



Conflict Factsheet

## Drought and Conflict across the Kenyan-Ethiopian Border

Type of conflict  
Main

Intensity  
3

Conflict Locality  
Eastern Africa

Time  
1944 –ongoing

Countries  
Ethiopia, Kenya

Resources  
Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water



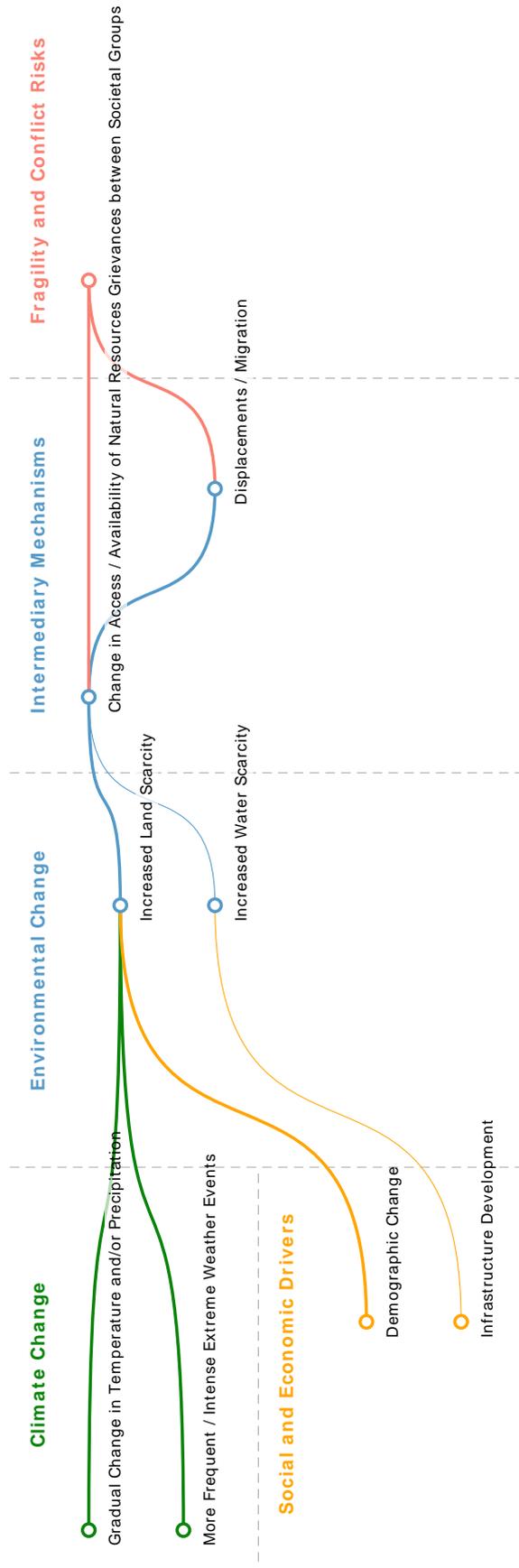
Local resource  
competition

### Conflict Summary

The Omo-Turkana basin stretches from southern Ethiopia into Kenya. Temperatures in the region are rising and droughts occur with higher frequency and intensity. As Ethiopian pastoralists venture further south in search of water and grazing land, conflicts with Kenyan pastoralists and fishermen are intensifying. Given their trans-boundary and protracted nature, these conflicts pose a particular challenge to local peace building and disarmament efforts.



## Conceptual Model



## Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

Overreliance on Specific Supplies

History of Conflict  
Lack of Alternative Livelihoods  
Proliferation of Weapons



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## Conflict History

The Lower Omo and Turkana region across the Kenyan-Ethiopian border is home to several communal groups such as the Mursi, Nyangatom, Daasanach (or Merille) and Turkana, which have adopted a nomadic agro-pastoralist way of life in response to a harsh climate and erratic weather patterns. These groups share a conflictual past, marked by intermittent but repeated fighting over essential grazing resources. The region is also the focus of protracted border disputes in the Ilemi Triangle ([UCDP, 2015](#)). Since 1960, temperatures in the region have been continually rising and droughts have occurred with higher frequency and intensity. In search of water and grazing land, local communities have had to range more widely, bringing them in closer proximity to other groups, with which they frequently fight over water and grazing land ([Powers, 2011](#); [e360, 2010](#)). Between 1989 and 2011 alone, conflicts between Nyangatom, Daasanach and Turkana caused more than 600 direct deaths ([UCDP, 2015](#)).

### Scarcity, migration and resource competition

Since 1960, temperatures in the lower Omo and Turkana Region have risen by almost 2°C and droughts occur with higher frequency and intensity. Areas prone to drought every ten or eleven years are now experiencing a drought every two or three years ([e360, 2010](#)). As a result, grazing resources have become scarcer, leading to increased competition and problems of overgrazing and land degradation ([Powers, 2011](#)). The reduction of grazing land also forces pastoralist to range more widely or to move closer to the Omo River, where they can diversify their livelihoods by growing crops on the river banks. Frequently this brings them in close proximity to rival groups, with which they compete over resources ([Powers, 2011](#); [e360, 2010](#)).

### Population pressure and upstream development projects

These dynamics are compounded by growing pressures on local resources. Since 1994, population numbers in the Lower Omo and Turkana region have strongly increased ([Avery, 2012](#); [De Cave, 2014](#)). Larger population numbers in combination with heavy reliance on local land and forest resources are, in turn, exacerbating problems of deforestation and land degradation, as woodlands are cleared for fuel wood and construction materials ([Powers, 2011](#)). Moreover, upstream dam projects on the Omo River, along with large scale water abduction for commercial agriculture, risk reducing downstream water flows and grazing land for local communities. These projects may also reduce the size of Lake Turkana, which acts as a natural barrier between the rivalling Daasanach and Turkana (see [Security implications of the Gilgel Gibe III Dam](#)).

### Contested borders and illegal firearms

The Lower Omo and Turkana region is also the locus of protracted border disputes. Both the governments of Kenya and South Sudan claim the Ilemi Triangle, a 10,000 - 14,000 km<sup>2</sup> region to the north of Turkana County. But also the Kenyan-Ethiopian border has been a matter of discord in the past. Pastoralist communities have frequently been involved in these disputes ([UCDP, 2015](#)). Moreover, porous borders and civil wars in neighbouring Uganda and South Sudan facilitate communities' access to illegal firearms, so



that disputes between herders are more likely to escalate into larger battles and massacres (Leff, 2009; Powers, 2011).

More generally, both the governments of Kenya and Ethiopia have had difficulties in dealing with local conflicts or improving the living conditions of pastoralists in the Lower Omo-Turkana region. Disarmament programmes have had a mixed record of success and cross-border peace initiatives are complicated by a lack of resources and coordination.

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## Resolution Efforts

Given their trans-boundary nature pastoralist conflicts in the Lower Omo-Tukana region require a concerted response by Kenyan and Ethiopian actors. In order to coordinate peace initiatives and disarmament programmes on both sides of the border, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has established the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN). With field monitors reporting from each of the countries, CEWARN is able to track and report on violent incidents in order to provide governments and civil society organisations with information regarding trends of emerging pastoralist violence (Leff, 2009).

### Cross-border coordination of conflict prevention

Along with the provision of timely information on conflicts, CEWARN also offers a platform for coordinating conflict prevention and mitigation at all levels of government and civil society engagement. At the national level, Conflict Early Warning Response Units (CEWERU) have been put in place in the years 2003 (Ethiopia) and 2010 (Kenya). These collect and analyse information, formulate response strategy and liaise with CSOs. They are assisted by CEWARN's rapid response fund. On the ground, field monitors gather conflict information and Local Peace Committees (LPC) engage in a variety of conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities (peace education and awareness raising, initiation of peace talks, organising the return of looted property etc.) (Glowacki et al., 2013; Babatunde et al., 2015). They are assisted by a number of CSOs and NGOs that provide training and resources to local conflict mediators, organise consultative workshops and promote cross-border peace initiatives (see Sapcone, 2015; APAD, 2015; Minority Voices, 2012; Glowacki et al., 2013).

Within the CEWARN framework, the Ethiopian and Kenyan government have facilitated a number of peace agreements and expanded cross-border cooperation. In some cases they were able to improve communal relations (Horn Affairs, 2011). Yet, important challenges remain: Lack of training and resources complicates the work of LPCs. Poor transport and communication infrastructures hamper the divulgence of conflict information and the organisation of appropriate responses. As a result, interventions often come too late, which undermines the credibility of the CEWARN mechanism (Babatunde et al., 2015; Glowacki et al., 2013). Moreover, the engagement of Ethiopian CSOs has been restricted by a recent law, which limits the actions of externally funded organisations (Glowacki et al., 2013). Overall, traditional conflict mitigation institutions are not sufficiently integrated in existing initiatives and there is a lack of horizontal and vertical coordination between agencies, organisations and communities on both sides of the border (Glowacki et



al., 2013; USAID, 2015; Gardner, 2015). This becomes particularly visible when considering disarmament efforts, where uncoordinated actions have at times encouraged rather than tempered communal conflicts.

### **The limits of disarmament efforts**

Both the governments of Kenya and Ethiopia have launched a series of disarmament programmes in parallel to cross-border peace initiatives. In Kenya, voluntary weapon collections have preceded the forceful disarmament of communities not willing to surrender their weapons. Disarmament projects include a development component designed to improve economic conditions in previously armed areas so as to reduce incentives for violence (Leff, 2009). In northern Turkana, weapon holders were recruited as local defence forces, exchanging their weapons for registered government-issued ones (Leff, 2009). Similarly, the Ethiopian government has registered guns and conferred gun ownership to the local administration and militias for safety and security (Christensen, 2009). At the regional level, the Regional Center on Small Arms and Light Weapons (RECSA) acts as a forum for cooperation to prevent illicit arms trafficking in the Horn of Africa and the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (EAPCCO) helps in the development and enforcement of legislations aimed at reducing cross-border violence (Leff, 2009).

However, the effectiveness of disarmament efforts has been limited in several ways: exactions against civilians during disarmament campaigns and the lack of an adequate security provision to disarmed communities have seriously undermined popular support for disarmament programmes (Leff, 2009). It is further unclear as to whether the creation of local defence forces really contributes to local security or creates new problems by conferring responsibilities to unpaid and untrained civilians (Leff, 2009). Most importantly, lack of coordination between Ethiopian and Kenyan operations has led to situations of uneven disarmament, where some groups have taken advantage of the temporary weakness of their disarmed neighbours (Christensen, 2009; Gardener, 2015).

There is actually an encouraging trend towards the integration of conflict information and peace initiatives across the Kenyan-Ethiopian border. Yet, examples such as the ones highlighted above illustrate the need for a concerted approach to cross-border conflicts, including the need for additional resources and communication between Kenyan and Ethiopian actors.



## Intensities & Influences



### INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity

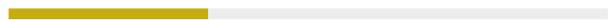


Human Suffering



### INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

**Yes**



Salience with nation

**Regional**



Mass displacement

**None**



Cross Border Mass Displacement

**No**



## Resolution Success

Reduction in Violence

**There was no reduction in violence.**



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.**



Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

**There has been no reduction in intensity**





## Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

<b>Disarmament, demobilisation &amp; reintegration</b>	<b>2</b>
Both the governments of Kenya and Ethiopia have launched a series of disarmament programmes.	
<b>Cooperation</b>	<b>2</b>
Within the CEWARN framework, the Ethiopian and Kenyan government have facilitated a number of peace agreements and expanded cross-border cooperation.	
<b>Improving state capacity &amp; legitimacy</b>	<b>2</b>
CEWARN also offers a platform for coordinating conflict prevention and mitigation at all levels of government and civil society engagement.	
<b>Improving actionable information</b>	<b>3</b>
The Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) was established to track and report on violent incidents in order to provide governments and civil society organisations with information regarding trends of emerging pastoralist violence.	

## Resources and Materials

### Conflict References

[Security Implications of the Gilgel Gibe III Dam, Ethiopia](#)

### References with URL

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[Babatunde, O., Uzodike, N.O., Ettang, D. & Tugizamana, C. \(2014\). Revisiting the Utility of the Early Warning and Early Response Mechanisms in Africa: Any Role for Civil Society?](#)

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[USAID \(2015\). PEACE III. Request for Applications \(RFA #2015-Prime\(s\)-P/III\) – Peace Partnership program grants](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/drought-and-conflict-across-kenyan-ethiopian-border>