



SOCIAL - ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS AMONG PASTORAL COMMUNITIES IN KENYA

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Abstract

The main aim of the paper was to examine the social-economic impacts of the inter-ethnic conflicts among the pastoral community in Northern Kenya. The study adopted descriptive research design methodology. The target population was pastoralist communities living in four counties of Laikipia, Samburu, Turkana and West Pokot. The respondents were randomly drawn from the target population. Primary data was collected using self-designed structured questionnaires that obtained both qualitative and quantitative data with five point Likert scale covering the three specific study objectives. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and presented on tables, charts and graphs. The study found that the social-economic impact of inter-ethnic conflicts resulted into competition for scarce resources and thus violence ensued. The impact at household level is felt in terms of reduced access to food, water, livestock theft, loss of life, destruction to property, interruptions to social cultural values, education, health care services and widespread insecurity. The study recommends policy shift to increase national resource allocations to these regions for development, provide permanent security presence, develop infrastructure and social amenities, resolve outstanding boundary demarcations and strengthen traditional cultural based peace building, dialogue and mediation initiatives through the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC).

Keywords: Competition, Conflict, Ethnicity, Pastoralism, Resources, Scarcity

INTRODUCTION

Kenya is one of the countries within the fragile Horn of Africa region that has frequently borne the consequences of terrorism, political violence, organized crime, piracy, inter-ethnic conflicts, climate change, drought, famine, poverty, economic strife and hunger (Haider, 2014). Kenya holds great geopolitical position in the region pertaining to its level of economic growth and infrastructure development. It hosts the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programs (UNEP) among many other international agencies. Despite all these achievements Kenya still has physical security challenges affecting the pastoral communities living in the northern part of the country (Wagner, 2013). The constant conflicts among these communities prevent them to participate fully in other productive social economic development activities. The resources in this region are limited which forces the communities to compete for the limited means of livelihood. Pastoralist communities in the region keep camels, goats, cattle and sheep. They mostly live nomadic lifestyle migrating from one location to another in seasonal search of water and pasture.

The land habited is not suitable for crop cultivation due to limited and unpredictable rainfall. Over the past decades, land ownership and boundary demarcation has remained a thorny issue among the pastoralist communities. There are communities which have claimed ownership to land and resources however, no clear boundaries or historical maps exist to back up their community claims. Some communities along the river basins have taken up crop cultivation along the riverine decreasing the size of grazing fields. The other issues which have fueled conflict among these communities include political power, economic marginalization, depletion of resources, climate change and small arms proliferation (Abdulqadir, 2001). The northern region of Kenya remains largely underdeveloped and lacks basic infrastructure comprising of schools, hospitals, government offices, and social amenities for the growing population. The region also hosts some refugee camps such as Kakuma and Daadab. The influx of refugees has contributed to some of the conflicts in the region through entry of illegal immigrants, human trafficking and proliferation of small arms (Pkalya, Adan and Masinde, 2003).

Frequent clashes flare up allegedly due to competition over ownership and access to grazing land, pasture, water, relief food, cultural identity and political control of the region (Healy, 2010). These low intensity violence between the communities often result into injuries, deaths, theft of livestock, forceful displacements and disruption of social services. The vulnerable groups that bear the brunt of hostilities are the women and children (Williams, 2011). However, the government has failed to take up effective conflict resolution measures. Thus, The

general objective of the study was to critically analyze the social economic impact of persistent inter-ethnic conflicts among the pastoral communities in northern Kenya.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was grounded on Conflict Theory. The argument is based on Karl Marx's idea which purports that due to society's never-ending competition for finite resources it will always be in a state of constant conflict. The implication of this theory is that those in possession of wealth and resources will protect and hoard them, while those without will do whatever they can to obtain them. This dynamic means there is a constant struggle between the rich and the poor in the society (Sites, 1973). This theory looks at what happens when one group attempts to rebel against the other group and various roles against each other. The theory analyzes the social control that the rich have over the masses. Marx believed that a society only functions in order to try and better their social situation, which can result in some type of social upheaval. Marx's theory brings out different types of conflicts that include conflict regarding class, race, ethnicity, gender, and religion. Marxian conflict theory can be applied to a number of social disputes as it relates to how one group controls the rest, the struggles within the oppressed group, and the way that the controlling group manipulates and sustains power.

According to Marx, the existence of different social classes in human society is the continuous source of inevitable conflict. Marx emphasizes the importance of interests over norms and values, and the ways in which the pursuit of interests generates various types of conflict as normal aspects of social life, rather than abnormal or dysfunctional occurrences. He sees the human society as a collection of competing interest groups and individuals, each with their own motives and expectations (Abrahams, 2004).

The situation in Laikipia, Samburu, Turkana and West Pokot can be analyzed using the conflict theory. In these regions, the competition for resources is intensified due to the unfavorable conditions prevailing in the constituencies. The most valuable commodity or symbol of wealth is livestock which are revered and protected by all means. The individuals who own livestock are keen on protecting what they have and even increasing their stocks while those who do not own enough livestock are constantly looking for ways through which they can also increase their herds of livestock. In such a society, there is a constant struggle between the rich and the poor. Langat (2016), reports of how Pokot raiders have been hired by wealthy livestock owners to steal livestock from vulnerable communities. The guns and bullets are expensive for most of the pastoralists and therefore those who can afford to have several wield a lot of power over the rest.

The Corporate Finance Institute (2016), reports that conflict is an unavoidable aspect of human society. Major disparities are bound to be experienced in regions which are less regulated by administrative governments. The Marxist theory of conflict posits that societal order is maintained using power as opposed to conformity. The members of Laikipia Samburu and West Pokot regions acknowledge the scarcity of resources in the region and therefore fight for their own interests. The proliferation of weapons from neighboring regions creates an enabling environment where one community can easily arm itself and attack another. There is also a difference in the reallocation of resources in the four counties. Resource allocation majorly depends on the type of leaders governing specific constituencies. Some cases of conflict are perpetuated by unequal resource distribution where some communities feel short-changed and resort to raiding the communities which appear to be doing better.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnic clashes mostly involve the pastoralist communities. Most of the conflicts are linked to the cross-border and regional conflicts that have changed the nature and intensity of the struggle through the proliferation of light weapons and small arms as the households increase their capabilities to self-protection, defense and superiority to acquire more wealth from their counter communities (Kimani, 2008). However the conflicts are largely fought over the struggle for control of the natural resources and rights of access. Banditry activities are also present triggered by highly connected business men who profiteer through the sale of smuggled weaponry in exchange for the stolen livestock (Goldsmith, 1997).

Most of the conflicts are linked to community cultural practices such as cattle rustling which are occasionally conducted as a norm. The practice of raiding other communities for cattle is deeply rooted in the traditions of these communities that it has become difficult to come up with an effective intervention method. The communities have come to expect occasional attacks from one another and have therefore put up several guards. Conflicts over natural resources occur mostly during the periods of low rainfall where several farmers depend on only a few boreholes and the few seasonal rivers available in the constituencies. No farmer wants their livestock to die over a lack of water and therefore they do everything in their power to make sure they gain access to the available water sources. Human Rights Watch (2014) reports that the population of the Turkana people increased from 855,393 in 2009 to 1,256,152 in 2012. While there is a significant increase in the population of the residents, the natural resources remain the same and some even start to lose their effectiveness. Such circumstances are naturally bound to cause anxiety and unrests as

residents fear for continuity of their livelihoods. The most important natural resource serving the four counties is Lake Turkana which is the largest desert lake in the world.

Human Rights Watch reports that the lake derives most of its water from the Omo River which flows from the Ethiopian mountains. The government of Ethiopia however, embarked on a plan to set up dams and irrigation schemes along the flow of the river and the move threatens the existence of the lake in Turkana County. The inability of the lake to meet the intensified water needs in the region is bound to cause more conflict in the coming years. The Marsabit Mountains and forest are also very important natural resources in the region. The forest acts as a water catchment area for the region but the massive deforestation being conducted threatens its existence. The Marsabit forest is an important pasture resource. During the dry seasons, most of the pastoralists migrate with their livestock in search of water resources and pasture. In most cases, these are usually possessed by other communities.

The migration of pastoralist communities in search of natural water resources is not limited by international boundaries. There have been cases where communities come from regions as far as South Ethiopia, South Sudan and Somalia and cross into the Kenyan border just to drink the water available in regions such as Dukana and Sololo. One incident that took place in Isiolo County in 2009 serves as a clear illustration of these dynamics. During that year, there was a serious conflict regarding the use and ownership of water resources among the Samburu, Turkana, Borana and Somali communities. The government failed to intervene and resolve the conflict amicably which led to the deaths of more than 32 people. There was also massive displacement of people and increased livestock deaths. The government has attempted to remedy the situation through increasing the number of boreholes in these regions but there are still conflicts over how these are to be allocated and shared.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive research design methodology. The target population was pastoralist communities living in the four northern counties of Laikipia, Samburu, Turkana and West Pokot. The respondents were randomly drawn from the target population. The use of purposive simple stratified sample was drawn from the local communities, civil society, ecologists, relief agencies, and government officials. The choice of this method ensured that the study remained simple, manageable, timely, cost effective and objective to the study requirements (Kothari, 2005).

Table 1: The sample size

Population Stratum	Population Density	Sample Size	Sample size % of Total
Laikipia County	42.19	50	23
Samburu County	10.65	50	23
Turkana County	12.45	60	27
West Pokot	55.91	60	27
Totals	121.2	220	100

Source: (KNBS, 2015)

Primary data was collected using self-designed structured questionnaires that obtained both qualitative and quantitative data with five point Likert scale covering the three specific study objectives. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics using SPSS and presented on tables, charts and graphs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussions on the social-economic causes and impact of persistent inter-ethnic conflicts among the pastoral communities in northern Kenya. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics through Statistical Package for Social Sciences computer software (SPSS). Research findings have been presented in tables, charts and graphs. The study targeted a sample size of 220 respondents from which 160 filled and returned the questionnaires making a response rate of 72.7%. This was achieved through enlisted field assistant under clear instructions. The response rate was satisfactory to make credible deductions from collected information.

Sample Characteristics

The study sought to establish the demographic information of the respondents in terms of, gender, age, distribution, level of education, period of residence and category of residence. From the findings, 70% of respondents were males whereas 30% were females. This shows that the study had few females than males. The reason for this is that males are more accessible than females due to the strong gender interaction culture in the communities. This representation is credible to allow assessment of the research questions on the cause and impact of inter-ethnic conflicts. Based on this finding, the respondents had acquired formal education as follows; Primary Education 20%, Secondary Education 15%, Higher Education 5% and Nil Education 60%. The study noted that minority had acquired formal education at a level of 40% which was adequate for the requirement of the research. The low literacy level is an

indicator of the severe consequences of inter-ethnic community conflict in the region and limited government development of the social-economic infrastructures in the region. The findings indicate that 75.44% lived in the region for more than 15 years. 17.54% lived between 10 to 15 years. 5.265% had lived in the region for 5 to 10 years while only 1.75% had lived in the region for less than 5 years. Period of residence by the respondent was of interest to the study because it correlates to the experience of respondent with inter-ethnic conflict. Hence credibility of the information collected from the respondents pertaining to the causes and impacts of inter-ethnic conflict in the region. The study found that local community were the majority at 52.63%, followed by Civil Society at 22.81%, then Relief Workers at 15.79% and Government workers at 8.77%. The category of the respondents was of interest to the study since this would provide good indicator on their personal interaction and experience with the causes and impacts of inter-ethnic conflict in the region.

Social-Economic Impacts of Inter-Ethnic Conflicts

Further, the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each by using the five point Likert scale of 1 to 5 where: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= Agree and 5 = strongly agree. The findings were presented on the table below.

Table 2: Social-Economic Impacts

Impacts of inter-ethnic conflicts	Percentages
Loss of human life	79.06%
Theft/ loss of livestock and property	75.45%
Displacement of population	72.44%
Negative ethnicity/ Animosity	65.11%
Interference with education	61.55%
Poverty/inequalities/under-development	60.55%
Environmental degradation	57.99%
Insecurity	70.07%

The findings from respondents indicate that these impacts resulted directly from inter-ethnic conflicts: Loss of human life 79.06%, Theft/ loss of livestock and property 75.45%, Displacement of population 72.44%, Negative ethnicity/ Animosity 65.11%, Interference with education 61.55%, Poverty/inequalities/under-development 60.55%, Environmental degradation 57.99%, Insecurity 70.07%. The study highlighted several consequences of violent conflicts,

which are negatively impacting on the communities under study. Loss of human life, property, displacements of large segments of the communities, disruption of socio-economic activities and livelihoods, increased hatred between communities, environmental degradation, increased economic hardships as a result of loss of livelihoods, high levels of starvation and malnutrition among the displaced groups and unprecedented dependency syndrome on relief food are the main negative impacts of the increasing and severe inter-ethnic armed conflicts in northern Kenya.

Other findings established that the impact of conflicts at the household level is felt in terms of reduced access to food, interruptions in education and lack of medical services. Reduction in the number of livestock through raids, loss of life, loss of properties, lack of water, lack of pasture, forced migration of families and livestock, negative psychological and social impact due to death, closure and destruction of boreholes, and intensified insecurity leading to reduced outdoor activities among others.

Respondents included some impacts like: injuries and deaths, loss of livelihoods, displacement of persons, loss of property, high poverty index, disturbance in education, rape and gender based violence, citizens lose faith in government of the day for failure to prevent conflicts before they happen, breeding grounds for extremism and radicalization as poverty can lead to manipulation, overstretched use of social amenities as a result of people migrating, and harassment and public humiliation by government authorities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study aimed to identify the social-economic impacts of inter-ethnic conflicts among the pastoralist communities in Northern Kenya. The entire region has 11 counties whose different nationalities have consistently clashed with each other through non-ending annual cyclic rituals. Due to limited time and resources, the study was confined to only four counties of Laikipia, Samburu, Turkana and West Pokot as a representation of the entire region. These were the counties worst affected by inter-ethnic conflicts. The purposive sample was drawn from the local communities, civil society, ecologists, relief agencies, and government officials. In order to perform an effective analysis, it was important to first understand the physical and socioeconomic characteristics of the region. The impact of conflicts at the household level is felt in terms of reduced access to food, interruptions in education, poor health care services, interruption of trade, theft of animals, loss of life, displacements, closure of the boreholes and increased violence between the communities. The findings further found rise in tribal animosity, perceived government marginalization, limited resource allocations, temporary police and government services and political manipulation by those wielding power. These findings are

similar to Kimani, (2008) who observed that the inter-ethnic conflicts result in huge losses to the communities through trails of death and loss of livestock.

It is evident that ethnic conflict impacts negatively on social and economic activities among the pastoral communities in Northern Kenya. The stakeholders from the community including the national and the county government should deliberately increase national resource allocations to these regions, increase social amenities and infrastructure which are vital for the community livelihoods such as water points, solve pending land and boundary issues, and encourage the pastoralists to keep adequate number of livestock which can be sustained by the diminishing grazing pastures due to climate change. There is need also to educate the pastoral communities to embrace peaceful coexistence with each other to reduce raids and counter attacks. The communities should be sensitized against bad cultural practices which promote violent conflicts. The National Cohesion and Integration (NCIC) should roll out local peacebuilding dispute resolution, dialogue and mediation initiatives incorporating the community leaders.

However, due to inefficiencies of small sample size this findings would not be appropriate for replication. The researcher thus recommends a comprehensive study to be undertaken for the entire region. This will provide better results and findings upon which appropriate national policy and legislation framework would be developed to solve these perennial conflicts. Ethnic conflicts in Northern Kenya counties have caused great loss of innocent lives, and destruction to properties including bold banditry attacks against the security forces sent to provide security. The government and civil societies supported by the international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) continues to spend huge resources in direct intervention efforts year in year out without addressing the root problems of these societies which have remained unresolved mysterious annual ritual.

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