Conflict

Climate change and conflict in northwest Kenya[87]

The way of life of the Turkana people – nomadic pastoralists who graze huge herds of cattle and other animals on the dry savannah of northwest Kenya – has long been made more precarious by political pressures from outside. Their ability to roam was restricted by arbitrarily imposed colonial borders, and modern governments have not done much to help them.

Now powerful forces outside their control increasingly threaten the very survival of the Turkana. Rainfall seems to be failing and this has become a trigger for conflict between the Turkana and their neighbours, even as armed groups from outside, and a flood of automatic weapons, spill over from the long-running conflicts in neighbouring southern Sudan and northern Uganda.

Very much in line with models of climate change in Sub-Saharan Africa, droughts in northwest Kenya appear to be becoming longer and more frequent. The Turkana have names for them. The latest is *Kichutanak*, which started in 1999. This drought has continued, with only poor and sporadic rains, right through until today (March, 2005). *Kichutanak* means "it has swept away everything, even animals". The Turkana had barely recovered from the previous prolonged four-year drought of 1992–95 called *Longuensil,* meaning "when the man with no legs from Oxfam came", a reference to an Oxfam member of staff with a disability. In 1979–80 came *Lopiar* or "sweeping everything away", which spread over two years. The previous severe droughts had been in 1970 – *Kimududu*, meaning "the plague that killed humans and livestock" – and in 1960, the year called *Namotor*, meaning "bones exposed".

The Turkana are used to dealing with drought and with food shortages. But because the droughts are more frequent and more prolonged, they have less opportunity to recover from a poor rainy season before the next is upon them. Also, rain is less predictable than it used to be. Even in the longest drought, rains come to some places at some times. They could tell, from natural signs, when rains would come and where they would fall. Now rain, when it comes, may be sudden, violent and unpredictable.

There have always been tensions between the Turkana and other pastoralist groups for access to water and pasture. But these have increased as water sources have dried up and pastures been lost. Because the water table is not being recharged, the wetland areas that the Turkana could traditionally fall back on in times of drought have dwindled. Even the huge Lake Turkana has receded.

Territorial disputes have become more common as the lake recedes, taking with it the landscape features that formed traditional boundaries between groups. Many such disputes are settled peacefully, but each time one party or the other is perceived to have broken an agreement, the willingness to trust the next time, and to respect borders, is eroded.

Cattle raiding is also linked to drought. Raiding has always been used as a strategy to restock herds during or after a drought. Not surprisingly, prolonged drought and more cattle deaths leads to more raids. Last year a particularly big raid saw a coalition of the Toposa from Sudan and the Dodoth from Uganda take away large numbers of Turkana cattle. And raids lead, in turn, to new cycles of retaliation.

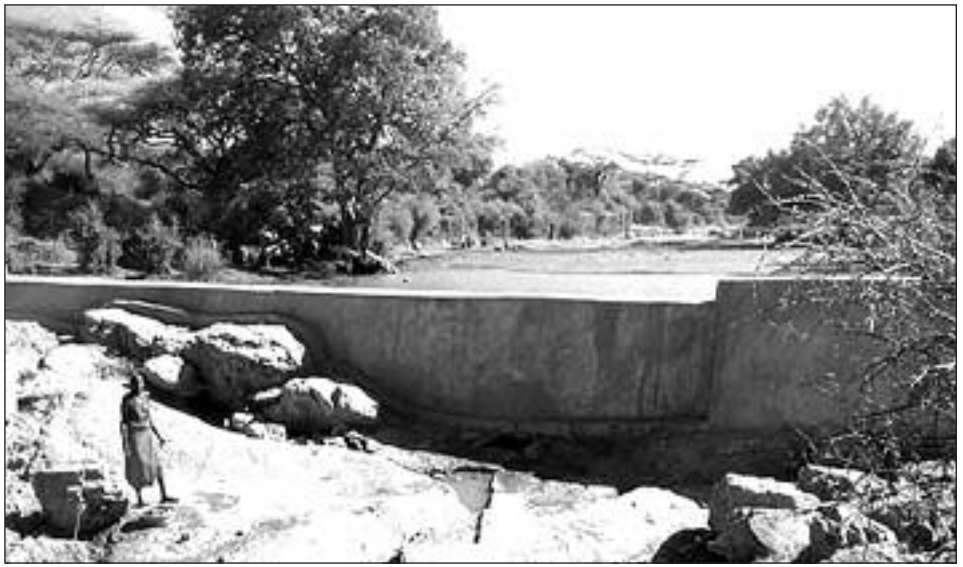
The marked increase in violence and killings, however, is associated with changes in the nature of conflict. Guns and bullets are cheap and plentiful and wars in neighbouring countries have led to a brutal form of predation replacing the traditional form of raiding. The Turkana face raids from a motley variety of well-armed gangs and rebel groups whose motives are often to seize cattle to sell for profit. These raids, unlike those undertaken in order to re-stock cattle, are carried out on a large scale and are extremely violent. They obey none of the traditional rules that tended to limit violence.

As a result of the droughts and growing insecurity, the Turkana have moved from a state in which they are able to cope most of the time, to one in which destitution and vulnerability to famine is a constant danger. International aid agencies like Oxfam have been providing relief food and still continue to do so, because the latest rains at the end of 2004 were patchy and poor. Oxfam's approach is not just to give out food, but to link human and animal health, relief and development, and to help Turkana institutions that are trying to tackle the problems of cross-border raiding using conflict reduction and peace-building techniques.

Conflict and water: peace-building between tribes in northern Kenya[88]

Recurring drought in arid and semi-arid lands has long been a major natural hazard, causing mass livelihood losses, hunger, conflict, and internal displacements. Rainfall in such areas is always unreliable and erratic and most have seasonal sandy streams that are only active for a short period of time during any rainfall event. Climate change is causing a reduction in the amount and the pattern of rainfall. Coupled with other pressures on the natural resources of their rangelands, pastoral farmers are experiencing increasing conflict with each other over access to scarce water.

Teams of Samburu and Turkana women and men working together on constructing a sand dam



The completed dam after the rains

During the dry periods they get water for themselves and their livestock by scooping into the sand beds of the dry streams. Water in such sites is usually clean for drinking but finite and quickly depleted. Sand dams are an artificial enhancement of this traditional practice that puts extra water into the sand beds to recharge and store water for use. They're made by building a concrete wall across the channel at specific sites to trap and hold back the sand during flooding; this creates an additional sub-surface water bank for harvesting.

With careful siting, the total amount of water available in the sand dams can be considerable, over 6000m^3. Sand dam technology has been used successfully in Kenya in Kitui, Machakos and Samburu districts. Other countries with similar dry environments such as Ethiopia and Namibia have also used sand dams. Compared to other water-harvesting techniques, the benefits include provision of clean water for households, control of erosion, and improved water infiltration. Sand dam sites witness plants regrowing which attracts other biological resources and ecosystems threatened by drought. The project is costly in terms of getting people involved and it is labour intensive. But it is also culturally acceptable and has the potential to alleviate the region's water shortages and benefit livelihoods.

Constructing sand dams gave ITDG the opportunity to help build peace between tribes in conflict over scarce resources. Teams of Samburu and Turkana men and women working together built the dams. A condition of the project was that equal numbers of each tribal group and of men and women, should work together, which helped informal interaction and renewed recognition between the tribes of common problems.

The improvement of shallow wells and the desilting of water pans reduced the deaths of both people and livestock. The construction of water troughs at the wells has allowed more animals to be watered, at the same thereby reducing congestion and conflicts from water users. These improvements to existing water resources, coupled with better management, opened up underused rangelands and lead to environmental protection and rising livestock productivity, despite poor rainfall.