

The Unrelenting Persistence of Certain Narratives

An Analysis of Changing
Policy Narratives about the
ASALs in Kenya

Michael Ochieng Odhiambo

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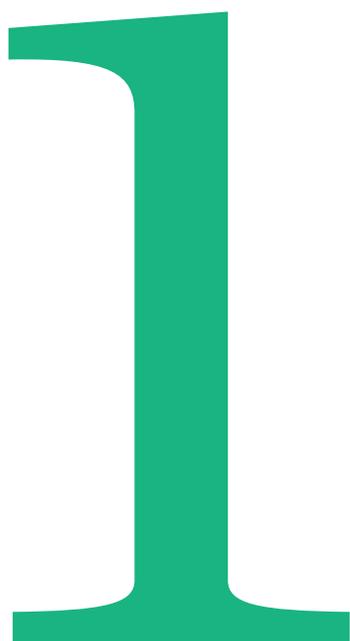
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Kenya cannot achieve its development targets unless there are appropriate investments in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs). Covering two-thirds of the country, the ASALs can make a significant contribution to national development and the failure to integrate them into the national economy is perhaps being the main reason for the failure of national development since independence. Investing in the ASALs is now a constitutional imperative and the institutional foundations for their integration into national development are now in place. What remains to be overcome are the persistent negative narratives that have traditionally held back their development, and for all concerned actors to translate the policy reforms into actual benefits for the ASALs and the country as a whole.

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Introduction



The place and role of Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs)¹ in national development, and lately, climate change adaptation, has been a matter of significant debate in the country. The debate has revolved around the contribution of these lands to national economic development on the one hand, and the extent to which the populations living in these lands have received their fair share of the benefits of national development on the other hand. With the emergence of climate change as a major development concern, the ASALs have come to the centre of discussions about climate change adaptation, given the variability that characterizes these ecosystems. Practices of communities living in the ASALs are seen to provide a basis for the design of climate adaptation initiatives, given that they have traditionally lived with climate variability and adapted to extremes of weather patterns.

No serious observer can dispute the fact that ASALs have not been properly integrated into national development planning and action, that the full potential of these lands have not been exploited for the benefit of the development of the populations resident therein or of the national economy, and that the ASAL populations have not enjoyed the benefits of national development. In recent years, this reality has been acknowledged at the highest levels of government, resulting in the design of policy and institutional interventions to remedy the situation. The most significant of such interventions was the establishment in 2008 of the Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands (MNKOAL), which has spearheaded significant policy and institutional reforms to address the development challenges facing the ASALs. It has, in partnership with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and local communities in Isiolo initiated a pilot project aimed at integrating local knowledge and institutions of pastoral and agro-pastoral communities into planning for adaptation to climate change.

This paper reviews developments in the national policy arena in Kenya mainly focusing on 2003 onward in order to better understand the content and dynamics of current narratives on drylands and climate change adaptation in Kenya. The year 2003 is important in this regard, as it was then that the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) took over the reins of government after defeating long serving Kenya African National Union (KANU) in the 2002 General Elections, signaling a new commitment to addressing the challenges of the ASALs.

In June 2003, shortly after taking over, the new government published its economic development blueprint, *Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation 2003-2007* (ERS). It provided the most comprehensive coverage of the ASALs in a national development policy framework since independence,² devoting an entire chapter to these area and their issues. The ERS effectively marked the turning point for policy attention to the ASALs, leading eventually to the creation of the MNKOAL.

This paper analyses how the policy framework and discourse on the ASALs has evolved since the ERS and the establishment of MNKOAL. It identifies achievements and challenges that have been experienced over the period. It concludes with an outline of issues to be addressed in order to consolidate the gains made over this period and to address the challenges that remain.

In sum, the paper seeks to identify the key national actors responsible for defining policy narratives on development and climate change adaptation in Kenya, their perceptions and perspectives about the ASALs, and the premises that underpin these perceptions and perspectives. It also seeks to understand the impact of climate change discourse on ASALs policy and programming, and how the climate change discourse could be used to change the perceptions and perspectives of major policy actors on the ASALs.

This paper demonstrates the complexity of issues and entrenched nature of interests that drive and maintain the dominant narratives on ASALs in Kenya. It calls for the articulation of counter narratives on the basis of arguments that respond to the concerns of key policy actors. It proposes a reframing of ASALs policy narratives and public discourse through the perspective of 'equity, ecology and economics', by better articulating the dynamics of human and ecological processes and their interactions with, and contributions to, drylands economic development in the context of climate change.

This paper is part of a global research and advocacy project on *New Perspectives on Climate Resilient Drylands Development* implemented by IIED in partnership with national organizations in China, India and Kenya,³ with funding support from the Ford Foundation. The ultimate objective of the project is to identify how best to frame arguments in support of a new perspective on climate resilient drylands development that will resonate with key decision-makers.

¹ In this paper we use 'ASALs' rather than 'drylands' as this is the categorization that has gained currency in policy circles in Kenya and is the one used by the Ministry of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands. The term is however used to the same end, namely to refer to those ecosystems characterised by low, erratic, seasonal and variable precipitation, and high inter-annual climatic variability in which pastoralism, agro-pastoralism and rain-fed, or in some areas flood-retreat, agriculture are the dominant land uses and livelihood systems.

² The first national development policy to articulate the loss of opportunity to the national economy arising from the failure to exploit the full potential of the ASALs was however Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on *Economic Management for Renewed Growth*; but it fell short of the level of detailed strategy that is found in the ERS

³ The ASAL Secretariat of the MNKOAL is the local partner for the project in Kenya

The paper is divided into five sections. This first section introduces the paper and its methodology. Section Two provides a review of the context of the evolution of narratives about the ASALs in Kenya since colonialism. Section Three analyzes the changing narratives since 2003 when the long running rule of the independence political party came to an end and a new political dispensation was inaugurated, continuing to the present day. The analysis highlights the key policy documents that have been produced over the period, identifying key narratives informing them. Section Four focuses on the narratives around climate change and examines how key policy documents on climate change adaptation have treated the ASALs. Section Five concludes the discussion by summarizing the key narratives around ASALs in Kenya, noting that although significant shifts have occurred in the way ASALs are viewed in national policy, certain narratives persist and pose a challenge to the realization of the vision articulated in the new policy documents. In particular, the narrative depicting ASALs as degraded environments that are unproductive remains prevalent among key policy actors. While appreciating the progress made under the leadership of the MNKOAL, the paper cautions that these persistent narratives have the potential to undermine the gains represented by the new policy framework. It recommends strategies for ongoing engagement with policy and institutional processes to secure the gains for the good of the ASALs and the country at large.

1.1 Methodology

The paper is based largely on a desk review of existing policy documents and targeted interviews of relevant individuals within and outside MNKOAL. Beyond MNKOAL, other institutions critical to this discussion include the Ministry of State for Planning, National Development and Vision 2030, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Livestock Development, Vision 2030 Delivery Secretariat, Agricultural Sector Coordination Unity (ASCU), the Kenya Livestock Marketing Council (KLMC) and Pastoralists Parliamentary Group (PPG). Discussions were also held with development partners and civil society organizations engaged in ASALs-related policy work. Box 1 lists the main questions addressed in the interviews and to which the paper seeks answers. The same questions are addressed in similar studies in India and China to facilitate the comparative analysis of national, regional and global narratives on drylands and how they vary at different levels and between Kenya, India and China.

An initial draft of the paper was presented at a global workshop at Elementaita, Kenya in September 2012 that brought together participating organisations from the three countries to review the national analyses and generate ideas for an overarching narrative and set of

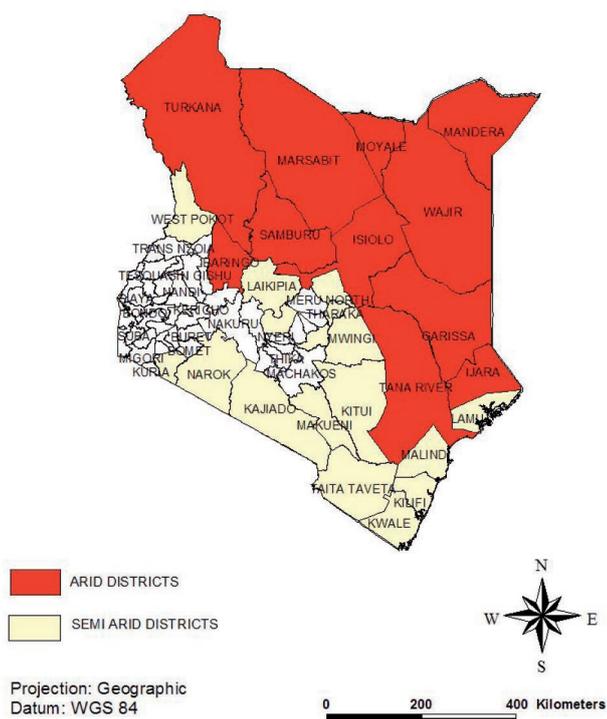
arguments to articulate a new perspective of climate resilient drylands development. It was also shared with other key stakeholders in Kenya to solicit their inputs and perspectives, which have been integrated into this final draft of the paper and into the global project.

1. What are the dominant narratives on ASALs development in key policy documents/circles in Kenya?
2. How has climate change affected the understanding of key policy actors about ASALs and their place in local and national adaptation strategies and development?
3. Who is articulating narratives about ASALs and in what contexts/arenas?
4. What evidence informs such narratives?
5. Why do negative narratives about the ASALs persist in policy circles? What economic/political interests, if any, do such narratives serve?
6. Who/which are the powerful agents that shape the dominant narratives about ASALs in policy circles?
7. What role do representatives of ASALs constituencies play in the policy discourse on drylands in Kenya?
8. What strategies can be used to positively influence policy narratives on ASALs in Kenya?

Background: context and evolution of policy discourse on ASALs

2

ARID AND SEMI ARID DISTRICTS



The ASALs and the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities that occupy them constitute a significant part of Kenya, covering more than 80% of the country's land mass and with a population of nearly 10 million people (see map). In economic terms, the ASALs hold approximately 70% of the national livestock herd and are home to most of the country's national parks that are the foundation of its thriving wildlife tourism (Republic of Kenya, 2010). Yet this significance has not been reflected in national policy focus and action.

The interaction between national policy in Kenya and the ASALs has been defined in large measure by policy perspectives on pastoralism as a land use and livelihood system. Although the ASALs are a complex ecosystem that supports not just pastoralism, but also agro-pastoralism and irrigation agriculture, the more arid components of the ecosystem inhabited by (nomadic) pastoralists have tended to define the way in which these areas are perceived in policy circles. This has translated into a policy relationship that has been characterised as oscillating between outright hostility and benign neglect (Odhiambo, 2002). In common with a majority of African countries, policies in Kenya have tended to discriminate against pastoralists and to marginalize them from governance and development processes. For the most part, policies in many African countries have been 'anti-pastoral', preferring instead to support and promote settled cultivators and urban populations (Little, 1992; Horowitz and Little, 1987; Galaty et al., 1981).

2.1 Containment, hostility and neglect both before and after independence

Throughout much of the colonial period government policy towards many parts of the ASALs was defined by imperatives of containment rather than engagement. Laws such as the Outlying Districts Ordinance of 1902, and the Special Districts (Administration) Ordinance of 1934, were used to restrict movement into and out of large areas of the ASALs, encompassing present day counties of Wajir, Mandera, Garissa, Isiolo, Marsabit, Tana River, Lamu, Samburu, and Kajiado. The ASALs were administered through much harsher and authoritarian methods than those obtaining in other parts of the territory. Special passes were required for movement into and out of these regions. Administrators working in the region had extensive powers of arrest, detention as well as collective punishment over resident communities. As a result, the ASALs were isolated from the rest of the country not just physically but also socially, politically and economically.

For those parts of the ASALs that lie within North Eastern Province, the situation was worsened with the advent of political independence. To counter the disaffection of Somalis and their push to secede and join the independent Republic of Somalia, the newly independent government of Kenya declared a state of emergency in December 1963, ostensibly to strengthen the hand of security forces in fighting off the *Shifita* insurgency. The state of emergency would end up lasting "for close to 30 years leaving behind a trail of death, destruction violations of human rights, marginalization and underdevelopment" (Hassan, 2008; Branch, 2011; Hornsby, 2012). The state of emergency lasted for so long and was so pervasive in its reach that it has continued to define policy attitudes towards these parts of the ASALs long after it was discontinued.

2.2 Major narratives about the ASALs: the legacy of Sessional Paper No. 10/65

The state of emergency perpetuated a narrative of the ASALs that revolved around security, (or more specifically, insecurity). The area and the people came to be viewed largely in terms of security. Interactions between them and organs of the state were defined in the same terms. Most government resources spent in these areas went to security, law and order, albeit with little respect for the rule of law. Indeed, over the period between independence in 1963 and the reintroduction of multi-party politics in 1992, hardly any investments

were made in social service delivery or economic development. As a result, the ASALs, particularly those in Northern Kenya missed out almost entirely on the development opportunities of the first three decades of independence.

The **security/insecurity narrative** applies even in ASALs that are not part of North Eastern Province, and which therefore do not share in the history of threatened secession. It is closely linked to the **conflict narrative** that pervades other ASALs, feeding on the prevalence of resource related conflicts associated with competition for access to water and pastures and to cattle rustling. It is the narrative that informed the location of the Arid Land Resource Management Project (ALRMP) within the same government ministry that dealt with internal security issues.

Yet the reality is much more complex. Although resource-based conflicts and cattle rustling traditionally exist within pastoral and agro-pastoral communities, the prevalence and severity manifest in these phenomena today has little to do with tradition. It is, instead, a function of the combined impact of inappropriate policy interventions that have undermined traditional governance and resource management systems and institutions, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region, and the absence of effective law enforcement institutions.

Parallel to this narrative and equally devastating for all the ASALs was a **narrative of agriculture (read crop production) as the foundation of the national economy**. This narrative entailed the concentration of national resources in the development of agriculture, including through the creation of research and marketing institutions as well as farmers' cooperatives. Indeed, the investment in support of single crops such as coffee, tea or pyrethrum exceeded by far what was invested in support of the entire livestock sector, even though the latter constitutes a substantial part of agricultural Gross Domestic Product. The single institution in support of livestock, the Kenya Meat Commission (KMC) was located in Athi River, far from the ASALs that produce the livestock for processing there.

But it is the **narrative of trickle-down economics** that had the greatest impact on policy towards ASALs between independence and the fall of KANU in 2002. The narrative was embodied in the country's blueprint for economic development, Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on *African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya*. Focusing national economic development strategies towards agriculture, the policy characterized areas with potential for rainfed agriculture as *high potential areas*. These were the areas in which an investment of resource would bring guaranteed high returns. Those returns on investment in the high potential areas would then be used to develop the

other less productive areas of the country, such as the ASALs.

One of our problems is to decide how much priority we should give in investing in less developed provinces. To make the economy as a whole grow as fast as possible, development money should be invested where it will yield the largest increase in net output. This approach will clearly favour the development of areas having abundant natural resources, good land and rainfall, transport and power facilities and, people receptive to and active in development. (Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965, para 133)

This policy choice had the effect of institutionalizing the marginalization of the ASALs which, as has been seen above were not developed at independence, thanks to the policies of containment implemented by the colonial government. As the MNKOAL has observed, the legacy of the policy choice is evident in the poor indicators of development in Northern Kenya, where, "in an area that covers approximately 70 per cent of Kenya's land mass, only one district is served by the national electricity grid. There is no High Court or university campus. Across 400,000 sq. km of land there is less than 700 km of tarmac, most of which is on one road which has fallen into disrepair. Primary school enrolment in some districts is less than 30 per cent, compared with a national average of close to 90 per cent. Adult literacy is one-quarter of the national average; maternal mortality is two-and-a-half times higher". (MNKOAL, 2008:2)

Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 had far reaching implications for the prioritization of development interventions and the allocation of national resources. Over time it affected how policy makers perceived the ASALs. The policy effectively condemned not just the areas but also the populations living in them, who were clearly perceived as not receptive to and active in development. These perceptions fed into and created supporting narratives about the ASALs and the people living in them.

One of these supporting narratives was to the effect that **mobile pastoralism was irrational, unproductive and environmentally destructive**. This was an all-embracing narrative with economic, socio-cultural and environmental overtones. It had devastating effects on the way both policy makers and the rest of the society viewed pastoralists – largely as backwards and resistant to change, refusing to modernize and take advantage of the benefits of civilization and development. Anthropological explanations such as 'cattle complex' were used to validate such characterization. But their livelihood was also depicted as being environmentally

destructive pitting it against dominant environmental conservation imperatives.

Another supporting narrative held that **ASALs, pastoralism and pastoralists contributed little to the national economy**. This narrative supported the assertion by Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 that the ASALs could only benefit from the economy as recipients of “grants of subsidized loans” from the more economically productive parts of the country. Thus, literally by the stroke of a pen 80 per cent of the country and a quarter of its population ceased to be productive members of the society and were reduced to mere recipients of aid. This in spite of the fact that the country continued to depend on these regions for a steady supply of livestock and livestock products, and to benefit from its rich biodiversity in support of a thriving tourism economy.

The era of Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 coincides with the era of nationalism following the attainment of political independence. It was also an era in which colonial continuities were manifested in the social, political and economic landscape.⁴ Thus, although the authors of the Sessional Paper are at pains to emphasize the uniqueness of their proposed policy options, it is quite clear that the Paper builds on the framework that the independence government inherited from the British. Hence, as regards the ASALs, the Paper breaks no new ground, essentially institutionalizing the framework for agriculture and rural development that had supported the colonial economy.

No attempt is made in the Sessional Paper to better understand the ASALs or to integrate them more effectively into the national economy. It did not help that the ASALs had predominantly supported political parties that were opposed to KANU in the run up to independence. And for the Northern Frontier District, it did not help that they were identified with the *shifita* insurgency in support of secession to join up with Somalia. In the end the policy choices and actions deriving from the Sessional Paper also served the political purpose of demonstrating to the populations the dangers of not supporting the ruling party.

This period was also characterized by a top-down approach to development planning. The Sessional Paper is replete with ideas about the need for government to plan national development and to control production. The newly installed political leaders were full of optimism and confidence about their vision for society, and they perceived the citizens as beneficiaries of their leadership and guidance in the quest for economic development. The narratives outlined above were articulated entirely by people who were themselves not from the ASALs, and who for all practical purposes had no clue about the realities of pastoralism and life in the ASALs.⁵

The absence of development activities in the ASALs meant that interaction between these areas and development actors revolved solely around emergencies. This in turn fed a **narrative of vulnerability** about the ASALs that characterised them purely in terms of disasters and food aid. This narrative has engendered a paternalistic approach to development in the region. Even when not framed around ‘emergencies’, many development projects in the ASALs have taken a rather patronizing attitude towards the local populations and their livelihood system.⁶ International NGOs and humanitarian organizations are complicit in the propagation of this narrative, using pictures of malnourished, starving and dying children to raise funds in the West in support of their work in the ASALs, and seeking to justify their ‘good works’ to a Northern audience. The pictures became for many outside the ASALs the representation of what these areas consisted of, and reinforced negative perceptions about the people of the ASALs and their livelihoods.

⁴ For one illuminating analysis of this period, see Leys, 1975

⁵ The Ministry of Economic Planning and Development was headed by Tom Mboya with Mwai Kibaki as its Permanent Secretary. Mboya and Kibaki were also major players in KANU as Secretary General and Executive Officer respectively

⁶ Consider for instance the constant questioning about the future of pastoralism, often couched as though pastoralists are incapable of appreciating the constraints under which they live and the changes occurring around them.

Changing the narrative: ASALs in national policy discourse since 2003

3

The realization that the failure to make use of the potential of the ASALs was a lost opportunity that undermined national economic development can be traced to Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986. Entitled *Economic Management for Renewed Growth*, the Sessional Paper was issued at the height of country's interaction with Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It urged a more inclusive development approach that would tap the potential of the entire country including the ASALs and made a case for strategies for mainstreaming the region into the national economy. However, it was too generic to have any lasting impression on the situation and little changed in the overall approach to national economic development.

3.1 ASALs in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

Significant changes began to occur in the narratives surrounding the ASALs and their place in national development and economy during the decade of the 1990s. This period coincided with the push for so-called 'second liberalization' characterized by the push for greater democratization. The work of the Kenya Pastoralists Forum (KPF), a national network of civil society organizations working in pastoral area, contributed in a significant way to raising the profile of pastoralists' concerns about poverty and marginalization.

The processes leading to the drafting of the National Poverty Eradication Plan 1999-2015 and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) provided an opportunity for structured attention to these concerns. The Plan articulated the need to address the ASALs "as a special case" and recognized the need for special interventions aimed at "their economic integration with the rest of the country" (Republic of Kenya, 1999:66). Ultimately, pastoralism was identified as a separate theme and a Pastoral Thematic Group (PTG) was established to work on the specific concerns and strategies for addressing poverty among pastoralists, ensuring that the specific needs of pastoralism were identified and addressed in a manner that would not have otherwise been possible (PTG, 2001).

The PTG produced a Pastoral Poverty Reduction Strategy that was ultimately incorporated into the PRSP. This marked a turning point with regards to the integration of concerns of pastoralists and the ASALs in national development policy. The significance of the process was that it allowed ASAL communities to voice their concerns directly and to propose strategies for addressing them. Thus, the PRSP was the first major national initiative to consult with pastoralists on their development priorities and strategies for realizing them. The Pastoral Poverty Reduction Strategy and the PRSP

thus laid the foundation for a change in the narrative about the ASALs and the populations that inhabit them (PTG, 2001; Odhiambo, 2006).

3.2 ASALs in the Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS)

The development objective in arid and semi-arid areas is to strengthen rural livelihoods through support to livestock and range management, eco-tourism, and where feasible initiating long-term irrigation projects to contribute to the overall food production and security in the country. Improvement in livestock production and marketing, however, remains the key goal in the medium term. Strategies to be adopted will also aim at minimizing stock losses resulting from drought. Other Governments objectives for ASALs include improving security and communication access to health, education, water, energy, and telecommunications services. These objectives will not only promote sustainable livelihoods but also militate against the rampant poverty in ASALs (ERS, p. 36)

The climax of these developments was the publication of the ERS by the NARC government in June 2003. The Strategy acknowledged the failure of past governments to confront development challenges of the ASALs. It demonstrated a commitment to break with the past by making the ASALs an integral part of the national economy. In a marked departure from the approach of Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965, ERS highlighted the potential of the ASALs in livestock production, fishing, mining and tourism development, and trade and industry. It also articulated challenges to be overcome in order to realize this potential, including establishing appropriate coordination mechanisms for disaster response, improving land tenure, health and education, security and law enforcement, and physical infrastructure.

The ERS articulated the link between securing livelihoods of the ASAL population and sustainable national economic development. It underscored the need to improve livestock production and marketing, and committed to changing previous approaches by investing in livestock production, processing and marketing infrastructure to be established in the ASALs. In effect, ERS articulated a changed narrative – one of **mainstreaming the ASALs into the national economy**.

Although implementation of the ERS fell short of its stipulations, it marked a significant departure from previous approaches to national development planning by locating the ASALs at the centre of the development

discourse. It laid the foundation on which Vision 2030 would build. Its major shortcoming was the failure to deal with historical marginalization and support to pastoralism as a livelihood system.

Historical marginalization is a defining attribute of the ASALs that cannot be redressed merely by refocusing policy attention to the region. Having been marginalized for so long, the ASALs and the people who live there have lost out significantly in physical, material and human terms. Substantial investments are required to bring them to levels where they can effectively compete with the rest of the country. Even as the ERS was being published these matters were being canvassed within the framework of the constitutional review process. Vision 2030 and the Constitution of Kenya 2010 would ultimately capture these imperatives and make specific provisions about addressing historical disparities in development.

But the failure of ERS is also attributable to the absence of an institutional framework devoted to the development of the ASALs. A major explanation for its failure was the absence of a mechanism in government to ensure that the commitments made by individual sectors were followed through. It thus demonstrated the need to address this aspect if the emerging positive policy pronouncements and commitments are to translate into real benefits and change for the communities of the ASALs.

3.3 ASALs in Kenya Vision 2030

Kenya Vision 2030 is anchored on three pillars, namely: economic, social and political governance. All the three pillars are of direct relevance to the residents of the ASALs. The economic pillar seeks to achieve and sustain an average economic growth rate of 10 per cent per annum to contribute to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The social pillar seeks “to create a just, cohesive and equitable social development in a clean and secure environment”; while the political pillar seeks to build “an issue-based, people-centered, result-oriented and accountable democratic system” in Kenya (GoK, 2007: vii). These are objectives which, if realized and applied to the ASALs, will address their core livelihood and development challenges.

Unlike Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965, Vision 2030 articulates a vision of inclusive development that seeks to exploit the different potentials across the country. For instance, it recognizes the importance of livestock production in the ASALs to agricultural development, asserting that:

The arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL), representing 84 per cent of the total land mass of the country, remain largely underexploited. There are 24 million hectares in the ASAL that can be used for livestock production, but only 50 per cent of the carrying capacity of the land is currently being exploited. Additionally, there are 9.2 million hectares in ASAL which have the potential for crop production if irrigated. This irrigable area is equivalent to the total farmland in high and medium potential areas in the country.⁷

Its vision for the agricultural sector is stated as “innovative, commercially oriented and modern farm and livestock sector”. Among the strategic thrusts for achieving the vision is ‘developing arid and semi-arid areas for both crops and livestock’.⁸

It is however under the social pillar that Vision 2030 most clearly articulates and demonstrates a changed narrative for the ASALs. In order to build “a just and cohesive society that enjoys equitable social development in a clean and healthy environment”, the Vision proposes major interventions in eight social sectors, namely: education and training; health; water and sanitation; the environment; housing and urbanization; gender; youth; sports and culture. Importantly for the ASALs, the Vision makes special provisions for previously marginalized communities, who are identified to be predominantly communities living in the ASALs.

In the specific case of Northern Kenya, with its combination of challenges, urgent remedial action must be taken if the developmental gap between the north and the rest of the country is to be closed. Uneven human development is a major threat to national cohesion and one of the biggest obstacles to Kenya achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Equal treatment on an unequal base will simply perpetuate inequality. The region needs to be brought to the same threshold as the rest of the country before it can take advantage of the opportunities anticipated in Vision 2030. This will require new mindsets and methods, bold and innovative strategies, and the understanding and support of all Kenyans.

MNKOAL, 2011: 12

⁷ p. 42

⁸ p. 44

The social pillar of Vision 2030 improves upon previous policy documents by recognizing that there can be no meaningful national development if the benefits of economic advancement are not equitably distributed across the entire country. This constitutes a new and changed narrative for the ASALs in which they are seen as **an integral part of the national economy but acknowledged to have specific disadvantages borne out of historical marginalization that require special attention.**

Unfortunately, this positive development is underpinned by an underlying **narrative of the ASALs as the new frontier**, much like the wild West of the United States, that many in the ASALs find offensive. It is this 'new frontier' thrust that MNKOAL has worked consistently to negate. This is important in order that the importance of the ASALs is not seen solely by reference to what the rest of the country can get out of them.

3.4 MNKOAL: aligning Vision 2030 to Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands

When announcing the establishment of MNKOAL in April 2008, the President asserted that the Ministry would address the unique challenges facing the ASALs "which have in the past suffered neglect due to inadequate resources provisions and poor infrastructure". Establishment of the Ministry was in and of itself a significant shift in the narrative about the ASALs generally and Northern Kenya in particular.

On the one hand, it demonstrated acknowledgment at the highest levels of government that there was a fundamental problem in the way in which development of the ASALs had been dealt with by successive governments since independence. On the other hand it indicated a commitment to prioritize concerns of the ASALs and their inhabitants within the national governance and development framework. The appointment of a Minister who had a long experience in development work in the ASALs also signified an appreciation of the need to involve local people in the search for lasting solutions.

The MNKOAL reviewed Vision 2030 to align it to the needs of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands. The main thrust of the review was that in order for the ASALs to fully benefit from and take advantage of the interventions envisaged in Vision 2030, their historical marginalization must be addressed through some form of affirmative action so that they may have the wherewithal to participate fully in opportunities provided by Vision 2030. Unless such remedial action is taken, the ASALs shall remain disadvantaged and the implementation of Vision 2030 may well perpetuate

and worsen their marginalization. The review resulted in the publication of *Vision 2030 Development Strategy for Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands*, which now constitutes an integral part of the five-year Medium Terms Plans for implementation of Kenya Vision 2030

The Ministry argues for a unique approach to the development of the ASALs based on an appreciation of its unique ecology and livelihoods and culture of the people. It rejects approaches founded on imperatives of transformation of local people and their livelihoods to fit into a preconceived model of 'development'. It identifies seven 'foundations of development' which have to be put in place to provide an enabling environment for local populations to pursue their livelihoods and achieve development. The foundations are: infrastructure; security, peace building and conflict management; human resource development, labour and employment; public sector reforms; natural resource management and land reforms; drought management and climate change; and science, technology and innovation. The Ministry thereby adds natural resource management and drought management and climate change to the foundations of Vision 2030 to underscore the importance of these to the ASALs.

The review of Vision 2030 built on and reinforced the strategies that the MNKOAL has articulated in Sessional Paper No. 8 of 2012 on *the National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands* (the ASAL Policy). The Policy sets out to address three policy challenges of particular relevance to the ASALs. First is the challenge of closing the developmental gap between these regions and the rest of the country, and thereby redressing the region's historical marginalization. Second is to put in place appropriate mechanisms to support mobile pastoralism as a viable livelihood system. Third is to ensure food security across the ASALs given weather unpredictability that is likely to be aggravated by climate change.

The Vision 2030 Annex and the ASAL Policy constitute the boldest challenge by government since independence to the dominant narrative on the ASALs in Kenya. The two documents confront the dominant paradigm that revolves around agriculture, the 'greening' of the ASALs and settlement which has for so long undermined the livelihoods and ecological sustainability of the region. It shifts the discourse on the ASALs away from being seen as 'problem areas' that need to be treated separately and instead sees them as part and parcel of the national economy.

This new narrative acknowledges that the ASALs have been marginalized in the past and have therefore lost out on the opportunities that other parts of the country have enjoyed since independence, and goes further to articulate strategies to redress this historical injustice. It recognizes the uniqueness of the ASALs defined by the

ecological reality that prevails there, but sees this not as a constraint but as an opportunity to be harnessed by having recourse to different approaches that build on traditional knowledge, institutions and systems including support to mobility in order to strengthen pastoralism. This new narrative is entrenched in the Constitution of Kenya, 2010.

3.5 ASALs and the Constitution of Kenya, 2010

The promulgation of the new Constitution of Kenya in August 2010 marked the climax of a two-decade long struggle that cost many lives and limbs. A major motivation for the push for a new constitution was disaffection on the part of Kenyans with the poor governance and widespread inequity that progressively enveloped the country especially over the two decades immediately preceding the promulgation of the Constitution.

ARTICLE 56 OF THE CONSTITUTION OF KENYA 2010

The State shall put in place affirmative action programmes designed to ensure that minorities and marginalized groups –

- (a) participate and are represented in governance and other spheres of life;
- (b) are provided special opportunities in educational and economic fields;
- (c) are provided special opportunities for access to employment;
- (d) develop their cultural values, languages and practices; and
- (e) have reasonable access to water, health services and infrastructure

The Preamble to the Constitution asserts the “the aspiration of all Kenyans for a government based on the essential values of human rights, equality, freedom, democracy, social justice and the rule of law”. These aspirations are common to all Kenyans, but have a particular resonance with pastoralists and agro-pastoralists living in the ASALs, whose historical marginalization would not have occurred if the country had been governed on the basis of these prerogatives.

In this connection, the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 constitutes a fundamental shift in the narrative of ASALs and their place in the overall framework of the country. But the shift in the narratives surrounding ASALs is even more specific. Article 56 of the Constitution provides for affirmative action to redress historical marginalization, effectively providing constitutional backing to the strategies that MNKOAL has proposed in the Annex to Vision 2030 and the ASAL Policy.

These provisions have to be read together with the provisions of the Constitution on devolved government. Among the objects of devolved government specified in Article 174 of the Constitution are: “to protect and promote the interests and rights of minorities and marginalized communities” and “to ensure equitable sharing of national and local resources throughout Kenya”. The Constitution defines “marginalized communities to include “pastoral persons and communities, whether they are (i) nomadic; or (ii) a settled community that, because of its relative geographic isolation, has experienced only marginal participation in the integrated social and economic life of Kenya as a whole”.⁹

The Constitution also creates an Equalization Fund “into which shall be paid one half per cent of all the revenue collected by the national government each year”. The Fund which shall run for at least 20 years shall be used “only to provide basic services including water, roads, health facilities and electricity to marginalized areas” in order to bring the quality of those services in those areas to the level generally enjoyed by the rest of the nation.

By these provisions, the Constitution has fundamentally changed the narrative about pastoralists and the ASALs. The new narrative is **one that recognizes the rights of pastoralists as citizens, while appreciating, accepting and supporting their uniqueness as part of the diversity that characterizes the country**. In so doing, the Constitution sets the stage for realizing the hope expressed by the MNKOAL in the Annex to Vision 2030 in the following terms:

Once that has been achieved, Northern Kenya and the ASALs will in effect become a ‘normal’ part of the country, requiring no conscious deliberation or attention because their particular needs and circumstances will have become part of mainstream thinking and planning. The region will still be different – in its ecology, livelihood, cultures, and aspirations – and those differences will be valued and respected. But they will no longer matter.

⁹ Article 260

ASALs and the discourse on climate change adaptation

4

Climate change has focused attention on the ASALs of Kenya, albeit for all the wrong reasons. Although the ASALs have long been associated with periodic weather-related disasters, principally droughts and floods, the frequency, magnitude and severity of these disasters have increased substantially in recent years. Vision 2030 acknowledges that a major shortcoming in current approaches to disaster management is that they are focused on disaster response rather than disaster reduction.

Climate change feeds an age old narrative about ASALs – that which views the **ASALs as degraded and blames pastoral land use** for the degradation. This narrative is in opposition to a counter narrative that articulates **the variability and resilience of the ASALs and appreciates mobile pastoralism as the most appropriate land use system there**. The former narrative pervades the rural development spectrum, and is the pet position of the Ministry of Agriculture, which in spite of the all the scientific evidence to the contrary continues to see the ASALs as areas of degraded land. The latter narrative is largely fronted by the MNKOAL and those who work closely with it.

The Ministry of Agriculture has traditionally viewed the ASALs purely through the prism of rain. The absence of predictable rain in the ASALs and the fact that they are not appropriate for rainfed agriculture renders them wastelands. Indeed, when in the late 1970s the Ministry of Reclamation of Arid and Semi-Arid Areas and Wastelands was established, its main motivation was to reclaim the ASALs for purposes of agriculture. Even today, the Ministry of Agriculture in conjunction with the Ministry of Water and Irrigation see all the green areas and water points in the ASALs solely in terms of their potential for irrigated agriculture. In effect, these Ministries would convert all dry season grazing areas in the ASALs to green belts for agricultural production. In recent times, the two Ministries have been hard at

work, with the support (ironically since MNKOAL was a Ministry within his office) of the Prime Minister on a drive aimed at ‘greening the ASALs’ through irrigation, for crop production.

The counter narrative seeks to address climate change challenges to the ASALs in a manner consistent with their ecological reality, and in order to secure them principally for livestock production. This narrative views the ASALs as resilient rather than vulnerable, and pastoralists as active producers equipped with traditional knowledge and experience and having in place institutions capable of harnessing the resilience of the ASALs for improved productivity and livelihoods security even in the face of climate change. After all, climate variability is an inherent feature of the ASALs.

This narrative is gaining ground within the climate change discourse in Kenya. The National Climate Change Response Strategy (NCCRS) specifies strategies for addressing climate change in pastoral areas, which include the conservation of wetlands for use as dry season grazing areas, and the application of indigenous knowledge for coping with climate change and integrating these into the formal framework for climate change adaptation. The Strategy notes the need to provide water for human and livestock use in the ASALs, but makes the important point that construction of dams should only be done “after due consideration of a particular region’s geologic and hydrologic characteristics”.¹⁰ Of particular significance is the fact that the Strategy recognizes the need to ensure ‘sustainable pastoralism’ in the ASALs. This is a clear departure from the previously dominant narrative that seeks to transform pastoralists into crop producers and convert the ASALs into crop production zones.

¹⁰ p. 52

In Conclusion: challenges of the persistence of the dominant narrative

5

This paper has reviewed the evolution and content of policy narratives surrounding the ASALs and pastoralists in Kenya. It has shown how the situation has changed, especially since 2003 when the long ruling KANU lost the general elections, NARC came into power, and promptly published the ERS as its blueprint for economic transformation of the country. The policy changes introduced by the ERS were consolidated by the creation 2008 of MNKOAL, which has spearheaded a shift in policy narratives about the ASALs and raised the profile of the ASALs in national policy discourse. The shift has now been entrenched in the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

The paper shows that there is no single policy narrative about the ASALs. Different, even conflicting narratives subsist at any given time. The following major narratives have been identified as informing policy actions and priorities in the ASALs since independence:

- **security/insecurity and conflict narrative:** by virtue of which government resources into the ASALs are focused on dealing with security, and which depicts local people as conflict prone and these areas as embroiled in pervasive conflict that leaves little opportunity for development;
- **crop agriculture is the foundation of the national economy:** which justified government focusing investments in crop producing areas, characterized as high potential, and paying little or no attention to livestock production;
- **narrative of trickle-down economics;** by which government justified investing in the so-called high potential areas, arguing that the high returns on such investments would be used to subsidize ASALs which were deemed to be non-productive and thus not a worthy investment;
- **mobile pastoralism is irrational, unproductive and environmentally destructive (or ASALs are degraded and pastoralism is the cause of it all):** which justified the drive to transform pastoralists into crop producers and convert rangelands into crop farms through irrigation;
- **ASALs, pastoralism and pastoralists contribute little to the national economy:** which justified the failure to invest in promoting the economies of the ASALs in the same manner as was done with crop production;
- **narrative of ASALs as areas characterized by disasters and always in need of food aid:** which justified a project and emergency approach to government interactions with the ASALs;
- **narrative of mainstreaming the ASALs into the national economy** as a means of promoting national integration, which also posited that the failure to do so amounted to a lost opportunity for the entire national economy;
- **ASALs are an integral part of the national economy, but require special treatment in order to play their rightful role in national development:** which acknowledges and pushes for affirmative action to reduce the developmental gap between the ASALs and the rest of the country arising from historical marginalization;
- **ASALs are part and parcel of Kenya, but they have unique constraints and attributes** by reason of history and ecology that must be taken into account in designing strategies and interventions for their development. This is the narrative fronted by MNKOAL and which has now been entrenched in the Constitution of Kenya, 2010.
- **the ASALs are resilient and mobile pastoralism the most appropriate livelihood and land use system there:** which is the narrative being used to push for appropriate climate change adaptation strategies for the ASALs

This list is by no means exhaustive. Indeed as long as the discourse on the most appropriate approach to rural development continues, narratives about the ASALs and pastoralism will continue to emerge and evolve. It can well be said that there are ultimately just two narratives that counter each other, namely: one that sees the ASALs as resilient and productive ecological systems and another that sees them as degraded and unproductive. Everything else is a derivate of the one or the other.

The key challenge is how to counter the second narrative, the holders of which, unfortunately, have tended to be the most influential policy actors in Kenya. The work of the MNKOAL over the past four years has shown that the way to do this is to make the production case for the ASALS, to show that they have the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the development of the nation as long as their uniqueness is appreciated and appropriate approaches are employed. As regards climate change, what is needed is to demonstrate to policy makers what works in traditional climate adaptation approaches. These strategies, combined with the imperatives of participatory governance, natural resource management and development planning entrenched in the Constitution of Kenya, 2010, will ensure that the ASALs play their rightful role in the national economy without sacrificing their unique characteristics, and building on the capacities and experiences of pastoralists and agro-pastoralist that live in them.

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Acronyms

ALRMP	Arid Lands Resource Management Project
ASALs	Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
ERS	Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation
GoK	Government of Kenya
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KMC	Kenya Meat Commission
KPF	Kenya Pastoralists Forum
MNKOAL	Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands
NARC	National Alliance Rainbow Coalition
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PTG	Pastoralists Thematic Group
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
WB	The World Bank

Kenya cannot achieve its development targets unless there are appropriate investments in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs). Covering two-thirds of the country, the ASALs can make a significant contribution to national development and the failure to integrate them into the national economy is perhaps being the main reason for the failure of national development since independence. Investing in the ASALs is now a constitutional imperative and the institutional foundations for their integration into national development are now in place. What remains to be overcome are the persistent negative narratives that have traditionally held back their development, and for all concerned actors to translate the policy reforms into actual benefits for the ASALs and the country as a whole.

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