

POLICY BRIEF 63

The voices of women and smallholder farmers in Kenya's Lamu Corridor

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Key messages

- The Lamu Corridor Project in Kenya promises to develop infrastructure to connect a vast area covering Northern Kenya, South Sudan, and Southern Ethiopia with global markets.
- Driven mainly by oil and mineral transport needs, state planners hope the development will boost agricultural investment, including building processing plants and distribution centres, while also creating special economic zones and free trade areas.
- To boost agricultural production, the focus is on establishing large plantations, nucleus farms, outgrower schemes, and large holding grounds for livestock, which presents both risks and opportunities for land users: for women in particular, as well as for smallholders across all sectors.
- Small-scale and informal farmers, pastoralists, and fishers along the corridor are responding in diverse ways: some oppose the project, while others negotiate the terms of inclusion in advance of investments. Pressures on land, associated with livestock commercialisation, are already creating conflict, social differentiation and imbalances in pastoral communities.
- Civil society organisations (CSOs) are demanding that comprehensive social and environmental impact assessment studies be conducted, with community consultation and other safeguards such as the formalisation of individual and communal land claims and assurances of employment for locals.
- To ensure that corridor development is inclusive, authorities need to create quotas for the participation of women and smallholders in the LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority (LCDA), including respectable smallholder associations, women's groups, and land rights groups.
- They need to collaborate with the Pastoralists Parliamentary Group to develop proposals for value chains to ensure that pastoralist interests are not excluded.

Background and context

Since 2009 the Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor Project has been marketed as a transformative project, which promises to turn the historical marginalisation of Northern

Kenya 'on its head', and open up the region for investments, economic development, good governance, and security. However, the implementation and governance of LAPSSET have been complex. It has had to come to terms with local concerns and interests, and the ways that various local actors, including smallholders, have sought to direct the project to better respond to local realities. Another problem confronting the project is that the infrastructure was mainly intended to improve petroleum transport. However, falling petroleum prices, conflict in South Sudan, and Uganda's decision to transport oil through Tanzania and not Kenya have caused delays in project implementation.

In 2012, the Kenyan government started to commission the construction of different components of the project. The components of the LAPSSET corridor in Kenya include:

- A modern, 32-berth deep-water port at Manda Bay in Lamu;
- A new system of highways running from Lamu and across Northern Kenya to the borders with Ethiopia and South Sudan;
- A new standard-gauge railway;
- A new oil pipeline from the Lokichar Basin of Turkana to Lamu;
- A new oil refinery at Lamu;
- The upgrading of Lamu, Isiolo, and Lake Turkana into resort cities;
- Three new airports at Lamu, Isiolo, and Lokichokio in Turkana; and
- A high-grand falls water dam on the Tana Delta.

The Kenyan government hopes that the anticipated transport corridor will offer opportunities for industrial, logistics, and tourism development, including agro-commercialisation. Planners hope to leverage infrastructural developments to boost investment in short- and long-term agricultural value chains. They also plan to establish agricultural growth areas with processing plants, distribution centres, special economic zones and free trade zones. All are to be clustered around nine proposed growth areas in Northern Kenya and in Lamu, namely, at Lamu, Garisa-Bura, Mwingi, Isiolo-Meru Archers Post, Turkana, Lokichokio, Moyale, Mandera, and Wajir. The LAPSSET project further proposes to establish large plantations, nucleus farms, outgrower schemes, and large holding grounds for livestock. The key node of the project is the proposed Lamu Growth Area, which will include industrial and energy investments, a free trade zone, a special economic zone, an export port processing zone, and a food processing plant, including fish processing. ¹

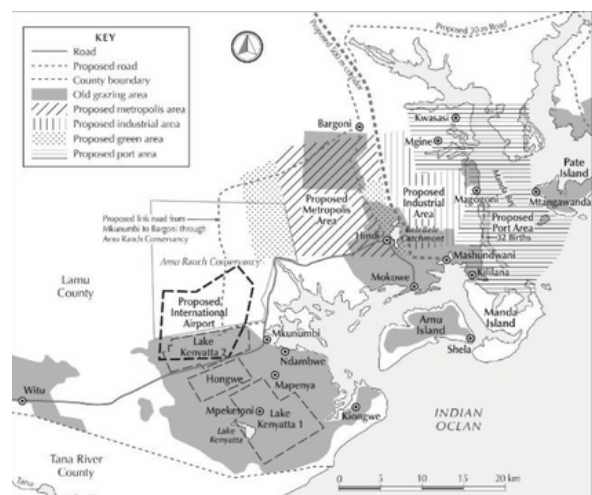


Figure 1: Proposed Lamu Growth Area

The details of the project are not yet clear, and smallholders (especially women, farmers and fishermen) in the area are already raising questions about the nature of compensation and other resources they will receive for the land claimed by LAPSSET. There are no large-scale plantations in the Lamu county, but rain-fed smallholder agricultural activity takes up to 70,000 hectares of land closer to the Indian Ocean (the islands, Hongwe, Bahari, and the lower parts of Mkunumbi and Hindi ward) and informally employs about 54% of the region's working-age population (evenly distributed between men and women).² Agricultural crops include cotton (42% of household income), bananas (14%), maize (8%), cassava (7%), bixa (6%) and mangrove (5%). Smallholders in Lamu have minimal access to markets, seeds, credit, storage facilities, inputs, and extension services, which has made them vulnerable to exploitation by local intermediaries who buy farmers' produce at unusually low prices.³

After failed attempts to set up large plantations in the 1960s, some land was turned into the Lake Kenyatta Settlement Scheme Phase 1. Initially, some local Bajuni, Sanye, Boni, and Giriama settled there, but Kikuyus with origins from Kenya's central highlands arrived between 1973 and 1975 – and now constitute the bulk of the population on the mainland, while the Bajuni dominate the islands. Other groups have also migrated to Lamu from different parts of the country. Inward migration is now leading to disagreements over land ownership, boundaries, and access to valuable land-based resources. It is also driving local debates around who should benefit from the prosperous future being projected.

Pastoralism is mainly practised in the drier, sparsely inhabited northern parts of the county, which border Kenya's Northeast region and have largely remained distinctively traditional and small-scale since the 1960s. Like smallholders, pastoralists also lack access to livestock markets, with the Nagele market on the northern fringes of the county not being functional. Livestock traders complain that the site is inappropriate, insecure and has no accommodation facilities. While the lack of a local market for livestock products means that pastoralists can look elsewhere in Northern Kenya to market their products, this does not shield pastoralists from exploitation by local intermediaries who usually set low prices.

Pastoralists are vulnerable because access to pasture and water is becoming more restricted by increased sedentarism, the spread of communal conservation efforts, and land allocation for LAPSSET activities. Smallholders without formal title deeds are also vulnerable. LAPSSET intersects with and intensifies these wider territorial restructuring processes. As competition for land and land-based resources rises and conservation is enforced, the conflict between farmers and pastoralists, and between farmers, pastoralists, and hunter-gatherers, deepens. Competition can become more intense as people anticipate the opportunities of the modernised port city of the future. In the context of these struggles, smallholders, especially women and young people, risk losing access to important resources, which can make them even more vulnerable in the future. Some smallholders fear that 'opening up' Lamu would accentuate the current exploitation of smallholders by local intermediaries if large investors begin engaging directly with smallholders without any safeguards.

However, many smallholders remain optimistic about the possibility of increased opportunities in terms of value-addition and access to inputs, seeds, credit, and markets.

Fishing is the predominant economic activity on the islands of the Lamu archipelago, with 40 fishing grounds and 37 landing sites and a total catch of 2,200 metric tonnes (in 2015/16) coming from mostly small-scale artisanal fishers.⁴ Most of the fishing catch (40%–50%) is sold within Lamu through local buyers and traders, intermediaries, and kinship networks (fish cannot be exported due to licensing restrictions).⁵ Only one cold storage facility exists in the county, so most catches are sold raw.⁶ Fishers – mostly men – stay within five nautical miles of the shore. However, fishing on shallow grounds has caused over-exploitation and led to a depletion of fisheries stock, which results in a lower catch per fisher and, thus, lower income.

More endangered species, including those on the Red List of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), are also at risk, as they are targeted for their economic value. Therefore, Beach Management Units (BMUs) have been set up at landing sites to support sustainable fisheries use and management through co-management between fishing communities and governmental agencies. Amid these communal conservation efforts, LAPSSET's planned port extension will lead to the loss of fishing waters for the fishers. In anticipation of this problem, civil society organisations (CSOs), BMUs, and other community-based organisations (CBOs) have demanded that a bio-cultural community protocol be developed (a tool for community engagement with the

government in natural resource management) based on a comprehensive social and environmental impact assessment study. These plans and negotiations are at an advanced stage.

Participation and voices of smallholders and women

LAPSSET is currently being implemented under a new political dispensation – symbolised by the new 2010 constitution, which is centred around the devolution of power and resources to expanded and better-funded instruments of local governance called county governments. The new dispensation promotes a public language of communal consultation and communal rights to culture and a livelihood.

Individuals and groups in Lamu have appropriated this language to make specific demands on the design and implementation of LAPSSET, and the political environment has created opportunities that can, and at times have, promoted the voices of women and smallholders in its ongoing implementation. In particular, organised civic engagement in Lamu around the LAPSSET agenda has involved questions around control, participation and ownership, the impact on culture, and the ecological diversity of Lamu. Further questions have been raised about employment and other direct benefits, including financial compensation for land and resources that will be claimed by the physical development of the corridor.

The most organised and prominent community organisation is the Save Lamu coalition, which was registered in 2011. It brings together local CBOs, BMUs, as well as religious and other cultural leaders to respond to LAPSSET. Save Lamu consistently clarifies that it is not opposed to LAPSSET, but rather that it is concerned with the way the corridor has been designed and is now being implemented. Save Lamu has challenged various aspects of LAPSSET through street demonstrations and at the High Court of Kenya. Over time, it is becoming more focused on procedure while tapping into global funding channels, including cultivating networks with national and international NGOs.

Save Lamu has also broadened its scope – beyond specific components of LAPSSET – by engaging in awareness-raising activities, collating data and challenging wider social and environmental injustices. However, the coalition has had difficulties representing the diverse views of affected communities, thus failing to develop distinct narratives regarding the fate of pastoralism, small-scale agriculture (especially on the mainland), and issues of concern to women. It is also subjected to state harassment and faces being undermined by local elected officials who question its legitimacy.⁷

A central narrative in Lamu, driving civic engagement around LAPSSET, is that information about the project is not forthcoming and that LAPSSET's decision-making processes should include community consultation and participation. Demands for information have been made by means of petitions that are addressed to concerned

authorities; street demonstrations, and legal challenges. A petition citing concerns about communal safeguards, community consultation, environmental protection, and the fate of customary natural resource management, led to the formation of the LAPSSET Steering Committee. The committee brought together LAPSSET officials with local activists, smallholder farmers, women, the youth, BMU managers and local religious leaders. However, six months after it received official recognition, on 2 March 2012, the steering committee was dissolved due to political wrangling at county-government level.

Since the dissolution of the committee, the political environment has become volatile, with multiple actors struggling to overturn and control certain aspects of LAPSSET that would advance their competing interests. In some instances, LAPSSET managers have made unilateral decisions, especially regarding land acquisition for key components of the corridor. This has affected the swift implementation of LAPSSET, as people resort to taking their grievances to the High Court, and community protests against LAPSSET and its associated projects in Lamu have become more frequent.

In addition to the lack of information, communities are also concerned about how their local cultures and livelihoods will be respected and protected. These concerns are about access to Lamu's ecological diversity and the management and stewardship of 'indigenous' territories and areas aligned to customary laws, values, and decision-making processes.

Local conservationists have deployed multi-dimensional, traditional knowledge systems transmitted culturally through generations, which they argue provide a better understanding of local and interconnected patterns and processes over large spatial and temporal scales. These include turbidity of the seawater caused by port dredging, cycles of resource availability within forests and coral reefs, and shifts in climate and ecosystem structures and functions. The Bajuni fishers living on the islands are afraid that LAPSSET risks destroying Lamu's ecological diversity, and with it, the livelihoods of its residents. Therefore, activists have pressed LAPSSET decision-makers to pay attention to environmental conservation and human rights while respecting existing livelihoods and culture.

LAPSSET managers have made various proposals to modernise and commercialise fishing in Lamu and are now negotiating the modernisation agenda with the County Government and BMU representatives. It is unclear if this development means that smallholder agency in the design of fisheries' value chains will be promoted, or whether more attention will be given to issues affecting women in the industry.

Lamu communities are also looking for other possible opportunities, such as higher investment in public education and scholarship opportunities for locals so that they can gain skills in, for example, port and related operations, with the hopes of future employment. Farmers' groups are also expecting compensation for their land and other natural resources based on a precedent set in 2015 when 300 smallholders were compensated for their plots at Kililana (now within the port area).

However, local opinion is divided as some groups focus on the long-term consequences of LAPSSET on land, smallholder farming, and fisheries, while others focus on immediate benefits. This aggravates unequal power relations between smallholders and large investors.

Conclusions and way forward

Civic engagement over LAPSSET has raised key questions about the control and ownership of the proposed corridor, including who is most likely to be its potential beneficiaries. LAPSSET managers and local politicians should pay attention to the often exclusivist nature of local politics because local divisions – in terms of expectation and resource distribution – might drive conflict between smallholders of different ethnicities and political orientations. Women and smallholders are concerned that if they do not influence the future direction of LAPSSET, especially regarding access to land, the seascape, and markets, integration with value chains will not automatically accrue benefits to them.

While public community narratives have embraced concepts like consultation, inclusivity, and participation, it is unclear if these will be practised in the future, when investors begin engaging with the upstream segments of anticipated value chains. Despite active civil society space in Lamu, information asymmetries regarding LAPSSET continue, causing confusion, misinformation, and suspicion. Hence, smallholders and activists are focusing their attention on issues that pose a direct threat to existing livelihoods, including those that promise immediate benefits such as financial compensation for land and resources claimed by the infrastructural developments.

Recommendations

It is essential to include the visions of local actors in the design of the LAPSSET project – something not evident to date. Urgent steps are now needed to engage the people who will be most affected by the corridor – in particular, smallholder farmers and women – to enable them to make informed choices, take effective action, and influence the nature of the anticipated value chains. Specific recommendations are:

- **Create quotas for the participation of women and smallholders** in the LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority (LCDA) by including respectable smallholder associations, women's groups, and land rights groups.
- **Collaborate with the Pastoralists Parliamentary Group** to develop proposals for value chains that will not exclude pastoralist interests.
- **Work closely with CSOs and county governments** to create LAPSSET steering committees across all counties along the corridor. These committees will provide a much-needed channel of communication between local communities and LAPSSET managers – to help project managers and community representatives address information asymmetries and reduce the need to resort to the courts, street demonstrations, and state harassment of CSO representatives.
- **Target organisations with a wide communal reach** and improve local stakeholder engagement regarding the agro-commercialisation proposals detailed in project documents. Effective action, knowledge-sharing, and debate regarding these proposals should also be informed by experiences within local and ongoing conservation and commercialisation efforts.
- **Address current communal concerns about LAPSSET's impact** on the environment, land, and local resources and improve smallholder awareness on commercialisation pathways to promote business-savvy smallholders and educate them on the pros and cons of contractual arrangements with companies and commercial buyers.

Acknowledgements and disclaimer

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Endnotes

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