

# BUILDING PEACE IN THE NEW OIL FRONTIERS OF NORTHERN KENYA

Since the discovery of oil five years ago in Northern Kenya, explorations have spread to more than 30 drilling and testing sites. This has brought foreign investment, and in turn, new work opportunities, corporate social investment in schools and health clinics, and options for personal enrichment through contracts and tenders. In an area long inhabited by pastoralists, this rapid development has created tensions, resistance, and conflict around both access to new opportunities and also the impacts on lives and livelihoods. The Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK and the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, Kenya, as well as a team of researchers from Turkana County in Kenya have worked closely with big businesses, advocacy organisations, and communities to understand and balance out the interests at play. They have enabled the different parties to navigate a peaceful and sensitive process and this will be key to informing future plans for oil development.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Oil exploration operations by London-based Tullow Oil and the Canadian firm Africa Oil have grown significantly in Turkana County, Northern Kenya since 2010, bringing significant foreign investment with them – the greatest in Turkana County's history. These explorations are set to continue, with the full development of the region's oil fields estimated to require US\$2.9bn (Tullow Oil 2018).

In recent decades, many Turkana people have been pushed out of livestock-keeping, gravitating to Lokichar and other large towns in search of work and

new beginnings. Still, pastoralism has remained the largest part of the area's economy. Inevitably, there were a number of concerns about the oil development, particularly around the environmental health impacts, the blocking of access to pastoralists' key resources, and the potential impacts on culture and heritage. The area itself has long been at the bottom of poverty indices in Kenya (Samoei *et al.* 2015). It has a history of marginalisation by governments, and concerns were raised as to how to ensure Turkana County's oil was developed in equitable and fair ways.



**Cover photo:** Turkana road marshals employed by the local company Amailo, subcontracted by Tullow. Work for local residents is thinly spread and precarious – road marshals, concrete mixers, and cleaners are the more common types of work available for Turkana. Few are employed in more specialist positions on oil rigs. **Credit:** Sven Torfnn

## THE RESEARCH

Researchers from IDS, the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, and Turkana communities were funded by the ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research in 2014–17. Together they wanted to identify different local opinions and views on oil development and empower those involved to work peacefully with each other. They worked with a range of actors including local businesses, traditional leaders, young people, civil society, and county government to understand the impact of oil development and identify what the future holds in the area.

The researchers carried out interviews, a household survey, and focus groups using a range of participatory exercises with communities. They ran a number of group exercises which helped to map stakeholders, and enabled different groups and individuals to visualise and discuss situations and identify different interests. This approach was particularly useful in this setting as it created a clear picture of the region, the connections between the different actors, and relative levels of influence within the local political economy.

The findings showed that engaging the large and diverse network of local stakeholders opened up and allowed a very important dialogue to take place – contributing to a more meaningful and peaceful process than one where decisions are imposed by external oil companies or by national or local leaders.

## THE IMPACT

This research contributed to the understanding of both the different groups at play and their specific interests. Business leaders, advocacy groups, and local communities have used the findings to plan and work with each other for future oil development. Communities are now engaged with from the beginning of the process.

Sean McMurtry, Asset Protection Manager with Tullow Oil in Kenya, explained how the research helped the company consider and plan how to engage in a sensitive way with the community:

As with every complex environment, once you can achieve some clarity on the context, the real challenge comes with designing a robust and reactive strategy that can help navigate: the ‘what’ is achievable, it’s the ‘how’ that tends to be the more difficult part. This research and associated maps/images can be particularly useful for leaders charged with designing and delivering an engagement strategy. And, with articulating that context and strategy to business leaders who may be more removed from the sharp end and have less insight.



At a new well pad just north of Lokichar, a rig is positioned to begin drilling. Credit: Sven Torfinn

Local and international advocacy groups in Kenya such as Saferworld and Friends of Lake Turkana have also used the findings to inform their advocacy and decision-making processes. In parallel, the research team brought the findings back to communities. This enabled them to clearly see how their voices could make a difference and demonstrated where the influence lies in the future of oil development.

## FURTHER READING

IDS (2017) *Precarious Prospects: Oil in Northern Kenya – Digital Story*, <https://youtu.be/UFH8kulKvKM>

Lind, J. (2017) ‘Governing Black Gold: Lessons from Oil Finds in Turkana, Kenya’, *Research Briefing*, IDS and Saferworld, [www.ids.ac.uk/publication/governing-black-gold-lessons-from-oil-finds-in-turkana-kenya](http://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/governing-black-gold-lessons-from-oil-finds-in-turkana-kenya)

Lind, J. (2017) ‘Devolution, Shifting Centre-Periphery Relationships and Conflict in Northern Kenya’, *Political Geography* 63 (March): 135–47

Samoei, P. et al. (2015) *Spatial Dimensions of Well-being in Kenya: Where are the Poor?: from Counties to Wards*, Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics

Tullow Oil (2018) *East Africa: Kenya*, [www.tullowoil.com/operations/east-africa/kenya](http://www.tullowoil.com/operations/east-africa/kenya) (accessed 16 April 2018)



**Large development investment and local peacebuilding in rural Africa: building and sustaining peace at the margins**

The research team was funded by ESRC-DFID’s **Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research**, led by Jeremy Lind, Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

## THE IMPACT INITIATIVE

For International Development Research

The Impact Initiative seeks to connect policymakers and practitioners with the world-class social science research supported by the ESRC-DFID Strategic Partnership, maximising the uptake and impact of research from: (i) the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research, and (ii) the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Programme. We seek to identify synergies between these programmes and their grant holders, support them to exploit influencing and engagement opportunities, and facilitate mutual learning. The Impact Initiative is a collaboration between the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the University of Cambridge’s Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre.

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## CREDITS

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