



# The intersection between climate change and female genital mutilation/cutting

**A case of the Maasai of Kajiado county, Kenya**

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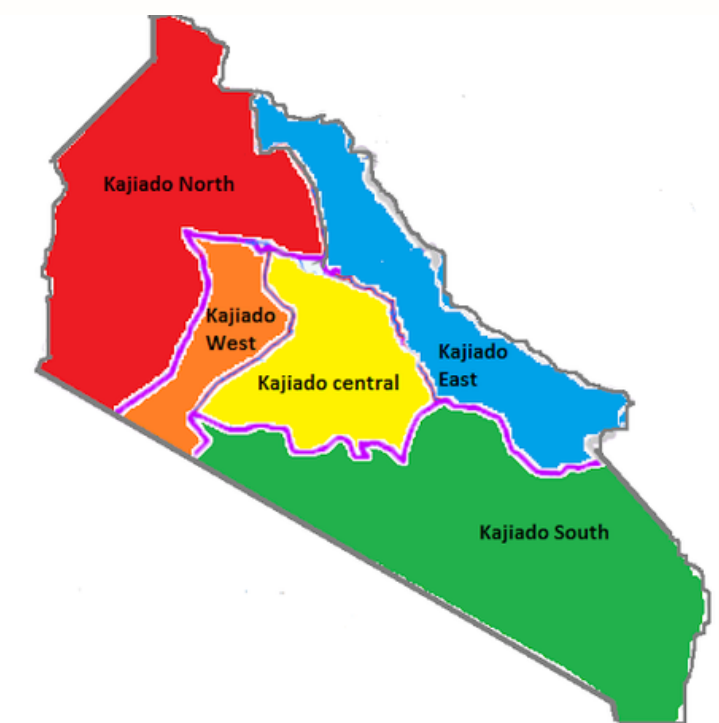
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# Background: Climate Profile Kajiado County

- Kajiado County is predominantly **semi-arid** with a history of devastating droughts since the 1900s. The frequency of drought has increased over time to about every 2–3 years.
- Kajiado County, Kenya – the town is located 80 km south of Nairobi, along the Nairobi – Arusha highway.
- Local people are predominantly of the Maasai tribe.
- **Livestock rearing and crop farming** (along rivers and springs in south-western parts) are the main economic activities in the county.
- The main climatic challenge facing the **agricultural sector in Kajiado is drought**.
- The **frequency and severity of droughts in the county** have resulted in crop failure and livestock losses and triggered severe food shortages in the past.
- In **past droughts, crop failure** in the county reported at more than **90%**, while **livestock losses were in excess of 70%** in most areas within the county.

**Low literacy rates** coupled with high **poverty levels** further compound the challenges brought about by climate change and variability; **more than 53% of the population live below the poverty line**



# Study rationale & approach

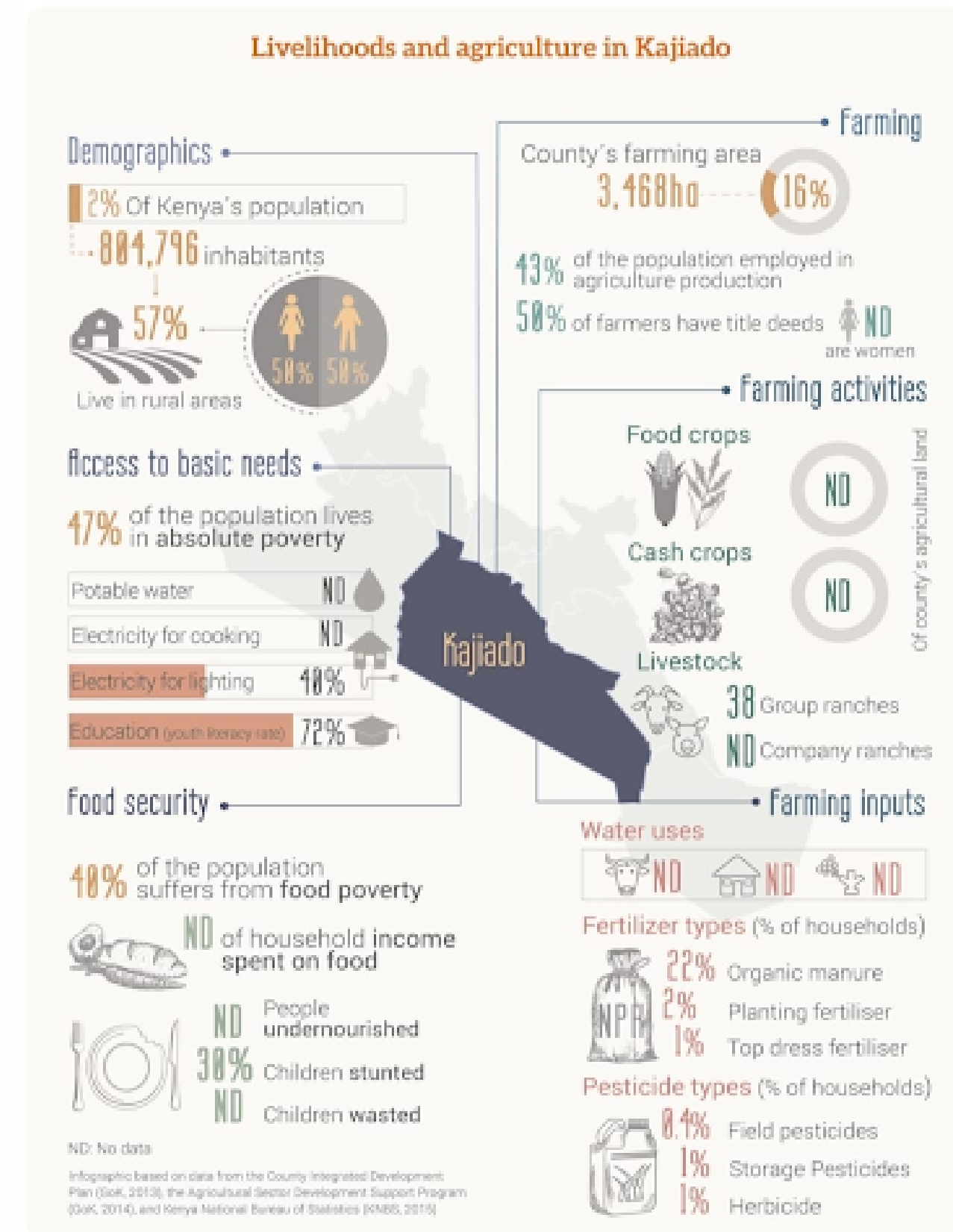


- The **trigger** : Kajiado County Initiative under the ministry educations – **Training for Vocational Educational Progamme** and **Early childhood development** – under Kenya Big 4 Agenda
  - The project aimed to target youth with basic **Primary** and **Secondary** education for enrollment into various vocational courses such as plumbing, tailoring etc
  - Set out to, **advertise, identify** and **recruit** trainees to take part in the training
    - 95% of applicants were males gap identified that fewer girls
    - Identification of a gender gap
  - We argue that climate change is **contributing to changes in the practice of FGM/C** among this community, as a result of the **increasing gender inequalities** and strained **livelihoods** due to socio-economic decline which has a direct impact on women and girls
  - Resulting in **affirmative action to try recruit more girls**, eliminating education **qualifications** of girls, **visiting homesteads** to recruit and **investigate**
  - **Objective**: Therefore, this study sought to elucidate the effect of climate change on changing social, gender norms and FGM practice
  - **Methodology: Qualitative**
    - **Interviews** with administrative chief, heads of households, women and girls, county officials, **12 key-informants** and **8 focus group discussions**.
- reviewing published, grey and other articles** related to the subject of climate change, gender norms and FGM as well as.

# A Background of the Maasai people

- Analysis of historical temperature **trends in the county over 25 years** (1981 to 2005), indicate that mean first season temperatures have **increased by approximately 0.5°C**, while second season temperatures decreased slightly  $\leq 0.1^\circ\text{C}$
- Because of these changes in temperature and rainfall, first season has experienced a large **increase in the number of heat stress days**, while **flood** risk in both seasons has increased.
- The Maasai social structure – **complex, highly stratified and hierarchical social structure, with age and gender serving as key axes of the social formation/organization**, role differentiation and allocation
- The maasai's **economic activities** has been based on **livestock production** – Dairy, Beef production, Hides and Skins,
- Community's livestock production activities has been organized along **an elaborate framework of socio-spatial organization** that divided the **community and territory into various segments**
  - a framework that is not sustainable any more due to climate change.
  - They have to move from area to area in search of grazing pastures and water
- **Water supply is stressed** where community members sometimes find themselves covering an average of **10km** in search of water. The **ongoing drought has worsened this water crisis!**

**FGM** – seen as a transformational processes linked as a '**rite of passage**' are crucial in shaping a woman's femininity, identity, marriageable status and legitimating sexuality





# Findings: Impact of climate change among Maasai in Kajiado

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- Kajiado County – has experienced **a rise in annual temperatures** over the past decades and changes in rainfall patterns, particularly **increase in frequency of droughts**.
- Lack of water availability has led to **dying animals and vanishing vegetation** hence **impacting their livelihoods**
- **Cattle densities declined with increases in maximum temperature. Below 30°C**, the cattle density was around **10 animals per km<sup>2</sup>**, whereas at about **34°C**, cattle density reduced to approximately **1 cattle per km<sup>2</sup>**.
- Participants confirmed that the area had **experienced unpredictable rains** and periodic **drought, leading to crop failure and lack of pasture and water** for their cattle.
- Cattle keepers are **forced to travel further** and further distances in search of forage and water
- They describe the **situation as a tragedy** with rivers and lakes having run dry



## Excerpts on effect of climate change on girls

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“...with little education, girls are less likely to access formal employment and other related opportunities and this increases chances of being married off,”

–A **community elder** from the Olitinka area

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““While searching for water and food some of the girls find themselves crossing the border into communities that still practice FGM where they are likely to get married. Some like those who get married in remote regions like Saitamurt risk being cut because of low awareness levels and poor enforcement (of the law) in such regions”

–An **Administrative Chief**

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“.....the FGM prevalence has gone down but in they were experiencing a new threat that you the extended period of drought where families lose cattle (cows and Goats) and this jeopardizes livelihoods at household level to restock families have resorted to secretly cutting and marrying off girls.....”



## Excerpts on effect of climate change on girls

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“When sons migrate with the cattle, the old people are left at home, old mothers left behind, they are unable to perform most household chores such as looking for water, firewood and milking the few animals left behind”, she adds “hence my son had to marry a young woman in order to help around the home”–

A **mother-in law** to a new bride:

She was further asked whether the new child bride had been cut to which she said:

“...In this community uncut girls cannot be accepted”

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“the main river that drains into lake Magadi had since dried up, and this forces girls to stay out of school and help the mothers in search for water and food”

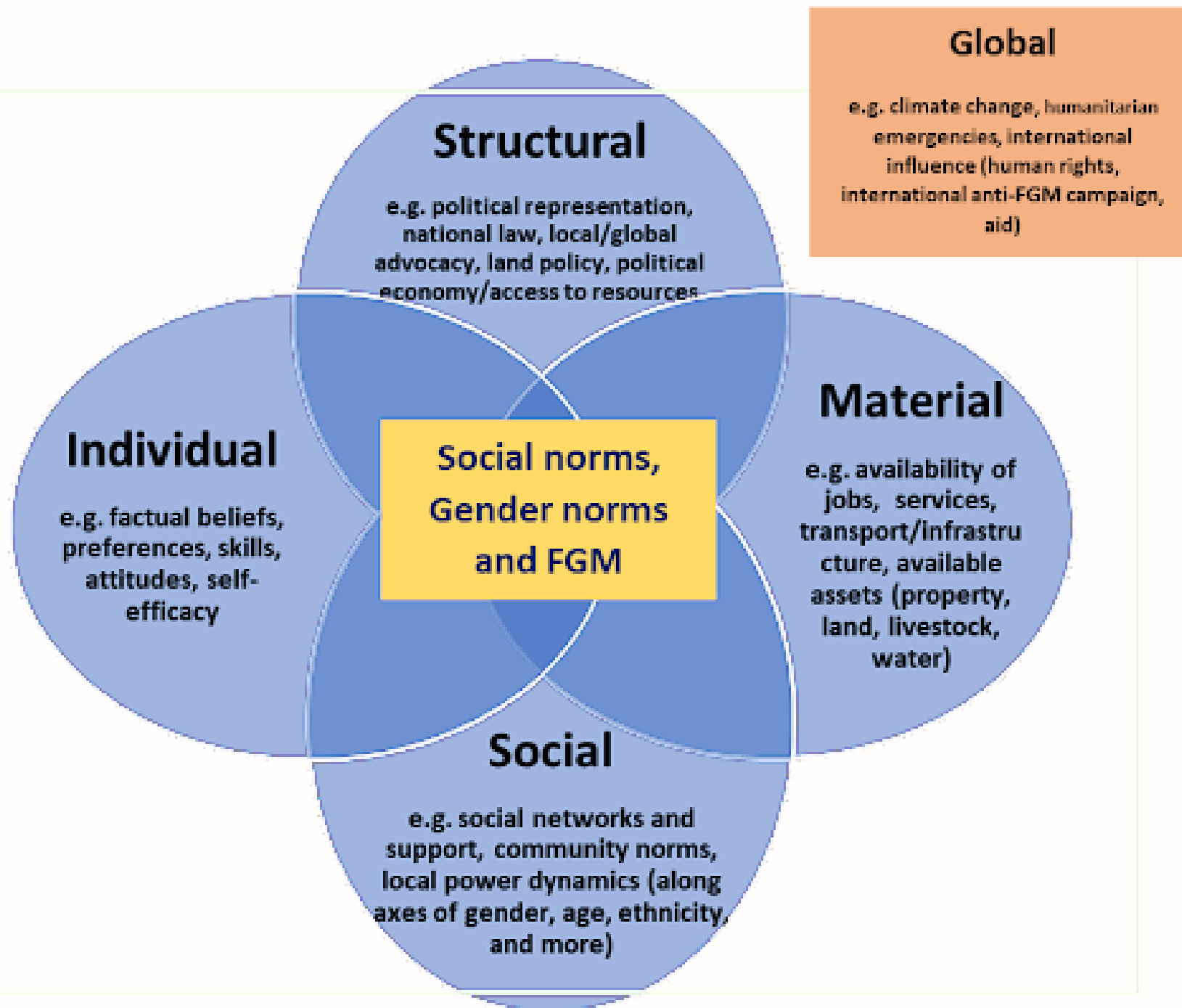
–**A community elder**

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...families with elderly parents pay dowry for girls to be married in order to help with house work which includes walking longer distances in search of water and to take care of the older parents”

–**Administrative Chief**, Saitamurt

# Conclusions and recommendations



- In conclusion, the study **points to the intersecting axes of climate change on gender norms and FGM**, further research mixed-method continental studies
- The study portends that **broader socio-ecological factors pose as barriers to social and gender norms change** among the Maasai of Kajiado.
- Therefore, there is **need to adopt a multilevel intersectional approach** when designing programmes to end harmful practices.
- The contextual **social, economic and environmental factors should not be overlooked** when tailoring FGM intervention programs
- The findings reveal that climate change is an emerging threat to the achievement of gender equality
- through the **socio-economic disempowerment** of women and girls
- and the **persistence of harmful practices detrimental** to girls and women.

Strategies that support communities resilience to CH by encourage **keeping girls in school, delaying marriage, and abandoning FGM** are very crucial to adopt in the face of climate change



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**Methods** The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional study design, employing quali-

