

**Understanding the Multiple Factors in ‘Natural
Resource Conflicts’: A Case Study of Local
Perspectives from Ewaso Ng’iro North River Basin,
Northern Kenya.**

**by
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Abstract

Kenya's Northern Arid and Semi-Arid regions are characterized by endemic conflicts commonly attributed to competition between pastoralists and agriculturalists for access to natural resources, especially fresh water. This research sought to explore how local actors representing different communities in the region perceive the factors that drive conflict in the region. Drawing upon extensive interviews and fieldwork, the study delved into intricate dynamics of natural resource-based conflict in Ewaso Ng'iro Basin as ethnic communities jostle for control and access to natural resources such as grazing areas, water, and land. The study examined the interconnection of political, environmental, and socioeconomic factors to conflicts in the region. The findings provide a more contextualized understanding of the political, economic, and social dynamics that make local people feel pessimistic about the prospects for ending conflict in this region. Specifically, the endurance of an ethnic-based political economy in Kenya undermines incentives for different groups to cooperate in the management of access to limited resources in the region. The study concludes with some recommendations for conflict resolution and cooperative management strategies in relation to natural resources in the region.

Keywords: Natural resource-based conflict; conflict drivers; climate change; ethnic politics; Northern Kenya

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List of Acronyms

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CEWARN	Conflict Early Warning and Early Response
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DPC	District Peace Committees
ENNDA	Ewaso Ngíro North Development Authority
GSU	General Service Unit
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
IPL	Isiolo Peace Link
KII	Key Informant Interviews
Med-Arb	mediation and arbitration
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

Chapter 1.

Natural Resource – Based Conflict

1.1. Introduction

Natural resource-based conflict refers to a social or political conflict where natural resources contribute to the onset, aggravation, or sustaining of conflict, due to disagreements or competition over the access to and management of natural resources, and the unequal burdens and benefits, profits, or power generated thereof' (Schellens and Diemer 2020 p.5). Natural resources include renewable (e.g. forests) and non-renewable material stocks (e.g. oil, minerals). Many such resources are integrated in human economies and perceptions of their scarcity are often linked to risks of conflict (WTO 2010). Different terminologies such as “resource wars” and “intractable conflicts” have been coined by scholars to describe the interplay between violence and natural resources (Watts 2008). Natural resource-based conflicts are directly or indirectly linked to factors of human development, especially socio-economic development (Muigua, 2016; Schwartz, 1999).

This connection is recognized by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well. There are different SDGs that establish and recognize a link between socioeconomic development and natural resource-based conflicts. For instance, SDG No. 1 (no poverty) is connected with natural resource-based conflicts as marginalized communities depend entirely on natural resources for livelihoods (Kipkemoi, 2018). Also, SDG No. 2 (zero hunger) effort is affected as access to resources and food production are disrupted by natural resource conflicts leading to malnutrition and exacerbating hunger (Lile, Ocnean, & Balan, 2023). Further, SDG No. 6 (sanitation and clean water) is affected as communities compete over scarce water resources (Herrera, 2019). Similarly, SDG No. 11 (sustainable cities and communities) cannot be achieved when communities fight for access to land (Vaidya & Chatterji, 2020). The SDG No. 13, 15, and 16 (climate action, life on land, and peace, justice, and strong institutions) are linked to natural resource-based conflicts. Resource conflict is a prevalent occurrence in many regions in the Global South that depend on natural or extractive resources, and a

particular focus of attention from development, governance, poverty, and conflict policy experts and scholars (Karl, 1997; Collier, 2005).

Prominent theories posit that natural resource conflicts primarily stem from scarcity, driven by population growth, unsustainable consumption patterns, and environmental degradation. For instance, Thomas Homer-Dixon's influential "environmental scarcity thesis" suggests that competition for dwindling resources, such as water, land, and energy, exacerbates tensions and increases the likelihood of conflict. Empirical studies have provided evidence supporting this theory, particularly in regions experiencing water stress, land degradation, and deforestation (Dabelko, 2003).

However, other scholars have challenged this thesis as too narrow. They contend that conflicts cannot be understood without appreciation of broader economic and political contexts (McNeish 2010; Kronenburg Garcia 2015; Andreoni & Chang, 2019). McNeish (2010), for example, argues that the relationship between conflict and natural resources is multifaceted, involving social, political, and economic dimensions. Understanding intercommunal conflicts requires a deep knowledge of the underlying divisions and power struggles in and between communities instead of a generalizing claim that conflicts are simply about access to natural resources. Some scholars have argued that marginalization, land dispossession, and other historical injustices tend to fuel distrust and resentment among communities (Kronenburg Garcia, 2015). Other studies have examined the role played by political dynamics in shaping the relationship between conflict and natural resources. Kronenburg García (2015) notes that differing agendas and competing interests among social groups and ethnic communities create rifts that exacerbate tensions and can complicate dispute-resolution efforts. According to Kronenburg García (2015), the layered nature of conflicts should be recognized to initiate and foster sustainable and inclusive approaches when it comes to the governance of natural resources.

The Ewaso Ng'iro North River Basin in Northern Kenya has experienced endemic conflict among local communities (Ikuathu, 2019; Kiteme et al., 2021). These conflicts are largely understood as natural resource conflicts exacerbated by climate change which has made land and water resources scarcer, leading to more intense competition between pastoralist and agricultural communities (Ikuathu, 2019; Kiteme et al., 2021). This study seeks to explore if and how these conflicts are also influenced by

social, economic, political, and governance factors, and how such factors interact with communities' concerns about access to natural resources. This study is informed by the appreciation that inter-communal conflicts over natural resources are multifaceted and complex and often influenced by different political and social aspects that intersect at different stages. It follows other analysts' arguments that there are intricate conflict dynamics such as inter-community relationships, structure, power, and goals of conflicts when government bodies and local communities as well as civil external players compete for not only access but also control of valuable natural resources (Kronenburg Garcia 2015). It seeks to account for if and how inter-communal conflicts about natural resources are influenced by a multifaceted interplay of political and social aspects such as internal divisions, power struggles, and historical injustices within communities.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin has experienced a lot of conflicts among local communities. These conflicts result in displacement, loss of property, and loss of life as well as other socioeconomic and emotional challenges. Available data from briefing notes and observations by the Isiolo District Peace Committees (DPC), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Conflict Early Warning and Early Response (CEWARN) indicate that conflicts in Isiolo County claimed over 200 lives, displaced almost 3,000 people from their homes, and led to the loss of around 9,000 livestock between 2009 and 2013 (Safer world briefing, 2015). According to Traore and Lo (2000), conflicts is detrimental and the resulting changes lead to further marginalization of certain segments of society (Traore & Lo, 2000). In the event, the conflict is not effectively contained as has been the case in most parts of Africa and Northern Kenya, it erupts into violence, war, loss of life, destruction, long-term injuries, displacements, and trauma. Other impacts include a sense of hopelessness, depression, distrust, and deep fear among communities as has been the case during the chaotic post-election violence that rocked Kenya in 2008 (Machel & Mkapa, 2014).

These conflicts tend to be attributed to inter-communal competition for access to natural resources, especially land and water to support pastoralist and agricultural livelihoods. Many of these conflicts have been between various pastoralist groups fighting for access to water and grazing resources, as well as stemming from pastoralist herders moving into agricultural areas causing retaliation from the communities

(Muhammad et al., 2019; Saruni et al., 2018; Sater et al., 2018). However, longstanding ethnic tensions, underlying economic and political problems, and political contestations are also prevalent (Kansanga, Arku, & Luginaah, 2019; Lewis & Sagnayeva, 2020).

Despite the government actors using various approaches to resolve these conflicts, they continue to persist. Over the years, the state's security apparatus has employed tactics for addressing violence through the deployment of armed police or military forces to suppress conflicts, disarm armed community members, and forcefully recover stolen livestock (Rialem, 2018; Peace, 2020; Ahmed, 2023). These have also been damaging. Military operations, for instance, have disrupted schools, markets, and the flow of food and other essentials, thereby damaging local communities' lives and livelihoods. Studies have shown that the state's conflict suppression and punitive approaches have been ineffective (Mkutu et al., 2021). The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) (2021) issued a report in 2021 that described Kenyan security agencies' perceptions of local pastoralist communities as hard to deal with, and characterizing pastoralists as only interested in banditry. Widened mistrust between security agencies and the local pastoralist communities in Northern Kenya seems to be making efforts to understand the dynamics of conflicts, and building sustainable peace, both difficult and impractical.

There is a glaring need for more effort to consider the perceptions and lived experiences of people in this region about what factors contribute to and exacerbate intercommunal conflicts in the region. Therefore, this study seeks to examine social, economic, and political drivers that influence or trigger inter-communal conflicts about access to natural resources in Northern Kenya; a case study of Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin, Isiolo County in Northern Kenya. It is designed to incorporate multiple different actors' perceptions so that a more layered appreciation of conflicts in the region can inform approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the future. The overarching research question for this study's data collection was: What do different actors in the Ewaso Ng'ro River Basin consider the contributing factors to endemic conflict in this region? In my analysis, I seek to answer the question: How can multifaceted analysis of intercommunal conflicts provide informed understandings and approaches to what has traditionally been regarded as simply natural resource conflicts?

Many different kinds of initiatives have been taken to secure peace between communities in the Ewaso Ng'iro Reiver Basin. These have included using mediation, conciliation, arbitration, adjudication, as well as litigation and military intervention. For any approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding to work effectively, it is important to understand different actors' perceptions of the factors that trigger and sustain inter-community conflicts and undermine existing peacebuilding efforts. Natural resources influence the livelihoods, identities, and economies of communities. Intercommunity conflicts may arise due to perceived discrepancies in not just their access to natural resources but also their distribution and management. Scarce resources like pasture and water trigger disputes among communities where resources are limited, and historical grievances exist. Further, dominant ethnic groups may use their political power and influence to exploit available resources at the expense of marginalized groups thus resulting in resentment and ultimately conflict. Additionally, competing interests such as environmental conservation versus economic development can trigger conflicts among groups over access, allocation, and use of resources. Therefore, perceptions of locals regarding the links of the resources to their livelihoods and identity, control, equity, and fairness are fundamental in influencing and shaping conflicts, often rooted in political and socio-economic dynamics.

This research sought to evaluate perceptions of the links between natural resources and conflict in Ewaso Ng'iro Basin. However, perception-based studies may be prone to bias and not paint a true picture on the ground as they highlight subjective perceptions. They often depend on self-reporting which relies on individuals' memory recall and interpretation. Also, perceptions differ widely from one individual to the other or among groups making generalization of findings challenging (Devkota et al., 2017).

1.3. Literature Review

1.3.1. Resource Scarcity and Conflicts

Competition over natural resources is understood as a key driver of conflict. In 2004, the then Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), Kofi Annan, convened a high-level panel on threats, challenges, and change which observed that shortage of natural resources can be one of the drivers of civil wars and social unrest among societies in the world. Further, an Expert Advisory Group on Environment, Conflict, and

Peacebuilding of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) established that natural resources-based conflicts are likely to intensify in the coming years (UNEP, 2009). The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research Conflict Barometer (HIIC) indicates that natural resource-based conflicts are prevalent. The Conflict Barometer records only cases where conflicts were solely caused by resources and reveals that out of 363 conflicts documented in 2010, resources were the second-most frequent cause after system/ideology (HIIC, 2010). Some scholars such as Urdal (2008), Raleigh and Urdal (2007), Hauge and Ellingsen (1998), and Homer-Dixon (1994) have theorized that there is a positive relationship between conflict and scarcity of resources. They argue that when people are deprived of their livelihoods, they are left with no choice but to fight to survive. Further, Avom et al. (2022) observe that natural resources negatively affect the economy by 10% and thus reducing the capacity of the community to meet their basic needs.

Thomas Homer-Dixon (1994; 1999) used sixteen case studies to develop a theoretical approach contending that scarcity of resources leads to unequal distribution of resources, increased demand caused by population growth, and depletion or degradation of water, forests, and cropland. He established that these factors may result in violent conflicts in the form of military coups and banditry, insurgency, and ethnic clashes (Homer-Dixon, 1994). Increased scarcity of resources may trigger migration of people because of resource depletion or degradation in their regions. This aspect makes host communities feel that their livelihoods are threatened, and they may engage in violent means to assert their power resulting in ethnic clashes.

However, the environmental scarcity thesis has been qualified with recognition of other important coinciding factors. According to Homer-Dixon and Percival (1998), water scarcity and land degradation alongside high population density caused pre-election turmoil in South Africa. However, the scholars also established that the transition to democracy, strong group identities, and ethnicity were also some of the drivers of conflicts (Homer-Dixon & Percival, 1998). Meanwhile, Urdal (2005) established that land scarcity and population growth are positively and significantly related. Nonetheless, he argued that the causes of armed conflicts may be explained better alongside other variables such as low levels of development, slow economic growth, and unstable regimes.

The relationship between resource scarcity and conflicts has since gained prominence in light of attention to climate change. Some scholars have attempted to establish a connection between climate change and the effects of conflicts. For instance, Nordås and Gleditsch (2007) observe that climate change impacts namely drought, flooding, and rising sea levels can alter the availability of natural resources such as water and land significantly. Similarly, Barnett and Adger (2007) posit that if the quantity and quality of natural resources are reduced by climate change this ultimately increases the potential for conflicts.

Further, Reuveny (2007) contends that migration of communities because of climate change leads to violent conflicts on four dimensions, namely socioeconomic fault lines, mistrust among host and incoming communities, ethnic tension, and competition over resources. In such conditions, the risk of conflict is exacerbated if the sole source of livelihood for the host community which is the environment is invaded, threatened, or contested. The situation is even worsened if the community is struggling with resource scarcity and characterized by political instability (Reuveny, 2007).

However, there is also some scholarship that does not find any significant connection between resource scarcity and conflict. Bates et al. (2003) conducted a quantitative study using data from across the globe between 1995 and 2002 and established that there was no significant relationship between political instability and environmental variables. Binningsbø, de Soysa, and Gleditsch (2007) drew from a cross-sectional dataset using deficit, ecological reserve, biocapacity, and ecological footprints as independent variables between 1991-1999 and failed to link environmental variables and political instability. On the contrary, these studies suggest that resource scarcity may be used to predict social and economic development and peace.

Several scholars have contested a simplistic relationship between scarcity of resources and conflict arguing that there exist a lot of non-environmental variables which intervene to establish a direct connection between scarcity-induced conflicts and population growth (Le Billon 2001; Wolf 2005; Brown 2010). Population growth and scarcity-induced conflicts are related through several non-environmental variables. For instance, Selby, Daoust, and Hoffmann (2022) observe that distribution of resources such as energy, water, and land is a critical factor. Jones and Brown (2019) opine that unequal access to such resource fuels scarcity-induced conflicts in many regions of the

world. According to Seter, Theisen, and Schilling, (2018), rapid population growth intensifies competition among groups over limited resources resulting to tensions and ultimately violence. Further, resource distribution inequality coincides with socioeconomic disparities which fuel conflicts and grievances further (Robert, 2017).

Other studies such as Butchart (2020) have found that institutional capacity and governance is another significant variable. Similarly, Arif et al. (2021) observe that ineffective resource management, corruption, and weak governance structures intensify scarcity-induced conflicts environmental factors notwithstanding. Population growth negatively affects systems of governance and complicates allocation of resources and effective conflict resolution (Mendenhall et al., 2020). Marginalized populations are more vulnerable to exclusion and exploitation, in such contexts, leading to unrest and social conflict.

1.3.2. Multifaceted Understandings of Natural Resource Conflicts

The drivers of conflicts are multifaceted. Studies have demonstrated that natural resource-based conflicts are often a result of different perceptions of who should benefit from the resources. For instance, Muigua (2016) states that conflicts are an indicator of accessibility and control of natural resources; the evolution of tenure systems and rights; and resource availability. Inter-communal conflicts over resources have been scrutinized by several studies proposing a multifaceted and a more holistic approach to understand the underlying complexities of such conflicts. For instance, Jones (2015) and Smith (2010) are studies that emphasize how historical grievances drives natural-based resource conflicts. The studies argue that marginalization and land dispossession which are some of unresolved historical injustices cause resource conflicts in the contemporary world. These factors may lead to deep-rooted distrust and animosities among communities or social groups and thus exacerbate tensions over not just access but also control of resources.

Further, scholars such as García (2018) and Brown (2012) underscores the influence of governance failures and political parties in fueling intercommunal conflicts. Unequal distribution of political power, corruption, and weak governance structures can be drivers of marginalization of communities resulting to resistance and feelings of disenfranchisement. Where state institutions have no capacity to address community

grievances or manage resources equitably, social groups may opt for violence to challenge existing power dynamics or assert their rights. In addition, identity-based narratives and cultural factors shape intercommunal conflicts as far as natural resources are concerned. Some studies such as Nguyen (2019) and Kumar (2016) explain how perceptions of group belonging and identity influence conflict dynamics and grievances related to resources. Symbols, myths, and cultural narratives are intertwined with justifying claims on resources of territories, reinforcing group identities, and resource struggles. Therefore, these cultural dimensions lead to the complex nature of conflicts making them difficult to resolve.

Furthermore, environmental degradation and economic considerations are fundamental factors that may exacerbate natural resource-based conflicts. According to Wang (2017) and Patel (2014), competition over dwindling natural resources, unequal access to resources, and economic disparities escalate intercommunal tensions. Resource competition and scarcity are intensified by climate change and unsustainable resource extraction and thus heightens the risks of conflicts. Therefore, these existing literatures suggest that intercommunal resources-based conflicts cannot be driven by only one factor but by multifaceted factors such as environmental, economic, cultural, political, and historical dynamics. Understanding these aspects may inform the formulation of conflict management and resolution strategies.

1.3.3. Understandings of Natural Resource Conflicts in Kenya

Historically, Northern Kenya is characterized by multifaceted and complex conflict situations involving diverse interests, identities, and actors. The pastoralist communities are one of the primary actors. These communities include Borana, Samburu, Somali, and Turkana among others who heavily depend on livestock as their source of livelihood. According to Johnson (2016), these communities compete over scarce natural resources such as pasture and water resulting in interethnic conflicts. The government is another significant actor that has historically played a fundamental role in the governance of the region, security provision, and resource allocation (Ogot, 2012). Branch (2011) adds that different armed groups, including militia groups and bandits, have been involved not just in perpetrating but also in exacerbating violence and tensions.

Ethnic identities in the region have been essential in influencing conflicts as tensions stem from political marginalization, competition over resources, and historical grievances (Haider, 2020). These actors have diverse interests ranging from political representation and power, water sources, and securing grazing lands. Conflict dynamics in this region are characterized by intermittent peace agreements, retaliatory attacks, and cycles of violence. Further, Mkutu (2019) observes that small and light weapons proliferation exacerbates not just the intensity but also the duration of conflicts. This makes it difficult to resolve these conflicts.

Notable conflict events in the region include recurring cattle rustling episodes, which sometimes escalate into large-scale conflicts between ethnic communities. In addition, the struggle for political power during elections in Northern Kenya triggers conflicts as different ethnic communities contest for resources and influence. Attempts to address these conflicts have taken different approaches including development projects, disarmament programs, and peacebuilding initiatives to address the root causes of conflicts such as marginalization and poverty. However, there are still challenges that need sustained collaboration and efforts from non-governmental and governmental actors to promote sustainable development, reconciliation, and peaceful coexistence of communities.

The aforementioned issues are often overlooked as the history and trends of violent conflicts have been widely documented in Kenya as being a result of competition over the use of natural resources such as land for settlement, farming, and livestock grazing (Kocher et al., 2011). Some of these conflicts are always characterized by the trespassing of herders and resultant retaliation from the communities placing natural resources conflict at the center of the dynamics of Kenyan conflicts. Omosa (2018) and Mwangi (2016) highlight how disputes over pasture, water, and land have led to inter-communal conflicts, especially in regions predominantly occupied by pastoralists in the country. These conflicts are as a result of competition over scarce natural resources and are escalated by the impacts of climate change, population pressure, and environmental degradation.

However, some scholars argue that one cannot fully understand natural resource-based conflicts without appreciating economic, social, and political factors. Political dynamics such as the distribution of power, state policies, and governance

structures shape resource conflicts as well. For instance, Kamau (2019) and Nyongesa (2017) argue that weak institutions, corruption, and political marginalization perpetuate conflict cycles and increase the risks for resource-related grievances. Further, social factors such as historical grievances, religion, and ethnicity complicate natural resource conflicts. According to Odhiambo (2020) and Kiptala (2015) explains how politics of identity and ethnic tensions shape access and control of natural resources and thus resulting in inter-ethnic or intercommunal conflicts.

The scholars also observe that historical injustices such as colonial legacies and land dispossession continuously shape resource conflicts and thus deepening the animosities and mistrust among and between groups (Kiptala, 2015; Odhiambo, 2020).

Other studies such as Gathura (2019) and Otieno (2014) link economic factors to resource conflicts in Kenya. They observe that unequal development, poverty, and economic inequalities fuel resource-based conflicts, especially in marginalized areas like Northern Kenya. They also add that land commodification and neoliberal economic policies have led to land displacement and land grabbing which have increased tensions among communities over ownership and access to land. Therefore, integrating these multi-layered factors in the understanding of natural resource conflicts allows for a comprehensive knowledge of not just the causes but also the dynamics of resource-based conflicts. Also, examining the relationship between economic structures, social identities, politics and natural resource conflicts can result in effective resource management and conflict resolution strategies. In the end, a holistic approach is required to address the underlying factors that cause resource-based conflicts in relation to power imbalance, structural inequality, and scarcity.

1.4. Conflict in Isiolo County, Kenya

The prevailing long-standing communal conflicts across Northern Kenya are widely understood as legacies of state-sponsored historical injustices, violence, and repressive state policies that pursued marginalization that incubated decades of neglect, economic emasculation, and underdevelopment. In colonial Kenya, Isiolo was made the headquarters for the Northern Frontier Districts (NFD), a region that comprised the pastoralist-dominated enclaves of Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa of the Northeast

inhabited by various clans of the Somalis, the Tana River of the Kenyan Coast, and the Borana dominated regions of Moyale, Marsabit, and Isiolo, (Anderson, D. M. (2014).

Geographically located at the center of Kenya, Isiolo is a small County compared to the average land sizes of the rest of the 11 Northern Kenya Counties. It is this strategic position that made it a favorite for the British colonialists to establish it as a regional capital to oversee the administration of the volatile and highly mobile Cushitic livestock herding communities straddling the international boundaries of Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Being at the intersection of the agriculturists' highland region in Kenya who waged the Mau Mau insurgency for independence against British colonial rule and the NFD's secessionist struggle to separate from Kenya and join Somalia, the foundation for the region was laid on a tricky political state of affairs that would see bad to worse society -state relations over the decades.

From the colonial period, the NFD faced a political history of competing sovereignties and allegiances. It is portrayed as an intractable periphery with an image of disorderly and ungovernable spaces. The Kenyan central government, and the world, continue to see it primarily through a security lens as an unruly frontier, chronically affected by illicit economic activities, recurrent local conflicts, and a hotbed of international Islamist terrorism (Thompson, 2015).

The colonial land administrative policy regimes pushed agriculturalists and nomadic pastoralists from different ethnic communities to live in closer proximity to the region. For instance, the British colonial administration seized the agricultural land in Nyambene in Meru County moved the residents to Isiolo town, and moved other communities from the established private farms in Laikipia to the Isiolo area. In 2021 the most persistent conflict was along the border of Isiolo-Meru counties between pastoralist herders and agriculturalists farmers Resulting in loss of lives, destruction of crop farms, and death and injury to livestock. The immediate government reactions such as orders to ban camel herders crossing or migrating to Meru County have heightened tension among the communities. The claims to the boundary area between Meru and Isiolo remain unresolved and have the potential to trigger violence at any moment.

At the turn of independent Kenya, a majority of the people of the Northern Frontier Districts fiercely agitated for succession from the young Kenyan state to join

Somalia. The British government organised the first referendum for the secession question and almost unanimously, the NFD population preferred to join the Republic of Somalia. The new independent Kenyan state rejected the result and made it clear it would maintain its territorial borders and strengthen its legitimacy, leading to complete chaos across Northern Kenya (Kochore, 2016).

The 1964-1967 insurgency that was labeled *shifita* ('bandit') by the state saw the State security forces use indiscriminate violence against the local population across the region in the name of 'collective responsibility' for the insurgency, killing an estimated 4,000 people and hundreds of thousands of livestock, collapsing the economic foundation of the pastoral economy (Kochore, 2016; Carrier & Kochore, 2014).

The decades after the independence saw some of the worst human rights atrocities committed against the Northern people. During the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission hearings of 2011- 2012, Isiolo residents recounted that over 2,700 people were killed during the Isiolo massacre including the Isiolo Mosque Massacre where 18 elders were shot inside the main Mosque by government forces in 1967 (Guleid, 2021).

The Shifita Wars of the 1960s and the Government's heavy-handed response had created the impression that the government was out to maim and kill the local population, placing the effects of the state-sponsored violence in a longer-term context that wedged a rift between the state and citizens. Villages and settlements across the region have turned out to be violent spaces and this has endured for a long term making the region's population second-class citizens with massive restrictions on access to key services such as identity documents, development services, restriction on movement, and general criminalization. These 'othering' measures have made the state abandon its primary mandate and made the entire Northern Kenya a playing ground for criminals such as killings, banditry, livestock thefts, and displacing rival communities (Whittaker 2012).

Successive governments from the British colonial administrations to the most recent central governments of independent Kenya have perpetrated violence against pastoralist populations. (Lind et al., 2017; NCIC & Interpeace, 2017). Although devolution in Kenya has brought services and leadership closer to the people, it has also

deepened ethnic divisions and galvanized communities to vie for and install one of their own into the many county-level elective positions. According to a briefing paper on conflict assessment hotspots by Isiolo Peace Link, (IPL) apart from conflict over pasture and water, devolved resources and power are the other main underlying causes of increased inter-ethnic tension, intolerance, and instability in Isiolo County. This was noted as especially prevalent during the 2022 electioneering period. Prospective candidates for various positions campaign and run on a platform of defending or advancing communal interests if elected, hence enhancing hatred and tensions. The electoral contest for key political positions in many instances exacerbates the longstanding tensions and turns the dominant ethnic communities such as the Boran against minority groups.

During and after the election campaign period of 2022, bandits killed 100 civilians and tens of security officers in Isiolo and neighboring conflict-prone counties of Laikipia, Samburu, and Pokot. In response, the national government declared this violence a national emergency and launched a joint military and police operation in February 2023, but early reports indicate that this hard security approach has been unsuccessful, (IPL, 2023)

Women are particularly vulnerable to insecurity and conflict compared to men in Northern Kenya. The effects of conflicts and climate variability have impacts on both women and men but there is gender variation in coping and adaptation strategies (Barrow and Mogaka 2007). The loss of livestock and related livelihoods to cattle thefts and raids as well as severe droughts pushes vulnerable communities deeper into poverty, and it is during such times that women tend to suffer more than men as the socio-cultural and socio-economic organization of pastoral societies privileges men to be better agile and fit the quick struggle for survival than women who will be responsible for their children's safety and wellbeing.

This is largely anchored on customary structures in a culture where the men will freely seek diversified livelihoods such as jobs in urban centres, reconnect with relatives for assistance, or/and engage in the livestock business but women are more likely to find themselves in internally displaced camps with children. The conflicts in Isiolo over the years have had a heavy burden on women and children as dozens of families lose husbands and fathers in every cycle of violence.

ISILO—Leaders of the Somali community in Isiolo have asked the national government to quickly address conflicts between local camel herders and Meru farmers on the Isiolo-Meru border.

Politicians blamed for fanning inter-communal conflict between Somali herders and Meru farmers

Published 1 year ago on October 30, 2022
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- The conflict has left several people dead in the past few months.

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Isiolo County Commissioner Geoffrey Omoding. He said the communities living along the Meru/Isiolo border have resolved end conflicts. Waweru Wairimu | Nation Media Group

Figure 1. News Reports on Conflict in Isiolo

Chapter 2.

Research Design and Methods

2.1. Research question

The overarching research question for this study is: What factors do local community leaders perceive as contributing to the recurrent conflicts among the communities seeking to access the natural resources in the Ewaso Ng'iro Basin? The question was open-ended, and it allowed community members to share their experiences and views on different perspectives of the root causes of these conflicts.

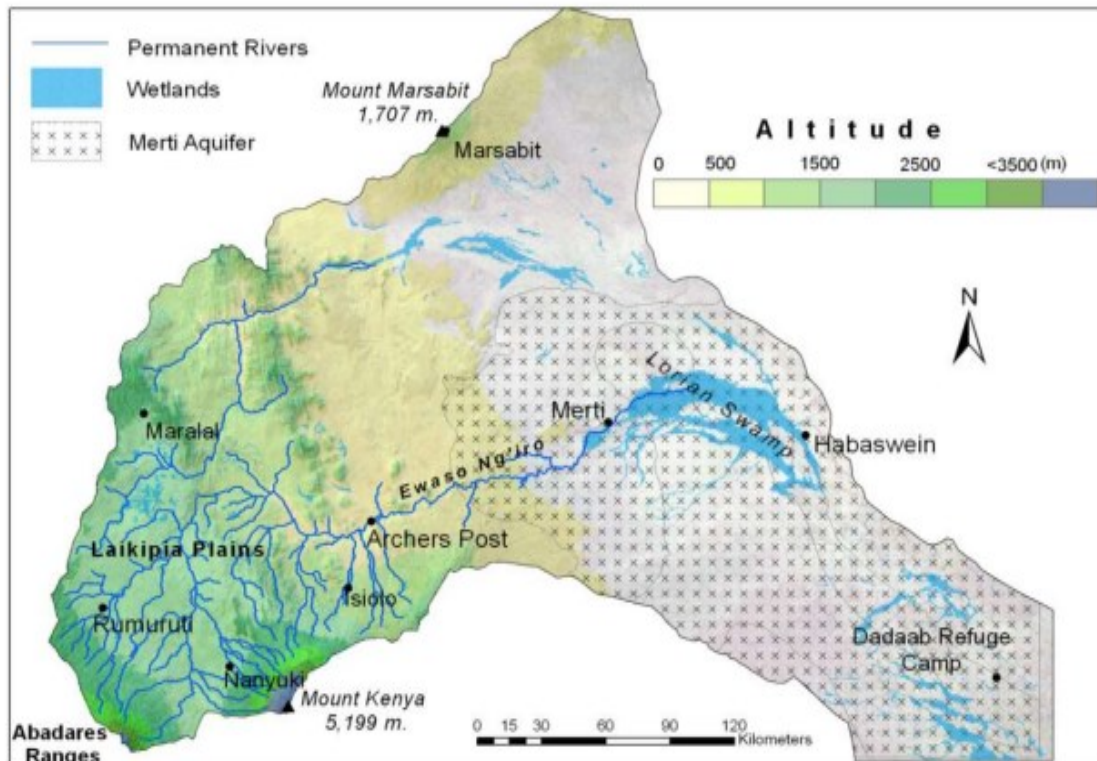
2.2. Research Design

This was an exploratory, qualitative study to account for how local communities, peace-building practitioners, and administrators view or perceive conflicts and identify their causes in the Ewaso Ng'iro River in the Isiolo region. The key data collection method was semi-structured, open-ended individual interviews. I also conducted content analysis of some key texts from related project reports, documentaries, and media reports. The study was designed to gain the in-depth, contextualized, and diverse perspectives of local community leaders regarding the multiple factors and dynamics that they believe have exacerbated conflicts between the communities living around the river basin.

2.3. Study site

The study is focused on the endemic conflict between various local communities along the Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin that has perpetually engulfed parts of Northern Kenya. The iconic Ewaso Ng'iro River meanders its way from the lush green Aberdare ranges of Mount Kenya and pours its cool water to the low-lying regions of Laikipia, Samburu, Isiolo, Marsabit, and Wajir in the far arid north of the Lorian swamp. The river water which is the largest natural resource to the local pastoralist communities, unites and divides these communities in equal measure. According to the latest population census by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019), the water basin supports over

5 million residents who predominantly survive on livestock pastoralism, small-scale agricultural farming, and tourism.



Source: De Leeuw et al, 2012, Benefits of Riverine Water Discharge into the Lorian Swamp, Kenya.

Figure 2. Map of the study area

The Kenya Meteorological Department (KMD) has continuously reported seasons of failed rains from the period from October 2020 to March 2023 across the entire Northern Kenya region. This means that the two annual rainy seasons in all the Arid and Semi-Arid counties in Kenya have performed poorly in terms of failing to start at the onset of the traditional season, being below average in precipitation amount recorded, and poor distribution across Kenya's largest swathe of rangelands in the North. The inadequate rainfall meant a vegetation deficit in the country's rangeland that supports livelihoods of over half of Kenya's population. The productivity of livestock such

as camels, cattle, goats, and sheep worsened as water sources shrank, grazing pastures depleted, and livestock sales collapsed.

Such grim situations have placed the growing impact of climate change at the heart of Northern Kenya's livestock rangelands and farming activities, hitting the most vulnerable hardest, and contributing to food insecurity, population displacement, and stress on water resources.

During these seasons of severe draughts and famine, pastoralist communities across Northern Kenya have recorded massive migration with their livestock in search of water and grazing resources. This has included crossing the international borders into Ethiopia, across Somalia to the Juba valley basin and much internal migration in Kenya, as pastoralists moved to the coastal strip of River Tana Basin and into Isiolo's Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin.

This study was carried out along the Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin in 2023, with a specific focus on the different pastoral community groups in the larger Isiolo County that form the bulk of the river basin, and related parts of Laikipia, Garissa, Samburu, and Meru counties where tentacles of the local conflicts spread to or have a direct correlation.

2.4. Data collection

Data was collected using two methods: interviews, and content analysis.

Key informant interviews:

The target population in this study was individuals involved in planning and implementing programs and projects in conflict situations and/or are involved in peace-building initiatives. As such, the targeted key informants included program officers, community leaders, and security practitioners involved with IPL on the situations of conflicts between communities from Garissa and Isiolo counties, Isiolo and Samburu counties as well as Isiolo and Wajir counties. The study also targeted various cadres of people who took part in the Camel Caravan initiative. Others included as key informants were village elders, local religious leaders, and other community leaders, representatives from local and international Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and

government officials who have an interest and have taken part in peace-building initiatives in the region.

The participants involved in the research were drawn from a diverse group of individuals who had knowledge concerning conflict and peacebuilding in the region. The interview questions were structured in such a way that they were relevant to the different participants who represented different layers of the communities and related stakeholders and provided viable perspectives on the issue under exploration. In total, 26 key informants were individually interviewed for this study in 2023 as demonstrated in Appendix D. The researcher used an interview guide that is attached in the Appendix A to conduct semi-structured interviews lasting 35–45 minutes with a focus on stories and personal viewpoints. The researcher traveled with and spent an extended period with 2 of the informants for script-long ethnographic vignettes that were deeply informed about the issues and context of the conflicts in Isiolo. This approach was used to give participants a chance to express their experiences and perceptions in a way that would not have been possible in a large-scale survey. All interviews were conducted by the researcher in English and Kiswahili. The interviewer developed consent for the interviews to be conducted and only conducted the interviews with consent. The participants consented to recording the interviews and the researcher assured the confidentiality of the information. The participant did not provide their personal information, rather just their views and perceptions were recorded. The participants also chose the locations of the interviews, and they were done in a private set-up to ensure confidentiality. The recorded responses and field notes were later transcribed.

Fifteen (58%) of the interviewed community members were male, while the remaining eleven (42%) were female. The participants interviewed included village elders, representatives from Isiolo Peace Link, representatives of IMPACT–Kenya, politicians, religious leaders, community leaders, farmers, herders, participants of the Camel Caravan Initiative, local administration such as Chiefs, a senior Police officer, and one Deputy County Commissioner, and security and peace experts as shown in Appendix D. These community members were selected because of their experience in conflict resolution, their role in peacebuilding, their knowledge of the region and the culture, and their diverse perspective on conflicts and peacebuilding in relation to natural resources. All these community members were purposively selected and recruited for the study over a long time based on personal interactions during the annual Camel

caravan walks, references from the Isiolo Peace Links, and contacts of government institutions.

The researcher interviewed six representatives from Isiolo Peace Link and six participants of the Camel Caravan Initiative each representing an indigenous community in the region such as Meru, Borana, Somali, Samburu, Turkana, and Kikuyu. The researcher made sure that both male and female community members were included in the study to collect different gendered perspectives on the underlying causes of conflicts in the region. This helped the researcher collect in-depth information on natural resource-related conflicts in Ewaso Ng'iro Basin.

Further, the researcher also interviewed four village elders, two religious leaders (Muslim and Christian), and three community leaders. Village elders are at the lowest rank of the national administration recognized by the government for the role they play in connecting the citizens with the central government. Community leaders are elders in the community who are considered knowledgeable and can speak on behalf of the community. They are respected and revered for their knowledge and experience. Categories of gender, religious, and ethnic diversity were considered in informant recruitment. This approach allowed the researcher to collect in-depth information on the different perceptions of the root causes of conflicts in Ewaso Ng'iro Basin.

In addition, the researcher interviewed one Deputy County Commissioner (the highest-ranking national government official in a sub-county), two chiefs, and two security experts who gave historical accounts of local dynamics on the issues of conflicts over natural resources. These were persons knowledgeable about matters of security: one has been practicing this profession as a consultant while the other has been an employee of the government under the peace cop brigade.

Content Analysis:

This entailed a comprehensive review of relevant literature, including academic publications, policy documents, and relevant reports. The study reviewed the project reports and findings from the Isiolo Peace Link, and World Peace Service on their conflict assessments and peace-building projects. It also examined the documentaries and literature resulting from the Camel Caravan Initiative for the period 2020-2023 annual walks for peace and conservation of the river for ascertaining the approaches,

methods of practice, and the underlying causes of conflicts between warring communities in the Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin in Isiolo. Media news reports for both broadcast and print in the national mainstream media and online community-based blogs have enriched the understanding of the themes of the nature and extent of resource-based conflicts and their drivers in the region.

2.5. Data Analysis and Presentation

All the collected data was processed and analyzed in accordance with the objectives of the study. Qualitative data was derived from the KIs and Semi-Structured Interviews and was collated for inferences, judgment, and conclusions as necessary. Editing and rechecking was done during the processing of data. Consistency checks were done to ascertain the emergent key terms and cross-cutting themes to draw explanatory patterns and responses to the research question for the case study.

2.6. Ethical consideration

The study followed all ethical considerations throughout the entire period of recruitment, data collection, and analysis as well as presentation. The interviewees had the study explained to them and were given some time to consider whether they wanted to participate or not. The community members were then required to give their consent before data collection proceeded, and they were advised they had the right and freedom to withdraw from the study at any point of data collection. The research ensured data anonymization whereby personal details including name, contact, and address were not included in the recordings or field notes. The research adhered to confidentiality measures throughout the research journey. They were also notified that the findings of this study were purely for academic purposes. The researcher sought and obtained research authorization and a permit from the Simon Fraser University Ethics Review Board (Canada) and the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) (Kenya). Further, the researcher also got approvals to conduct research from the local administration (the County Commissioner of Isiolo.) Data collected was stored electronically with access limited to the researcher.

Chapter 3. Study Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings from my data collection. These are organized according to prominent themes that emerged and I account for how different key informants to the study explained their perspectives on what is causing the conflicts between groups in Isiolo County in Kenya. and their views on local governance and prospects to prevent future conflicts. The chapter is organized into 2 main sections.

The first section reviews how people explained the causes of conflict, and it is subdivided to account for explanations that emphasized climate change, ethnic competition, and socioeconomic factors that gave context to what usually triggers conflicts in Isiolo. The second section addresses peoples' perspectives about what is working or not working in current approaches to conflict that specifically points towards the government's security-focused punitive responses and further accounts for the governance-related dynamics that situate the strange non-state actors in conservation that have taken over security and conflict containment mandates in the pastoralist's regions of Northern Kenya.

3.1. Causes of Conflict

3.1.1. Climate Change Fueling Conflict.

The Government of Kenya's main policy document on unlocking the investment and growth potential of Northern Kenya, Seasonal Paper No. 8 of 2012, estimates that Kenya has about 70% of its land mass classified as Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs). These ASALs host 80% of the country's livestock population. Isiolo region which sits right at the intersection of the ASALs, and the rest of the country has experienced successive prolonged and abnormally dry and hot seasons which have meant less than average precipitation. It is 50% ASAL (Sala, 2019). This scarcity of rainfall has heavily impacted communities.

Study participants identified changes in climate as a significant contributor to continued conflict and insecurity in the Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin. Specifically, informants described how severe drought conditions over the last few years have caused more pastoralist groups to move into Isiolo as the county is slightly better endowed with water

and pasture resources than other neighboring counties. Pastoralist groups from counties such as Laikipia, Samburu, Marsabit, Wajir, and Garissa have come to Isiolo during these drought conditions leading to concentrations of people and livestock in a few strategic survival pockets and drought reserves along the Ewaso Ng'iro River, springs like Gotu, swampy reserves such as Chafa Gafarsa and better-vegetated areas bordering Agricultural farming zones of Tigania in Meru region.

Local informants clearly identify climate change as a key factor. One of the members of the community noted that:

Climate change has contributed to the region experiencing uneven weather conditions. The dry seasons are increasingly longer, and little rainfall is recorded in the region. The levels at which desertification is being experienced in Northern Kenya are alarming and that has seen intensity in resource-based conflicts in the region. (KII 2, 2023)

Further, another community member who is a representative of one of the local organizations that are concerned with gender empowerment at the grassroots level in Isiolo's GarbaTula area observed that climate variability contributes to conflicts. She notes that:

From my experience what I have observed over the years is continuous increases in resource-based conflict across the region most is triggered by drought and climate change so I can confidently say resource-based conflict is actually the main kind of conflict experienced in the region and I don't think it has really changed whenever rain comes the drought eases a little then once drought starts again these communities start conflicting over the water sources. (KII 6, 2023).

A member of the local administration within the community also adds that climate change is one of the leading contributors to conflicts in the basin. She says;

So, the conflicts have been on the rise and this as I said earlier has been attributed by the factor that there is climate change and also these prolonged droughts have led to conflicts (KII15).

The Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin is a significant site of resource competition and conflict. The Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin is prone to water scarcity due to the region's semi-arid nature and irregular rainfall patterns. As well, there has been continuous population growth in the basin region. Although it is practically difficult to get accurate data on pastoralists' migration during both dry and rainy seasons, The 2019 Kenya household and demographic survey placed Isiolo among the top 10 regions in Kenya

and the only region among the ASALs that has realized net migration. That population growth has resulted in increased demand for water, which is required for agricultural activities, to sustain livestock, and for domestic use. The demand has exerted immense pressure on the available water resources. A member of the community observed;

The region's insecurity has deteriorated in the last few years with the drought and also with the climate change because we have seen pastoralist coming even from Marsabit, from our neighboring counties in Garissa, Wajir they come to Isiolo and you know whenever pastoralist converge in one place they usually fight over the scarce resources that we have, especially with the drought that was like a few months ago, we have seen communities fighting one another because of resources that we have especially along the Ewaso Ng'iro River. (KII 15, 2023).

The concentrations of people and livestock in these areas have resulted in conflicts between hosts and other communities as they clash over scarce water and pasture resources. This includes conflicts between agriculturalists and pastoralists. Most pastoralists in the region depend on water sources for their livestock. The pastoralists are most likely to engage in conflict following their encroachment onto farmlands as they look for water and grazing areas. It shows that these conflicts have been going on for a more extended period. A community member who represents one of the community-based organizations that observes conflict added that:

Ethnic tensions between pastoral and agro-pastoral communities that predominantly occupy the region are caused by the dry seasons being longer, which have seen pastoralists venture into the farms of agro-pastoral communities, which has been a source of tension and conflict (KII 3, 2023).

Conflict pitting agriculturalist farmers and livestock herders has been in most of the counties in Kenya where these 2 groups are neighboring. The rise of this new trend of conflict was most profound between 2019 and 2023 when there was severe and prolonged drought across the country. According to local media reports, in Southeast Kenya, Pastoralists in Garissa County invaded farms in the neighboring Kitui County and Those living in Tana River County drove their livestock to farms in neighboring Taita-Taveta County. A similar situation in Northern Kenya was against the Pastoralist in Isiolo versus Farmers in Meru and the pastoralists and farmers clashes in Laikipia which received profound media coverage and deployment of the military to drive livestock out of huge privately owned ranches and wildlife conservancies. Farmers contest arable

land to protect it from pastoralist who are looking for pastures for their cattle, especially during dry seasons thus leading to conflicts.

3.1.2. Ethnic Competition

According to almost all study informants' perspectives, conflict in Isiolo is the result of competition between different ethnic communities. There are many different dimensions to how ethnicity is considered central to conflicts in this area. These include: the distinctive character of Isiolo as a competitive resource; the enduring political relevance of ethnicity in Kenya; and the external influence for dominance pushed for by populations and politicians outside the County. These are each accounted for below.

Isiolo as a Contested Resource

Isiolo County is a small cosmopolitan county located geographically at the center of Kenya. It marks the intersection between Kenya's central regions which comprise substantial agricultural farming and the drier Northern region associated with livestock keeping and pastoralism. The Ewaso Ngiro river meanders through Isiolo before it drains into the Lorain swamp. This permanent water source, in comparison to the other ASAL Counties, and huge tracts of rangelands make the county suitable for pastoralism, with local pastoralist communities rearing cattle, camel, goats, sheep, and donkeys. Small-scale crop agriculture is practiced around Isiolo township and areas bordering Meru County. Isiolo County is inhabited by 5 major ethnic communities whose larger population numbers and bases are from several neighboring counties of Samburu, Meru, Turkana, Marsabit, and the 3 North East Counties of Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa. It is inhabited by ethnic communities whose larger population bases are located in other neighbouring counties and consider regions in other neighbouring counties as their homes. Indigenous communities are those who are originally owners of land in Isiolo.

Isiolo's centrality and proximity to the better-developed part of Kenya as well as having more strategic water and pasture pockets during dry season because of the Ewaso Ngiro river and springs makes it slightly better endowed in terms of water and grazing land than any other county in Northern Kenya. This scenario puts it as an attraction point, especially during droughts for pastoralist groups from neighboring counties such as Samburu, Marsabit, Wajir, and Garissa. Interactions among the many

different groups in Isiolo, and specifically their efforts to access the same scarce resources of pasture and water for their animals, often lead to conflict between these groups.

According to almost all study informants' perspectives, conflict in Isiolo is the result of the combination of the two factors of competition for resources and ethnic differences. The ethnic dimension of competition was commonly stressed, as in the sentiments from a representative of one of the local CSOs who observed that:

We have the Borana, Somali, Samburu, Turkana and the Meru communities which are the major communities in Isiolo considering that Isiolo is a cosmopolitan county, we also have other communities that are with us here and with that cosmopolitan nature, we normally have communities in conflict with one another (KII 9, 2023).

A religious leader in the county explained that each ethnic group sees itself in competition with others for economic advantage, and Isiolo is often regarded as the epicenter of such competition. As he described:

Isiolo has been inhabited by people who came from other areas, and they found themselves in Isiolo. This is why you get that everybody is in Isiolo, all the tribes are here in Isiolo and many fights that you hear in Isiolo mostly they are fights that are not much started in Isiolo, they are brought. Because everyone would wish to have a portion at Isiolo and by the virtue that now the government has stated that it is a resort city, so it has been seen by other eyes in a bigger way than the people thought (KII 7, 2023).

The religious leader expounded on his argument further, saying:

Now the problem with Isiolo, the tribe that came to Isiolo is influenced by other tribes. The Meru in Isiolo is influenced by the Meru of Meru County, the Somalis are being coerced by Somalis from Mandera and other Somali-dominant areas ..

This informant is describing how many conflicts that occur in Isiolo are connected to the interests of communities that span outside of the area. He sees that people's allegiances to the success of their own ethnic community are driving them to compete for greater advantage in Isiolo, which is regarded as open to competition.

This brings up the question of who the most indigenous community in Isiolo is. The Deputy County Commissioner sees this to be the most difficult question to answer

for any administrator in this County. He explains that all the 5 major communities have their own defining terms and concepts that give them the original claims to this area.

..The Borana says look at the names of places, the Somalis claim they were the first group here, and the Turkana says can't you see us, we are here too. Then let's go to the Meru, the Meru tell you no! We have been here. Look at the records the land goes all the way beyond Isiolo and goes up to Samburu. Then there you are worried and now left tongue-tied. What is it? The conflicts of boundary, ancestry, and ownership is complex here. So those are now the concepts that they have in mind, so unless you really tell them that that is a wrong concept, there will be a conflict... (KII 19)

Claims to settlement and access to resources in Isiolo by different ethnic groups with their historic and majority populations in neighboring counties have been on the increase. This seems to be linked to new development investments occurring in Isiolo. As the religious leader quoted above mentioned, politicians stated that Isiolo would be developed into a 'resort city' through the LAPSET projects that connect Ethiopia and South Sudan to the Lamu port at the Indian Ocean coast through Isiolo by developing linking infrastructure such as pipelines, roads, railway lines, recreational and leisure facilities.

A senior police Inspector, who took the researcher to the active conflict areas of grazing lands at Mlango area at the Samburu/Isiolo border as well as the road project on the Garissa/Isiolo border described how some of the series of killings around May and June 2023 and related retaliatory attacks along the B9 (Isiolo-Modogashe) highway that passes through Isiolo, Garissa and Meru counties were caused by inter-ethnic contestation. The ongoing construction of the Horn of Africa Gateway Development Project (HoAGDP) was disrupted by violence and displacements due to conflict between the Somali and Borana communities which each wanted to control the road building's labor and supplies opportunities. Therefore, it is not just about climate change, but rather competition over all scarce resources. The place names to claim land ownership that the Deputy County Commissioner mentioned earlier resurface in another form as the Police Inspector drops the new places naming trend;

The Somali communities from Garissa and even on Isiolo's border with Wajir County have gone to establish new villages some with chiefs and gave them new names while these locations are known to be geographically within Isiolo County and have indigenous Borana names.

3.1.3. Community Tensions and Political Manipulation

Communal Tensions

Many community members saw ethnic communities' sense of competitiveness with others as influenced by Kenya's political history. An elder in the community pointed out that:

Ethnic tension, in most cases, fueled by political differences plays a critical role in making it difficult for the achievement of peaceful coexistence of communities in Northern Kenya. Individuals are balkanized along tribal lines and are made to believe that problems they experience in terms of scarcity of resources are as a result of individuals from the other tribes (Kil 1, 2023).

Ethnicity has been a very prominent dimension of Kenya's political fabric since the colonial era. The enactment and promulgation of Kenya's 2010 Constitution came with a devolved governance system that intensified fierce political competition that redefined contemporary politics (Lind, 2018). According to Mueni (2023), Kenya's devolved system of governance decentralised political power which in turn fostered political competition in Northern Kenya as local politicians contested for control of decision-making and over natural resources. Scott-Villiers (2017) observes that the intensified political competition emanates from competition over limited resources and increased autonomy leading to political rivalries and mobilization. A renowned political commentator on Kenya's politics, Mr. Mutahi Ngunyi attracted the media limelight during the 2013 general elections, the first elections under the new constitution, when he correctly predicted Uhuru Kenyatta's win of the presidency through his tyranny of numbers theory basing his core predictions and arguments just on ethnic arithmetic (Balato-Chrimes, 2021). Ngunyi defended his reasoning by saying that Kenyan's voting pattern is well known as tribal census and by just observing the tribal affiliations and support bases for the leading presidential contenders he could rightfully predict the numbers.

Political Manipulation

Politically instigated ethnic tension is one of the causes of conflict in the region. Most of the community members identified political competition during campaigns and election periods across Northern Kenya as an emerging threat to peace and stability

among local pastoralist communities. In Isiolo County, existing hostilities over access to water and land and contests over boundaries have been worsened by attempts from some tribes and clans to consolidate ethnic-based support to have one of their own occupy political seats perceived to be powerful or resourceful such as County Governor. Some ethnic groups jointly campaign together to run a slate of nominees for county-specific seats like Governor, Senator, and Women Representative (These 3 seats are county-level elected seats). Other than the presidency the other ballots that are determined at an election after every 5 years are Member of the National Assembly (National) and Member of County Assembly (County). This new mode of building ethnic alliances into a political campaign strategy is locally referred to as 'line ups' and the lineups are meant to deny certain ethnic groups any chances to be successful in winning any of the seats in the elections. The Isiolo North Deputy County Commissioners observe that some of these alliances are based on ideas of which groups should be denied influence in Isiolo:

The inhabitation of this place by those communities were at various levels of time so there is the group which feels that they owe much more their origins here than others. That becomes the problem when they are defensive and seek to exclude others to pursue any interest in the County. (KII 18, 2023).

Tribes that had longstanding conflicts over grazing fields and water resources have escalated their contest from those sites to the ballots. According to McCrone (2023), ongoing changes in governance in Northern Kenya have resulted into opportunities which political elite exploit to mobilize territorial violence for political and strategic ends to win election contents. This understanding was shared by representatives from the Camel Caravan walk who observed that political differences between communities are widening the historical ethnic cleavages and this is making peacebuilding between communities more difficult to initiate.

Rendering to McCrone (2023), ethnic political mobilizations in the ASALs regions of Northern Kenya has laid bare well-known political strategies employed in Isiolo and neighboring pastoral counties where political leaders whip up ethnic emotions to rally their communities to register their votes in particular electoral units to give them an advantage during the elections. The researcher has described the locally understood voters' transportation to artificially created strongholds as 'vote shipping' an example of this is where voters in thousands are transported from Nairobi to an electoral unit in

Northern Kenya so that one of their communities gets elected. This is widely practiced and the elections agency (Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission -IEBC) looked the other way although the laws mandate them to regulate elections ethics and conduct from the registration to voting. Politicians or elites involved in organizing the violence, in creating militias, in arming them to achieve a political agenda (Shcheneckener, 2018).

3.1.4. Poverty, Culture, and Socio-economic Inequalities

Study informants also perceived that a combination of poverty, cultural customs, and inequalities factored into the high incidences of conflict in Isiolo. The Ewaso Ng'iro basin is characterized by a diverse mix of communities, and disparities in wealth, access to resources, and opportunities can create a volatile environment. In general, the ASALs counties the lowest development indicators and highest poverty incidences, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2021) Continuous household survey reports put the poverty rate for Isiolo county at 69%, in Isiolo Poverty affects much of the population making the communities food insecure (KNBS, 2021). Study informants identified that poverty and socioeconomic inequalities among the young people in particular contribute significantly to the conflict in the Ewaso Ng'iro river basin.

The instruments and tools for these conflicts are the young men within the communities who are easily deployed, incited, and mobilized to the battlefield. Kenya has a large youthful population, sometimes referred to as a 'youth bulge': according to the National Council of Population and Development (2017), over 80 percent of the population is aged 35 and below, and more than one-third of the national population is between the ages of 15 and 34. This youth cohort has the highest unemployment rate in Kenya, at 67 percent (NCPD 2017). As many analysts have noted, in these conditions, youth are vulnerable to frustration and manipulation, and some politicians have incited young people to blame their poor prospects on other communities and to seek violent revenge or theft (McCrone 2023).

This research has observed that different pastoralists in the region initiate raids, killings, livestock theft, destructions of property to displace others, and revenge killings for numerous different reasons and cultural norms. Traditionally, most of these communities were motivated by cultural norms and belief systems to attack perceived

opponents and regard these attacks as heroic rites of passage for males to transition from adolescence to adulthood. Stocking up livestock wealth is a sign of prestige, and it is common for young men to use stolen livestock for settlement in dowry, marriage, and community-imposed fines.

One of the study's key informants who is the chairperson of one of the main religious bodies in Kenya, the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCK) in Isiolo, delved into different communities' cultural norms that propagates conflicts in the region. As a member of the inter-faith team that is called upon severally to resolve community clashes, he had this to say about how cultural beliefs are inherent to peace dialogues in the region:

...Because now we are dealing with some tribes that have gotten a certain culture that they grew with, because we are working with a culture that tells you to go and steal and you'll be measured by how much you bring home that's the time you will get a wife then you can see those people they were given those perceptions and you know when we teach a young child some issues, they will not just let it go. You'll see that they will grow with it. Now that is the retrogressive culture that we are fighting as religious leaders because we are trying to tell Samburus for instance like now can't we change this issue?

The bishop's viewpoint was reinforced by a Samburu community organizer who was trained by Isiolo Peace Link as a peacemaker within the community. She narrated the series of hurdles, resentment, and rejections she encountered as a woman leader in her community who had strong cultural reservations about women sharing a platform with men in decision-making. The community member also commented on how she believes cultural norms in her own community contribute to the series of livestock raids and killings in the region.

.. you know even the language on how young men, the morans are sent to raid, kill and steal other communities' livestock is really telling. The elders order them to go and bring us those cows. Just as simple as if it does not involve fighting, death, and stealing. The cultural-based attitude is bad and it will take a long time to erase. (KII 16)

Some study participants also described those religious differences as one of the challenges in the area. Isiolo being comprised of different communities also has different cultures and religions and the relationship between inter-faith groups is not always good.

One of the religious leaders described that these differences could hinder cohesion and stability efforts:

When I am a Christian, a religious leader from a Christian background before I am accepted by a Muslim crowd, it must take an intervention of a Muslim cleric to invite me, so we closely work together to create that acceptance (KII 7, 2023).

Mistrust between communities is a clear theme in participants' explanations of the region's many outbreaks of conflict. In Isiolo, this mistrust is largely displayed along ethnic and sub-ethnic undertones. Each community seems to have particular bulla- (estates) or certain specific villages and settlements dots across the County.

3.1.5. Proliferation of Small Arms

The vast, sparsely populated landscapes of the region, and Kenya's quite porous (i.e. unpoliced) borders with the conflict-ridden and fragile states of Somalia, South Sudan, and Ethiopia – across which many of the region's pastoralist groups move unhindered - have made the flow of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) readily accessible to local feuding communities. One of the religious leaders described the availability of guns and the majority of people owning guns in the region as a serious problem. He described:

.....the issue is of a lot firearms being in the hands of the civilians because you find a 10-year-old boy herding their cattle or goats with a gun. Guns in this region have become like sticks because of conflicts in neighboring countries like Somalia, Southern Sudan, and Ethiopia (KII 9, 2023).

The proliferation of these weapons is viewed as both a consequence and a contributing factor of ongoing conflict in the region. The inability of the police and local administration to provide security and recover stolen livestock has exacerbated and escalated communal warfare between communities, in turn making conflicts harder for security forces to contain and resolve. For instance, armed pastoralists walk around freely, and the government operatives may not be able or interested in disarming them. According to a representative of a local agricultural farming community who believes that local pastoralist communities are the transit and conveyors of the local arms trade:

Isiolo as it is, it is a pastoralist area so these people have got guns and it is very shameful to say that our police sometimes they will fear even the guns which are owned by our pastoralists, when we had an issue that KPR [Kenyan Police Reservists] were not working, that issue took a lot of our peace because the police could not enter into the deep areas where livestock theft and killings were happening. (KII 13, 2023).

In the course of this study, the researcher witnessed first-hand an incident where the local police stormed a restaurant in central Isiolo township and arrested individuals who attempted to sell firearms to a police informer. Commenting on this event, a local conflict observer for an NGO quipped as he was interviewed for this study.

..Isiolo can be termed as an arms supermarket if one can get such a deal on a coffee table .. sales, testing, and exchange are openly done in the pastoralist villages and rangeland as the police presence ends in major centers and highways (KII 23)

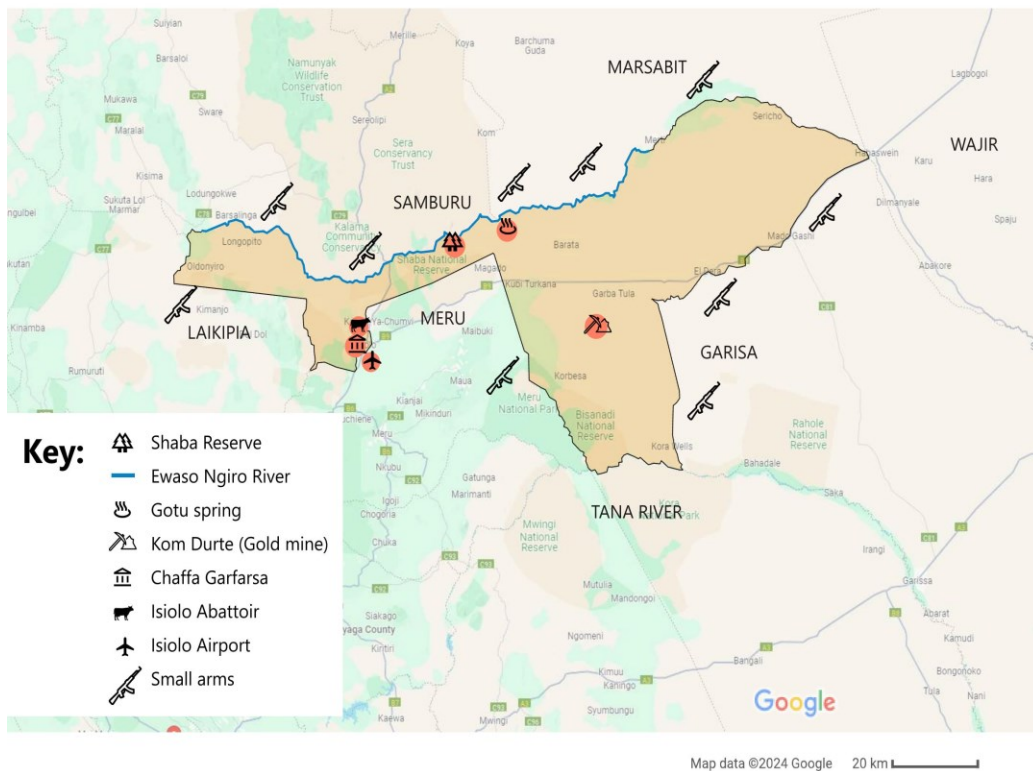


Figure 3. Map of Small Arms Movement into Isiolo
 Source; Researcher, (2024) The movement of arms into Isiolo County as described by the study participants.

3.2. Government Strategies in Conflict Prevention

3.2.1. Government Approaches and Responses to Conflict

The interview questions that asked participants about the role of government in conflict containment, prevention, and resolution, received very divergent and often opposing responses from various categories of the interviewees. In most cases, the views of community-based activists, victims of conflicts, and other community members significantly differed from those of chiefs who are national government representatives, police leaders, and the Deputy County Commissioner who heads the Government administrative architecture at the sub-county level.

Non-government-affiliated interviewees agreed that the conflict prevention and resolution approaches employed by the Kenyan government, including the Kenyan police, rarely involve peacebuilding initiatives and dialogues. Instead, people described the police and government officials' rush to security interventions such as making arrests including arresting known community leaders, profiling certain communities as suspicious, declaring curfews, seizing livestock, and threatening to disarm or disarming communities. A community member stated:

The preferred government intervention involves security intervention where after the conflict results in people losing their lives in the area, a security operation is carried out. ..it has not yielded any peace, actually, it escalates as always there is the perception that it is one-sided (KII 11, 2023).

Further, a representative of one of the local CSOs observed that:

The problem is that the government has been relying on similar approaches that have not been able to yield any positive outcomes. It is almost expected that herders will encroach into other people's land, a conflict will ensue, attack and retaliatory attacks will be experienced, and then a security operation will be affected with curfews and brutal disarmament initiative. By the time they are reacting, the real culprits can't be traced, innocent community members suffer the police brutality, and the mistrust widens. (KII 9, 2023).

Meanwhile, government representatives interviewed in this study highlighted the role of the Kenya Police Reservists (KPR), also known as National Police Reservists (NPR). The KPRs are usually members of the local communities and are identified through chiefs and village elders. They are trained for a basic level of firearms handling

and ethics, and they are issued with Government firearms and uniforms, but they do not enjoy any remunerations. It's important to note that there is no known mobile police presence in the entire region where communities are nomadic. Police presence ends on the major highways, urban centers, or peri-urban communities but members of the armed KPR force have access to most of the nomadic settlements.

Several community members both from government and community members agreed that the deployment of KPRs provided the best and quickest response in most of the cases of conflicts among communities. A local chief for one of Isiolo's most conflict prone locations made this observation on KPR's role:

.. . They are our first line of defense in times of attack. KPR provides credible information to authorities and importantly they preach peace within their communities. (KII 8, 2023).

However, one of the study's key informants who worked on community and government relations on encountering violent extremisms in the region shared a strong opposing view on the effectiveness of deploying KPR forces to handle security issues across the pastoralist communities. He observed that:

..deploying KPR complicates the situation, there are no mechanisms to account for their actions, and most of them use government-issued guns to raid other communities to kill or steal livestock. They are affiliated to their ethnic groups (KII 21)

Overall, the non-government-affiliated participants in this study provided examples of how the Kenyan government's punitive approaches have been ineffective in terms of bringing sustainable peace to the region. Generally, most of the participants painted government initiatives as not being effective because they were inherently not inclusive and alienated the people needed to facilitate the peace process. The approach by the government demonized the local leaders and victimized members of the community who are supposed to be a source of intelligence when it comes to facilitating peace in the region. The government even occasionally conducts security operations which jeopardizes peace talks and negotiations. A local community member who is trained on mediation and served in a council of elders resolving conflicts had this observation.

Once the government decides that there are going to be security operations, the door for talks and negotiations is closed. Leaders will be

arrested and paraded as instigators of violence and the fear of disarmament initiatives sees people flee their homes because of the high-handedness of the security personnel (KII 12, 2023).

And Isiolo Peace Link's program coordinator added:

....the difference is that the government is demanding and they don't really look at inclusivity they don't, they don't bring the council of elders and they don't bring the youth on board. But what we do as local organizations is ensure that all communities, all members of the community whether you are young or old are involved in this process.(KII 7)

3.2.2. Conservation Reserves and Paramilitary Units

Other interests and actors have also been perceived as contributing to conflicts in the area, both directly and indirectly. Some community members identified conservation interests and external actors as implicated in local conflicts.

As described above, the Ewaso Ngiro River basin has one of the best rangelands for pastoralist livelihoods with large tracts of community land endowed with pasture and water resources. In recent years, this same area has seen new government conservation projects that some community members described as lacking much public participation and thus low awareness about this project among local people.

The conservation projects have carved out hundreds of thousands of acres through the establishment of Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) which enjoys top-level national government and international donor support which gives priority to the protection of wildlife and development of tourism ventures over local communities' pastoralist economies.

NRT runs several conservation areas that employ, and support locally recruited paramilitary units to protect wildlife and habitat. A National Security expert interviewed in this study perceived that these conservation-focused paramilitary units were causing security imbalances because they can help in surveillance, logistics, and support to raiders from some communities over others, and they are not accountable to the local police or public administration.

..just here at Archer's post in Samburu County, across the river, there are dozens of land cruisers with armed rangers stationed to support the conservation.. the pastoralists in Isiolo strongly believe that these armed

teams in uniform are giving cover to raiders from Samburu who are causing mayhem in the lower part of Isiolo. (KII 23)

While this concern was not explicitly identified by other interviewees, the researcher has witnessed public condemnations and voiced allegations by community leaders at the burials of people who died in Somali and Samburu clashes that conservation paramilitary units had armed or otherwise helped rival communities and were complicit in killings of people.

The government prioritizes these strategies because of perceived political expediency and perceived short-term efficacy. It sees these strategies as the quickest way of restoring order while at the same time offering tangible benefits to the local communities, for example, the NRT project. It is also a way that the government is seen to be committed to solving the underlying grievances and restoration of peace. However, these strategies tend to ignore the root causes of conflict and neglect long-term efforts of reconciliation thus resulting in persistent tensions. Further, the government is seen to prioritize its own interests over the preferences and needs of local communities.

Chapter 4.

The Bigger Picture to Natural Resource Conflicts in Northern Kenya

4.1. Context Matters to Natural Resource Conflicts

This study strongly indicates that context matters to conflict dynamics. One implication is that it can be misleading to simply categorize conflicts as ‘natural resource conflicts’ even when they are largely about access to natural resources. According to almost all study informants’ perspectives, conflict in Isiolo is the result of the combination of the two factors of competition for resources and ethnic differences. We see from study informants’ accounts that while water scarcity is a paramount concern, and many fear how water scarcity will be exacerbated by climate change, there are other aspects to inter-communal relations that drive endemic conflict in the region. Moreover, local actors’ accounts indicate that there is competition between groups in the Isiolo region over many kinds of scarce resources, including jobs and land for real estate speculation or compensation, for example.

One contextual aspect that was highlighted in this study was the uniqueness of Isiolo County. Its availability of fresh water and pasture lands is particularly significant because of its central location: it is a place where many different ethnic groups can migrate to when water and pasture are not available in their neighboring counties. Isiolo is also considered unique in how it features in national development plans. There is active speculation about whether there will be future wealth available in Isiolo as a result of these development plans. This speculation also fuels competition between groups, who regard that their actions to assert their claims today might pay off tomorrow. Isiolo County has long been a site of convergence and therefore many different groups make claims to it. Many informants to this study noted how Isiolo is a ‘cosmopolitan’ place in that people of many different backgrounds live there. Its heterogeneity is regarded by many as a source of conflict. People described how in Isiolo different communities jostle over resources and influence which potentially leads to conflicts.

The findings from this study challenge assumptions that when different people come to settle in urban centers, they become more cosmopolitan. Appiah (2017) defines cosmopolitanism as a worldview or ideology focusing on the idea that an individual is a citizen of the world and not exclusively tied to a particular culture or nation. However, in the context of this study, cosmopolitanism is a diverse community where members of different ethnic groups live. Cosmopolitanism is often theorized as a good thing. For instance, Harvey (2009) observes that cosmopolitanism has the potential to foster social cohesion, cooperation, and intercultural dialogue among communities. It enhances tolerance and promotes the exchange of ideas and understanding. Further, he opines that cosmopolitanism helps in mitigating tensions and conflicts.

Sharing space is obviously not enough, and might even run contrary to cosmopolitanism, as we seem to see in the case of conflicts in Isiolo. Other scholars have noted how cosmopolitanism is not the automatic outcome of groups mixing. According to Faist et al. (2023), some rural communities increasingly attract different inhabitants because of globalization, migration, and urbanization. The authors note that as the communities become home to different communities with competing identities, values, and interests, competition over scarce resources including economic opportunities, as well as water and land, can result in conflict. Braak (2022) also observes that as diverse populations come to live together, there may be a clash of ethnic identities, ideologies, and political power which may escalate to intercommunal conflicts as communities strive for dominance.

There was not much hope among this study's informants about people letting go of their ethnic identities in favor of a more cosmopolitan Isiolo or Kenyan identity. Instead, many local leaders perceive that the problem in Isiolo arises from the enduring loyalties of people in Isiolo to the advancement of their greater ethnic groups residing in neighboring counties. This aspect makes the environment in Isiolo hostile as the social, political, and economic interests of some of the ethnic groups in Isiolo are influenced by their communities in other counties such as Mandera, Samburu, or Neighboring Meru. Groups in immediate neighboring counties like Wajir, Samburu, Meru, and Garissa have all claimed or disputed their border with Isiolo as their communities moved into settlements inside Isiolo County.

These findings agree with the findings of a study conducted by Norris and Inglehart (2012) which established that when individuals migrate to new communities and live side-by-side, they bring with them conflicts from their home regions, religious beliefs, and cultural values. These religious, cultural, and societal differences may create misunderstandings and divisions resulting in hostility and tensions among ethnic communities. Further, it aligns with the findings of Bourhis et al. (2013) which found that the integration and acculturation process can hasten tensions between migrants and host communities. They argue that as newcomers struggle to maintain their social and cultural identity while at the same time adapting to the practices and customs of the host community, they may clash particularly where cultural differences are seen as a threat to stability and social cohesion. The findings also align with Mau, Mewes, and Zimmermann (2008) who opine that communities in a cosmopolitan setup are likely to adopt the political practices of their regions of origin. They continue to be loyal to their home society's values and relationships thus influencing their behaviors in their new place of residence and livelihood. The authors note that such behaviors may result in conflicts and tensions, especially in environments that are politically polarized and where ethnic groups have different political allegiances.

It was hard for the informants to this study to imagine how people might loosen their ethnic affiliations and overcome their sense of perpetual intercommunal competition in favor of more willingness to cooperate with different groups in Isiolo. This sense of pessimism arises from local understanding of how the political economy is structured in Kenya.

4.2. Ethnic Competition in Kenya

Many community members saw ethnic communities' sense of competitiveness with others as influenced by Kenya's political history. Unequal treatment between different ethnic groups have historical legacies, tracing back to colonial administrations, ineffective devolution efforts, and continuing unequal power dynamics through postcolonial decades. Longstanding ethnic disparities in decision-making, resource allocation, and political representation have fueled animosity among ethnic groups. Governance structures favor certain ethnic communities while marginalizing the rest thus exacerbating feelings of resentment and injustice.

Many people interviewed in this study generally perceive that politics dictate economic losers and winners, and ethnic differences are significant in the political and governance system of Isiolo. People also believe that ethnic politics influence the security or insecurity of different ethnic communities. Many hold a zero-sum view of ethnic politics in Isiolo County, where an ethnic community feels that the gain of the other is their loss. It is important to note that local communities perceive conflicts as being structured by a mentality of this zero-sum system. They view themselves as either winners or losers in the control over resources based on resource allocation and political influence. This perception fuels animosity and deepens divisions among ethnic communities and hinders attempts at collaboration and sustainable resource management (Sharamo, 2014).

Competing ethnic groups that have had long-standing conflict because of grazing fields and water resources have escalated their contest and show of dominance from the grazing fields to the ballots forcing their dominance to control political power and influence. When an ethnic community has an elected representative, the community is represented, and its interests are voiced in decision-making processes as far as natural resource management is concerned.

Most of the community members identified political competition during campaigns and election periods across Northern Kenya as an emerging threat to peace and stability among local pastoralist communities. Elections-related episodes of violence were highly recorded in the Counties of Mandera and Marsabit, in Isiolo it was a low level that manifested itself in voter importations and claiming of settlements in order to dominate specific electoral units in the county. The ethnic-based political alliances during campaigns to exclude some groups from the possibility of winning political seats left a deeper animosity among ethnic groups in Isiolo.

Political representation is essential in understanding inter-community conflicts over natural resources since it determines decision-making, access, and benefits of resource allocation and management. Elected leaders may influence how their communities benefit from natural resources through access, allocation, and opportunities for development projects. This aspect entrenches tensions and divisions among communities.

These findings are in line with De Goede (2017) study which observed that ethnic groups often contest political power and representation because it acts as a means of patronage where certain groups are favored. He observes that ethnic communities develop electoral strategies to exclude or marginalize rival communities from political power, and that ethnic identities are instrumentalized and politicized by elites to consolidate power through mobilizing for political support.

However, the findings depart from the findings of some studies such as Reynal-Querol (2002) and Cederman, Wimmer, and Min (2010) who established and opined that political competition in multiethnic societies may promote social cohesion and mitigate interethnic tensions. Elections can provide marginalized groups with an opportunity to air their voices during the decision-making processes; and reduce marginalization of feelings of marginalization. It also provides communities with a platform for participation and representation.

The current scenario in Isiolo and the rest of Northern ASAL regions is that there is massive shoving up of ethnic-based support and building of political alliances for elections making political conflict the most significant insecurity risk in the region. This has posed the danger of excluding minority sub-clans or tribes within the communities from accessing the benefits of the devolved units such as employment opportunities, supply chain businesses, and rural development amenities such as health care and water services which will likely deepen marginalization and worse social relations and cohesion.

4.3. Violent tools are entrenched as Security Responses Undermine Cooperation

On issues and strategy about conflict containment strategies, the study observed that there are divergent views on the government of Kenya's role in deepening levels of mistrust among communities and between communities and the authorities in regard to conflict containment, resolution, peacebuilding, and related security strategies. Most government actors, such as the police and security personnel, practice armed and punitive approaches in response to conflicts in the region. There are also prominent cases of armed conservation actors, sometimes seemingly with government authorization and sometimes apparently independent of government authorization. It is

hard for people to consider laying down their guns since their concerns about security risks from potential attackers are not addressed.

Most of the participants in this study (apart from government personnel) highlighted the failures of the Kenyan government to resolve conflicts between communities in Isiolo. First, many people perceive the government as tending to respond with rushed security interventions that are immediately punitive to local communities. Second, many informants noted that these tend to be very narrow responses that do not incorporate neighboring counties and are rarely inclusive and participatory. Most members of the local communities believe that the government strategies to address conflict situations in the region fail to address underlying grievances, lack inclusivity, and are biased. These findings match Lung'ulung'u (2021)'s observations that the Kenyan government's interventions prioritize security measures such as high military presence and increased policing which are not only temporary but also fall short of addressing the root causes of conflicts. Further, these interventions are often seen to favor certain ethnic communities thus exacerbating intercommunity tensions.

The deployment of Kenya Police Reservists (KPR), also known as National Police Reservists (NPR), frequently featured as a concern among local community representatives interviewed in my study. Several community members both from the government and community members agreed that the deployment of KPR provided the best and quickest response in most of the cases of conflicts among communities. However, some community members shared a strong view opposing the effectiveness of deploying KPR to handle security issues across the pastoralist communities. Some participants painted government initiatives as not being effective because they were inherently not inclusive and alienated the people in the peace process.

These findings are in line with a study conducted by Lid and Okwany (2020) which established that NPRs enhance local security by helping police officers in remote areas to protect civilians and deter criminal activities. But it is also in line with another study by Chome (2020) which found that the involvement of paramilitary officers increases tensions thus leading to intercommunal conflicts. Also, in agreement with the community members' arguments is Sharamo (2014) who found that most of the government's security containment measures in Northern Kenya have not worked except for some instances of brief pauses.

The movement of firearms that are owned and sold illegally across the ASALs regions poses the biggest threat to governance, stability, and human security in Kenya. Local communities are acutely aware that there is an unhindered flow of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) among feuding communities across the region. The police and local administration have been unable to provide security and or recover stolen livestock making communal warfare between and among communities more destructive.

The availability of guns and the majority of people owning guns in the region is a serious problem brought about by porous borders and political instability in neighboring countries. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in northern Kenya exacerbates intercommunal conflicts as it also increases the frequency and lethality of violence. Its access also perpetuates cycles of violence and undermines peace-building efforts (Wilson, 2015). However, blaming the proliferation of SALW alone oversimplifies the multifaceted nature of factors that fuel conflict in the region such as political, economic, and social factors as well as historical tensions, resource competition, and marginalization which are at the center of intercommunal conflicts.

Almost all observations and research findings agree that Northern Kenya has been isolated and not well integrated into national economic development for far too long. There is insufficient state security apparatus in pastoral areas due to their size and isolation, most pastoralists purchase illicit firearms for self-defense, which exacerbates the issue and fosters the conduct of commercialized livestock raids by criminals (Abdi, 2011). Further support for this thought is Schilling et al., (2012) who agree that the lack of guaranteed personal safety, the poor conditions of the region, the lack of enough security forces with the capacity to guarantee the community's safety; and the failure to secure the porous borders against the heavily armed neighbors exposes them to danger necessitating communities to arm themselves.

In Isiolo, some community members for this study identified conservation interests and external actors as some factors affecting local conflicts. There are new government-supported NGO-led conservation projects that some community members described as lacking much public participation and contributing to the levels of mistrust and imbalances among communities. The conservation projects have carved out hundreds of thousands of acres through the establishment of Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) which enjoys top-level national government and international donor support which

gives priority to the protection of wildlife and development of tourism ventures over local communities' pastoralist economies. These NRTs cause security imbalances as they help in surveillance, logistics, and support to raiders from some communities over others.

The state transferring its most fundamental security containment functions to non-state actors also presents a very worrying scenario for the people of Northern Kenya. Rotberg (2002) in presenting the features and signs of state fragility argued that once a core state functions especially in the periphery regions like in Northern Kenya is transferred to a non-state actor then it depicts the lack of capacity of the state to carry out its mandate effectively.

During this research, there were public condemnations and voiced allegations by communities that conservation paramilitary units had armed or otherwise helped rival communities. These findings align with the findings of a study conducted by Mkutu (2019) who found that the multilayered security of Isiolo, armed NRT officers, and community members due to illicit arms makes the region insecure and interethnic conflicts inevitable. It also agrees with a study conducted by Schetter, Mkutu, and Müller-Koné (2022) which observed that NRT personnel not only provide security in the region but are also drivers of intercommunal conflicts. Greiner (2012) made a more comparative study on the role of conservancies in the conflict in the counties of Laikipia, Pokot, and Samburu and found out that in some communities the community-based conservancies are fueling conflict, resentment, and mistrust. Therefore, as much as NRTs can help improve the socioeconomic well-being of local communities, they can equally contribute to their miseries by not only fueling but also funding conflicts.

Chapter 5.

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Summary of Findings

It is not enough to categorize conflicts as 'natural resource conflicts' just because nomadic communities in the ASALs continue jostling to access natural resources. Conflict in Isiolo is driven by an amalgamation of different factors including competition between different communities for many different resources, including natural resources, job and business opportunities from devolved County Government, land upon which many speculations are made, and political representation and associated power. It is therefore reductionist to simply categorize conflict in the region as usual pastoralists contest over access to grazing lands and water points for their livestock.

Many different ethnic communities have been present in the region for decades and persistently claim access and ownership to its land, and its attendant natural resources in Isiolo. These groups continued to compete for political influence to dominate and control the local resources such as job opportunities, and development projects. This continues to build up tensions, widening ethnic cleavages in seeking control of political power which escalate to intercommunal conflicts as communities strive for dominance, especially in environments that are politically polarized and ethnic groups have different political allegiances.

The communities are generally pessimistic about their peaceful coexistence in the region since the political economy is structured as a zero-sum game and the win of a community spells doom for the losing community. The ethnic-based political alliances exclude other communities thus leading to a deeper animosity. Elected leaders influence the access, allocation, and opportunities for development projects which entrench tensions and divisions among communities. This aspect results in cyclic patronage politics and competition. Minority sub-clans in the region are excluded from accessing the benefits of devolution units such as employment opportunities, supply chain businesses, and rural development amenities thus worsening social relations and cohesion.

The Government's conflict containment strategies also threaten peace in the region as armed actors, including the state's security forces, practice punitive approaches making it hard for communities to consider laying down their guns since security risks from potential attackers are not eliminated. It is evident that the government's actions or inactions contribute to conflict as the mistrust gap between society and the security services continues to widen. Government initiatives are ineffective as they are inherently not inclusive and alienate the people in the peace process. Furthermore, non-governmental conservation bodies like Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), which could help improve the socioeconomic well-being of local communities, have also been perceived to be among the drivers of conflict in the region.

5.2. Conclusion

During the study, I encountered a lot of pessimism among members of the community. They do not trust the initiatives used by security apparatuses such as forced disarmament, arresting community leaders, and threatening to use force to restore peace in the region. They also are wary of the nature of politics in the cosmopolitan region as communities gang up against each other to secure political power which they use for their own benefits in terms of job opportunities and accessing and controlling resources in the county. The disconnect between the government and the local communities exacerbates cultural stereotypes. It also portrays violence as a characteristic of these communities. These cultural stereotypes overlook historical marginalization and socio-economic complexities of the region, perpetuating injustices. Addressing these challenges demands that a gap between local realities and governance structures be bridged to challenge cultural narratives essentializing conflicts and foster inclusive policies. The advent of devolution, however, has significantly empowered pastoral communities through socio-economic opportunities and political representation and it is slowly fostering understanding among communities albeit cycles of tensions and mitigating deep-rooted biases.

Climatic changes and the proliferation of small arms to the ASAL region through the porous border from neighboring conflict-prone countries are other reasons that make the people more pessimistic about peace in the region. However, many people still want

to live secure lives. They yearn for safety not just for themselves but for their children as well. They want secure livelihoods that cannot be disrupted by conflicts and strongly support national development plans to open the region. They want an environment that is not characterized by fear and where they can continue with their pastoral-based livelihoods without the threat of displacement or harm.

The people also long for reconciliation among various conflicting ethnic communities. There is a need that to bridge the divides and heal the historical wounds, while at the same time fostering a sense of solidarity and unity among community members. Similarly, people want the resources of the county such as grazing areas, water, and land to be equitably distributed. Further, those services dictated by political power such as infrastructure development, education, and healthcare should be equally distributed regardless of tribal, ethnic, or political affiliations.

Some members of smaller communities feel that they are not adequately empowered to be meaningfully involved in the decision-making processes of the county. There is a need for them to be empowered socioeconomically and politically to take on their challenges and participate in shaping their future. Effective conflict resolution mechanisms that fairly and peacefully resolve conflicts should be prioritized. Despite some communities feeling that some conflict resolution mechanisms are not inclusive, there is still hope that if they receive support from all communities, civil society, and government they will achieve sustainable peace. However, there is a need for stakeholders of peace and security to be intentional about this approach.

It is important to note that most people depend on livestock as a main source of livelihood and when the droughts set in, they have no alternative means thus increasing the possibility of conflict over scarce grazing land and water. There is a need for development initiatives and economic opportunities to reduce competition over scarce resources and alleviate poverty. As one of the Vision 2030 mega projects, the government has set up a resort city with the construction of an international airport, livestock slaughter facility for meat export, and network of road and rail from Lamu port in Isiolo to integrate the pastoralists' economy to the national stage. The project aimed to turn Isiolo into a regional hub, open up the northern region, and attract investments and economic activities. This can serve as an alternative source of livelihood for the local communities thus alleviating conflicts. Although the local residents are appreciative of

these development projects and plans, it has already flamed up the existing fault lines as several deaths occurred over the contest for settlement along the LAPSSET corridor.

Further, there are lots of local peace initiatives, efforts by the council of elders, and government and non-governmental entities efforts that all contribute to fostering some inter-communal understanding and cooperation. Local administrators and dedicated police officers have employed tactics and strategies that are promising to bear results in reducing the scales of violence and severity of the conflict by engaging community focal points such as elders and women who are respected for promoting understanding and mutual respect among various ethnic groups. There are different local peace initiatives and community engagement programs for promoting peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and conflict prevention targeting both adults and youth in communities. These local peace initiatives include peace radio talk shows, community peace forums, inter-community peace dialogues, and training of peace committees. The Isiolo Peace Link, (IPL), a local Isiolo-based NGO is making significant efforts to engage relevant stakeholders from all communities, government administrative officials, the police, youth, and women groups in building a resilient, peaceful, and cohesive community in Isiolo.

From the foregoing, the government should reevaluate its security strategies and shift towards community-led conflict resolution approaches rather than relying solely on hardline suppression tactics, which seems to have been exacerbating tensions. Similarly, there is a need to promote political inclusivity and reconciliation among communities. The reconciliation approaches should entail representatives from all communities living in the county. Also, the county government to reform its governance practices to align with the aspiration of the 2010 Kenyan Constitution where local communities are empowered to manage their resources. Lastly, there is a need to adopt a conflict resolution mechanism that focuses on addressing the root cause of conflicts and promoting mutual respect and understanding through inter-ethnic dialogue. All these aspects will lead to peaceful coexistence and sustainable peace in the region.

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Appendix A.

Key Informant Interview Guide

- A. Interview guide that will be used for local administration and security experts.
1. What is the state of security in the region?
 2. What is the position of the government on peace and security in the region?
 3. What approaches has the government used to restore peace and security in the region? Have they been successful? If not, why? If yes, why?
 4. What is the perception of the local administration on the peace talks and dialogues organized by different stakeholders in the region?
 5. What achievements and challenges have been experienced with these peace talks and dialogues organized by different stakeholders in the region?
 6. What is the best approach to attaining lasting peace and security in the region?
- B. This is the interview guide that will be used for village elders, representatives from Isiolo Peace Link, politicians, religious leaders, and community leaders
1. How long have you been involved in peace dialogues in this region? Kindly share your experiences.
 2. What are the most contentious issues during the peace dialogues?
 3. Why do you think that these contentious issues among warring parties exist?
 4. What challenges have you faced in brokering peace deals among conflicting parties in this region?
 5. Have you been trained in negotiation skills in conflict resolution? How do you navigate the complex task of bringing the conflicting parties together on the negotiation table?
 6. What is the composition of participants in the negotiation process in terms of age, gender, and level of education?

7. Kindly share your achievements in peacebuilding dialogues among warring parties in the region. What do you think has contributed to these successes?
8. Do you think that there are different ways you could carry out these peacebuilding dialogues to achieve maximum and sustainable outcomes? If you are to do it over again, what would you change?

Appendix B.

Nacosti Research License - Kenya

Republic of Kenya
National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation

Ref No: 233246

RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Mr. Yussuf Abdi Osman of Simon Fraser University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Isiolo, Laikipia on the topic: What factors contribute to the success and/or failure of local community-based peacebuilding initiatives in the Ewaso Ngiro River Basin? for the period ending : 29/April/2024.

License No: NACOSTI/P/23/25471

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See overleaf for conditions

Appendix C.

SFU Ethics Approval



Minimal Risk Research Ethics Approval – Delegated

Study Number: 30001672

Study Title: What factors contribute to the success and/or failure of local community-based peacebuilding initiatives in the Ewaso Ngiro River Basin?

Approval Date: October 5, 2023

Principal Investigator: Elizabeth Cooper
Faculty/Department: International Studies

Expiration Date: October 5, 2024

SFU Position: Faculty

Student Lead: Yussuf Osman

SFU Collaborator(s): N/A

Research Personnel: N/A

External Collaborator(s): N/A

Funder: Internal Funds

Funding Title: N/A

Funding Number: N/A

Document(s) Approved in this Application:

Consent Form, version 1 dated July 20, 2023

Interview Guide, version 1 dated July 20, 2023

Recruitment Letter, version 1 dated July 20, 2023

Document(s) Acknowledged in this Application:

Ethics Clearance by the Kenya National Government Ethics Review Board, dated April 29, 2023

Research Team Members TCPS 2 CORE Tutorial Certificate:

Yussuf Osman, dated January 26, 2022

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human participants.

The approval for this Study expires on the **Expiration Date**. **An Annual Renewal must be completed every year prior to the Expiration Date. Failure to submit an Annual Renewal will lead to your study being suspended and potentially terminated.** The Board reviews and may amend decisions or subsequent amendments made independently by the authorized delegated reviewer at its regular monthly meeting.

This letter is your official ethics approval documentation for this project. Please keep this document for reference purposes.

This study has been approved by an authorized delegated reviewer.

Appendix D.

List of KIIs

KII'S NO.	ROLE	DESCRIPTION	LOCATION	GENDER	AGE
1.	Advisor	Peace & Conflict – County Government	Township	M	41
2	Farmer	Growing crops as a source of livelihood	Gambella	F	39
3	Farmer	Growing crops as a source of livelihood	Gambella	M	52
4	Pastoralist	Rearing and selling animals as a source of livelihood	Burat	F	27
5	Local administration	Retired Chief	Ngaramera	M	67
6	Community Member	Every Girl's Dream CBO leader	Garba-Tula	F	29
7	Religious Leader	National Council of Churches - NCKK	Wabera	M	56
8	Local administration	Serving Chief	Burat	M	43
9	Peace ambassador	A Community member trained on Peace building	Ngaramera	F	47
10	Local administration	Assistant Chief	Bulla Oda	M	35
11	Chairman	In charge of Water users Association	Garba Tulla	M	68
12	Peace ambassador	A community member trained on conflict & Peace	Burat	F	34

13	Farmer	Growing crops as a source of livelihood	Ruri Village	F	-
14	Pastoralist	Rearing and selling animals as a source of livelihood	Garba Tulla	F	-
15	Water Resources Officer	Ewaso Ng'iro North Development Authority (ENNDA)	Isiolo - Works across the region	M	49
16	Community leader	Community Religious leader	Garba Tulla	M	57
17	Project Officer	Working for Isiolo Peace Link (IPL)	Isiolo County	M	31
18	National Government Official	Deputy County Commissioner	Isiolo – Heads the County	M	-
19	Government Security agent	Police Inspector	Isiolo County	M	-
20	Peace initiative organizer	Camel Caravan Organiser -IPL	Isiolo County	F	56
21	Chairperson	Community Women Group	Isiolo County	F	-
22	Peace initiative organizer	Camel Caravan Organiser- ENNDA	Isiolo County	F	37
23	Security expert	Security expert analysing security issues in the region.	Isiolo County	M	35
24	National Government Official	Official working on environmental conservation	Isiolo County	F	52
25	Security observer	Peace & Conflict Monitor- IPL	Regional Based	M	33
26	National Government Project official	Deputy County Commissioner's office - Isiolo	Isiolo County	M	-