

**Social Aspects of Dynamic Poverty Traps: The case of  
Ng'ambo Location, Baringo District, Kenya**

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## **Introduction**

This paper is an effort to provide the sociological dimension of poverty dynamics among the Ilchamus community of Baringo district, Kenya. Other similar studies in Kenya have been done in Marsabit and Vihiga districts. The study acts as a complement to survey analyses that were focused on the quantitative factors determining poverty traps among rural households in Kenya and Madagascar.

Although economic factors are certainly significant in explaining the poverty levels among rural agricultural households, they fail to account for all causes of household poverty and why some households become and remain poor while others come out of poverty yet they seem to operate within the same economic environment. Sociological factors are also significant and, for some groups like pastoral communities, may even outweigh economic considerations. Furthermore, in many cases, they establish the context in which the economic factors become significant. Clearly, the economic environment, though necessary is not sufficient to account for poverty levels within rural households.

The arid and semi-arid areas of Kenya represent a region with a special people with high incidences of poverty, lack of productive resources other than livestock and relatively marginalized from the rest of the country. At the same time the area is experiencing a rapid population increase. A great deal has been written on the non-economic factors that account for the large livestock herds kept by pastoral communities when it would make *sense* to keep a few in line with the land's carrying capacities. In addition, the sophisticated market economy remains remote to the communities living in far-flung arid areas occupied by the pastoralists.

The objectives of this study were twofold:

1. To characterize, identify, and analyze dynamic poverty processes using social and historical methods, with particular attention being given to the effects of shocks on welfare dynamics and the relationship between natural resources management practices, changes in natural capital and human welfare dynamics.

2. To identify existing and potential strategies for households to escape poverty traps and to understand the constraints in employing them.

### **Methodology**

This study involved focus group discussions to understand the range of important concepts related to poverty processes. It sought to understand the general poverty trends in the community with time and the causative agents. Further, the discussions helped identify the escape from poverty strategies employed at the community and general household levels. More than 20 members of the community assembled at one central place in Loropil area and with the use of pre-set guidelines gave data on poverty trend lines and timelines on poverty-inducing natural or artificial occurrences. This was followed by case studies of selected households to provide their socio-historical profiles. The procedure in identifying the households for the case studies borrowed heavily from the works of the earlier quantitative work. Households were classified into a panel matrix of 8 categories. They included the Nonpoor – Nonpoor, Poor – Nonpoor, Poor – Poor, and Nonpoor – Poor categories of households. Within the Nonpoor – Nonpoor category and the Poor – Poor categories of households, subcategories included those households that had experienced a significant increase in their wealth, those that had experienced a decrease and those who had experienced no significant change. All these divisions were made possible through the quantitative analyses from the earlier survey. From each of the subcategories two households were selected and subjected to an interview to determine how the households had survived over time given changing resource and asset bases with time. The Poor-Nonpoor category had only one household. In addition, there were no cases for the Nonpoor – Nonpoor, decrease and no significant change categories and hence the sample size yielded only 11 households. The maximum expected was to be 16 households.

After the case studies, a survey of key informants was done to corroborate and expand upon the key issues and details that emerged from the focus group and household interviews. The key informants included an old paramount chief, the oldest serving area civic leader (councilor), a district electoral commissioner from the area, and manager of World Vision-Marigat, a renowned trader from the area and an educationist from the community.

### **The study site**

This study centered on a small section of Central Baringo district where part of the Ilchamus live. The study concentrated on one administrative location, Ng'ambo. The households sampled were spread within three villages, Ng'ambo, Loropil, and Sintaan. The region represents the floor of the part of the Rift Valley lying between 36<sup>00'</sup>, 36<sup>015'</sup> E and 0<sup>020'</sup>, 0<sup>030'N</sup>. It is inhabited by the Ilchamus who were originally pastoralists but are embracing agro-pastoralism. The community has kept and relied on livestock whose mix has changed over a period of time. Initially, zebu cattle were the major livestock kept. With overgrazing and a change in vegetation cover from grassland towards bush land, goats and sheep are the dominant livestock kept.

The area around Ng'ambo has been experiencing a cycle of droughts over the years. Very severe drought tends to come every 10 to 15 years and small drought just every three to four years. On average, the monthly amount of rainfall from the area falls within the 50 – 55 mm bracket. Available records indicate that Ng'ambo area receives heavy rainfall on an average 40 – 45 days a year.

The population of the area is about 11,300 and the density is 76 persons/km<sup>2</sup> representing one of the most densely populated areas of Marigat division. Besides livestock keeping, irrigated crop production can be regarded as the most important supplemental livelihood together with bee keeping, fishing and craft making.

### **Community level factors affecting welfare change**

The Ilchamus' welfare is intricately tied to livestock to the point where the number of animals owned determines society's view on a household's economic status. Households lacking livestock are considered poor irrespective of whatever other property they own. Income from wherever source has to be utilized in livestock purchase, otherwise the household is poor. In fact, reference is made to livestock when talking about assets or wealth within the community.

The indicators of poverty include lack of livestock, persistent borrowing for survival, living and depending on others and dependence on wild game and wild plants for food

*(The Ilchamus depended on wild animals and plants very many years ago when they did not have livestock. It was claimed that only the poor, because they lack livestock depend on wildlife).* The poverty line is embedded in the Ilchamus' saying 'people differ in five', meaning that owning less than five head of cattle and five shoats (sheep and goats) imputes you with poverty.

More than twenty years ago, droughts had more devastating consequences than now, thanks to current relief efforts, ability to move far in search of jobs in towns and diversified sources of income for households. The 1980s was the most favorable period, experiencing only one drought a year unlike the other decades. Since 1990, things changed. There has been a general increase in general poverty levels of households within the community and this was attributed to a number of factors.

(i). Increase in the number of children going to school, resulting in more livestock sales for school fees. The few animals left are poorly managed since the children are not available for herding work. Further, most children drop out of school during and after droughts compounding the poverty problem.

(ii). Droughts are now accompanied with livestock and human diseases unlike in the past where they occurred solo.

(iii). Increased frequency and severity of floods that sweep away livestock (wealth) and other property to Lake Baringo. This is worsened by unexpected changes in the course of River Perkerra. The floods usually come on the heels of droughts.

(iv). Dwindling crop harvests over the years. In the 1980s high crop harvests in the irrigation scheme coupled with guaranteed availability of market accounted for the booming micro-economies in the region. Currently, only a fraction of the land in the irrigation scheme is cultivated annually and this implies a depressed per capita household wealth.

(v). People have diversified into other projects reducing the capital for investment in livestock, thus depressing their numbers and hence a reduction in the number of wealthy households over time.

(vi). The floods caused by River Perkerra at the end of 2002 after the weir was washed away were a new addition to the recent calamities to affect the community. The floods washed away houses and livestock to Lake Baringo leaving most of the community in destitution.

The story on how the poor in the community have been receiving treatment over time has taken a worse trend. In the past, the poor were a responsibility of the community. Nowadays, a poor person cannot borrow anything from the neighbor. The opinion of the poor has no value in the eyes of the public. The able no longer invite the poor to their parties, something that could not be heard of in the past, where everybody especially those of the same clan were automatically invited to the feasts. The hand of generosity has been severed to the level that mothers no longer encourage their sons to invite their age mates to share food, especially if the age mates would not be in a position to reciprocate. This selfishness is a new phenomenon within the Ilchamus community. A number of factors have precipitated this. For one, peoples' actions are driven by economic considerations where expenditure should attract a benefit. According to one member of the group, 'helping a poor person is like pouring water in a bottomless pit, you cannot expect to see any benefits in return'. In the past, people had a religious obligation towards the poor. Negligence of the poor was an invitation of God' curse and wrath. This belief has lost relevancy in the face of more economic hardships. The poor are also to blame partly for they tend to abuse the generosity bestowed upon them. Some poor end up eating somebody's animal when given only to milk and utilize the milk. Others mismanage the animal while others tend to over-depend on a benefactor once he shows that he can help. All these have forced the rich members of the community into a selfish shell. However, not all the poor are neglected. There are those who have had to benefit from their clans' generosity to develop and escape poverty permanently. However, escape from poverty was and is not restricted to clan benevolence. Other strategies existed and still exist through which people escaped poverty. These included:

*Crop farming.* In the past, people with no livestock used to produce millet and sorghum and exchange the harvest with small stock. Improved farming came with the advent of Perkerra Irrigation Scheme. The crops from the irrigation scheme included horticultural products and cereals. The crop harvests had a guaranteed market. The farmers used the

money to buy livestock. Currently, though there is limited market guarantee for most of the crops grown in the Irrigation Scheme, farming is still critical to accessing income for livestock purchase by the Ilchamus.

*Cattle rustling.* This was the most widely practiced mode of livestock acquisition used by the Ilchamus. The activity was carried against the Turkana who would also reciprocate in kind. This traditional activity was legal within the cultural framework. When the Pokot came with heavy guns on the scene and brought in the criminal dimension. Currently, cattle rustling is outlawed in Kenya and is no longer practiced as a way of improving the economic position of the community.

*Marrying off of daughters.* This used to be the easiest way of escaping poverty in the past. The household head could give out the daughter in marriage even if very young. Nowadays, the girls are no longer forced to marry anybody and they stay until maturity before marriage irrespective of the household's wealth status.



### **Household level factors affecting welfare change**

Most of the households attributed their poor economic status to the droughts of 1991, 1994 and 1999/2000. A number of them managed to pull out of its effect while others still experience its negative effects. A few households blamed the floods of 2002, which carried all their wealth to Lake Baringo.

However there are a number of factors that helped households change their economic status from poverty to riches. These included:

1. Ownership of a farm and farming within the Perkerra Irrigation Scheme. Production of Kenya Seed Company maize was one sure way of earning enough income to purchase livestock. Those households with land within the Scheme or those with the capacity to hire the land (e.g. Nolpunyaki Lekararaiyo) and farm found it easy to escape poverty i.e. avoid falling into poverty. It appears like land outside the irrigation Scheme did not play a big role in increasing household wealth mainly because no serious returns could be realized from the same because of lack of rainfall.
2. Having educated and working class children. Remittances by working children played an important role in making households acquire wealth (see the case of Lopedes Alaper). Though some households blamed education as a contributor to their poverty state, those households with educated children were on the wealthier.
3. Belonging to an active women group. Nearly all households that had escaped poverty had women as members of active women groups. The women groups were a source of income through fundraising for each of their members and the normal merry-go-round activity. Some women groups received support from non-governmental organizations to buy water pipes to access water for irrigation around their farms.

Other factors were pro-poverty for some households. These included:

1. Working as casual laborers. Working as a casual laborer was consistently correlated with households that were unable to break out of the poverty circle.

This might be explained by the low wages associated with the activity resulting in little disposable incomes for the households to invest.

2. Lack of land in the irrigation scheme. This denied large incomes to the households concerned.
3. Over-reliance on livestock. Households that relied on livestock were prone to losing everything they had in a drought or flood and attaining hopelessness because there was no other source of livelihood they could turn to for survival.
4. Wrong mentality. Some of the poor members of the community felt poor and were contented enough to accept it. It would take a lot of effort to change their attitude. For instance, Macharia Kichuki accepts his position as a foreigner who is poor and sees no way his position can change.

## Appendix 1: Case studies

### Case study 1: Lopedes Alaper: Nonpoor-Nonpoor (Increase)

Lopdes Alaper remembers the late 1970,s and early 1980,s with a spat on the ground and a curse. Her household had only three children by then, but life was a nightmare. The family had no iota of wealth (livestock) and the children knew misery in detail. Their main source of food then was *ndorok* (a water lily from Lake Baringo producing millet-like grains) and the family relied on herbs to maintain their health. This was supplemented by begging from clan members and other relatives. Now, with 9 children (3 girls and 6 boys), life is paradoxically bearable. It took the family about ten years to break completely from the grips of poverty. By the time the first research was done, 1988, her household had already escaped from poverty. Alaper's household currently owns in excess of 20 head of cattle and more than 100 small stock.

The Perkerra Irrigation Scheme was the savior for her household. The family entered the production of pepper, which had a market by then. She also planted maize for food and onions for sale though pepper provided the bulk of the income. With income from sale of the first crop, she bought 1 cow and 2 goats. With the next crop, she bought more goats. The household allocated some money to take children to school since educated people (the chief and councilor by then) at the time was recognized in society. The children are now assisting with the education of the others. Out of a total of 9 children, only two are still in primary school and they have no problem with school fees. The rest are either working or are in secondary school. Alaper's household has an iron walled house that is considered permanent. Within the same homestead, the sons also have similar houses.

She attributes her current economic stability to farming in the irrigation scheme, remittances from children and a large herd of livestock, which is a regular source of milk and occasionally meat.

According to Alaper, it takes people a shorter time to come out of poverty now unlike in the past. She attributes this to the presence of the livestock auction at Marigat Shopping center, which attracts buyers from far with better price deals. In fact, Alaper thinks that lack of an organized livestock marketing system in the past was the root cause of rampant poverty. At the onset of the 1999/2000 drought Alaper's household disposed off much of the livestock and retained just a few. Though some of them died, the impact was not as great as what some of her neighbors experienced.

A part from water conservation through water pans, Alaper feels that there is totally no natural resource management activity within the community. As a person, she has been called upon in the past to de-silt a water pan in Sintaan area. She belongs to one group; *Saruni Women Group*. The group collectively hires land in the Irrigation Scheme after which it is distributed equally among the members for planting Kenya Seed Company Maize. She chose Saruni Women Group over the famous *Maendeleo Ya Wananawake Women group* because the latter relied on external support from politicians and was only active during elections.

## **Case study 2: Nolpunyaki Lekararaiyo: Nonpoor-Nonpoor (increase)**

Nolpunyaki comes from Loropil village of Ng'ambo location. She cannot remember the year she was born or got married. She married into a poor family. She lived a life of poverty up to the time she had the 4<sup>th</sup> born son (who was born around 1967). By 1970, she had been allocated land in the Irrigation Scheme and was an established farmer. Nolpunyaki's household enjoyed a life of wealth from 1969 to 1973 when a drought destroyed all the household's animals. However, they were not exclusively depended on livestock. The household used to produce pepper and onion in Perkerra Irrigation Scheme. There was market for these products and after a time the family acquired another lot of livestock through purchases and breeding. The accumulated wealth prompted them to sideline crop farming since they felt contented. Her farm in the irrigation scheme was given out to somebody else because she neglected it. In 1999/2000 Nolpunyaki lost her livestock again to drought. Because their farm in the scheme had been given out, they had to hire land in the irrigation scheme and re-engage in crop farming. She is now a maize seed farmer for Kenya Seed Company in the Irrigation Scheme. In addition, she brews chang'aa, one of the local distilled brews with high alcohol content. Though it is against the law, she says that it was one of the activities that made her household withstand the negative impacts of the 1999/2000 drought. The amount of wealth the family has grown from zero after the drought of 1999/2000, to cows in excess of 10, more than 30 goats and about 20 sheep.

Her husband, Mr. Lekararaiyo, used to work as a casual in canal construction, road works and tree planting (with the forestry department) just before and after the birth of the 4<sup>th</sup> child. This used to supplement the income from crop farming. He also stopped engaging in casual employment when their wealth grew substantially. He is now too old to engage in any form of employment. Nolpunyaki feels strong enough to work and provide for him.

Nolpunyaki says that they had no real trouble with school fees and they managed to educate their children and now two of them are teachers. She is happy that the sons' households are richer than her household. The sons however remit some of their income to parents. One of the sons owns a posho mill at Loropil Centre where Nolpunyaki spends most of her time. She harvests a lot of maize in the Irrigation Scheme. This represents the largest source of income at any one time in her life though it comes only once per year.

According to Nolpunyaki, a poor person is one who has less than 10 small stock and less than 4 cows. In the past, the rich in the community cared for the poor unlike now. There is so much work especially with Kenya Seed Company maize and it does not feel good for her to sweat it out alone only to share it with those who did not help her, even if they are poor. Some people are poor simply because they spent most of their time in drinking places forgetting that they have to work to acquire wealth.

Nolpunyaki belongs to *Naya Nkare* women group. The group organizes merry-go-round fundraising activities where money is raised and items bought for each member on a rotational basis. This has helped her acquire household property, especially utensils. When it comes to soil and water conservation, she attributes little to her household's effort. Soils within the Ilchamus flats are under no threats of erosion and there has been

no recognizable decline in soil fertility within the region. The National Irrigation Board programs water for irrigation and there is no misuse by any one individual.

### **Case study 3: Renson Lesisikoi: Nonpoor – Poor**

Renson is a man who has known the faces of poverty and wealth through the years. He was born in a poor family and therefore had to struggle for survival from an early age. In the 1970s while a bachelor and staying with his mother, as his father had passed away earlier on in life, Renson was out daily doing casual menial jobs. He used to work in the irrigation scheme for very little wage. He only managed to raise enough money to buy livestock when he got short stints at KARI – Perkerra and KETRI offices in Marigat. By the time he was marrying his first wife in the early 1980s, he had a few livestock to himself. Later on he began dry land farming and farming under irrigation. By 1990, Renson's household was considered among the wealthy households in the community. The drought of 1991 forced him into poverty once again. He was left with very few animals. He was lucky to find help from one of his *Ilparsaina* clan members who lent him a cow to milk. He finally managed to build a herd and flock from the animals and by mid 1990s, his household was wealthy again. He took a second wife.

The 1999/2000 drought forced his household into poverty again. Renson tried to overcome the drought effects on his wealth by selling off most of his animals with a hope of buying them after the drought. However, the drought came together with human diseases. He spent nearly all he had obtained from animal sales on medical care for himself and other family members. Relief food was available but at the bare minimum. As if that was not enough, the floods of 2002/2003 carried nearly all he had to Lake Baringo.

He is trying his hand at farming. The income from the 2003 harvest was used to purchase 3 head of cattle. The remaining goats have multiplied and together with a few purchases had a total of 30 by the close of November 2003. Asked to name the causes of poverty in his household, the man from Sintaan village, in Ng'ambo location assumes a distant look and says, "*I would be somebody if it was not for droughts, diseases and the floods*".

Renson believes that poor people find it easier now than in the past. In the past, people died because of poverty unlike now where it is possible to access external help from the government and relief organizations. He argues that the well-off are more willing currently to help the poor unlike in the past because of Christianity.

He does not belong to any group because they are mainly composed of women. If he needs credit, he goes to members of his clan who offer him credit in kind or cash. He pays back the cash at no interest.

#### **Case study 4: Lillian Lorokowa Nabori: Poor – poor (increase)**

Lillian is married to Lorokowa Nabori. She was born of the clan Ilkapis and the husband is an Ilmurtanat. They stay in Loropil village, Ng'ambo location of Marigat division.

Lillian remembers the early 1980s as the years of prosperity for her household members. The household had more than 100 head of cattle, 300 sheep and approximately 1000 goats. Her parents gave her livestock when she was getting married and they multiplied to increase the herd within the boma. Lillian actually had more livestock than her husband, but quickly adds, "The man owns all the livestock in the boma". Those were the days she took eating good food for granted. There was plenty of food, which she could access through sale of livestock. Likewise, medicine and clothing were easy to access. This was the state until the year 1984 when her livestock started dying as a result of drought and diseases. She sold out some to avoid total loss. By 1988 she was only having four herds of cattle and 10 shoats. However in 1991 when the drought came they were all wiped out. All the animals died and she was left with nothing to rely on. The family was left destitute and she remembers begging from neighbors and relatives for survival. Occasionally, the husband would team up with her to work in the irrigation scheme on casual basis. The income from the casual jobs was not enough to provide the whole family with food. Her parents and husband's clan members helped them occasionally, but it was not like the days when they had their own wealth.

Some farming around the homestead during the rainy period enabled the family to harvest some sorghum and maize. She exchanged these for small stock and by the late 1990s had some few goats and sheep. When the drought of 1999/2000 came, it cleared everything the family had and left them with nothing. Currently Lillian and the husband have no job. GEF Lake Baringo wetlands project helped the household with water pipes, which they connected to the main water supply from Chemeron water dam to Ng'ambo Secondary School. She currently uses the water to grow vegetables, maize, beans and sorghum. Lillian belongs to a women group that has organized a merry-go-round where each of the members receives cash once a year to use for any project of choice. It was not a lot of money (refused to disclose the amount!) but it helped her to acquire food for the family where relief food from the government and non-governmental organizations was not sufficient.

### **Case study 5: David Ilngambo: Poor-poor (increase)**

David traces all his poverty problems to early 1980s when the drought of 1984 wiped out all his livestock. His Ilmurtant clan members tried helping him by giving him some livestock. When he was about to stand on his feet, the drought of 1994 wiped out all his livestock yet again. It was after this, when he was reduced to a beggar, that he started working as a casual laborer in the Perkerra Irrigation Scheme. His clan members were not willing to give him livestock again. The best they could do was to lend him livestock. From working in the irrigation scheme, he raised enough capital to buy and sell green vegetables on a very small scale. Money from the petty business was not enough to care for his family's needs. He supplemented it by borrowing from his Ilmurtanat clan members and friends. By 1997 he had a few goats and sheep. When the drought of 1999/2000 came, it cleared them and he was left with totally nothing. His mother saw the suffering he was undergoing with his family and she gave him a calf, which he has been rearing since then.

His main benefactors after the last drought were the government of Kenya, Non-governmental organizations and his clan members. Their help to his household was in terms of food, money for paying for medical services and some materials for clothing.

David has no farm in the Irrigation Scheme. He only goes there to work as a casual laborer. He has two wives and his children are still very young. He has a piece of land for dry land farming. This only comes in handy when the rains are available. He can then plant maize, beans and sorghum. The floods of 2002 washed away his crop for that year when he had great hopes of a bounty harvest given the rains. The floods also carried away his one goat and its kid. He currently owns one cow and 4 goats. With these, David considers himself poor. He said that, a poor person should have less than 5 head of cattle and 5 small stocks. To be rich, one should have in excess of 50 head of cattle and 100 small stocks. Asked whether he hopes to own such magnitude of wealth, David's hopes lie with his children. He hopes to educate his children to a point where they will get employed to earn enough to assist him to get out of poverty.

David was not alone in facing the ravages of the two droughts. There are those who managed to escape the poverty grip while others still face the same poverty conditions with him. Those who managed to escape did not do it overnight. They were either hard working or educated their children who are now employed and whose remittances are crucial to their wealth creation. Others had capital to engage in crop farming within the Irrigation Scheme. Still, others were able to acquire wealth using the income from crop farming. Those like him who had nothing to begin from still suffer the problems of poverty.

In the past, droughts were not as severe as now. People were fewer and grazing grounds were larger. Floods were not there to destroy property. In times of drought and hunger, morans could move with livestock to as far as Rugus hills where they could access pasture. One of them could bring back milk and meat for the other family members to use as food. Things have changed these days. With the advent of education, money meat for buying food and livestock is used for fees payment. Currently, the rich do not extend services beyond the hired laborer. As such, it was easier to escape from poverty to riches than it is now. David blames everything on education. Because of education, nobody is



concerned with his neighbor: they concentrate only on their immediate families. That is why the poor find it harder now than in the past.

In the past, David found it easier to cultivate anywhere and plant crops for his family members. Now settlements have increased and people have started demarcating areas as their own. As such, David does not realize much from dry land crop farming. He has no money to purchase a water pump and therefore cannot utilize water from Perkerra River for irrigated farming.

A part from being a member of an age set, David does not belong to any group whether formal or informal. The groups he has heard of are for women.

## Case study 6: Kanangole Lekipirich: Nonpoor – poor

Kanangole's boma has totally no livestock. This was not always the case for the 1943-born Loborkishu clan man. He did not know what poverty was until the drought of 1999/2002. At the onset of the drought, he had 20 head of cattle, 35 goats and 40 sheep. At the end of the drought, there was nothing to "mark his *boma*" with even small drop of dung. The animals died from starvation and livestock diseases. He had been used to hiring people to work on his farm where he practiced dry land farming for maize, beans and sorghum. There was no problem accessing basic needs like food, clothing and medical care since he had an income stream from his livestock. But after 2000, he was reduced to a 'nobody'. He had to depend on relief at the start, but this is no longer available.

Now Kanangole says that a visitor who knew him before the drought would not believe that he is the one and same person he knew by then. He has aged drastically in the recent past. This has been compounded by sickness and lack of enough food. He tries to do casual jobs in the Irrigation Scheme but he is not consistent in reporting for duty because of his condition. In addition, the money paid as wages is too small to buy a meal (gets about US\$ 0.60 per day he has worked) for a large family. He has been reduced to begging from people he would never have dreamed of begging from in the past. His children are young and strong. They work as casuals and make some remittances to him. However, the jobs are not available always. On several occasions the whole family has gone without food.

Kanangole would like to cultivate his land for farming but the rains are not predictable as they were in the past. He would be happy to practice irrigated agriculture, but he has no land in the Irrigation Scheme and neither does he have a water pump for pumping water to his piece of land outside the Scheme.

By observing how people are living these days, Kanangole believes that if he had educated his children, he would not have sunk to such a low level of poverty. Those who educated their children in the past receive something from them in a form of money, food, clothing, and even better housing. He has children in school and hopes they will have a better life in future.

In the past, poor people could escape poverty through borrowing and receiving donations from their clan members. Now, things have changed. People have become mean and merciless. One could farm outside the Irrigation Scheme and build up wealth from the farm proceeds. Now, the rains have become scarce and unreliable. He has seen people who were affected by the drought in similar manner escape poverty through engaging in businesses either of selling vegetables or having a kiosk for selling basic items like bread, sugar salt etc. But they had capital for all these activities, which he did not have.

The only natural resource his household can lay a claim to is the portion of land where he used to cultivate crops. He had leverage in terms of increasing the area under crop production since the whole area was open to him and anybody who wanted to practice farming. Now, the population has increased. There are settlements everywhere and he is hedged in from all sides.

## Case study 7: Macharia Kichuki: Poor-poor (decrease)

Mr. Kichuki's household has been poor for very many years. His position was aggravated by the drought of 1999/2000. Before then, life was fair to him. He could not compare himself to the rich people in the region by then. He had 4 heads of cattle, and over 80 shoats. Prior to the drought, he used to farm on the outskirts of the Irrigation Scheme and was producing maize, beans, pumpkin and some sweet potatoes. He had enough food from crop farming and his livestock. Now, he has nothing, the rains are no longer there and one cannot predict when they would be coming.

Most of the people who were in similar situation broke out of it and are now wealthy. Very few still struggle like him. However, they are better off than he is. Kichuki found it hard to come out poverty probably because of his history in the area. He is a foreigner. He came to Marigat as a Mau Mau convict to serve his term in the concentration camp around. While in prison, he gained skills as a mason and helped construct the chief's house in Ng'ambo. The chief was so impressed with his work that he persuaded him to stay around after his release. He was given a wife from the community and he even got absorbed in the Ilmae clan. Belonging to a clan by naturalization is different from belonging to one by blood. While other members of the community could borrow from their clan members, he could not since they were not his relatives. During and immediately after the drought, he got help from the government and other relief agencies working in the region.

Before the drought, Kichuki's *boma* had livestock. However, they all belonged to the wife. She was given some goats by her mother and they multiplied. He however had control over the animals. Kichuki has a son who is relatively wealthier than him. The son gained some carpentry and joinery skills at Marigat Youth Polytechnic. The son makes remittances to Kichuki, his father at those times when business is good. Mr. Kichuki could have educated his son beyond what he achieved. However, lack of school fees was the main cause for the son not going beyond primary school. Mr. Kichuki believes that educating children is a sure way of escaping poverty in the long run. The free primary school education program will help those children still in primary school to finish.

The primary risks threatening to sink his household deeper into poverty include crop failure in addition to human and livestock diseases and drought. These risks are not new. Their intensity is what worries Mr. Kichuki most. In the past, he could move livestock to the hills on the east when drought set in. The previous drought covered a wider geographical area and therefore there was no place anybody could have moved his livestock. Strange and more complicated livestock and human diseases have emerged and they create a burden on the limited financial resources available. Meanwhile Mr. Kichuki plants his crop very early in the season to ensure that they escape the dry season while utilizing the little amount of rainfall. He has lost much of crop on many occasions by doing this because rain does not come at the expected times. Sometimes he lacks seed and on other occasions, he has received seed from friends and relatives from the wife's side. Occasionally, he has had to eat the seed because there was no alternative source of food.

The little land that Mr. Kichuki cultivates is now under the threat of *Prosopis spp.* This threatens to choke any other plant material in its wake. He has tried to control it by uprooting without success. The whole of his land under is in danger of the plant.

Mr. Kichuki hopes that God would remember him one day. Meanwhile he has left everything to Him.

## **Case study 8: Sarah Sokoni: Poor-poor (no significant change)**

Sarah is a widow living in Sintaan village of Ng'ambo location. She is a Kalenjin but married to an Ilchamus of the Ilkapis clan. She remembers only one time when her household was rich. That was before 1972. Later on the livestock (mostly goats) died from Caprine Bovine Pleuro-Pneumonia (CBPP). From that time, life took a downward trend. The time the household had sunk to the lowest levels of poverty was after the drought of 1984. There was totally nothing for the family and the drought was very severe. This was the time she remembers going to stay with her parents until conditions improved and stabilized. By the time the 1999/2000 drought came, her household did not have a lot of wealth but were contented to have food in their stomachs at the end of the day.

Unlike the rest, Sarah managed to survive the 1999/2000 drought. It was bad but she pulled through. She lost most of her animals but it was the time when the son was working. His remittances helped cushion the household from starvation and medical commitments. She also got some funds from a local women group, *Letboi Women group*. In addition, relief food was available and the family did not go without food for even a single day.

Sarah is currently a small-scale trader in vegetables and fruits. She started buying and selling vegetables within Longewan area, before she was given a tender to supply vegetables to a local secondary school. This was when she begun buying vegetables from the Irrigation Scheme where there was a larger supply. She now supplies the school with half a sack of vegetables daily and sells the rest in the open-air market at Marigat shopping centre.

Other members of the community who were affected by the drought managed to get out of poverty through caring for breeding the livestock that remained and by following up on debts they had with people before the drought. Some people have managed to pull through by brewing the local beer for sale. Others have sunk deeper into poverty since the drought. They have nothing and depend on borrowing most of the time. In addition, they send their children to work as casuals even on Sundays.

According to Sarah, it was easier to escape poverty in the past than now for most households, unless there is a family member working. The poor used to depend on the generosity of the rich. The rich were more merciful and one person's problem was everyone's problem. Nowadays everything has changed because people love money more than anything else.

Sarah is a member of Letboi Women Group. The group is involved in making gourds for sale, fundraising for each of the members and general farming. The group may hire land within the Irrigation Scheme collectively, but distribute it to each of the members for farming. Alternatively, if the land is too small, they grow Kenya Seed company maize collectively then share the returns to each of the individuals. Through this Sarah is involved in farming. Otherwise she has no individual piece of land upon which she does farming.

Sarah hopes to upscale her business and thereby acquire wealth for the household.



## Case study 9: Napunyo Lemarkoko: Poor-poor (no significant change)

Napunyo is the wife to Mr. Lejason Markoko. They live in Sintaan village of Ng'ambo location. According to her, the household has sunk to the lowest point ever in her lifetime. Before the 2002 floods, they were living a poor life but not to the current point. Their daughter got married sometimes in 2001 and they were given 12 goats as bride price. Before then, they had only 2 goats. When the floods of 2002 came, their low-lying homestead was in the direct line of the fast waters. Everything they had was carried away to Lake Baringo and they were lucky to escape with their lives. Now her household is left with only one goat and nothing else.

Napunyo's family is a young one. Apart from the daughter who is married, the rest are young children. All of them apart from the youngest are in primary school. Her motivation for taking children to school was the good life for those with educated working children. This coupled with the free primary education program were reasons enough to have all her children in school. Her husband does casual jobs in the Irrigation Scheme to enable them eat. At times there is total lack of casual work and the family has to depend on *ndorok* for food. In fact, at the time of the interview she had finished removing the *ndorok* from where she had spread it to dry in the sun. She also joins the husband occasionally to work in the Irrigation Scheme if there is a lot of work. However, the young children require her attention at home most of the time.

After the floods, her husband's *Itomal* clan members gave her shelter, clothes and food, besides that from the relief program. She depends on traditional herbs for health unless the children are so sick that she can spare something from what was earned as casual wage. She also begs from relatives to enable her solve emergencies. Now his relatives offered her husband a higher ground and they managed to construct a temporal structure where they are now putting up.

Napunyo sees life to have changed for the worst from 1999 up to the present. The drought and the floods following each other in succession were too much for poor households like hers to bear. This has reduced more households into poverty unlike in the past. The people have also become very mean, probably because things are expensive.

Napunyo does not belong to any group, whether informal or formal. According to her, you need money to pay for the many subscriptions groups demand for. She only hopes that the son-in-law will be faithful enough to pay next installment of bride price as he had promised. That may change her household's wealth status.

## **Case study 10: Nkirichat Lemeiguran: Nonpoor – poor**

Lemeiguran considers his household to be poor. He says he has only 6 goats. His poverty stemmed from the drought of early 1990s (most probably 1991). Before then, he had 30 goats, 20 sheep and 30 head of cattle. His relatives, mainly from the *Ilkapis* clan helped him with 2 goats, which he bred and built a flock within 5 years. Occasionally he could hire land in the irrigation scheme to grow seed maize for Kenya Seed Company. He had even acquired some cattle and goats before the 1999/2000 droughts. All the animals died from the drought and he was left with nothing.

He has no money to hire land in the irrigation scheme and only relies on the portion outside the scheme to grow maize, beans and vegetables for food. This however happens only when the rains are available. His crop for the year 2003 died because the rains did not come as expected.

Lemeiguran has 3 children in school. He hopes that they will learn, finish and get jobs and assist him in future. He believes that if he had land in the Irrigation Scheme, he would easily acquire wealth. He has seen his neighbors who were affected by drought getting enough money from maize in the scheme to buy livestock.

Lemeiguran only goes to the irrigation scheme to offer his services as a casual laborer. The jobs are not available always. There are times when a week can go by without him getting anything to do within the scheme. These are the times when his wife has to go begging from relatives.

Mr. Lemeiguran does not belong to any group. He has heard of them within Ng'ambo location but they are all women groups. His wife does not belong to any group because she has no money to contribute and there is none close to her household.



## Case study 11: Joseph Lemanyamai: Nonpoor - poor

Joseph is a young man who finished school in 1996 (class eight). He considers his household to be poor. He has 7 goats, 4 sheep and 2 head of cattle. According to him, he would be rich if he had 60 shoats and 15 head of cattle.

Joseph told us that it wasn't until after the year 2000 that life became a bit difficult for him. The drought of 1999/2000 left his family very poor. His mother widowed and by then he was barely an adult. They were so poor that they could go in search of *machicha* (brewers waste) from the local brew, *busaa*, to eat as food. Healthcare was by herbs and he was borrowing clothing and bedding from his relatives. The mother received some relief food, which was very little.

According to Joseph, his sister's marriage was godsend. He was given 1 cow, 3 goats and 3 sheep as part of the bride price. Of the 3 sheep, the family ate one to celebrate the marriage of their daughter. He slaughtered 2 of the goats, but in year 2003, was given another by his uncles from *Ilkesiani* clan. Some of his neighbors have escaped from poverty while others have sunk even deeper in poverty. The main cause for the latter case was livestock and human diseases, school fees (from sale of livestock) and over-reliance on livestock instead of diversification.

Currently, Joseph depends mostly on casual work to sustain his family. He works in the scheme when there are jobs and occasionally gets something to do at KARI Marigat. Farming would have helped improve the economic position of the household but he has no land in the irrigation scheme. His land on the outskirts does not receive water unless it rains. In the past, when the weir on Perkerra River was intact, water could spill over on farms on the outskirts and he could benefit.

Joseph believes that poor people were treated better in the past than now. The wealthier were merciful to the poor and could give them something when in need. But because the economy is bad, there is little money even for the rich and it cannot support people outside the immediate families. Joseph says there is a popular saying among the well to do that goes "*Mimi nimejita futia*" (I have struggled for myself).

Joseph has children in school. He went to school and appreciates the value of education. In fact he believes that with education, his children will not be poor. He however cautions that education has contributed to some people's poverty where they had to sell all the animals they had for fees only for the child to finish and lack employment.

The greatest risks threatening to plunge his household into utter poverty are lack of employment and livestock diseases.

Joseph does not belong to any group just like most men in their area. Only women groups are available. He would still find it hard to belong to a group because of time constraints. He is always out looking for work to do or doing work.

In the meantime, Joseph hopes to breed his few animals into a herd and flock.

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire guideline

1. Are you poor or rich or midway?
2. How long have you been poor or rich?
3. If you're rich, have you ever been poor? Describe how life was those days (*food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, livestock, transport, etc*)
4. If you're poor, have you ever been rich? Describe how life was those days (*food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, livestock, transport, etc*)
5. What made you escape from a poor to a non-poor status? Was it gradual or sudden?
6. What made you drift from richness to poverty? Was it gradual or sudden?
7. Were others in similar circumstances able to climb out of poverty to riches or drift into poverty from riches? Explain
8. Who were your benefactors during the time you were poor? (*Government, NGO, relatives, neighbors, friends, etc*)
9. What do you think is keeping your household in its current socio-economic status?
10. Describe a rich man or woman or household in this region. What should you have to be called rich?
11. Describe a poor man or woman or household in this region. To be called poor, what shouldn't you have?
12. Is it possible for a father's household to be richer or poorer than a son's household? How is it in your household?
13. Can a man and woman in the same household differ in terms of riches? How is it in your household?
14. Do you think more people are poorer this time than it was 10 years ago (before multipartyism) or 20 years ago (before and after death of Kenyatta)?
15. How did poor people access food, shelter, healthcare, livestock/products, etc in the past?
16. Are poor people treated better, worse or the same by others in the community relative to how they were treated 20 years ago? How did the community treat you if all you were ever poor?  
Why the difference?
17. In the past, how did people escape poverty?
18. How do people escape poverty today? What have you done to escape poverty?
19. Is it easier to escape poverty now than it was 10 or 20 years ago? Have new strategies become accessible in the last 10 or 20 years?
20. Are there different strategies for escaping poverty for parents and children or children and adults?
21. Do you have children in school?
22. What motivates you to take children to school?
23. Do you view educating children as a form of escaping poverty for you as parents and for the children themselves?
24. What are the primary risks that threaten to cast your household into poverty?
24. Are these risks the same as those that were there 10 or 20 years ago?
25. How do you protect yourself from these risks that threaten to plunge you into poverty?
26. Have these mechanisms changed in availability or effectiveness or are they still the same, as they were 10 or 20 years ago?
27. Are these mechanisms available and accessible to everybody?
28. What methods exist to cope with these shocks after they occur?
29. Have they changed in availability and effectiveness over time?
30. Who has access to these coping strategies?
31. What was land used for in the past?
32. How is the land utilized this time?
33. How has this affected crop and livestock production activities (spp. choice, management methods, productivity etc)?
34. Has this made you better off as a household or worse off? Explain
35. What natural resources do you have as a household? Have they decreased or increased with time?
36. What benefits do you get from each of these resources? Have the benefits increased or decreased with time?
37. What currently threatens to destroy each of these natural resources? Are these dangers new?

38. How do you protect each of the resources from destruction? Is this different from what used to be done in the past? If so why the difference?
39. Name the various informal groups among the Ilchamus community and the role for each
40. Which ones do you belong to and which ones don't you belong to? Why
41. What are the objectives of the groups you belong to?
42. How do the groups help you as a member?