

Kenya Resilient Arid Lands Partnership for Integrated Development (RAPID) Activity

Performance Evaluation: Overview and Key Findings

RAPID Context and Evaluation Background

The Kenya Resilient Arid Lands Partnership for Integrated Development (RAPID) Activity is a US\$35.5 million public-private partnership/Global Development Alliance activity (2015–2020), funded jointly by USAID, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), private sector partners, and Millennium Water Alliance (MWA) members. The program seeks to ensure sustainable and resilient livelihoods for communities, increase access to water and sanitation and access to water for livestock, and rebuild a healthy rangeland-management ecosystem in five counties: Garissa, Isiolo, Marsabit, Turkana, and Wajir.

The USAID/Kenya and East Africa (USAID/KEA) mission in conjunction with SDC commissioned this performance evaluation at the end of Kenya RAPID's fifth year. Given the dynamic situation with COVID-19 in Kenya and globally, the Evaluation Team was advised against travelling or holding face-to-face meetings and thereby conducted the entire evaluation (~70 interviews) remotely.

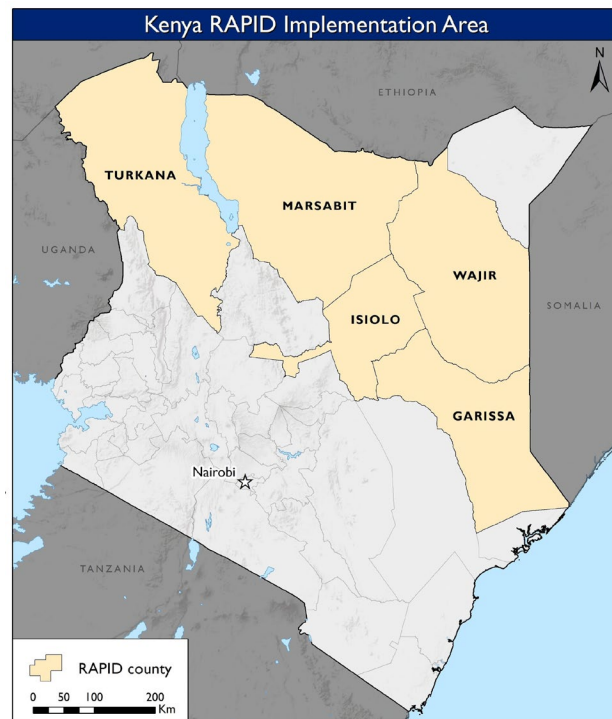
Summary of Findings

Assessing Kenya RAPID's Design. Within the context of devolution, Kenya RAPID offered an ambitious set of activities aimed at supporting county governments to develop critical policy and related documents and overcome significant capacity gaps. For health, livelihood, and conflict mitigation, Kenya RAPID sought to integrate thematic interventions in a more holistic and inclusive manner. While linkages did not come out clearly in interviews with the exception of nutrition and Community-Led Total Sanitation, a key achievement has been the emphasis on county-level joint planning and cross-department coordination. New understanding of the linkages between previously siloed activity areas could still bear fruit.

Assessing Kenya RAPID as a Partnership.

Kenya RAPID was delivered through a multi-partner, multi-layered arrangement that put counties at the center. Overall, the structures put

in place were effective and the partnership spirit very positive. The different levels and the designated partner roles and responsibilities were clearly laid out and well understood. Having implementing partners (IPs) with a solid history of working in the counties proved a real strength. MWA received huge appreciation for how it navigated and positioned Kenya RAPID in a neutral way. Under the coordination of a dynamic project leader and Program Coordinating Unit (PCU), the size of the partnership does not appear to have been a hindrance to progress. Often “dragged into logistics and related firefighting challenges,” however, the PCU was seen by many to be too lean in terms of staffing,



and opportunities may have been missed to facilitate deeper exchange and internal reflection, particularly around social inclusion/gender and the business model components of the Activity.

Assessing Kenya RAPID's Approach to Business Models. Kenya RAPID is seen to have encouraged private sector engagement; shifted mindsets; and made headway, particularly around water service delivery. A focus on sustainability of services and strengthening commercial approaches to water service management were appreciated. Ultimately, a more structured approach might have seen more direct achievements. Perceived or real pressure from USAID on reaching targets may also have stymied further risk taking. Apart from a few exceptions, “private” partners were not actively looking to forge their own sustained transaction-based relationship with domestic customers. More dedicated resources, deeper levels of analysis, and greater flexibility around some of the funding in later years could have been instrumental in driving new business models across the region.

Technological innovations introduced or supported by Kenya RAPID for water supply (ATMs for distribution, desalination technologies, and an insurance scheme for maintenance and repair) all hold promise in the ASALs. On the agriculture side, more could have been done to support access to farming supplies and create opportunities for value addition and links to markets.

Assessing the Facilitative Approach. Much appreciated by county staff, the facilitative approach has been a critical component of Kenya RAPID. IP staff members were embedded in county government offices, where emphasis was placed on their facilitation role, in addition to technical knowledge and implementation experience. While progress might be slower than traditional ways of working, the likelihood of ownership by the county, the ability to coordinate across initiatives, and the emphasis on longer-term sustainability through this facilitative approach is likely to be higher.

Kenya RAPID also supported county capacity needs assessments and the creation of a County Capacity Building Fund (CCBF). Many activities of the CCBF were scheduled later in the five-year activity and thus were significantly slowed down by the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous activities were directed at enhancing community-level governance, but a key challenge remains around the ability of county administrations to sustain these efforts with limited staffing levels and resources. Ultimately, the Evaluation Team questions whether Kenya RAPID was long enough to prepare for exit in a meaningful way to ensure sustainability of the contribution and approach.

Cross-Cutting Themes. Limited data and a lean response to **gender** concepts from which to draw concrete conclusions is seen as a finding in itself. While findings reveal an increase in women's access to resources, *control* over resources was less clearly in evidence. An early, more rigorous gender analysis prior to program inception and a dedicated social inclusion and gender staff person could have helped prioritize a more gender transformative approach. Kenya RAPID implemented or enabled multiple initiatives that are likely to improve **resilience** to shocks. For justifiable reasons, the project did not invest, however, in collecting and analyzing data that could demonstrate whether improved resilience was an outcome of these efforts. To support **conflict** mitigation, Kenya RAPID strengthened community governance systems to manage water resources and oversee rangeland management. Kenya RAPID also introduced conflict resolution mechanisms through the formation of community dialogues.

Conclusion

With regard to its overarching impact, the Evaluation Team applauds Kenya RAPID's ambition and inclusivity, noting a clear shift in county government officials' attitudes. The Evaluation Team is, however, unable to answer whether: 1) counties will continue to work through a multi-themed approach without Kenya RAPID's facilitation support, 2) technologies and data will continue to be used for decision-making, 3) women's empowerment efforts will be sustained without addressing entrenched gender norms, and 4) community structures put in place or strengthened will withstand the test of time.