



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Listening Project: Mui Basin, Kitui County

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Capturing Community Voices - A First Step towards Informed Dialogue in
Kenya's Extractives Sector**

27th JULY 2017



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Capturing Community Voices-A First Step towards Informed Dialogue in Kenya's Extractives Sector

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The Extractives Baraza (EB) has commenced a series of county-level information needs assessments known as the Listening Project. This commenced as a pilot on 1 April 2017 in Kitui County, a coal-rich region in Kenya, in partnership with the Aga Khan University – East African Institute for a period of 3 months. Considering the significant contribution of the extractives resources to the economy and the direct impact in the regions within which they are exploited, there is need to assess the situation at the county level in terms of community perceptions and knowledge about the sector as well as their information needs and gaps. One recurring theme among affected communities is that national based stakeholders have failed to objectively capture and document community perceptions, experiences and knowledge of the sector or related sectors. EB recognizes that access to information interventions can best be informed by establishing stakeholder perceptions, knowledge, concerns and understanding of the extractives activities within their regions. The Listening Project provides a strong and critical avenue to assess and establish these perceptions, knowledge and concerns so as to inform innovative interventions for information access and dissemination involving communities, and elicit best (local) practices regarding community engagement. We hope to see this project address critical information needs at the county level and inform best intervention mechanisms by EB and other stakeholders especially the government and investors.

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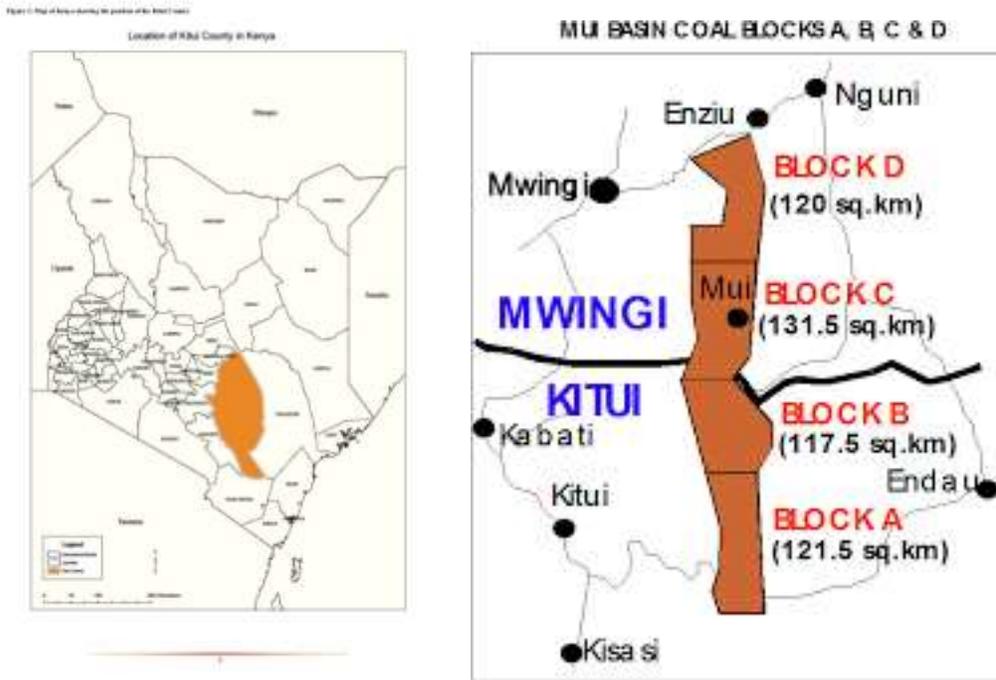
Overview

The backdrop of this study is that local communities and stakeholders at the county level in Kenya hold certain positions, concerns, knowledge and perceptions critical to informing policy interventions at both national and county level. The information in this report, which focuses in Kitui County, a coal-rich region in Kenya, was gathered in a county-level information needs assessment conducted by the [Extractives Baraza \(www.extractives-baraza.com\)](http://www.extractives-baraza.com) based at the Strathmore University, Nairobi Kenya with support from the East African Institute – Aga Khan University, Kenya. The main objective of the needs assessment exercise was to get a basic understanding of the information needs and challenges that various stakeholders at the county level experience in Kenya’s extractive industry in order to inform the content and products that relevant stakeholders, including the Extractives Baraza, should create and share that is relevant and timely to the needs of these stakeholders. The ultimate goal of the project is to use these findings to influence key policy and project decisions by stakeholders at the national level based on documented community perceptions, knowledge and expectations at the county level so as to advance good governance of Kenya’s extractives sector.

Data Collection Methods

The study began with a two-week listening exercise with over 40 participants from the four Blocks A, B, C and D in Mui Coal Basin in Kitui County in April 2017. The researchers held conversations with people who represented a broad cross section of their communities such as local area chiefs and community members, government officials and civil society activists, men and women, young and old including people with disabilities. Listening conversations included people who are directly affected by the exploration and those who will be indirectly affected as well as those who did not come from the affected region but were interested in the conversation as they are close enough to the process to have valid and interesting insights about the project’s impacts. Local people and experts who have been part of the early reconnaissance phase also participated in the Listening Project. The conversations originally began as small group dialogues and grew into free flowing group conversations.

The study also utilized surveys with key participants from Civil Society Organizations, government representatives as well as business operators in Kitui town. The following maps indicate the survey areas in the Mui Coal Basin:-



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Geological Survey Map of Mui Basin Blocks
 Source: Google images July 2017

Key Observations/Highlights

1. Our initial findings suggest that the community is not opposed to the coal mining project, which is still in the exploration phase, but they want their concerns and complaints heard and resolved. People of Mui Basin are hungry for information about the anticipated coal mining activities and how this will affect their lives and livelihoods.
2. There is also a significant gap between the information seekers (community/CSOs) and those perceived to be information holders (national government, companies). Those with information – the national government, segments of the county government and the extractive companies - are seemingly able to access quality information that inform their decision-making at project level whereas the civil society representing community interests

and affected communities are left to depend on what they are told by politicians, media and the occasional meetings organized by the national government. The study reveals that the lack of adequate, quality and relevant information has created room for speculation and rumors and this has created suspicion and mistrust.

3. Stakeholder engagement in Mui Coal Basin appears to have largely been undertaken by the national government with very little influence from the county government. Similarly, other government agents and agencies like agricultural extension workers, Water Resources Management Authority and Kenya Forestry Research Institute are less aware of and do not link the impacts of coal mining to their work. The county government felt that they did not have a role to play especially because mining is a national function. There are a limited number of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working on extractives in Kitui County.
4. The findings additionally suggest a preference for public meetings (85.7 %) as the best information dissemination channel for county-level stakeholders. In particular, the chief's Baraza is regarded as the best avenue for meeting and disseminating information. The youths prefer an SMS platform to communicate and receive information on extractives. The internet network in Kitui is unreliable plagued with regular power outages affecting maximal utilization of online information.
5. Community conversations revealed that most participants feel that relevant stakeholders such as the government and companies are deliberately withholding information from them. This was the most significant barrier to them accessing information about the coal exploration and anticipated mining in the area.
6. Lack of information on land came out as the greatest issue of concern among those likely to be affected especially in whether or not they would receive just compensation as well as the challenge of securing land titles.
7. The local business community is yet to understand their role and the opportunities present in the coal mining industry in the region.
8. All the respondents of the survey as well as the participants of the community conversations expressed interest in engaging with the Extractives Baraza platform either through receiving regular updates, utilizing the information gathered by the platform as well as attending events organized by the platform.

Recommendations

In light of these revelations on the exploration and future mining of coal in the Mui Basin, Kitui County, the following recommendations are suggested:

Recommendations to Government (National and County)

- The relevant government ministries both at the national and county level should work closely with the local communities to develop better and defined pathways and dissemination systems to communicate information on coal exploration and possible mining in the area. This will address the problem of miscommunication and conflicting information about coal exploration in Mui Basin;
- The national government should develop a robust framework of engagement mechanism with the county government to enable county government participation in matters relating to coal exploration in the county;
- The national government should provide clarity on how land adjudication, compensation and resettlement will be addressed. This will inform decisions regarding land and land use as well as negotiation strategies employed by the community;
- The county government should take the lead as a convener of public participation at the county level on matters relating to coal exploration and other mining activities. This will enable the county government to better identify and address grievances raised by its constituents;
- Both national and county governments should establish clear and credible grievance processes for all grievances relating to the coal exploration activities in Mui Basin;
- Both the national and county government should urgently address the prevailing problem of the Liaison Committees for the four blocks whose term has already expired.

Recommendations to the investor companies

- Companies should invest in engaging local stakeholders especially from the early exploration stages so as to build trust, understand community grievances/concerns so as to adequately address them and attain a social license to operate;

- Companies should continuously and frequently share information about their operations, opportunities available and any potential negative impacts as well as their mitigation strategies;
- Companies should proactively engage county governments to ensure a supportive operating environment.

Recommendations to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- CSOs should work towards building their capacity on the technical aspects relating to the sector to enable robust dissemination of information on coal exploration;
- CSOs should sensitize community members on available grievance mechanisms at the county and national level for ease of accessing remedies;
- CSOs should sensitize community members on the available opportunities in both employment and business as a result of coal exploration in the county. This should also include the anticipated negative impacts so as to manage expectations of locals;
- CSOs should seek to build strong linkages with national level stakeholders especially CSO platform to facilitate and enable ease of access to certain information not in their possession;
- CSOs should undertake evidence based advocacy *i.e.* consider carrying out scientific research to establish stakeholders' concerns. The outcome should be documented to inform targeted advocacy.

Suggestions for Further Research

While this study contributes to the information needs in the extractives sector at Kitui County level, many possibilities for scaling to other resource rich counties in other parts of the country remain. Therefore, this research serves as a starting point in evaluating the extent to which community perspectives formed by information available and accessible to them, shape the nature of engagement they have in the extractives sector. Understanding such would be informative in how effective public participation in the extractives sector should be carried out.

Access to the Full Report is available upon request. Contact us at:

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