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UNPACKING THE CONFLICT, CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT, AND NUTRITION NEXUS TO CATALYZE CHANGE FOR THE SUSTAINABLE REDUCTION IN PERSISTENT GLOBAL ACUTE MALNUTRITION IN SAMBURU AND TURKANA COUNTIES

LEARNING BRIEF

INTRODUCTION & RATIONALE

Increasingly complex and conflict across multiple levels, combined with the ongoing impact of climate change continues to be a significant barrier to peace and development in Kenya's drylands. The relationship between conflict, climate, natural resource management, and undernutrition is garnering increased attention within the nutrition community. However, gaps and uncertainties in knowledge of the relationships between these issues—and between violent conflict and wasting¹ in particular—has prevented informed and coordinated decisions across sectors and disciplines to strengthen nutrition resilience. This learning brief highlights key insights and lessons learned from USAID Nawiri's pursuit of

¹ Brown, M.E., Backer, D., Billing, T., White, P., Grace, K., Doocy, S., and Huth, P. (2020). Empirical studies of factors associated with child malnutrition: highlighting the evidence about climate and conflict shocks. *Food Security*. 12: 1241-1252.

a deeper understanding of the relationship between conflict and persistent global acute malnutrition (P-GAM) in Samburu and Turkana.

USAID Nawiri's insights have validated the importance of conflict systems to dryland nutrition causality, illuminated limitations of peacebuilding approaches with regard to nutrition resilience, and influenced key modifications to USAID Nawiri's Theory of Change (ToC) under *Purpose 3: A strong and resilient nutrition enabling environment*. Critically, this learning journey has uncovered the central role that even subtle socio-cultural, ecological, and economic differences among communities are likely to play in mediating or moderating relationships between conflict and nutrition in Samburu and Turkana Counties. It has also deepened appreciation of the entanglement of prevailing socio-political and environmental trends and their potential implications for nutrition security.

LEARNING JOURNEY

During Phase I, USAID Nawiri used a range of activities to discover information and deepen a collective understanding of the nuanced relationships between conflict and P-GAM in Samburu and Turkana. Activities included county and community consultations, collaborative interrogation of research findings through a conflict lens, context monitoring, social listening,² learning sprints,³ and structured conversations to distill insights from staff and partners with years of diverse personal and professional experience in northern Kenya. Additionally, insights and learnings were drawn from the Sustainable Conflict Management in Arid Land Ecosystems (SCALE) Program—a Mercy Corps' led initiative, funded by the European Union, with specific activities such as the Political Economy Analysis cost-shared by USAID Nawiri. The overall objective of SCALE is to strengthen local civil society to work with communities and government authorities to prevent conflict and build sustainable peace in Samburu and Turkana. USAID Nawiri will continue to leverage expertise, learnings, and resources from SCALE and replicate and adapt proven approaches across Samburu and Turkana.

INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

INSIGHT N°1: Strengthening an enabling environment for sustainable conflict management and nutrition resilience requires hybrid structures for the coordinated management of conflict and natural resources across landscapes.

Natural resource competition and scarcity emerge as core factors influencing the two-way relationship between conflict and undernutrition across northern Kenya. It is generally accepted that resource competition alone does not inevitably lead to violent conflict; but rather the way in which resources are governed, managed, and shared that largely determines whether competition turns violent in times of scarcity. In Samburu and Turkana, the threat-multiplying effect of climate change on peace and

² Social listening is the process of tracking and assessing conversations on the internet.

³ Learning sprints are experiential learning opportunities in which USAID Nawiri consortium staff and key stakeholders rapidly co-design, test and adapt solutions to the local context through a learning-through-doing approach. Key insights into the local conflict system emerged from the learning sprints facilitated during the COVID-19 pandemic response.

development objectives (including nutrition) will be heavily influenced by the strength and coordination (horizontal and vertical) of structures and mechanisms for the peaceful management of natural resources, including land, pasture, water, forests, and wildlife. Given the inseparable relationship between conflict and natural resources in the drylands, there is both need and opportunity to move away from siloed peace and natural resource committees towards hybrid committees with the capacity and mandate to prevent and manage conflict related to land and natural resources.

Under the SCALE program, Mercy Corps and partners formed and strengthened 13 hybrid village peace and natural resource management committees (HVPCs) to promote inter-communal peace and improved NRM.⁴ This experience helped surface a gap in structures for supporting intra-communal peacebuilding and the need for improved coordination and vertical and horizontal integration of HVPCs. During Phase 2, USAID Nawiri will work with the Peace Directorate (Turkana) and Department of Special Programs (Samburu), and through local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), to take an appreciative inquiry approach to form new and strengthen existing HVPCs to lead, manage, and own local-level planning and budgeting for peace and NRM (including rangeland management). This will involve advocating for recognition of the HVPCs within the NRM policies of both counties, legalizing their operations, and anchoring them in Ward Development Plans Committees (WDPCs) to ensure that the broader development plans are inclusive and driven by an empowered community. Using established resources, including ILRI's Participatory Rangeland Management Toolkit for Kenya, USAID Nawiri will also work with WDPCs to bring together these hybrid groups in the identification, mapping, and gazettement of rangelands, as was done in Wajir and Turkana, under the USAID-funded Livestock Market System program. (ToC Reference: Outcome 3.4.1.1; Outcome 3.4.1.2; and Outcome 3.4.2.1)

INSIGHT N°2: Programs that fail to conceptualize conflict as a system that transcends administrative boundaries risk fueling conflict and undernutrition.

Loss of life and livelihoods; physical and psychological trauma; restricted access to social networks and services (including healthcare, education, markets, and water points); and the normalization of violence are emerging as some of the most likely effects of violent conflict on nutrition causality in Samburu and Turkana. The self-reinforcing cycle between violent conflict and poor development outcomes is complex and dynamic; the effects of violent conflict may be far removed from the actual incident or conflict “hotspots.” For example, accounts suggest that undernutrition and other poor development outcomes consistently registered in the relatively peaceful areas of Sere Olipi (Samburu East) and Katilu (Turkana South) are inextricably linked, as both a cause and effect, to violent conflict along Samburu’s border with Isiolo and Marsabit and Turkana’s border with West Pokot.

⁴ SCALE formed and strengthened 13 HVPCs in northern Kenya. Committees are trained on conflict analysis, mediation, negotiation, and dialogue and climate change scenarios. The HVPCs ensure communities peacefully share natural resources through working with national and county governments, security agencies, and private ranch owners to resolve conflicts.

Numerous accounts from stakeholders in Samburu and Turkana suggest that pressure to deliver immediate results, driven in part by expectations raised by previous programs that reported quick wins, has created perverse incentives for externally funded peacebuilding actors to shelve a systems approach in favor of addressing the most immediate or obvious symptoms of violent conflict. Despite a proliferation of peacebuilding programs, a minority appear to be working collaboratively with local institutions and communities across landscapes to trace, understand, and manage conflict as a system. This issue is compounded by poor horizontal and vertical coordination across peacebuilding structures, weak integration of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding objectives, and the unintentional conflict *insensitivity* of many external humanitarian and development programs. Building from SCALE, USAID Nawiri will support local CSOs to engage the Frontier Counties Development Council on the development of the regional peace policy and its localization in the two counties. USAID Nawiri will also support the two counties to develop strategic plans for operationalizing their policies and strengthening their capacity to lead, manage, and own more coordinated peacebuilding actions as a critical pathway on their journey to self-reliance (J2SR). (ToC Reference: IO 3.4.1 and IO 3.4.2)

Many peacebuilding actors seem to default to what they know or what they have seen other actors do in the past. They work through the same “gatekeepers” without questioning if those gatekeepers are part of the problem or who the real gatekeepers are. This is how mistakes are repeated and why we have problems like persistent [acute] malnutrition. It doesn’t help that organizations—not just peacebuilding but all development actors—just talk about their successes. This culture of ignoring failures is a problem, because if we don’t openly share what failed, how can we hold others accountable to not repeat the same mistakes?”
—County Government Stakeholder, Turkana County

INSIGHT N° 3. Strengthening young people’s social and economic capital and empowering them as peaceful agents of change is key to climate-responsive peacebuilding strategies that support nutrition resilience in the pastoral landscape.

The shrinking resource base, combined with the growing number of obstacles in the pastoral landscape, such as protected areas and settlements, means that young men and livestock are now absent on longer and more complex migrations. While elders have traditionally held significant influence in decision-making processes, including: making and enforcing laws, directing herd movements, and commanding warriors on the timing and location of raids; this power has eroded over time. By necessity of distance, these decisions have fallen to the youth [warriors or *moran*], who at times cross restricted lines without permission from elders. This situation is aggravated by the effects of climate change and environmental degradation on traditional livelihoods and closely interlinked with the proliferation of guns, commercialization of livestock raiding, alcohol and drug abuse, high bride price, societal expectations of what it is to be a “man,” high youth unemployment, and what local elders describe the “erosion of the sanctity of life.”

“In the past, it was a big deal if a warrior killed someone, and the warrior felt it deeply, as a bad thing. He would return to his village for cleansing [rituals] – to cleanse the mind and also the clan of this deed. Today, this cleansing isn’t there and it’s like killing is normal. Without this [cleansing ritual] revenge attacks spiral and even women and children are killed. Our environment is part of the problem because since there is not enough [pasture and water] the warriors must take the animals far and we don’t see them for months or even years – [the warriors] become wild. No one is controlling them like before and their minds are becoming sick.” -Elder, Samburu East

There is mounting evidence on the potential of youth forums as platforms for transforming perpetrators of violence into socially and economically empowered and networked agents of change. As part of its resilient livelihoods strategy for Phase 2, USAID Nawiri will build from the accomplishments and lessons from SCALE, USAID PEACE III, and other programs, including the Northern Rangeland Trust’s work with reformed warriors, to promote “Warriors for Health and Nutrition.” This will involve interrogating findings of the labor and food markets studies—with warriors, elders, and the private sector—to identify job-creation opportunities that provide young men with viable and acceptable alternatives to raiding and banditry, while simultaneously addressing one or more underlying drivers of undernutrition in the local context. USAID Nawiri will focus on market systems with potential for creating social and economic interdependencies among warriors across ethno-ecological landscapes to secure and sustain peace and nutrition at scale. (ToC Reference: Output 1.1.1.4.5; Risk-informed ag/livestock-based livelihoods mapped for each ethno-ecological zone).

INSIGHT N° 4: Empathy is the foundation of sustainable solutions for peace and nutrition resilience in highly traumatized societies.

Reports suggest that at least three-quarters of the population in Samburu and Turkana have lost at least one family member to violent conflict.⁵ The indiscriminate killing of men, women, and children has become normalized and facilitated by the introduction of guns and erosion of traditional institutions for conflict management. Guns have become integrated into constructs of masculinity and how young men see one another; they have fundamentally altered how people live and interact in their landscape, with profound impact on empathy dynamics. Conflict trauma is widespread across gender and age groups and plausibly reinforced by the trauma of repeated exposure to the effects of climate-related shocks and stresses on vulnerable livelihoods. USAID Nawiri observes that the mechanistic systems and processes for dialogue and interaction, characteristic of conventional peacebuilding approaches, are not fit for purpose as they tend to reduce the importance of human relations at the micro-level. USAID Nawiri is therefore taking a new approach to the creative and intense work of conflict transformation in terms of person-to-person interaction and story-telling, and the critical role of empathy and collective, adaptive learning as transformative capacities for nutrition resilience.

In collaboration with the SCALE program, USAID Nawiri is observing how integrating trauma healing can be a valuable entry point for addressing deep-rooted cultural practices that are intertwined in

⁵ Children Peace Initiative Kenya, Narrative Report, August 2017-2018.

conflict and undernutrition causality, such as cattle rustling, female genital mutilation, and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence. We also understand that mainstreaming an empathy perspective into trauma healing—and across programming streams more widely—has potential for activating synergies at the *conflict-climate-environment-nutrition* (CCEN) nexus for greater, more sustainable results at scale. In Phase 2, USAID Nawiri will strengthen the capacity of CSOs and local peace champions to identify opportunities to nurture empathy among men, women, girls, and boys across gender, generation and conflict lines, while creating socio-economic interdependencies and addressing the intertwined root causes of conflict and P-GAM, such as climate vulnerability and harmful gender norms.

Additionally, boys and girls in early (2-5 years) and middle childhood (6-12 years) will be a key partner to promote positive boy-girl relationships and increased cohesion and integration among communities and groups alienated by conflict. Our work will build on lessons learned and promising practices from programs including the Children’s Peace Initiative in Samburu and Turkana and others that are responding to mounting evidence of the opportunities to catalyze sustainable, intergenerational change across a range of development outcomes by intervening in early and middle childhood—when boys and girls form habits, behaviors, and relationships that influence their transition to adolescence and adulthood (ToC Reference: Outcome 1.3.2.1; and Outcome 1.3.2.2)

INSIGHT N° 5. Achieving peaceful coexistence between humans and wildlife is as much a social and economic development priority as a conservation one.

One of the main contemporary challenges to both conservation and development is how to enhance and sustain peaceful, synergistic coexistence between humans and wildlife. In contexts like Samburu and pockets of Turkana, where humans, livestock, and wildlife share landscapes, a human-wildlife conflict (HWC) is as much a priority issue for socio-economic development as it is for conservation.⁶ In Kenya, HWC disrupts subsistence-based livelihoods, threatens the potential contribution of wildlife-based tourism to the economy, interferes with access to resources and social services, and drives inequality. Human injury and death, livestock predation, crop raiding, wildlife-to-livestock disease transmission, restricted access to traditional grazing lands (e.g., protected areas), and competition over pasture and water are among the costs incurred by communities living alongside wildlife in Samburu and Turkana. With regards to water, USAID Nawiri has learned that the issue is less about the quantity of water wildlife consume, but the quality and useability of water sources that are shared with wildlife. For example, communities in Samburu East lament that during dry season and drought, elephants contribute to women’s time poverty and household water insecurity by rendering water points inaccessible. Contamination of water sources is also a significant problem for both humans and livestock. Herders complain that during dry periods, relatively small animals, such as baboons and baby elephants, often fall into “singing” wells (unprotected, hand-dug wells in riverbeds used to water livestock), rendering them useless, and requiring significant time and energy to dig new wells. Communities in Samburu also complain that when a Grevy’s zebra urinates on a water point, livestock will not drink.

⁶ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) & World Wildlife Fund (WWF). (2021) A Future for All: The Need for Human-Wildlife Coexistence

Promoting human-wildlife coexistence in pastoral and agro-pastoral contexts requires identifying opportunities to create positive interdependencies between wildlife conservation and traditional livelihoods. This involves looking at shocks and stresses that typically aggravate HWC (e.g., drought) as windows of opportunity for aligning conservation and development objectives. Socio-economic benefits must be tangible, direct, and realized in the near term, and they should accrue equitably across the population or risk creating or aggravating not just HWC, but inter- and intra-communal conflict as well.

Drivers of HWC vary spatially and temporally, and like any complex challenge, require locally led, managed, and owned solutions. In Phase 2, USAID Nawiri will work with conservation partners, HVPCs, water resource user associations (WRUAs), WDPCs (or equivalent) and other local structures to mainstream HWC management into drought cycle planning at the village and ward level, with an initial focus in Samburu East and Turkana South. This may require efforts to de-escalate conflict in order to allow for dialogue with communities to explore the complex challenges of HWC and co-create innovative solutions for its sustainable management. HWC will be explicitly analyzed in the feasibility and design of any USAID Nawiri agriculture and livestock livelihood interventions in landscapes with potential HWC. (ToC Reference: IO 3.2.2 and IO 3.2.3)

INSIGHT N° 6. Supporting sustainable reductions in p-gam in the drylands requires real-time data and models that can provide actionable guidance to prevent and mitigate the negative impacts of conflict and climate on nutrition security in the local context.

Research has established climate and conflict conditions as among the most important factors preceding and feeding malnutrition crises.⁷ Over the past two decades, and against the backdrop of a long history of political and economic marginalization, communities in northern Kenya have faced six multi-year droughts, a significant loss of access to traditional grazing areas, and increasing rangeland degradation. Strategies employed to cope and adapt with these and other climate and non-climate related shocks and stresses are transforming traditional livelihood systems. The implications are seen in altered circumstances and prevailing trends, including labor migration, commercialization of livestock raiding, the proliferation of small arms, heightened competition between herders and farmers, and abuse of alcohol and drugs—all of which are presenting new challenges to peace and nutrition resilience in Samburu and Turkana. In this context, USAID Nawiri is learning that violent conflict functions as both a strategy to cope with climate pressures on traditional livelihoods, as well as a shock that introduces new risks and vulnerabilities into the system. However, many questions remain about the specific pathways or mechanisms linking climate conditions and conflict to one another across diverse local contexts and how spatial and temporal differences in this relationship help explain patterns and trends in acute malnutrition. USAID Nawiri has prioritized the CCEN nexus as priority for ongoing, adaptive learning in Phase 2. Emerging insights will be fed back directly into nutrition-sensitive actions designed and collaboratively adapted to mitigate the effect of climate and conflict on households and communities. This includes working across government sectors—including NDMA, the Peace Cop of the National Police Service—to strengthen and improve the pro-active generation and use of conflict, environment,

⁷ Among others: Brown et al (2020) Empirical studies of factors associated with child malnutrition: highlighting the evidence about climate and conflict shocks. Food Security. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s12571-020-01041-y.pdf>

migration, and market data; multi-scalar analytical approaches; and local models to provide early warning of when and where nutrition conditions might deteriorate. USAID Nawiri will also support enhanced dissemination of data for action by diverse stakeholders. (See Insight n°8 in the Governance and Systems Strengthening for Nutrition Learning Brief) (ToC Reference: SP 4.3 and IO 4.3.2)

CONCLUSION & PRIORITY AREAS FOR CONTINUED LEARNING

While USAID Nawiri's Phase I activities have validated assumptions of the important role of conflict in nutrition causality in Samburu and Turkana, they have also brought heightened awareness to the sheer complexity of the conflict system, as well as the spatial and temporal variability of its drivers and effects. Given its mandate to support the *sustainable* reduction and ultimate end of wasting in northern Kenya, and its commitment to doing so by disrupting the paradigms that have perpetuated “business as usual” programming, USAID Nawiri perceives both an opportunity and responsibility in Phase 2 to prioritize the CCEN nexus for ongoing, adaptive learning. An enhanced understanding of this nexus will not only support the sustainability of program results but will help amplify USAID Nawiri's impact beyond Samburu and Turkana. Pathways to scale that will embed adaptive learning include aiding advances in predictive modeling of malnutrition trends to enhance the synergistic contribution of humanitarian and development investments in building peace, strengthening climate resilience, and supporting an end to wasting across Kenya's drylands.

In addition to those mentioned in preceding sections, key priority areas for continued adaptive learning in Phase 2 include but are not limited to the following: (1) How might USAID Nawiri creatively leverage existing structures and institutions to address contemporary drivers of conflict (including HWC), while supporting populations to positively manage its effects through actions that strengthen climate-resilient livelihoods? (2) What platforms and approaches work for creating empathy within and among age, gender, and ethnic groups to simultaneously reduce violence at multiple levels: interpersonal, intra-communal, inter-communal, and how can boys and girls in early and middle childhood best be engaged as agents of sustainable change? (3) How might USAID Nawiri promote non-violent forms of masculinity that are compatible with women's rights and gender equality? Relatedly, what adaptations to conventional methods and tools for conflict analysis allow for a more thorough, and action-driven understanding of the relationship between gendered identities, conflict drivers, and nutrition outcomes in the local context?

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