

Indigenous Livelihoods Resilience among the Samburu Nomadic Pastoralist Community in Samburu County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the resilience of indigenous livelihoods among the Samburu nomadic pastoralist community in Samburu County, Kenya. The study was driven by the need to understand the indigenous perspectives and practices applied in building resilience against livelihood vulnerability, given the persistent vulnerability among nomadic pastoralists in Kenya. Five objectives guided the researcher: to investigate family-related factors, livestock resource-related factors, living environment factors, health-related factors, social factors and livelihood resilience among the Samburu nomadic pastoralists community. The research applied a qualitative approach, with data collected using in-depth interviews from 30 elderly persons (15 men and 15 women). Sampling was done using a purposive method, selecting the informants who had deep knowledge about the community's way of life. The data was analysed thematically and presented in a narrative way. The findings revealed that the majority (83%) of the respondents stipulated that the Samburu perspective of resilience, which they made every effort to actualise, was that having many and responsible sons who will help parents during old age, and having daughters for dowry purposes, supported the family's resilience capacity. The breadwinner having a minimum of 40 lactating cows and at least 100 goats and sheep, living in a secure and rich natural environment, with all family members being physically and mentally healthy, and living in a just society, are components of resilience. The study recommended interventions by supporters, like the government and NGOs, to build people's livelihood resilience capacity, taking into consideration their perspectives, because they had tested that those dimensions are instrumental in building their capacities.

Key Terms: Livelihoods, nomadic pastoralist community, resilience.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of cultural or indigenous strength cannot be overemphasised. Over many generations before Western influence, societies and communities have exhibited sustained adaptability and resilience by using their indigenous systems to build resilience and cushion themselves against livelihood vulnerability, threats, risks, and shocks. This enabled them to cope with, prepare, mitigate, and recover from livelihood threats. However, due to many dynamics mentioned above, indigenous communities have been exposed to strenuous conditions that threaten their livelihood resilience (Reyes-García et al., 2024). Since illiteracy levels among nomadic pastoralists in Kenya are still high, their proclivity and dexterity to adapt to fast changes is inadequate. Yet, current government social protection and development initiatives are inadequate in meeting their livelihood needs. This exposes them to more vulnerability. Thus, the importance of exploring ways of strengthening their indigenous systems in order to complement government efforts.

Indigenous social protection systems have mechanisms for building people's resilience against livelihood vulnerability. Indigenous people have old age traditions that have sustained indigenous communities against many shocks, risks, and threats that shake their existence (Eze, 2023).

Their social protection values, approaches, structures, and interventions have supported their vulnerable members and aid in building livelihood resilience (Saifullah et al., 2021). The approaches, structures and resources for social protection found in indigenous communities can play a major complementary role with modern social protection systems in enhancing social protection in the context of the modern and post-modern eras.

The indigenous social protection systems vital in enhancing resilience against livelihood vulnerabilities among nomadic pastoralist communities encompass a range of values, approaches, structures, resources, and interventions. These aspects collectively fortify communities against various socio-economic and environmental challenges (Saifullah et al., 2021).

The general objective of the study was to establish livelihood resilience among the Samburu nomadic

pastoralist community in Samburu County, Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were to; to examine family-related factors and livelihoods resilience among the Samburu nomadic pastoralist community in Samburu County, Kenya, to establish livestock-related factors and livelihoods resilience among the Samburu nomadic pastoralist community in Samburu County, Kenya, to assess living environment factors and livelihoods resilience among the Samburu nomadic pastoralist community in Samburu County, Kenya, to investigate health-related factors and livelihoods resilience among the Samburu nomadic pastoralist community in Samburu County, Kenya, to examine social factors and livelihoods resilience among the Samburu nomadic pastoralist community in Samburu County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Livelihood resilience is the capacity of social systems, particularly those in rural vulnerable situations, to withstand and rebound from the impacts of disasters. It is the capability of individual persons, households, and the general community aggregate to foil, fend off, contain, adjust to, overcome, counter, and bounce back from a myriad of risks and protect against future hazards (Yadeun-Antunano & Vieira, 2019). In the context of livelihoods assurance, resilience has specifically and recently been regarded as the capability that guarantees safeguards against calamitous and aggravated distress and imperilment that pose a long-term dire infliction and consequences on the present and future statuses (Tofu et al., 2023). Indigenous people's resilience against livelihood vulnerability is the innate determination to succeed and flourish due to their strong traditional cultures of collective identity (Pike, 2019).

Indigenous social protection existed and still exists in nomadic pastoralist communities where community members are protected against livelihood vulnerability brought about by the loss of breadwinners, livestock, and other happenings that impair life coping capacities. Indigenous social protection, therefore, helps build resilience to mitigate the risks and vulnerabilities faced by individuals by strengthening their capacity to cope with hazards and their consequences. Understanding, appreciating, and mainstreaming intra-community traditional support systems in the current interventions will bolster the

effectiveness of social protection initiatives and build livelihood resilience of indigenous communities (Kumar et al., 2023). This is possible when their rich socio-cultural heritage, which encompasses indigenous social protection values, approaches, structures, resources, and practices, is identified and strengthened.

According to Ghazali et al. (2021), the resilience of indigenous people has been possible because of their indigenous cultural and social structures that are integral to their livelihood strategies. However, globalisation and modernisation processes often undermine these cultural foundations, leading to the erosion of traditional livelihood practices and increased vulnerability. Using an ethnographic approach and purposively selecting community gatekeepers among the Endorois ethnic people in Kenya, Sergon et al. (2022) noted that indigenous economic systems are being threatened and replaced by neoliberal capitalist systems. Ghazali et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of recognising and supporting indigenous cultural resilience as a means to enhance livelihood security among indigenous communities.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in Samburu County, Kenya, among the Samburu nomadic pastoralist community. A qualitative research approach was applied in the study. The approach used an interview schedule to obtain responses from the elderly, and an interview was used to solicit responses from thirty elderly people (15 men and 15 women) who were selected using purposive sampling due to their knowledge of their people's traditions. The data was analysed using a thematic approach and presented in a narrative way, and where necessary, verbatim quotes were included. The researcher adhered to research ethics during the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results, as gathered from the responses, revealed ten key considerations that constituted the Samburu community's resilience perspective and practice against threats to their livelihoods.

1. Family Related Factors

Having sons for protection and help in old age – Twenty-five respondents (83%) stipulated that in the Samburu community, sons play a major role in protecting families and their livestock. This is especially so in their adolescent and early adulthood age bracket, when they are classified as *morans* – their key role is to secure the community against external aggression, especially from raiders who prey on the livestock. They also protect livestock and people in the community from wildlife attacks. Sons take over the role of herding from their father as he grows old. According to both Focus Groups, sons thus provide continuity in caring for the family's livelihood assets as well as the family itself as the father grows old and therefore, each individual is encouraged to found a family.

Having daughters that wealth through dowry – When a girl is getting married, the bridegroom's family pays dowry of bridal-wealth, called *nkishu e nkauti* in Samburu dialect, to the bride's family. This is in the form of cows and goats, the number of which is specific to families that marry off their daughters. Each sub-clan has a fixed number of livestock they expect from the bridegroom's family, so it is not dependent on the whims of the family that betroths their daughter. Therefore, as revealed by all the respondents, having daughters to marry off is a resilience source factor for enhancing a family's livelihood assets in terms of livestock. However, both Focus Groups expressed that this only applies to livestock keepers, but less to hunters and gatherers.

Responsible sons – Twenty-five of the respondents (83%) indicated that sons provide security for the people and livelihood assets as well as leadership in the family and in the clan. They also take care of their parents in old age. Therefore, raising disciplined and responsible sons who can effectively take up these responsibilities is a key vulnerability resilience resource for the family and community. As Respondent Mog pointed out, 'When your sons are responsible ... not drunkards and not unruly ... your family has a future...' the well-being of a family has much to do with the level of responsibility of the sons therein. FG1 similarly affirmed this observation, in that sustainable family livelihood resilience is dependent upon a family having dutiful sons. FG2 gave common practical scenarios where 'when a father is industrious and

committed in generating wealth, the sons become feckless and squanders of family livestock when the father dies, vice versa'.

2. Livestock-Related Factors

Having a minimum number of lactating cows – Twenty respondents (67%) said that in Samburu community, it was generally held among community members that a family should have at least forty milking (lactating) cows at any given time for it to have sufficient milk and to be self-reliant in terms of food supply. Therefore, every family aspires to push their livestock numbers above this level. However, FG2 tendered the view that, of late, only a few family heads have forty lactating cows, making the yardstick currently unrealistic. The members then must support each other to attain this status.

Number of sheep and goats – All the respondents pointed out that sheep and goats are a vital element in the livelihood of Samburu people because they come in handy for the family – they can be taken care of near the *manyattas* by women, boys and girls while the men are further afield with the cattle. Thus, the goats provide milk and sustenance for the household from close quarters all the time. For that reason, having an appropriate number of sheep and goats, which is approximately at least 100 for a family, is a vital livelihood vulnerability resilience factor because such a family will thrive even when the cows have been taken to graze far away from the *manyattas*. FG2, however, clarified that the ideal minimum numbers of shoats (sheep and goats) depends with the number of members within each family - the more wives a man has, the more demand for more animals required to sustain the family.

3. Living Environment Factors

Secure living environment – All the respondents indicated that the living environment of Samburu people is plagued with insecurity. There was an existential danger of cattle rustlers, who were a threat both to the people's livelihoods and to their personal security; human-wildlife conflicts was also a common feature in some parts of Samburu County, with wildlife being a threat to the people and their livestock; and floods were a threat to the people and caused them to be displaced as well as killed their livestock. They pointed out that the enhancement of security in these

areas of the living environment would positively impact their resilience against livelihood vulnerabilities.

Rich natural environment – Twenty-two of the respondents (73%) pointed out that sufficient vegetation in the environment, which provides natural vegetables, herbs for disease treatment, fruits and tubers for food for the people, as well as enough pasture for the livestock, is a great livelihood resource. They reported that if the environment was properly managed, it would more effectively support the livelihoods of the community and enhance its resilience against livelihood shocks.

4. Health-Related Factors

People being strong and healthy – Twenty respondents (67%) mentioned that the nature of Samburu people's key economic activity, which is nomadic pastoralism, requires physically fit persons in order to cope with the tedious productive engagements. The harsh climatic conditions and the difficult land terrain in most areas, plus the insecurity factors, all called for agility, physical strength and sound health if the people were to engage in gainful ventures that promote their quality of life. Therefore, they pointed out that good physical health, underpinned by proper healthcare and a healthy diet, is a strong contributor to livelihood vulnerability resilience in the Samburu community.

5. Social Factors

A just society void of exploitative tendencies – Twenty respondents (67%) pointed out that social justice in Samburu families and the community at large, void of *nkutorogonyo* - exploitation, was necessary for a social environment in which the people could thrive and overcome the livelihood threats they face. They pointed out the issues of gender-based exploitation of girls for wealth by their fathers in the form of dowry and denial of formal education; exploitation of boys and men from poor families through herding engagement, as well as girls as house-helpers on incommensurate remuneration, are factors that impair people's resilience. Others are sexual exploitation of girls through the *beading* practice, and denial of property rights for women, as areas which need to be addressed in an effort towards achieving social justice in the Samburu community.

Each person fulfilling his/her role and share of responsibility – All the respondents noted that communality and togetherness were key components of the Samburu community's social protection system, which enhances the community's resilience against livelihood threats. The strength of these components, the respondents recounted, demanded social responsibility, with individuals personally endeavouring to play their respective roles and carry out their share of responsibilities. As Respondent M02 pointed out through the statement, '... one should have in mind that his actions and behaviours affect the people in the family and in the clan ... and the whole community ... no one lives by himself ... we live as a community' – if everyone adopted this perspective, there would be collective strength to buffer the community against livelihoods vulnerabilities.

Respondent F12 consolidated the vulnerability resilience factors by stating that “assets that include

the individual person, family members, livestock, and a rich natural environment, all combined enable the person and his or her family to be resilient”.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: From the findings, it is evident that the Samburu nomadic pastoralist community had their own perspective on livelihood resilience, and they worked towards building capacity. Having a minimum number of livestock, living in a secure natural environment, and being physically healthy are some of these components of resilience.

Recommendations: The study therefore recommended that interventions be made by supporters, like the government and NGOs, to build people's livelihood resilience capacity, taking into consideration their perspectives, because they had tested that those dimensions are instrumental in building their capacities.

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