Conflict Factsheet

Communal Conflicts in the Karamoja Cluster (Kenya)

Type of conflict	Intensity
Sub	1.5

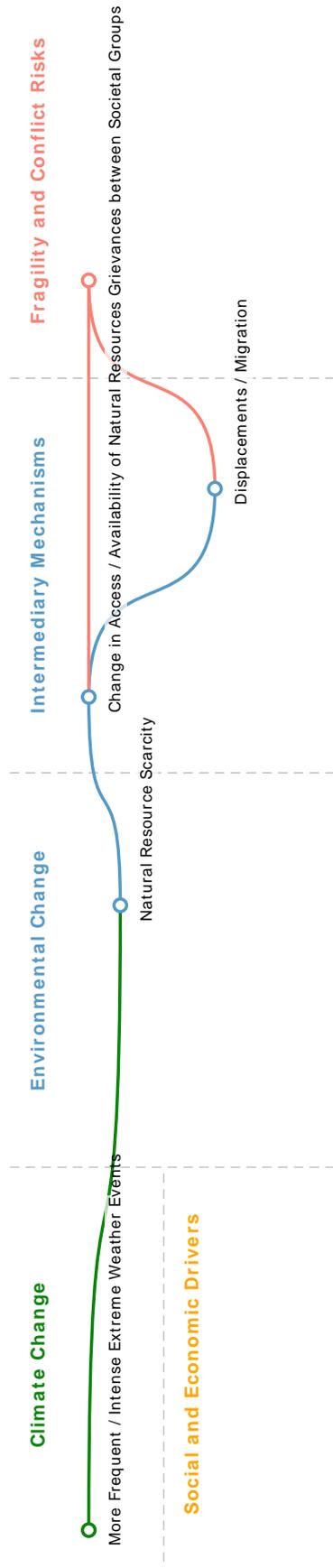|	
Conflict Locality	Time
Eastern Africa	1944 –ongoing
Countries	Resources
Kenya	Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water
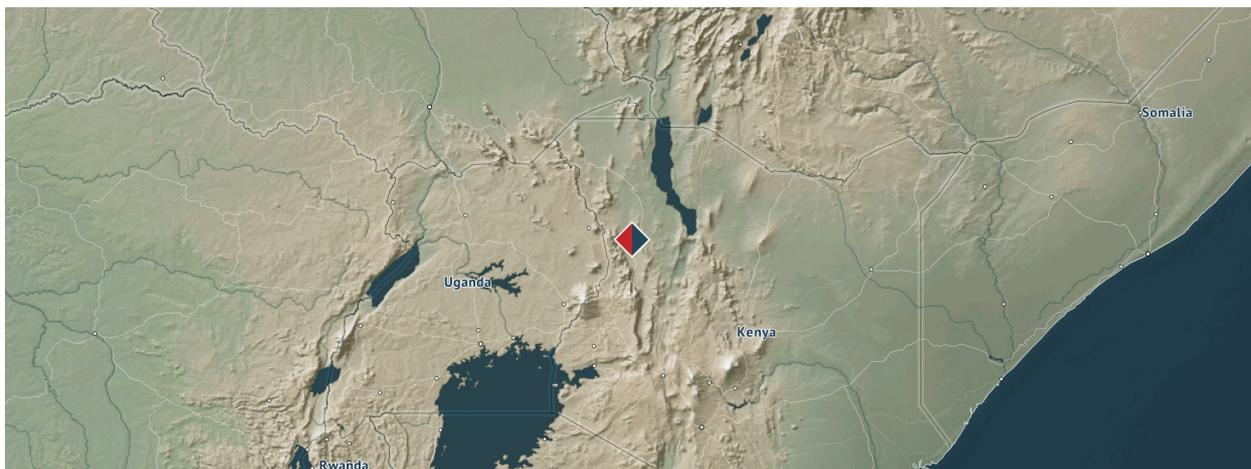
Local resource
competition

Conflict Summary

Livestock raiding and competition for water and pastures lead to cycles of reciprocal violence between different pastoralist groups in north-western Kenya. More frequent and severe droughts as well as the proliferation of weapons from war torn neighbour countries are further aggravating this situation. Yet, in recent years, different grassroots initiatives seem to have had some success in reducing the intensity of pastoralist violence in north-western Kenya.

Conceptual Model

Climate Change

Environmental Change

Intermediary Mechanisms

Fragility and Conflict Risks

Social and Economic Drivers

More Frequent / Intense Extreme Weather Events

Natural Resource Scarcity

Change in Access / Availability of Natural Resources

Grievances between Societal Groups

Displacements / Migration

Context Factors

Water-stressed Area

History of Conflict
Low Level of Economic Development
Unresponsive Government

Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

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Conflict History

Communal groups in north-western Kenya, such as the Turkana, Pokot and Samburu, traditionally compete for access to water and land, which are essential in a livestock rearing economy. These contests frequently take the form of reciprocal livestock raids, which are both, a means to claim access to grazing resources, and a means for herders to acquire wealth and restock their herds after droughts. Since the early 1990s Turkana, Pokot, Samburu and Marakwet groups have fought each other in various temporary alliances, leaving several hundred people dead. The intensity of violence on the Kenyan side of the Karamoja cluster reached a peak in 2008 and 2009, following Kenya's national elections and a series of particularly serious droughts, but has diminished again in recent years (Schilling et al., 2012; UCDP, 2014).

More frequent extreme weather events and livestock raids

Pastoralist violence in north-western Kenya is closely linked to erratic local weather conditions. Prolonged droughts frequently force herders to relocate into areas inhabited by other farming or herding communities thus provoking conflicts, as different groups simultaneously access the same resources. Periods following droughts are also more likely to see an increase in livestock raids, as herders try to restock their herds. With the number of extreme weather events in north-western Kenya gradually increasing, additional stress is put on pastoralist communities, which might lead to an increase in livestock raiding and conflicts over grazing resources (Campbell et al., 2009; Huho, 2012; Opiyo et al., 2012).

Weak institutions, automatic weapons and banditry

Weather-related conflicts in Kenya's north-western pastoralist areas are further compounded by the coexistence of different and sometimes incompatible land tenure systems (private property vs communal use rights), the absence of effective state security provision as well as the weakening of customary conflict mitigation institutions. The easy availability of automatic weapons as well as the increasing commercialisation of livestock raiding, in conjunction with lacking economic opportunities and the ineffectiveness of the police, encourage criminal activities among young men and undermine the authority of traditional conflict resolution bodies, such as councils of elders. In addition, traditional systems of conflict resolution, which are based on the partial restitution of stolen livestock, are drained of their main resource, as an important number of stolen livestock is sold to distant meat markets (Eaton, 2010; Huho, 2012; Schilling et al., 2012).

In recent years, the intensity of pastoralist violence in north western Kenya has diminished. Several NGO programs and grassroots initiatives have fostered inter-community dialogue and, with the aid of the Kenyan Government, somewhat reduced pastoralists' vulnerability. Yet, major environmental and socio-economic difficulties are still hampering peacebuilding in the region.

Resolution Efforts

Different initiatives and programs have been put in place to reduce pastoralist violence in northern Kenya. The Kenyan army has launched several disarmament campaigns against different pastoralist

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groups. These have however been criticized for their lack of coordination, increasing the vulnerability of disarmed groups against attacks of neighboring groups that had not been disarmed, as well as for their excessive brutality against pastoralist communities (Kona, 2004; Huho, 2012; Okumu, 2013). Other state-sponsored efforts have included the creation of game reserves, such as the Nasolot game reserve, intended to spatially separate Turkana and Pokot communities, or the establishment of shared schools and dispensaries to foster intercommunity dialogue and peace building (Okumu, 2013).

NGO and grassroots initiatives

NGO's-led initiatives include a food aid program for drought affected pastoralists by the Kenyan Red Cross and a peacebuilding program by World Vision Kenya (World Vision Area Development Programme: ADP), which began in 1997 and promoted the benefits of peaceful coexistence, while providing educational services, basic infrastructures (water piping, boreholes etc.) and drought resistant livestock to pastoralist communities. Moreover, the ADP has promoted small scale business alternatives aiming at reducing pastoralists' dependency on livestock and grazing resources (World Vision Kenya, 2013).

On the local level, councils of elders customarily manage conflicts between pastoralist communities by determining terms of settlement and compensation but also mutual grazing rights. Yet, as mentioned earlier, their efficiency is undermined by commercialized cattle raiding and the gradual, sometimes incoherent formalization of land tenure institutions. Other local initiatives include inter-communal sport events, such as an annual peace race, initiated by the Kenyan two-time world record holder in women's marathon Tegla Lorupe, as well as several women-led grassroots initiatives (Tegla Lorupe Peace Foundation, 2014; Okumu, 2013; Huho, 2012).

"Peace Caravans"

Moreover, Okumu (2013) highlights the role of "peace caravans". These are inter-communal associations of young and often educated professionals with strong ties to their respective communities. Adopting an intermediary position between different pastoralist groups, but also between these groups and political elites in Nairobi, they have partly succeeded in promoting dialogue and amicable solutions to conflict, while effectively lobbying for state-sponsored development and peacebuilding in Northern Kenya.
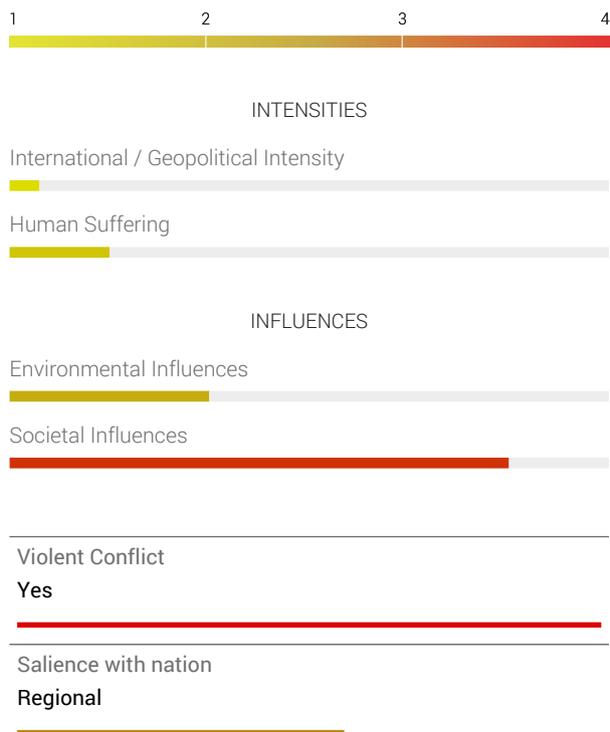
Remaining issues

Taken together, these initiatives seem to have had some success in reducing the level of pastoralist violence in north-western Kenya between 2009 and 2013 (see UCDP, 2014). Yet, major obstacles to peace still remain: Persistent insecurity and the fear of bandits and raiders have led to a situation, where many high potential grazing areas and livestock market cannot be accessed. Insecurity is also hampering the work of peace builders (Opiyo et al., 2012). The focus on short term relief instead of long term development, in some places, has made pastoralist communities dependent on food aid (Kona, 2004). Uncoordinated disarmament efforts, the brutality of the army and the lack of an adequate security provision by the police have also seriously undermined the state's credibility, hence compromising peace-building efforts (Okumu, 2013). Finally, droughts and floods have become more frequent over the last decades, putting additional stress on pastoralist communities and increasing the need for livelihood diversification.
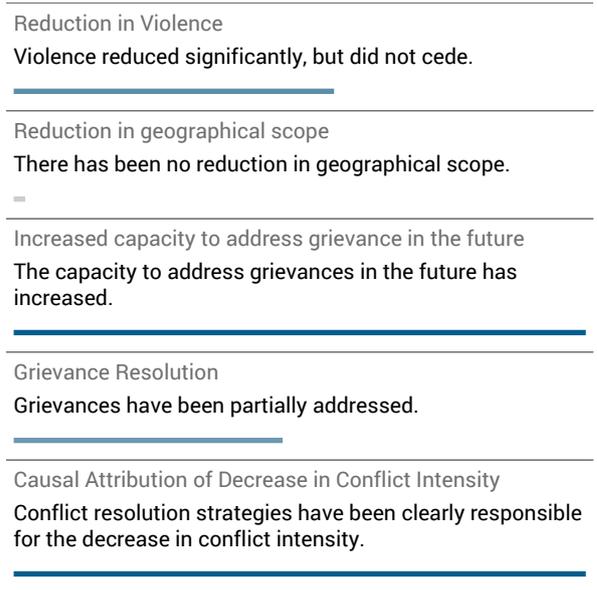
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In this regard, the recent discovery of large oil deposits in north western Kenya might be an opportunity for developing the region's infrastructure and generating additional economic opportunities for local communities. However, it might just as well accelerate the compaction of pastoral land and trigger communal disputes for oil rich territories (see Johannes et al., 2014).

Intensities & Influences

1	2	3	4

INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity

Human Suffering

INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences

Societal Influences

Violent Conflict

Yes

Salience with nation

Regional

Resolution Success

Reduction in Violence

Violence reduced significantly, but did not cede.

Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.

Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been partially addressed.

Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

Conflict resolution strategies have been clearly responsible for the decrease in conflict intensity.

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Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Disarmament, demobilisation & reintegration
The Kenyan army has launched several disarmament campaigns. However, they have been highly criticized and been deemed as failures by several observers.

2

Dialogue
Several NGO programs and grassroots initiatives have fostered inter-community dialogue and, with the aid of the Kenyan Government, have had some success in reducing the intensity of pastoralist violence.

3

Coping with uncertainty
The Kenyan Red Cross and World Vision Kenya have initiated programmes that provide food aid, educational and basic services, and drought resistant livestock to pastoralist communities.

2

Resources and Materials

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Further information
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