



The Negative Impacts of Oil Exploration and Discovery on the Turkana Community

Executive Summary

This policy brief addresses issues resulting from impacts affecting the Turkana Community, in light of the recent oil production activities. Some key issues include the growth of Kenya's economy, environmental assessments, rehabilitation programs to be implemented, management and distribution of resources. In 2012, Tullow Oil Plc. a UK-based multinational Oil and Gas Production Company discovered oil in Turkana County. The Turkana region has since then experienced changes economically and socially. The dramatic upsurge in oil exploration is expected to continue as the Turkana region remains vital to Kenya's oil production in decades to come. At the same time, many of the region's oil drilling sites are located in areas that affect the local communities directly raising concerns about the economic, social, and environmental impacts of the production.

Background

Exploration, discovery, and exploitation of oil has both positive and negative impacts on the local community. Some of these impacts include but are not limited to environmental, social, and economic aspects. Oil exploration in Kenya began in the 1950s with Shell and British Petroleum (BP) oil companies conducting the first survey. They mapped out major geological basins and drilled the

first oil well in 1960. Over 40 wells have since been drilled, but it was not until 2012 that potential commercially viable oil resources were discovered in Turkana County by Tullow Oil Plc. Turkana County is located in the northwestern part of the country and it is one of the 47 counties in Kenya. It borders three countries: Ethiopia to the north, South Sudan to the northwest, and Uganda to the west.

In June 2008, the Kenyan government launched *Kenya Vision 2030*. An ambitious development blueprint to modernize and make Kenya a middle-income economy. In April 2010, a new constitution was passed that offered potential for economic and social development benefits to help reverse high levels of inequality (*Kenya Vision 2030*, 2008). The discovery of oil promised such hope as the former President of Kenya, Mwai Kibaki, announced that Kenya had made a major breakthrough in oil exploration in the South Lokichar Basin, Turkana.

On June 3, 2018, approximately six years later, the media reported that four trucks left Lokichar (Ngamia 8 oil fields) ferrying crude oil to the Kenya Petroleum Refinery in Changamwe, Mombasa with armored police vehicle escorts. On June 30, 2018, barely a month after the launch of Early Oil Pilot Scheme (EOPS) in Turkana, Tullow Oil Plc. halted operations as they came under pressure from local



communities. The locals alleged that oil exploration activities did not benefit them, and their grievances were not taken seriously by the government and the company. The exploration of crude oil had raised expectations of residents. Justifiably, poverty is rampant and this has made the region lag behind in terms of development for many years. When EOPS was launched on June 3, 2018, Turkana Governor Josphat Nanok emphasized the importance of putting in place a comprehensive law that could guide the allocation of resources to the county, community, as well as national government (*Daily Nation*, 2018).

On August 22, 2018, transportation of crude oil officially resumed after Tullow Oil Plc. reached an agreement with the local community to allow operations to continue. Representatives from the Ministry of Energy, Tullow Oil Company, and Turkana County met in Kalemgorok, Lokichar and Nakukulas to discuss the way forward. Some of the grievances raised by the locals included how changes in the natural environment have affected and degraded livelihoods due to the excavations, seismic processes, emission of hydrocarbons, and dust. The local community also wanted fair disbursement of goods procurement and services, benefits accruing to the community when Kenya starts crude production, dispute resolution mechanisms to be put in place, and employment opportunities (*The East African*, 2018).

Key Findings

Le Billon (2012) draws a paradoxical link called resource curse between natural resources such as oil, and underdevelopment. This includes factors such as conflict, poverty, and environmental degradation. These factors have an impact on a national scale and particularly on communities living in resource rich areas. Resource wealth may increase the vulnerability of countries to conflicts by undermining the quality of governance and economic performance. Secondly, conflicts can occur over the control and exploitation of resources and the allocation of their revenues. Thirdly, access to resource revenues by aggressive parties can prolong conflicts.

Obi (2010) argues that the oil curse is a fixation, dependent upon a partial reading of the internal processes in oil-rich African countries without capturing its connections to globalized class relations and capitalist accumulation by dispossession. Oil endowment is not the curse. However, oil is 'cursed' by the high premium placed on it by globalized capitalism, spawning inequalities, and contradictions fed by an insatiable greed for finite hydrocarbon resources by the world's industrial powers. This is often at a huge environmental and social cost to its victims. Larsen (2004) is in concord asserting that, there are several resource-rich countries that have escaped the oil curse, including Norway and Canada.

Johannes, Zulu and Kalipeni (2014) note that the oil discovery has attracted non-Turkana residents and foreigners. Local communities, who have been historically marginalized, have expressed fear that the discovery of oil would further push them to the periphery – socially and economically. Emerging evidence shows that local communities have been excluded in oil-related decision-making. Land grabbing by 'outsiders', rampant corruption, emergent inter-ethnic increased vulnerabilities, risks, and perverse opportunities are some of the problems the residents are facing. These issues and more might result in full-blown violent conflicts: inter-ethnic, Turkana County vs. government, Turkana County vs. investors/Tullow Oil among others.

The risk of protracted social conflict in Turkana as Agade (2014) argues is also likely to trigger inequalities and uneven development arising from oil exploration. The government's attempt to create a sound legal basis for the nation to benefit from oil creates more tension with communities over real and perceived lack of benefit, infringement of land rights, adverse environmental impacts, and lack of access to information. At the regional level, there is evidence of similar tensions in the wake of resource finds and raised concerns about spillover effects across the borders. As oil revenues trickle in, proper management of resources is central to alleviate perpetuation of social, political, and economic and marginalization.

Kituo cha Sheria (2015), a legal center that provides human rights advice to empower the poor and marginalized, found that the exploration activities in Turkana County led to developments. These developments include infrastructure (transport and communication), social amenities (such as schools and hospitals), and economic benefits (small scale trading) perceived as blessings to the larger community and the County.

Crude oil drilling requires a lot of water. It is even problematic in places

where there is scarcity of water (Zabbey and Olsson, 2017). Hydraulic fracturing that Tullow uses in Turkana County is known to produce large amounts of wastewater that may contain dissolved chemicals and other harmful byproducts. A lot of water is used and the complexity of treating some of the wastewater components, treatment, and disposal are important and challenging issues. In this method, wastewater is intermittently expelled of by injection (Akpor et al., 2014).

With an increasing demand for oil, explorations have to rely on increasingly advanced technology to find oil that is less readily reachable. The economic and social aftermath is often substantial. The world depends on oil resources for a multitude of uses and even as alternative energy sources are being developed, the reliance on oil will remain high for many decades. Therefore, the environmental consequences of oil exploration, transportation, and use have to be carefully scrutinized, in particular with respect to the environment.

Conclusion

The resource curse is not inevitable. However, lack of transparency from the onset is a source of mistrust, confirms local fears, and presages the oil project in Turkana. It may have gotten off on the wrong foot as the management of resources is questionable and corrupt. As a start, Kenya could affirmatively demonstrate commitment to transparency and accountability in its oil administration transactions by becoming a voluntary member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. Kenya would then commit to produce, publish, and have peer-review records/reports of transactions associated with oil exploitation, and the accounting of the generated wealth to the benefit of its citizens, including Turkana community.

Kenya should not move with haste in exploitation of oil resources without resolving conflicts, and ensuring security and stability in the region. Relevant authorities should put in place robust management and conflict resolution institutions. More attention needs to be directed at the nature of state–society relations, and the linkages between the local–national–global relationships. Well -thought -out strategies and policies (environmental, social, and economic) need to be implemented and followed through timeously. Turkana County has drafted plans in becoming the next frontier of development in Kenya, this will be an avenue for the Turkana County to join other regions in Africa as a dominant oil producer.

Recommendations

The Government of Kenya should:

- Integrate local perspectives and address the needs of the local communities in order to foster sustainable development.
- Build strong partnerships and encourage collaborative initiatives between private, public, and civil society organizations, by empowering local people to protect their rights and access socio-economic and environmental justice.
- Promote public participation and consultations, accountability, and transparency by creating awareness to the local communities about the developments in their surroundings.
- Come up with affirmative action policies to enhance equity especially in jobs provision. Where the locals may not meet these minimum qualifications, a sustainable long term capacity needs to be implemented to build solutions that may include education, training and apprenticeship to grow local talent.
- Share the benefits of economic growth to reduce the inherent vulnerabilities that are present that makes the Turkana community susceptible to power exploitation.
- Proactively address environmental and social issues at every stage in the development of oil sector to avoid unforeseen problems that can undermine sustainable development.
- Take action to control and minimize the footprint of exploration and production operations to make positive contributions to environmental and social issues from the screening through to the rehabilitation phase.
- Ensure judicious use of the financial bonanza for future generations and, have substantial investments in health and education across board.

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