

Kenya: The current drought situation in Baringo

Baringo County has always been prone to drought. In August 2016, a formal early warning declaration was issued by international organizations predicting that counties in northern Kenya will be affected by prolonged episodes of drought. Two Months later, the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist livelihood zones which include Tiaty, Baringo South and Baringo North recorded approximately 24,000 people facing acute starvation. The severity of the drought is likely to increase immediately after May 2017, if the amount of rain received stays below average. But why do we witness a looming crisis when the system sounds effective enough to assist in early planning and response?

Towards a looming humanitarian crisis

Baringo County is one of the 23 arid and semi-arid (ASAL) areas in Kenya and is located in the northern part of the country with a population of approximately half a million people. The County is prone to drought as the main disaster and has four livelihood zones namely: pastoralist, agro-pastoralist, irrigated and mixed farming zones¹. In August 2016, a formal early warning-early action declaration in respect to *La Niña* induced drought was issued by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in addition to other corroborating agencies predicting that counties in northern Kenya will be affected by prolonged episodes of drought. Two Months down the line, the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist livelihood zones which include Tiaty, Baringo South

and Baringo North recorded an alarm level² with approximately 24,000³ people facing acute starvation. For the mixed farming and irrigated agricultural zones, the levels are at 'stress' and 'alert' respectively⁴. There is likelihood however, that the County may receive long rains in the Months of March, April and May. Nevertheless, the severity of the drought is likely to increase immediately after May 2017, if the amount of rain received stays below average, which is not unlikely in a *La Niña* phase. The situation is deteriorating fast especially in the three aforementioned Sub-Counties⁵.

Vegetation cover in Baringo County has reduced to nearly a third between October and December 2016⁶. The situation has even been worsened significantly by depressed short rains in December 2016. In Tiaty Sub-County (one of the three drought hardest-hit Sub Counties in Baringo) for instance, the rainfall received was an average of 3 mm in December 2016 compared to 68 mm that was received in December 2015. Tiaty's average rainfall during this period is usually 40 mm. Baringo County at large has seen drastic decrease in rainfall from 200 mm in December 2015 to 5 mm in December 2016. Usual

² Alarm level is a drought phase classification used by the NDMA in Kenya to illustrate areas where environmental and at least two production indicators for instance production indicator 1: milk production are below the normal production, production indicator 2: livestock body condition has worsened due to lack of enough water and pasture or production indicator 3: when the distance to water and pasture increases above normal.

³ Daily Nation, p 2, millions faced with hunger as drought rages. January 20th 2017.

⁴ Alert level is a drought phase classification used by the NDMA to illustrate areas where meteorological drought indicators move outside seasonal ranges, or simply put, when there is a significant drop in the amount of rain received in that period compared to other similar periods in the past or compared to what is expected by the relevant meteorological department.

⁵ Baringo First County Integrated Development Plan 2013-2017

⁶ Vegetation Condition Index (VCI) from 53.54 in October to 20-35, depending on the sub-counties in December. VCI is used to identify drought situations and determine the onset. It focuses on the impact of drought on vegetation. See <http://www.droughtmanagement.info/vegetation-condition-index-vci/>

¹ According to Famine Early Warning System Network, a livelihood zone is an area within which people share broadly the same pattern of livelihood, including options for obtaining food and income and market opportunities.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

KENIA

DR. JAN CERNICKY
EDWIN OTTICHILO
CHRISTIN NJERI

January 2017

www.kas.de/Kenia

ly, the County receives 147 mm as average rainfall.

While the main sources of water in the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist zones -for both domestic and livestock use- are traditional rivers and water wells covering 29% of the total demand of water in the county and pans and dams covering 22%, most of them have dried out as a result of the prolonged drought. This means that the ongoing drought will have a huge effect on the total availability of water particularly in the three Sub-Counties. Concentration of livestock where there is forage and water is one of the coping strategies being implemented at the moment in Tiaty Sub County, the only reminder of life are the hundreds of dry acacia trees dotted in the vast area with concentration of livestock in the very few water pans having more than tripled⁷. Due to severe hunger, locals have been compelled to eat carcasses of animals, leading to reports of diarrhea in areas like Tirioko Ward, Kulol division in Baringo South.

On a different note, trekking (migration) of animals is likely to continue leading to resource based conflict (now that both pasture and water is a problem). Currently, pastoralist communities are migrating from Baringo North and Tiaty Sub-Counties to southern Turkana to search for pasture for their livestock trekking for more than 100 kilometers, leading to inter-communal violence in some areas.

To illustrate the fast growing negative impact of the prolonged drought, a chief from Ridi-kwa, Baringo North Sub County argued that the current price for a goat is between 1,000 Kenya shillings (Kshs) and Kshs. 1,500. This is way down from the approximately Ksh. 2,835 per goat as of August 2016. Approximately 4,442 livestock have been reported dead between the 17th of December 2016 (where the first case was formally recorded) and 23rd of January 2017⁸. This is due to diseases and starvation.

⁷ National drought Management Authority. Drought Early Warning Bulletin for Baringo County, December 2016, p 4

⁸ The figures were obtained based on telephone interviews with the chiefs from Bartabwa, Barwessa, Saimo Soi and Saimo Kapraman, the respective ward Administrators from the three Sub Counties of Baringo North Baringo South and Tiaty as well as from local partners and the Baringo Drought Response Team.

The effectiveness of early-warning mechanisms in preventing drought in Baringo – Challenges and progress so far

National Drought Management Authority's (NDMA) drought early warning system is community based with data collection happening at household level (sentinel sites) based on proven indicators that are meant to characterize the drought condition⁹. The early warning system works within the larger Drought Management Cycle (DMC) which has four phases and corresponding alarm-levels namely:

- mitigation (normal)
- preparedness (alert/alarm)
- relief assistance (emergency)
- reconstruction (recovery)

Each phase has its own type of early information generated so as to assist in early action. For instance, during the mitigation phase, the information generated provides guidance for contingency planning; initiate series of tailor made capacity building activities, as well as promote integrated infrastructural development. In a mitigation phase, there are always incidences of drought biting some areas in the pastoral zones, but still manageable.

The second phase, preparedness, is depicting both alert and alarm levels; meaning drought has started to become severe. The warning information is packaged in a monthly bulletin and provides recommendations which generally includes establishment of strategic stockpiling of cereals and grains, rehabilitation of critical boreholes, commercial livestock off-take and marketing, setting aside supplementary feeds for animals and humans among others. It's mostly at the alert and not alarm level that drought response plans are developed, contingency planning revised and funds set aside to start bankrolling the recommendations.

Relief assistance signals an emergency level. This is where the pastoralist and agro-

⁹ Amos Nyakeyo, 2016. Lessons in Disaster Risk Reduction and Early Warning; understanding the NDMA's drought early warning system in Baringo County. Published by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung under the strengthening the concept of early warning for disaster risk reduction and food security.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

KENIA

DR. JAN CERNICKY
EDWIN OTTICHILO
CHRISTIN NJERI

January 2017

www.kas.de/Kenia

pastoralist zones in Baringo County are heading for by start of March 2017, although it's noteworthy to mention that there are drought hit-hard areas within the two prone zones that have reached the emergency level already. Most of what happens in this phase is emergency relief/assistance on the basis of humanitarian interventions, ranging from food aid and health assistance to mass livestock off taking exercises. Early warning information generally describes deteriorating human and animal health among others. Schools and most public amenities usually get closed in these areas as they lack basic provisions like water, while cases of widespread human and animal diseases continue to be reported.

The fourth phase is reconstruction, which depicts a recovery level. This phase comes immediately after long and short rains. The early warning information tends to revolve around restocking, rehabilitation, capacity building and infrastructural development among others.

Why do we witness a looming crisis when the system sounds effective enough to assist in early planning and response?

No matter how effective a system is in terms of relaying the information, if that information isn't well internalized and response made in time, then not much can be achieved. This has been the case that Baringo County is presently grappling with. The warning signs have been sent not only by the NDMA's Baringo drought early warning system but also by the keepers of the indigenous and traditional knowledge. To even strengthen early warning information, participatory scenario planning sessions have been conveyed in the recent past by the Agricultural Sector Development Support Program (ASDSP) bringing on board traditional and modern partners working on early warning mechanisms. Such engagements were not appreciated before but are starting to gain acceptance thanks to a number of partners including KAS, World Food Program (WFP) and United Nation Development Program (UNDP) among others, who have attempted to come up with different strategies to strengthen such concepts and practice. How-

ever, there are still challenges which include: low political currency/goodwill, as well as low capacities of stakeholders to internalize and share the information in reasonable time among the different stakeholders and community leaders.

Resource mobilization especially funding has been an emotive subject in Baringo especially at this point in time. The Governor of Baringo for instance, has intimated that the County needs 5.5 million Euro as contingency funds within the 2017/18 financial year alone to help respond to the ongoing drought. On the other hand the National Treasury has clashed with eleven County Governments in the ASAL regions including Baringo County for holding on to more than 100 million Euro in their reserves that they do not spend on emergency relief¹⁰.

The county governments confirmed that there are important sums of idle cash in their accounts, but claimed that this could not be spend for emergency-programs since it is already allocated for running projects. Baringo's deputy governor explained: "Most of the projects take longer than the stipulated time due to slow contractors (...), thus the funds are transferred to the next financial year. Still, it becomes obvious, that because of the devolution process started four years ago, many of the new counties are administrative-ly not completely prepared for tackling an extraordinary drought.

For example, regarding early information, the county government has not definitely set aside a drought contingency fund through an Act of the County Assembly that then compels the County Government to set aside funds to assist with response/early action. What is happening in Baringo is that good plans have so far been developed by institutions of the County and National Government with support from development partners but implementation of the same is still a challenge due to administrative shortcomings, lack of experience and expertise. This can be witnessed in most other counties and doesn't come as a surprise.

¹⁰ Kenyan Daily Nation Newspaper, 'Governors clash with treasury over cash', January 23rd 2017, p 2.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

KENIA

DR. JAN CERNICKY
EDWIN OTTICHILO
CHRISTIN NJERI

January 2017

www.kas.de/Kenia

Non-state actors providing oversight roles in the County argue that local politicians in the recent past have ignored the role of such plans in addressing immediate and mid-term challenges on time, rather concentrating on components that can gain them quick political mileage like relief distribution; an attitude that may not be easy to change with the forthcoming electioneering period.

NDMA has made efforts to utilize the national contingency fund by setting aside some funds to help in responding to drought in Baringo County relying on the Drought Monthly Bulletin and other sectoral response plans, integrated in NDMA's structures. What is important to note is that the Monthly Bulletin is discussed in the County Steering Group, a platform that helps actors to jointly coordinate responses. The Steering Group is more active during severe drought episodes.

Managing the looming crisis through the county drought response plan; what has been done so far?

As much as we acknowledge the impact and extent of ongoing drought episode especially the severity in Tiaty, Baringo South and Baringo North Sub Counties, we also take note to highlight the present coordinated assistance being made jointly by partners to manage the crisis in the worst affected areas. In the month of August 2016, KAS in partnership with UNDP, ASDSP, EU and WFP supported the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) and the County Government of Baringo to develop the 2016/17 County Sector Scenarios and Response Plans so as to minimize risks of loss of lives and livelihoods amid the *La Niña* drought alert.

This means that the current drought was well predicted and plans were established at least four months before a special alert was given by FAO in December 2016. The question however, is whether or not the impact of the drought is being managed more effectively as a result of such plans. This obviously is the case, although somehow with considerable challenges. Within the drought response plan, there are three scenarios, prepared by the different sectoral teams that guide interventions. To address the impact of a prolonged

drought at an early stage, interventions such as commercial livestock off-take, water trucking for livestock use and distribution of livestock and human feed supplements were identified and documented for immediate implementation. Presently, areas in Baringo North and South Sub County have seen off-take of approximately 12,000 livestock between December 2016 and January 2017¹¹. The process of mapping areas for off-take was largely informed by existing plans.

With help from the veterinary services, cattle dips¹² have been set up in the convergence zones where livestock off-take happens. Mass livestock vaccination that started in November 2016 after an outbreak of the foot and mouth disease relied heavily on the drought response plan at least during the planning phase¹³. Even though there have been serious steps to vaccinate the animals, some of them have ended up dead for various reasons including starvation especially during trekking and lack of willingness by the pastoralists since that the vaccines are expensive and prices not subsidized.

In addressing the scarcity of water for humans and livestock, the health, water and sanitation technical working group¹⁴ are at present conducting water trucking in Tiaty Sub-County in adherence to the county drought response plans. There are five trucks supplying clean water in the drought hit-hard areas. Because of the growing magnitude of the drought, it might soon become difficult to provide at least 20 liters of water daily per household as provided for in the county drought response plans.

Distribution of livestock and human feed supplements by the WFP and both Baringo County and National Government continue to be witnessed in a number of places in Tiaty Sub-County where 400 bales of hay and 500 Kilogram of range cubes were dispatched be-

¹¹ The figures were obtained based on telephone interviews with the chiefs, Ward Administrators as well as from local partners and the Baringo Drought Response Team.

¹² A cattle dip or else known as plunge dip is a bath designed to immerse livestock in liquid pesticide or other treatment

¹³ Status report of the agricultural and veterinary services in Baringo County, December 2016. Livestock Marketing Council, Baringo.

¹⁴ The Technical Working Group consists of the County Water Department, the Disaster Management Unit, NDMA, the Ministry of Water and Irrigation's Drought Mitigation Program, World Vision Kenya and the Regional Pastoral Livestock Resilience Program among others

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

KENIA

DR. JAN CERNICKY
EDWIN OTTICHILO
CHRISTIN NJERI

January 2017

www.kas.de/Kenia

tween December 2016 and January 2017. Important to note also is that a total of 4,500 poor households are currently being supported by WFP under the Cash for Assets Program to buy food from the local market with approximately 230.000 Euro having been spent so far in Baringo between December of 2016 and January 2017.

One challenge noted under this specific intervention area is that while the problem of providing pasture and water to the communities and livestock continues to endure due to the persisting drought, so is the growing frustration to observe to the guiding plans. The frustration is also fuelled by growing resource constraints as well as by political leaders taking advantage of the situation to conduct political campaigns.

While the drought response plans have and continue to provide leadership and coordination of joint interventions to a larger extent, by the different stakeholders, it should be noted that the plans will not be sufficient enough to manage the drought to reasonable levels especially if long rains will delay past March of 2017. As discussed earlier, elements of fatigue as well as challenges of resource mobilization, intervention coordination among others are gradually illustrating the magnitude of the crisis that if resources are not pumped and utilized appropriately, irrespective of the plan, the pastoralist zones may end up experiencing serious famine.

Conclusion: Helping to manage drought emergencies; what can the international community do?

The Kenyan government has made a commitment towards ending drought emergencies (EDE) by 2022 establishing a common program framework, one that is meant to guide the implementation of long term drought risk management interventions in view to curb the effects of drought in ASAL counties. Worth noting is that Baringo drought emergency situation especially in agro-pastoralist and pastoralist zones depicts how complicated and fast, prolonged drought can turn into emergencies and as a result escalate humanitarian and environmental crises. Even under normal circumstances, acute

food insecurity continues to appear as one of the prime challenges that the county has to deal with. With a long history of economic marginalization and present weak capacity of the devolved system to efficiently enhance service delivery and to re-energize favorable local market conditions Baringo will continue to face such challenges in respect to drought. This means that there is need to strengthen existing social welfare systems that protect and encourage poor indigenous groups to fairly access and engage in the local markets as a way of reducing poverty and conflicts which result from diminishing sources of livelihood.

Furthermore, while government funds are important in helping to implement plans and strategies, the capacities of the duty bearers (county government staff) to implement disaster risk integrated development plans are still weak, while the right holders (local communities) are not fully empowered with knowledge and skills that they can use to hold their county government accountable. International actors like KAS identified these shortcomings early and tackled these problems with trainings and development of educative material. Still, after just four years of existence, nobody can expect from a county government to manage an extraordinary situation alone. National and international partners, central government and civil society need to assist the different county administrations to overcome the recent crisis. With no public pressure and established structures to promote accountable spending as well as monitor and fighting corruption, there may be a risk that public funds end up being misappropriated or misprioritized. Thus, without a strong civil society, short time measures such as emergency relief may end up enriching a few if not monitored well.

It is important that the international community including the ASAL donor groups continue working closely with the relevant government institutions at the two levels, particularly to strengthen drought resilience by supporting short, medium and long term indigenous community resilience building agenda. It is equally important that the international community starts to focus on community empowerment strategies such as the Com-

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

KENIA

DR. JAN CERNICKY
EDWIN OTTICHILO
CHRISTIN NJERI

January 2017

www.kas.de/Kenia

munity Managed Drought Risk Reduction (CMDRR). Strengthening such strategies irrespective of the pastoralist communities' level of education will ease community acceptance and ownership. Apart from supporting the EDE framework implementation, international community can help to strengthen the EDE Common Program Framework action plans developed in Baringo as well as the review and development of the 2018-2023 Baringo County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP). The CIDP is an important development blue print that the County uses as a guide for the annual budgeting process, and therefore integrating drought risk management will be a milestone in the fight to combat the extreme impacts of drought episodes. The National government on its side should also invest more in social protection initiatives such as the Hunger Safety Net Program (HSNP¹⁵) and Cash for Assets by development partners in the three Sub-Counties hit hard by drought. Furthermore, the international community can support the government with both technical and financial support to this end.

Last but not least is that the country disposes of striking policy documents like the Sessional Paper No. 8 of 2012 on the National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands (the 'ASAL policy') but these documents are rarely consulted let alone being implemented. In some cases, the tendency has been ignoring them to the profit of short term interventions (that are much more visible in the media and thus advantageous in election campaigns). As much as short term assistance like food relief is needed in parts of Baringo, the idea should be on how to transit from food relief to more long term measures. This can only be achieved when both the government and the local communities in Baringo play their part in drought risk integrated development.

¹⁵ HSNP provides regular, predictable cash transfers to vulnerable households and currently covers four arid counties of which Baringo County isn't one of them.