



Life on the edge

Reducing vulnerability in Kenya

PRACTICAL ACTION

Technology challenging poverty





Life on the edge

In the harsh, arid lands of Kenya, generations of Turkana and Maasai pastoralists have adapted their way of life to survive in challenging surroundings. Livestock are central to their identity and very existence. Cattle, camels, sheep, goats and donkeys provide meat, blood and milk for food, a means of transport and an income. Yet in the face of unrelenting drought, pastoralists in Kenya are being pushed to the margins – living on the edge of survival.

In recent years, east and southern Africa has faced some of the worst droughts in living memory. Pastoralists in Kenya are used to coping with water shortages, but climate change is causing unprecedented cycles of drought and highly unpredictable rains. In 2006, nearly four million people were left in need of emergency food aid and millions of cattle perished in Kenya after three consecutive years of failed rains.

As competition for pasture and water is increasing, disputes between rival pastoralist groups spiral out of control, leading to loss of lives and livelihoods. Cattle rustling and the availability of weapons exacerbate the problem, and in the northern part of Kenya shepherds now carry automatic rifles as a matter of course.

International aid should offer hope in the face of this crisis and could transform the lives of marginalised pastoralists in Kenya. But all too often aid fails to reach those who need it most. The government and international donors have concentrated their funding on areas of the country which have 'high-potential', at the expense of arid and marginal areas.

Development assistance which has reached pastoralists has too often funded inappropriate projects, implemented after little consultation with the people they are supposed to be helping. As vulnerable communities slip nearer the edge of famine, the government and donors have responded with humanitarian relief, mostly in the form of food aid. Whilst this has provided a life-line to many, it is not an answer to the deeper, long-term challenges facing pastoralist groups in Kenya. It is expensive, unsustainable and can degrade the traditional livelihoods of pastoralists if they become dependent upon it once an emergency has ended.

Pastoralist communities themselves are calling for a new kind of support from both their own government and international donors – aid which strengthens their livelihoods over the long-term, helping them to prepare for the challenges ahead and to recover quickly after drought.

Practical Action is supporting Turkana and Maasai pastoralist communities to reduce their vulnerability and help them adapt to worsening droughts. Training in veterinary care helps to prevent animal disease; the provision of shallow wells and donkey panniers ease the pressure of finding and transporting water; training in alternative livelihoods such as soap-making, using drought-resistant plants such as aloe, can offer a new future for some. Reforms to the way government support and international aid is prioritised is urgent, before yet more pastoralists become destitute. We hope this exhibition – *Life on the edge: reducing vulnerability in Kenya* – demonstrates why development approaches which prioritise the needs of pastoralists are of paramount importance.



Maasai profile



Seeking water in a dustbowl



Carcasses on the plains

Maasai pastoralists

Cattle have always been central to the lives of the Maasai. Herders migrate across the plains of central Kenya in search of water and pasture for their herds. Now unrelenting drought is taking its toll on livestock, and indeed the Maasai's way of life.

In 2006, the Maasai hadn't seen proper rains for three years, and carcasses could be seen strewn across the Magadi district. Maasai leader Samuel Parmuat estimates that 80% of the livestock perished in the drought, wiping out families' life investments, as well as their sources of food and income. Without their cattle, the Maasai are totally dependent on external aid to survive.

Sharon Looremeta, Practical Action's project manager, describes the situation: "For the last three years, we've continued having drought. People here are not surviving because they have lost all their animals and they have lost a lot of water. If you look around me, you will see that there have been many changes. There is no grass and no shrubs, all the animals have moved from here and the communities have nothing to survive

on ... they have to rely on the government and aid for food because all our animals are dying."

The Maasai live in some of the driest regions of Kenya, where water is precious. Women and girls are responsible for collecting water and often have to walk long distances carrying heavy loads; in the dry season collecting 40 litres of water can sometimes be a three-day round trip.

In Magadi Practical Action has developed improved donkey panniers made out of canvas and plastic bags. Traditional donkey panniers were made from animal skins and could only carry two small containers of waters. As well as allowing the donkeys to carry more water, the improved panniers and harnesses can also be used to transport firewood. They are also kinder to the donkey as they even out loads and prevent sores.

Reducing the time spent collecting water and firewood frees women and girls for other activities, including income generation and education. Practical Action has also worked with Maasai women to diversify their livestock. As a result of training some women have started rearing camels, the most resilient animals in times of drought.

Photographs by Karen Robinson



Walking for water



Practical solutions

Turkana pastoralists

Lore Kapisa (below) is a semi-nomadic herdsman who heads a family of 20. Like all Turkana pastoralists, he has survived in the arid terrain of the north-west corner of Kenya by relying on his livestock. His camels, resilient to drought, have provided his family with nutritious milk. However, the increasing frequency and severity of drought in Turkana is having a devastating impact of Lore's livelihood. His family has little chance to recover and replenish animal stocks between one drought and the next.

"We have struggled to survive this period of droughts," says Lore. "When I was young there were grazing fields, water, milk, meat and blood for our food. But we have seen huge changes over the last ten years. We have seen our livestock die, our grazing fields have shrunk and our water sources have dried up."

With water and pasture becoming scarcer, disputes between neighbouring groups such as the Pokot are spiralling into violence, and Lore now carries an automatic rifle to protect his herd. Lore says that providing water and enough pasture, along with veterinary health services would enable them to continue their way of life and retain their dignity, instead of relying on food aid. "We have been sick and without food, but we are human beings capable of being productive. Food aid creates dependency and reduces us to lesser human beings."



'Hope for our future?'



Vital livestock



Drops of milk



A violent future?



Healthy herds

In an environment where animals are essential to livelihoods, Practical Action has worked with Turkana communities to reduce the vulnerability of livestock to disease. **Matthew Kor Inyang** (above) is a Practical Action-trained community animal health worker, and is now able to use modern medicines to treat livestock. When modern medicines are unavailable, he relies on his knowledge of traditional medicine which he refers to as 'basic first aid'.

"Since 1997 we have faced severe drought and our animals have died in large numbers. Animals that have not died are so emaciated they can't be sold and no longer produce milk. People here are also vulnerable to cattle raids, conflict, and animal diseases. We have had to adapt to these changing circumstances. The animals are so important to us we had to take chances with no access to veterinary surgeons. We still face an inadequate supply of drugs, but when we have none, I use traditional medicine. This is basic first aid."

Photographs by Georgina Cranston



Switching livelihoods



Failing aid



A receding shoreline



Fish to market

Lake Turkana

The increasingly harsh conditions in the region have forced some Turkana pastoralists to abandon their traditional livelihoods and start new lives on the shores of Lake Turkana. Fishing offers an alternative means of income and has provided much needed food for families. Yet drought is even taking its toll on the fishing industry in northern Kenya. The receding level of Lake Turkana is making fishing extremely difficult, and has sparked conflict between Kenyan and Ethiopian fishermen over fishing grounds.

“The lake has receded a lot in the last ten years,” says **Peter Nangole** (top left). “All this ground we are standing on now was water. When the water levels go down due to drought, we find it difficult to fish because we are forced to go very far from the shores of the lake.”

Samuel Emamakor (top right) stands in front of Kalokol fish factory, which was constructed through international donor funding. For several years the factory helped fishermen to market and process their fish. However, the local community was never trained to manage the facility, so when the donor agency pulled out and machinery broke down, the factory was abandoned. It has stood idle for 20 years – a white elephant on an arid strip of land.

Since the factory closed down Turkana fishermen have struggled to market their catch. In response, Practical Action has supported the Turkana fishing community to market their fish and have built links with fish buyers in the major town of Kisumu. **John Ayo** (bottom right) prepares delicious chibule fish into bundles ready to transport to the market.

Photographs by Georgina Cranston

The challenges of effective aid

In the desperate situation facing Turkana and Maasai pastoralists – recurring drought, conflict and problems of food security – international aid could offer a path back from the edge.

However, major international donors have instead focused their attention on areas of Kenya with ‘high-potential’, allocating money to projects which develop commercial farming, and funding large infrastructure projects. Remote and arid areas like Turkana, which are currently perceived to have little potential for boosting the country’s economic growth, have received very little long-term investment from either the Government of Kenya or international donors.

The little aid which does reach Turkana is emergency relief, usually in the form of food aid. Distributing food aid in Turkana is expensive and logistically difficult in an area which lacks infrastructure, and food aid trucks frequently get stuck on mud roads or crossing dry river beds. **Ewaar Echakari** (right, top) has to walk 10km to reach the nearest food aid point along the only road in the area, an uneven gravel track prepared by the community.

“We have nothing else, if we miss food



Food for thought



Relief delayed



The only road



Quenching thirst at a shallow well

aid, we depend on wild fruits. We travel two hours to Namurupth, every day in the hope of food aid,” says Ewaar Echakari. Whilst food aid undoubtedly saves lives in times of emergency, it is not an answer to the long-term problems facing the Turkana people.

Water is critical to survival in Turkana, and the government has responded to the drought by building more boreholes. The cost of building 100-metre-deep boreholes is very high, as is the cost to the community of buying diesel to pump the water. Practical Action has instead focused on improving existing shallow wells in Turkana, which are among the most used water sources in the region. They provide around three-quarters of the water needed for livestock in Turkana.

Photographs by Georgina Cranston



A new beginning



Making soap for success



Learning new skills



A path back from the edge

Reducing vulnerability in Turkana

For Turkana pastoralists, who are facing increasing droughts, livestock raids and conflicts over land and water, alternative livelihoods such as aloe processing can offer a new beginning.

Kenya is home to more than 80 different species of aloe, yet many people in the region still do not know of its potential as a source of income. The government put a ban on harvesting aloe because it was an endangered species, but Practical Action has shown ways of cultivating aloe gardens, harvesting and processing the plant sustainably so that it regenerates.

Lomong Lochaan (above), 34, is a member of Namurupth Bio Aloe Women's Group. "Drought and disease have taken our livestock and we have become dependent on food aid. In 1998 we were forced to settle because our donkeys, sheep and goat either died or were stolen, but also so our children could attend school and to avoid conflict on the border."

Settling has given risen to new opportunities for establishing livelihoods more resilient to drought. "I got involved in the Namurupth Bio Aloe Women's Group to try an overcome my family's hunger. The chiefs informed us of the plant's soap-making properties and Practical Action showed us how to make it. Now we need to make more and find more markets, but if we achieve this, this aloe will change our lives."

By working closely with vulnerable communities such as Lomong's, and supporting them to gain new skills and livelihoods using locally available resources in a sustainable way, aid can reduce vulnerability and transform lives.

Photographs by Georgina Cranston



African Voices in Europe

This exhibition is part of a three-year project to raise awareness of locally inspired and managed solutions to the poverty crisis in rural areas of Africa. By bringing the voices of African farmers and livestock keepers to European policy makers, the project has called for European aid to be targeted on supporting these solutions.

Farmers, pastoralists and politicians from some of the most remote and arid areas of Africa have spoken out on what their priorities are for development assistance, and asked why the pledges made at the Gleneagles G8 summit in 2005 for more and better aid to Africa have not been delivered. The project has brought their message to Europe: that aid is too focused on supporting industrial and commercial sectors involved in international trade rather than targeting the neediest people first. The rationale that increased prosperity in these sectors will eventually 'trickle down' to poor communities persists, whereas their experience is that they have become more marginalised than ever. A much more direct approach to poverty reduction is required. Practical Action is calling on the European Commission and European governments to involve community leaders from the most poverty stricken areas when planning its aid. By strengthening livelihoods and local capacities to manage natural resources, aid can dramatically reduce the vulnerability of people featured in this exhibition, enabling them to escape dependency and retain their dignity.

For more information please visit
www.africanvoices.org.uk

Practical Action

The exhibition is presented by Practical Action (formerly the Intermediate Technology Development Group), an international development agency which aims to demonstrate and advocate the sustainable use of technology to reduce poverty. Practical Action has over forty years experience of working with communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

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The photographers

Karen Robinson is a freelance photographer based in London. Her portraits and reportage have been widely published worldwide, and her interest in environmental issues has led to work on a number of high-profile campaigns. Karen travelled to Kenya in early 2006 to take the photographs of Maasai communities.

Georgina Cranston is a professional photographer currently based in East Africa. She has a wide range of clients including national papers and magazines, international organisations and government departments. Georgina took the photographs of the Turkana communities in late 2006.



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