



How can education in northern Kenya's Arid Lands help build a stronger and more secure society and economy? A UNICEF team collected views on education in Wajir, Marsabit and Turkana Counties from young people, parents and officials in the three counties between March 2014 and August 2015.

Parents in the Arid Lands want their children to receive a good quality education and are prepared to invest in it, but they say that state education is failing almost all of their children. The study found that problems with quality, content and accessibility are perpetuated as much outside the schools as inside them. Now parents, elders and out-of-school youth are looking for ways to take the issue in hand.

- Most children are not in school. For example, according to Government of Kenya statistics only 27.2 per cent of children of primary age and 9.3 per cent of children of secondary age were in school in Wajir in 2014¹.
- Parents are making a clear choice for alternatives such as pastoralist or religious education. They say these are more accessible and more economically and culturally relevant.

- Pastoralism is the economic mainstay of the Kenya's arid counties, yet schools do not teach subjects relevant to pastoralism and many portray a negative image of the livelihood.
- Only those children whose parents have money and connections are assured of access to a high quality state or private school education and hope for a good job at the end.
- Many schools suffer manipulation and negative politics. Politically motivated teacher transfers, uneven distribution of resources and poorly sited CDF (Constituency Development Fund) schools undermine education quality.
- Many school leavers feel economically and politically marginalized from the rest of Kenya.
- Most of the young people leaving secondary school are not finding secure jobs, yet feel unable to return to the rural areas. Instead many are 'hustling' in town.
- A rising number of young people who have been to school are turning to drugs and crime, including joining Al-Shabaab and other insurgent groups.
- A growing number of initiatives are now being organized by parents, youth and community leaders towards getting the kind of education that they want. Pastoralists, in particular, are starting schools that allow herding education and formal learning to move hand in hand.

This paper is the final version of an earlier draft that was printed for discussion in July 2015.



Background

"How has education, since it started, given value to pastoralists?" Pastoralist elder, Marsabit County.

Kenya's long-term development plan, Vision 2030, aims to transform the country into a newly industrializing middle-income country, providing a high quality of life to all its citizens by the year 2030. As part of its social pillar, the plan calls for investments in education to achieve an overall reduction of illiteracy and enhancement of wealth creation. The focus is on access, transition, quality and relevance of education to address absorption into the labour market, inculcate a sense of national unity and patriotism, encourage social responsibility and enhance moral and ethical values. Today, a comprehensive range of new national education policies point to ways forward on many of the problems of quality, relevance, access and

management that are also identified and

explored in this study. The study adds
explanations as to the broader
causes of failure in the system,
pointing to the world outside the
school gates, as much as to that

within it. ENROLMENT (PRIMARY) 2014 GIRLS TOTAL INFRASTUCTURE NEEDS 200 portable desks. 2 4 CLOSSYCOMS \$ 10 pit Latrines for boys and qu 4. 6. Bathrooms for boys and arriv 6 15 Tables and Chairs. 2

Recognizing the low enrolment and success rates in formal education in Kenya's Arid Lands, UNICEF has been supporting the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) in these marginalized areas. This has been, in part, in a drive to meet global goals of basic education for all. It also acknowledges the specific need in these areas to mitigate conflict and natural disaster and assist schools and learners to develop long term resilience to crisis. This is part of UNICEF's global programme of peacebuilding through education.

By virtue of their arid climates, the three counties studied have characteristic pastoralist modes of production, livestock-based economies, strong social norms around mutual cooperation and enduring customary governance arrangements. Around half of all households derive the majority of their income from livestock; most of these are mobile pastoralists². The counties export livestock worth billions of shillings to other parts of Kenya and to North Africa and the Gulf, creating further employment in transport, marketing and services³.

Communications, infrastructure and services are thinly spread in these vast borderlands. Weak institutions and politically motivated violence are often the norm. People living in the Arid Lands are not culturally more prone to food shortage and insecurity than people living in higher rainfall and more densely populated areas, since they have a long history of sophisticated modes of cooperation and technical knowledge on dealing with drought. But, being on the insecure borders with neighbouring states, and having very low levels of state justice, policing, healthcare, education and investment, these counties are indeed marginalized and insecure. This is reflected in the schools. They are often poorly resourced and have less than the necessary complement of teachers. They struggle to deliver on the basic curriculum and are often not well supported by local communities. Many are forced to close, some for long periods, due to conflict or when food for school-feeding programmes does not reach them.

Formal school provision in Turkana, Wajir and Marsabit Counties has increased significantly over the years, due to unprecedented commitment of effort and resources by the Government of Kenya and its partners. Nonetheless, many people in the three counties in this study are suspicious of it, especially in rural areas. Parents increasingly perceive school as expensive and high risk. They see it as importing an alien culture and largely failing to equip children with useful knowledge and skills. In all three counties most parents select

People living in the Arid Lands are not culturally more prone to food shortage and insecurity than people living in higher rainfall areas.

some children to go to school 'to give them a chance of getting a job' and others to be educated at home 'to keep the family's wealth' In Turkana, in particular, many use formal school primarily as a feeding centre for their younger children, pulling them out when they are around 8 years old.

Enrolment levels in the Arid Lands of northern Kenya are low, ranging from net enrolment of 27.2 per cent of children of primary age in Wajir to 58.8 per cent in Turkana and

65.7 per cent in Marsabit. At a secondary level net enrolment is almost the lowest in Kenya: 8.7 per cent of secondary age children in Turkana, 9.3 per cent in Wajir and 12.9 per cent in Marsabit¹. Performance is also consistently below the national average. Muslim parents are increasingly choosing to send children to Islamic *madrassa* instead of secular schools, as they trust these institutions to provide a good education; while traditional pastoralist education, and its urban equivalent where children learn a business or artisanal trade from family, is showing consistency in providing a relevant, but limited, education to the majority of children.

"Then who is listening to us when we say this system is not working for us?"
Government official, Wajir County.

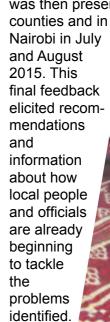


Images: School on outskirts of Wajir; Various notices from different schools; Gabra parents ponder the future of their children; Somali elders discuss education, Wajir.

Study Method

The study conveys the perspective of a wide range of people in the Arid Lands including those who learn in secular and religious schools, those who have just left them, teach in them, manage them and send their children to them and those who are given a traditional education by parents and elders. The fieldwork was carried out in Marsabit, Wajir and Turkana Counties between March 2014 and August 2015. All three counties have low levels of enrolment, low retention and poor performance in formal education. Four sites were selected in each county to encompass variations in urbanisation, administration, economy and environment and different types of school and mode of education provision. The method involved open-ended discussions with a wide variety of people inside and outside schools to establish key issues, followed by structured group discussions and interviews to probe and identify causes and effects, in all involving over 900 people. An initial analysis was presented to participants in a proportion of the

sites to stimulate further discussions, corrections and explanations. A summary of the final analysis was then presented to participants across the three







Analysis of results

The study finds inequity, irrelevance and cultural problems in education in Marsabit, Wajir and Turkana Counties. Local people explain that the causes lie not simply within the education system, but within a wider context of divisive politics and a patronage economy, barely controlled by politicized and weak institutions. Inhabitants of the Arid Lands explain that an ideal society is one that educates its members in three key elements to life: peace, rain and prosperity, categories that broadly accord with the political, socio-religious (rain being seen as 'from God') and economic spheres. The analysis is thus divided into these three elements.

The political sphere

"It's the system you go into through education, not what you learn in school, which makes corruption and conflict." Community leader, Wajir County.

External political stresses on Arid Land societies and their education systems include the war in Somalia, insecurity along the international borders and political and economic influences arising in other parts of Kenya. People argue that problems such as insurgency on the coast or misuse of state resources in parts of government are issues over which they have no influence. Internal political stresses include

northern Kenya's own increasingly volatile politics involving active and often-violent competition over tribally-defined constituencies and boundaries, contracts, jobs and land. Interference in the running of state schools is common.

In the process of their school education children in the Arid Lands tend to learn that political power and success is equated with amassing wealth and engaging in unscrupulous competition, rather than with promoting justice or the common good. In pastoralist and Muslim education in these areas children learn to distrust state institutions. Rural children also learn to look down upon town life. The political environment invites young people into a 'tribalized' system. In both formal and traditional education systems children learn that tribal patronage is key to success in life.

"The educated are the ones in politics, and because they know everything, they come and tell us that people from other tribes are not good. We did not have this before. They tell us not to vote for people from other tribes, while the educated from the other tribes tell their people the same thing." Male elder, Marsabit County.

While the study finds that children learning at secular and religious schools and at home learn

Children learn that political power and success is equated with amassing wealth and engaging in unscrupulous competition. positive approaches to managing conflict, these are not enough to protect them from pervasive negative politics. In formal schools children are discouraged from discriminating in terms of tribe, but tribalism seeps into the 'hidden' curriculum (the unwitting or unofficial

discourse of teachers and others in authority). Outside the school gates, in the towns and centres where many schools are located, the force of political division by tribe is strong. While some officials, civic and customary leaders and clerics are working to counteract this tendency, many other leaders are accused of fomenting it. Formal schooling is widely understood to be contributing to a culture of divisive politics; teaching youth to absorb and adapt in negative ways rather than helping in positive transformation.

"Boys from different backgrounds are classmates. But then when they leave school they lose that friendship very quickly. The force outside is too powerful." Secondary school teacher, Marsabit County.

Young people who might be expected to take positions of leadership find themselves ill-equipped to transform the system or make more than a few incremental adjustments for the common good. Those who have been educated on the rangelands learn customary leadership, but find that it has less influence in politics today. Many school leavers become easy prey to political candidates who recruit youth for campaigns, often using violence and economic incentives. Among a small but growing number of young school leavers, feelings of stress and a sense of alienation learned while at school and after leaving, increase their vulnerability to the attractions of insurgents. The siren call of Al-Shabaab and other militant groups has influence on disaffected young people in the small towns and centres where many school leavers find themselves neither able to succeed in an unequal and limited urban economy, nor return to a rural pastoralist life.

Images: Man in Kargi; Truck burnt out during political violence, Marsabit County; Young unemployed man.



"There are people I know from our village who the police arrested at night and told them that they had been arrested for being members of the Al-Shabaab. They were beaten up and put in the police cell for a week. This is not what the law says should be done... What would make such people not join Al-Shabaab?" Young man, Marsabit County.





Society, religion and culture

"Society has been depending on its own systems for a very long time. There are well laid structures at all levels – village, clan and sub-clan. There are people whose role it is to arbitrate. People know how the system works... But there may be a vacuum now...Education sounds more open and liberated, but the pastoralist system survives, and it still works."

Primary teacher, Wajir County.



Formal school education in the three counties is having a profound effect on culture, opening new horizons for some, but creating a level of confusion not previously experienced for many others. It is encouraging more and more young people to grow away from their rural origins and accelerating urbanization and the growth of a new urban underclass. The resulting divisions in society are to some extent an inevitable part of modernization, but they are also affecting people's sense of community and their willingness to work together. A new culture of blame and inertia is undermining social cohesion and societal resilience.

Yet most people in the three counties are fiercely proud of their pastoralist heritage, religion, culture and economy. The study found that, far from dying and being dependent on food aid, pastoralism is vibrant and adapting to the modern world. Across the counties, students, teachers, education officials and parents were unanimous in their view that education should support cultural and religious knowledge, governance and history. Children in religious, secular and traditional education all learn good behaviour, faith and morals, but the contradictory content of the different systems is leading to division and doubt.

While traditional and Islamic education creates strong cohesion within and between the pastoralist

"A drop-out from Class 7 mostly goes to town; it's a poison centre... He is poisoned there, not by the school." Male parent, Marsabit County.

and religious realms, they tend to teach that modern and town life is a bad life.

This does not equip children to operate with ease in the social, economic or institutional realities of modern Kenva. thus it is not helping them to influence the cultural change going on around them. Schooled children learn to They are look down upon their unschooled affecting cousins and pastoralist lifestyles. people's They adopt 'modern' ideas about willingness culture and society informed by to work notions of individualism and material together success. This can mean, many of our interlocutors told us, that they against tend to learn that the wealthy are shocks and better than the poor. They adopt stresses. 'westernized' ideas that sometimes

conflict with notions of tradition, collective good or religious humility. Many who gain good jobs move away and stop being part of the communal welfare system. Cultural divisions can be particularly acute for girls. Girls who have gone to school may lose their 'marriageability'. Many of them feel deeply insecure inside the schools, enduring rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Yet many also report they are better able to choose whom they marry and feel they have more potential at home and in society. Many young men who leave schools with few qualifications accept lives as second and third class citizens in the growing towns and trading centres. A rising proportion absorbs social stress by turning to drugs or adapt by turning to crime and insurgency. Contrary to what might be expected, successful girls and boys find themselves in a system that gives them little opportunity to work towards a fairer, more integrated society.

"The teachers openly say that pastoralism is an outdated way of life. They do not consider that some of our parents are pastoralists." Male secondary school student, Turkana County.



Images: Man chews qat in small town; Turkana child; Enjoying camel milk; Turkana girl talks proudly about her home education herding goats and camels while students take KCSE exams in nearby Lodwar town.





The economy

"How can education match the economy? It should raise the economy and if it interferes with it, it should be for the better." County education official, Marsabit County.

Parents explained that the decision to support a child, at some cost, through primary and secondary school, or to educate him or her as a pastoralist, a trader or artisan, is based on an assessment of future prosperity. Almost all rural parents said that they wanted between half and three-quarters of their children to be educated at home as pastoralists. Pastoralism, they said, is where young men and women will generate wealth. The formal economy, located in the towns, has yet to provide the majority of school leavers with a secure or well-paid livelihood, even those who have sat Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examinations (KCSE). This has left a significant number to find work in the uncertain and poorly paid informal sector

The irrelevance of school education to the realities of the economy contributes to this increase in vulnerability.

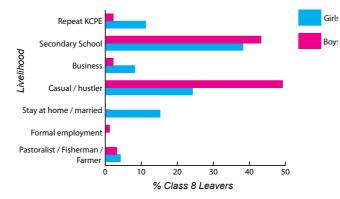
(as illustrated in the graphs opposite), a pattern common to much of Kenya. Schools teach little about pastoralism, yet this sector is the most significant economic activity in all three counties. Despite the North's reputation as prone to disasters, the livestock sector contributes

billions of shillings through food production and through its expanding commercial role in markets inside and outside Kenya³. Government investment in the pastoralist sector is low and progress on modernization slow. In school, children learn that the best livelihood is that of a salaried worker. But the vast majority of children have no hope of getting such a job, since they are very few and are often gained through patronage connections and payments.

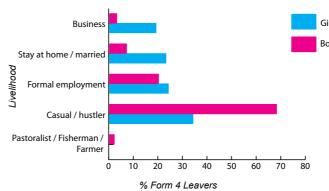
Through the unwitting biases in the curriculum and teachers' opinions, school-going children learn that pastoralism and other rural livelihoods are backward. Many parents and boys complained that school is not relevant to them, since it does not help them get a job. Girls, particularly in urban areas, were more likely to appreciate the languages and business skills they have learned and use them to set up businesses. "We do not choose jobs like men... we do not stay at home waiting. For example, one girl is waiting to go to college. She has started cooking and selling food to the people constructing the road," (female secondary student, Marsabit County).

Images: Sololo town in Marsabit County; Father takes goats to market to pay for school fees; Livestock is the main economy in all three counties studied.

Graph 1: What Class 8 leavers are doing after leaving primary school



Graph 2: What Form 4 leavers are doing after leaving secondary school



Graphs: Study respondents report on what their class-mates who left school within the last three years are doing now.

The most common explanation of why there is low interest in school education among parents in pastoralist areas and why so many young people leave school early is that the curriculum is irrelevant to and disrespects the rural economy. On the other hand, while the traditional education equips children to be capable pastoralists and to become part of traditional social arrangements, it does not have the capacity to teach everything they need in the changing modern economy. People explain that the different kinds of education are reflecting and exacerbating a weakness in the economy that is endangering its ability to add value to and develop the quality of its primary product, livestock. Pastoralist youth want accessible and good quality teaching in literacy, Kiswahili, mathematics and business, along with formal recognition of and contribution to their skills in livestock production.





"This child has loved cars since he was a baby. He is always pretending he has a car. This is the one who I will push through school. Perhaps he will become a driver or go to technical school." Pastoralist father, Marsabit County.

With the decline in the traditional system of clan-based social welfare not fully replaced by state-funded social welfare systems and with the expanding informal sector, inequalities of wealth are on the increase. Thus while the economy is relatively strong overall, its poorer members are becoming increasingly vulnerable. According to many, the irrelevance of school education to the realities of the economy contributes to this increase in vulnerability. For a worrying number of young people the only way they can hope to earn an income is by joining criminal enterprises or militant groups such as Al-Shabaab.





Recommendations

"We should have children going to school but also find a way of maintaining their culture. On syllabus and curriculum – people can be in their own culture but in a better way, rather than in a western way." County education official, Turkana County.

Positive action is underway in the three counties studied, but it is piecemeal and limited in scope. To take solutions to the scale needed to confront the difficulties enumerated in this study requires commitment. Communities should be putting more positive pressure on the state for better performance, but also need to make changes to their own approaches. Yet almost every group that the study team talked to in the three counties blamed someone else for the problems of education and society. This is partly the nature of a study of public opinion – people find it easy to lay blame elsewhere. But it also points to a real problem of growing collective irresponsibility, created by all the stresses identified in the study.

In line with Vision 2030, young people need a rigorous and relevant quality education that builds strong individuals and a resilient society. People in northern Kenya would put their active support behind the education system if it were more relevant, accessible, inclusive of parents and youth, of better quality and better regulated. However, they feel profoundly disempowered by problems of neglect, bad politics and low transparency and accountability in the use of state resources. The practical problems to be addressed immediately are as follows:

a) Academic learning is largely irrelevant to the local economies of pastoral communities. There is no opportunity for school-educated children to learn pastoralist-relevant skills. Instead, school children learn that pastoralism is 'backward'.

- b) Growing numbers of youth are unemployed after leaving school. While at school many of them suffer stress and a sense of failure, which increases the risk of their 'radicalization' or other forms of exploitation.
- c) Children who learn herding with their parents are not accessing literacy, language, mathematics and business skills in addition to herding skills.
- d) School children feel alienated from tradition and local culture when they go through formal school. Religious teaching is not well integrated with secular teaching.
- e) Formal schools are often poorly run and vulnerable to mismanagement, unequal distribution of resources in favour of elite and political pressures. They are under-resourced or resources are spread too thin. Schools are often unsafe.

The solutions to these problems lie in four initiatives each of which requires action. Some of these actions are already underway. (1) Curriculum revision and new programmes of instruction. including adapting the curriculum, improving teacher training and developing and certifying new programmes of instruction for pastoralist and religious education, will contribute to improving the economic and cultural relevance of schooling. (2) A pro-youth programme in support of young people in- and out-of-school involving mentoring, improved vocational options and investment, will contribute to reducing youth unemployment and alienation. (3) A programme of civic education on education led by and reaching out to teachers, parents, youth and elders will address issues of community involvement, accountability and continuous upgrading of education quality. (4) A programme of maximizing education resources,

including adjustments to the overall balance of resource distribution to address inequities, share management with communities, raise new resources and provide materials, will address problems of poorly distributed resources.



1. Curriculum revision and new programmes of instruction

Making schools more relevant and successful will improve the livelihood prospects and performance of

the children who attend, reducing vulnerability, politicization and radicalization of youth. Changing the profile of pastoralism as an industry offers prospects for school leavers to invest in and add value to the sector rather than rejecting it. Elders and parents are calling for a dual education system where those who learn herding learn formal subjects relevant to value addition and those in formal schools learn traditional subjects relevant to life in the Arid Lands.

Curriculum revision: To generate practical competencies and appreciation of culture and values, include pastoralism as an economic and cultural system at primary and secondary levels.

New programmes of instruction for pastoralists:

To complement young herders' learning on pastoralist livestock management make literacy, language, mathematics and business skills available through community-run schools and Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres.

Religious education: To bridge otherwise growing rifts between different cultures, work with Islamic and other religious leaders to integrate religious schooling into the certification system.



2. Pro-youth programmes

For unemployed youth who have been failed by the formal education system, feel rejected by parents and society and turn to hustling in town, take up crime or join

insurgencies, an approach is called for that gives them an identity and reintegrates them into the local economy and society. Youth groups and individuals need mentoring, training, investment, markets and moral support.

In-school mentoring and discipline: To help curb early school-leaving as well as problems of alienation, support peer mentoring for youth in schools by out-of-school young men and women.

To prevent a growing drug problem, review and amend discipline procedures in schools to promote measures that are supportive (i.e. applying positive

discipline methods) rather than punitive. Moreover, young people, parents and teachers must not equate failing in school with failing in life.

To avoid being a route away from local tradition and culture, schools should be better integrated into local society and give parents and elders more opportunities to take part in management and oversight.

Out-of-school support to youth and vocational learning: To stimulate innovation and investment among out-of-school and graduate youth of all ages, certify apprenticeships, increasing their value. Increase relevance and quality of polytechnic courses, including courses relevant to the pastoral livestock economy, urban trades, basic business, money management and ICT. Ensure polytechnics have qualified teaching staff and an improved image as centres of competence and innovation.



3. Civic education on education

Parents are ready to do more, but they need to understand the school system better. To give clarity as to what parents can expect

from schools and how they can be more involved, provide a programme of civic education. Boards of management and school management committees should receive independent support and oversight.

To democratize county education forums encourage parent/elder-led forums to take the lead. Include young people, pupils and parents in large numbers as well as experts, leaders and development partners. Invite international and local experts to engage in depth with parents, youth, elders and officials at conferences and in future rounds of research.



4. Maximizing education resources

To fill the demand for accessible, relevant and quality ECD and lower primary school, support a network of pastoralist-friendly schools; many

can be community-run and government financed. Concentrate resources for upper primary school into a smaller number of larger schools with better facilities.

To increase the number of teachers with the requisite skills and attitudes who are willing and able to teach in schools across the Arid Lands, offer free or subsidized teacher training places to locally identified candidates.

Maximise existing resources through improving school management and oversight. Engage parents regularly as valued partners in the education process, including as monitors and mentors.

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This paper is a summary of the study, 'Education and Resilience in Kenya's Arid Lands'. The study was commissioned by the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO). The study aims to increase peacebuilding and resilience through UNICEF-supported education programming in the Arid Lands of the region with evidence and analysis. It points towards appropriate ways of increasing access to good quality, relevant and conflict-sensitive education and strengthening sustainable results for children in fragile settings.

The study aims to stimulate collaborative action among and between citizens, state and civil society in Kenya, while also contributing applicable insights on education provision in marginalized and conflict-affected areas more broadly.

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The statements in this publication are the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of UNICEF.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Republic of Kenya, '2014 Basic Education Statistical Booklet', Ministry of Education Science and Technology. Nairobi, 2015.
- ² Krätli, S. and J. Swift, 'Counting Pastoralists in Kenya', DLCI/ REGLAP, Nairobi, 2015.
- ³ McPeak, J. G., P. D. Little and C. R. Doss, Risk and Social Change in an African Rural Economy: Livelihoods in Pastoralist Communities, Routledge, Abingdon, 2012.

Photo credits

P1: Top: © Pastoralist Communication Initiative and Sylwia Pecio, 2009, Bottom: S Wilson, 2014. P2-3 All images: M Kullu, 2014. P4-5 All images: S Wilson, 2014. P6 All images: S Wilson, 2014. P7 Top: M Kullu, 2014, Bottom: S Wilson, 2014. P8: S Wilson, 2014. P9 All images: M Kullu, 2014. P10: M Kullu, 2014. P11 All images: S Wilson, 2014. P12 All images: M Kullu, 2014.

Images: Front: School boy teaches his brother to read; Girls learn at home with elder, Marsabit County. Back: Schoolgirls in Lokichar, Turkana, Cattle in Wajir County.









