‘Where does the money go?’
Citizen participation in Turkana County, Kenya

Community members discussing social audit reports on devolved funds. Photo: Seline Locham, Turkana Women Advocacy and Development Organisation (TWADO)

This case study is about Oxfam’s work with the Turkana people, who live in one of Kenya’s poorest counties. Kenya has a system of devolved budgets, which in theory gives local people the opportunity to become involved in local authority funding of community projects. However, initial surveys found that in fact few people knew about the budgets, and even fewer were involved. So Oxfam undertook a series of training workshops for local people, who then chose social auditors from within their communities who were able to look more deeply into how local projects were being run and how they could be improved. The project also worked with local government officials. This paper looks at what worked and the challenges that this kind of work continues to face.
Introduction

"Why should we, the Turkana people, live in such poverty when there are funds to initiate development just like in other parts of the country? The question we keep asking ourselves is where does the money go? What can we do about it as a community?" – Mary Kaukon, community member and social auditor, Turkana Central district

Turkana County is situated in the northwestern part of Kenya and has a population of almost 900,000. It is hot and dry, and water is often scarce. It is inhabited by nomadic herders who depend on their cattle, camels, goats, sheep, and donkeys for a living. They have learned to live in the harsh landscape and have a strong sense of kinship and community.

With 94 per cent of the population living below the poverty line, Turkana is one of Kenya’s poorest counties. This is partly because the Turkana people have remained marginalized in the country’s development process. As a result, their access to employment and basic services is limited.

Table 1: Kenya and Turkana County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Literacy (%)</th>
<th>School enrolment rate (%)</th>
<th>Households with no access to safe water (%)</th>
<th>Children underweight (%)</th>
<th>GDP index</th>
<th>Human Development Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkana</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Government and local governance

Kenya ranks 143rd out of 169 countries in the 2011 Human Development Index. As Table 1 shows, there are also huge inequalities within the country between people in different regions, with pastoralist areas like Turkana being among the poorest. It is a patriarchal society, where the position of women lags behind that of men. Kenya also ranks 143rd out of 187 on the United Nations Index of Gender Inequality. Despite the 80 per cent of new MPs elected in the 2007 elections, endemic corruption and significant economic and social problems persist.

One positive step in terms of governance has been the introduction of devolved budgets, where the use of funds is decided by a local committee rather than by central government. This opens up opportunities for economic development and improved performance at the local level. The budgets include funds for youth, women, people with disabilities, HIV and AIDS, for road maintenance, electrification, poverty reduction, and drought.

One of them, the Local Authorities Transfer Fund (LATF), provides funds to local authorities to improve service delivery to the public, to improve financial management and accountability, and to reduce outstanding debts. Each year, 5 per cent of national income tax receipts are allocated to the LATF. Local authorities are supposed to combine the LATF monies with their own local revenues to implement services and investments at local level.

Another fund, the Constituencies Development Fund (CDF), aims to ensure that 2.5 per cent of government revenue is devolved to the constituency level for the purposes of development and poverty reduction, particularly by means of grassroots wealth creation. Both these funds are meant be used to improve participation and governance at local level.
Bringing change to the village

‘We want to bring change to this village. We are lacking essential facilities like schools, hospitals, and even good roads, yet money was provided by the central government, and it’s not being put to good use.’ – Mary Nacham, women’s group member, Loima district, Turkana County

It is against this background that Oxfam, in partnership with the European Commission and Turkana Women Advocacy and Development Organisation (TWADO), a local partner organisation, decided to implement the Community Engagement in Good Governance project in Turkana County. The project’s overall objective is to ensure that the rights of poor and marginalized women and men are assured through their integration into political, social, and economic systems at community, district, and national levels.

The first step was to survey how far community members were aware of, and involved in, decisions about local authority funding of community projects. A study was conducted of more than 700 people in 15 locations of the three administrative districts of North, Central, and Southern Turkana. More than half the respondents were women.

Respondents were asked to prioritize local authority services. Their responses showed clearly that they felt their priorities to be basic practical needs such as clean water, reflecting the high levels of poverty in the area.

Table 2: What are the services that local authorities should provide?
Survey results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percentage of responses (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure I get clean water</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan, build, and maintain roads</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health services, housing, and schools</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote development of markets, slaughter houses</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garbage collection and environmental cleanliness</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of sewerage system</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance security</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide services to prevent and fight disaster e.g. fire</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, the survey sought to understand levels of community participation in local authority processes. It focused on Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plans (LASDAP). These are supposed to be participatory planning processes linking locally developed plans with local authority budgets as part
of the LATF. Technically, communities are legally bound to participate. However, the survey found that 82 per cent of respondents had never heard of LASDAP and that only 5 per cent had actually participated in meetings. Another survey showed that 65 per cent of community members in Turkana felt that they did not have a role to play in ensuring that public services are properly managed.

Communities taking responsibility: accountability in practice

‘Some projects we see here in our village are not worth the amount of money that we are told has been spent on them. We want to make sure that the individuals responsible take responsibility for their actions. It is simply unacceptable; people cannot continue to suffer like this in poverty’. – Lenard Lokwamur, community member and social auditor, Turkana Central district

It was clear from these surveys that communities wanted to know more about how they could participate in deciding how the funds were spent – and making sure that this was done properly. So the project took time to educate community members on good governance, responsible citizenship, decentralized funds, project identification, prioritization, monitoring and evaluation, and how to engage in social auditing and public expenditure tracking. Women’s group leaders were targeted for training on governance and devolved funds, and were given information on where and how to access the funds and services available from the government.

After each sensitization session, people were given a chance to select individuals from within the community who could be trained further as social auditors. This helped to instil a sense of community ownership of the process. Each social audit group had an average of ten members, generally half women and half men. Due to their familiarity with the local context, the members quickly identified relevant projects, as the example in Box 1 shows.

**Box 1: ‘Promising heaven and earth’ – dealing with the misuse of bursary funds for needy students**

In each financial year the Municipal Council of Lodwar allocates each ward 400,000 Kenyan shillings ($3,900) to be disbursed in the form of school bursaries. A social audit in Napetet and Akwang’a wards discovered that some of the students who were supposed to receive bursaries had never received any money. For the financial year 2009/10, out of a total Ksh 800,000, Ksh 284,500 ($2,800) – 35 per cent – had not been allocated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Paid fees</th>
<th>Unpaid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akwang’a – allocated Ksh 400,000</td>
<td>Ksh 255,000</td>
<td>Ksh 145,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napetet – allocated Ksh 400,000</td>
<td>Ksh 260,500</td>
<td>Ksh 139,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The social audit team held various consultative meetings with councillors from the two wards and with the Lodwar Municipality Town Clerk. They were told that the bursary funds were diverted intentionally to settle municipal debts and that as soon as the ward received money from central government, it would be given to the students.
However, a month later, the money had arrived from the government but the students had still not received their bursaries. When contacted, the officials were not willing to talk about the issue.

The social audit team finally managed to obtain a list of students who should have received the money and a list of the cheques that had been sent to the schools. They also talked to the head teachers. They found anomalies here as well – for example, cheques reported to have been paid but which had never been received. They also found that councillors usually discarded the list of needy students shortlisted by the bursary committees and gave the money to other students instead – for example, some cheques meant for poor students had been given to students at Turkana Driving School. The result was that needy students could not continue with their education.

The team then held a meeting that was attended by the area chief, local religious leaders, the Napetet social audit team, and community members. The area councillors, however, declined to attend. They later criticised the area chief for hosting the meeting.

But the community process had now developed its own momentum. At the meeting, there was consensus on the following points:

- People felt that their leaders had misled them, believing that because they were illiterate they would not speak out. ‘They begged for votes while promising heaven and earth only to let [us] down.’ The community vowed to vote them out in the next election.

- The community agreed that the beneficiaries of the fund from that point on should be needy children. Existing funds should be reallocated to those who needed them most.

- Turkana County Council should be made to repay the money it had used from the two wards to pay debts or it would be sued for diverting money meant for needy children.

- The community members requested that a transparency board be set up where they would demand that their civic leaders display all the reports and the allocation lists from then onwards.

With examples like the one described in Box 1, it is not surprising that there is mistrust between local authority officials and councillors, with each side accusing the other of vested interests and malpractice. If accountability is not improved, and results are not delivered, people are likely to become increasingly cynical and alienated. But through these devolved budgets, there is a significant window of opportunity to develop a more open, participatory, and accountable system, as the two contrasting examples in Boxes 2 and 3 demonstrate.
Box 2: ‘Now we are happy’ – Kanamkemer dormitory project

Kanamkemer is a mixed primary school with about 2,000 pupils. The dormitory project was an initiative of the parents and the School Management Committee, who recognised that pupils who trekked long distances to school every day needed somewhere to stay overnight. This would help reduce school drop-out rates, especially among girls.

A proposal was therefore written by the School Management Committee and submitted to the Turkana Central Constituency Development Fund. The contracting and supplying of building materials were vetted and these were sourced. The Committee resolved to award the contract to the lowest bidder.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total amount allocated</th>
<th>Ksh 800,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total amount spent</td>
<td>Ksh 800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project status</td>
<td>The project is complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents received/accessed by the social audit team</td>
<td>Minutes, payment vouchers, invoices, bank slips</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why the project succeeded:
- The community, including the School Management Committee, and all of the Project Management Committee (PMC) members were involved, thus showing a level of transparency.
- There was a good relationship between the school head teacher and the PMC.

One member of the PMC said: ‘By the time the project ended, the work was good, funds were well utilized, no one was complaining and the community was happy. Now we are happy that our children are accommodated within the school and they do not have to walk long distances.’

Box 3: Learning lessons: Nabulon dormitory project

Nabulon is a girls’ primary school with about 700 pupils. As with Kanamkemer school, the dormitory project was an idea that came from parents who thought their children had too far to travel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total amount allocated</th>
<th>Ksh 800,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total amount spent</td>
<td>Ksh 795,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project status at the time social audit was conducted</td>
<td>Incomplete and work had stopped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents received/accessed</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Nabulon PMC told Oxfam why it believed the project had initially failed:

- **Communication:** The head teacher did not involve other committee members in the implementation of the project or communicate with them. There were also difficulties in the relationship between the head teacher and the contractor.

- **Poor documentation and record-keeping:** no single record was obtained.

- **The project was never inspected** by the Constituency Development Fund Committee or by the Department of Public Works.

- **Poor financial management:** Materials were diverted to a different project, despite the fact that the dormitory project was not yet complete.

The community raised these issues with their local MP, who ordered the CDF Committee to allocate an additional Ksh 400,000 to the project. This has since been used to complete the building.

**Building the capacity of local authorities**

*Before we developed the strategic plan, activities at the council were implemented haphazardly without any guidance.* – James Lobwin, development officer, Turkana County Council

The social auditors found problems on the government side too. Local authority officers did not know enough about the LATF or other funds. Councillors did not have the capacity to formulate strategies or to make key choices, but instead tended to intervene on an ad hoc basis, often at the implementation stage. In practice, much decision-making was informal, while formally approved budgets were not adhered to due to the lack of financial resources, or because of misappropriation of funds.

Oxfam therefore decided to design a capacity-building package aimed at giving local authority officials the knowledge and skills needed to enable them to work effectively. This consisted of training on good governance, social accountability, and citizen participation, along with support to develop a strategic plan.

During the training, lack of planning quickly emerged as one of the major causes of confusion. Local authority officials were therefore supported to develop five-year strategic plans (2009–13), which were subsequently approved by the Minister for Local Government. Officials also developed:

- A **service delivery charter** outlining the purpose and the standards of services expected from the municipality;

- A **clients’ charter** outlining the actual services provided by the municipality, such as road maintenance, garbage collection, school bursaries, grants to community initiatives, disposal of unclaimed bodies, and payment for council services such as land rates, business permits, and burial fees;

- A **citizens’ scorecard** to monitor and audit the performance of the councils.

These documents were disseminated to the communities through public meetings organized via a local network of civil society organizations.
‘The best thing this project has brought to my village’: what has been achieved?

‘Today our operations are more focused and projects are in line with the strategic plan. The service charter has enabled the communities to be more aware of the operations of the council and the services offered. Now we have more people coming to make enquiries about how they can access services such as school bursary funds, grants to community development initiatives, and even how to participate in the monitoring of the projects run by the council.’ – James Lobwin, development officer, Turkana County Council

The project has achieved much at both local authority and community levels. For example, the LASDAP process now takes place annually, and community members discuss and prioritize development projects for their local areas. The council budgeting process is now a public event conducted every year and the approved budget is shared with the public in July, when citizens are invited to give comments and feedback to the council. Oxfam has also supported the council to set up a ‘transparency board’, where its annual budget and expenditure details are posted for public validation.

In addition, the council’s accounts are now accessible to anyone who wishes to know how much money it has received and how much has been spent for what purpose. This can have practical results. For example, according to development officer James Lobwin, ‘The council had to revise all the fees and charges for various services it supplies as a result of feedback that we got from the community after disseminating the client service delivery charter. The community members had complained that the charges were prohibitive to most of them.’

The impact of the trainings on devolved funds for communities can be summarised in the words of Josephine Akiru, in charge of Lokichar provincial administration: ‘After being trained on devolved funds by Oxfam, the Lokabuur women’s group leader mobilized her group members and went to the Ministry of Arid Lands to request training on small business entrepreneurship, which they succeeded in getting. They later proceeded to the Ministry of Social Services to request loans. Today most of their members are engaged in petty trade and are able to earn some income to feed their families. In my view, engaging community members in accountability processes is the best thing that this project has brought to my village.’

The power of knowledge: what works and what doesn’t

‘It is only the power of knowledge that will free this community from poverty. I want to know so that I can take the right action.’ – Elizabeth Longoe, community member, Turkana Central district

This project is not a ‘quick fix’. It took time to get the work off the ground and, because citizen engagement in public resource monitoring is a new concept in Turkana County, participation remains a frustrating process. Some politicians and government officials still do not recognize the fact that they are accountable to the community as well as to local government. At the same time, people in the community often do not have the skills, knowledge,
or inclination to become involved. But the project has begun to make inroads on both sides. A number of factors were key to its successes:

1. **Training and sensitizing both service providers and service users** was crucial. Accountability can only be achieved when interventions target both the supply and demand sides of governance (where supply side is the government and demand side is the community).

2. **Individuals make a difference:** In those places that seem to be performing best, it is usually possible to identify one key person, or a small group, who are committed to reform and good practice, and who are able to work effectively with others. As one Kanamkemer PMC member noted: ‘We realized that it was important to work together as a team. It all happened under the good leadership of the school head teacher. He made sure information was shared with every member of the team. Together we decided to comply with the right procedures.’

3. A lot depends on **local leadership** – councillors, government officers, fund managers, and in some cases PMCs. But in many places there remain serious problems of bad relationships, lack of trust, corruption, opportunism, and misuse of resources that are difficult to overcome.

4. **Good liaison with, and involvement of, government officials:** For example, the Project Steering Committees (PSCs) have two representatives from government offices at the district level and two from the local authorities, who change each year. This has enabled the government to understand the governance activities and makes it easy for the project to mobilize government officials and councillors for training on good governance. It has also meant that government officials do not view community empowerment activities with suspicion.

5. **Local communities** are the ultimate beneficiaries of the decentralization process; therefore they must **empower themselves to demand accountability** and to monitor policy implementation. This takes time. Community engagement is a dialogue that provides citizens with the opportunity to provide feedback to service providers within a non-threatening environment.

Knowledge of the existence of the project is now widespread in the region. Many community-based organizations have approached Oxfam to ask how they can participate. They are beginning to understand their role in sensitizing communities to hold local governance institutions accountable. The government side, for its part, is beginning to include communities in setting development priorities and in project monitoring and evaluation. In this way, the project will eventually realize its goals – a government that is more accountable and responsive to its citizens’ needs, and an empowered community that is capable of holding governance institutions to account.

Finally, come the 2012 general elections in Kenya, the incoming government will embrace a new governance structure and system (at national and county levels) in which more power and resources will be devolved to county-level governments. With such a system in place, it is critical that citizens actively engage with the governance system for effective service delivery. The Turkana governance project has provided a good foundation for this to happen. Oxfam will continue to support activities which seek to ensure that this continues.
Notes
