

Farmers and pastoralists conflicts among neighboring communities in Isiolo South Sub-County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Farmer-herder conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa have become a significant security threat. This nature of conflict is driven by climate change, resource scarcity, land tenure insecurity, and ethnic tensions. However, the nature of conflicts may be escalated or provoked by other historical factors. The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of conflicts and the impacts of conflict between the Borana, Somali and Meru communities. This study was guided by social learning and conflict transformation theories. The study adopted a qualitative research design to assess farmer-pastoralist conflict between the Borana and Meru communities. The study collected qualitative data. The study targeted 44,490 persons living in Isiolo South. The participants in this study included residents, police officers, administrative leaders, and six nongovernment organisations (NGO) representatives. The participants were collected using a structured interview schedule. Data collected was analysed using thematic analysis. The study identified resource competition, land disputes, cultural practices, and livelihoods as key drivers of farmer-pastoralist conflicts in Isiolo South. These conflicts were fuelled by the commercialisation of cattle raids, political influence, and weak governance. The study further found that displacement, loss of livelihoods, and breakdown of social cohesion were social implications of farmer-pastoralist conflicts identified in Borana and Meru communities' conflicts. The study found that intercommunal conflict between the Borana and Meru communities is driven by culturally rooted cattle raiding, which has evolved into a commercial and politically influenced activity. This study recommends strengthening local peace committees and intercommunity dialogue frameworks to build peace and prevail over disputes emerging from grazing and water resources, especially during the drought-induced migration.

Keywords: Farmers, Inter-Communal Conflict, Pastoralists, Small Arms

I. INTRODUCTION

There is increased concern of conflict among farmers and pastoralists in most Sub-Saharan Africa. The main triggers of these conflicts are raising demand for resources due to population increase and changes in climate, ethnic tension and land tenure (Adams et al., 2023; Ntumva, 2022). Further, there is increased access to small weapons in these regions, which sometimes leads to increased consequences of these conflicts (Ajala, 2020). These consequences include loss of lives, displacements and destruction of property, which impede regional economic efforts by increasing poverty (Okunlola & Okafor, 2022; Falanta & Bengesi, 2018). The competition between farmers and pastoralists over decreasing resources has continued to negatively influence peace between farmers and pastoralists (Adams et al., 2023). Other notable factors that have led to the escalation of this challenge include unethical conduct and a weak governance structure in these communities (Falanta & Bengesi, 2018). As noted in the study conducted by Maelo and Harris (2021), armed conflicts and persistent ethnic clashes have persisted for decades.

The causes of pastoralists' and farmers' conflicts in Africa, especially in Tanzania and Nigeria, include resource competition and climate (Massawe & Urassa, 2016; Ntumva, 2022). This conflict influences the agricultural production effort, leading to increased food insecurity and reduced household income, which eventually derail the economic development (Gebrihet & Gebresilassie, 2025). Though cultural norms have remained a key contributor to conflict involving pastoralists and farmers, the role of climate change, increased access to small firearms continues to increase (Wild et al., 2018). In other instances, political players fuel conflict by inciting and mobilizing militia herders and supporting them for political interests (Peace, 2017; Wild et al., 2018; Greiner, 2013). This new front of conflicts, where politicians motivate conflicts leading to raids, ravages, and community hostility, continues to pose significant obstacles in the peacekeeping effort and regional economic growth (Sempiga, 2017; Wild et al., 2018).

Kenya has experienced significant economic and social consequences from persistent conflicts, which continue to affect the sustainable development projects (Onono, 2016). Since 1997, there has been a notable increase in the use of arms in the conflicts, leading to fatalities (Njatang et al., 2023). Further, climate change has negatively affected pastoralists' livelihood and coping mechanisms (Fikru et al., 2024). Due to increased farming activities, there are

increased land disputes and unresolved boundary disputes (Bukari, 2023). Though various reforms have been suggested and initiated to address the challenge, the challenge has persisted over decades, calling for alternative measures to increase family livelihood, representation and youth empowerment (Aritho & Reuben, 2023). The background highlights complex connections between socioeconomic, political and environmental challenges; this stresses the need for evidence-based interventions to boost peaceful coexistence, economic development and livelihood.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Violence is a leading cause of death among young men in developing countries and one of the major obstacles to attaining development (Basedau et al., 2016). Poverty makes the country more susceptible to civil wars and violent conflict, impeding efforts to achieve economic growth and increasing the chances of the recurrence of violence (Braithwaite et al., 2016). According to the United Nations (2022), two billion people live in nations affected by violence. Approximately 84 million people were forced to leave their home areas the previous year because of conflicts, violence, and human rights violations, a number estimated to increase by 82% by 2025 (Alamir et al., 2018). The dominant communities in Isiolo are Borana, Gabra, Sakuye, and Turkana.

Several variables have changed the nature of the farmers-pastoralists conflict in Kenya and many other African nations into something arguably more violent and linked to larger political, economic, and social forces. Integration and clan interactions among the different farmers-pastoralists of Northern Kenya and the broader Horn of Africa regions have been characterized by conflict and violence in recent years, which has been related to cattle rustling, communal tensions, expulsions, and killings. Pastoralists faced complicated issues such as land-related conflicts involving farmers and stress issues such as resource depletion, drought, starvation, and other natural disasters. Clashes involving the Borana and Meru communities led to the death of seven people in 2015, 10 people in 2017, five people in 2019, and seven people in 2021, as reported by ACLED. Also, ACLED recorded 23 civilian fatalities in the year 2022, resulting from attacks staged by pastoralist militia. In 2023, ACLED records rising tensions linked to county borders. Among the disputes that turned violent that year were those reported in the border areas of Isiolo-Garissa and Isiolo-Meru. These conflicts typically involved different forms of violence, including armed ethnic clashes, riots, fighting over territorial claims, and cattle raiding. Most of these acts of violence are retaliatory attacks targeting families, especially women and children, leading to displacement and closure of schools. Herders from pastoral communities, especially from counties in the arid and semi-arid lands, migrating into neighbouring counties in search of water and pasture after a series of failed rainfalls have recently led to violent theft and banditry.

Isiolo promises more development as a treatment for the cancers of marginalization, violence, and war, thanks to its crucial position in Kenya's Vision 2030 programme. Isiolo hosted a key resort city, an international airport, and a railway line connecting Lamu to Lokichogio and Ethiopia, according to Vision 2030 plans (Golicha & Wanyonyi, 2018). Isiolo experienced tremendous development growth throughout the same period, with improvements to the road network, airport, and business developments, among other things. Conflict dynamics are poised to change again with decentralization and the establishment of Northern Kenya as a primary focus for the national economy's economic and social development. The policy question remained about ways to prevent persistent violence while safeguarding farmers-pastoralists' interests in the region's economic transition. Despite the increased developments, Isiolo County has remained slightly unchanged.

Violence is predictable; community violence and political violence are the two primary forms of violence in Kenya (Raleigh and Linke, 2018). The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project [ACLED] (Carboni, et al, 2017) recorded a significant reduction in violence in Kenya from 2013 to 2017. Mbijiwe (2021) notes that dominant political and economic interests are the primary drivers of ethnic violence in Isiolo County. The conflict between pastoralists (nomadic or semi-nomadic herders) and agriculturalists (sedentary farmers) has deep historical roots. It often stems from competition for limited resources, primarily land and water, essential for agriculturalists and pastoralists' livelihoods. Many scholars have documented instances of such conflicts dating back centuries, often in regions with a delicate balance between these two groups (Golicha & Wanyonyi, 2018; Mehta et al., 2019; Ture Golicha, 2018; Schmidt & Pearson, 2016). The literature review on the efficacy of dialogue in resolving conflicts between farmers and pastoralists is limited. While there are anecdotal examples of successful dialogue initiatives, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that systematically assess the effectiveness of dialogue in mitigating these conflicts. Further, the causes of conflict are disparate and could be ideal for a specific group/community. Therefore, this study aims to assess the nature, extent, trends, causes, and consequences of violence to propose strategies to reduce violence and promote peace-building among the farmers and pastoralist communities living in Isiolo South in Isiolo County.

1.2 Research Objective

The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of conflicts and impacts of conflict between the Borana, Somali and Meru communities in Isiolo South, Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory, proposed by a Canadian psychologist, Albert Bandura, is among the prominent theoretical concepts developed (Bandura, 1969). The theory posits that human beings can learn behaviour through perception and copying (Bandura, 1971). Bandura claimed that learning is a social cognitive process which happens when an individual observes or is instructed (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Learning is facilitated by penalties, moralities and rewards through a process known as vicarious reinforcement. Further, cultural notions of ethics and the learner's internal consciousness are examples of the social learning concept (Bandura, 1971). According to Bandura, when an individual receives rewards for their learning process, they are motivated to reproduce the results; these can be mimicked and used by trainers to impact knowledge or change behaviour in the real world (Bandura, 1986). Children, among other people, observe and learn behaviour or practices glorified in the community as acts of courage or heroism (Bandura, 2006).

According to social learning theory, farmers-pastoralist conflicts can be learned by observing and incorporating the society's perceptions. In most farmers-pastoral conflict areas, conflict is learned through observations; teenagers observe, retain and eventually engage in conflict (Likaka & Muia, 2015). The farmers-pastoralist conflicts are mainly caused by cattle raiding and resource conflicts (Chebunet et al., 2013). Cattle raiding have previously been perceived as a practice for community heroes, and these heroes have been celebrated in community traditions in most pastoral communities in Northern Kenya. Youth warriors who perform successful raids are given heroic praises, which motivate them to continue raiding and killing, leading to constant conflicts (National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), & Interpeace, 2021). Influential persons and the framework through which violent behaviour is transmitted can be targeted through interventions to reduce violence.

2.1.2 Conflict Transformation Theory by John Paul Lederach

Conflict transformation theory was advanced by John Paul Lederach through the 1990s and published in a book in 2003. Lederach assumes reconciliation as a composite change in the systems that transform violence into peace (Lederach, 1996, 1997, 2003). Change in conflict involves persons, organizations, relations and cultural components over time in a well-structured and monitored process (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). Long term structures are developed for societal negotiations to help repair destroyed connections and help build reconciliations (Lederach, 2012). Conflict resolution theory and practice deal more with conflict itself than the dominant system, though not exclusively. According to Burton and Dukes (1990) and Mitchell (2002) conflict reconciliation process involves the parties' needs and perspectives, and the process should incorporate these dynamics to transform the systems and relations.

2.2 Empirical Review

Mkutu (2019) conducted a study to understand pastoralist politics and government development with a view to explaining the organization of armed conflict in Isiolo. The objective of Mkutu was to explore the dynamics of conflict in Isiolo and its effect on land planning and claims. In his paper, he argues that survival motivation, which mainly involves access to water and pastures and the need to accumulate wealth were key driver of conflict in the region. Further politics, which are mainly motivated by personal accumulation of wealth, take an ethnic line in most communities in the region, which is also a significant challenge to peace among border communities. The infrastructure plan further fueled tension and fears of exclusion in customary lands due to speculative grabbing of land and state acquisition of land without compensation. It is also worth noting that Isiolo is a hub of small arms, which has often complicated the conflict dynamics. Despite the presence of specialized security personnel, efforts to restore peace and end persistent conflict in the region remain below the desired threshold. Therefore, addressing the conflict in this region requires understanding conflicts layers and developing appropriate approaches to these conflicts.

Another study conducted by Mwikali and Wafula (2019) sought to assess the effect of recurring farmer-pastoralist conflict on the socio-economic development of communities in Mutitu Kitui. The study assessed the effect of conflict between the year 1963 and the year 2013. The conflicts in this region involve Kamba communities, who are mainly farmers, and Somalis and Oromo, who are predominantly pastoralists. The study was informed by John Galtung's theory of structural violence. The theories assume that institutional injustices and failure to provide basic human needs increase incidences of violence while reducing the quality of life in the communities. The study used secondary and primary data. Secondary data was obtained from existing reports, while secondary data was collected using structured questionnaires, key informant guides and focused group discussions. The study found that persistent conflicts in the region had hindered social and economic growth in the community.

The study also reviewed the work of Garba et al., (2015), which sought to assess the socioeconomic consequences of conflicts involving farmers and pastoralist in the western Zone of Bauchi State in Nigeria. The study examined the demographic characteristics of participants, estimated the prevalence of violence, and identified the

economic and social effects of violence and the spillover effects of the conflicts. The study used quantitative methods; 75 arable farmers and 75 pastoralists were targeted using questionnaires. Most of the participants were aged between 30 and 49 years. The study found conflict involved financial losses, increasing poverty, trust breakdown and food insecurity. The spillover effect included increased commodity prices, social vices and a scarcity of food items in the study area.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative action research study design. According to Huyler and McGill (2019), the use of qualitative methods in data collection is effective in studying complex issues and collecting rich data. This approach allowed the researcher to work together with the community to investigate problems and co-design solutions. The research gathered data using semi-structured interview guides and focused group discussions.

3.2 Study Area

The research sought to describe the farmers-pastoralists conflict involving the Borana and Meru communities living in the Isiolo South Sub-County. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics in 2019, 44,490 persons live in Isiolo South. The Isiolo South has a population of 44,490. Isiolo County has Borana, Samburu, Gabra, Sakuye, Turkana, Meru and Somali communities. KNBS has a precise mapping of household and community distribution in the region. People in this region live in clusters, especially in Borana and Somali communities, and therefore, the KNBS mapping helps understand the targeted population.

3.3 Target Population

The selection of participants was conducted in a manner to ensure inclusivity of key society members, including men, women and youths. Youth aged between 18 and 34 years, older men and women (35+) were included in the study. The researcher also collected views of administrative police officers, chiefs and Non-Government Organizations representatives.

3.4 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

The selection of the participants was informed by a number of factors: their experiences on matters of security, participants in local security committees, and their involvement in governance. The investigator used a purpose sampling technique to select the participants for this study. The study conducted 6 focused groups, 2 per community involving 6 members each. The researcher conducted 12 interviews targeting 6 NGO representatives, and 6 administrative officers.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The researcher used key informant interviews and focused group interview guides to collect data. The key informant interviews were conducted targeting leaders from respective communities, chiefs, and NGOs representatives. The study targeted 14 key informants to gather insights on farmers-pastoralists conflicts. The interview sessions lasted for approximately 20 minutes and were conducted at various places, administrative centres. The process sought to explore the nature of conflicts and causes of conflicts to co-design the solution to conflicts.

3.6 Data Analysis

The audios were transcribed and translated from Swahili to English. The audio and script files were de-identified and stored in a locked folder. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involves: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and renaming themes and finally, presenting and discussing the results.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Prior to the fieldwork, the researcher obtained permits and relevant authorizations required for this study. Research permit was obtained from the Durban University of Technology Ethical and research Committee, South Africa and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, Kenya. The researcher also obtained approval from Isiolo County Commissioners before proceeding to recruit the participants and prior to conducting the data collection. Further, the researcher described the purpose of conducting the study to the participants and their rights during recruitment. Participants were informed of all issues about the research, including the use of data, and their questions were clarified. They were requested to provide written consent before participating in the study.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Cattle Raid/Rustling

The study observed that pastoralists have engaged in cattle raiding for a considerable amount of time, with the practice being governed by cultural authorities and sanctioned by elders through rituals. The pastoralists raid and steal cattle from the farmers and other communities. Observed to be historical, these raids aimed to acquire cattle for various purposes, including paying bride prices, restocking after droughts, and being a symbol of warrior status. The elders would bless the warriors before the raid.

".....there are people in the pastoralist communities who perceive raiding as a means of establishing dominance and power within and between pastoralist communities. The people engage or sponsor raids, where successful raids are often seen as a sign of bravery and strength and could help enhance the raiders' social status within their community," ~ a police officer, March ,62023

Another police officer reiterated that raiding was a means of obtaining wealth, as shown in the response below.

"In some pastoralist societies, raiding is sometimes used to amass wealth. This is particularly common in societies where livestock, such as cattle, camels or sheep, was the primary wealth form," ~ a police officer, March ,62023

However, the report indicates that the current state of cattle raiding has taken a different turn, with the practice being commercialized. As a result, stolen animals are sold in urban abattoirs to benefit influential individuals in the country. The report further suggests that urban dwellers are the primary financiers of cattle raiding and banditry in Isiolo since they provide a readily available market or consume the meat products from the stolen cattle. This commercialization has resulted in increased harm to women and children, who are now more vulnerable to harm during the raids.

"Cattle raiding has been commercialized, and the stolen animals are sold in abattoirs in urban areas for the benefit of influential individuals in Kenya," ~ a Somali youth. March 7, 2023

While cattle rustling remains a primary challenge to inter-community peace, efforts should be made to ensure youths are empowered economically to discourage the perspectives that promote raiding as a form of economic activity.

4.1.2 Limited grazing land and watering points, Conflicts

The study found that pastoral and agro-pastoral communities predominantly occupy Isiolo County, and limited grazing resources, including water, have historically contributed to conflict. It was also noted that recurrent dry spells and drought in the surrounding counties resulted in diminished pasture reserves and the subsequent movement of livestock from the adjoining counties of Wajir, Marsabit, Tana River, Samburu and Garissa. The livestock movements tended to converge in Isiolo and compete with local livestock for grazing resources. The resulting resource depletion was exacerbated by the failure of communities migrating into Isiolo County in search of water and pasture to follow traditional resource-sharing mechanisms. It was noted that in many instances, migrants were aware of negotiated rules of access but acted in disregard of these.

"Clashes over resources are a common cause of conflict and violence in many parts of the world. The competition for resources such as water, land, minerals and energy can often create tensions between communities or groups, particularly in areas where resources are scarce or with uneven access," ~ a Borana elder, March ,72023

Another response from a Meru elder stressed the increasing demand for limited resources, such as water and pasture, as critical sources of conflict.

"Conflicts over water are also common, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions where water is scarce. These conflicts can arise between different communities or farmers and pastoralists who may have competing demands for water," ~ a Meru elder. March ,82023

The findings suggested a conflict between farmers and pastoralists, particularly between Turkana, Meru, and Somali community members. In particular, the migration of camels was associated with conflict because they were often left to roam and, therefore, grazed on any available vegetation, foraging on food crops, reserve pastures, and live fences (fences made of thorny plants). The conflict resulting from these disputes has turned violent.

4.1.3 Border Disputes

The study found that land allocation and land tenure security were vital to contemporary African rural communities because of inequalities under colonial and post-colonial regimes, population increases, agricultural expansion, increasing vested interests, and resettlement schemes. Most of the land in Isiolo County is communal – i.e., unregistered land held under trust by the county government. Since land is communally owned, the landless are mainly found in the county's urban areas, where the poor from outside the county cannot purchase land or have not been allocated plots. Less than 1% of the land is titled, which, until laws are enacted permitting group titling for community

land users, renders communities vulnerable to displacement if the county or national government decides to make changes to land use and hampers the process of compensation when they are required to leave.

Also, as observed during the interviews, the rival communities between Borana and Meru clashed over border disputes. Citing from the responses;

".... we Borana communities don't agree with the current border between the Meru communities" ~ a Borana elder. March ,72023

It was observed that land disputes constantly fuelled conflict among these communities since one is a farming community, while the other is a pastoralist community. Land ownership rights have been complicated by political and ethnic considerations that have negatively impacted the conflict context in Isiolo County.

".....During the drought seasons, herders bring their herds of camels to graze without asking who owns the land. The farmers then kill the animals on their farms, and armed herders consequently strike back by attacking the farmers," ~ a Meru elder said. March ,82023

4.1.4 Conflict Triggers

Politicians in Isiolo have been accused of using land ownership as a political tool, making promises to ensure ownership of contested parcels of land to get support from people from their ethnic communities. The primary challenge was a result of ethnicity, resource constraints and border conflicts; the crop-farming community, in this case the Meru community, was mainly affected during the drought seasons and had their crops destroyed by the herders from the Borana and Somali communities. During these seasons, animal raiding happened constantly, and some community members lost their livestock. Citing some of the responses;

".....here the nature of conflict is mainly fuelled by constant drought, which leads to constrained resources such as grass and water, during the period we experience constant conflicts," ~ a Somali youth. March ,7 2023

".... Our neighbours, Borana communities, claim that all the livestock are theirs; we can't keep the goat, they (Borana) will come for them," ~ a Meru woman. March ,82023

"We have coexisted with a Meru neighbour for a long time, and the recent conflicts have been politically motivated. The government should establish the root cause of the conflicts," ~ a Borana youth. March ,7 2023

Conflict within the region had various consequences in the area; these included fatalities, displacement of communities, loss of property and hopelessness, among others. This section discusses these factors.

4.1.5 Impacts of Farmer-Pastoralist Conflicts Fatalities

The issue of fatalities in farmers-pastoralists communities' clashes in Isiolo County is a complex and multifaceted problem that has deep roots in the history, culture and political dynamics of the region. The farmers-pastoralist communities in Isiolo County are mainly composed of ethnic groups such as Borana, Meru and Somali, with a long history of conflict over scarce resources such as water, pasture and grazing land.

"Most of the time, where there are clashes between these communities, numerous fatalities occur, affecting both sides. Most of these communities, especially the Somalis bordering Somalia, access small arms and light weapons and with slight provocations, they open fire." ~ Police officer March ,62023

"I am still bitter; my father was killed, 29 head of cattle and a donkey were taken. He left behind orphans. This peace campaign will not succeed until those responsible, the government too, for failure to offer protection, agree to compensate us," ~ a Borana youth. March ,72023

4.1.6 Destruction of Property and Displacement of Communities

The study found that the region usually experienced the destruction of property during raids, clashes, disputes, and revenge. In particular, the conflict between the Meru (farmers) and Borana (herders) was characterized by the highest property loss. It was observed that the Borana community were constantly attacking Meru communities and destroying their farms, and in response, the Meru communities attacked and killed their animals.

"When properties are destroyed during violence, this results in significant financial losses for individuals, businesses and governments. The loss of homes, infrastructure, and other essential facilities can lead to the disruption of people's lives and can have a severe impact on the local economy. In some cases, the destruction of properties can also result in the loss of valuable cultural and historical landmarks," ~ a police officer, March ,62023

"The camel herders, who are from the Borana community, have been destroying crops in this area and are very hostile," ~ a Meru woman. March ,82023

The Borana's killings are motivated by a desire for pasture. It has been reported that a head was found in the park, which is thought to have been decapitated from the body of a missing person," ~ a police officer, March ,82023

It was further observed that the displacement of communities as a result of clashes in Isiolo County was a significant issue that contributed to the humanitarian crisis in the region. The clashes between farmers and pastoralist communities in the area led to the displacement of thousands of people, causing immense suffering and disruption of livelihoods. The displacement of communities in Isiolo County is often a result of violent clashes between the different communities. Various factors can trigger these clashes, including competition over resources such as water and grazing land, political interference and historical disputes.

"The displacement of communities has far-reaching consequences, including the loss of property, displacement of families, disruption of livelihoods and increased vulnerability to violence, exploitation and abuse," ~ an NGO representative. March ,92023

4.1.7 Ethnic and Political Rivalry

The findings from FGDs show that constant farmers-pastoralists conflicts in the region have introduced rivalry among the communities and subgroups. Most of this rivalry has been intensified by political leaders and environmental factors. The conflict over resources has constantly increased the rivalry among the communities and hindered the integration between the communities. There is a clear linkage between ethnic disputes and their effects on the economic development and growth of Isiolo County. However, any political, economic and social growth needs a habitat of peace and solidarity. More precisely, economic development and growth schemes require the participants to be at peace with one another. Aside from this, ethnic clashes destroy what has been established. It breaks systems formed for economic growth, resulting in the collapse of businesses, damage to infrastructure and loss of lives of individuals who engage in development. Some parts of Isiolo County are underdeveloped because of ethnic clashes.

4.1.8 Psychosocial Challenges

The constantly affected communities, such as the Merian, live on the immediate border of Isiolo with Borana in a place known as Kinna. In the discussions with this community, they reported desperation in keeping livestock or farming activities; they argued that every time they kept livestock, the Borana pastoralists would pass through while grazing, combine the livestock with theirs, and rustle them.

"Isiolo is a war zone; many people have been killed, and children orphaned. We have witnessed an increase in the number of widows; hundreds of families have lost their homes and been displaced, with no effort made to resettle them," ~ a police officer. March ,62023

4.1.9 Unemployment and Youth Bulge

The constant and unpredictable clashes have discouraged involvement in economic activities. This has led to high rates of hardship and unemployment levels, which are considered fundamental situations that have contributed to societies being exposed to armed disputes because they support injustice and generate large numbers of frustrated and idle youths who engage in crime. This final aggression is especially prevalent in Isiolo County. Due to the large number of unemployed, the area has recently encountered a dramatic demographic tension known as the youth bulge.

4.1.10 Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

Over the last few years, there has been an increase in the availability of SALW in Isiolo County. Semi-automatic weapons are sneaked across Kenya's boundaries and into towns, especially in Isiolo County. However, Isiolo County is at the epicentre of the use of SALW. The study revealed the following:

"Isiolo County is approached by many challenges of inter-racial resource-based disputes, underdevelopment and accessibility to war-prone neighbouring counties, which have the largest connection of small arms." ~ County administrator, March ,92023

"Members of the community are aware of the Borana herders wielding firearms but are afraid to report them for fear of being assassinated," ~ a police officer. March ,62023

Additionally, the research asserts that the use of SALW has become entrenched in Isiolo County and is enhanced by long-term insecurity. This causes a security predicament in which societies arm themselves for protection, activating neighbouring communities to act by arming themselves.

4.2 Discussion

The culture of cattle raiding is rooted and legitimized in most of the pastoralists' communities as a means of acquiring wealth, gaining societal respects and replenishing the animals destroyed by drought or diseases. Dabasso et al. (2022) argue that the Borona pastoralists held the cattle as a symbol of wealth and identity. Raiding has been a

historical practice in most societies, which was entrenched in the communities' cultural norms that defined where and when and how from whom the raid could be performed (Spencer et al., 1998). Historically, anthropologists describe the raid as a practice institutionalized in the community culture and governed by norms and specified when, how and against whom the raid is to be conducted. These claims are supported by Okumu et al (2017), Mkutu (2008), and Dietz et al., (2015), who found that raids were embedded in cultural norms but further noted an increase in political influence and commercialization of livestock theft in recent days. Opiyo et al (2012) and Raleigh & Kniveton (2012) observed that the pressure emerging from environmental factors continues to fuel conflicts and raids.

Natural resources reduction due to human and environmental pressure is emerging as a main source of conflict between the Meru and Borana communities in Isiolo South. This leads to increased competition in land use, grazing areas and water sources, especially during long drought seasons. These findings are consistent with the work of Limiri (2022) and Chikandah (2021), who found recurring droughts pushed pastoralists from Isiolo to Meru farms, leading to conflicts. The findings further support the works of Schilling et al. (2020), who found that climate variability and environmental pressure increased the movement of pastoralists, increasing competition for the use of limited resources. Additionally, the pressure on resources gives rise to border conflicts between the Borana and Meru communities, leading to recurring conflicts. This supports the work of Boye and Kaarhus (2011), who described the Meru–Borana border as a hotspot of the conflict between the two communities, citing unresolved territorial claims, patterns in pastoralist movements and historical unresolved disagreements. According to Mkutu and Mdee (2020), lack of clear tenure, unclear boundaries, political pronouncements of the border, and unreliable intervention by the state continue to promote the intercommunal conflicts.

Political incitement and weak governance have been identified as critical issue that escalates conflict between the communities (Mbijiwe, 2021). It was noted that politicians exploit existing tensions on land tenure, ethnic differences, conflict history and struggle for the resources as a tool to win elections. This practice by the political class increases the intercommunal differences, increases hostility, undermining the effort to attain peaceful coexistence among the communities. These findings support the work of Kalabamu (2019) that weak land tenure and political influence destroy governance and create conditions that support hostility among the communities. Further, Mendez and Naples (2015) found political class fuels ethnic identities and border conflicts. Additionally, studies by Okumu, et al (2017) claimed that the political class supplied firearms, provided protection to raiders, and incited people on the issues of borders.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study found that conflict between the Borana and Meru communities is driven by culturally rooted cattle raiding, which has evolved into a commercial and politically influenced activity. Competition over scarce natural resources, particularly land and water, intensifies during droughts, leading to clashes between migrating pastoralists and local farmers. Unresolved border disputes and weak land tenure systems further exacerbate tensions, often manipulated by political actors for personal gain. Addressing these conflicts requires strong governance, inclusive land reforms, and community-based dialogue to promote peaceful coexistence.

5.2 Recommendations

This study made recommends strengthening of local peace committees and intercommunity dialogue framework to build peace and prevail disputes emerging from grazing and water resources especially during the drought induced migration. The government should address the challenge of border dispute clarify on land tenure and administrative boundaries and demand accountability for violence incited by politics. The study further, recommended a future study to assess the influence of commercialization and politicization of cattle raiding on persistent conflicts. Also, a study should be done to assess interaction between climate variability and weak governance structure.

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