

Interactive comment on “The nexus of oil, conflict, and climate change vulnerability of pastoral communities in Northwest Kenya” by J. Schilling et al.

Anonymous Referee #1

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The paper does fit the aims and scope of the journal by “conceptualizing, modelling, quantifying and predicting system behaviors and global change.” It specifically examines whether oil exploration in the Turkana District will make pastoral communities more vulnerable to climate change. It draws on two bodies of literature, one showing the detrimental impact of the oil industry on the environment and communities in other parts of the continent; and the second, the impact of climate change on pastoral conflict. The paper is unique in coupling these two effects; however it ultimately fails to link oil exploration to increased ethnic conflict, the second part of their second research question (p. 1167).

Based on interviews with town dwellers, the paper documents the discontent and ten-
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sion with the oil exploration company, Tullow Oil. Newspapers have reported thefts and vandalism at oil exploration sites. The authors discuss the degradation of the environment occurring with oil exploration and extraction, rendering it less suitable for watering and feeding livestock; and the fencing off land by oil companies making it inaccessible to pastoralists. The authors also show the increase in violent conflict in the Turkana-Pokot border region within a four-year period that coincides with the period of oil exploration. However, they fail to provide any evidence directly linking pastoral conflict with oil exploration. For now the paper gives only a warning of the possibility of violent conflict, which is nonetheless an important point to make known. Oil exploration could force more Turkana pastoralists into the border zone where they would be more vulnerable to Pokot attack. However without further evidence, the actual rise in conflict in conjunction with oil exploration could be just coincidence. Pastoral conflict does occur in cycles with annual fluctuations in rainfall.

Linking oil exploration with increased ethnic conflict is problematic in this paper because the authors overlook two important aspects of Turkana social organization in the ethnography. One is the Turkana are organized into territorial “sections” that circumscribe migratory routes in good rainfall years. While border conflict and oil exploration may occur in the same southern region of the Turkana District they are in different Turkana sections and may not involve the same Turkana groups (see Adem et al. 2012). The other aspect of Turkana social organization is the divide between pastoralists and town-dwellers, the latter are individuals and families who are no longer able to survive as pastoralists and have moved to towns where they can find wage labor (see Broch-Due and Sanders 1999). Pastoralists and town-dwellers might have different expectations, be differentially impacted by oil exploration and climate change, and therefore require different policy responses. Also it is not clear whether Turkana pastoralists would violently engage oil companies the same way they do the Pokot, or the same way that town-dwellers do.

If the authors address these concerns they would make a stronger more nuanced ar-

gument.

References:

Adem, Teferi Abate, et al. "Dangerous Geography: Spatial Distribution of Livestock Raiding in Northwestern Kenya." *Ethnology* 51.1 (2012): 1-29.

Broch-Due, Vigdis and Todd Sanders. "Rich Man, Poor Man, Administrator, Beast: The Politics of Impoverishment in Turkana, Kenya, 1890-1990." *Nomadic Peoples* 3.2 (1999):35-55

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