

## Turkana pastoralists at risk: Why education matters

*Turkana pastoralists in north-western Kenya have always depended on their livestock for their livelihoods. Goats, sheep, camels, cattle, and donkeys are the common types of livestock within these communities. Livestock keeping is at the centre of the lives of these communities because it forms the basis of their diet (meat, milk and blood) and of their income. It is also an important element of cultural heritage for Turkana pastoralists because it is linked to traditional practices including the use of animals for payment of dowry (bride price) during marriages, for food during ceremonies and celebrations, for kinship support (e.g. during sickness, death) and for prestige and social status. Turkana pastoralists are exposed to increasing risks such as drought and livestock diseases, in an environment of limited infrastructure and low educational engagement, leading to poverty and inequality. Due to their overreliance on livestock, these risks have adverse effects on their livelihoods, making education an important investment for improving livelihoods.*

Education has the potential to foster socio-economic development, yet participation remains low amongst pastoralist communities in Kenya. According to the Turkana County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP), literacy levels amongst the Turkana pastoralists are low, at around 46% (County Government of Turkana, 2013).

This policy brief is the product of a research study (2018-20) in Turkana, funded by the Scottish Funding Council as part of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), and led by researchers at the University of Glasgow (UK), with colleagues at Lancaster University (UK) and Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands), and in collaboration with Friends of Lake Turkana (Kenya). This work shows that Turkana pastoralists are increasingly embracing education as a means of earning a livelihood. The study was conducted in three sites (Kangakipur, Loperot and Napusumoru) located in Southern parts of Turkana and involved household surveys, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and field observations. The study reveals that pastoralists are vulnerable to substantial risks and identifies perceived obstacles to and benefits from education.

### Livelihood challenges

The study identified important challenges which expose Turkana pastoralist to risks as follows:

**Low levels of education:** There is low school attendance, especially for girls beyond primary school age.



Picture 1: Animal herding in Kangakipur, rural Turkana.

**Droughts:** In 2017, the prolonged drought had substantial adverse impacts on livestock. On average, households lost approximately 18 goats, 11 sheep and 4 camels (**Figure 1**).

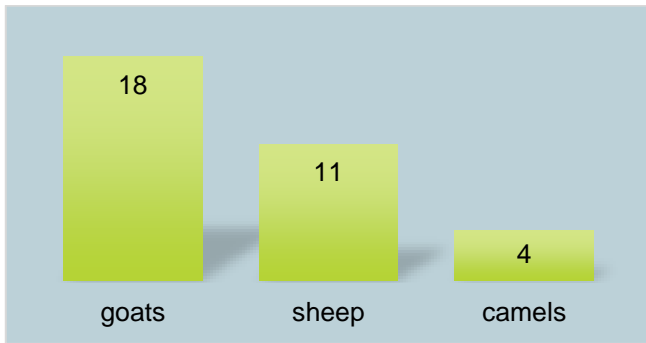


Figure 1: Livestock losses per animal type (Average per household in 2017).

**Livestock diseases:** The most common livestock diseases in these areas include Peste des petits ruminants (PPR), contagious Caprine Pleuropneumonia (CCPP), worms, Trypanosomiasis, Mange and respiratory tract infections. In 2019, households reported that several camels had died from respiratory tract infections.

**Competition over scarce resources and livestock raids:** Due to scarce pasture and water, conflicts often arise between the Turkana pastoralists and their neighbouring Pokot and Samburu communities, leading to livestock raids.

**Poor infrastructure and socio-economic services:** These areas are remote with extremely poor road and telecommunication networks. Poor infrastructure deters many households from accessing schools, health care, veterinary services and markets.

**Poverty and inequality:** According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), Turkana is the poorest of the 47 counties of Kenya, with approximately 88% of the population living below the national poverty line, in comparison with the national rate of 45% (KNBS, 2010).

**Human diseases:** The accessibility and availability of health care services is limited by inadequate coverage, drugs and personnel. There are preconditions and illnesses that pastoralists suffer from that contribute to school drop-out. The most common are those shared with livestock (zoonotic diseases) and there are frequent outbreaks of cholera.

## Why Education matters

Until recently, education was underappreciated by the Turkana pastoralists because livestock keeping remained central to their lives. Local narratives reveal that in the old days, educational campaigns among Turkana pastoralists suffered setbacks because many parents resisted schooling their children due to ignorance and strong cultural beliefs. However, much of this resistance to education is slowly fading as



Picture 2: Turkana Research Assistants at work.

pastoralists are struggling to sustain their livelihoods due to their increased exposure to the socioeconomic and environmental risks that adversely affect their livestock. Our findings show that Turkana pastoralists are increasingly accepting education as a long-term strategy and investment to sustain their livelihoods.

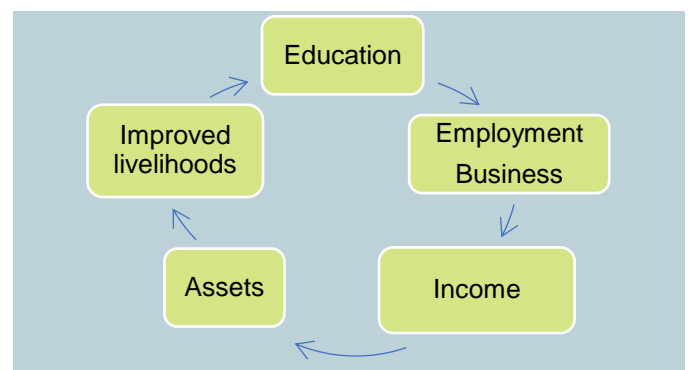


Figure 2: Perceived pathway for education to improve livelihoods through employment.

**Direct benefits of Education:** Turkana pastoralists increasingly appreciate education as a route to employment and long-term source of income (Figure 2). Our findings show that parents send their children to school with the hope and expectation that

formal qualifications will help them secure jobs and earn income.

They anticipate that educated children will support their parents in various ways including: buying food, clothing and livestock; building permanent houses; and fulfilling other basic needs such as transport and healthcare. These expectations are rooted in pastoralists' experiences and encounters with educated individuals from local villages (e.g. politicians and businessmen), who are largely perceived to have better livelihoods.

Earlier work by grassroots organisations and NGOs shows that education started to matter much more for Turkana pastoralists when oil exploration commenced in 2010 in villages adjacent to Lokichar and Kapese settlements. Due to lack of formal qualifications, many could not secure professional jobs in the oil mines, apart from a few individuals who worked as unskilled/casual labourers (as cleaners, security guards, porters, and cooks). According to these local narratives, these pastoralists have always felt that they are deliberately excluded from mainstream socioeconomic activities and employment in the extractive sector despite the mines being located within their ancestral lands. Tensions between the Turkana pastoralists and oil companies often emerge because of an unequal division of benefits, land dispossession and environmental externalities (e.g. FAO, 2018, Johannes *et al.* 2014).

Today, pastoralists are more interested in acquiring formal education to qualify for good jobs in the oil industry and elsewhere because they believe that this will lead to higher earnings, allowing them to buy more livestock and meet other necessities.

*Education is an important investment that helps pastoralists find employment, earn income and diversify their livelihoods. It also helps in skills and knowledge acquisition that can be useful to support pastoralist lifestyles.*

Our research reveals that pastoralists also value education as a way to diversify their livelihoods, and thus reduce risks, by moving away from livestock keeping as a single source of livelihood. Some households now perceive livestock keeping as riskier due to recurrent challenges posed by prolonged droughts and livestock diseases. They see herding as a less rewarding activity due to the dwindling animal numbers and believe that education will open new economic opportunities such as starting small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

**Social status:** Our findings show that among Turkana pastoralists, education is prestigious and secures high social status.



Educated individuals who come from these areas are seen as role models and agents of change.

*Picture 3: Typical rural Turkana village, Loperot.*

They are often highly respected and hold influential positions (e.g. politicians, teachers, or business owners) and are considered to be better off, having money and power. To other pastoralists, these individuals are inspirational, especially to the Turkana youth who are aspiring to build a better future.

**Underappreciated indirect benefits of education:** In contrast to the widely valued direct financial and status benefits, there is little evidence that pastoralists appreciate other important indirect benefits of education. Knowledge, numeracy and literacy skills can help them to: engage in improved herding/farming practices; adopt and adapt to new technologies; make better decisions to deal with animal diseases based on advice by experts such as veterinary officers; improve parenting skills given that educated parents can provide better healthcare

and nutrition for their children; access insurance and micro-credit opportunities; etc.

## Obstacles to education

Obstacles to education are intricately linked to sociocultural characteristics of the Turkana pastoralists as well as external factors that are beyond their control (e.g. infrastructure and physical environment).

**Costs and risks associated with schooling:** Our study shows that many households find it costly to educate their children beyond primary school. The Kenyan Basic Education Act (2013) stipulates that schooling from early childhood to secondary school is mandatory and free for all (Government of Kenya, 2013). However, to enrol their children in schools, parents are required to purchase uniforms, stationery, personal items and to pay for examinations. In some cases, parents are required to contribute money to school projects.

Secondary education is more costly for many households because it often requires sending children to boarding schools; this also entails substantial opportunity costs (with children unable to contribute to animal-rearing activities). Many parents struggle to raise money to meet all school requirements, particularly during prolonged droughts when livestock prices fall.

**Girls are sources of dowry:** In Turkana culture, girls are highly valued for their role in bringing dowry/bride price, mainly in the form of livestock. Parents prefer to marry off their daughters when young, as this fetches more dowry. School attendance is seen as risky and an obstacle to getting married. School enrolment can increase the risk of unintended pregnancy, forcing girls to drop out of schools. Girls who have children out of wedlock tend to fetch a lower bride price. Additionally, continuing school delays marriage and may reduce dowry, as traditional Turkana men prefer younger brides.

The financial returns to education are often perceived to be low for girls, because traditionally

they are expected to get married, have children and take care of their own families, and thus not engage in remunerated work.

**Putting livestock first:** Livestock keeping is central to the livelihoods of Turkana pastoralists. Our findings show that within small households, some parents prefer their children to herd instead of attending school. For example, a householder with more than four children explained that their children engaged in education on a rotational basis so that not all children are in school at the same time. Although some parents are willing to sell large numbers of livestock to educate their children, others are more reluctant to sell even small numbers. This is partly because the benefits of education are perceived as long-term compared to investing in livestock.



*Picture 4: Animal herding in Napusumoru, rural Turkana.*

An additional setback is that during prolonged drought, some parents migrate temporarily with their children in search of pasture and water for livestock; others remove their older male children from school and send them away with the animals, sometimes only to return after several months when conditions become more favourable. Once back, they often lag behind in school so much that some give up due to the stigma associated with being older than others at their level and the slow pace of learning.

**Limited educational infrastructure and resources:** Our findings show that the schools in Turkana lack basic infrastructure and learning resources (e.g. textbooks), as well as essential

facilities such as toilets, water supplies and sanitation. For example, we were told that in one school, the main water source comes from a river which students share with livestock, exposing them to health hazards.

Security is poor in some schools due to lack of physical protection (fence). For some children, the distance to school (up to 8 kilometres each way) is a significant deterrent to education, involving long walking times and requiring good physical conditions.

Our findings further revealed that schools are commonly understaffed, with some having only one or two qualified teachers. We find that understaffing is a disincentive for school attendance; parents withdraw their children from schools with few teachers to have them enrolled in schools with better resources. Feeding programmes exist as a part of government policy to encourage enrolment and retain pupils in schools. However, food supplies tend to be inadequate, partly due to the logistical challenges of procuring and distributing food in these areas. When food is not available, school attendance often falls.

## Key Recommendations

Our work reinforces the usefulness of the following recommendations, many of which have also been proposed previously and/or are being implemented.

**Raise awareness of broader benefits of education:** Raise awareness among pastoralists of the full range of benefits of education in support of both their existing and alternative livelihoods. Local role models such as elites, highly respected, influential politicians and teachers can help with this.

**Introduce and support mobile schools / initiate a school rotation system:** Mobile schools provide mobile learning services to pastoralists as they move from one area to another in search of pasture and water. Mobile schools are designed to suit pastoralist lifestyles. Rotation systems can allow herding and education during different days of the week and/or times of the year.

**Enrich the curriculum:** Add and tailor lessons to the needs of pastoralist communities (with emphasis on knowledge/skills that these local communities need, e.g. livestock illnesses and treatment, parenting skills, financial literacy, understanding economic and institutional developments) so that schooling is not viewed as a threat to the pastoralist way of life, but instead as an opportunity to become a more successful herder and entrepreneur.

**Strengthen parent-teacher associations:** More frequent and direct engagement between teachers and parents helps establish approaches to address challenges and to identify and work to solve problems.

**Promote education for girls:** Work with pastoralist communities to find ways to encourage female participation in education even following marriage, e.g. by emphasising the positive impacts on parenting or encouraging pooling of childcare.

**Encourage collective community action:** This might take the form of community activities such as volunteering time to accompany groups of children (especially girls) to school, building fences, childminding for mothers to attend school, cooking and delivery of food to students. Fundraising to support local services such as transport to school, food, etc., can also be beneficial.

**Adoption of a 'One Health' approach:** This is a collaborative and multi-disciplinary approach that cuts across human, animal and environmental health. It requires an integrated provision of human and livestock health services which can help to address the spread of zoonotic illnesses among the pastoralists.

**Clarify priorities of educational investment:** Access to clean water and sanitation in schools, strengthen school feeding programmes, ensure full staffing of schools, improve school infrastructure.

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## Authors

Dorice Agol, Researcher, Friends of Lake Turkana, Kenya.

Konstantinos Angelopoulos, Reader, Economics, Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow, UK and CESifo Fellow, Munich, Germany

Spyridon Lazarakis, Lecturer, Economics, Lancaster University, UK

Rebecca Mancy, Senior Lecturer, School of Education and Leckie Research Fellow, Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, UK

Elissaios Papyrakis, Associate Professor, International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Erasmus University, Netherlands

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For more information on this project, please contact

Dorice Agol ([agoldorice@hotmail.com](mailto:agoldorice@hotmail.com))

Researcher

Friends of Lake Turkana,  
<https://www.friendsoflaketurkana.org/>