Mitigating Climate Change in Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu Counties: A Strategic Approach

Introduction

Climate change has become one of the most pressing issues facing Kenya, particularly in the counties of Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu. These regions are experiencing severe climatic shifts, including prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall, and unpredictable temperature fluctuations, which are impacting agriculture, water resources, and livelihoods. This article explores crucial measures that can be implemented in these counties to avert further climate-related damage.

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1. Renewable Energy Transition

Harnessing Solar and Wind Energy

Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu counties are all located in regions with significant potential for renewable energy, particularly solar and wind. Solar power can play a pivotal role in reducing reliance on traditional energy sources and mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, wind energy is especially viable in the northern parts of Laikipia and Samburu, where wind speeds are higher. At places like my former home – Rumuruti can actively harvest solar and wind energy.

Examples of Action:

- **Nakuru** is already benefitting from solar energy initiatives, with several rural areas installing solar panels for off-grid power solutions.
- **Samburu** and **Laikipia** are ideal candidates for wind farms. The government could scale up efforts similar to the Lake Turkana Wind Power Project, which has already made strides in clean energy generation in the northern regions of Kenya.

By incentivizing investments in renewable energy, these counties can reduce deforestation (by decreasing dependence on firewood) and contribute to Kenya's renewable energy goals. As one who have come from one of the very arid land of Laikipia, at Aiyam Village – Rumuruti Town Ward, I consider renewable energy as one of the sustainable investments that the county government can initiate instead of heavy investments in other low return investments. Power is an incentive to different economic activities and the government must collaboratively operate between national and devolved unit to see effective roll out and progressive advancement of the projects. If individual adoption of solar energy has been felt, it is imperative upon the county government to lobby for such investments.

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2. Sustainable Agricultural Practices

Adapting Agriculture to Climate Change

Agriculture is the backbone of the economies in Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu, with the majority of the population relying on farming and pastoralism. However, changing climatic conditions, such as erratic rainfall and increased droughts, threaten food security. Implementing climate-smart agricultural practices is crucial to ensuring sustainable farming in these counties.

Specific Measures:

- **Agroforestry**: Planting trees alongside crops in Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu will help improve soil fertility, reduce soil erosion, and provide shade to crops during extreme temperatures. This practice also contributes to carbon sequestration.
- **Water-efficient irrigation**: Investing in efficient irrigation systems like drip irrigation can help conserve water and boost crop production, especially during dry seasons.
- **Drought-resistant crops**: Introducing varieties of drought-resistant crops such as sorghum and millet can reduce dependency on water-intensive crops like maize, which are vulnerable to climate variability.

Examples:

- **Nakuru** has seen success in promoting sustainable agricultural practices in its horticultural sector. The adoption of drip irrigation and water harvesting techniques in areas like **Subukia** has enabled farmers to cope better with dry spells.
- **Laikipia**, a semi-arid area, has embraced **agro-pastoralism**, where livestock and crop farming are integrated for enhanced resilience against climate shocks. Rainfed agriculture remains untenable. In Laikipia's Wangwaci and Aiyam villages have shown tremendous potential for horticulture and related irrigation farming through private investments in both solar and irrigation farming by harvesting surface run off and utilizing underground water resources.

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3. Reforestation and Afforestation

Increasing Forest Cover to Combat Climate Change

The loss of forest cover due to illegal logging, land conversion, and fire has been a significant environmental concern in Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu counties. Forests are vital in mitigating climate change by acting as carbon sinks. Reforestation and afforestation are key strategies to enhance carbon sequestration in these areas.

Specific Measures:

- **Tree planting programs**: Establishing tree nurseries and encouraging local communities to plant trees is essential for restoring forests. This can be particularly impactful in areas affected by soil erosion, such as the **Mau Forest Complex** in Nakuru, which is one of Kenya's most important water catchment areas.
- **Community-based forest management**: Engaging local communities in sustainable forest management practices can reduce illegal logging and encourage the conservation of forest resources.

Examples:

- **Laikipia** has made strides in integrating **community-driven conservation** with tree planting programs. The **Laikipia Nature Conservancy** works with local pastoralist communities to restore degraded land and promote sustainable land use practices.

- **Samburu** can benefit from tree planting along riverbanks, as seen in other parts of Kenya where trees help stabilize soils and prevent erosion.

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4. Water Conservation and Management

Efficient Use of Water Resources

Water scarcity is a pressing issue in Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu counties, particularly in the arid and semi-arid areas. Climate change is exacerbating water shortages through prolonged dry spells, reduced rainfall, and evaporation. Effective water management is crucial to ensuring that these counties can withstand these challenges.

Specific Measures:

- **Rainwater harvesting**: Installing rainwater collection systems in both rural and urban areas can provide a reliable source of water, especially during the wet season.
- **Construction of small-scale dams and water pans**: These structures can store water during the rainy season for use during droughts.
- **Water-efficient irrigation**: In farming areas, using water-saving technologies such as drip irrigation can significantly reduce water consumption.

Examples:

- **Nakuru County** has invested in **water harvesting initiatives** in rural areas such as **Njoro**, where community water pans provide a reliable source of water during dry spells.
- **Samburu** and **Laikipia** face significant water scarcity, but both counties have begun to use **solar-powered water pumping stations** to pump water from boreholes and rivers to rural communities.

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5. Climate Change Education and Awareness

Engaging Local Communities in Climate Action

Raising awareness and educating the public about climate change, its impacts, and adaptive strategies is critical for building local resilience. Communities in Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu need to be equipped with the knowledge to understand the severity of climate change and take action to reduce its impacts.

Specific Measures:

- **Community workshops and training**: Local governments and NGOs can organize training sessions on sustainable farming practices, water management, and renewable energy use.
- **Schools and youth engagement**: Integrating climate change education into school curricula can empower future generations to advocate for environmental conservation.

Examples:

- In **Nakuru**, organizations like the **Nakuru Environmental Care Organization (NECO)** work to educate schools and local communities about climate resilience and environmental conservation.
- **Samburu County** has seen the implementation of **youth-led conservation initiatives**, where young people are trained in sustainable land and water management practices.

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6. Strengthening Climate Adaptation Policies

Improving Governance and Policy Implementation

Strong policies and regulations are needed to combat climate change and ensure that adaptation measures are implemented effectively. In Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu counties, local governments play a crucial role in designing and enforcing policies that support climate resilience.

Specific Measures:

- **Climate adaptation plans**: Each county should develop and implement a local climate adaptation plan that includes climate-resilient infrastructure, disaster preparedness, and sustainable land use planning.
- **Policy integration**: Climate change considerations should be integrated into all sectors, including agriculture, water, energy, and urban planning.

Examples:

- **Laikipia County** has developed a **County Climate Change Action Plan** that outlines strategies for water conservation, sustainable farming, and forest management.
- **Nakuru** and **Samburu** could adopt similar frameworks, involving local communities in the decision-making process to ensure that the plans address their unique needs and challenges.

Conclusion: A Unified Approach for Climate Resilience

As Kenya continues to grapple with the impacts of climate change, Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu counties must embrace a multifaceted approach that integrates renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, forest restoration, water conservation, and effective climate policy. Through collaboration between the government, local communities, and NGOs, these counties can not only mitigate the impacts of climate change but also build resilience for future generations.

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- **Article by: Makarious M.N., 12th Dec, 2024**

Author, Makarious Njuguna,

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Contact: +254723354483

Email: businesswave1@gmail.com

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