



Man cools off a water point near Sopol, Turkana North in Northern Kenya. Photo Credit: Carlos Barrio, 2022.

Fostering Sustainability and Resilience: A Kenya Case Study of Social Cohesion and Natural Resource Management

In Kenya's arid Turkana County, severe recurrent droughts have intensified the vulnerabilities of a population heavily reliant on ecosystem-based livelihoods, notably pastoralism. Over the past decade, there have been notable improvements in resources allocation due to the decentralization of government through devolution, which provided an opportunity to address the issues of climate change more systematically than before and with increased government presence and investment.

Seizing this sustainable opportunity, in partnership with the [Diocese of Lodwar \(DOL\)](#), [CRS Kenya](#) has been implementing several climate-smart projects, including the program titled "[Enhancing Community-based Climate Adaptation in Turkana \(ECCAT\)](#)." Through ECCAT, CRS Kenya with DOL supports seven communities in adapting to climate change and enhancing resilience. This support includes training and grants for natural resource management (NRM) groups, community-managed disaster risk reduction (CMDRR), and increased advocacy

with the county government for community-responsive climate policies. Learning from ECCAT has underscored a concerning link between recurrent drought and conflict, driven by resource scarcity and competition.

In 2022, CRS Kenya collaborated with [CRS's Strategic Change Platform 1: Fostering a Just and Cohesive Society](#) to explore how integrating social cohesion and justice could enhance project outcomes, boost resilience, and strengthen sustainability. The pilot project had specific objectives, including:

- Strengthening inter-community social cohesion and conflict management capacity.
- Expanding the potential for vertical social cohesion among women.
- Broadening project participation beyond existing NRM groups to ensure broader social cohesion and resilience benefits across communities.

Integrating Social Cohesion for Natural Resource Management Enhancement

The approach employed a mix of horizontal and vertical strategies to enhance social cohesion within NRM groups. It focuses on both internal dynamics and external relationships with other groups and external stakeholders. The goal was to create a supportive environment that enables NRM groups to operate effectively, collaborate with other entities, and contribute to their community's sustainable development and natural resource management. The integration approaches taken are presented below:

- **Social Cohesion among Members.** This component of the approach aims to enhance social cohesion within the NRM group itself. It involves tailored capacity building and support in resource management, inclusive group dynamics, business skills, and facilitation. By strengthening these internal operations, the group can function more effectively and harmoniously, fostering better communication and collaboration among its members.
- **SC&J Integration with NRM Groups in the Community.** Exchange visits were recognized as a key activity for strengthening social cohesion between different community actors. They enabled interaction, learning, and collaboration among different NRM groups and a larger community. Therefore, this cross-learning method proved valuable for both the NRM groups and the communities that carry out social cohesion and women empowerment.
- **Social Cohesion between Members and Leadership.** The focus is on enhancing social cohesion between the members and the leadership of the NRM group. This is crucial for efficient group functioning and decision-making. Activities include capacitating NRM group members and leadership in the area of good governance. Good governance practices help maintain transparency and accountability within the group.
- **Social Cohesion with Government Structures and Market Actors.** The initiative also supported building relationships with governments and market actors. Broadcasting radio shows on social accountability tools and the role of climate change planning committees, organizing community events related to new climate change laws, and hosting feedback forums helped renew communication between NRM groups and government and market entities. Finally, engaging the women in local community training, with particular attention given to pastoral women's

business, increase all women and leadership empowerment.

Pilot Accomplishments and Benefits

This approach successfully fostered social cohesion, empowerment, and stakeholder engagement, enhancing the NRM groups' capacity, market access, and economic stability.

- Exchange visits **reinforced relationships** among NRM groups, leading to **improved market linkages**. For example, women's livestock groups established agreements for livestock marketing and shared market information.
- **Engagement forums for women** NRM group members and local leaders **strengthened vertical social cohesion**, particularly among marginalized groups. Seven community-hosted events addressed group governance and dynamics, encouraging transparency and accountability.
- Community forum sessions met high demand for **training on inclusive group dynamics** and proposal writing, addressing internal group needs.
- Well-established relations between the Diocese of Lodwar, CRS, and Turkana County government **facilitated climate change adaptation efforts**. The Diocese's involvement in drafting the national Climate Change Law contributed to success.
- Project support **improved relations between NRM groups and local Chiefs and Village Administrators**. These leaders played a role in advising, motivating, and connecting groups to development partners, training, and funding opportunities. The Directorate of Climate Change educated groups on climate change and financing.
- The observed benefits prompted the **revival of previously inactive NRM groups**, resulting in renewed group certificates and meetings.

Kenya case study exemplifies the profound impact that a strategic blend of social cohesion and justice integration can have on community resilience. Through fostering strengthened relationships and building capacity, safeguarding and protection, it has expanded market linkages and broadened participation, particularly among marginalized groups.

The success of this initiative underscores the transformative potential when innovative approaches are employed, creating a supportive environment for NRM groups to flourish, collaborate, and contribute to sustainable community development. Additionally, this case offers valuable insights for organizations and communities looking to address climate challenges and promote inclusivity, emphasizing the crucial role of social cohesion in resilience-building efforts.