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# Moving in contexts of environmental change: a rural–urban livelihoods perspective from Laikipia, Kenya

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# Executive summary

This paper explores physical movements, and the translocal connections that accompany them, through the perspective of rural–urban livelihoods in Laikipia County, Kenya. In doing so, it sets out an alternative perspective to some of the common assumptions about how people move in contexts of environmental change and to the ways in which livelihoods adapt in the process.

Rural–urban livelihoods play an increasingly important role in the local economies and livelihoods of large numbers of people in the Horn of Africa. This paper suggests two possible framings of rural–urban livelihoods: 1) a migration/mobility perspective that emphasises how households access assets, resources and activities dispersed across multiple rural and urban settings; and 2) a translocal perspective that focuses on the individuals (both migrants and non-migrants) connected across collective livelihood activities in rural and urban settings. In this context, recognising rural–urban livelihoods as a common socioeconomic phenomenon provides a valuable perspective, as these forms of livelihood incorporate not just movements (whether everyday mobility or longer-distance, longer-term migration), but also the translocal connections and livelihood diversification strategies that often play an important part in decisions and experiences of moving.

Natural resources, and in particular land and water, are becoming increasingly scarce in Laikipia and have emerged as a major concern, especially for marginalised groups. And yet environmental factors alone do not explain the growth in mobile, translocal or diversified livelihoods in recent years. Plurality is a common characteristic of many contemporary livelihoods and mobility patterns. A range of environmental, social, political, economic and cultural changes, often occurring at the macro level, have contributed to the uptake of rural–urban livelihoods over time. These include economic decline, improved technical and infrastructural connectivity between rural and urban people and places, and the changing expectations and aspirations of women and young people.

Having set the scene in which rural–urban livelihoods occur in Laikipia, this paper considers such livelihoods from the perspectives and lived experiences of those involved in them. It illustrates why some groups are unable or unwilling to engage in mobile and diversified livelihoods in the first place and why, even when they do, outcomes are uneven and unequal among migrants, non-migrants and the wider community. The relationality and interconnectedness of many collective livelihood strategies mean that extended family and the wider community are nonetheless implicated in rural–urban livelihoods, even if they themselves do not move.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations are made for EU staff and others engaged in policymaking and programme implementation:

1. Movements that occur in contexts of environmental change are not inherently forced, but occur out of complex combinations of both necessity and choice. This diverges from the popular image of the protracted ‘environmental refugee’ moving permanently across national borders or from rural to urban settings. Rather than being a unidirectional or one-time decision that is made, people facing resource scarcity are engaged in bi-directional flows of internal movements between rural and urban settings and enduring connections are maintained between migrants and non-migrants spread across different locations. With this in mind, policy and programmes should incorporate political economy and historical

analyses in order to recognise the complex drivers and multiple experiences of mobility occurring in contexts of environmental change.

2. Movements – whether daily mobility or long-distance migrations – can represent an important livelihood option for the growing numbers of households affected by natural resource scarcity. Interventions should support – rather than seek to thwart – these movements, and in contexts where opportunities for safe and legal mobility are constrained, seek to expand the political space and economic opportunities for moving.
3. Access to and outcomes of mobile and diversified livelihoods are, however, mixed, uneven and often unequal. Some households may be unwilling or unable to engage in mobile livelihoods in the first place and, when they do, outcomes range from destitution to survival to improvements in wellbeing. While some diversification may lead to sustainable futures for mobile people and their social networks, others may be less durable. This raises questions about the sustainability of rural-urban livelihoods that emerge out of necessity (rather than choice or preference), that create or exacerbate existing inequalities or that place additional strain on those involved. Interventions should reflect this nuance by extending support to vulnerable and marginalised groups affected by negative aspects of rural-urban migration.
4. Contemporary livelihoods and economies have become increasingly relational and collective – spread across multiple activities and individuals in both rural and urban settings. In this context, policy and programmes should consider the potential for interventions that target a particular person or area to have wider repercussions that can be both positive and negative. For example, support for migrants in cities may have wider repercussions for connected family members, communities or places elsewhere including in rural areas. At the same time, care should also be taken to avoid using livelihood labels and categories that overlook this diversity, particularly those that treat rural and urban dwellers as entirely distinct populations.

# 1 Introduction

This paper explores physical movements, and the translocal connections that accompany them, through the perspective of rural–urban livelihoods in Laikipia County, Kenya. In doing so, it sets out an alternative perspective to some of the common assumptions about how people move in contexts of environmental change and to the ways in which livelihoods adapt in the process. However, before doing so, it is helpful to define some of the terms used in this paper – in particular, ‘migration’, ‘mobility’ and ‘translocality’ – all of which relate to movement in different ways.

Migration and mobility tend to be differentiated in the literature according to: (1) time – after a certain length of stay, someone is no longer mobile and becomes a migrant; and (2) borders – with a distinction often made between internal mobility and cross-border migration (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, 2020). With this in mind, this research defines ‘mobility’ as the everyday, transitory movements that people make in their daily lives, while ‘migration’ represents longer-term and longer-distance movements – although not necessarily across a national border. However, recognising that clear-cut distinctions between mobility and migration are likely to be arbitrary (and at times problematic), the two terms are referred to interchangeably as mobility/migration in many instances in this paper.<sup>1</sup> Linked to migration and mobility is the concept of ‘translocality’ – defined as, ‘Sets of multidirectional and overlapping networks, constituted by migration, in which the exchange of resources, practices and ideas links and at the same time transforms particular places’ (Greiner, 2010, p. 137). Translocality builds on the concept of ‘transnationalism’, defined as ‘the process through which migrants build cross-border ‘familial, economic, social, organisational, religious and political’ activities and networks through ‘sustained contacts and travel across national borders (Kutsche, 1995, pp 1–2; Ahmed, 2003, p 3). However, it represents a departure in that it also encompasses migrants who have not crossed a national border, but move internally within a country (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2015, p 8).

With these definitions in mind, rural–urban livelihoods can be conceptualised in two ways: through a migration/mobility perspective focused on livelihood activities, and using a translocal perspective focused on connected individuals. From a migration/mobility perspective, rural–urban livelihoods can be understood as the collection of livelihood activities that households can draw upon simultaneously across rural and urban settings through the act of moving (whether on a daily basis or for longer periods of time). Household members interviewed during fieldwork were able to undertake a range of different livelihood activities (such as livestock herding, commercial pastoralism, small-scale subsistence or commercial farming, trading and business ventures, casual labour or wage employment) by moving – on a daily or longer-term basis – between different rural and urban locations. At the same time, rural–urban livelihoods can also be seen through a translocal perspective focused on connected individuals, rather than activities. These translocal connections enable households to assume collective livelihoods that incorporate both migrants and non-migrants located in both rural and urban settings. For example, respondents described how networks of translocal connections with relatives elsewhere constituted key elements of their livelihoods, and in

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<sup>1</sup> Efforts to differentiate between mobility and migration according to parameters such as time and borders are problematic from a methodological perspective: how long does it take to become a migrant, and how useful is a focus on borders among porous cross-border communities? Efforts to differentiate between migration and mobility are also problematic from an ethical stance as, in a context of migration management, this may create a two-tier system between ‘privileged mobile persons’ and ‘unwanted migrants’ (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, 2020).

some cases of their very survival. With this in mind, migration, mobility and translocality are fundamental features of rural–urban livelihoods, without which households would be unable to engage in such livelihoods in the first place or maintain them in the long run.

There is a strong case to be made for studying rural–urban livelihoods, rather than migration *per se*. First, most research to date has explored the relationship between migration and the environment. By shifting the focus to rural–urban livelihoods and the mobility and translocality that they entail, this paper seeks to reposition the debate beyond migration in and of itself to a wider appreciation of how movement and livelihoods interact in contexts of environmental change. Second, rural–urban livelihoods play an increasingly important role in the local economies and livelihoods of large numbers of people, and represent an important potential adaptation to environmental change (Tacoli, 2002). Household livelihoods in Kenya have, for generations, been spread across rural and urban settings. Jamal and Weeks (1988, p 288) have described these households as the ‘trader-cum-wage earner-cum-shamba class’.<sup>2</sup> However, a review of the literature suggests that rural–urban livelihoods have grown in scope and importance in recent decades. Potts (1997, p 449; 1995, p 250) argued that existing multi-local livelihoods are becoming stronger and more critical than before, taking on a ‘new and vital significance’. Similarly, Owuor (2004, p 3) found that ‘rural–urban linkages are increasingly becoming an important element of the livelihood (or survival) strategies of the urban (poor) households’ in the Kenyan town of Nakuru. Likewise, Ramisch (2016) suggested that, over the past decade (or longer), Kenyan smallholder farmers have increasingly relied on multiple livelihoods across rural and urban locations. In addition, a third reason for studying rural–urban livelihoods is to improve understanding of the interactions between rural and urban settings, and the ways in which livelihoods increasingly depend on the opportunities found in both of these spaces. The multi-directional ties and dependencies that connect rural and urban economies remain poorly understood; this review aims to provide a welcome contribution to this gap in the literature.

The paper begins by outlining the research methodology, including the selection of locations, respondents and a mixed-methods approach. Following this, section 3 provides a more detailed analysis of rural–urban livelihoods and what these entail through an exploration of migration, mobility and translocality in the context of Laikipia. In doing so, it infuses the wider literature and theory with tangible examples derived from fieldwork. Having established what rural–urban livelihoods look like in theory and practice, section 4 explores the wider, macro-level factors that contribute to the growth of rural–urban livelihoods. It focuses on issues of land, water, economic decline, improved connectivity between people and places, and gendered and generational changes. Section 5 subsequently narrows the analysis to the micro-level experiences of rural–urban livelihoods among migrants, non-migrants and the wider community. Recommendations for policy and programmes are included in the concluding remarks of each section, and also summarised in the concluding section 6.

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Shamba’ is a Swahili word that translates as ‘field’ or ‘farm’ in English.

## 2 Methodology

This paper draws on eight months of fieldwork undertaken in 2019 in Laikipia County in Kenya.<sup>3</sup> Natural resources, and in particular land and water, are becoming increasingly scarce in Laikipia and have emerged as a major concern, especially for marginalised groups. In addition to undergoing environmental change, Laikipia provides a compelling setting for researching mobility in its many different forms, with significant movements into, out of and through the area, including nomadic pastoralism, displacement, state-endorsed resettlement programmes and labour migration. Laikipia also presents an interesting case when it comes to understanding how these dynamics impact in diverging ways on different groups practising a range of different livelihoods. The county is a mixed zone of arid and semi-arid pasture land and sites suitable for high-potential farming, and is geographically located at the intersection of equally diverse landscapes.

In this variable and versatile setting, a wide range of stakeholders emerges, including those engaged in multiple activities, such as smallholder farming, agro-pastoralism, pastoralism, labour migration, trading, small business and commercial ranching and farming. Private landowners, large companies, NGOs, conservationists and tourism operators are also present in Laikipia. Through partnership with a local research organisation, CETRAD (the Centre for Training and Integrated Research in ASAL Development), respondents from a range of livelihood backgrounds and sectors were targeted for interviews.<sup>4</sup> Interviews involved a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative and quantitative approaches. In total, 106 in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and life histories were conducted with 133 respondents, including migrants, non-migrants and key informants. Fieldwork centred on five main areas, which are outlined in Figure 1, and below:

1. Nanyuki town, in particular the suburbs of Thingithu, Majengo, Likii and Muthaiga.
2. Mukogodo in Laikipia North, in particular the small town of Dol Dol and surrounding pastoral settlements: Tool, Mukongo, Kuri Kuri, Bokish, Loisokut; these are characterised as semi-arid and arid areas.
3. Il Polei in Laikipia North, in particular Il Polei trading centre and surrounding pastoral settlements: Musul, Oloruko, Olampaa and Munishoi; these are characterised as semi-arid and arid areas.
4. Ethi in Laikipia East, in particular Ngenia and Mia Moja agro-pastoral rural areas, characterised by a semi-humid climatic condition.
5. Marula in Laikipia East, in particular Baraka and Njoguini agro-pastoral rural areas, characterised by semi-arid climatic conditions.

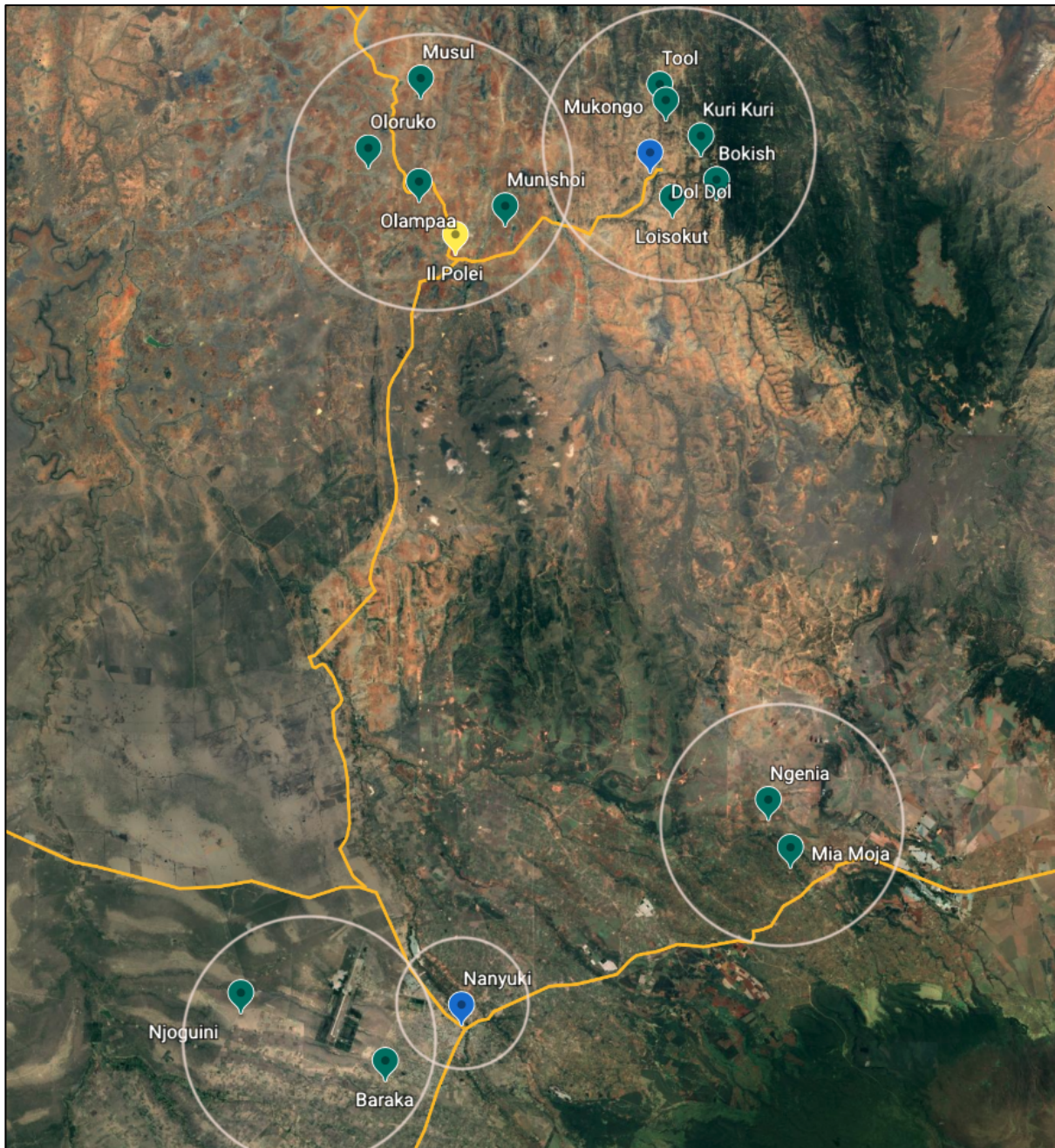
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<sup>3</sup> Fieldwork was conducted as part of the author's ongoing PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

<sup>4</sup> CETRAD is a bilateral research institution between the Kenyan and Swiss governments. It was established in July 2002 as a follow-up to the then Laikipia Research Programme (1976–97). CETRAD is based in Nanyuki town in Laikipia, and conducts research and training on sustainable development, livelihoods and natural resource use.



Figure 1: Fieldwork locations



# 3 Rural–urban livelihoods in the context of mobility and translocality

The term ‘rural–urban livelihoods’ is used to illustrate the way households make a collective living across rural and urban locations, through migration, mobility and translocality. This concept is now explored in detail through an analysis of how it has emerged in theory and in practice.

## 3.1 Migration and mobility

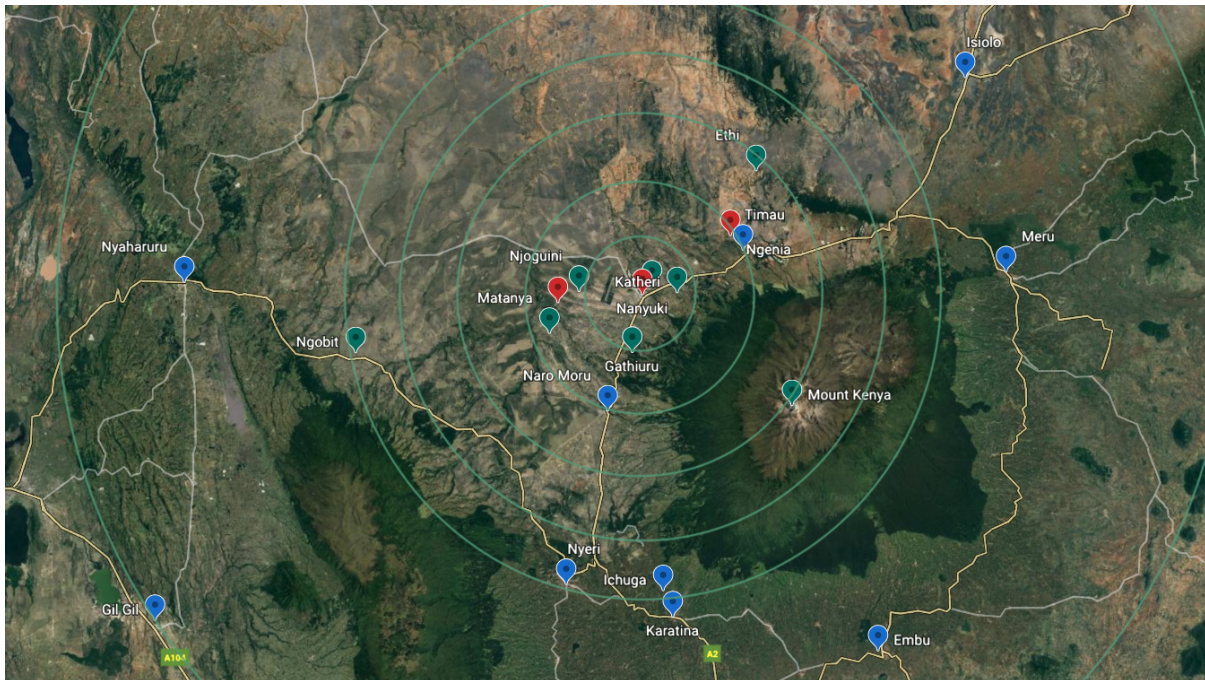
Both migration and mobility are common among Laikipian households from a range of different socioeconomic and livelihood backgrounds, and movements have become increasingly prevalent in recent years. ‘These movements have become more often than before’ was a common refrain from interviews across all the research sites. While migration is still dominated by young men, in contemporary Laikipia, increasing numbers of women are now also moving for work, education and other opportunities, and not just for marriage. Young, educated women without children are more likely to migrate (often to towns or beyond county borders) than older generations or those with family responsibilities, who tend to stay closer to home, if they move at all. In addition to youth, those who are well educated are more likely to move, especially to towns further afield where they can find job opportunities in NGOs, the private sector, or the public sector as teachers, health workers, police and civil servants.

In the vast majority of cases, migration is internal, either within Laikipia County or to neighbouring counties, such as Nyeri and Meru, and to a lesser extent to major and more distant cities such as Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa. Of the 25 locations that respondents in Nanyuki, Ngenia and Sweetwaters described moving to, 16 per cent are within a 10 km radius, 40 per cent are within a 20 km radius and 84 per cent are within a 100 km radius (see Figure 2 on migration destinations). In light of these relatively short distances, many respondents are able to return to their place of origin regularly – in many cases, commuting on a daily basis. In contrast, long-distance or permanent migrations across national borders occurred very rarely and only two respondents described having relatives who had moved abroad, to Dubai and South Africa. Furthermore, many movements were ultimately cyclical, linked to seasonal farming jobs (either on horticultural farms or neighbouring smallholdings) and in search of pasture during dry spells. The establishment of formal markets on specific days of the week also contributed to the cyclical nature of movements, and a number of young men described moving on a regular basis for several days at a time in order to sell their livestock at specific markets within Laikipia or neighbouring counties.

While the direction of movements tends to be rural to urban, many respondents also move in the opposite direction. This bi-directionality of movements was a clear finding of the research, and reasserts the notion that movements are not automatically rural–urban. When asked to give their reasons for moving, respondents offered a range of explanations – many of which help to explain the bi-directionality of migration and mobility. In most cases, respondents moved in search of

employment or business opportunities elsewhere. This could involve better markets and more clients in towns, especially for those in the hospitality, communications or technology industries, opportunities for which tend to be more widespread in urban settings. But the search for employment or business opportunities also entailed movements to rural areas to work on horticultural farms, conservation and tourism projects, as well as among brokers or middle-men looking to purchase agricultural and livestock produce (such as milk, eggs, meat, vegetables and maize) from small farmers and herders, to subsequently sell in urban markets.

**Figure 2: Destinations**



In many cases, respondents highlighted health and education as a reason for moving. For some, this involved moving to towns in order to access superior schooling or health care. However, for others, it entailed moving to rural areas where schools are cheaper and environmental and sanitation conditions better. A number of respondents complained that their physical and mental health had deteriorated in larger towns characterised by higher levels of pollution and stress. In addition, respondents moved in their retirement in the direction of both towns and rural areas. In some cases, elderly relatives moved in with younger relatives in towns, where they could more easily access social welfare support (in particular the US\$20 monthly payment to pensioners) and retire from more demanding physical livelihoods, such as farming and herding. In other cases, elderly migrants, tired of the pressures of urban life, retired to rural plots to be near to family who had stayed behind. Other reasons for moving included marriage, insecurity, access to land and pasture, as well as a general discontentment with life and a desire for better opportunities somewhere else.

This focus on physical movement helps to conceptualise the multiple assets, activities and resources distributed across rural and urban locations, and upon which many contemporary livelihoods rely. Indeed, key livelihoods resources, such as water, land, pasture, markets, labour, social and financial services, and employment opportunities remain unevenly distributed across rural and urban settings. This means that, while some households may be able to conduct a range of activities in situ, in most cases, some members of the household may need to move. After all, when livelihoods are framed in terms of assets, resources and activities, migration and mobility represent important mechanisms for accessing these when they are geographically dispersed across different locations.

Viewed from this perspective, a rural–urban livelihood can be understood as the collection of multiple livelihood assets, resources and activities that households draw upon simultaneously across rural and urban settings. Households interviewed during fieldwork typically engaged in a range of activities that encompassed different combinations of livestock herding, commercial pastoralism, small-scale subsistence or commercial farming, trading and business ventures, casual labour or wage employment. They were able to access these by moving (often on a regular basis) between multiple rural and urban locations, suggesting again that migration and mobility are integral components of many rural–urban livelihoods.

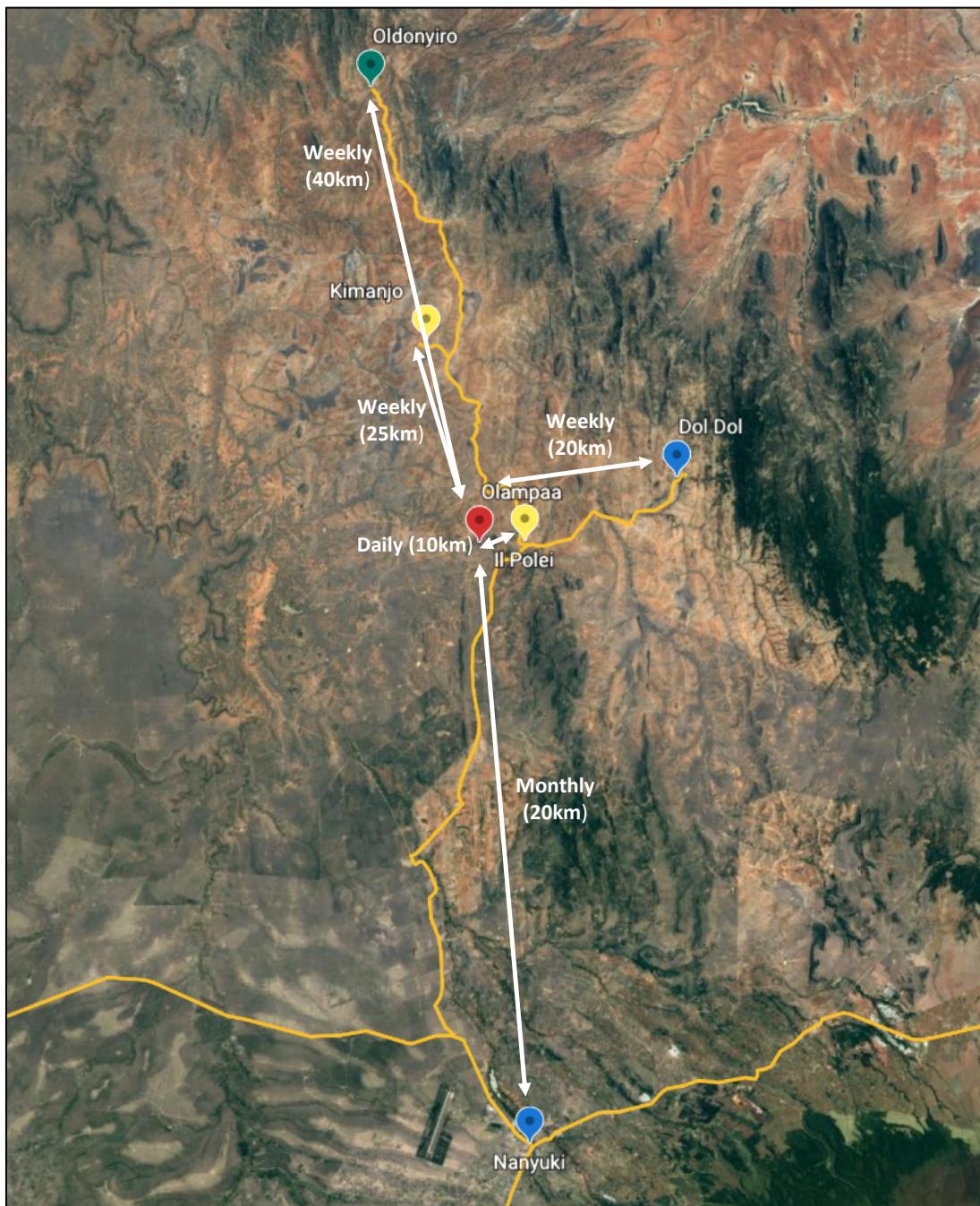
To give an example, a respondent in his fifties interviewed in pastoral Olampaa, Laikipia North described how he, his wife and children moved regularly between six locations, loosely defined as rural settlements (Olampaa and Oldonyiro, highlighted in green in Figure 3), semi-rural trading centres (Il Polei and Kimanjo, highlighted in yellow) and urban small towns (Dol Dol and Nanyuki, highlighted in blue). In doing so, they were able to access the different resources available in these rural, semi-rural and urban locations, whether pasture, water, markets, schools, health care or banks. Access to these different resources subsequently enabled the respondent’s household to undertake a range of livelihood activities, including subsistence pastoralism, chicken farming, trading, educating their children, purchasing inputs and collecting remittances. The sum of these different livelihood activities was contributing to their overall livelihood strategy, both in the present (in terms of immediate income), but also in the future (by investing in productive assets for their livelihoods as well as the long-term health and education of themselves and their children). These dynamics are shown in Table 1 and Figure 3.

**Table 1: Summary of the assets, resources, activities and income derived from a mobile livelihood**

Location	Assets	Resources required	Livelihood activities	Annual income (US\$)
Olampaa	Communal land, house and livestock	Pasture and water	Subsistence pastoralism and chicken farming	2,400
Oldonyiro	None	Market	Trading	40
Il Polei	None	School Market	Children’s education and purchasing inputs	N/A
Kimanjo	None	Market	Trading	40
Dol Dol	None	Market and health care	Trading	40
Nanyuki	None	Banks	Collecting remittances	1,200

Notes: Green represents rural, yellow represents semi-rural, blue represents urban.

Figure 3: Mobility patterns that constitute a livelihood



### 3.2. Translocality

Just as migration and mobility are integral components of rural–urban livelihoods, so too are the translocal connections that connect migrant and non-migrant household members, and enable them to stay in touch and support one another over time and across distances. These may include: the transfer of money, food and other goods; the sharing of new opportunities and ideas; return visits, phone calls and messaging; investments in home-town associations and local development; political lobbying on behalf of community interests; and participation in local ceremonies and events.

These kinds of translocal connections were prevalent among respondents from across the research sites. Eighty-three per cent of migrant respondents reported staying in touch with household

members who stayed behind. On average, migrants stayed connected with five relatives, although this ranged from one to 12 family members, depending on the respondent. All respondents who stayed in touch did so through telephone communications, and 85 per cent stayed connected through regular return visits. In terms of frequency of communications, 30 per cent stayed in touch on a daily basis, 55 per cent weekly, 5 per cent quarterly and 10 per cent annually. In addition to staying in touch, 75 per cent of migrants reported supporting relatives back home, for the most part through financial remittances, but also by providing food, advice, clothes, labour, inputs and school fees contributions (see Table 2 for a full breakdown). The amount of financial remittances that migrants reported sending to relatives averaged \$550 per year, which is fairly substantial when compared to the average annual income,<sup>5</sup> although the actual values of remittances ranged from \$50 to \$1,400. In addition, the value attributed to in-kind support (such as food, clothes, inputs, etc) averaged nearly \$500 per year.

Importantly, these support mechanisms also work in reverse, and 58 per cent of migrants also reported receiving assistance from relatives who stayed behind. Most individual migrants received support from multiple relatives – on average two, although numbers varied from one to four. Of the migrants who received support, most were provided with labour that enabled them to maintain plots of land and livestock in their absence. Migrants also reported receiving money and food, as well as assistance in looking after children and relatives. The average value of monetary contributions received was \$420, a similar amount to what most migrants remitted back home. Furthermore, in-kind contributions – in particular labour and securing assets, such as property, land and livestock – had an average annual value of just under \$1,000.

**Table 2: Summary of the forms of support sent and received by migrants**

Forms of support	% of migrants who send	% of migrants who receive
Advice	22	7
Child care	0	7
Clothes	11	0
Food	22	36
Inputs	6	0
Labour	11	57
Looking after elderly relatives	0	7
Money	78	43
School fee contributions	6	0
Securing assets	0	14

In addition to the bi-directional flows of money and in-kind assistance, migrants and non-migrants also stayed connected through the sharing of ideas, knowledge and opportunities. For example, respondents reported sharing information about a range of topics, including education bursaries, employment opportunities, improved farming techniques, vaccination programmes, veterinary services, and community news and events. At the same time, migrants living in towns often provided rural relatives with a place to stay when they needed to come to town. According to a female migrant in Nanyuki town, ‘My family members benefit from my hosting them while [they are] accessing medical services in the hospital. They also come and spend a night here while running errands in towns such as government services, such as NHIF and land matters’.<sup>6</sup>

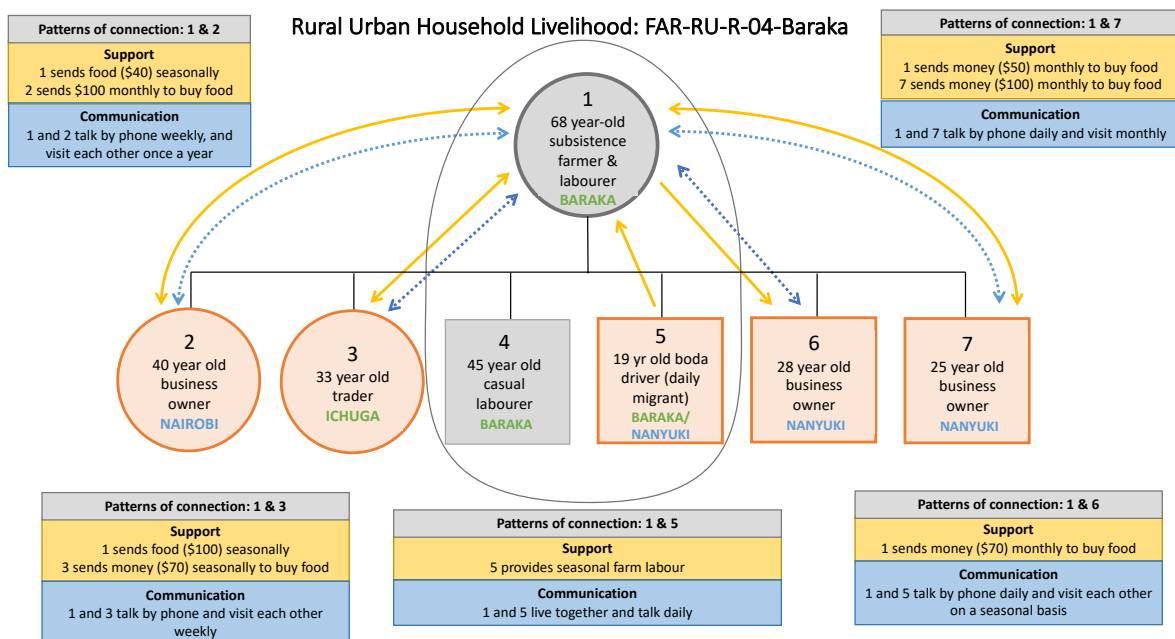
<sup>5</sup> Gross national income (GNI) per capita was US\$1,750 in 2019, according to World Bank data.

<sup>6</sup> NHIF is Kenya’s National Insurance Hospital Fund, which provides health insurance to Kenyans over the age of 18 years.

The translocal connections outlined in the above examples are integral to rural–urban livelihoods. They enable household members to stay in touch and support one another over time and across distances – without which, rural–urban livelihoods that rely on the pooled resources of different family members would probably break down over time. The emphasis on translocality (rather than just migration or mobility) provides an additional perspective on rural–urban livelihoods – one that focuses on the people involved and the threads that connect them with each other. This provides an added viewpoint on the assets, resources and activities required for maintaining a mobile and diversified livelihood, which are brought to light by a focus on movement. Moving beyond actions and transactions associated with mobile livelihoods, the emphasis on people and connections fostered by translocal livelihoods helps to shed light on the lived, everyday and often interconnected experiences of both migrants and non-migrants involved in rural–urban livelihoods. A translocal focus is also valuable in demonstrating how individual livelihoods often form part of the wider livelihood strategy of a household or collection of households. Indeed, fieldwork revealed the large extent to which some household members relied on the livelihood activities conducted by connected relatives. This was especially relevant for elderly or vulnerable respondents who were unable to work themselves, or those whose livelihoods had come under significant strain from social and environmental changes (many of these are outlined in the next section).

A people-based, translocal livelihood is exemplified by a 68-year-old widow interviewed in the rural village of Baraka (see Figure 4). She maintained translocal connections with five of her six children located in rural Ichuga and Baraka, as well as urban Nanyuki and Nairobi. With an annual income of only \$240 (derived from the sale of livestock products) and reliant on growing her own food on a small quarter acre plot, the support – both material and symbolic – that she shared with connected, yet often distant, household members represented a critical livelihood strategy not just for her financial security, but also for her social and emotional wellbeing. When asked what impact this arrangement had on her living, she replied, ‘My wellbeing has improved. I am able to get food for my household consumption. I don’t struggle a lot with my life. My living standards have improved. I am able to pay my electricity bills and water through this support. I am now happy because I have peace of mind. My children have given me peace and reduced stress’.

Figure 4: The collective livelihoods of a translocal household



### 3.3. Conclusions and implications for policy and programmes

This section has explored the dynamics of migration, mobility and translocality in Laikipia, and argued that these are integral elements of rural–urban livelihoods. In doing so, it has highlighted two possible framings of rural–urban livelihoods. First through a migration/mobility perspective that emphasises how households access assets, resources and activities dispersed across multiple rural and urban settings. Second, taking a translocal perspective that focuses on the individuals (both migrants and non-migrants) connected across collective livelihood activities in rural and urban settings. As well as expanding our understanding of rural–urban livelihoods in theory, the above analysis also provides some important findings when it comes to developing policies and programmes in practice.

A first key finding of this paper is that migration, mobility and translocality constitute an increasingly important component of the contemporary livelihood strategies of many households living in contexts of environmental change. Nevertheless, common assumptions, upon which policy and programmes are formed, do not always reflect the realities on the ground in the context of Laikipia. For example, it can no longer be assumed that people move from rural to urban areas, and that support is automatically sent only from urban to rural places. Policy and programmes should recognise the bi-directionality of movements towards both rural and urban settings.

Second, policy and programmes that address livelihoods should be mindful of the array of different locations, activities and individuals that constitute a livelihood. A singular focus on either a primary livelihood activity, singular residence (rural or urban) or a specific breadwinner risks overlooking the array of secondary, tertiary and additional activities, places and people that contribute to contemporary livelihoods. This suggests that it may be more accurate to see livelihoods as plural and collective, rather than as a discrete or singular entity. It also raises questions about the labels and categories used to refer to different groups based on their livelihood activities – such as pastoralist, agro-pastoralist, farmer, wage employee, casual labourer, trader and business person. While such categories provide a useful means of ring-fencing particular groups or activities for assistance and support, fieldwork suggests that they do not represent the everyday livelihoods of most people. With this in mind, an over-reliance on labelling and categorisation by policy and programmes risks missing the more nuanced realities of people’s livelihoods, thereby limiting the potential impact of interventions. What is more, the examples outlined in this section suggest that, for many people (especially those who are unable to make a living on their own), a livelihood may be less about particular activities, such as pastoralism or farming, and more about the connections that they are able to sustain with others. The reliance on activity-based labels and categories overlooks these groups completely.



## 4 Macro-level factors that determine mobile and translocal livelihoods

When asked to identify the main challenge affecting their household, the majority (84 per cent) of non-migrant respondents highlighted water, including issues with availability, access and quality. Food security, poor markets, weak governance and ‘other’ factors comprised the remaining 16 per cent. A similar story emerged among migrant respondents, 37 per cent of whom highlighted water as the main challenge affecting their household before moving. This was followed by poor markets (21 per cent), and then by a mix of issues, such as the high cost of living, poor business environment, health issues, lack of access to roads and unemployment. Water issues were also highlighted by 50 per cent of migrant respondents as the second most significant challenge affecting their household, suggesting that nearly 90 per cent of migrant respondents experienced water issues, as either a primary or secondary concern. And yet, when asked to describe the reason(s) why they had decided to move, only 12 per cent of migrants highlighted water, with the majority framing their migration decision making in terms of livelihoods. Indeed, 83 per cent of respondents said they had moved in order to look for better livelihood opportunities, either because their current livelihoods had failed to provide an adequate living or because they thought they could access better assets, resources and opportunities elsewhere. This is not to say that water was not a significant factor in their decision to migrate, as it clearly emerged as a major challenge for most respondents. Rather, water in and of itself is not a direct driver of migration and mobility, and is better conceptualised in terms of its wider impact on livelihoods when it comes to understanding the motivations for moving.

However, much of the environment literature still seeks to theorise movements in relation to one-dimensional climatic indicators (such as changes in rainfall or temperature), ignoring the wider social, political, economic and historical context in which these occur, and which have a bearing on household livelihoods. With this in mind, this section provides a detailed and critical analysis of livelihoods in the study area through an overview of environmental, as well as social, political, economic and cultural changes that have contributed to the uptake of rural–urban livelihoods over time. Particular attention is paid to the challenges of generalised livelihood precarity brought about by land pressures, water scarcity and economic decline. However, the analysis also recognises that rural–urban livelihoods emerge from a combination of opportunities, as well as challenges. These include improved rural–urban connectivity and the changing expectations, aspirations and abilities of women and young people.

### 4.1. Appropriation, privatisation and compartmentalisation of land

Land use and ownership in Laikipia has changed significantly over the decades, shifting between nomadic pastoralism, commercial ranching, subsistence agriculture and conservation. These changes have placed growing pressure on natural resources, such as land, and contributed to the precarity of many contemporary livelihoods. This precarity, in turn, has encouraged growth in rural–urban

livelihoods as households seeking access to alternative resources and activities diversify their livelihoods through migration, mobility and translocal connections.

During the early 1900s, colonial settlers displaced Maasai nomadic pastoralists from large swathes of Laikipia in order to convert the land to commercial ranching (Hughes, 2006, p 5). The Maasai were pushed to the most arid and marginal fringes of the county (as well as to Kajiado and Narok counties), where many remain today. Following independence, the government encouraged the in-migration of large numbers of landless peasant farmers, and land use changed again – this time to subsistence irrigated agriculture. This significantly increased the number of land and water users in the county, putting growing pressure on natural resources (Wiesmann, 1998). It also resulted in the privatisation and subsequent compartmentalisation of land, as smallholders fenced their crops. In addition, as the vast majority of these farmers were Kikuyu or Ameru (Kariuki, 2015; Ngutu et al, 2018), the ethnic composition of the county also changed significantly, and ethnicity, politics and access to resources have become closely intertwined in contemporary Laikipia. Population growth (associated with in-migration but also natural increase) and rising land prices have added to land pressures, exacerbated by the sub-division of family plots with each new generation of children. Finally, the conservation and eco-tourism sector that emerged during the 1980s has also reduced access to land, as large swathes of land traditionally used for seasonal farming or pasture has been fenced off.

In this context, the appropriation, privatisation and compartmentalisation of land over many decades has contributed to livelihood precarity in Laikipia and, by extension, to the growth of rural–urban livelihoods. One respondent described how in recent years most households’ primary livelihood has shifted from pastoralism to other activities, either as a result of combining activities or by changing livelihoods completely. Privatisation and fencing have disrupted migration routes, grazing areas and social networks upon which nomadic pastoralists depend. On top of this, invasive species, such as *Opuntia Stricta* and *Sansevieria*, have colonised large swathes of pastureland, making them unsuitable for livestock grazing. At the same time, competition for land has diminished smallholdings, which now average between one and two hectares (Government of Kenya, 2013, p 25), and are no longer large enough to sustain subsistence agriculture under inadequate agro-ecological conditions (Ulrich et al, 2012, p 243; Wiesmann, 1998, p 94). As a result, as summed up by a male respondent interviewed in rural Njoguini, households are increasingly obliged to diversify their livelihoods through different combinations of migration, mobility and/or translocality: ‘People are shifting from purely peasant farming, and adding activities such as casual work and boda boda [motorbike] transportation, as well as setting up businesses’, he explained. In support of this, other studies estimate that between 60 and 80 per cent of rural incomes in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania and South Africa are now derived from non-farming activities (Bryceson, 2002).

## 4.2. Unreliable rainfall and growing upstream water abstraction

Water pressures are another factor contributing to livelihood precarity and subsequent diversification across rural and urban areas. The link between water and changing livelihoods was clearly recognised by respondents: ‘We are shifting from farming to business because of increased drought and inadequate rainfall’, explained a male informant interviewed in Njoguini. In spite of the fertile soils around Mount Kenya, crops routinely fail, leaving households without sufficient food or income. A comparable picture was captured among respondents with livestock, especially in Laikipia North, who directly attributed water and pasture shortages to animal deaths, disease and theft. One respondent interviewed in Loisokut described how her entire herd of livestock was recently stolen by neighbouring communities seeking to replenish their own depleted stocks. ‘This has taken me many steps back. Finding the capital to buy other livestock will take a lot of time’, she said. In this context, many households have little choice but to diversify their livelihoods into alternative activities across both rural and urban settings. However, water issues were not limited to rural

residents, and urban respondents also voiced concerns during fieldwork. Residents of Nanyuki's slums and informal settlement experience insufficient and contaminated water supplies and poor sanitation facilities. According to a female migrant interviewed in Nanyuki town, 'We are not connected to safe and clean water here. It is expensive to buy water. I use river water for washing clothes. The river water is not clean. It is highly polluted by people upstream. There is a lot of waste such as human waste getting into the river'.

River water levels are a key indicator of water scarcity, and they have fallen significantly across Laikipia County: by 20 per cent in the Naro Moru river, nearly 60 per cent in the Burguret river, 68 per cent in the Teleswani, and over 80 per cent in the Timau river (Lanari, 2014, p 106). Falling river water levels can be attributed in large part to changes in rainfall. Drought is common in Laikipia, and interviews suggest that conditions have deteriorated in recent years: 'Drought has become very severe. The dry months in a year are more than the wet months', according to members of a community farming group. Nevertheless, average annual rainfall does not appear to have changed significantly. According to a water monitor, 'People talk about climate change, but if you look at the amount of rainfall compared to 30 years ago, it is more or less the same'. The same respondent went on to explain that it is the timing, intensity and duration of rainfall that has changed. Rainfall in Laikipia has always been variable, but the widespread tendency of respondents to refer to serious drought implies that household livelihoods have become increasingly vulnerable to even small changes in rainfall patterns. This suggests that levels of vulnerability and perceptions of rainfall may provide a better insight into the relationship between water scarcity and livelihoods than quantitative rainfall data alone.

Beyond rainfall, a secondary factor behind falling river flows is human abstraction of water. Many of the aforementioned factors that put pressure on land – the appropriation and privatisation of land, immigration and population growth, and the increase in private sector activities – have also influenced water use in Laikipia (Aeschbacher et al, 2005; Gichuki, 2002; Lanari, 2014; Lanari et al, 2018; Notter et al, 2007; Wiesmann et al, 2000). Immigration and population growth have increased the number of domestic water users. The influx, from the 1960s onwards, of intensive small-scale mixed farmers reliant on irrigated crops has also increased water demand for subsistence, as well as commercial farming. Indeed, the rapid expansion of large horticultural farms has put further pressure on water and land resources (Lanari et al, 2018; Ngutu et al, 2018; Zaehringer et al, 2018). That said, the reputational damage (linked to local unrest and political pressure) of taking water directly from rivers has motivated many commercial farms to capture (rather than extract) water through dams, pans and other storage systems.

### 4.3. Economic decline in an increasingly cash-based society

On their own natural resources, such as land and water, do not explain livelihood precarity, and economic decline emerged as another key factor during fieldwork. The resulting livelihood precarity has led to the rapid expansion of livelihood diversification, as households choose or, in many cases, are forced to seek alternative sources of income. However, as multiple livelihoods in both rural and urban areas experience this economic squeeze, replacing one activity or location with another does not necessarily strengthen a livelihood. Therefore, many households have sought to strengthen their livelihoods by diversifying across multiple activities, locations and individuals – although, as explored in section 5, this often results in mixed and uneven outcomes.

Economic decline can be largely attributed to the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) implemented during the 1980s and 1990s. The economic reforms and free market principles of SAPs have had profound, enduring and highly unequal consequences for rural and urban livelihoods (Little, 2014). In the spirit of economic liberalisation, SAPs ushered in drastic cuts to public expenditure on social services, resulting in higher user fees for health and education, and the

retrenching of many public sector jobs. The privatisation of state-owned corporations and the dismantling of subsidies and marketing boards has meant that agricultural inputs and consumer goods in East Africa have risen faster than agricultural produce prices. In this context, respondents routinely complained that ‘the cost of agriculture has gone up’ and that they could no longer afford to purchase seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, or feeds and veterinary services for their animals.

However, the economic squeeze on rural and urban livelihoods cannot be attributed to SAPs alone. Growing debt and financial mismanagement have further weakened the Kenyan economy over the decades, and have contributed to a noticeable rise in living costs. Respondents were all too aware of these issues. ‘The government is taking too many loans from abroad and making life harder for us. We are forced to pay high taxes so that they can repay their loans’, complained a male respondent interviewed in pastoral Musul. Urban households are facing particularly high costs – including rent, food, water, electricity, transport and school fees (Satterthwaite & Tacoli, 2002, p 56). ‘The food sold in town was too expensive to feed my large family’, explained a female respondent, who subsequently decided to move from Nanyuki town to rural Ngenia. Likewise, businesses in urban areas face expensive rents, permits, licences, inspections and utility bills, which squeeze profits and undermine livelihoods.

That said, living costs are also high in rural areas. A rural respondent explained how it used to cost him \$25 per month to feed his family, but that this had doubled in recent years. What is more, some studies suggest that the challenges of making a living in cities mean that poorer urban migrants are sending less money and goods to rural areas than they used to (Bah et al, 2003, p 20), and are instead becoming increasingly reliant on transfers of food and other goods sent by relatives in rural areas (Potts, 1997, p 466). This puts additional pressure on rural households already struggling with high living costs. In an increasingly indebted and cash-based economy, the low productivity and slow returns of many traditional rural livelihoods compelled many respondents to take up rural–urban livelihoods. It takes up to nine months for livestock to mature to the point of sale, explained a male respondent in Mukongo, during which time there is ‘no immediate money. This is the reason people are shifting to other activities that generate income easily, such as shop-keeping or the hotel industry’.

#### 4.4. Rural–urban connectivity in a context of institutional, infrastructural and technical change

While the previous sections explored how land, water and economic challenges have contributed to a rise in rural–urban livelihoods, the next few sections will examine some of the new developments and opportunities that have also contributed to the growth in diversified, mobile and translocal livelihoods. For example, the 2013 devolution of power and resources to the county level has brought services, jobs, markets and other opportunities to the small-town, county level (rather than the capital city). This greater proximity has enabled rural households to diversify their income sources into urban activities while still keeping one foot in their rural home. Proximity to county towns explains why so many rural households are now engaging in relatively low-cost, low-risk rural–urban livelihoods that involve day trips or weekly commutes to nearby county towns, rather than more permanent and costly relocations to distant capitals. Improvements in transport and communications – in particular the expansion of road networks, proliferation of boda bodas and privately owned minibuses (matatus), growth in mobile phone usage and improved network coverage – have also strengthened rural–urban connections and the propensity of households to engage in rural–urban livelihoods.

It is now easier and cheaper to move, yet still stay in contact with relatives left behind. Improved transport and communications also enable households to keep checks on livelihood activities across

multiple locations, either through quick visits or phone calls to check on livestock elsewhere, remotely manage casual labourers during harvest times and monitor prices in neighbouring markets. Mobile money services like M-Pesa, which allow users to transfer money quickly and easily across rural and urban locations, have also enabled rural–urban livelihoods. Greater access to information through mobile internet access has also helped to disseminate new ideas and trends around livelihood diversification and mobility. According to a male respondent in pastoral II Olampaa: ‘Through the transfer of technology, through listening to the radio, watching TV and attending workshops and seminars, people in this community have been enlightened about the many ways to make a living’.

While the above developments paint a broadly positive picture of the growth of rural–urban livelihoods, it should be noted that rural–urban connectivity is neither evenly spread nor evenly experienced. Some people and places remain cut off, while the rights and resources of other communities have become increasingly restricted as a result of being better connected. For example, devolution has exacerbated sensitive land issues in Laikipia by reinforcing ethnic politics and corruption. Tensions reached a crisis point in 2017 when the Laikipia North MP incited drought-affected pastoralists to move their cattle onto private land in order to win over their support and votes, resulting in violent conflict and displacement (Mutiga, 2017). Such events exacerbate livelihood precarity and, by extension, the need to diversify livelihoods across multiple activities and locations in an attempt to spread risk and make ends meet, not out of choice or preference, but out of necessity. As summed up by a male respondent interviewed in Majengo slum in Nanyuki town, ‘There are bad politics in the country that results in low flow of income, unemployment, collapse of businesses and conflicts that disrupt peoples’ livelihoods’.

#### 4.5. Shifting expectations and opportunities in a context of gendered and generational change

Another factor behind the increase in rural–urban livelihoods relates to changing gender relations, which have seen more women engage in mobile and diversified livelihoods than ever before. While migration has for the most part been undertaken by men, the number of female migrants has increased significantly in recently years across Sub-Saharan Africa (Tacoli, 2006). This can be partly understood in the context of generalised livelihood precarity, which has left many women with little choice but to earn a living, often in conjunction with a pre-existing heavy workload of household chores. According to a female respondent interviewed in Bokish: ‘A household can only survive if both wife and husband are supporting each other to provide for the family. When one person brings maize flour, the other one brings vegetables’. The increase in women working is accompanied by an increase in diversification and mobility as, while some female respondents were able to earn an income in situ, when prospects there are limited, they must move elsewhere in search of opportunities across both rural and urban settings. This was the experience of a female respondent in Mukongo who, in addition to herding livestock, now also commutes on a daily basis to Dol Dol town to run a small restaurant, which provides the household with most of its income.

While livelihood precarity has made it economically essential to engage in rural–urban livelihoods, improved gender equality has also made it socially acceptable to do so. According to a male NGO respondent, ‘Respect for women has increased. The community has accepted that we now all need to do things equally’. Yet fieldwork suggests that the kinds of mobile livelihoods in which women can engage still conform to traditional roles and responsibilities. For example, married women are more likely to engage in daily commuting than longer-distance migration because they must return home each day to look after the family and home. Men and, to a lesser extent, women without children, are much more likely to move further and for longer periods of time as they are not expected to fulfil domestic responsibilities to the same extent. This suggests that women are increasingly able to take

up rural–urban livelihoods, as long as these do not threaten to destabilise traditional roles and responsibilities.

Livelihood precarity has also had a significant impact on young people, so much so that they no longer perceive exclusively rural livelihoods as desirable or sustainable. Young Kenyans are more likely than ever to engage in mobile and diversified livelihoods across rural and urban location (Potts, 1997). For example, a youth group explained that its members often moved to town on a temporary basis in order to work and raise the capital needed to set up alternative rural ventures, such as agri-business and greenhouse farming. But to what extent does young people’s reluctance to farm or herd represent a permanent cultural change or a current phase of life? Indeed, a number of respondents who had moved to town in their youth were now looking to return to rural areas in their middle or old age, suggesting that lifecycle stages may play an important role in such decisions. This desire to return home later in life helps to explain the translocal connections that migrants maintain with their place of origin. On the one hand, young people seek to take advantage of rural or urban opportunities elsewhere. On the other hand, they do not want to lose touch with the places or resources where they came from, particularly as many Kenyan men cannot marry, transition to adulthood, or be buried without access to ancestral land (Ramisch, 2014, p 18). The need to access opportunities elsewhere without losing access to critical (albeit often limited) resources at home is another factor behind young people’s propensity to engage in rural–urban livelihoods.

#### 4.6. Conclusions and implications for policy and programmes

This section has highlighted the multiple and diverse environmental, social, economic, political and cultural factors that are contributing to the expansion of diversified, mobile and translocal livelihoods and, by extension, to the growth of rural–urban livelihoods themselves. These factors include the appropriation, privatisation and compartmentalisation of land, unreliable rainfall and growing upstream water abstraction, economic decline in an increasingly cash-based society, rural–urban connectivity in a context of institutional, infrastructural and technical change, and shifting expectations and aspirations in a context of gendered and generational change. The findings of this section lead to a number of practical recommendations when it comes to developing policy and programmes.

First, the impact of environmental change on movement should be seen through the perspective of livelihoods. While water issues emerged as a clear challenge in Laikipia, they were not expressed as a direct driver of mobility or migration by respondents. Rather, it was the impact of water scarcity on wider livelihoods that influenced decisions to move. Viewed from this perspective, a livelihoods framing provides a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the circumstances under which mobility occurs. It makes space for more subjective factors, such as perception and vulnerability, which can supplement quantitative data on, for example, rainfall or temperature rise. A livelihoods framing is also welcome in that it reinforces the idea that movements in contexts of environmental change are not inherently forced, but may form part of a wider livelihoods strategy. While this is now recognised in the academic literature, many interventions remain based on the assumption that mobile livelihoods occur out of necessity, rather than choice or preference. The findings of this research suggest that migration and mobility typically occur out of a complex combination of both necessity and choice. Furthermore, movements that occur in contexts of environmental change and natural resource scarcity are habitually framed as migration rather than mobility: as a one-time, permanent movement, often across national borders. The case of Laikipia reasserts the notion that, for the vast majority of households, movements are internal and close to home, and that migrants remain strongly tied to the people and places they leave behind, thanks to strong translocal connections. Recognition of this helps to put the focus back on mobility, as well as migration.

Second, analysis of migration, mobility and the environment should be understood in the context of political economy and critical history analysis. While the multi-causality of people's movements is now widely accepted in the academic literature, many interventions continue to assume a straightforward relationship between environmental change and migration/mobility. Not only does this overlook the wider social, political, economic and cultural context, but it also 'naturalises' the political causes of environmental degradation, and ignores the role of social relations and state responses (Hartmann, 2010, p 235).

Third, in light of the technical, infrastructural and institutional connections between rural and urban locations, interventions should reflect the multi-directional ties and dependencies that connect rural and urban economies. These remain poorly understood, and are often overlooked by interventions that treat 'rural' and 'urban' as separate and isolated entities. In this context, actions that target a particular area or sector are likely to reverberate in unintended ways on connected economies located elsewhere. This research suggests a more complex and multi-directional relationship that blurs traditional binary understandings of rural and urban. As summed up by Bryceson (1999, p 25), 'Migration brings the city to the village and vice versa'.

# 5 Micro-level experiences and outcomes of rural–urban livelihoods

So far, this paper has considered the macro-level, external factors that set the scene for rural–urban livelihoods. The remainder of the paper will now consider these livelihoods from the perspectives and lived experiences of those involved in them. In doing so, this section will consider the uneven uptake of rural–urban livelihoods, as well as the wider repercussions (both positive and negative) of migration, mobility and translocality on migrants, non-migrants and the wider community. The section will also explore the outcomes of rural–urban livelihoods for different groups of people, with a focus on strategies of survival and accumulation. Within the literature, there is a tendency to depict experiences of migration or mobility in contexts of environmental change as problematic. This is reflected in terms such as ‘environmental refugee’ and ‘climate displacement’, which suggest that migration is a movement of last resort resulting from a failure to adapt to environmental change. In recent years, however, another narrative has emerged, which theorises movements as a positive strategy for adapting to environmental change. Taking a more optimistic view of environment and movement, which recognises the potential for positive outcomes for adaptation, can help to re-balance the more pessimistic interpretations of environmentally induced displacement that have tended to dominate popular narratives. That said, the links between migration, mobility and adaptation are neither straightforward nor inevitably benign, and require careful scrutiny.

## 5.1. Unable or uninterested - the uneven uptake of rural-urban livelihoods

The ability to engage in mobile and diversified livelihoods remains out of the reach of many households, and many people are excluded from moving at all as a result of household inequalities that determine the division of labour, access to resources and decision making (Carr, 2005, p 930; Kothari, 2002, p 4; Nelson & Stathers, 2009, p 82). Indeed, a number of factors determines people’s ability to move, maintain translocal connections and diversify. Low education levels and a lack of financial literacy prevented many respondents from branching out into alternative activities, such as business. This was especially the case for older, rural residents, as well as low-income pastoralists, many of whom had dropped out of school at a young age. Low financial capital was another barrier to rural–urban livelihoods, as explained by a male respondent in rural Ngenia: ‘The rich and well-educated are able to adapt better than others. This is because they have the capital and a better understanding than the illiterate in the village’. Other common barriers were age, physical health and geographic location – with the most remote and least connected respondents less likely to take up mobile livelihood strategies. Access to land was another determinant. Low-income urban residents without ancestral land struggled to expand into rural farming, while wealthier urbanites were able to lease farmland in fertile areas around Mount Kenya. Land barriers were also an issue for women, many of whom do not inherit family land and have few entitlements to joint assets upon divorcing a spouse.



However, unequal opportunities and barriers are not the whole story. While some respondents did not engage in rural–urban livelihoods because they were unable to, others did not because they did not want to. Attachment to one’s place and way of life was a key factor in why some respondents avoided mobile or diversified livelihoods, and they expressed little or no disappointment in doing so. A male respondent from Il Polei stated: ‘We do not have any idea of what life can be like in town or what we would be doing in towns. It is not comfortable there as we have a large family. We are contented with our lives here and don’t wish to move at any given time’. This disinterest or reluctance to move is rarely addressed in the literature (Wiegel et al, 2019). This is perhaps because ‘opting out’ goes against the notion that moving in contexts of environmental change is inherently forced. What is more, uneven interest and uptake is a valuable reminder that movement and livelihood diversification are not for everyone, and the emerging narrative of ‘migration as adaptation’ should not be taken to apply to all.

## 5.2. Impacts on migrants, households and the wider community

The previous section illustrated how many people do not themselves adopt mobile or diversified livelihoods – out of either choice or circumstance. However, this does not mean that their lives and livelihoods are not influenced by the rural–urban livelihoods of others. This section demonstrates how the impacts of rural–urban livelihoods are far-reaching. They touch the lives of migrants, non-migrants and the wider community in a variety of ways, both direct and indirect, and with positive and negative outcomes, particularly when it comes to wider social and cultural changes. Indeed, the translocal connections and collective livelihoods outlined in section 3.2 clearly demonstrate the relationality and interconnectedness of many livelihoods. This means that the ups and downs of livelihoods in one location are transferred to others elsewhere. While the 68-year-old widow described in Figure 4 benefited financially and emotionally from being connected to relatives elsewhere, these same connections may also spread risk and misfortune. For example, the loss of employment opportunities in towns can exacerbate the drought vulnerability of rural households that depend on urban remittances (Eriksen et al, 2008, p 18).

While the impact of rural–urban livelihoods on connected households may be relatively clear, there are also consequences for the wider community. Some of these impacts are direct, such as when migrants remit money to friends, invest in home-town associations or donate to community infrastructure projects. In other cases, the consequences for the wider community may arise organically or by chance. Home community residents may indirectly benefit from the paid opportunity to manage the farms and livestock of people who have moved elsewhere. Host community respondents also benefited from the business opportunities associated with the influx of migrants, such as leasing out small rental rooms to labour migrants, and the greater demand for goods and services. However, fieldwork suggests that these new opportunities are often tempered by increased competition for jobs and the inflation of housing and land prices, which many respondents (fairly or unfairly) associated with in-migration. At the same time, migration, mobility and translocality have contributed to the circulation of new ideas and practices among the wider community, in both places of origin and destination. According to a male respondent interviewed in rural Ngenia, ‘They [migrants] try to elevate the living standards of this area by bringing new knowledge and technology to this area’. Such knowledge and technology include changes in livelihood practices, such as awareness of improved seeds and irrigation methods, drought-resistant animal breeds, solar-powered technology, greenhouse farming and alternative building practices.

## 5.3. Social and cultural changes associated with rural-urban livelihoods

These changes in livelihood practices are encompassed by ‘social remittances’, a term which refers to the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow between migrants and non-migrants (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2010). Social remittances have been compared to a ‘local-level, migration-

driven form of cultural diffusion' (Levitt, 1998, p 926), to which rural–urban livelihoods have arguably contributed, in conjunction with a range of other factors (many of which have been outlined in section 4). While significant academic attention has been paid to financial remittances and the economic repercussions of migration and livelihoods diversification, social and cultural implications have attracted much less interest.

A range of social and cultural changes emerged during fieldwork, often with profound implications for household and community dynamics. For example, traditional power relations that reserve leadership positions for male elders are being challenged by mobile and diversified livelihoods. A group of female respondents from a community women's group summed it up as follows: 'The youths are also elected into leadership positions as opposed to in the past. This is the result of movements and cultural dynamics. The most educated people who move gain a lot of knowledge from elsewhere and are thus elected into leadership so that they can transform society for the best'. Growing numbers of women, empowered by their earning potential, have also taken on decision-making and leadership roles at home, but also within savings groups, churches and community organisations. 'My role as a wife has improved and now I put more on the table as opposed to depending on my husband. I am actively involved in household development and investments as I have gained more knowledge on livelihood and accessed more opportunities', explained a female respondent who combined urban wage employment with rural commercial farming for a livelihood.

While these social and cultural shifts were described by respondents in broadly positive terms, in other cases, changes in household and community dynamics were seen as problematic, and even dangerous. Many respondents associated mobile and diversified livelihoods with a growing individualism and erosion of community cohesion. According to a focus group in Ngenia, 'Community cohesion has reduced due to many people moving out. This is because people focus mainly on their wellbeing, and not the wellbeing of fellow community members'. While the migration-induced 'cosmopolitanism' of Nanyuki town was often welcomed, residents of smaller towns, such as Dol Dol in Laikipia North, were much more critical of what they perceived as an erosion of their culture and community. Many respondents were uneasy about changing dress codes, new eating habits, the dilution of local languages and a generalised 'moral decay' associated with alcohol, drugs and prostitution. These changes were often associated with mobility, migration and livelihood diversification, particularly among households struggling to make ends meet by juggling multiple activities. Participants in a focus group in Ngenia described how, 'Parents who move have no time to sit down and guide their children. The children don't respect the elderly. Most parents don't have time for their children. They are struggling to make ends meet to make their daily bread'.

#### 5.4. Survival or accumulation?

This uneven picture suggests that the experiences and outcomes of rural–urban livelihoods are ultimately mixed and will vary, often depending on the resources and status of those involved. This is reflected in the wider literature. For example, Warner and Afifi (2014) differentiate between resilient and non-resilient households, and argue that households lacking land, social networks and education are more likely to engage in erosive coping strategies as a result of migration. This resonates with theories of survival and accumulation, according to which the former is undertaken by low-income households looking to minimise risk and stabilise incomes, while the latter is adopted by wealthier groups looking to maximise profits by investing across rural and urban (Tacoli, 2002, p 7).

Such dynamics of survival and accumulation are apparent in Laikipia, and are clearly visible in the experiences of Laikipian pastoralists. As resources come under pressure, access to pasture increasingly depends on financial transfers and political negotiation (Goldman & Riosmena, 2013). While wealthier pastoralists connected to urban centres are able to manage this transition, poorer herders have not been able to do so. This has resulted in the rapid differentiation between elite

pastoralists with the resources to accumulate and thrive and marginal pastoralists whose primary concern is survival (Scoones et al, 2013). What is more, in the case of Laikipian pastoralists, the outcomes of survival and accumulation are co-produced: the ability of urbanised elites to accumulate wealth and pursue opportunities elsewhere (typically in urban centres) depends on the availability of marginal herders to stay put and manage the elites' livestock in their absence. At the same time, the reason that these herders find themselves in a position to take up casual herding is because they were unable to compete with these same elites in the first place. Thus winners and losers emerge from movement and diversification, often through a cyclical relationship within which the upward trajectories of some groups exacerbate inequality in the long term.

## 5.5. Conclusions and recommendations

This section has argued that social, cultural, economic and political inequalities result in unequal access and outcomes when it comes to rural–urban livelihoods. Not everyone is able or willing to engage in mobile and diversified livelihoods in the first place and, when they do, outcomes are uneven and unequal among migrants, non-migrants and the wider community. This finding can help to inform policy and programmes in a number of ways.

First, mobile and diversified livelihoods are not relevant or even available to some groups, particularly those lacking the social and financial resources, or the desire, to access them in the first place. That said, the relationality and interconnectedness of many collective livelihood strategies means that extended family and the wider community are nonetheless implicated in rural–urban livelihoods, even if they themselves do not move. With this in mind, policy and programmes should take into account the far-reaching and wider potential, as well as implications, of interventions associated with livelihood movements.

Second, the outcomes of mobile and diversified livelihoods are mixed, uneven and unequal. While migration and mobility emerge in a more positive and flexible light than is often reflected in popular narratives, they may undermine the status of vulnerable groups who lack the social and financial resources to thrive and accumulate. A similar picture emerges with livelihood diversification, which has become a central development strategy adopted by many NGOs operating in Laikipia. Important questions around sustainability arise when rural–urban livelihoods emerge out of necessity (rather than choice or preference) or when they do more to meet the vested interests of elites than those of the households that are engaged in them. At the same time, for some low-income families, the added strain of juggling multiple activities places the burden of responsibility on certain groups (especially women) and leaves parents with less time to invest in their children's development.

## 6 Final conclusions and recommendations

This paper has sought to broaden knowledge around rural–urban livelihoods, which arguably play an increasingly important role in the local economies and livelihoods of large numbers of people, and represent an important potential adaptation to environmental change. In doing so, this research puts forward two possible framings of rural–urban livelihoods: 1) a migration/mobility perspective that emphasises how households access assets, resources and activities dispersed across multiple rural and urban settings; and 2) a translocal perspective that focuses on the individuals (both migrants and non-migrants) connected across collective livelihood activities in rural and urban settings. Such framings show that migration, mobility and translocality constitute increasingly important components of the contemporary livelihood strategies of many households living in contexts of environmental change.

In placing the focus on rural–urban livelihoods, the paper has also sought to challenge a number of common assumptions around migration/mobility and the environment, which persist in the academic literature and are echoed in wider policy. First, the relationship between mobility and the environment is complex, and interacts with a range of wider social, political, economic and cultural factors. The existence of social, cultural, economic and political inequalities helps to explain the unequal access and outcomes when it comes to rural–urban livelihoods. This also complicates any attempts to portray a straightforward relationship between environmental change and migration/mobility. While the multi-causality of most movements is now widely accepted in the academic literature, many interventions continue to assume a straightforward relationship between environmental change and out-migration. With this in mind, this paper suggests that it may be more helpful to frame such movements through a livelihoods perspective. A livelihoods approach recognises that migration and mobility that occur in contexts of environmental change are not inherently forced, but can form part of a wider livelihoods strategy involving a mix of choice and coercion.

A second finding of this paper is the plural and collective nature of many contemporary livelihoods. Research uncovered the array of different locations, activities and individuals that constitute a livelihood. A singular focus on either a primary livelihood activity, singular residence (rural or urban) or a specific breadwinner risks overlooking the array of secondary, tertiary and additional activities, places and people that contribute to contemporary livelihoods. This suggests that the labels and categories that are used to refer to different groups based on their livelihood activities do not represent the everyday livelihoods of most people. What is more, for many people a livelihood may be less about particular activities, such as pastoralism or farming, and more about the connections that they are able to sustain with others. The reliance on activity-based labels and categories overlooks these groups completely.

A third finding is the relationality of many contemporary mobile livelihoods. In practice, this means that the wider repercussions of mobile and diversified livelihoods are felt not only by translocally connected households but also by the wider community. Thus the consequences of rural–urban livelihoods are also experienced by those who do not move or diversify their livelihoods themselves.

The idea of relationality is also reflected in the multi-directional ties and dependencies that connect rural and urban economies. If we accept that livelihoods simultaneously span rural and urban locations, then we should also recognise the multi-directional ties and dependencies that connect rural and urban economies. Yet these remain poorly understood, and are often overlooked by interventions that treat 'rural' and 'urban' as separate and isolated entities. There is therefore a need to recognise the complex and multi-directional relationship that blurs traditional binary understandings of rural and urban.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations are made for EU staff and others engaged in policymaking and programme implementation:

1. Movements that occur in contexts of environmental change are not inherently forced, but occur out of complex combinations of both necessity and choice. This diverges from the popular image of the protracted 'environmental refugee' moving permanently across national borders or from rural to urban settings. Rather than being a unidirectional or one-time decision that is made, people facing resource scarcity are engaged in bi-directional flows of internal movements between rural and urban settings and enduring connections are maintained between migrants and non-migrants spread across different locations. With this in mind, policy and programmes should incorporate political economy and historical analyses in order to recognise the complex drivers and multiple experiences of mobility occurring in contexts of environmental change.
2. Movements – whether daily mobility or long-distance migrations – can represent an important livelihood option for the growing numbers of households affected by natural resource scarcity. Interventions should support – rather than seek to thwart – these movements, and in contexts where opportunities for safe and legal mobility are constrained, seek to expand the political space and economic opportunities for moving.
3. Access to and outcomes of mobile and diversified livelihoods are, however, mixed, uneven and often unequal. Some households may be unwilling or unable to engage in mobile livelihoods in the first place and, when they do, outcomes range from destitution to survival to improvements in wellbeing. While some diversification may lead to sustainable futures for mobile people and their social networks, others may be less durable. This raises questions about the sustainability of rural-urban livelihoods that emerge out of necessity (rather than choice or preference), that create or exacerbate existing inequalities or that place additional strain on those involved. Interventions should reflect this nuance by extending support to vulnerable and marginalised groups affected by negative aspects of rural-urban migration.
4. Contemporary livelihoods and economies have become increasingly relational and collective – spread across multiple activities and individuals in both rural and urban settings. In this context, policy and programmes should consider the potential for interventions that target a particular person or area to have wider repercussions that can be both positive and negative. For example, support for migrants in cities may have wider repercussions for connected family members, communities or places elsewhere including in rural areas. At the same time, care should also be taken to avoid using livelihood labels and categories that overlook this diversity, particularly those that treat rural and urban dwellers as entirely distinct populations.

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