

South Africa: "The economy is sick" – whither the ANC? **Kenya:** Tana – the delta of discontent

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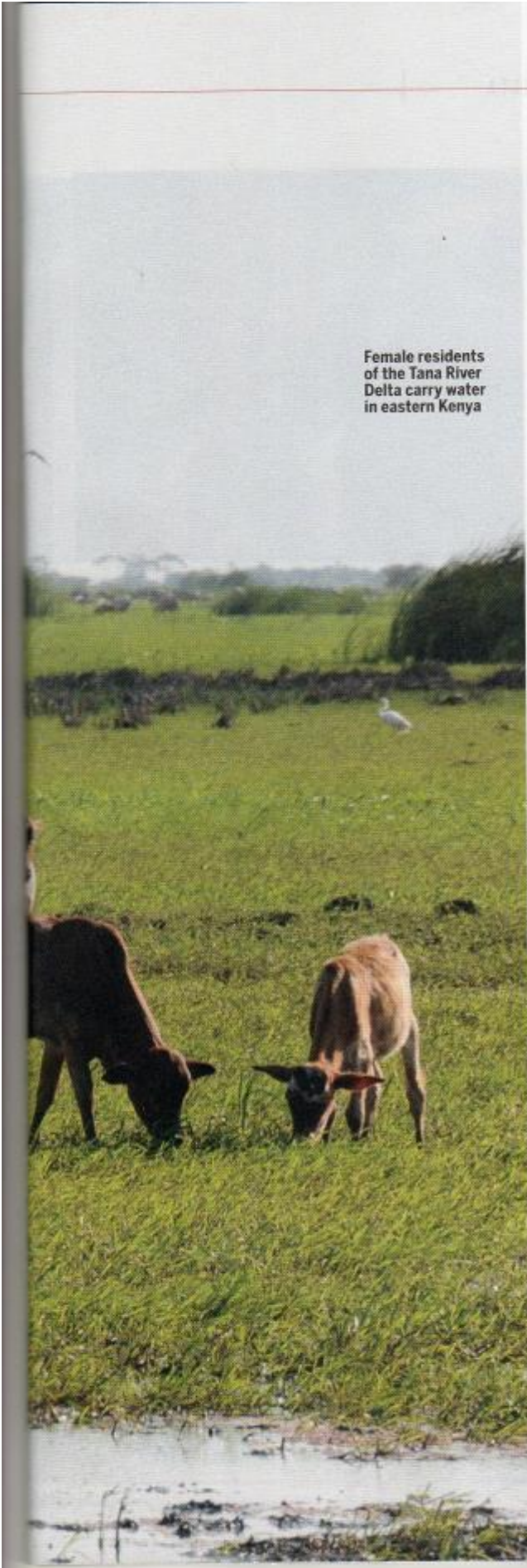


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Since colonial times, the Tana River Delta in Kenya has been considered East Africa's farm-to-fork bastion, but it has never fulfilled this ambition. For this report, our Nairobi senior correspondent **Wanjohi Kabukuru** travelled to the troubled region to investigate, finding a community of broken dreams marginalised by corporate interests, and let down by ruling officials.

Tana: The delta of discontent





Female residents of the Tana River Delta carry water in eastern Kenya

On a hot day in early January 2014, Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta donned a dusty coat and boarded a Massey Ferguson tractor in the coastal delta locale of Galana-Kulalu, which borders Kilifi and Tana River counties, 250km north of Mombasa. With the press in tow and smiling guests, President Kenyatta drove the tractor, ploughing the land. This tilling act signified breaking the ground of his coalition government's ambitious Kshs 250bn (\$2.37bn), 1.2million acre Galana-Kulalu Food Security Irrigation Project. Much of the land for this is in Kenya's Tana River Delta, which is majorly fed by Kenya's main river, the Tana River.

President Kenyatta's seemingly 'novel idea' is not the first one on the delta. It has been this way for 50 years and four presidents later.

Tana River traces its source from Mount Kenya, flowing northwards. It then takes a detour in Garissa, surging eastwards, creating a breathtaking 200,000ha delta of immense global importance consisting of flood plains, mangroves, riverine forests, sand dunes and grasslands as it empties into the Indian Ocean.

But the Tana River is a 1,000km waterway flowing with broken dreams, marginalisation, competing interests and grievances. The river's cascade is one narrative of governmental inconsistency and incompatible geopolitical interests amidst a low-intensity yet deadly resource and land-based conflict.

Some geologists define the delta, which is a designated Ramsar Site (a wetland of international importance as designated under the Ramsar Convention), as a biodiversity hotspot, starting from the coastal tourist spot of Malindi (200km from Mombasa), hugging Lamu County and ending at the Somalia border.

Tana Delta - the commodity frontier

Many interested parties see this riparian ecosystem differently, for different reasons. To agriculturalists the delta is a food

basket. Conservationists see it as a rich ornithological site hosting 22 bird species. Investors see the delta as a "commodity frontier" and a natural resource haven. Oil and gas exploration, which has shown positive results, is underway within the precincts of the vast delta, and there are established titanium deposits. It is this amalgam of wealth in one zone that makes the Tana Delta a study in contrasts and attracts competing interests.

"Conservation can co-exist with agriculture. The best way to proceed is by adopting the concept of a biosphere and implementing the comprehensive land use plan launched in late July this year," says Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) lecturer Philip Wandera, who has conducted environmental audits in the delta for over two decades.

For him, "Agriculture, livestock breeding, mining and conservation can coexist in the Tana Delta without conflicts flaring up. The only problem is that we don't want to address the land tenure and land use in the delta. If we address these problems comprehensively, the Tana Delta can accommodate all those activities."

Maulidi Diwayu, the chief executive officer of the environmental defence lobby, Tana Delta Environmental Conservation (TADECO), explains further: "The Tana River Delta is a wetland of international importance that can feed the entire East African region and supply industries with minerals without losing its conservation status. The sad thing is that the government and some of the investors who have come here have not been sincere. They come here and get titles yet for decades the locals have never even received an allotment letter. It is such doubles standards and hidden agendas that breed political incitement and inter-community clashes."

Three state agencies involved in the Tana Delta region are the National Irrigation Board (NIB), Tana and Athi Rivers Development Agency (TARDA) and the National Oil Corporation of Kenya (NOCK).

The NIB has irrigated parts

of Tana Delta since the 1950s and TARDA, with financial assistance from the Japanese Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF), set up the 2,100ha rice-growing Tana Delta Irrigation Project (TDIP) in 1986. They only managed to irrigate 1,763ha. Apart from being viewed with suspicion by the locals, the project operated without a title deed for years and became a major failure 10 years later as climate change, after El Niño, destroyed it.

Hardley Becha, director of the coastal environmental lobby Community Action for Nature Conservation (CANCO), echoes Diwayu's sentiments. "TARDA's land is contested land. It is only when the TARDA and the Mumias sugar project saga came out to the public that TARDA was challenged to produce documents of ownership... At that time they did not have any document but later they secured title to that land under dubious circumstances and yet TARDA has been in the Tana Delta since the early 1980s. Many local communities do not have tenure rights to their ancestral land."

TARDA officials declined to answer any of the queries posed and refused to return our calls. But Diwayu hastens to ask: "Both TARDA and NIB have been here for more than 20 years. In all those years we cannot feed ourselves and the country is still a net importer of food. Do you see the contradiction?"

The Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) notes that the population of the Tana County stands at 262,000 and the poverty index in the Tana Delta is now at 76 per cent.

Distressed development

Looking through the data of Tana River's distressed development history, a pattern of government- and donor-managed let downs emerge.

The 1996-2001 Tana River Primate National Reserve (TRPNR) saga was not the first of the World Bank's blunders along the Tana River. The World Bank

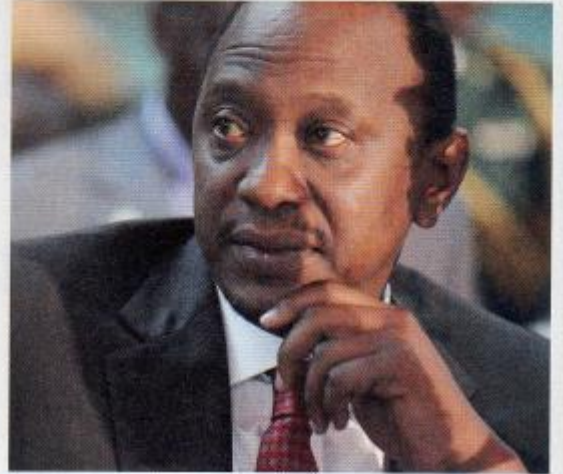
first became involved in the Tana in 1978 when among other donors it funded the Bura Irrigation and Settlement Project 400km north of Mombasa. The project was to grow cotton and maize in a 35,000 acre area at a cost of \$98m. By 1990 the project was still hobbling along as only 6,000 acres had been irrigated at an escalated cost of \$108m, not to mention there being a string of disenfranchised families who had been promised land and livelihoods in the Bura scheme but were never allocated any land.

The Tana Irrigation Scheme, which was set up in 1953 and is the oldest national scheme, collapsed in 1989 when the Tana River changed its course. Its revival is yet to yield any significant national success. The NIB, which is the lead government agency in the 1.2 million-acre food sufficiency project, says that only a 10,000 acre model farm has been irrigated at a cost of \$141.4m. Apparently despite the noble intentions behind the scheme, it is also being viewed with historical suspicion as yet another plan by government to dislocate the locals from their land in the delta region.

TARDA in the meantime is planning to expand the current rice irrigation scheme from 1,763ha to 5,000ha to produce 24,000 metric tonnes of rice per annum." It also plans to partner with sugar miller the Mumias Sugar Company to develop a further 20,000ha of sugar fields and construct a 10,000 metric tonnes sugar processing plant complete with a 34MW cogeneration power plant and the installation of an ethanol plant capable of producing 75,000 litres per day. These plans have been contested in court by the local community, challenging TARDA's legitimacy in owning the land.

"There are many court cases between the community and TARDA. Some of the court cases have not been resolved to date," says Philip Wandera.

Trying to make sense of how and why half-a-century's food security irrigation strategies have failed takes me on a torturous 346km-long, hot, dusty and bumpy ride from Garissa to Malindi towns with stops along the way at Bura,



Above: Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta has a delicate case, balancing the economic and environmental imperative

Hola, and Garsen. This is the main Tana Delta road and it is in a terrible state of disrepair.

"All the projects are top-down, from government to community. Not the other way round and never inclusive," Becha says, adding: "Communities have not been included in project design, and planning. The approach used and the projects themselves, do not address local needs and aspirations. All these projects fail because they seem to be displacing people of their rights to land and access to resources."

Interestingly, even with a long history of policy disappointment, the delta is still attracting intense interest. A large-scale agribusiness venture in the pipeline is a \$340m sugarcane irrigation project



As many companies seek a piece of the delta, little is mentioned of local communities, who are not factored into land allocation plans. This has created bad blood, even among the communities themselves.

mooted by Mat International in partnership with Mumias Sugar Company and TARDA. This was preceded by the bartering of a 40,000ha fruit farming lease to the Qatari government in exchange for \$3.5bn for the construction of the proposed \$24.7bn Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor.

On natural resources, the National Oil Corporation of Kenya (NOCK), which geologically defines the area as Lamu Basin, has carved out the delta into several oil blocks. Block L6, which covers both onshore and offshore areas, has been allocated Gas NL. Zarara Oil has Bloc L4, Lamu Oil and Gas, a subsidiary of EDGO, has control over Block L14, while Block L2 is under Imara Energy. This scramble

by energy conglomerates is a worry to environmentalists.

Economic factors and environment

According to Becha there are numerous unseen interests at play in the Kenyan Delta, as is the case in many other deltas in Africa, notably Niger Delta and Rufiji Delta. "The environmental and social consequences of oil and gas development are well documented, with many examples across Africa, from massive environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity in the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystem, and the dwindling socio-economic fortunes of local people," Becha says. "The question being asked is, will the Tana Delta be any different from the Niger Delta? Economic factors are being pushed to the forefront at the expense of environmental and social matters and local livelihoods and well-being."

As all these companies seek a piece of the Tana Delta, little is mentioned of local indigenous communities, such as the Orma, Pokomo, Wardei, Malakote, Munyoyaya, Boni and Watta among others, who are not factored in the land allocation plans. This has bred bad blood against government, donors, the investor community and even among the communities themselves.

Dispossession and communal conflict

"The question we were always confronted with during our audits was why outsiders and foreigners should get land title deeds when indigenous communities who have been here for generations have no titles. New titles means dispossession of land from the local people."

Frustrations over the opaque nature of land acquisitions have intensified at the community level, stirring deadly inter-communal clashes between the Orma, Pokomos and Wardeis, claiming over 2,000 deaths in the last 23

years. Since the 1992 general elections, and in every electoral cycle after that, the delta has become a grim reaper.

The government's inability to contain what has rightly been identified as politically instigated inter-communal clashes between the delta's three main communities, in the Orma, Pokomo and Wardei "pastoralist versus farmers" dispute, remains a mystery. This is especially so considering the 1992 Kennedy Kiliku Parliamentary Select Committee on electoral violence, the 1998 Akiwumi Commission of Inquiry into Tribal Clashes in Kenya and the delta-specific 2012 judicial commission of inquiry into the ethnic violence in Tana River.

"Fear of more violence in the delta as the country approaches the 2017 general elections is real," Diwayu says.

All three government commissions of inquiry identified the root causes of the conflict bedevilling the Tana Delta but nothing concrete has been done. Tension still lurks in the delta.

However, all this is but one account of the troubled region, which cites communal conflicts exacerbated by competition over water resources, pasture and farmland. The other account on the real origins of the violence in the delta, which is firmly overshadowing the inter-ethnic animosity narrative, of course mentions competing multi-billion large-scale land acquisition deals which involve multinationals, foreign governments and the elite from outside the delta seeking agricultural land, aquaculture spaces, extractive contracts and exploration blocks for oil and gas.

It is in this, the restive Tana Delta – shaped by five decades of economic and environmental discontent – that President Kenyatta's food security aspirations are anchored. With three unsuccessful presidents, will President Uhuru's 1.2 million acres "field of dreams"-style project succeed? **NA**

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