A Comprehensive Review of the Underlying Causes of Conflict in the Borderland Areas of Mandera County (Mandera /Dawa and Liben Zone)

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Abstract

The paper provides an overview of the patterns of communal violence in Kenya, as well as to highlight important drivers and prospective peacebuilding strategies along the borderland area in Mandera County of North Eastern Kenya. Several variables that have been identified as crucial in understanding the occurrence of violent communal conflict in Kenya include the politicised nature of ethnicity in the country, as well as the fact that elections and land tenure are intimately tied with ethnic identity. The following four primary factors that contribute to conflict were explored: electoral politics, local resources, boundaries and local authority. These factors were discussed in addition to the dynamics of national politics. The article has also emphasised that particular dynamics are at play in different conflicts. The precise way that different conflict drivers interact with one another varies from case to case, which suggests that actors who are looking to manage and resolve conflicts need to conduct comprehensive analysis of the conflict that is currently taking place. Not only does this imply that all conflicts should be viewed against the backdrop of a state and a political culture in which ethnicity is strongly politicised, but it also suggests that the impact of political dynamics at the national level on communal conflicts will differ from case to case.

Keywords: *Communal Conflict, Mandera County Borderlands, Electoral Politics, Resource Competition, Ethnic Identity*

1.0 Introduction

Generally, the North East of Kenya has history of atrocities perpetrated by unaccountable security forces, along with official neglect and exclusion (ICG, 2018). North Eastern Kenya and its populations have historically been relegated to the periphery of the nation (Scharrer, 2018; Kochore, 2016). The region is historically underserved and is performing below national average on development indicators. Poverty levels are high at 70%, compared to 58% national average.

The road networks are poor to nonexistent; electricity access is at 7%; only 45% of households have access to safe water and, only 36% have access to improved sanitation,

The state has historically treated the Somali population, who live primarily in the North East, as outsiders (Lind, 2015). Kenyan Somalis hold various roles: marginalised citizens, high-ranking politicians, businesspeople and urbanised (lower) middle-class Kenyans (Scharrer, 2018). Indiscriminate state violence has eroded trust between the local population and security agencies.). The police have protected the political and economic elite at the expense of all citizens. Despite reforms to improve accountability, corruption remains entrenched (Nolasco, 2017). Efforts have been made to improve civilian-police trust in the recent past.

From the early 1990s onwards, anti-refugee sentiments have been directed at the Somali population. They were collectively associated with insecurity and later terrorism and with taking commercial opportunities away from Kenyans (Scharrer, 2018; Lind et al., 2015).

Mandera County in Kenya and Liben Zone in Ethiopia are severely affected by persistent clan conflicts, which disrupt socio-economic stability and create humanitarian crises. Despite various efforts, recurring violence, including revenge killings and resource-based disputes, continues to destabilize these regions (Ahmed, Simmons, Chowdhury & Huq, 2021).

The County has experienced its fair share of conflict and violence in the past decade. Nestled in Kenya's north-eastern corner, bordering Somalia and Ethiopia, the county has been plagued by killing, livestock raids, cross border attacks and retaliation, played out among large pastoralist clans. In this region, villages are scattered across land divided by ethnic groupings and some designated colonial borders, seemingly arbitrary lines across which people and animals regularly roam in search of grazing pastures. Histories of violence blanket the region whose nomadic practice have always disregarded borders that obstruct their wandering way of life.

Antecedents of Conflict and Peacebuilding

According to a joint research by NCIC and Interspeace, conflict in Mandera can be attributed to six main issues; lack of sustainable social reconciliation, lack of trust between the local population and security agencies, inequitable resource sharing, border disputes, cross-border spill overs of conflict and vulnerability of special groups. The Garre-Degodia conflict was the most destructive in recent years. With its roots stretching up to the interior of Ethiopian regions, the conflict was mainly triggered by competition for natural resources, clan superiority and the 'expulsionist' and 'expansionist' myth, aggravated by political competition. The aftermath of the 2013 elections marked the epitome of this conflict

However, the root causes of these conflicts are complex, involving socio-economic disparities, historical grievances, and competition for limited resources (Menkhaus, 2016). Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, while culturally significant, often struggle to address modern conflict dynamics effectively. Additionally, the effectiveness of peace and security responses from governmental and non-governmental organizations is frequently compromised by inadequate resource allocation and coordination challenges.

A critical issue exacerbating the conflict is the absence of functional conflict early warning systems and early detection mechanisms for criminal activities within these communities (UNDP, 2021). The lack of established community policing systems that operate effectively across borders further hampers coordinated efforts to manage and prevent conflicts. Peace structures in these regions also suffer from inadequate capacity. The most relied-upon structures, such as local elders in peace

committees, face significant challenges. These elders, who play a crucial role in mediation, are not formally vetted, and there are no established guidelines or protocols to ensure their effectiveness and impartiality (Bereketeab, 2024). This lack of formal oversight and structured protocols undermines the credibility and effectiveness of traditional conflict resolution efforts. Furthermore, peace-building processes often exclude key stakeholders, such as youth and women, who are disproportionately affected by the conflicts. Their exclusion from peace-building initiatives limits the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of these processes, as these groups are critical to the social fabric and stability of the communities. Additionally, historical conflict survivors or victims and their families are often not given an opportunity to voice their acceptance or disagreement with verdicts from traditional structures regarding compensation for victims. This exclusion from the decision-making process can lead to further resentment and revenge killings, perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Hindrance towards a Sustainable Peaceful Borderlands/Liben Zone

From 2009 to date, the conflicts in Ethiopia's Dawa Zone led to devastating repercussions in the MalkaMari area and Banisa Sub-County, exacerbating local tensions and fueling violence. Mostly recently, in the early hours of August 27, 2024, a tragic and violent incident occurred in Mubarak district of Ethiopian bordering Banisa Sub-County. This incident triggered a series of retaliatory attacks from the leading to further casualties, including the deaths of innocent women and children. The violence rapidly escalated, threatening to destabilize the region and reverse the progress made in peacebuilding efforts over the past decade. A number of incidents have been reported in 2025 despite efforts to bring a lasting peace.

Additionally, Mandera has experienced inter-clan conflicts among pastoral communities due to prolonged droughts caused by climate change, which in turn is exacerbating competition over resources between such clans. Ethnicity-based politics is also a significant driver of conflict in the county. These challenges have contributed to a steady socioeconomic decline, causing an exodus of the local population, including many health, education and construction professionals. These conflicts have destabilized the region, leading to loss of lives, displacement of communities, and a breakdown in social cohesion. Despite efforts to build peace and resilience through various programs, the area remains volatile, with ongoing risks of conflict escalation due to its proximity to the Ethiopian border.

A key driver of communal conflict, closely connected to the control over local resources as well as to electoral dynamics, concerns over boundaries of grazing areas and local authority. As noted previously, land and the notion of "ethnic homelands" play a crucial role in Kenyan politics. Holding land is a source of security and power for individuals, and at the group level, being associated with a piece of territory provides an important component of being perceived as genuine Kenyan citizens with a legitimate claim on a stake in national power (Kurgat 2012; Lynch 2011a). The strong political salience of land and territory, together with the fact that much of the land in rural areas is communal land rather than privately owned, implies that land conflict often takes on an ethnic dimension. In many locations, exact border demarcations are unclear or there are overlapping claims, and de facto settlement patterns and displacement can often affect formalizations of land claims. The question of local borders and which group has a legitimate claim to a certain territory also affects local political power and authority.

Exacerbated by the scarcity of resources and the neglect to improve public services and infrastructure, inter-clan violence plagued the county, further reinforcing the vicious cycle of

suffering and instability. In particular, the conflict between the Garre and Degodia clans of 2010-2015 has since led to the displacement of more than 18,000 households and the deaths of more than 70 people. Pockets of internally displaced persons still live in the county awaiting resettlement. However, in October 2019, leaders from Garre and Degodia clans committed to end hostilities, enshrined in the signature of the Banisa peace declaration which led to the immediate cessation of hostilities and reduction in criminal activities such as raids and property damage, which led to much lower levels of internal displacement.

Another critical issue exacerbating the conflict is the absence of functional conflict early warning systems and early detection mechanisms for criminal activities within these communities (UNDP, 2021). The lack of established community policing systems that operate effectively across borders further hampers coordinated efforts to manage and prevent conflicts. Peace structures in these regions also suffer from inadequate capacity. The most relied-upon structures, such as local elders in peace committees, face significant challenges. These elders, who play a crucial role in mediation, are not formally vetted, and there are no established guidelines or protocols to ensure their effectiveness and impartiality (Bereketeab, 2024). This lack of formal oversight and structured protocols undermines the credibility and effectiveness of traditional conflict resolution efforts.

Furthermore, peace-building processes often exclude key stakeholders, such as youth and women, who are disproportionately affected by the conflicts Youth and women do not get adequate representation due to cultural concerns though many peacebuilding organizations are now pushing them to change the situation. Their exclusion from peace-building initiatives limits the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of these processes, as these groups are critical to the social fabric and stability of the communities. Additionally, historical conflict survivors or victims and their families are often not given an opportunity to voice their acceptance or disagreement with verdicts from traditional structures. This exclusion from the decision-making process can lead to further resentment and revenge killings, perpetuating the cycle of violence.

To address these issues, it is essential to understand the underlying causes of the conflicts, evaluate the effectiveness of both traditional and modern conflict resolution mechanisms, and assess the impact of current peace and security responses. Strengthening conflict early warning systems, establishing early detection mechanisms for criminal activities, developing cross-border community policing systems, enhancing the capacity and formalization of peace structures (including vetting of elders and implementing guidelines), ensuring the inclusion of all affected stakeholders, particularly youth and women, and providing a platform for conflict survivors to participate in the resolution process are crucial for achieving sustainable peace and stability in Mandera County and Liben Zone.

The redrawing of constituency borders became so strongly contested because it affected control over resources as well as electoral outcomes, and local elites used ties to the president and other national elites to acquire "their own" constituencies (Ojielo 2010). Aside from this form of political maneuvering, the conflict was further exacerbated by overall insecurity in the region, which borders Somalia and Ethiopia. The conflict also has cross-border dynamics, with both communities building alliances with their kin in Somalia and Ethiopia and accusing each other of harboring foreign militants. Like other pastoralist areas, Mandera has suffered from a high degree of marginalization, and there is a lingering distrust against the state, particularly the security forces, from the time of the Somali secessionist struggle in the 1960s when severe and indiscriminate force was employed (Ojielo 2010; Menkhaus 2015).

The new county governments were given significant power over fiscal resources and legislation, prompting concerns from several analysts that while devolution might diffuse the contest over national power, it also had the potential to intensify communal conflicts at the local level. Indeed, rather than resulting in "everyone's turn to eat," devolution in many cases produced locally excluded minorities (D'Arcy & Cornell 2016). From the perspective of ethnic violence, such situations were particularly concerning when local minorities were powerful at the national level or had strong cross-border networks, suggesting the capacity to mobilize for violence against the community in power at the local level. In line with such concerns, Lind (2018) points out that "in recent years' levels of conflict have been greatest in counties with pointed majority minority group divisions, notably Moyale, Marsabit, Mandera, Isiolo and Tana River." To prevent communal violence during the 2013 elections, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) – a government body which was created after the 2008 election-related violence and tasked with promoting peace and national unity – in several locations promoted pre-election agreements between communities on how to distribute elected posts. Essentially, such power-sharing agreements were negotiated among community "elders" – a term commonly encompassing leaders with a customary or moral authority as well as influential businessmen and other "big men" – together with party representatives, and then anchored within the broader community. This form of "negotiated democracy" in several locations was credited with the avoidance of violence in the 2013 elections (Mitullah 2017; Lind 2018).

The porosity of borders, illicit trade and spread of small arms, and cross-border clan groupings, produce complex conflict dynamics across countries and counties (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017; Nolasco, 2017; Wakube et al., 2017; Menkhaus, 2015). Depleting resources and access to land escalates inter-ethnic or inter-clan conflict over land, water and pasture (Nolasco, 2017; Mkutu, Marani & Ruteere, 2014).

Radicalization and violent extremism in Mandera, Kenya, are closely linked to regional political problems, particularly the instability in Somalia. The porous border between Kenya and Somalia has allowed extremist groups like Al-Shabaab to recruit and commit attacks in Kenya. Radicalisation and violent extremism has resulted in a pattern of repeated violent attacks, inextricably linked with regional political problems, particularly in connection to Somalia (Nolasco, 2017).

Traditional cultural practices and other cultural rites harmful to women and girls are still predominant among the communities. The North East has the highest prevalence of female genital mutilation or cutting (28 Too Many, 2018; Nolasco, 2017) and high levels of child marriage (OECD, 2019). Sexual offences are often addressed through the traditional Maslaha system, resulting in under-reporting (USDOS, 2019).

Elite Power Struggles, Identity Politics and Political Exclusion:

Communities previously marginalised at the national level are now powerful majorities in their local counties under devolution (D'Arcy & Nistotskaya, 2019). Minority clans within counties are at a political, economic and socio-cultural disadvantage relative to the big clans (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017). The behaviour of political elites is deeply tied to identity politics and clientelism: state resources, jobs and contracts are allocated on an ethnic basis (Nolasco, 2017; Cox et al., 2014).

Weak Social Contract

State-society relations are undermined by the absence of the state from people's daily lives, evident in absent or poor basic public services, including security (Lind, 2018; International Alert, 2016). As a matter of fact, the state has not only neglected and marginalised the region, it has also committed atrocities – including two massacres in Garissa (1980) and Wajir (1984) districts. Furthermore, a violent nationwide 'screening' of all ethnic Somalis residing in Kenya during 1989-1990 demonstrated the fragility of citizenship and belonging for Kenyan Somalis.

Regional Inequality, Exclusion and Marginalisation

Threats to peace and security in the North East are strongly linked to entrenched forms of marginalisation and inequality. For instance, Poverty levels are 66% (Garissa), 63% (Wajir) and 78% (Mandera), compared to 36% nationwide. The three counties are among the seven poorest of Kenya's 47 counties (Abdille, 2019). Even with devolution, the region lags behind the rest of the country in a range of education, health, and infrastructure indicators.

The Actors of Conflicts

The County governments, with greater local knowledge, are well placed to address conflicts. County governors have, however, been accused of rewarding their ethnic constituencies, and marginalising minorities (Menkhaus, 2015; Mkutu et al., 2014). Ethnic Somali clan groupings exist on both sides of various borders are involved in attacks and mobilization of resources. Loyalty to one's clan is manipulated at times by powerful individuals and groups to mobilise clans (or sub-clans) against the others. Clan conflict is related to wider cross-border factors, interests and spillovers (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017; Menkhaus, 2015). The fragile situation is compounded by other external parties. Al-Shabaab incursions from Somalia into Kenya are arguably the country's main threat from foreign enemies (Botha & Abdile, 2020; Lind et al., 2017).

Women have played crucial and successful roles as peacemakers, though at times have also incited clan conflict. Elders retain influence and authority, including applying customary law in conflict resolution. They have also been key actors, however, in mobilising voters along ethnic and clan lines. Religious leaders have played important roles in cross-border dialogue, often called upon by the state to help contain violence while youth marginalisation and mistreatment by security actors is a driver of radicalisation (Pact & Mercy Corps, 2018). Youth are also involved in peacebuilding.

Businesspeople have a vested interest in peace and stability, working across clan-lines. Business monopolies have also incited violence, however, and turned to al-Shabaab to protect their interests (Mohamed & Warfa, 2019; Menkhaus, 2015). More resources were historically allocated by the state to high rainfall areas, with the view that such areas would give better returns to investments than arid or semi-arid lands in the North East (Njoka et al., 2016). Pastoral conflicts have become more frequent and unpredictable, exacerbated by scarce resources (water, arable land and pasture), and have increasingly involved small arms (Njoka et al., 2016; Witsenburg & Adano, 2009).

The weaker socio-economic situation in the arid or semi-arid lands means that climate shocks and stresses, especially drought, often have greater consequences, such as acute food shortages (Njoka et al., 2016). Poor security and porous borders in the North East have contributed to the infiltration of al-Shabaab and the proliferation of small arms, which have led to more violent pastoral conflict (Nolasco, 2017). Cross-border clan groupings and identities play a significant role in conflict dynamics and conflict spillover (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017; Nolasco, 2017). While efforts have been made to coordinate actors and response, there is inadequate coordination between Kenya,

Somalia, and Ethiopia on issues of peace, security, trade, and the movement of people across the borders (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017).

Devolution aims to bring the government closer to the people and to address historical marginalisation. However, the benefits of devolution have come with unintended negative consequences. It provides a counter to the centre, greater political power to Kenyan Somalis, and larger resource allocations to marginalised areas (Cannon & Ali, 2018). It has also had the effect of intensifying inter-clan competition for political and economic power. The ethnicisation of politics at county levels can undermine the accommodation of different groups (Lind, 2018; Carrier & Kochore, 2014). Incitement by politicians, local elites and mainstream and community media is a key feature in the majority of prior violent conflicts in Kenya (Nolasco, 2017). There are specific reports of politicians inciting clans in Mandera County during election time, with abusive and derogatory statements about rival clans (Mohamed & Warfa, 2019). Despite progress in countering hate speech (e.g. monitoring social media, court cases), politics in Kenya remains divided along ethnic lines (Nolasco, 2017).

Communities in the North East have low levels of trust in security institutions. Low trust is due to inadequate service delivery, alleged police corruption and a history of heavy-handed security operations directed against them (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017; International Alert, 2016). Blanket suspicion of local communities by security agencies undermines willingness of residents to provide information (Botha & Abdile, 2020; NCIC & Interpeace, 2017). Alleged corruption among border police is considered an 'enabler' for extremism – allowing terror suspects and illegal goods to enter the country (Mongare, 2019). Furthermore, small arms availabilities have rendered communal conflict, such as cattle raiding, increasingly violent (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017; Nolasco, 2017; Mukutu et al., 2014).

Finally, while al-Shabaab remains focused on enforcing its variant of Islamic law in Somalia, it has exploited local grievances and regional cleavages in North East Kenya to gain support (ICG, 2018; Lind et al., 2017). Recent research indicates that Al-Shabaab exploits clan disputes in Kenya to foster insecurity and advance their operations (Mohamed & Warfa, 2019; Sahgal et al., 2019; ICG, 2018). Lack of opportunities for youth and poor youth-police relations can render youth susceptible to extremist recruitment (Anderson & McKnight, 2015; Mkutu et al., 2014). Attacks have prompted an exodus of civil servants from the North East, with dire effects on services (Abdille, 2019; ICG, 2015; HFTT, 2015). Unfortunately, the securitisation of the government's response to violent extremism has been counter-productive.

Conflict: A Hindrance towards a Sustainable Peaceful Borderland

The poverty levels in Mandera, Wajir and Garissa, counties in the North Eastern region of Kenya, stand at 78%, 63% and 66%, respectively, thus ranking among the poorest compared to the other 44 counties in Kenya (Abdille, 2019). This high poverty rate accounts significantly for the high crime and insecurity rate in the region. Another key driver of communal conflict, closely connected to the control over local resources as well as to electoral dynamics, concerns boundaries and local authority. As noted previously, land and the notion of "ethnic homelands" play a crucial role in Kenyan politics. Holding land is a source of security and power for individuals, and at the group level, being associated with a piece of territory provides an important component of being perceived as genuine Kenyan citizens with a legitimate claim on a stake in national power (Kurgat 2012; Lynch 2011a). The strong political salience of land and territory, together with the fact that much of the land in rural areas is communal land rather than privately owned, implies that land

conflict often takes on an ethnic dimension. In many locations, exact border demarcations are unclear or there are overlapping claims, and de facto settlement patterns and displacement can often affect formalizations of land claims. The question of local borders and which group has a legitimate claim to a certain territory also affects local political power and authority. A conflict between the Garre and Murule, two Somali sub-clans, in Mandera in northeast Kenya illustrates these dynamics. The two groups, which are both traditionally pastoralist communities, have a long history of conflict and clashes over pasture and water (Menkhaus 2015). They have also been fighting about local power – which group should exert authority over Mandera district (now Mandera County).

Exacerbated by the scarcity of resources and the neglect to improve public services and infrastructure, inter-clan violence plagued the county, further reinforcing the vicious cycle of suffering and instability. In particular, the conflict between the Garre and Degodia clans of 2010-2015 has since led to the displacement of more than 18,000 households and the deaths of more than 70 people. Pockets of internally displaced persons still live in the county awaiting resettlement. However, in 2019, leaders from Garre and Degodia clans committed to end hostilities, enshrined in the signature of the Banisa peace declaration which led to the immediate cessation of hostilities and reduction in criminal activities such as raids and property damage, which led to much lower levels of internal displacement. The recurring dispute between the Garre and Murule communities in Kenya's Mandera County had disrupted social cohesion and community life for years. The two communities in northeast Kenya have experienced repeated cycle of violence resulting in the loss of life, damage to property and leaving their loved ones injured. Recently, both communities decided to talk to each other, instead of fighting, thereby transforming a violent situation into a peaceful process. Facilitated by Interpeace and its local partner the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), the declaration was the fruit of the dialogues of local leaders themselves which reflected a cross-clan desire for peace. Reinforced by the creation of the Ceasefire Monitoring Committees (CMCs), the declaration is still in effect and is being respected, but the efforts towards reconciliation and strengthening social cohesion continue to this day.

Creating lasting peace in the region does not end with the signature of one agreement. Interclan conflicts still plague the region, yet the work of Interpeace and its partners continue, building on what has been learned in the years of community engagement and consultations in the county. One of the main threats that County Government officials in Mandera are concerned about is the porous border with war-torn Somalia. There is particular concern that the impacts of conflict in Somalia will spill over into Kenya and that extremist groups like Al-Shabaab are exploiting the porous border to recruit and commit attacks in Kenya.

Additionally, Mandera has experienced inter-clan conflicts among pastoral communities due to prolonged droughts caused by climate change, which in turn is exacerbating competition over resources between such clans. Ethnicity-based politics is also a significant driver of conflict in the county. These challenges have contributed to a steady socioeconomic decline, causing an exodus of the local population, including many health, education and construction professionals. This leaves the county with a dearth of qualified professionals to provide essential services, further exacerbating an already volatile local landscape. Equally important, there is a concern about the lack of practical coordination between national and local authorities, which impedes the City's ability to effectively address and mitigate these threats. The local government recognises the need

for both improved national-local cooperation and support from international partners to build resilience against these threats and safeguard social cohesion.

Strategies towards Peacebuilding in Borderland Areas

Between 2010 and 2020, movement of people and livestock between the villages of Domal-Choroqo, Banisa-Guba, Malkamari-Eymole, Boqonsar-Handrak, Malkaruqa-Ardagarbicha was heavily restricted due to fear of attacks and theft. Inhabited by the opposing Garre and Degodia clans, members of these villages have for years battled over the scarce resources of the area – issues of land ownership as well as grazing rights were exacerbated by political conflict. These 5 villages are located in the buffer zones of the two clans and have suffered most from the effects of the vicious cycles of violence. Interpeace and its partner NCIC mobilized community members to participate in dialogue meetings, acting as mediators among elders, local administrators, youth and women from the 5 villages. Interpeace and NCIC created inter-village dialogue spaces, where members from different sides of the conflict came together to develop solutions to preventing and mitigating inter-clan escalations.

Taking up the role of mediators, Interpeace and NCIC held dialogues among the different constituencies, recognising that these villages, while at the buffer zone that delineates clan divides, are also the frontliners to ensure peace and dialogue between the clans. In March 2020, 5 intervillage pacts were agreed by members of the Garre and Degodia clans, including the sharing of water and pasture between the towns. Since the signature of the pacts, the clans agreed to share their resources and resolve disputes peacefully. The intervillage dialogues carried out in this conflict has been the model Interpeace and NCIC have been using to provide peaceful approaches to long-standing interclan conflicts in Mandera and the North Rift of Kenya. This dialogue model has also spread to Ethiopia, opening up relations across the Kenyan-Ethiopian border which has led to safe cross border movement of people, trade and livestock in search of water and pasture.

Devolution remains one of the most promising ways in which to prevent conflict in the North East, despite negative unintended consequences (Lind, 2015). County-level administrations responsible for spending government funds have extended state-building processes into previously marginalised areas (Mosley & Watson, 2016). Devolved government structures require adequate skills and capacities, effective links to national government, and proper oversight (Chome, 2016).

Dialogue and Reconciliation between the Murulle and Garre Clans

In addition to conflicts that arrive from resource disputes, Mandera also experiences conflicts that arise from border disputes among different clans and villages. One such case was seen between the Murulle and Garre clans, located close to Somalia, whose inter-clan border disputes continued to ensue despite accords that were not respected by both sides in the past decade. Ceasefire attempts have been made since 2000, but the conflict has continued to escalate which has led to death and destruction to both clans for the past two decades.

Interpeace, NCIC and the Mandera county government first examined the reasons behind the violence despite previous accords, and after consultations with members from both clans, it was clear that the deadlocks were caused by lack of representation and influence of both clans in the mediation process. Preceding peace processes provided very little roles for both clans in the judgement and creation of the accords, which has led to the communities to return to violent solutions to resource disputes.

On the request of the conflicting communities, Interpeace and NCIC brought an external arbiter whom the two clans trusted. Other intergovernmental agencies – the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Land, Survey of Kenya, National Land Commission (NLC), National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding (NSC) and the Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission were brought on board– to the negotiation table to arrive at a sustainable solution to this deadly stalemate. The process led to two clear verdicts, co-designed and agreed upon by the conflicting groups: (1) the immediate cessation of hostilities and directives for reparation to be led by the local peace infrastructure and (2) that the border dispute will fall under the government who will delineate the disputed territory.

On February 8 2021, the political class, elders, religious leaders, civil society members and members of security team witnessed the signing of the Sheikh Umal II peace accord between the Murulle and Garre clans at the County headquarters' hall. The accord led to compensation of destroyed and vandalized properties during the conflict. It was also during this accord that the government was tasked with delimitation of the contested boundary to bring permanent solution to the conflict, which has also opened opportunities for collaboration and restoring trust between the clans and the local government. The process of intergovernmental agencies to demarcate the border is ongoing.

Prevention of Radicalisation & Extremism

In 2018, the Ministry of Interior launched a dedicated Prevention of Radicalisation & Extremism Department, through which the County Government developed its action plan for preventing and countering violent extremism that was mandated by the national government. The plan was developed in consultation with and outlines a role for a diversity of actors, including national government stakeholders, faith-based institutions and civil society. It has a specific focus on youth engagement, recognising that young people remain a particularly targeted demographic amongst extremist recruiters. The plan also seeks to improve coordination among civil society and county government actors, create 'accountable security', raise public awareness of extremism and radicalisation and strengthen community-based early warning and incident response.

In line with this strategy and as mandated by the national government, the County also established a County Engagement Forum (CEF) to coordinate the implementation of the County Action Plan (CAP) and the Ministry's prevention activities more broadly. The CEF ensures that all actors align their interventions with the CAP and operates with five strategic pillars: law enforcement, economy, ideology/faith, politics, and education

Further, to strengthen community cohesion and foster better collaboration between local government, security forces and community members, the CEF hosts regular coordination meetings that focus on: bringing together various community stakeholders to build trust, strengthen understanding about extremist threats and requirements for response, and build an overall sense of having a unified response against extremist threats. Enhancing communication and cooperation between local administrative bodies and security personnel to ensure a coordinated response to the threat landscape as well as developing effective strategies and solutions to resolve conflicts within the community before they escalate to violence and/or are exploited by extremist groups, and more broadly promote peace and stability.

In addition, through this department, the county government has trained 600 community members to become countering violent extremism 'champions', with champions coming from 30

administrative wards across Mandera and being responsible for monitoring local extremist threats and sensitising communities to the dangers of extremism.

Community Engagement, Civic Education & Public Participation

The County Government's Ministry of Public Service Management, Devolved Units and Community Cohesion additionally has a department responsible for guiding and promoting public participation and civic education programmes, as well as protecting and promoting the interests and rights of minorities and marginalised groups, ensuring their access to public service. This Community Engagement, Civic Education & Public Participation Department is also responsible for ensuring the participation of civil society organisations in county government-led programming.

Among its achievements, the department, with support from the national State Department of Devolution, has developed a guidebook for civic education and public participation called Jukumu Langu. This guidebook outlines standards for public participation and offers a community engagement roadmap against which the County Government can hold itself accountable. Additionally, the department spearheaded the formulation of a participatory and multi-stakeholder-informed blueprint (the Mandera County Integrated Development Plan 2023-2027) for addressing the root causes of insecurity, from climate change to unemployment. Importantly, the plan also identifies key challenges, causes (as identified by community members) and how those challenges were being addressed prior to the plan's launch. It also outlines priorities per county government department, providing a clear mandate and scope of responsibility per department, which avoids duplication of efforts or a lack of understanding as to who does what.

Community Cohesion & Conflict Management

New narratives of collaboration and shared public spaces can lessen inter-clan conflict and foster unity. The Kenya Vision 2030 gives a prominent role to infrastructure that connects periphery areas to the centre, addressing historic underdevelopment of infrastructure in these areas (Kochore, 2016). Monitoring of hate speech and peace messaging helped reduce electoral violence in 2013, but there are concerns that fear of conflict elevates stability over democracy (Lynch et al., 2019). Guaranteeing equal citizenship rights for all Kenyans can also improve state-society relations and lessen community tensions (Scharrer, 2018; Lind, 2017; International Alert, 2016).

Finally, the Ministry has a Department of Community Cohesion & Conflict Management, which takes a broader conflict resolution approach focuses on the overall peaceful co-existence amongst communities in Mandera County and enhancing capacity for early warning and response to all types of conflict. It also conducts research on local threats and challenges and monitors and evaluates county-led conflict resolution efforts.

Strengthened Security Arrangements

Operations led by local, ethnic Somali security officials in the North East has built trust in security services and improved information gathering as residents consider locally rooted offices more responsive to their needs (ICG, 2018; Mkutu et al., 2014). Trust-building between youth and security officers (e.g. soccer matches) could help to counter youth susceptibility to extremism (Pact & Mercy Corps, 2018). Trust-building between women and girls and the police (e.g. school visits and clubs) is also necessary to raise awareness of rights and on reporting VAWG (Beston, 2018). Communities become a key part of front-line strategies to prevent violence in their own communities. They can provide early warning for crime and extremist recruitment (Nolasco,

2017). Community policing and neighbourhood watch (e.g. Nyumba Kumi – ten houses) can improve trust between communities and the police.

Transitional Justice

Lack of acknowledgement by state actors of past atrocities against the Somali population undermines the important findings of state culpability (Anderson, 2014). Progress toward implementing the TJRC report and acknowledgment by elites would help to address historical injustices (Kirui, 2019; Nolasco, 2017).

Peace Committees (PCs)

The marked decline in violence in Northern Kenya from the late 1990s is attributed in large part to the formation of PCs (Menkhaus, 2008). The Wajir District Peace and Development Committee, formed in 1995, as well as other District Peace Committees, are vastly inclusive, giving marginalised social groups (e.g. elders, women, and youth) a central place in civic-government collaboration (Nolasco, 2017; Menkhaus, 2008). The PCs can produce beneficial spill-over effects, in which one successful PC is emulated elsewhere (Nolasco, 2017). PCs have been weakened by underfunding and neglect by county leaders under devolution (Karienye & Warfa, 2020; ICG, 2015). Critiques and challenges include inadequate participation of women and inability to address root causes (Wise et al., 2019).

Mandera County Peace Actors Forum was established to make all the peacebuilding organizations in the county work together to avoid competition, duplication, and mobilisation for resources and synergy. Mandera County is where all the ideas of Peace Actors, CMCs, inter village Dialogue spaces began and was replicated on the other 8 Counties where Interpeace and NCIC work. Subsequently, Peace Acts have been developed in several counties to make peacebuilding legit,

Traditional Elders and Council of Elders (CoEs)

Traditional elders and CoEs have played an effective role in enforcing peace initiatives and agreements and managing conflict in Northern Kenya (Nyamweru & Chidongo, 2018; Nolasco, 2017). There are few CoEs that transcend ethnicity, however, and elders and CoEs have engaged in clan politics, eroding their own influence (Nyamweru & Chidongo, 2018; Carrier & Kochore, 2014). Although the resolution of disputes through traditional systems can offer quick justice and prevent retaliation, they can fail to address gender-based violence adequately (USDOS, 2019).

Religious Leaders and Inter-Faith Dialogue

Local religious leaders have successfully mediated conflict, leading to the development of permanent peace dialogue mechanisms involved in addressing cross-border conflict, violent extremism and VAWG. Customary and religious leaders continue to influence attitudes and behaviours of pastoral communities (Pact & Mercy Corps, 2018).

Media

Kenya's vibrant and dynamic media can contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes (Maweu, 2019). Community radio facilitates dialogue, the portrayal of peaceful alternatives, and trust-building among different communities (Maweu, 2019). The Wajir community radio is a trusted source of climate information and a platform to voice grievances (Mercy Corps, 2019; Sladkova, 2019). The same could be supported in Mandera County. However, community-based media may suffer from lack of funding (Maweu, 2019).

Business and Entrepreneurships

Cross-border trade has produced a network of business elites whose partnerships span national and ethnic boundaries (Menkhaus, 2015). Communities on both sides of the Mandera County-Somalia border use one another's services, including livestock markets and airstrips (Mohamed & Warfa, 2019). Such interdependence has helped to prevent or resolve conflicts that could adversely affect mutual interests. The business success of Kenyan Somalis can also transform perceptions of them (Varming, 2020). Businesspeople have, however, also incited violence and relied on extremist actors to protect their interests (Mohamed & Warfa, 2019; Menkhaus, 2015).

2.0 Conclusion

The borderland areas of Mandera County and Liben Zone are plagued by recurring conflicts, driven by complex factors such as electoral politics, local resources, control of boundaries, and local authority. The porous border with Somalia and Ethiopia has allowed extremist groups like Al-Shabaab to exploit local tensions and recruit members. Control over local resources on both sides of the boundaries and unresolved past conflicts seem to the most recurring cause of the conflict. This, to achieve sustainable peace and stability in the region, it is essential to address the underlying root causes of conflict, engage communities on both sides of the border, involve political leaders and the local authorities along the borderline and promote inclusive dialogue and long term reconciliation processes.

3.0 Recommendations

By implementing the following recommendations, it is possible to promote sustainable peace and stability in the borderland areas of Mandera County and Liben Zone, and to address the complex drivers of conflict in the region.

a) Strengthen Conflict Early Warning Systems: Establish functional conflict early warning systems and early detection mechanisms for criminal activities within communities.

b) Formalize Peace Structures: Enhance the capacity and formalization of peace structures, p including vetting of elders and implementing guidelines to ensure their effectiveness and impartiality. This structures need to adequately facilitated by both the county government and I/NGOs working in the sector.

c) Inclusive Peacebuilding: Ensure the inclusion of all affected stakeholders, particularly youth and women, in peacebuilding initiatives to promote comprehensive and effective conflict resolution.

d) Promote Dialogue and Reconciliation: Foster long term dialogue and reconciliation processes between communities, leveraging traditional and modern conflict resolution mechanisms. Political leaders should engage in dialogue continuously as opposed to just congregating only when incidents happen.

e) Address Socio-Economic Grievances: Implement development programs to address poverty, inequality, and lack of access to basic services, which contribute to conflict and instability.

f) Improve Security Arrangements: Strengthen security arrangements, including community policing and neighborhood watch programs, to build trust between communities and security agencies. Develop cross-border community policing systems to improve trust between communities and security agencies.

g) Support Transitional Justice: Support transitional justice processes to address historical injustices and promote accountability for past atrocities.

h) Empower Local Leaders: Empower local leaders, including traditional elders and women, to promote peace and stability in their communities.

i) Encourage Regional Cooperation: Foster regional cooperation between Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia to address cross-border conflicts and extremist threats. Regional organisatios such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and National Government Organizations working in the region should develop longer term multi-sectoral resilience programmes that support local efforts.

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