects of flash flood risk evaluation and flooding and water insecurity in Lodwar.

Introduction

Socio-economic inequalities are significant in determining people's water access, impact of water hardship on their livelihoods, their cross-cutting vulnerabilities and resilience to hazards, such as floods. Gender influences structures and operation of the society, and specifically, how different difficulties are experienced and managed. The analytical lens of gender and other socio-economic parameters shows unequal position of specific social groups at certain situations; for instance, we have identified that single mothers do not have an option to relocate after the flashfloods in Lodwar, because in a new location they cannot combine three important tasks: water access, income generation and child care. Other socio-economic inequalities can be equally important, for example, migrants (particularly, non-Turkana) are routinely excluded from different projects (e.g. in relation to flood support) because they are considered as temporary residents (hence not belonging to the locality) by the local elders. These interlinked intersectional social relations are complex yet crucial for any intervention success.

Socio-economic inequalities grounded in power relations, cultural norms and socio-political environment are corresponding to Sustainable Development goal 5 (Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment) and 10 (Reduce Inequality Within and Among Countries) and are crucial for justice, sustainability and alleviation of poverty of any initiated project even of technical nature, such as provision of a new borehole.
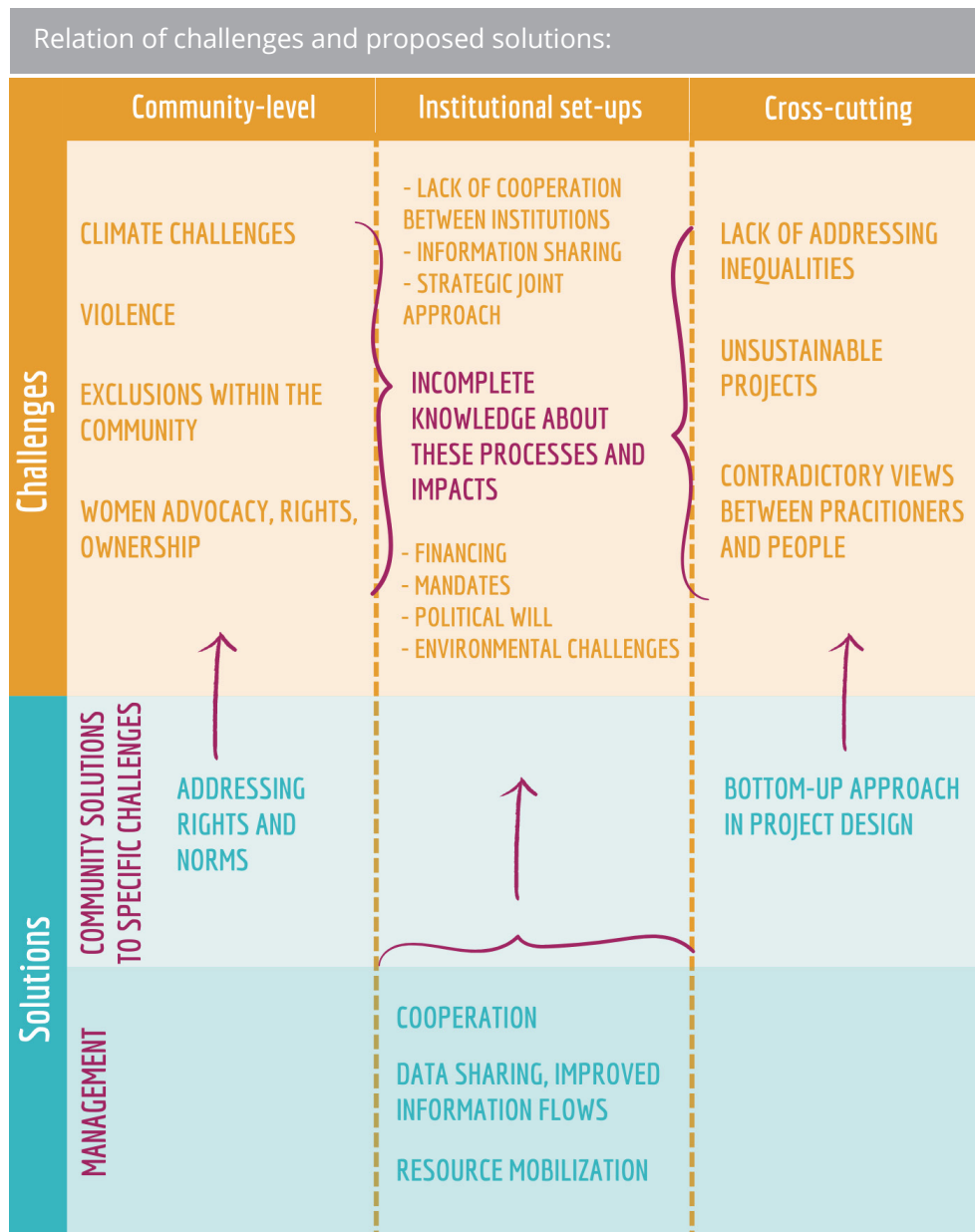

The workshop aimed to raise conversations on these aspects. The first session was led by social researchers from the University of Nairobi and the University of Oxford through case studies of flash floods in Lodwar (see Appendix 1), followed by a set of small group dialogues with stakeholders from national, governmental organizations and NGOs. The discussion in each group was facilitated by a researcher. The following questions guided discussions:

1a: What are the challenges that practitioners face at the community level in approaching socio-economic inequalities?
1b: What could be the solutions to these problems?

2a: What are the challenges that practitioners face at the institutional level in approaching socio-economic inequalities?
2b: What could be the solutions to these problems?

Discussions were fruitful, open and revelatory, especially when discussing connections between challenges of socio- political context, power relations and institutional practices. Workshop notes were structured and further developed. This report represents subjective stakeholders' observations and opinions, and aims to continue discussion on socio-economic inequalities.

This work specifically aims to:

a. Consider, challenge and re-think experienced challenges,

b. Consider root causes of and solutions to the existing challenges,

c. Discuss jointly outlined challenges in yet missing dialogues among NGOs. We hope that this report could be the first out of many materials on this topic.

Relation of challenges and proposed solutions:		
Community-level	**Institutional set-ups**	**Cross-cutting**
Challenges CLIMATE CHALLENGES VIOLENCE EXCLUSIONS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY WOMEN ADVOCACY, RIGHTS, OWNERSHIP	- LACK OF COOPERATION BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS - INFORMATION SHARING - STRATEGIC JOINT APPROACH INCOMPLETE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THESE PROCESSES AND IMPACTS - FINANCING - MANDATES - POLITICAL WILL - ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES	LACK OF ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES UNSUSTAINABLE PROJECTS CONTRADICTORY VIEWS BETWEEN PRACITIONERS AND PEOPLE
Solutions COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS TO SPECIFIC CHALLENGES ADDRESSING RIGHTS AND NORMS MANAGEMENT	COOPERATION DATA SHARING, IMPROVED INFORMATION FLOWS RESOURCE MOBILIZATION	BOTTOM-UP APPROACH IN PROJECT DESIGN

This graph illustrates the discussed barriers in addressing socio-economic inequalities at the **community level** (Section 1), in **institutional set-ups** (Section 3) and **cross-cutting** challenges (Section 2) in the operational stage of implementing projects. The figure also presents discussed solutions, both specific ones that could address identified problems at the community level, but also shifts in institutional structures and operational approaches to address socio-economic inequalities.

The dry river bed of the Kawalasee river used for drinking water scooping. The river is prone to floods.
Image credit: M. Korzenevica

1. Observed challenges and suggested specific solutions

In the workshop we identified four major challenges that relate to communities: climate, women's ownership of land and assets, as well as barriers in advocacy, multiple existing exclusions, and violence. This list is not exclusive, though it indicates a broad range of observed difficulties.

1a. Climate

Turkana is a diverse country with challenging but also various environmental setups and unique cultural traditions that have been enabling Turkana people to adapt to climate variability through generations. **Climate variability and climate change affect how communities adapt, how different social groups are affected and how practitioners' approaches are developed.** The variations of environmental conditions and community set ups make it challenging to develop uniform adaptation practices. Pastoralism as a way of life and livelihood source is very vulnerable to climate variability. The patterns of pastoral mobility also have implications for social structures; occasionally families split and only men are moving with their livestock, developing polygamous family in different spaces. Water projects impact mobility routes in different ways, e.g. pastoralists define their paths based on the access to water, and practitioners try to adapt water projects to mobility routes. **Understanding the climate and being able to adapt is crucial for both genders in different ways, though women are less informed.** In certain cases, men are found to receive first-hand information about impending disasters/shocks while women and children are often informed as 'by the way'.

Existing environment-security nexus is making it difficult to finance and/or realize projects in poorly accessible communities, and that creates socio-geographical inequality. Most institutions are facing financial difficulties and thus they make decisions based on the locations that are easier and cheaper to access. Locations considered unsafe are facing acute water security problems. Far away based communities also experience problems of reaching institutional credit loans due to challenging connectivity and poverty (affects ability to secure loans).

Establishment of a disaster-focused working group at the community level could help to improve information flow about disasters from the community to practitioners. This group needs to be inclusive in its composition and representative of different social groups within the community.

1b. Women's advocacy, rights and ownership

Women's ability to advocate their interests is tied to ownership rights and norms defining women's role in the society. Within families women are supposed to fulfil the requirement of raising many children (perceived a sign of wealth) and only wives of powerful men are likely to be vocal and lead social groups. There is a lack of women-public leaders. According to traditional principles of inheritance women get land rights through their marriage. The communal ownership of land in Turkana discourages investment in land and at times pushes women out of decision making in relation to land, though times are changing and land is getting commodified, particularly in the urban areas. Inflexible gender division of labour continues to prescribe women's responsibility over domestic sphere (child care, fuel fetching, water provision, shelter provision and food provision for the household) relative to men who remain owners of production assets (cattle and land).

Long term solutions should target women's rights of ownership while addressing cultural norms at different levels. For example, land inheritance practices could be approached through advocacy principles and creating awareness within different age and gender groups within the community. Additionally, dialogue is needed with the council of elders on gender sensitive principles of ownership. The highest impact would be expected from understanding drivers of social norms and investing in transformative dialogues and learning in different institutions, such as families and schools.

1c. Inclusion and exclusion within communities

Community leadership and hierarchies are often convoluted and can range from the principles of inclusiveness to nepotism and marginalization; at times it is difficult for practitioners to both accept and challenge cultural setups. Institutional community leadership structure (elders, community group, water user groups) has been meant to represent diversity of the community's needs and to protect the most vulnerable members. Whilst true in some cases, they often do not advocate for marginalised groups of women, youth and persons with disability in decision-making. In water committees men typically lead and women take only subordinated yet "glamourised" treasurer roles that still do not give them access to fully oversee actual money flows that remain within the hands of the chair and secretary. Moreover, when the project is passed to the community for the ownership, the knowledge and capacity remains in the hands of a few and there are cases when these people move out from the community.

A woman carrying firewood on her head. Collecting and selling firewood is one of the most common income sources for poor peripheral communities of Lodwar. Image credit: M. Ngikadelio

Education has potential to bring social and economic transformation within the communities, however, engagement with education is interwoven with gender roles; moreover, at times it doesn't provide the expected outcome. There is a general observation that more educated people are better off socio-economically and more interested in transformation at different levels.

However, there are different gendered barriers to schooling, e.g. boys are sometimes kept at home to engage in pastoralism or others prefer to engage in motorbike or construction business; as per girls, they are not expected to continue with the school if they get pregnant. Moreover, sometimes education brings power imbalances within the community and exacerbates inequalities between the educated and non-educated.

Water and poverty related decision making within the communities are affected by cultural and gender norms, and there is insufficient understanding of those norms. For example, during drought people choose to keep their livestock until they die (as opposed to selling them to the NGOs and government in advance) as there is cultural attachment to livestock. Men-pastoralists typically construct their masculinity and the right to pay dowry through the number of livestock they have; loss of livestock affects their mental health, leading to alcohol abuse and stress. A better understanding of the role of livestock in the Turkana family, associated gender norms, and family dynamics is needed.

1d. Violence between ethnicities

The role of violence and insecurity is overwhelming and potentially significantly affecting the roles within water related decision making, pushing women's voices in relation to safe water and sanitation out of consideration. There are many unknowns in this topic and research is clearly needed; however, there is some anecdotal evidence that projects in insecure zones tend to be less successful. Vandalism is common from the community members as well. In this situation we need to ask, how can we overcome the competition between water access and security? How are water and risk of violence related and what are the gender implications?

1e. Gender

Existing gender inequalities within the communities are embedded in internalized power structures and gender roles remain poorly understood and/or difficult to challenge in planning projects. These include different rights to assets (land, livestock etc.), participation in decision making (especially in relation to environmental resources), cultural norms around assets (e.g. the importance of livestock for men's identity), households negotiations during security threats or climate shocks, as well as, gender barriers (both boys and girls) in gaining education.

Woman stands outside her house with jerry cans for water collection. The house has multiple damages and is perceived to be structurally unstable after the last floods. Image credit: P. Ong'ao Ng'asike

2. Resulting cross-cutting challenges

These are the challenges that occur in interaction between practitioners and communities. These occur due to structural problems, and a lack of data.

Traditional culture and ways of living contradicts with practitioners' visions for pathways out of poverty. Turkana people have been traditionally leading pastoral lifestyles and adapting to climate variability through mobility. The strong attachment to this lifestyle is opposed by the practitioners who are advocating for the benefits of growth and a modern sedentary lifestyles. As perceived by practitioners, people are reluctant to take ownership of the projects that are designed to improve their economic situation.

Projects are unsustainable. Projects are short-lived and socio-economic nuances are not sufficiently integrated.

Projects should have bottom-top approach from the community as a whole and different social groups within it. Imposition of projects is likely to fail and to reproduce social inequalities. It is crucial to understand experienced daily life problems by collecting data from different sources, making sampling inclusive and diversifying data collection strategies, e.g. key informant interviews, focus group discussion with different representatives, interviews and social groups. Recognition of and cooperation with local leadership is crucial, though it is important to identify gaps in representation and to supplement missing information from other sources. Local leadership can be transformed to be more inclusive and more representative, though it is important that marginalized groups have an influence in their representation. Community representatives from diverse social groups could be brought into dialogues with the government representatives and the practitioners can mediate that. Intercultural learning between different communities could be potentially successful if the informal education holders are obliged to communicate their experiences to representatives from different social groups.

A woman is scooping water from a river well. Image credit: M. Korzenevica

3. Institutional set-up, challenges and solutions

Institutions are experiencing multiple challenges. Several initiatives could help to develop more targeted and effective approaches to address socio-economic inequalities.

Understanding socio-economic inequalities requires good data, but current information sharing channels are weak, both from/to community, but also among responsible bodies. Community level knowledge may be understood by the ground level officers, but it is not reaching the leadership levels. Information sharing within the community is also exclusive to women and young people.

Addressing socio-economic inequalities is commonly not prioritized in institutions or political spaces. There is a lack of political commitment and clear prioritization of socio-economic inequalities in institutional mandates. Institutional mandates commonly are rigid and not responsive to internal community needs, but are rather covering larger topics (e.g. forestry or climate change) without a space to understand the differential impacts of these environmental aspects to socio-economic inequalities.

Reducing socio-economic inequalities requires concerted action from different acting bodies, though not only their different roles are unclear, but also cooperation is rare. Political environment is affecting coordination between institutions in myriad ways, e.g. lack of will to work together due to political differences, frequent changes in government policies or lack of clarity in role division between different bodies, particularly between national and country levels. Independent NGOs also do not cooperate and sometimes implement similar water projects within one community. These challenges promote breadth over depth, the latter being necessary to understand local marginalization and complex vulnerabilities.

The primary problem that needs addressing is the coordination of interventions. Both independent working groups have identified this as the main obstacle in approaching socio-economic inequalities. **Organisations need mechanisms to share information among themselves.** Existence of these structures could ensure that already at the planning stage organisations learn about costs, decision making, and challenges encountered from the previous bodies and projects.

Multi-sectoral approaches in socio-economic inequalities should be enhanced through different steps aimed at reducing institutional conflicts and promoting institutional cooperation. Though some structures exist at the governmental level (e.g., county steering groups, Civil Society Organization(s) reference group), NGOs prefer to work independently and are also not keen to cooperate with the government. There is a need to create a programme that would prevent duplication of the projects and ensure transparency in money flow, control of programmes and sharing of information. There is a need of a joint database of the projects and development of mechanisms to regulate NGOs and prevent socio-geographical marginalization of some communities.

Mobilisation of resources could greatly increase the success in understanding complex community issues. The sharing of resources (vehicles, money) could ensure better, longer and deeper engagement with the communities. Further, if information is shared it could create a common pool of knowledge.