



BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH COLLECTIVE LEARNING REFLECTIONS FROM THE USAID PREG CROSS COUNTY KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE ACTIVITY IN KENYA

Background and Introduction

Kenya's 23 counties in the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) cover 89% of the country and support 38% of the population¹. ASAL counties have continued to experience sporadic rainfall, recurrent shocks of drought, floods, and human conflict.

To address these challenges, *USAID is investing more than \$500 million in ASAL counties in Kenya to increase resilience and economic growth among pastoralist communities to increase adaptability, reduce risk, and improve social and economic conditions to target causes of vulnerability.*

The USAID Partnership for Resilience and Economic Growth (PREG) network in Kenya brings together humanitarian and development partners to build resilience and accelerate economic growth among the

vulnerable pastoralist communities in Northern Kenya. The PREG network is operational in six ASAL counties including Isiolo, Garissa, Turkana, Marsabit, Samburu, and Wajir.

The network unites multiple USAID program implementing partners working with the National Government, the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), County Governments, the private sector, and local communities to coordinate resilience and economic growth activities. The coordination and integration of complementary humanitarian and development assistance activities allow USAID and partners to adjust as communities increase resilience over time and enable partners to leverage knowledge and resources.

The USAID PREG Cross County Exchange Activity

Strategic economic growth and development have the power to revitalize local communities, attract investments, build wealth, and support long-term sustainability. Continuous learning and knowledge exchange serve as pillars to leverage resources and strengthen systems to address local and global threats like climate change. It is against this backdrop that the USAID PREG Cross-County Knowledge Exchange

USAID defines resilience as “the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth.”

[1] Republic of Kenya (2012b). Sessional Paper No. 8 of 2012 on The National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands. Retrieved from: <http://www.ndma.go.ke/index.php/resource-center/policy-documents>.

activity was organized from January 28th to February 2nd, 2024. The activity, targeting USAID-funded programs in Isiolo, Samburu, and Marsabit Counties, aimed at achieving the following objectives;

- To reflect on effective and innovative approaches that USAID PREG partners are implementing to build the resilience of local communities.
- To facilitate uptake of lessons, experiences, and good practices emerging from USAID PREG partners, government, and other private sector investments.
- To consult with stakeholders, exchange ideas, and foster collaboration between individuals, teams, and institutions for replication and scaling up sustainable resilience interventions.
- To increase participants’ awareness and understanding of the USAID PREG network and its coordination approaches to develop new perspectives individually and collectively.

NUMBER OF EVENT PARTICIPANTS



BY COUNTRY	BY ORG'N TYPE
KENYA 188	LOCAL DEV'T ORG 25
SOMALIA 4	USAID 19
ETHIOPIA 4	PRIVATE SECTOR 3
USA 3	IMPLEMENTING PARTNER 101
UGANDA 1	IGAD 1
	GOV'T 51

Themed “Building Community Resilience through cross-county experiential Learning and deepening integration for sustainable development in the ASALs”, the activity served as a nexus for collaboration, bringing together a diverse cohort of 200 participants. The participants were drawn from various organizations, including USAID bilateral missions, the National Government-State Department of ASALs and Livestock, the Council of Governors (CoG), County Government Representatives, the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), IGAD, USAID implementing partners from Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, and Ethiopia, as well as Local Development Organizations (LDOs).



Participants interacting with traders at the Isiolo livestock market

DAY ONE - ISIOLO COUNTY

The event kicked off with an opening conference at El-Boran in Isiolo County, led by Hon. Dr. James Lowasa, the Deputy Governor of Isiolo County. This marked the beginning of the program, setting out the objectives for learning, reviewing the itinerary for field visits, and organizing participants into five small groups to maximize learning objectives. These sites to be visited were carefully selected by the County Governments PREG leadership using a criteria that highlights the collaborative efforts between USAID implementing partners (IPs), County Governments, and local communities.

In Ngaremara village, the Daaba water facility brought relief to families, offering them clean water closer to home and liberating women from the hectic task of fetching water over long distances. Meanwhile, at the Mchuro site in Garbatulla, participants delved into the USAID PREG poverty graduation approach, witnessing firsthand its transformative impact on ultra-poor households vulnerable to malnutrition. The bustling Isiolo livestock market showcased local entrepreneurship flourishing under the USAID Feed the Future initiative. A visit to Lucy Mwendwa’s solar-powered poultry farm highlighted the tangible benefits of the USAID Impact for Northern Kenya Fund (INK fund). At the Rapsu

Irrigation Scheme, fertile lands teemed with life as pastoralist communities embraced farming, and at the Walqabana Camel Milk Cooperative Society, innovative technologies revolutionized camel milk production. Lastly, engagements with County Government leadership underscored the importance of Joint Work Planning in fostering collaborative efforts for sustainable development and collective impact.

DAY TWO - SAMBURU COUNTY

In Samburu County, visits to Laresoro Sereolipi, Lolkuniani, and Suari Model Health facilities highlighted impactful collaboration among partners, particularly in addressing household malnutrition. Water management committees and local communities shared success stories of improved water access through projects like Lkwasi and Lolkunian, demonstrating USAID PREG's joint efforts with Samburu County Government to extend water distribution to reach the last-mile connectivity to vulnerable communities. At Ngilai farm, pastoralist families embraced social behavior change by cultivating local vegetables, supported by USAID PREG initiatives. The 'Ujuzi Mashinani' program decentralizes education for out-of-school morans and teenage girls, providing courses relevant to the local job market. On pasture production sites, participants witnessed how the rangeland interventions are building the capability of community conservancies in grazing management through grazing committees and conservancy leadership.

DAY THREE AND FOUR - MARSABIT COUNTY

In Marsabit County, participants interacted with communities and local engineers at the Bubisa water facility in the North Horr Constituency. The solar-powered plant can desalinate 10,000 liters per hour and supplies quality water to over 2000 households. Its water kiosks are automated by technology with data dashboards available to monitor sales and increase transparency. At Ujuzi Manyattani, the transformative impact of USAID PREG interventions was evident through the vocational training program that empowers young community members with marketable skills, enriching lives while preserving pastoralist traditions. The Merille livestock market, funded by USAID Feed the Future, emerged not just as a trading hub for livestock but also as a place where livestock keepers, businessmen, and women could capitalize on their hard work and earn a living. The Merille Health Centre displayed collaborative efforts between USAID PREG partners and the Ministry of Health to combat malnutrition and deliver integrated health services to vulnerable populations in Marsabit County. Discussions with the County Government representatives revolved around strengthening policy frameworks in programming.

The activity reached its pinnacle with a full-day learning conference in Marsabit on Thursday, 1st February 2024, the final day, presided over by H.E. Solomon Gubo, Deputy Governor of Marsabit County. Through panel discussions, group work sessions, and plenary discussions, participants shared the wealth of knowledge accumulated over the three days of field visits.

Key learnings from the field site visits

County Government buy-in and Community Ownership are critical for the sustainability of development interventions: Experiences from the community rangeland management processes established that the sustainability of the USAID interventions at the community level depends on finding innovative and inclusive ways to engage the local people, by increasing their capacity to participate in the policy-making processes to influence their future. While the program sites visited had their respective USAID implementing partners, it was the County Government representatives and community members who took the lead in sharing their daily experiences with participants; a testament to County Government buy-in and community ownership of these interventions. The use of existing community structures such as Ward Planning Development Committees at the Rapsu Irrigation scheme and the Isiolo Livestock Market, utilization of water management committees and market cooperative groups to negotiate producer prices proved effective in ensuring that engagement activities take place in both formal and informal settings to get wider feedback and input into the County Development Integrated Plans (CIDPs) for policy-making process.

The use of innovative digital technologies and creative approaches offers tremendous opportunities to build strong social resilience for sustainability: Experience with the cash transfer programs in Garbatulla revealed that harnessing digital systems, particularly mobile money, holds immense potential to significantly lower operational expenses and improve access to savings mechanisms. In the Bubisa water facility, scientific innovations like reverse osmosis for the purification of saline underground water, and utilization of data dashboards to trace daily sales offer immense opportunities for engaging with communities, and cutting off water cartels by enhancing transparency.

Joint planning is a useful tool for county-level programming. We live in a world of increasing frequency and complexity of risk, where shocks and long-term stresses threaten development gains and overall human well-being and no single organization can provide all the solutions. The PREG network, recognizing the importance of collaboration in finding and implementing solutions to complex problems, has established, and advanced the Joint Work Planning

collaborative approach to development. JWP explores new ways of thinking about how County governments, stakeholders, communities, and USAID implementing partners can work together.

Private Sector and Local Development Organization engagement are key to success: PREG partners demonstrated that collaboration with the private sector actors who understand local contexts enabled innovation and creative approaches like the automation of the community water kiosks and the provision of solar water pumps. Such innovations and collaborations expanded the community reach of those who can access essential services thus the need for partners to continually provide an enabling environment for the private sector collaborations to thrive.

The evolution of access to finance initiatives in Northern Kenya has propelled the region along the investment spectrum, transitioning from reliance on humanitarian aid to embracing impact investing. This shift has involved USAID's provision of capital to financial institutions, enabling them to extend loans to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises across counties within Kenya's Frontier Counties Development Council (FCDC) region. Experiences from recipients of the USAID Impact for Northern Kenya Fund (INK fund) outlined the creation of safer business opportunities for sustainable development in the region.

A market systems approach has the potential to strengthen resilience by harnessing business models and market dynamics to address development and humanitarian challenges on a broad scale. The management of the Isiolo and Merille livestock markets by PREG partners exemplifies the application of market-based strategies aimed at enhancing the resilience of local communities. These strategies include: 1) Facilitating livestock co-management dynamics through partnerships with community members and livestock market associations; 2) Promoting financial inclusion opportunities by establishing livestock market cooperatives and village savings and loans associations for farmers and traders; 3) Encouraging the diversification of community livelihoods by fostering other value chains within the markets, such as beekeeping, poultry, and camel milk and finally 4) supporting the adoption of innovative climate change and drought risk management technologies, such as hydroponics.

Sustainable development in Northern Kenya through formulation of Public-Private partnerships policies (PPPs). County governments play a crucial role in providing and maintaining infrastructure. As public funding is limited, it is critical for PREG County Governments to diversify sources of financing for infrastructure development and to leverage

on private resources for the provision of public services. PREG partners are working to support counties in formulation of PPP policies.

Social Behaviour change is key in adoption of alternative livelihoods: observations from Invems, Ngilai farms and Karare sites that predominantly pastoralist communities were embracing alternative livelihoods such as vegetable farming and poultry rearing. This was largely attributed to social behaviour change by the pastoralist communities who are seeing the need to supplement their nutrition from livestock production with vegetables and poultry. Surplus food production was used for economic gains as the communities could sell off their agricultural produce to the nearest markets—a case of Lolkuniani in Samburu County.

Gender mainstreaming and inclusion of women and youth is key to success: In most of the sites visited, there was a notable increase in women, youth, and persons living with disabilities (PWD) either taking the lead or playing a significant role in the management of community interventions. In Karare village—Marsabit County, Antonella Lekupano demonstrated the strength of a woman-led household farm that utilizes solar water pumps and rain harvesting technologies for sustainability. At the Ujuzi Manyattani site in Marsabit County, it was evident that youth engagement is especially essential for not only income generation but also succession planning in rural communities. In pastoralist communities in Samburu County and within Daaba and Garbatulla groups visited in Isiolo County, PREG partners demonstrated the application of gender-intentional approaches by integrating women's asset building with asset protection measures. Testimonials from the women groups pointed to the findings that partners not only invested in building assets but also implemented measures like insurance or savings interventions through the Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) programs in empowering the women to safeguard their assets over the long term.

The importance of a backbone facilitator organization in promoting collective learning among stakeholders. Throughout the learning week, participants consistently recognized the pivotal role of a backbone facilitator organization in fostering a collective learning experience among the PREG stakeholders. Amidst the challenges of meeting programmatic mandates and contractual obligations, carving out intentional time for cross-partner collaboration can be daunting for the USAID implementing partners and government representatives. Thus, the presence of a backbone support organization, exemplified by the PREG Coordination mechanism in this instance, is essential. With deliberate planning, structure, and resources, such an entity facilitates stakeholders to convene and share experiences, fostering experiential

learning across the region. In this knowledge exchange activity, the USAID-Resilience Learning Activity, overseeing the PREG network, played a pivotal role in mobilizing, coordinating, and facilitating the learning process.

Issues on cross-border resilience within communities in the clusters of Karamoja, Moyale, and Mandera were highlighted during the conference plenary sessions. It emerged that expanding conflict-sensitive and inclusive livelihoods and employment opportunities, strengthening social cohesion, and improving the management and equitable sharing of natural resources in cross-border areas are critical pillars of cross-border resilience programming

Opportunities identified

- There is a need for continued support to local leaders in their work and to build the capacity of communities to engage and own the development interventions.
- There is a significant opportunity for partners to empower the Kenyan Jua Kali sector by enabling local fabrication of prepaid water machines, rather than relying on imports.
- Increasing funding for research, studies, and engineering designs by the County governments will provide development partners with support and evidence for proposed projects and programs.
- Access to credit to promote investor appetite for County PPP projects and to allay any concerns around a county's ability to meet its financial obligations. Opportunities exist to support counties with low credit ratings.
- Emphasis should be placed on evidence-based programming to attract public-private partnerships. Private sector actors are critical in designing, building financing, and operating community infrastructure facilities provided by the public sector for improved service delivery. The actors also support capital mobilization given the inadequate funding from donors and governments and thus their involvement can speed up the delivery of public services.
- Opportunities to further enhance rangeland conditions and increase the availability of quality forage through initiatives such as seed harvesting, storage, and selling. These improvements not only contribute to enhanced livestock health but also offer additional income sources for rangeland members to withstand droughts. Consequently, this strengthens the resilience of pastoral rangeland systems, aids communities in adapting to climate change, and enriches livestock-based livelihoods.
- Increased adoption of climate-smart agricultural technologies and practices that enhance productivity,

reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and contribute to food security. PREG partners can thus support Climate-smart agriculture interventions to offer farmers in substantial benefits in terms of increased productivity and income, better risk management, and improved resilience to climate change.

- Shifting from nutrition-specific interventions, such as prenatal care and behavioral interventions targeting women's diet and child feeding practices, to more nutrition-sensitive interventions is essential. There is a need to focus on diversification in the production of vegetables for use at the household level and incorporate extension officers for capacity building on good agricultural practices. These interventions focus on broader factors that influence nutrition outcomes, including livelihood diversification, improved access to safe drinking water, and the empowerment of adolescent girls and women.
- Supporting the documentation of indigenous community knowledge. Local individuals and communities, particularly women, youth, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples, play pivotal roles as producers of knowledge for resilience evidence. In Samburu County, the community demonstrated the use of local knowledge to harvest and use water from underground sand dams for their livestock. At the Rapsu Irrigation scheme, local farmers showcased their ingenuity by developing a method to distinguish between male and female pawpaw seeds through a localized experiment using water in a bucket. By gently agitating the seeds, they observed that the female seeds would settle at the bottom while the male seeds would float, demonstrating their ability to self-determine and implement innovative solutions. Following their discovery, local farmers proceeded to utilize this method for seed propagation and multiplication purposes. They manage their seed stocks and optimize agricultural practices for improved yields and sustainability. The legacy of such knowledge and skills can help the present generation fight against environmental and climatic stresses.

The USAID PREG experiential learning activity provided participants who work across humanitarian aid, development assistance, peace-building efforts, an opportunity to learn and listen to the voices of local communities and leaders. The sites visited revealed the extensive scope of resilience-building interventions across Isiolo, Marsabit, and Samburu counties. It showcased the stakeholders' utilization of various approaches and the collaboration with different communities to foster resilience. This collaborative exchange fostered an insightful conclusion to the knowledge-sharing activity.