



Practices at the Community Level in Kenya to Address the Intersection between Displacement and Climate Change Impacts: **Highlights From the Rift Valley, Nyanza and Western Region Consultation**



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Global Network of
Civil Society Organisations
for Disaster Reduction

The Context

Displacement in the context of disasters, including the adverse effects of climate change, is one of the significant humanitarian challenges facing States and the international community in the twenty-first century. Every year, millions of people are displaced by disasters caused by natural hazards such as floods, tropical storms, landslides, droughts, saltwater intrusion, glacial melting and related glacial lake outburst floods, and melting permafrost. In 2022 alone, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), an unprecedented 32.6 million displacements were associated with disasters, capping a decade that has seen an average of 23.4 million disaster displacements every year.

Community Consultation Overview

As part of the Project to Avert, Minimize, and Address Disaster Displacement (PAMAD), launched and implemented by the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) since 2021 with funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), a community consultation was conducted in Kisumu, Kenya, from 19 to 20 March 2024. The consultation aimed to map practices to address displacement and Loss and Damage by Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in Western Kenya. The two-day event brought together over 30 representatives of CBOs from Kisumu, Homa Bay, Kakamega, Busia, Kisii, Kericho, Migori, Vihiga, and Siaya counties. It was also attended by representatives from local governmental bodies, notably two National Government Administrative Officers, the Chairman of the City of Kisumu Urban Areas Association, and the Kisumu County Director for Disaster Management and Emergency. The objective of the consultative meeting was to document practices aimed at preparing for, mitigating, and addressing displacement resulting from climate change within the Lake Victoria Basin, and the highlands of the West, Central and South Rift Valley. This event was the fourth consultative meeting organized under the PAMAD project, following similar meetings held in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Lodwar throughout 2023.



This Information Note presents a compilation of key messages from a consultation session with Civil Society Representatives from Western Kenya. The key messages it contains are a record of discussions and should not be construed as the official position of GNDR or PDD.

Key Messages

Resilience and Livelihood

- 1. Climate-smart agriculture (CSA) for vulnerable households:** In the face of the challenges of food security and climate change, CSA helps increase the resilience and productivity of land for families affected by the adverse effects of climate change. CSA practices such as permaculture, a farming practice involving creating conditions similar to those typical of natural ecosystems and minimising chemical inputs, help vulnerable households improve food production through green and climate-resilient practices.
- 2. Collaboration with Local and International Corporations:** Civil society organizations in the region routinely collaborate with diverse external entities to enhance the scope and effectiveness of assistance provided to communities. The experience of the Osiepe Sango (Friends of Lake Victoria) is exemplary in this regard. Operating in the outskirts of Kisumu town in one of the locations worst affected by the rising lake levels, the organization works with external organizations such as Semapay and EarthEcho International to find solutions to the plastic pollution plaguing the lake and its tributary rivers. Plastic pollution affects fish availability, which is critical to community life in the Sango area where several families have been displaced and have lost arable land because of the rising lake levels, resulting in increasing local reliance on fishing.
- 3. Partnerships with Local Communities for risk assessment and reduction:** CBOs such as Bunyala Social Justice Center, Local Initiatives Development Organization (LIDA), and Aluora Makare engage with community members to identify the micro-level causes of flooding and develop solutions collaboratively. By working with affected and at-risk communities, they aim to mitigate the impacts of flooding and restore the environment while improving livelihoods in the affected areas. CBO representatives emphasize the importance of involving community members in decision-making and empowering them to act and solve their local issues. Mobilizing and organizing communities is essential for driving positive change and effectively addressing challenges linked with the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.
- 4. Planting trees to foster resilience:** Flooding and drought are the most common environmental hazards affecting Kisumu County. In response to these challenges, local CBOs engage in tree-planting drives to improve local environmental conditions and build disaster resilience. The tree-planting drives are accompanied by sensitization meetings in collaboration with local governments to teach community members about the importance of afforestation to reduce disaster risk, as well as the importance of developing local-level preparedness capacities.

- 5. School Eco Clubs:** The idea of Eco Clubs in schools is common among CBOs in Western Kenya. Eco Clubs seek to transform pupils into active agents in the fight against climate change and its impacts. Through Eco Clubs, CBOs educate children on environmental conservation and good agricultural practices and encourage them to share this knowledge with their respective communities in order to build momentum for effect change and work towards slowing global warming and adapting to its local impacts.
- 6. Environmental Education and Conservation:** Most CBOs aim to address local environmental challenges through education and action. Children are taught about environmental conservation and are encouraged to plant trees and engage in activities that promote environmental stewardship. Transfo Green World, a CBO operating in Kericho and Bomet Counties, has rehabilitated more than 70 hectares of forest, wetlands, and river banks and has donated about 400,000 tree seedlings to various schools in areas like Kipkelion where recent heavy downpours resulted in landslides that displaced hundreds of families
- 7. Economic Empowerment and Educational Access:** All livelihood, risk reduction, and resilience activities rolled out at local level require community members to have increased awareness and knowledge, and be able to implement improved practices. In order to face the various risks associated with climate change and disasters, civil society organizations in the Lake Basin provide access to education, skills training and support. This work is particularly targeted towards young people, women, and persons with disabilities, with the aim of improving their households' economic prospects.

Preparing for Displacement

- 1. Building preparedness for evacuation:** Flooding in the Lake Basin occurs frequently, particularly during periods of heavy rainfall. CBOs play a vital role in responding to this recurring challenge at the local level. CBOs provide early warning to vulnerable communities like those residing in the Budalangi and Nyando areas. They also mobilize resources, such as vehicles and boats, to assist people in evacuating to safe areas with some of their belongings in advance of floods. The presence of local CBO representatives who know the members of each community and are aware of their mindset in these operations is crucial, as cultural beliefs often make it challenging to persuade people to leave their ancestral lands, which can result in people becoming trapped and being acutely affected when floods actually hit their areas of residence.
- 2. Collaboration with Local Leadership:** Addressing the impacts of climate change-related disasters requires a solid foundation of collaboration. Fostering close collaboration between civil society, local organizations, and the local leadership is vital to effectively raise awareness on disaster risk, developing and executing evacuation protocols, and implementing resettlement plans. This collaborative approach not only allows for pooling and building upon respective resources and capacities, but also strengthens local respon-

Use capacities during disasters besides supporting enhanced community resilience in the long run. This is why organizations like the Bunyala Social Justice Center prioritize cultivating synergies through collaboration, ensuring a proactive and coordinated response to disasters and other crises.

- 3. Collaboration with External Agencies:** Collaboration with external actors is also essential to improving disaster preparedness and response. Civil society organizations in the region routinely collaborate with external entities such as the Red Cross and government agencies like the National Disaster Management Unit (NDMU) to improve and provide better assistance to affected communities.

Responding to Displacement

- 1. Provision of Relief Aid:** CBOs assist communities affected by disasters and the impacts of climate change. The aid they provide comes in different forms, including through delivery of shelter materials like tents, distribution of food supplies, and availing other essential items like nets and drugs to help mitigate the impact of disasters.
- 2. Healthcare Assistance for the Elderly:** For communities living in rural Kenya, facilitated access to healthcare is essential, especially in disaster situations. In a proactive approach to supporting particularly vulnerable individuals, some CBOs cover the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) membership fee for the elderly in the communities within their scope of operations. It is a critical step in ensuring continuity of care in the face of disasters, thus minimizing risks and impacts on health associated with climate change and related disasters and displacement.
- 3. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Awareness:** Disasters and environmental crises are known to exacerbate GBV. Therefore, GBV awareness campaigns are critical for addressing issues arising from insufficient disaster management facilities and cultural practices that are typical of the Western Kenya region. Raising awareness of risks and mitigation measures, and providing support to survivors helps to minimize the occurrence and impacts of GBV. This improves individual physical and mental health outcomes and community well-being over the short and long-term, fosters inclusive communication, and helps raise awareness and address the specific challenges that women, boys and girls face in times of disaster.

Recovery and Durable Solutions

- 1. Establishment and strengthening of Community Groups:** Community groups allow community members to come together and support each other in times of crisis. They serve as the foundation upon which social and civic engagement is established, enabling community members to identify essential collective needs and speak with one voice to influence policy decisions. By facilitating the establishment of such groups, CBOs in the -

Lake Victoria region support better outcomes for communities affected by the harmful effects of climate change.

- 2. Housing Assistance:** Recognizing the housing challenges faced by flood-affected communities, some civil society organizations offer housing assistance. They assist community members in flood-prone and affected areas, so they can live in structures that can withstand floods. In the Nyando area, for instance, community members are encouraged and supported to build corrugated iron sheet-walled houses (known commonly in the area as “suit”), which are less easily washed away by raging flood waters compared to traditional earthen-walled structures built out of mud and cow dung.
- 3. Long-Term Solutions to Flood-related Displacement:** In Bunyala, CBOs are working with local government actors to address the recurring issue of floods by acquiring land and building permanent houses for flooding victims. It is a sustainable initiative geared towards addressing displacement in a way that reduces dependency on emergency response measures in future disasters.

Public Health Issues

- 1. HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaigns:** Nyanza region has long reported higher-than-average HIV/AIDS prevalence rates, and numbers have continued to grow rapidly in recent times. Lakeside areas that are seeing dwindling fish stocks are among the most affected, recording recent spikes in infection numbers. In fact, as the combined impacts of overfishing and climate change reduce catches, competition among women who buy and sell fish becomes more fierce. Unscrupulous boat owners, predominantly men, take advantage of this situation, demanding transactional sex for fish-buying rights from their boats. In response, CBOs operating in these areas have intensified HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns to inform the local population about the disease, focusing on how last-resort coping strategies such as sex-for-fish can fuel the spread of the disease.
- 2. Integrated Mental Health Services:** The importance of early and appropriate psychological support for disaster victims, and in particular displaced persons, cannot be overemphasized. Some civil society organizations like TINADA integrate mental health services into their programs. Their support helps affected individuals tackle various challenges, such as chronic diseases, alcohol and drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, and gender-related issues. This support helps improve the overall well-being and resilience of community members, especially those impacted by the harsh realities of climate change and related displacement.
- 3. Tanks and Filters for Clean Drinking Water:** Lake Victoria is experiencing unprecedented algae blooms, including due to warming water temperatures. Algae produces a foul smell (that persists even when the water is boiled), rendering the lake’s water increasingly unfit for domestic use. The lack of clean drinking water has been linked to a rise in rape, unwanted and teenage pregnancy cases and the spread of sexual-

ly transmitted diseases. As women and girls are forced to walk long distances for this critical resource, unscrupulous boda boda (motorbike taxis) riders take advantage of their situation by offering them to fetch water in exchange for sexual favours. In response to these issues, particularly acute in Kisumu and Homa Bay Counties, CBOs have started promoting access to clean drinking water by distributing tanks and filters

Conclusion

The consultation in the Western Kenya Region allowed CBOs to connect and share knowledge relating to disaster displacement in the context of climate change. The highlighted messages showcase the diversity of issues participants face as a result of climate impacts in their local communities, and the many ways in which grassroots organizations are already engaging and acting to avert, minimize and address the consequences.



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