

RESEARCH BRIEF

APRIL 2022

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN TURKANA WEST, KENYA

RESEARCH BRIEFING: URBANIZATION IN NORTH RIFT KENYA

Introduction

This analysis focuses on urbanization in the North Rift Region and Turkana County in the wider northern region of Kenya. Kenya's northern region is the country's least urbanized region, particularly in areas considered to be Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs). Historically, these ASALs have been marginalised, however there is growing optimism with the recent establishment of county governments and ongoing investments by the national government to provide infrastructure aimed at promoting regional connectivity. This brief presents an analysis of the urbanization in this region, specifically the North Rift Economic Bloc (NOREB) in relation to its local and regional (national and international) contexts. NOREB consists of eight counties: Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet, Nandi, Samburu, Trans Nzoia, Turkana, Uasin Gishu, and West Pokot. The key focus of the analysis is on outlining the nature and trends in the region's urbanization and identifying emerging issues for policy attention. The analysis presented in this brief primarily relies on secondary data, and it's among the first to examine the region's urbanization. However, the study was limited by scant data and information, which was often aggregated at county level, and therefore lacked focus on individual urban centres in the region.

Kenya's Urbanization Context

The analysis begins with a focus on the national urbanization context. Kenya is one of the fastest urbanizing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, yet one of the least urbanized countries in the region. The country's 2019 census reported 31% of its population as urban (from a total of 47,564,296), of which 43% were aged 15-34 years. In actual numbers, the census reported this national urban population of 31% as 14,744,474 people¹. According to the United Nations Population Division's 2018 Urbanization Prospects, the country is only expected to become 50% urbanized after 2050, at which time the world is estimated to be about 68% urban. Structurally, Kenya's urbanization landscape encompasses a broad spectrum of characteristics, which range from the size of settlements to their socio-economic dominance. Some of the defining traits of Kenya's urbanization include the following:

- Rapid rate of urbanization amidst low levels of urbanization and a growing rural population
- Service sector- and agriculture-driven urbanization
- A history of centralised urbanization, with potential for urban re-distribution
- Urbanization without structural transformation

1 NBS (2019a). 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census: Volume II. Distribution of Population by Administrative Units. Online access (16/02/2021): <https://www.knbs.or.ke/?wpdmpromo=2019-kenya-population-and-housing-census-volume-ii-distribution-of-population-by-administrative-units>

Geographically, a system of interconnected cities and urban areas emerges, with each level performing a unique function both at the local context and within the urban continuum. In 2019, Kenya's urban landscape consisted of a total of 307 urban areas which met the minimum population threshold of 2,000 people. When considering only their population size, these urban areas constituted 8 cities ($\geq 250,000$ residents), 39 municipalities (50,000 - 250,000 residents), 101 towns (10,000 – 50,000 residents) and 159 market centres (2,000 – 10,000 residents). The census data indicates Kenya's largest city, Nairobi, had a population of 4,397,073 in 2019. The next largest city is Mombasa with a population of just over one million, according to the 2019 census.² The other major centres are secondary cities with populations of about 500,000 residents, including Eldoret, Nakuru, Kisumu and Ruiru. Notably, Ruiru is a satellite town of Nairobi city.

Most Kenya's urban centres (and urban population) are connected by Northern Economic Corridor (NEC) or can be found within 100-kilometre radius from the corridor. NEC connects Kenya's port city of Mombasa in the south-east to Malaba and Uganda to the west. While the northern part (or North Frontier Districts) is the least urbanised region in Kenya. Socio-economic development in region is marked by history marginalisation, which resulted in its poor spatial and economic connectivity with the rest of Kenya. However, recently Government of Kenya embarked on the Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor, which is anticipated to connect the northern region with NEC and neighbouring countries. NEC has been instrumental in shaping spatial-economic development. The enhanced connectivity is also anticipated to trigger urbanisation and growth of the towns along the new corridor.

NEC has the oldest infrastructure in the country: the Kenya–Uganda Railway and the A1 Road that runs parallel to it – both of which connect Kenya to Central Africa. A new railway line was built parallel to the old one, but this new line is yet to connect the entire stretch of NEC.³ Besides, the old railway is largely dysfunctional. Based on a 2016 World Bank study, NEC has three urban clusters:

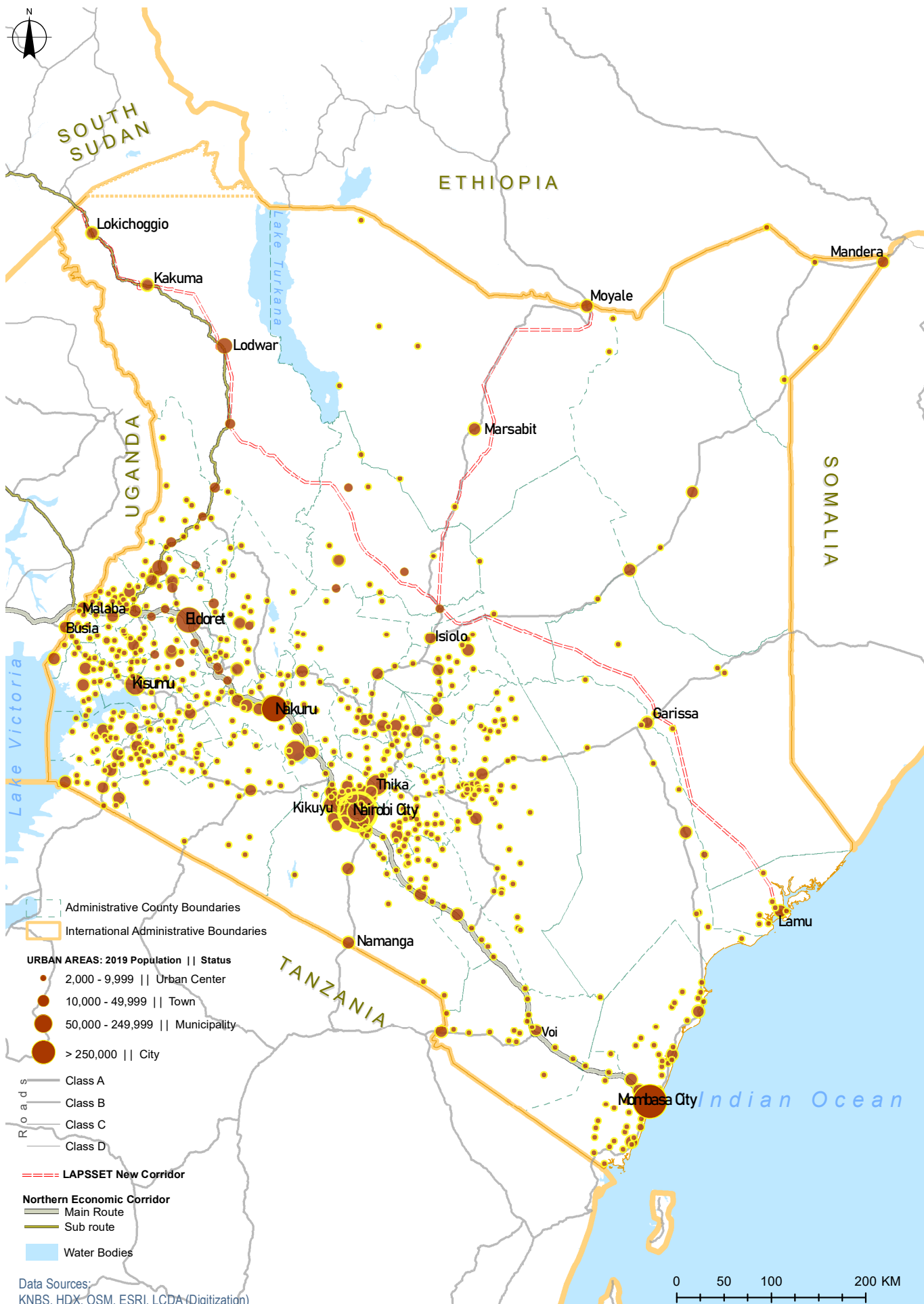
- **The Coastal cluster** – concentrated around the coastal counties of Mombasa, Kilifi and Malindi which largely rely on the 'blue economy'. This is strongly connected to the port of Mombasa, as well as the tourism and hospitality sectors. This area features the oldest cities and towns in Kenya.
- **The Central cluster** – this largely consists of the Nairobi Metropolitan Area, including Nairobi city and its satellite towns. It is Kenya's main industrial and commercial hub, with Nairobi city being the nation's capital.
- **The Western cluster** – this hub consists of the main inland secondary cities, with hinterlands dominated by agricultural production. The main cities in this region are Eldoret, Kisumu and Nakuru.

Kenya's economic growth strategy, called Vision 2030, has placed high stakes on urbanization. Subsequent policies such as the National Urban Development Policy (NUDP) and the National Spatial Plan (NSP) emphasise the crucial role of urban centres in the country's economic transformation. However significant investments are needed in infrastructure and services that promote urban economic development, planning and management, if Kenya's urbanization is to lead to structural transformation. It also requires closer policy attention to secondary cities and small towns, as well as urbanization in historically marginalised regions.

² Ibid

³ World Bank (2016). Kenya Urbanization Review. World Bank, Washington D.C. Accessed on 10 July 2020 at: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/639231468043512906/pdf/AUS8099-WP-P148360-PUBLIC-KE-Urbanization-ACS.pdf>

Map 1: Kenya's Urbanization Geography



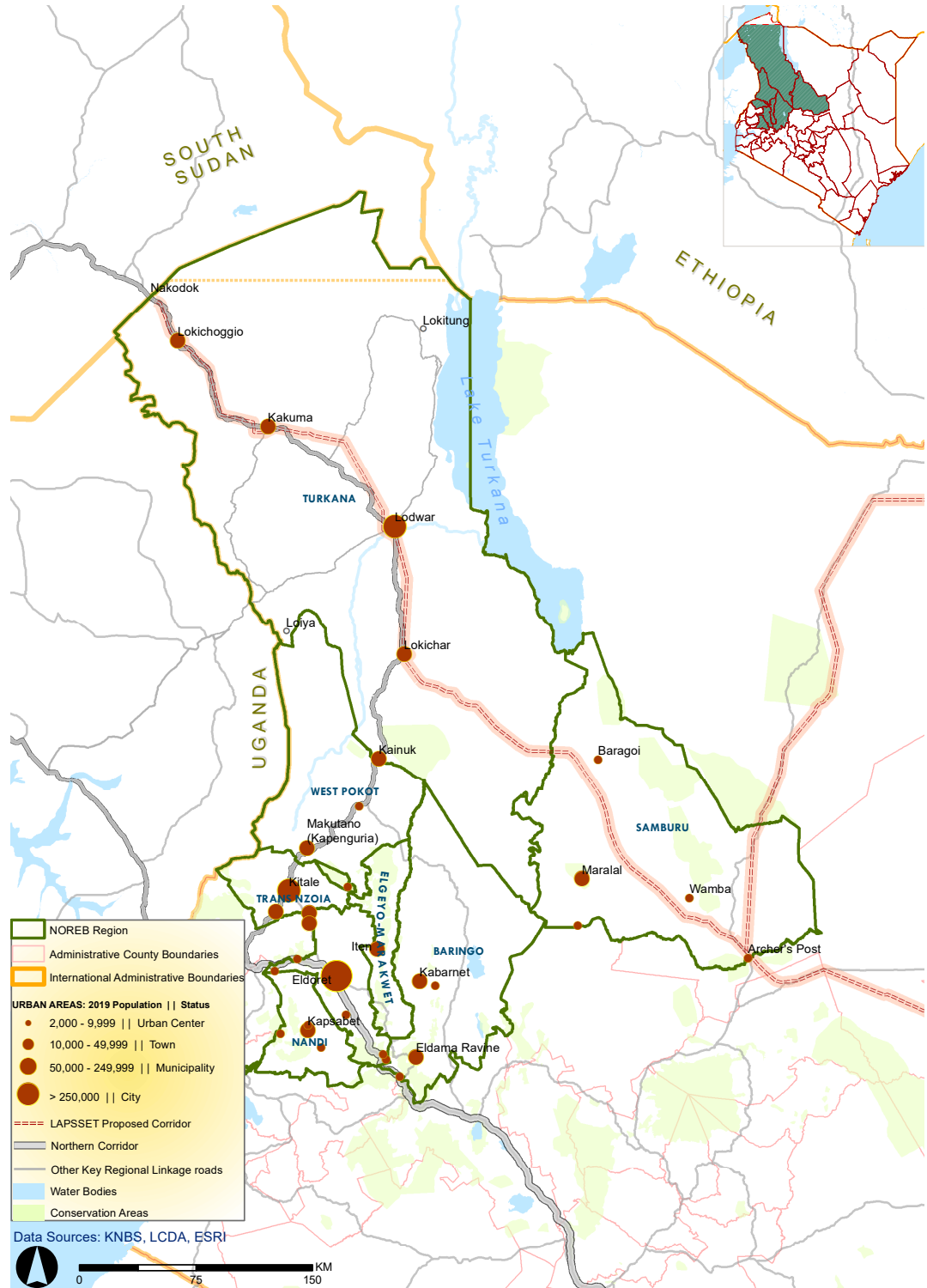
Source: Drawn by UN-Habitat/ Data-Courtesy

Urbanization in North Rift Kenya

The second level of analysis is focused on NOREB, a region that lies in the north-western part of Kenya. NOREB is dominated by rural agricultural and pastoral settlements, with most of its counties displaying an urbanization level below the national average. The distribution of population reveals that NOREB counties with the highest populations and a reliance on farming also have the highest densities.

The region is characterised by urban primacy, with Eldoret acting as a primate city, intermediate cities that are mostly county headquarters, and numerous small towns and rural centres serving as livestock auction centres. Livestock keeping is a major economic activity in the region, especially for pastoral communities.

Map 2. NOREB's Urbanization Geography



Source: Drawn by UN-Habitat/ Data-Courtesy

This urban primacy is replicated within counties, which usually feature one major urban centre, along with many small towns and rural centres. In Turkana County, the county capital of Lodwar has a population more than double that of the next largest town, Kakuma.

The urban centres that recorded the highest increase in population between 2009 and 2019 are Eldoret, Kapsabet, Kiminini, Lodwar, Maralal and Matunda, where populations have almost doubled during the intercensal period. While most urban centres recorded high population growth, some towns registered a decrease in population, e.g., Kakuma (2009-2019) and Lokichoggio (1999-2019) in Turkana County. Unplanned urbanization also dominates urban growth in NOREB – a trend that is reflected across the rest of Kenya. This is linked to traditional land management systems and inefficient urban planning dominated by 'plotting' of poorly planned land subdivisions. Such failures of urban planning, among other factors, have resulted in a proliferation of informal settlements in urban centres.

Urban centres in this region have been historically disadvantaged through poor connectivity and integration with the national and international (East Africa) urban system. But there is the potential for greater connectivity and integration with the anticipated trade flows between Kenya and South Sudan associated with the ongoing construction of the A1 Road between Lodwar and Nadapal (East Africa Community (EAC) Corridor No. 3), and the other infrastructure proposed under the LAPSET corridor. LAPSET will be crucial for enhancing the connectivity of NOREB, nationally and internationally, as well as internally within the region. Already the Nairobi-Moyale Road has been completed, traversing Samburu County. The section of the LAPSET corridor through NOREB will begin from Isiolo, connecting to Juba through Baringo and Turkana Counties. At Lokiochar, this corridor will merge with NEC's A1 Road.

Beyond strategic connectivity, most urban centres in the region have inadequate infrastructure and services and face myriad urban planning challenges which have negatively impacted socio-economic conditions and slowed local economic development. While variations exist regarding planning approaches and the level of access to services and amenities across NOREB counties, the exact measurement of service provision at the individual city or town level is difficult to establish, as available data is not disaggregated at that

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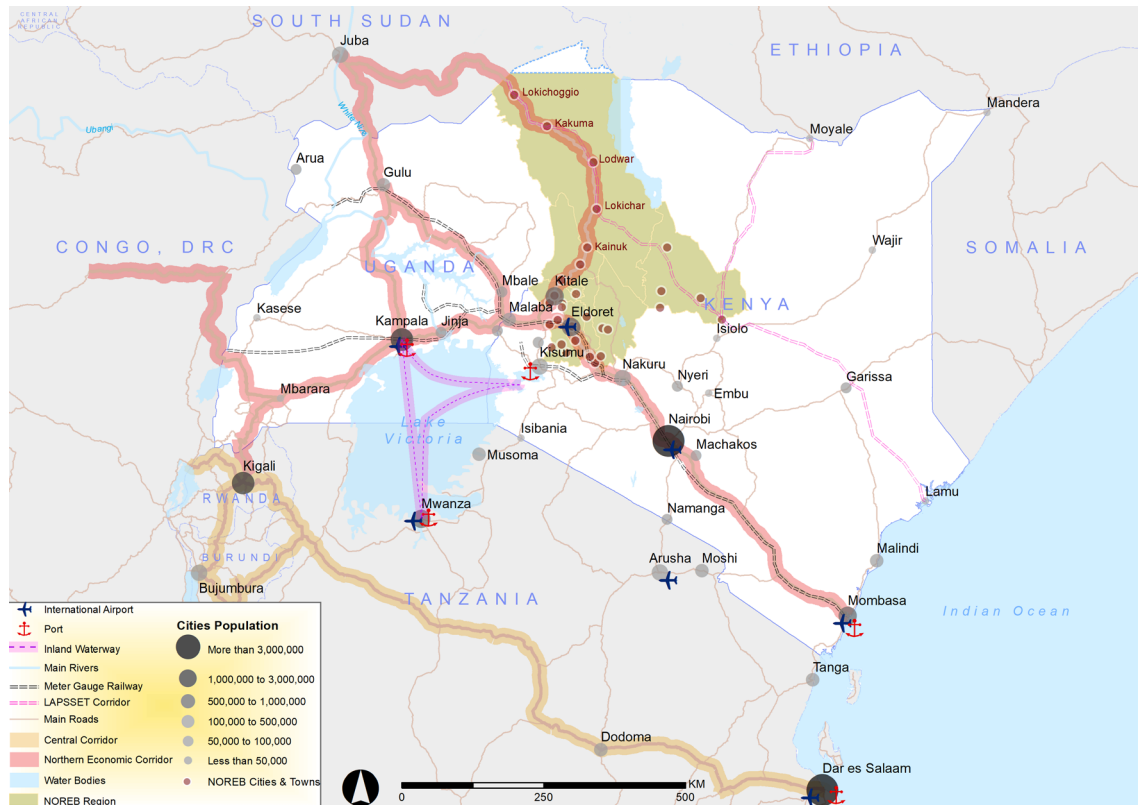
level. Importantly, devolution has presented an opportunity for counties to institutionalise urban management and focus on promoting urban development in the region. However, outcomes will largely depend on the urban strategies that counties deploy. The analysis indicates that there is a lack of dedicated focus on urban development in development planning and financing, even though urban centres are major sources of the Own Source Revenue (OSR) levied by county governments.

Urbanization in Turkana County

The third level of analysis focus on human settlements, urbanization, and spatial development in Turkana County. The county neighbours Uganda, South Sudan and Ethiopia. Its population predominantly practices nomadic pastoralism, which has a significant impact on the low urbanization levels in the county and promotes settlements that are temporary or seasonal, depending on availability of pasture and water. Urbanization in Turkana County, therefore, unfolds in a relatively unique context, being characterised by influxes of refugees and an increasing shift from pastoral to urban-based livelihood activities among the host community. Additionally, Turkana County Government (TCG) states that 'recent years have seen increased levels of migration into Turkana from other parts of Kenya, with many community members now seeking economic opportunities in urban centres, particularly Lodwar and Lokichar – especially since the discovery of oil and gas reserves in the Lokichar Basin.⁴ Lake Turkana is another major resource located in the county. However, the growth and economic potential of urban centres along the lake's shores has been hampered by a lack of infrastructure that links to larger economic hubs and urban centres. For example, road infrastructure is currently of poor quality, which increases transportation costs in accessing communities along the lake's shores.

4 Turkana County Government (2018). Turkana County CIDP 2018-2022. Turkana County Government, Lodwar.

Map 3. NOREB's Regional Context



Source: Drawn by UN-Habitat/ Data-Courtesy

Lodwar is the largest urban centre in Turkana County, by population, and one of the largest in NOREB, and is classified as municipality with regards to Kenya's Urban Areas and Cities Act (2011). The next largest town is Kakuma, followed by other small rural centres sparsely distributed across the vast county. However, it must be noted that Kenya's official census population statistics do not include refugee populations. If Kakuma's refugee population were also counted, Kakuma will be the largest urban area in Turkana West, and second largest in NOREB, after Eldoret. Most small towns in the county are livestock auction centres and are located adjacent to some form of water source. These centres link the livestock economy with markets outside the county. The livestock economy is the main means of livelihood for the Turkana people, while other forms of economic activities exist in more settled communities, including beadwork and basketry, which is common in Eliye Springs, Kaboi, Kerio and Turkwel. However, these industries remain underdeveloped, with potential for enhanced productivity.

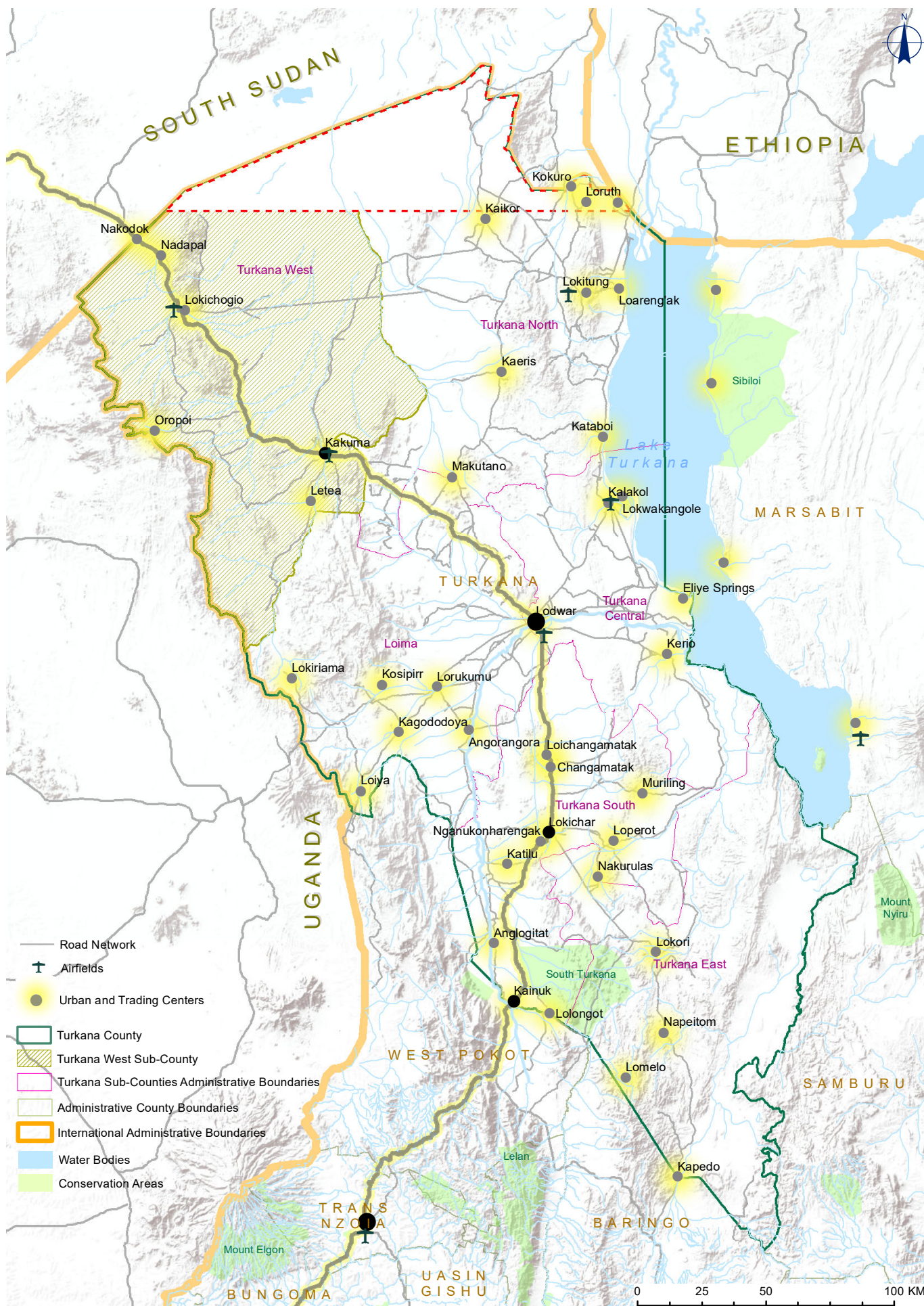
In the sub-county of Turkana West, populations concentrate in four unique kinds of settlements:

- urban centres (or urban villages)
- rural sedentary villages
- nomadic villages; and
- refugee settlements.

Both towns have hosted refugee-based operations, with current refugee settlements in Kakuma-Kalobeyei. However, the refugee-based operations in Lokichoggio have since been closed, resulting in a decline trend for the town⁵. The historical underdevelopment of infrastructure, especially road and energy, has isolated urban centres in Turkana West, and the area more broadly. While air connectivity has served the area for a long time, it is largely limited to the operations of humanitarian organizations. Therefore, enhanced road connectivity is anticipated to stimulate local economic development and provide benefits for the greater population, including host and refugee communities.

5 Koskei, S (2014). Lokichoggio, the town that lost its glory. Accessed on 28 October 2021: <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/north-eastern/article/2000104732/lokichoggio-the-town-that-lost-its-glory>

Map 4. Distribution of Urban Centres in Turkana County



Source: Drawn by UN-Habitat/ Data-Courtesy

Recommendations

The analysis reveals that urbanization trends across NOREB are not uniform. Patterns are different in ASAL regions compared to areas where crop farming is the dominant economic activity. This is because pastoral communities in ASALs are less urbanized due to the predominance of nomadic pastoralism, whereas crop farming areas tend to feature concentrated populations and more urban centres. However, geographical factors are superseded by migration as the main driving force of urbanization in the NOREB region. These are rural-urban migrations, triggered by various factors such as drought and famine in the ASALs, and youth seeking alternative livelihoods to livestock and farming. Forced displacement from neighbouring countries, such as South Sudan and Somalia, has seen Turkana County record a unique form of urbanization that is associated with refugee influxes to camps at Kakuma and Kalobeyei. These refugee camps co-exist with small towns and host communities. Urban centres in the region face numerous challenges, including:

- Underdeveloped infrastructure and poor provision of basic services
- Inadequate housing especially the increasing challenge of providing affordable housing for all
- Urban poverty and high unemployment
- Weak urban economies
- Poor urban planning and continued prevalence of unplanned urbanization
- Municipal financing challenges
- Environmental challenges.

Thus, for the NOREB region to benefit from the positive agglomeration advantages associated with urban centres, several interventions are required. At a global level, countries have adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which includes Goal Eleven: seeking to achieve 'Sustainable Cities and Communities'. Prior to SDGs, UN member states adopted the New Urban Agenda, which is wholly dedicated to the attainment of sustainable urbanization and development.

At a national level, Kenya has the National Urban Development Policy, which outlines numerous interventions needed to address the unfolding urbanization in the country. In addition to these frameworks, this work makes the following recommendations:

1. Prioritise the urbanization agenda in the County Integrated Development Plan

While most of the population in NOREB counties live in rural settlements, their urban population is growing. Although NOREB urban centres are relatively small, they perform important economic roles, including linking rural-based economies to a wider economic network. Yet the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) only weakly addresses urbanization and does little to ensure focussed investments for enhancing sustainable urbanization. A deliberate focus on urbanization and the role of urban centres is required for the county's development. This must include attention to the following issues:

- Urban-rural linkages. Links between urban and rural economies are important to socio-economic development in the region.
- Financing urban development.
- A networked system of urban centres and rural settlements, including the prioritisation of regional connectivity infrastructure, ensuring urban centres are linked with transportation networks, communication, and energy systems.

2. Institutionalise Urban Planning

Most urban centres in the region are growing rapidly but lack any coordinated urban planning. This has resulted in numerous land development challenges including sub-standard developments, low-quality urban spaces, challenges in providing reticulated infrastructure, congestion, environmental degradation, scarcity of public open spaces etc. Cities and towns need appropriate planning, and the capacity to coordinate and implement those plans. NOREB counties need to structure the administration of urban planning so that all sizes of urban centres can be well-planned.



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A Residential Area in Lodwar Town © Baraka Mwaru

3. Establish Functional Urban Administration and Management

The region's rapidly growing urban centres not only lack effective urban planning, but also functional urban management. According to Kenya's Urban Areas and Cities Act (2011), each major town in NOREB has the legislative opportunity to have a municipality. While the major secondary cities are part of the Kenya Urban Support Program, a national government program funded through a World Bank loan⁶, which assists the establishment of municipalities, considerable efforts are still needed to ensure that municipalities are fully functional, including matters of:

- Municipal staffing
- Municipal revenues and financing
- Municipal planning and engineering capabilities
- Municipal service provision capabilities

4. Develop Appropriate Policies and Legislation to Support Effective Urban Management

To realize functional municipal management, counties need to develop appropriate urban policies and legislation. This is important for operationalising municipal management. Policies and legislation support the effective performance of:

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- Local/municipal finances
- Spatial planning and development management
- Affordable housing and basic services provision – water and sanitation, mobility, energy etc
- Local economic development
- Good urban governance, including public participation, partnerships, inclusion and equality, accountability and transparency.

5. Invest in Local Infrastructure and the Provision of Basic Services

The availability of good local infrastructure and basic services is a major determinant of urban economic development. Interconnectivity within NOREB and between the major towns in the region must be improved for NOREB counties to optimise the opportunities brought by the A1 Road linking Kenya and South Sudan.

6 World World Bank (n.d.). Kenya Urban Support Program. Accessed on 29 October 2021: <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P156777>

Improved local connectivity will ensure that agriculture and livestock producers in the hinterlands have better access to the market opportunities presented by the A1 Road. Without accompanying local investments, the economic flows brought by the A1 Road may simply bypass the region.

6. Establish an Alliance of Cities and Towns in the NOREB Region and along the A1 Corridor

To promote learning and capacity development, and to strengthen economic integration, a platform for networking the urban centres along the corridor and the region should be established. This would provide an opportunity to bring together policy makers, urban planners, municipal managers, urban political leaders and the private sector, among other important actors. The NOREB Secretariat can be a starting point to conceptualize, assess and organize this kind of alliance, supported by the respective counties, and development partners. This platform could address issues including:

- Networking municipal management to strengthen capacity for urban management
- Networking producers (e.g. livestock and agriculture production) businesses and local industries

- Addressing policy and institutional barriers to trade within the region and between urban centres along the corridor
- Sharing knowledge about urban infrastructure development and services provision

7. Plan and Invest in Strategic Infrastructure Networks in the Region

NOREB, as an economic bloc, can leverage economies of scale by jointly planning and implementing certain projects allowing counties invest in mutually supportive projects rather than competing ones. An example is the bloc's initiative to build a shared meat factory in West Pokot. These collaborations can be scaled up to the provision of strategic infrastructure such as water supply. Inter-basin water transfers could be possible within such a system and facilitated by the inter-county framework of service provision envisioned in Kenya's County Governments Act (2012). This initiative would make it easier for water scarce areas, such as Turkana, to enhance its water provision by working with neighbouring counties that have a higher potential for such water projects. Such collaborative projects can maximise value for money in infrastructure investments.



Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates the importance of regional connectivity infrastructure in shaping a system of secondary cities and towns in NOREB, especially along the A1 Road. The analysis reveals the influence of prevailing socio-economic patterns on urbanization, noting that ASALs are far less urbanized due to the dominance of nomadic pastoralism in those areas, whereas urbanization is higher in areas dominated by crop farming and sedentary livelihood strategies, even though rural-based sectors still dominate economic productivity. In Turkana County, the exceptional phenomenon of refugee influxes has had a significant impact on the growth of urban centres in Turkana West, notably Kakuma-Kalobeyei.

This reveals the need for mixed approaches to promote sustainable urbanization in the NOREB region and along the A1 corridor, as the varied contexts dictate certain specific interventions. For example, the future of Kakuma-Kalobeyei town is strongly linked to the refugee presence, which makes the growth of the town uncertain in the coming years, given the Government of Kenya's recent policy shift towards closing all refugee settlements. The closure of refugee settlements will have profound impacts on the socio-economic development of the area, like the economic decline that followed in Lokichoggio after the exit of refugee-based operations.

Yet humanitarian and development interventions in the area have not created sufficient resilience capacity to ensure minimum negative impacts in that eventuality. Fundamentally, Kakuma-Kalobeyei needs to be imagined beyond a refugee-based economy, with a focus on investing in the long-term socio-economic development of the local area. However, this is not the case with the secondary cities like Eldoret, Kitale and Lodwar, and other small towns in the region where rural-urban migrations are the main drivers of urbanization, and where humanitarian inflows are not determinants of the structure of the local economies. These towns require interventions that focus on strengthening existing systems and connectivity to regional networks. Yet despite these variations and specific local contexts, strategic interventions are nevertheless needed at a regional level. Key among this are the interventions geared towards establishing a network of cities and towns in the region, and addressing common urban challenges such as urban planning, infrastructure and utilities, housing, incomes and equitable economic growth. These variations – elements of both diversity and commonality – can be the basis for alliances and shared platforms for implementing a common vision for the sustainable urbanization in the NOREB region.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This report is available from <http://www.unhabitat.org>
First published in Nairobi in October 2021 by UN-Habitat.

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Produced by Urban Planning & Design Section

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This brief was produced by UN-Habitat in partnership with the County Government of Turkana for the two-year project title “Sustainable Economic Development Along Turkana West Development Corridor Through Enhanced Connectivity” as part of the Cities Alliance Global Programme on Cities and Migration financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

Project financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and implemented in Partnership with Cities Alliance and Turkana County Government. Additional Funding came from The EU Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF).

The implementation of this study could not have been without the efforts of our partners, community research assistants and local leaders, and all participants who took part in our primary data collection activities.

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