

Project profile

Integrated management of natural resources for resilience in the arid and semi-arid lands of Kenya (IMARA)

Introduction

IMARA is a seven-year partnership programme – funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) – which aims to increase the resilience of vulnerable households to climate change-related shocks. The project is taking place in eight counties in Kenya’s arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL).

IMARA has four programme outcomes: 1) secure livelihoods and sustainable natural resource management; 2) sustainable and restored social-ecological landscapes for enhanced biodiversity and ecosystems; 3) strengthened governance systems and structures for conflict-sensitive and sustainable natural resource management and climate change adaptation at community, county and national levels; and 4) programme monitoring, evaluation, accountability, research and learning. Saferworld is working with civil society partners Turkana Pastoralists Development Organization (TUPADO), Catholic Justice and Peace Department (CJPD) and Pokot Youth Bunge County Forum, in order to achieve outcome 3.

The first phase of the project (2018–2020) was implemented in Isiolo, Laikipia, Marsabit and Samburu counties; in the second phase (2021–2025), IMARA is working in four additional ASAL counties (Elgeyo Marakwet, Narok, Turkana and West Pokot). ASAL counties make up 29 of Kenya’s 47 counties. Most people in these counties earn a living through pastoralism; the pastoralist practice of keeping huge numbers of livestock places stress on the land and increases environmental degradation. As a result, the pastoralist drylands experience persistent intercommunal conflicts that transcend administrative boundaries, due to competition over shrinking resources.

The unsustainable use of already dwindling resources continues to reinforce intercommunity conflicts, which mostly occur during dry periods or drought. Institutional, political, economic and social drivers fuel these conflicts. These drivers include poor and inconsistent management of rangeland resources (due to weak formal and informal frameworks across boundaries), contested boundaries, and weak land tenure systems. The diminishing role of elders and other informal institutions in rangeland management, failures in policing and the justice system, and the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons also contribute to conflict.

Over the years, weaknesses in governance and a lack of a clear policy direction or processes for implementation have undermined the ability of ASAL counties to realise their full potential and have resulted in a number of avoidable challenges that affect communities. These include high poverty levels, high rates of malnutrition, food insecurity, high illiteracy levels, insecurity, and constant intra- and inter-group conflicts.



Photo: Patrick Adomo, a member of the Council of Elders, talks at a community dialogue in Kitelakapel, West Pokot County

Project locations

Elgeyo Marakwet, Isiolo, Laikipia, Marsabit, Narok, Samburu, Turkana and West Pokot counties, Kenya

Partners

World Vision Kenya, Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association, Stockholm Environment Institute, Northern Rangelands Trust

Funded by

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), World Vision

Project duration

7 years (July 2018–October 2025)

Saferworld thematic area

People’s security and justice, climate action

Project approach

Through a rights-based approach, the project aims to build the capacity of people to challenge authorities on the social, economic and political issues that affect natural resource management and which negatively impact households' livelihood security.

There are three areas of intervention:

1) Enhanced social accountability processes and structures for natural resource management at the local level, through:

- identifying and prioritising relevant community structures in line with natural resource management recommendations and policies
- identifying change agents – such as lobbying and advocacy champions – within these community structures
- strengthening principles of good governance for community-led natural resource management projects, by building the capacity of these change agents through training, exposure tours to counties where meaningful social accountability is enshrined in natural resource management, broadening reach and participation through community radio stations, and providing training modules and materials
- facilitating engagement with policymakers, decision makers and stakeholders as part of strengthening lobbying and advocacy efforts

2) Strengthened engagement on the review, development and implementation of natural resource management policies and climate change adaptation, legislation and strategies, through:

- providing technical assistance to the county assembly and relevant government departments and stakeholders on natural resource management, climate change and gender-responsive policy formulation, budgeting, decision-making and implementation
- a biannual dialogue workshop for county-level policy and decision makers – led by trained change agents, from both community lobbying groups and county governments – aimed at sustaining a culture of responsive, inclusive and transparent budgeting in relation to natural resource management
- continuous engagement and education through citizen action, local climate action groups, awareness raising through local radio programmes, and public barazas (meetings) to stimulate discussions on natural resource management policy and budgeting, ensuring that annual development plans and strategies are in line with community priorities



Photo: Stakeholders during a consultation meeting in Lomut Ward, West Pokot County, July 2022.

3) Functional, inclusive, responsive and effective formal and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for managing resource-based conflicts within the target counties – as well as neighbouring counties – by:

- supporting sustained dialogue
- providing opportunities for collective review and updating of shared priorities
- institutionalising mechanisms and structures for alternative dispute resolution that facilitate quick, responsive and context-specific early warning and early response within and around the target counties