



**Drylands Learning and
Capacity Building Initiative
for Improved Policy and
Practice in the Horn of Africa**

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FOR ADVOCACY IN WEST POKOT COUNTY

Economic opportunities and human development are increasingly related to the mobility of people, goods and information which lead to improving the welfare of a community. This means that the mediums through which people get information, mobilise or rally on need to be established and fully functional in a country. On the other hand, pushing for specific policy change may not work for an audience that is not effectively informed and engaged in the formulation of the policies in the first place. This paper looks at the effectiveness of the communication and information avenues available in West Pokot County, notably road, mobile and telecommunication, internet, print and social media and radio. It also looks at the role of tradition institutions in voicing community concerns to local governments and holding governments to account.

West Pokot is situated in the north rift along Kenya's Western boundary with Uganda border. It borders Turkana County to the North and North East, Trans Nzoia County to the South, Elgeyo Marakwet County and Baringo County to the South East and east respectively. The County covers an area of approximately 9,169.4 km².¹ The population is 512, 620 as per the 2009 census, but the County CIDP put a projection at 631,231 as of 2013. It has a population growth rate of 5.2%, higher than 3% national rate, and the largest age group is 17 – 43 years.² The county has four constituencies namely: Kapenguria, Kacheliba, Sigor and Pokot South and a total of twenty county wards. Kapenguria and Kacheliba constituencies have six wards, while Sigor and Pokot South have four wards each.

Some of the development actors in West Pokot include the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), Action Aid, Transparency International, ACTED, Action Against Hunger (ACF), CHEKODIP, FEP-Group Company, LIDS NGO, POKOT ICC – CBO, West Pokot Council of Elders, Pokot Karamoja Turkana Sabiny (POKATUSA), SIKOM, Tegla Lorupe Peace Foundation, World Vision Kenya and Yangát Resource Girl Child Potential Sensitization Group and Transparency International Kenya.

¹ West Pokot County Integrated Plans (2013).

² Ibid

Kapenguria and Pokot South constituencies are inhabited mainly by crop and livestock farmers, while North and Central Pokot is arid and semi-arid and mainly inhabited by pastoralists who from time to time move with their livestock in search of good pasture and water. The County has for a long time become part of the wider marginalized North, with poor infrastructure and insufficient basic services provision. Two explanations have been given for the poor performance of the ASALs relative to the other parts of the country. One is that policy makers have a poor understanding of the mixed systems of production in the two parts of the County, which leads to one side (arid) being undermined in favour of the agricultural areas. Another argument is that the pastoralist regions who have no political leverage to ensure that policies are designed and implemented to support their development (a term Michael Odhiambo refers to as “*power imbalance*”).

Transport and communication

In any country, when transport systems are efficient, they provide economic and social benefits that result in positive multipliers effects such as better accessibility to markets, employment and additional investments. When transport systems are deficient in terms of capacity or reliability however, they can have an economic cost such as reduced or missed opportunities and lower quality of life. The latter is the case for West Pokot, whose general status of the road network is poor, with earth and gravel surface making up 87 percent of the road network, while tarmacked road is only 151 km and is poorly maintained. The County has no rail network or airports, while the two airstrips found are completely out of order. Despite the presence of Turkwel Dam, which generates electricity, connection is still low with only 2 per cent of the population accessing electricity and only 10 trading centres being connected with electricity.

Television

A few families that have access to electricity possess TV sets which are used for watching the news and other programmes. Most of these are found in South and West Pokot constituencies most of whom are mainly agro-pastoralists. This means that majority of the populations from other constituencies do not get access to the information, or if they do only the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). TV programmes such as the *Shamba Shape Up* on Citizen TV and *Busara Shambani (Knowledge on the Farm)* on K24 TV are mainly watched by farmers mainly above 40 years, with the majority of youth watching programmes such as the *Sikika Sasa (Be Heard Now)* that runs on Thursday on KTN featuring in different counties where leaders and citizens discuss issues of governance. These are avenues where policy implications for certain practices get to be discussed, they can only reach a very small audience.

Internet and telecommunication access

There was one cyber café in Makutano, the biggest town nearing Kapenguria town, but it shut down almost immediately due to high energy costs. Hence few people with printing, scanning and photocopy services using the wireless modems by mobile phone providers such as Safaricom and Airtel to do their work. The tariff costs are quite high among the service providers, hence few people are able to browse and download large files or monitor policy processes or other significant documents or information. An average person in West Pokot County spends an average of 10 minutes per day³ on their phones or computer browsing the internet compared to an average of 30 minutes in the country⁴. Most people do not have mobile phones and give various reasons: they cannot afford to buy one, there is no internet connection, and they don't know how to operate a mobile phone or because they do not have many people that need to be reached via phone. West Pokot County also has 4 Post Offices and 3 private courier services, most of which are mainly used by schools, NGOs, hospitals, governments and commercial companies to send and receive letters and parcels. A few individuals near and in the urban areas have post office boxes and mainly use for the existing schools.

Despite the electricity and network challenges in some parts, most people utilize their mobile phones to access emails and link to their social networks. However, others have benefited greatly with the mobile phone technology, as they are able to access information that they need. For example, at a milk cooler plant in Lelan in Pokot South constituency, most milk producers communicate with the truck drivers on pick up times so that they can organise milking and transportation to the main road for collection of the milk. Also, onion farmers and traders in Ortum also communicate on their mobile phones with traders from Turkana and transit goods trucks on arrival times to have their produce ready for market. Livestock traders also utilize their mobile phones to get information on extension services, pasture condition in neighbouring locations, as well as livestock market prices. Local leaders like the chiefs also use mobile phones to communicate information or call for meetings, unlike in the past when he had to walk long distances for the same. Parents with children in private schools also receive SMS messages relating to closing and opening dates, relevant school events etc. This has significantly transformed communication between people and institutions.

³ Personal correspondence with Solomon Loriono, a Pokot Professionals Association in Nairobi chairman and education economist, KNEC.

⁴ See Communication Authority of Kenya Sector Report, 2014

The coverage of the mobile network is still low despite the presence of all major mobile operators (Safaricom, Zain, Yu and Orange) in the County and therefore the County government has a role in encouraging these network providers to extend their network services to all parts in order to facilitate easy communication and also to eliminate marginalization of some areas like Pokot North. This can have a multiplier effect of opening up the County for investment and development, leading to the realization of the County Integrated Strategic plan.

Print and social media

Unlike their Turkana counterparts who boast of more than two local newspapers, West Pokot has no single local print or online newspaper. 3 of the most popular national papers (Standard, Daily Nation and Star) are sold in the major towns in West and South Pokot, including Kapenguria, Makutano and Chepareria, while other towns and villages do not get access to the newspapers and rely on word of mouth from people that go to work or trade in the town centres and are able to read the papers.

Facebook and twitter are the major social media sites utilized by mostly the youth to mobilise, share information and speak against societal problems such as conflict, corruption, and harmful cultural practices. For instance, in Sebit in Pokot Central, university students rallied on Facebook and demonstrated against the mining and transportation of limestone to Uganda by the Indian conglomerate Sanghi Group. The Competition Authority of Kenya said West Pokot holds enough limestone to produce one million tonnes of cement annually for 50 years, hence more cement makers should operate in the county.⁵ A group page called *Pokot Spot: Let's Build our Land* was created in 2012 to demonstrate against the award of exclusive mining rights for the company for 99 years. The page now has over 1,800 likes, while the Office of the Governor's page also has a group page with over 1,500 likes. Other groups that are quite active and interactive include: Pokot County Development Forum (500 members), West Pokot County Updates (2,800 members), Turkana and Pokots are Friends (200 members) among others.

Radio

The provision of information and skills has gained popularity in the quest to empower communities, with community or vernacular radio being regarded as a unique and effective tool to reach the masses at any particular. They also offer platforms for people to air their views and for authorities to disseminate policies

⁵ <http://www.businessdailyafrica.com/Corporate-News/Indian-cement-firm-s-99-year-Pokot-mining-lease-under-probe/-/539550/2233858/-/9hie5jz/-/index.html>

and issues affecting the people. Kenya has a total of 116 radio stations, but only 10% of these are accessible to the people of West Pokot. The growth of local and vernacular radio stations reflects both the improvements in information technologies and the shifting of development paradigm towards a more participatory style of information and knowledge transfer. Local radios in Kenya are important avenue for participatory communication of communities with populations that can't speak the national language. Community radios can play a significant role at the grass roots level for rural development, such as issues of gender inequality, poverty and education among other social, political and economic problems that could be the focus of programming. They are usually for the people, run and owned by the people and give meaning to decentralization and local governance. If effectively utilized, they could enhance the capacities of local people to work together to tackle a range of social problems, including poverty and political exclusion. It contributes to nurturing of the creative talents of the community and providing a forum for a diversity of opinions and information.

Below are some of the common radio stations accessible to most parts of West Pokot County and their frequencies and coverage:

	Name of FM station	Frequency	Kapenguria	Pokot North	Pokot Central	Pokot South
1.	Kalya (Peace) FM	106.5	—	—	—	—
2.	West FM	104.1	—		—	—
3.	Kiss 100	101.2	—			—
4.	Classic 105	105.2	—			—
5.	Milele FM	99.3	—	—*	—*	—
6.	Radio Maisha	101.2	—	—*	—*	—
7.	KBC	92.9	—	—	—	—
8.	Radio Jambo	98.4	—		—	—
9.	Sayare FM	96.3	—			—
10.	Kass FM	92.5	—		—	—
11.	Radio Citizen	90.4	—	—		—
12.	Easy FM	97.7	—			—
13.	Chamgei FM	98.4	—	—	—*	—
14.	Hope FM	93.9	—			—
15.	Imani FM	88.8	—	—	—	—

Key

— Frequency coverage

*Unreliable Frequencies

Conversation with various groups of people including youth, women, men and elders mainly from Pokot South and West regarding what stations they listened to and gave various responses according to age group, social status and education attainment. A majority of youth (both male and female) said they listened to the following radio channels by priority: Radio Maisha, Milele FM, Radio Jambo, Kalya FM, and West FM among others. This group also said they didn't listen much to the local radio (Kalya FM) because most of the programmes are duplication of what national radio stations air. They also said that it doesn't have good and informative programmes that affect the lives of the Pokot youth, and that its news are mainly national and international with a few from within the County. The frequency was also unreliable and given the power outages experienced almost on a daily basis at the radio station, most people get worked up and prefer instead to switch to other radio channels. Some of the villages too within these counties have no access to information via whatsoever means, hence remain behind. For example, there has been no awareness around family planning and maternal health (only 9% of the population uses contraceptives).

The older men and women said they listened mostly to the local station as most of the issues are relatable issues at the local level given the presenters spoke the Pokot dialect. Some of the discussion topics are also not appreciated by a largely conservative population who would rather not talk about relationships and marriages, contraceptives in public. Other issues that this and the younger group raised are: missed out programmes are never brought back, there are a lot of interruptions in programmes they term as very entertaining and educative, there is frequent interruption by radio presenters which compromises programme quality; and that news or announcement are not properly edited before they are broadcast.

Also, most of the older people (60 years and above) are not receptive to public criticism of the leaders as part of the Pokot tradition, but they do believe that giving direction on what needs to be done is a better way of resolving issues such as corruption and bad governance. This means that at the policy formulation stage, the elders and older people have a crucial role to play in giving their voice and the views of the communities they represent. The reality is not so though, as the elders are not facilitated with the platform to give their input, hence all major decisions are left the drafters of the policies. Government and other development partners do not often utilize the radio to pass on information or to get much

needed feedback from the community, therefore those that design programmes do so not necessarily based on public interest, but depending on who pays money to air their programmes.

Over time, NGOs and governments have utilized these local radio stations to pass on important information or to get feedback from communities on certain subjects. For example, professionals use such platforms to announce vaccination plans, study scholarship opportunities available to children from marginalized areas, an outbreak of a disease or an impending drought. These stations have been thought to be highly efficient means of spreading word across the hilly terrains. The use of radio to share information is suitable in pastoralist areas where communities have no time to go to meetings, or are unable to read written information. Some are on the move with their animals in search of water and pasture, hence their priorities are set out clearly.

While other parts of Kenya boast of more than one local FM stations, West Pokot has only one called *Kalya 106.5 FM* which became operational in 2012. While Kalya FM is meant to be a commercial FM station, it has more often played as a public not-for-profit station where communities present their views. Its tag line is “Uniting the community”. A statement on its website reads: *“Kalya FM runs for 24 hours in a blend of Swahili and Pokot languages meant to complement each other to reach a wider audience with an all-round programming that caters for the youth, old, literate, illiterate and in rural and urban areas, with the production, broadcasting and presentation anchored on active community & media participation, advocacy and education in thematic areas”*⁶. Kalya FM Radio covers an approximate potential of 4.6 million listeners in Kenya with at least 2.5 million of these tuning in to our broadcasts at any given time. This means it goes beyond West Pokot and serves other neighboring communities in Trans Nzoia, Turkana and parts of western Kenya and even parts of North Eastern Uganda.⁷

Traditional institutions

Elders in Kenya served as dispute resolution agents and provided guidance to the communities on many issues affecting them before colonialism. Their verdict and direction was upheld and respected and command authority in their communities, a fact acknowledged and encouraged by the Constitution. Article 159 promotes the use of traditional dispute resolution mechanisms that do not contravene the Bill

⁶ <http://kalyafm.co.ke/about-us/>

⁷ Kalya FM is accessible in Tororo, Moroto, Kapchai and Bukwa in Uganda

of Rights and that are not inconsistent with the Constitution. The use of the councils of elders is among the traditional dispute resolution mechanisms in Kenya and in other parts of Africa.

West Pokot is one of the Counties with an organised and outspoken Council of Elders whose job is mainly to oversee the work of the County Government and act as an adviser on key issues, as well as present the views of the communities. On various occasions they have acted as mediators on behalf of the community in matters relating to peace and security with Turkana. They have also been very instrumental in organising community gatherings (barazas) during conflict resolution /peace building scenarios. It is at such forums that information gets shared and communities raise their concern. These forums are effective in inaccessible areas with poor phone network and road connectivity, and word of mouth and mobilization by community leaders are utilized. It's however been argued that councils of elders may be governed by traditions that do not necessarily embrace principles of equality. The West Pokot Council of Elders under the chairmanship of Mr. Mwok for example, have also been accused of being manipulated by certain politicians to champion a course or endorse a certain politician, which may be contrary to community expectations. Other than that, community gatherings that have been organised the recent past, such as on accountability by Transparency Internationals' *Uwajibikaji Pamoja Initiative* have shown that it is possible for elders to embrace change and become champions for community rights, including women rights. The process may not be instant and requires consistency and time, but positive results through these platforms have started to emerge.

In sum, development agencies and governments should explore effective technologies and innovations to tap into the available energy resources power phone, TV and radios so that information gets to as many people in the communities as possible. Capacity building support to local radio presenters (and TV in future) through presentation, programme development trainings is also critical. Regular feedback from the listening public is also essential in order to identify listeners' preferences. The taste of various listeners (youth, women, men, aged, etc) should be taken into consideration when designing programmes. Policy makers and local governments should also support and listen to local radio stations to get community input. Traditional institutions such as the Council of Elders should be streamlined to include women, whose voice is important. DLCI could utilize the existing channels to disseminate its synthesized material, especially through local radio and existing youth and professional associations.

