



## Regular Research Article

# Contestation, conflict and claims-making around the Lake Turkana Wind Power windfarm, northern Kenya<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Investment in large-scale renewable-energy projects has risen significantly as governments focus on green energy solutions. The general view is that renewable energy investments are beneficial, increasing national energy production from renewable sources and contributing to economic growth. However, the benefits for communities near project sites can be unclear, with less emphasis placed on the impacts on social cohesion or the rights of local populations. This paper contributes to discussions about community perspectives and responses to large land and resource based investments, stressing the role of local agency. Using the example of the Lake Turkana Wind Power (LTWP) project in northern Kenya, it examines how various stakeholders involved with specific resource-based investments perceive and challenge the development process and the distribution of project benefits and harms. It employs an ‘intersecting methodologies’ approach that includes community-based participatory research (CBPR), participatory video, and qualitative and ethnographic methods, conducted in small settlements around the LTWP area between 2017 and 2019. As the largest single private investment in Kenya’s history, life remains insecure for many residents near the LTWP wind farm. By revealing different local perspectives, the paper outlines the broader impacts and forms of contentious politics related to the LTWP project. The study finds that community strategies to seek recognition and associated rights highlight deeper conflicts involving governance and authority concerning everyday lives and livelihoods. Local agency underscores the limitations of efforts to formalize rights within a statutory legal and regulatory framework and other processes through which community stakeholders assert their inclusion in large-scale investments.

## 1. Introduction

Investment in large-scale renewable-energy projects has increased substantially in recent years as governments capitalise on the turn to green energy. The prevailing perspective is that renewable-energy investments are broadly positive – generating ‘public good’ by expanding national energy production from green sources while contributing to economic growth (Avila-Calero 2017, Güney 2019). Yet, benefits for communities adjacent to project sites are often more ambiguous, with inadequate attention to the impacts on social cohesion or the rights of local peoples. Where possible impacts are observed, they are relativized as being localised and manageable through the provision of adequate security and distribution of project benefits to area residents.

This paper adds to discussions of community perspectives and responses to large land and resource-based investments that highlight the

role of local agency. Taking the example of contestations around the Lake Turkana Wind Power (LTWP) project in northern Kenya, this paper examines how different local stakeholder communities who are assembled around the LTWP windfarm frame and contest the project’s impacts. Completed in 2017, the LTWP windfarm is a flagship project of the country’s Vision 2030 development strategy. With the capacity to generate an estimated 18 per cent of Kenya’s energy demand, it’s commissioning further elevated the country as a global leader in green energy production.

Yet, the progressive vision of green energy development and new investment in the country’s historically neglected dryland north jars with new tensions and struggles in the area (Cormack and Kurewa 2018; Renkens 2024; Hashimshony Yaffe and Segal-Klein 2023), some ignited by the project itself. Hashimshony Yaffe and Segal-Klein (2023) conclude that the project centralized land control, marginalizing

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pastoralist populations at the state's periphery. Other observers note that a revaluing of land and resources has accompanied the introduction of large resource projects, with different local stakeholder communities staking claims as rightful custodians based on occupation, ancestral precedence or seasonal use. [Drew \(2022\)](#) shows that perceived rights to inclusion and negotiations surrounding the LTWP were underpinned by a sense of belonging and deep attachment to place framed in terms of intimate environmental knowledge. [Cormack and Kurewa \(2018\)](#) similarly found that the LTWP reinvigorated people's attachments to land embodied in historic and cultural values as a basis to secure benefits. They argued that the inherent value of land is not only in its material value, 'but also around a spectrum of privileges and aspirations that people hope to access,' (ibid.: 91).

While practices of territorialised claims-making were evident during the planning and construction of the LTWP windfarm, the locus of conflict has shifted in important ways since the last turbines were installed in early 2017. Life continues to be deeply insecure for most of the region's herders and small-town dwellers. By examining how residents living near the LTWP project 'see' and respond to the development of the windfarm, we address the following question: *How do different actors who are 'assembled' around particular resource-based investments frame and contest the project and specifically the distribution of its benefits and harms?* By centring the views and priorities of residents based in 'communities of place, identity and interest' ([Banks et al. 2013](#)), we uncover the multiplicity of possible interpretations, influenced by differences such as gender, age, ethnicity, employment and social status. We argue that various community strategies and manoeuvres to seek recognition and associated rights to opportunities, benefits and compensation uncover a deeper conflict around governance and authority as it relates to everyday lives and livelihoods. Local agency highlights the shortcomings of efforts that seek to formalise rights within a statutory legal and regulatory framework and the other processes through which community stakeholders assert their inclusion in large projects.

The paper is based on an 'intersecting methodologies' approach encompassing community-based participatory research (CBPR), participatory video, and qualitative and ethnographic methods, carried out in small settlements in the LTWP area between 2017 and 2019. These different approaches were incorporated into an intensive two-week programme of structured activities that were carried out with six groups segmented by gender and age in the main centres in the project region, Loiyangalani and South Horr, as well as in Sarima, a small village sitting within the windfarm, and in Palo, a small pastoralist settlement north of Loiyangalani (see [Fig. 1](#)). Each group was facilitated by 2–3 facilitators from the region who had completed a three-week research training and co-design workshop. The groups comprised 8 members; two groups were carried out with women, two with youth, and two with men. Three groups (Sarima men, Sarima women, and Pastoral elders) included Turkana participants; the group in South Horr comprised Samburu participants; most members of the groups in Loiyangalani were Turkana. Groups mobilised for the research included both those benefiting from the LTWP project – such as through casual work or providing goods and services – as well as those who were not directly involved or receiving benefits. Activities undertaken by the groups encompassed participatory video exercises such as those focusing on building expressive confidence and capacities, exploring the environment, telling stories through visuals and storyboards; and participatory activities including the construction of historical timelines, resource maps and livelihood trend analysis. In addition, key informant interviews (n = 28) were carried out with an assortment of local public authorities, community leaders and other individuals in the project region, including Marsabit town (the administrative centre for Marsabit County). By revealing various local subjectivities and competing vernacular perspectives, the paper details the wider impacts and forms of contentious politics arising around the LTWP project.

## 2. Background – the Lake Turkana wind power development

The LTWP windfarm spans a 40,000-acre area southeast of Lake Turkana in Marsabit County. Situated some 200 km from the nearest tarmacked road, this is an expansive rangeland area inhabited by interacting groups of Turkana, Samburu, Rendille and El Molo peoples. The idea of a windfarm in the region was mooted in 2005, with plans advancing in subsequent years for a 365-turbine development. The Kenyan Energy Ministry authorized the project, and in 2008, LTWP signed a memorandum of understanding with Kenya Power, a public liability company that distributes electricity to consumers.

The \$800 million wind farm was years in the making and feted as the largest single private investment in Kenya's history. The LTWP project brought together KP&P Africa B.V. and Aldwych International as co-developers and investors, with Aldwych overseeing construction and ground operations for LTWP. LTWP attracted financial support from a range of other investors including the Finnish Fund for Industrial Cooperation Ltd. (Finnfund), the Industrial Fund for Developing Countries (IFU), Vestas, the Norwegian Investment Fund for Developing Countries (Norfund), and Sandpiper.<sup>1</sup> The African Development Bank was the lead arranger for the project's debt finance, enabling construction to begin in 2014 ([Renkens 2024](#)).

The 310 MW windfarm began supplying power to the national grid in 2018, through a 438 KM transmission line connecting the LTWP substation with a substation in Suswa outside of Nairobi. The windfarm contributes to a brightening picture of electrification in Kenya. According to IEA estimates, 79.1 % of Kenya's population had access to electricity in 2023, a figure that more than doubled within a decade.<sup>2</sup> Yet, years since the LTWP began supplying the national grid, the project area, and wider Marsabit County, are yet to be integrated into the national grid ([Simberg-Koulumies 2024](#)). While Kenya's Treasury announced allocations in the 2024/2025 budget to construct a power line to connect Marsabit with the national grid, the county has continued to rely on off-grid fuel-powered stations. The smaller communities nearer the windfarm site have very little power provision; most residents have none while businesses rely on diesel-powered generators. LTWP has provided solar power to area schools and health centres ([Olsen and Westergaard-Kabelmann 2018](#)). Further, solar panels were also promised households of Sarima village in the centre of the project area, who were relocated during the construction phase ([Hashimshony Yaffe and Segal-Klein 2023](#)). As the discussion below shows, inequities in access to electricity were but one of a litany of issues animating contestations around the project.

## 3. Local agency and responses to large resource-based and infrastructural projects

### 3.1. Local social and political mobilisation around large resource developments

There is growing recognition that local agency and mobilisations are significant to determining the shape and outcomes of largescale land and resource-based projects. Far from passively accepting projects, or local land users resisting possible expulsion from project sites, responses at the local level encompass a wider range of anticipatory actions and moves to make alliances that speak to how the benefits of projects are distributed ([Aalders et al. 2021](#); [Chome et al. 2020](#); [Elliott 2020](#)). Diverse forms of local agency interact with broader – global and national – forces to influence not only how projects are planned and implemented

<sup>1</sup> AfDB convenes lenders to secure Kenya's largest private sector investment | African Development Bank Group, accessed 26 November 2024.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.iea.org/reports/sdg7-data-and-projections/access-to-electricity>, accessed 25 November 2024.

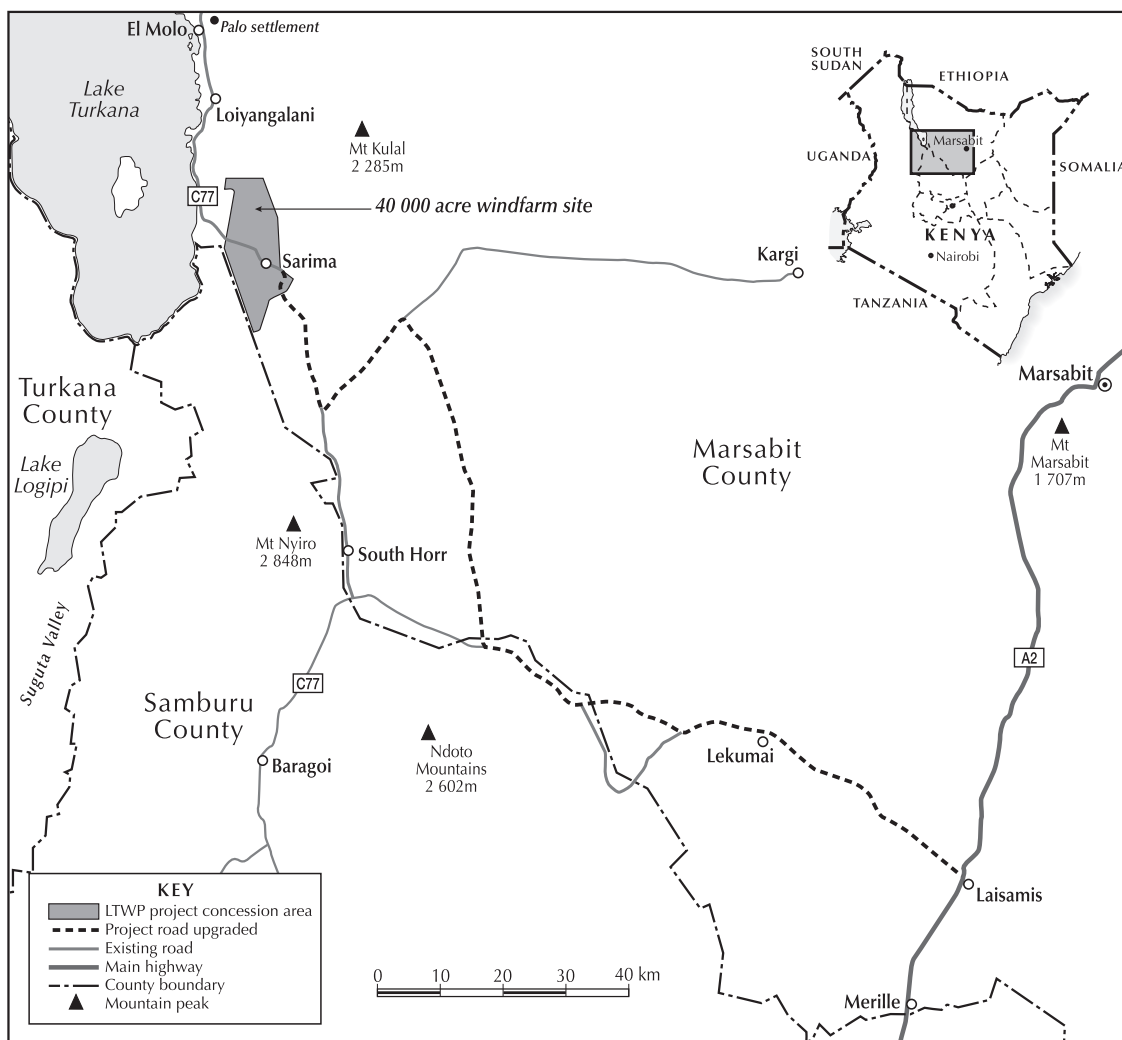


Fig. 1. Map of LTWP project site and surrounding areas of Marsabit County.

but also the legacies of these for diverse social and political relationships within and across communities, between communities and local and national government, between local and national government, and between industry/developers and these various other stakeholders. Local social and political mobilisation around largescale projects is important because it renders the distinction between global capitalist forces and local societies less pointed that is often assumed in popular discourse on investment, particularly that happening in rural peripheries. Far from transformations in these places being driven primarily or exclusively by distant and powerful capital, actions and responses by local-level actors reimagine and restructure the grand plans of states and investors (Cross 2014; Chome et al. 2020; Lind et al. 2020; Mosley and Watson 2016).

Much of the global literature on large renewable energy infrastructure considers local opposition and conflict dynamics around projects in terms of ‘social acceptance’. In other words, opposition to new projects, and struggles around the siting of proposed infrastructure, reflect a lack of acceptance by local societies. The implication is that this is something that can be addressed through planning and implementation approaches that are more sensitive to local opinion. Officials with renewable energy companies and supportive local government officials often regard opposition as something arising from a small group of people, and that a silent majority remains supportive (Van de Grift and Cuppen 2022: 5). It is also common to associate the lack of acceptance as an expression of ‘not-in-my-backyard’ sentiment (or, NIMBY-ism) – a tactic that marginalises local oppositional views as being deficient in understanding. In

contrast, ‘By presenting their own arguments as objective and true, developers contrast opponents as unknowledgeable and thus attempt to delegitimize public opposition,’ (Van de Grift and Cuppen 2022: 7).

The emphasis on social acceptance can flatten the nuance and timbre of diverse local responses, which span resistance, apathy, support and alignment. Thus, it can colour perceptions of local oppositional views as harbouring an opportunistic and/or ignorant positioning rather than being legitimate social and political commentary. As Sovacool et al. (2022: 2) argue, opposition to energy infrastructure should not be reduced to simplistic assumptions of NIMBY-ism; rather it should be understood ‘from the broader lens of social movements and mobilized publics,’ (Sovacool et al. 2022, 2). We follow Sovacool et al. (2022) in using mobilisation to refer to ‘networks of individuals and organizations that utilize institutional and/or extra-institutional tactics to gain responses to grievances from incumbents (in the state, industry, or other organizations) who are perceived as responding inadequately to those grievances,’ (page 2). In northern Kenya, networks do not necessarily resemble organised coalitions made up of established advocates and registered organisations; they encompass variously positioned state and non-state stakeholders that converge around particular controversies and at specific moments in time. They are shifting, and because they are so, they can be difficult to see, though they are no less salient and influential in driving local dynamics.

Mobilised publics invokes notions of ‘contentious politics’ or, ‘collective activity on the part of claimants- or those who claim to represent

them-relying at least in part on non-institutional forms of interaction with elites, opponents, or the state,' (Tarrow 1996: 874). Further, as Temper et al. (2020:3) explain, '[S]ocial mobilizations provide a window into the political demands and concerns of the most marginalized communities', ranging from concerns around common resources and environmental health to demands for land and political sovereignty based on indigeneity. They systematically mapped resistance to both carbon intensive and low-carbon energy projects. Significantly, they found that those mobilising against renewable energy projects often invoked claims for democratic participation alongside distributional claims, '[M]obilizing groups denounce that largescale and centralized facilities reinforce an unequal distribution of economic gains, in favour of large corporations, and the uneven consumption of electricity produced,' (Temper et al. 2020: 13).

A focus on mobilised publics matters because it furthers understanding of conflict that might arise around resource-based projects. Temper et al.'s review showed that the substance of conflicts around renewable energy projects, specifically, uncovered the need to strengthen consultative processes and environmental impact assessments as well as democratic decision-making processes and risk assessments involving a wider range of stakeholders (page 13). Much of the global literature on social mobilisation and opposition to energy infrastructure, and how developers might seek to address potential conflicts that arise, derives from settings where the state has a larger presence in environmental regulation, permitting and land use planning, enforcement of employment law and worker's rights, and policing and security. While insights generated from these settings are useful, they are limited in how far they can help understanding of social attitudes and the dynamics of conflict in places where the presence of the state wanes. At the geographic and political margins, governance and security are often the purview of hybrid arrangements consisting of state actors that share powers with a host of other non-state public authorities and customary officials (Lind and Luckham 2017; De Herdt and Titeca 2019). Thus, framings are necessary to understand mobilised publics around largescale resource-based projects where 'statehood' is characterised by hybridity in public authority and alliance-making in governance.

### 3.2. Mobilisation and opposition at the margins of the state

The assumption is that large resource-based projects developed by global corporates will have the effect of extending the presence of the state and, thus, bring about a change in governance as 'state' stakeholders become more visible in public life (Watts 2001). Companies and states often assume this is a positive development, by enabling states to assume a more active role in providing services and support in places that had been difficult to reach. For example, a representative of the Kenyan national government in Marsabit described the wider impacts of the LTWP project in terms of 'opening up' a previously remote region, particularly through road building, which they described as helping to 'bring the government closer to the people.' A socio-economic assessment of LTWP similarly found that road construction for the windfarm had increased accessibility to isolated communities, with local government officials perceiving this to be 'one of the most important spill-over benefits' (Olsen and Westergaard-Kabelmann 2018: 80).

The 'enclave' is one existing framing of social mobilisation around resource projects at the margins that has considerable pull. Central governments and industry officials often view conflict around resource-based projects as localised disturbance that can be contained through the provision of more security, corporate social investment, and deals that incentivise local acceptance (Lind et al. 2020). Still, perspectives across states and industries hosting such projects in rural peripheries have evolved considerably in the decades since social strife and widespread violence occasioned the expansion of oil extractive operations in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. Watts (2001) has described social mobilisation and opposition to energy infrastructure in the Niger delta,

documenting the use of violence to establish and maintain securitised enclaves for extractive operations. Drawing on other examples of spatially segregated securitised enclaves for oil extraction in Cabinda in Angola and minerals in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ferguson (2005) explained how intensive resource exploitation could happen in areas marked by conflict and weakened central government authority.

Yet, the enclave model of resource exploitation, where infrastructure and operations can be developed in a protected zone untouched by surrounding low-level violence and politics, does not fit many settings of hybrid governance. In some of these settings, far from being walled-off, the practices of resource-based companies reflect an 'enmeshing' with local political society (Lind 2021). For example, in the Lokichar basin in Kenya's northwest Turkana County, oil exploration firms – while carving out small sites nominally under their control and guarded by private security – recognised and acted on the need to directly address the area residents' demands for recognition and rights. They did so through nurturing relationships and developing shared interests with local political networks, 'Operational security in this environment is not developed through walling off exploration activity but rather necessitates thinking at a hyper-local level and negotiating with an array of interlocutors who seek to give voice to 'community' grievances,' (Lind 2021: 231).

An emphasis on 'enmeshing' casts a different light on responses and practices of local stakeholder communities at the margins. Using the example of oil exploration operations in Turkana, Okenwa (2020) argues that subversion and maneuvers are means by which some local stakeholder communities engage and seek to be included in the distribution of benefits tied to large land and resource-based projects. As Okenwa (2020: 60) explains, 'Subversion becomes the way to assert inclusion and disrupt established hierarchies.' She shows how some of the stakeholders involved in setting up roadblocks as seeming acts of resistance were also involved behind the scenes in negotiating deals with the lead developer, Tullow Oil, and sub-contracting firms to be included in the distribution of benefits. Thus, 'inclusion by subversion' (Okenwa's shorthand) as a counter-logic was effective as means to forge connections with industry, not to break them: 'It is not so much what happens during protests, demonstrations and blockades but what emerges from these acts of seeming resistance that puts into relief the contrast between the public enactment of consultation and participation, and the 'backstage' of deal-making and pursuit of opportunities that involve various stakeholders, intermediaries and investors themselves,' (Okenwa 2020: 56).

Largescale resource-based developments thus fuel new articulations of citizenship, inclusion and claim-making. However, inclusion is not guaranteed, nor is it often an open process, as Okenwa shows. The negotiation of projects through various industry-initiated ways of 'community engagement' can generate new exclusions and struggles as developers solicit cooperation based on 'performances of deservingness by emerging community factions and leaders seeking to lay claims to the resource benefits,' (Lind et al. 2020: 28).

Aalders et al. (2021) document local responses to the development of infrastructure as part of Kenya's Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET). They introduce the concepts of *entangling* and *fraying* to describe broader local reactions. Entangling involves individuals with limited authority attempting to integrate their own ambitions into the megaproject (Aalders et al. 2021: 1280). Examples include people setting up temporary homesteads, or manyattas, along proposed routes for roads and railways, and community stakeholders trying to secure titles under Kenya's Community Land Act to adjust terms of recognition in pursuit of compensation from project developers. Fraying is used to describe more disorderly politics that rejects state visions of megaprojects and proposes alternative imaginaries. These ideational aspects of local engagement include aspirations, hopes, and fears connected to historical legacies, memories, and meanings specific to the place.

Local meanings and, hence, responses to large resource or

infrastructural projects are informed by historical legacies and past experiences as much as they are by aspirations to gain a rightful share of benefits. In northern Kenya, these legacies and experiences reflect a long struggle between the state and diverse local, mostly pastoralist societies. The state was often reviled, at once threatening pastoralist lives and livelihoods as being backwards and requiring transformation, while also being remote and absent from daily life.

Recent conflicts over large resource-based projects in eastern Africa's rural frontiers are linked to changes in governance, where hybrid systems were long predominant. In Kenya, devolution has fuelled territorial claims based on politicized identities (Lynch 2006; Lind 2018). Ethiopia's model of 'ethnic federalism' since the early 1990s heightened ethnic competition for control of regional states (Hagmann and Peclard 2010; Rettberg 2020; Regassa et al. 2019; Gebresenbet 2020). In Uganda, since the National Resistance Movement's rise to power in 1986, governance structures have undergone radical changes in Karamoja, with Karamojan elites benefitting from government positions and wealth (Czuba 2019).

These broader governance changes happening over recent decades inform understanding of how mobilised publics assembled around large resource-based projects frame and contest claims to territory and resources. As the following discussion highlights, claims to land and territory still animate different local ways of 'seeing' the LTWP project. Still, it is perspectives on political leadership, governance structures and processes of local engagement that have come to define community stakeholder outlooks of the windfarm and its legacies.

#### 4. Community stakeholder framings of the LTWP windfarm

##### 4.1. Local perceptions of project impacts

From the initial phases of constructing the windfarm, LTWP recognised the necessity of community engagement as a central component of its operations, particularly in a setting inhabited by a range of different groups and with a history of tensions. LTWP aspires to 'meaningful engagement with local communities to foster peacekeeping and generational change,' (LTWP 2022: 48). The company established the Winds of Change (WoC) Foundation in 2015 with a 10 million Euro fund to support community engagement efforts, primarily in the Laisamis parliamentary constituency that spans southern Marsabit County. Projects have included improvements to education, health facilities, and water infrastructure. The foundation also funded emergency relief efforts such as school feeding programs and water trucking. The company organizes community engagement events addressing various issues such as employment opportunities, health and safety awareness, and local development project priorities. Since 2018, when LTWP shifted to an operational phase, the company recorded 865 community engagement activities (LTWP 2023). Nevertheless, despite these efforts, life remains challenging and has not significantly improved for the majority. Precarity is the prevailing experience for many, even though a select few have amassed new wealth from LTWP-related developments.

A key contention in large resource-based and infrastructural projects is the distribution of benefits. Groups organised for participatory video and exercises thus reflected on benefits that could be associated with LTWP. Five of six groups reported benefits, with a group of elders in Palo reporting no benefits in their community – the most distant from the windfarm of all the study locations (Table 1). The provision of water was the most cited benefit, by four of five groups. While employment opportunities are regarded in wider literature as amongst the key possible benefits arising from large projects, only three groups referred to this – groups with young people in Loiyangalani and South Horr, as well as with men in Sarima. Groups described casual work opportunities as watchmen, cleaners and cooks. However, according to interviews with various local residents and officials, most of these were short-term, and nearly all ceased to exist once the construction was completed. Still, for those who were able to get work, the opportunity made a significant

difference to their personal situations. A fisherman in Loiyangalani recalled, 'When this company came, many people went there to seek employment. For those who are employed, they are better off now. They had something to sustain themselves for some time or for as long as they worked there'.

Increased commerce was also indicated by three groups, including women in Sarima and Loiyangalani as well as young people in South Horr. Groups described an influx of people from outside the region, workers, contractors and others seeking opportunity. This led to an increase in demand for local products such as milk, fish, charcoal and rocks for construction. So, too, did the increase in purchasing power brought about by more cash circulating in the local economy. Notably, women in Sarima clarified that, while increased commerce was welcome, it was a temporary bump and quickly faded once construction activities ebbed, wrapping up in 2017. A businessperson from the region explained that certain individuals providing services had benefitted a great deal, opportunities that were elusive for most local residents, few of whom were able to get work opportunities with LTWP or sub-contractors: 'LTWP has been good for business, but it has been bad for the community. They misused the locals. Some of them were underpaid. Workers who were paid drank the money away'.

Three groups referred to roadbuilding, as did several interviewees. Given the remoteness of the windfarm area, the installation of turbines – which began in 2014 – required the construction of a new 200 km tarmac road, connecting the site with Laisamis, a town on the main road running north–south that connects Marsabit County with the central highlands of Kenya to the south. Environmental and social assessments of LTWP emphasise the road as a key impact of the project, with positive consequences for making the region more accessible – for marketing and trade, for making health services more reachable, and easing access for state administration, including by police and security personnel. The estimated time to travel from Laisamis to the LTWP site decreased from 1-2 days in the dry season before the road construction to 4 hours (Olsen and Westergaard-Kabelmann 2018: 43). Undoubtedly, an increase in the range of transport services and reduced costs for these is a testament to the region's heightened accessibility. It is also felt by some that the security environment in the region has improved, in part due to a greater administrative police presence, as several interviewees noted. A participant of a men's focus group discussion in Loiyangalani explained, 'Our security situation is not bad because there are now more security personnel and vehicles. The only factor disturbing the peace is that our youth no longer listen to the elders'.

Other benefits referred to by groups include the provision of ambulance services, greater social interaction across ethnic groups (including a higher incidence of inter-marriages), and the construction of LTWP-funded education facilities such as classrooms and dormitories.

There was greater unanimity in PV group perspectives on the project's negative impacts (Table 1). Five groups reported an increase in diseases, which when pushed group members explained was something associated with a rise in prostitution as well as alcohol use. Four groups reported new land disputes, while the same number described social harms including the break-up of family units. Displacement from grazing sites was described by three groups, whereas two groups singled out 'unfulfilled investor commitments' as a negative impact.

However, the most widely reported impact overall – either positive or negative – was an increase in inter-group conflict. While conflict, especially between the Turkana and Samburu, predates the LTWP project, social boundaries have grown more rigid as various individuals have staked identity-based claims to land, work opportunities, contracts, and compensation. Several groups emphasised what they perceived to be inequity in the distribution of work opportunities – something not only expressed in terms of increased conflict between groups but also as corrupt gatekeeping and elite capture, as the following quotes show:

'Our leaders employ their relatives and clan members, while others are left out. We demand that during processes to find employees, that

**Table 1**  
Impacts of the LTWP windfarm development according to focus groups.

	Sarima men	Sarima women	Loiyangalani youth	Loiyangalani women	South Horr youth	Pastoral elders
<i>Positive impacts</i>						
Provision of clean water	X	X	X	X		
Provision of ambulance service	X		X			
Employment opportunities	X		X		X	
Increased commerce		X		X	X	
Roadbuilding			X	X	X	
Increased security presence (AP)			X	X		
Construction of education facilities					X	
Increased social interaction				X		
Increased incidence of intermarriage					X	
<i>Negative impacts</i>						
Increased inter-group conflict	X	X	X	X	X	X
Land disputes	X		X	X	X	
Increase in diseases	X	X	X	X		X
Displacement from grazing areas				X	X	X
School drop-outs	X					
Social harms (family breakups)			X	X	X	X
Unfulfilled investor commitments		X				X
Diversion of security personnel	X					
<i>Barriers to benefiting</i>						
Poor representation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Discrimination in allocating work opportunities	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lack of community involvement in decision-making	X		X	X	X	
Lack of skilled labour / limited training opportunities			X	X	X	
Lack of an MoU			X			

equality and justice is applied to ensure fairness for all.’ Participant in Focus Group with Men, Loiyangalani  
 ‘The distribution of job opportunities at LTWP was not fair. There was a lot of nepotism and favouritism.’ Participant in Focus Group with women, Loiyangalani

Vying claims to the rangelands around Sarima by Turkana, Samburu and Rendille stakeholders is the focus of land struggles associated with the windfarm. Turkana herders settled in Sarima in the late 1990s/early 2000s, over time establishing a small village while grazing livestock on the surrounding rangelands. Yet, both the Samburu and Rendille claim ancestral precedence and cultural attachment to resources in Sarima (Cormack and Kurewa 2018; Drew 2020), leading to competing claims and violence. In 2015, several Sarima residents were killed in an attack carried out by a group of Samburu fighters, bringing attention to the conflict risks associated with the project.

Inter-group tensions were highlighted by a case filed in 2014 against LTWP, the defunct Marsabit County Council, Kenya’s Attorney General and the National Land Commission alleging that the land was leased illegally. The petitioners, including the Marsabit County Senator and a group of members of the Marsabit County Assembly (MCAs), were mainly drawn from Rendille and Samburu pastoral groups who represented themselves as patriotic in putting communities’ interest before their own (Achiba 2019: 20). They held that they were restricted from accessing full grazing rights within the LTWP leasehold (Cormack and Kurewa 2018), which extends over 110,000 acres, although the core development sits on 40,000 acres with the rest set aside as a ‘buffer’ for LTWP. The petitioners claimed ancestral and cultural (customary) rights that were conferred to the community to be enjoyed as a whole or as its individual members; the court confirmed their standing based on these rights.<sup>3</sup> Representation for the LTWP Consortium argued that the law

<sup>3</sup> <https://opiniojuris.org/2021/12/15/wind-farms-in-indigenous-areas-the-fosen-norway-and-the-lake-turkana-wind-project-kenya-cases/>, accessed 20 October 2023.

grants communities access rights to communal grazing but not formal ownership of the land.<sup>4</sup> Notably, local opinion around the court case split, largely reflecting ethnic divisions that have long animated wider politics in the region.

In November 2021, the High Court in Meru sided with the plaintiffs in ruling that the land was acquired irregularly. The judgment did not revoke the title deeds but gave one year for the Marsabit County Government, the Attorney General, the Chief Land Registrar and the National Land Commission to regularise the process.<sup>5</sup> In May 2023, a High Court bench rejected an application from LTWP to extend the time to regularise the acquisition, reversing control of the land to communities (Renkens 2024).

4.2. *Governing LTWP from below: Attitudes and responses to the windfarm*

Conflicts around large resource-based and infrastructural projects are often seen as either territorialised struggles to control land in expectation of compensation and other recognition, or as struggles to control work and contracts amongst other expected benefits. To an extent, framing conflict in these ways reflects the project cycle, with tensions arising when projects are first proposed and then continuing once further planning and implementation happens. Yet, many local stakeholder communities around LTWP have come to see conflict differently. While struggles around land and work opportunities certainly describe a significant sub-set of local attitudes, they diminish attention to governance itself as a factor contributing to conflict. Here, these refer to processes and methods of community engagement, views of local leadership, and procedures for accountability and redress. Outlooks of these were far more significant to how stakeholders in the LTWP region have come to frame the legacies of the project, and its

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theelephant.info/long-reads/2021/07/02/return-to-the-land-of-jilali-reflections-from-kenyas-northern-frontier/>, accessed 20 October 2023.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/kenya-court-rules-that-lake-turkana-wind-power-acquired-community-land-unprocedurally/>, accessed 17 October 2023.

influences on conflict, in the period since the windfarm was constructed. This section details these various perspectives, providing a different and complementary focus to existing studies and assessments that describe conflict as struggles to control project benefits.

#### 4.2.1. Perceptions of community engagement methods

There is overwhelming disappointment within communities in the LTWP region concerning processes of community engagement that were undertaken in planning and constructing the windfarm. A common refrain is that community engagement was cosmetically done and perfunctory. Whereas consultative meetings were organised in Loiyangalani, South Horr and other settlements, these mainly involved local duty bearers and other influential local opinion-makers. Thus, interviewees described these as 'invited' spaces that excluded many. Without other forums for involving wider community participation, the impression was set that an alliance of company and state officials intentionally sought to marginalise and quiet a wider cross-section of perspectives. A professional from the region explained:

'When the company organised meetings in 2012 and 2014, they gathered a limited number of people to act as representatives. What you had was very few people, gatekeepers, holding information on the development. Then you had a much larger section of the community that did not know what was happening. That is why this (LTWP) continues to be debated. Some had access to information but many more did not'

An advocate for the El Molo, a small population of fisher-folk living on the shores of Lake Turkana, voiced a similar view: 'The area MP, MCA and the windfarm people handpicked a few people and they met at Oasis (a hotel in Loiyangalani). All the people who participated in the process were handpicked by politicians.' Similarly, [Drew \(2022\)](#) found that intermediaries and middlemen, such as politicians and businesspeople, had significant influence as gatekeepers in LTWP's engagement with Samburu communities.

The focus on incorporating local political administration in consultative meetings had the effect, intended or otherwise, of excluding women and young people. A women's group leader from El Molo village explained how little effort was put into involving women in dialogue with LTWP, 'It is mainly political leaders (who influence decisions regarding the project). They come to talk with us only if there is something they want to do with our land. But they don't give us room to get fully involved.' A similar view of being left out is voiced by many young people from the region. A youth leader in Loiyangalani explained, 'It was only the area MCA and MP who have the voice (on decisions concerning the project's implementation). They say there is a committee, but we aren't aware of its workings because youth are not represented on the committee. It is just a few individuals who are friendly with politicians and company officials'.

This sense of minimal, perfunctory engagement with communities, in which LTWP and a narrow selection of local leadership command a closed consultative space, is viewed as being an obstacle to more participatory processes that could give voice to a broader range of local stakeholder concerns and interests. Wider debates on community engagement in energy projects highlight that mechanistic processes can harm relations with local stakeholders and contribute to opposition ([Aitken et al. 2016](#)). Instrumental approaches to engagement that solicit local input into plans and operations that are mostly fixed contrast sharply with humanistic approaches, which incorporate broader aims of empowering participants (INVOLVE 2005, in [Aitken et al. 2016](#): 560). Thus, while LTWP had processes for community engagement, there are differing views on their effectiveness. Some local stakeholders have highlighted the need for more inclusive approaches that are not dominated by influential gatekeepers.

LTWP did enlist community liaison officers (CLOs), as well as local political administration, to consult with residents and oversee the allocation of work opportunities. Yet, being as they were on LTWP payroll,

CLOs were seen to carry out the developer's bidding. According to a Marsabit county government official, 'The CLOs role is to suppress community opposition. If people say they are going to protest, the CLO comes and speaks in the local language, praising the company and what it has done.' From the perspective of the company, CLOs gather intelligence on localised tensions, identifying where trouble may be brewing and who might need to be incorporated in the distribution of project benefits. Yet, this moulding of the CLO role renders the position meaningless from the perspective of residents who seek someone to advocate on their behalf.

In parallel to meetings organised with local leaders, and enlisting CLOs to follow and act on local dynamics, there were also efforts to constitute local committee structures. However, these were not seen as performing effectively, with inadequate attention paid to defining a role that was clear and meaningful and supporting them in doing so. A participant in a men's focus group discussion in South Horr explained, 'We didn't initially have a community committee. It is there now but it does nothing. Their role is not well defined. They depend on leaders who sometimes lie to them and threaten us that the project belongs to the government and there is nothing you can do about it'.

A representative of an area NGO explained that local participatory committees often exist to rubber stamp projects that have been pre-defined, conveying information on plans that have been pre-determined rather than soliciting ideas and views that could be different or even diverging. Outlooks of these participatory structures are so poor that many people will not come to meetings unless they are paid. They explained, 'You'll find that people want to take a back seat, and that the same people are always appointed as representatives.' This underscores the difficulty of designing meaningful participation and consultation, more so in a context in which many people have become conditioned to performative acts of participation that feel disconnected from real decision-making and influence.

In summary, perceived shortcomings in community engagement processes during the planning and construction of the windfarm are an important dimension of public attitudes toward the LTWP project. They show how local struggles around the project involve more than manoeuvres to capture work and other opportunities; rather, they articulate with expectations for meaningful consultation and having one's views considered in the project's governance.

#### 4.2.2. Local leadership and accountability

Judged by local opinion in the LTWP region, the failings of community engagement in developing the windfarm are inseparable from what most people consider to be ineffective and corrupt local leadership. Participatory video focus groups were asked to explore the key barriers to the wider sharing of benefits from the project. Whereas four groups indicated the lack of community involvement in decision making, all groups stressed poor representation ([Table 1](#)). A mother from Loiyangalani complained, 'Our political leaders have been our downfall.' In interviews with residents of the region, inaction, secrecy and collusion were often taken as interlocking problems that ensured community engagement processes would work against more varied local interests, as the following exchange shows:

Interviewer: Why do you think the community has not benefited sufficiently from the LTWP development?

Respondent: There was no advocacy from the community and the leaders. The chiefs should have been the people to advocate about wind power because they are the people on the ground. The government likes doing things through the back door. It should involve the community through sensitisation and public meetings. There was only one public meeting in this area, there should have been many more.

Interviewer: What was the role of your leaders in these meetings?

Respondent: We never saw them advocate for us, even on a single occasion. We only heard young people raising their voices for more

employment opportunities. I think the leaders partnered with the project to hide some things from the community. (Interview with resident, South Horr, 09/05/19).

As revealed by this exchange, many feel in the dark and are suspicious of duty bearers that the company might otherwise consult with. A religious leader in Loiyangalani put it this way, 'If there are any benefits, they are being shared secretly. Nothing is being done in the open for communities to decide what goes where and for whom.' Some local businesspeople who would hope to benefit from local content provisions around the construction of the windfarm were similarly critical, as the following interview in Loiyangalani highlights:

'The company was giving the community false information, claiming that "We'll do this, we'll do that", but they didn't deliver. They said when wind power is finished, they'd bring power to Loiyangalani, Kulal and South Horr. But they haven't. People complained that the former MP never involved the community. He just did deals with wind power without consulting with the local elites and communities'

Local attitudes at once cast judgment on engagement processes that are taken as cover for decisions being made behind closed doors as well as voice expectations of how local leaders should be involved. Area residents seek vigilance by their leaders to guard public interest. In the words of one resident in South Horr, 'Our leaders are our watchdog, but they don't follow up the (LTWP's) promises. They are supposed to raise voices on our behalf but there is nothing.' Local attitudes vilify local leadership not only for engaging in shadowy decision-making that borders on corruption but also failing to challenge company plans and operations and holding developers and more senior politicians accountable, as the following exchange with participants of a men's focus group in South Horr reveals:

Interviewer: Were your leaders consulted when decisions were being made during the windfarm planning and construction?

Respondent: They worked together with the project management, yet none of them care about us.

Interviewer: Who do you blame, the company or your leaders for failing to respond to wider community interests?

Respondent: We blame them both but mostly our leaders. They don't question anything being done or carried out by the company. They don't follow up on what was promised (by the company) so it means they are working together. (Focus Group Discussion with men, South Horr, 10/05/19).

With the windfarm completed and now generating power for Kenya's national grid, the lack of written agreements between LTWP and local communities looms large in how residents assess the shortcomings of the planning and construction phases. A youth leader from the region commented, 'The problem is that these (LTWP CSR commitments) were never put in writing. The company was not obliged to abide by what was agreed, there was nothing we could do to hold them accountable.' This view held across multiple interviews and focus groups. A Member of the County Assembly who held office when the windfarm was being planned explained that, while minutes were made of local engagement meetings, these fell short of anything resembling a written agreement. The lack of a written agreement, at least in the sense of something acknowledged to be so in the view of area residents, dented confidence in local leadership, which was widely seen as having been ineffective in presenting and advocating for a broader public interest. Equally, lacking confidence in local leaders and trust in consultative processes that were regarded as being closed, residents felt it was impossible to hold LTWP accountable.

#### 4.2.3. Seeing conflict at the margins

From the perspective of LTWP and the state, the development of the windfarm in a previously remote corner of northern Kenya has brought

significant benefits to local societies in the region, ranging from new road infrastructure, classrooms and bore holes, and opportunities for work as well as increased opportunities for marketing and trade. There is comparatively less attention to how the windfarm has influenced social and political relationships, or conflict. A review of environmental and social impact studies carried out for LTWP concluded that these were not sensitive to possible conflict mechanisms and dynamics associated with the windfarm: 'their identification and scope of conflict mechanisms were crude at best,' (Lomax et al. 2023: 8). Further, the studies framed conflict narrowly in terms of changes in the security environment or vaguely referenced 'community cohesion' but used secondary data and reports to determine relative impacts (ibid.). Thus, their conclusions were misleading or in some instances wrong. For example, one assessment acknowledged that the distribution of work opportunities could ignite tensions between groups; yet, it found 'that jobs and opportunities were allocated equally amongst ethnic groups, and even contributed to reduced conflict between groups,' (Lomax et al. 2023: 5). This is despite several independent studies finding otherwise that the allocation of work opportunities remained a strong point of contention throughout the implementation of the project (Cormack and Kurewa 2018; Drew 2020, 2022; Simberg-Koulumies 2024). Further, as the analysis above shows, it continued to be so even after the construction was completed. From the perspective of the state, the establishment of the windfarm is a powerful symbol of modernity and transformation. Moreover, with completion of the road, and LTWP funding the construction of some administrative police posts, it has helped to extend the state's reach through more security and other public services.

Local ways of 'seeing' paint a different picture highlighting paradoxical dynamics at work and revealing a more profound conflict between local societies at the margins and a constellation of public authorities. While some incidents of violence, especially in and around Sarima, punctuated the period of the windfarm's construction, many local stakeholders describe a gradually improving security landscape – one that seemingly endorses the state vision of greater policing presence helping to deter violence. However, equally important in local perspectives is a view of hardening social relationships. A religious leader lamented a situation suggesting the superficial appearance of improved security co-existing with greater levels of enmity, 'Sarima was a battlefield but since the company came it is a bit more peaceful. There is now water, jobs, businesses and the new road. The greatest undoing is the hatred it has created between communities'.

While greater tensions between the Turkana, Samburu, Rendille and El Molo is a key legacy of LTWP, at least in the near term, local ways of 'seeing' conflict emphasise aspects of the project's governance – how community engagement processes were undertaken, who was invited to be part of these, the role of elected leaders and other key persons of influence within these, and the limited scope for local stakeholders to hold LTWP to account. Unfavourable local perspectives state more than simply a lack of acceptance of the project. Rather, they are a critical commentary of local society encounters with seemingly more powerful but distant institutions and capital. Across generations, the view holds that performative, 'frontstage' politics is window-dressing for processes that continue to exclude most area residents while channelling profits and privileges to few.

These dynamics are powerfully expressed in the lack of a reliable energy supply for many in the small communities that dot the LTWP region (Hashimshony Yaffe and Segal-Klein 2023; Simberg-Koulumies 2024). Even though it is not a duty of LTWP to connect area communities to the grid, subjective views hold strongly that LTWP shoulders some of the blame. A resident from the project area based in Marsabit town explained, 'The people in Sarima, Loiy, South Horr and Kulal are still in darkness. We raised it with LTWP, but they said it wasn't their role, that it was something for the national government to address. But it should have been obvious for the company to provide power to the people, on whose land they were developing.' A member of a focus group discussion with men in South Horr invoked a Maasai proverb to



express the frustration and disappointment that many in the area feel, ‘They (LTWP) lied to us that they will connect us (to power). There is no way “we provide a cow to be slaughtered and we don’t get a share of the meat” (Maasai saying). Not possible at all.’ Significantly, local perspectives on the production of energy, and the lack of local connectivity to the grid, shows that residents of the project area were alert to the wider political economy of the windfarm. When asked who benefitted from the wind development, a woman running a tea stall in South Horr stated, ‘In my own opinion, the project benefitted because they will get a lot of profits.’ Such perceptions turn on their head the view that local responses to largescale projects are simply a scramble to capture small benefits in the way of work opportunities. Local framings of the LTWP project convey an appreciation for how such largescale resource projects benefit their financiers and chief developers, as well as the multi-level governance that guards the status quo.

## 5. Conclusion

Many assessments of large-scale resource-based and infrastructural projects in eastern Africa have focussed on the conflicts and struggles engendered by projects that are in planning or under construction, emphasising ‘economies of anticipation’ that grow around expected benefits, as well as claims made to territories that are valued by competing stakeholder communities (Chome 2020; Cormack and Kurewa, 2018; Elliott 2020). This article adds to these debates by exploring local framings and ongoing contestations of projects that have been completed. Framings of the LTWP windfarm by residents from adjacent and nearby communities show how large resource-based projects are redefined through local meanings and practices in ways that challenge developer and state governance of everyday lives at the margins. Judged by local ways of ‘seeing’ the windfarm, the experience of many area residents is a corrupt bargain between investors and political administration at multiple levels, underpinned by performative consultation and enacted through gatekeepers that control and direct the distribution of benefits. Framings and meanings given to the LTWP windfarm do not invoke straightforward notions of resistance or anticipating rewards. Rather, they are a critical commentary on the project’s governance through performative consultation and its elevation of gatekeepers that steer benefits to the exclusion of most. The impacts and forms of contentious politics arising around the LTWP project include an overwhelming sense that people had not been told the truth, and that many promises were made that were not going to be kept, or were already broken; an increase in conflict as people felt that jobs and opportunities were given out in ways that were not fair and balanced; and consultation processes that were circumscribed and which quieted the voices of many residents in a way that was reflected in how project benefits were distributed and harms left unattended.

Thus, local herders and small-town residents see the LTWP windfarm not as a totem to green progress, but as evidence the powers of a large project backed by remote financiers and decision-makers that spurs local struggles and leaves the poor behind. Many locals have contested the project through opposition to elected leaders and middlemen, citing a crisis of representation. They reject the developers’ consultation modes and methods, that are endorsed by key government officials, as being ineffective and corrupt. This opposition is evident in local elections that have ousted duty bearers seen as being too close to the development, and in local discourses highlighting broken promises and gatekeeping by corrupt elected and company officials. Mobilization within local society is focused on rejecting the decisions made by developers and local elites regarding both the benefits and their distribution. These decisions are considered to lack popular consensus and based on consultations that were neither open nor keeping residents adequately informed of plans, their implications, and potential consequences.

Local perspectives are closely linked to strategies and actions people employed to gain recognition, including protests and blockades to mobilise local opinion against the development, and electing leaders

who opposed the project. These various strategies are intended as a means of engagement and way to forge connections with public authorities. This chimes with the key finding of Temper et al.’s (2020) global review of opposition to green energy projects – that strengthening democratic decision-making processes involving a wider range of stakeholders is necessary for such investments.

While the findings presented here are specific to a particular project and period, they dovetail with critical assessments of large resource-based investments elsewhere in eastern Africa. They will be especially pertinent to consideration of large developments in rural areas with hybrid forms of governance. Like so many largescale infrastructure and resource projects elsewhere in the region, the construction of the LTWP windfarm has unmasked an enduring crisis in governance at the margins of state power. This predicament is one in which many people lack confidence or trust in formal and informal institutions and associated negotiations and dealmaking, which restrict access to benefits for most who are in diminished positions in social hierarchies. The entry of global capital into settings of hybrid governance requires careful navigation in creating spaces for participation and consultation that garner broad local support and connect meaningfully to decision-making processes. Addressing these issues is crucial for resolving conflicts surrounding renewable resource projects and ensuring that the ‘public good’ benefits of such developments extend to the populations who may be the most distant from political power.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Jeremy Lind:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Daniel Salau Rogei:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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