Effects of climate variability on the livelihoods and coping strategies of the Borana community in Isiolo county, northern Kenya

his study was done to assess the effects of climate variability on the livelihood and coping strategies of the Borana of Isiolo County. The study sought answers to the following research questions: What is the Borana understanding of climate variability? How has climate variability affected the livelihoods of the Borana in Isiolo County? How has climate variability affected the community’s coping strategies? And, are there any adaptive strategies which would be more suitable for the community than others? The overall objective of the study was to assess the effects of climate variability on the livelihood and the coping strategies of the Borana of Isiolo County. The specific objectives were to establish the Borana peoples’ understanding of climate variability; to examine the effects of climate variability on the livelihoods of this community; to describe the effects of climate variability on the community’s coping strategies; and to identify possible adaptive strategies that could minimize the adverse effects of climate variability on the livelihoods of the community. The study was guided by the cultural ecological and resilient theories, data were collected through secondary sources, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and direct observation. The findings indicate that the respondents are aware of climate variability, which is associated with human activities, nature and God’s doing. The study also shows that climate variability has affected negatively the livelihoods of the Borana in various ways including the deaths of livestock, poverty, displacement, reduced food security, change in eating habits, house building styles, emergence of livestock and human diseases and changes in gender-based roles. The findings also indicate that pastoral coping strategies have been weakened by recurrent droughts and floods. The study further shows that some adaptive strategies have been put in place by government departments, NGOs and faith-based organizations to mitigate the effects of climate variability in the study area. The study concludes that climate variability has, in general, negatively affected the coping strategies of the Borana of Isiolo County. The study, therefore, recommends a combination of the existing indigenous early warning indicators with modern forecasting methods to make them more appropriate. The study also recommends that the government and other actors involved in the area should assist the community with more sustainable and effective intervention measures. Finally, there is a need for development agents to ensure full participation of the local communities in the conception, design and implementation of sustainable interventions to reverse the effects of climate variability in the County. For further research, the study recommends a study to document the number of Borana ex-pastoralists due to severe drought, the type of activities they engage in and the constraints they face in implementing their activities. The study also recommends that more research needs to be done concerning wild edible plants, their nutritional status and their mode of propagation.