

## Leveraging Role of Non-Governmental Organizations to Spur Development in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands of Kenya

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### Key Highlights

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a key role in implementing development programmes, sometimes partnering with the government and other times acting independently. This policy brief focuses on the contributions of NGOs in promoting development in Garissa County and identified the challenges NGOs face in implementing development programmes in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) in the country. The key highlights include:

- i) Limited funding, lack of infrastructure, and difficulties in accessing resources hinder the implementation and sustainability of development programmes. It is important to leverage on local ownership and participation in development initiatives.
- ii) Cultural norms limited social cohesion, and low levels of community organization make it difficult for NGOs to involve the local population effectively. Furthermore, limited coordination among NGOs, county government, and national government leads to low project ownership and overlapping of projects, causing delays and waste of resources.
- iii) Global political economy issues such as conflicts and pandemics can have a significant impact on NGOs' operations and funding.
- iv) Addressing these challenges will require a multi-faceted approach that includes sustainable financing and investments in human capital, resource mobilization, community engagement, and improved coordination among stakeholders. Only by addressing these challenges can NGOs effectively implement development programmes that lead to sustainable economic development.

### Introduction

The ASALs are characterized by long droughts, famine, lack of water and pasture, low levels of education, poor transport and communication infrastructure and inadequate governance from the National government. The livelihoods in the ASALs are mainly pastoralism-based, which entails the movement of humans and animals in search of pasture for their livestock and water.

Recognizing the social-political and economic marginalization in the ASAL counties in Kenya, the government launched the *Sessional Paper No. 8 of 2012* on the "National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands", which provides harmonization and institutionalization of appropriate policy responses to the marginalization and under-development of ASALs. This admission by the government that the region needs specific policy responses to address the challenges of ASALs recognized the significant role of NGOs as alternative public service

providers, complementing the government's role in promoting the development of ASALs.

While the country has a substantial number of registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the persistent problems in ASALs need a rethinking of their missions, objectives, contributions, and impact, and while Kenya has over 12,000 registered NGOs, their role may be expanded to address these present challenges. This policy brief synthesises findings from comprehensive research done in Garissa County and provides a set of practical suggestions targeted at reinvigorating and maximizing the contributions of NGOs in promoting the development of ASALs in Kenya.

### Evolving Role of NGOs in Kenya

The financial year 2021/22 NGO Coordination Board annual report revealed that out of 9,794 active NGOs, a total of 3,005 NGOs who filed their annual reports received an amount of Ksh 175.9 billion compared to 2020/2021,

where 2,712 NGOs received Ksh 138.4 billion. Over Ksh 102 billion of this was allocated to various projects, primarily in the areas of health, education, and disaster relief. This demonstrates the importance of NGOs in the development sector. It is important to highlight, however, that only 30 per cent of NGOs in Kenya comply with annual reporting requirements, indicating the need for more severe monitoring, coordination and enhancing the compliance rate. According to the Kenya Vision 2030, strong partnerships and collaborations with NGOs have been recognized to strengthen the implementation of the Vision 2030 for enhanced socio-economic development.

A comprehensive examination of the NGOs operating in Garissa County, which covers a wide range of sectors such as education, health, livelihood programmes, agriculture, and governance exposes several operational issues. These range from financial deficit, security concerns, and political interference to project duplication challenges caused by inadequate coordination. Crucially, NGOs face challenges with the inability to address structural causes of under-development, such as acute infrastructural deficits in the region. These impediments affect NGOs' efficiency, reach, and sustainability in ASALs, requiring immediate intervention.

## Emerging Issues Faced by NGOs in Promoting Development

### i) Unsustainable funding

Great and sustained dependency on donors characterize many NGOs. As a result, NGOs face difficulties in scaling up and ensuring the sustainability of projects/programmes. It was noted that when most NGO programmes ended due to lack of funds, many of their initiatives ended, yet it was expected that the government at all levels would sustain these programmes after closeout.

### ii) Political economy: Operational and environmental challenges

Many NGOs encounter challenges such as working in dangerous and conflict-prone communities. In some cases, some areas that need humanitarian aid from NGOs are not accessed due to presence of militia/terror groups. Similarly, dealing with change in unpredictable and harsh contexts (social and cultural aspects) can be a challenge for some NGOs. In addition, exposure to political interference, poor governance structures in the county and external determination of local development agendas due to donor funding requirements, interests and priorities are experienced by NGOs. Political interference by local leaders is witnessed in various cases whereby leaders want to influence the recruitment of NGO staff. In such scenarios, they push for the employment of incompetent persons who can not steer the organizations to achieve their programmes' objectives. Nepotism by local leaders during the identification of programmes' beneficiaries is also experienced.

### iii) Structural and governance issues

The inability to address local structural causes of under-development were the leading challenges faced by NGOs in promoting development in Garissa County. A local structural cause of under-development, such as poor infrastructure, hampers access to some regions. Similarly, inadequate coordination among NGOs, County government and National government resulting in duplications of development projects was a major challenge faced by several NGOs. This led to lack of ownership of projects, especially when the county government did not support activities initiated by NGOs. Due to the overlapping of some projects undertaken by different organizations and the county governments, some projects and programmes stalled. Additionally, lack of updated/current official statistics from the government useful for proper programme planning. The county government's inability to prioritize community development needs also meant that NGOs had more responsibilities and, for that reason, these organizations had to overstretch the limited resources at their disposal.

### iv) Human resource and capacity

Inadequate resource mobilization skills among the NGO staff characterize some NGOs. Further, organizational learning from experience/past interventions is lacking among some NGOs.

### v) Low community engagement and targeting

Poor community mapping and execution of interventions/programmes without due consideration of ongoing community initiatives, and difficulties in tailoring interventions, programmes to local needs and realities and poor social networking with other organizations were found to be challenges hindering the work of NGOs. The other challenges faced by NGOs in promoting development in Garissa County included the outbreak of pandemics that were unforeseen and unplanned. Particularly, COVID-19 had a significant impact on NGOs operating in the county. The pandemic disrupted the implementation of crucial projects/programmes, which exposed the beneficiaries to more risks at that time.

## Policy Recommendations

- a) **Diversify funding sources:** NGOs should explore and diversify their funding sources beyond regular donors. Partnerships with local businesses, fund raising campaigns, and the exploration of social enterprise models to create sustainable funding for their projects could all be part of this.
- b) **Improve coordination and promote joint working plan/agreement:** There is need for County governments and National government agencies to coordinate development programmes carried out by NGOs, and this can be accomplished through aligning priorities, pooling resources together, and reducing project duplication for better and more impactful benefits to local communities. In this regard, through the stewardship of the NGO Coordination Board,

it is crucial to develop and implement a policy framework that discourages project duplication in the sector. International donors could adopt similar policies adopted by USAID, Partnership for Resilience and Growth (PREG), a coordination platform that unites multiple USAID implementing partners along with sub and national government actors, Kenyan institutions, and resiliency and development practitioners from other donors to leverage resources and generate a knowledge management platform.

- c) **Sustainable planning:** NGOs could incorporate sustainability planning into their programmes from the start. This includes preparing local communities through the respective county government institutions to take over and own projects whenever NGO investment ceases.
- d) **Community engagement:** NGOs could prioritize community engagement and participation in project identification and implementation. This can be achieved by including local communities in decision-making, such that interventions/projects can be implemented to their developmental needs.
- e) **Addressing political interference:** A policy should be put in place to protect NGOs against any political interference. Additionally, to reduce political influence, recruitment practices for NGO workers should be merit-based and transparent.
- f) **Risk management and improved security:** NGOs need to be creative and innovative in coming up with risk management plans for their programmes, particularly in places prone to insecurity or unforeseen problems. These plans should include measures for risk mitigation and project continuation. NGOs could use and empower local CBOs to reach out to communities in far-flung areas. Both county and national

government institutions should endeavour to find lasting solutions to insecurity in the region for enhanced NGOs' operations and presence in all the sub-counties in the county.

- g) **Building staff capacity:** In a bid to increase the capacity and efficiency in project implementation, NGOs could introduce regular training and knowledge transfer for NGO workers.
- h) **Establishment of county monitoring frameworks:** County governments should aggressively take ownership of development programmes carried out by NGOs. Counties in consultation with the NGOs Coordination Board through County Commissioners should promote community monitoring and verify that NGOs' operations are in line with both local and national developmental goals.
- i) **Annual documentation of projects:** County governments through the directorates of donor coordination and partnerships and economic planning should document annually all NGOs' complementary activities carried out within the county. This will go a long way in establishing the level of NGOs' contributions in ASAL counties.
- j) **Enforcing compliance authority:** The degree of compliance regarding the submission of annual reports by NGOs remains low, thus a need for the NGOs Coordination Board to exert their compliance and enforcement authority. This will in turn aid in quantifying the NGO sector's contribution to both local and national development.
- k) **Enhancing governance:** To enhance openness, transparency, and accountability in the sector, NGOs operating in Kenya need to adopt the best globally accepted practices.

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### About KIPPRA Policy Briefs

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