

Nature of Cross-Border Conflicts between the Communities at the Kenya and Ethiopia Border

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Abstract: Cross-border conflicts have more often than not culminated into full-fledged wars between states globally. Conflict-affected and fragile states are experiencing repeated and interlinked violence that crosses borders. In Africa, cross-border conflicts have been dynamic in nature being orchestrated by a number of factors including inadequate natural resources, territorial disputes, and shared resources among others. The cross-border of Kenya and Ethiopia is no exception. It has been affected by seasonal patterns of drought and famine, seasonal movements of armed pastoralists and livestock across the border. Moreover, Kenya-Ethiopia border has experienced a continuing degradation of the environment leading to food insecurity and increased competition for scarce resources mainly water and pasture. These phenomena have more often than not resulted in cross-border conflicts among communities living along the border of Kenya and Ethiopia. The research objective of the study was to examine the nature of conflicts between the communities at the Kenya and Ethiopia border. This research paper is underpinned by power theory.

Key words: Cross-border conflicts, communities, Kenya and Ethiopia border

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict prevention, management and resolution remain one of the major challenges facing the international community. Despite technological developments, the abundance of mechanisms and initiatives to address these conflicts, and the institutional capacity for this purpose remain weak (Nyambura, 2003). Many Africa countries are experiencing ethnic-cross-border-conflicts, which impose great social and economic costs. The pastoralist cross border conflicts in African context have proved devastating to the socio-economic and development trajectories of entire regions (Bevan, 2007). For instance, the Toposa of Southern Sudan has been in conflict with a number of neighboring groups including the Didinga, Turkana, Dinka, Dassenach and Karamojong sub-clans (Bevan, 2007). These conflicts are not caused by a single factor but by many intermingling factors happening simultaneously such as resource scarcity, widespread poverty, weak government structure in rural areas, and limited participation in economic, political and cultural decision making (Salih, *et. al.*, 2001; Yohannes, *et. al.*, 2005; Bekele, 2008).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In anarchic environments, each units incentives is to put itself in a position to be able to take care of itself since no one else can be counted on to do so (Waltz, 1979). The study was

underpinned by power theory. Waltz (1979) observes that balance of power politics prevails whenever “two or more state coexist” in an anarchic order with no superior agent to come to the aid of states that may be weakening or to deny to any of them the use of whatever instrument they think will serve their purposes (Waltz, 1979). A state must always be concerned with its relative power. The power of others – especially great power- is always a threat, never a cure. Weak states may have no alternatives but to guess right and hope that early alignment with the victor will ensure their survival and (at least some) other vital interests (Donnelly, 2000). The argument is that whenever two dominant powers face each other, each is the only real threat to security of the other, they cannot but be enemies. Each must, whatever its preferences or inclinations, balance its power against the other. John Herz argues that international anarchy assures the centrality of the struggle for power even in the absence of aggressively or similar factors (Herz, 1976). For purposes of this research paper, the study therefore focused on how states wield power to influence regional institutions in perpetuation of conflict, in this case Kenya and Ethiopia.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using descriptive survey design. Orodho (2003) defines descriptive survey as a method of collecting information by interviewing, or administering questionnaire to a sample population to get their attitude, opinion and habits on any variety of educational or social issues. The area under study was the border area between Oromia region in Southern Ethiopia and Marsabit County in Northern Kenya. Marsabit County borders the country of Ethiopia to the North with about 500 kilometer stretch. The county comprises four constituencies Saku, North Horr, Laisamis and Moyale. Moyale (Kenya) has 7 wards namely Butiye, Sololo, Heillu, Golbo, Township, Uran and Obbu from which the household heads were drawn. Moyale (Ethiopia) is one of the woredas in the Oromia Region of Ethiopia. Yohannes *et al.*, (2005) observe that the regions on both sides of the border share similar arid and semi-arid environments sharing same dominant ethnic groups, culture and customary institutions. This region is the homeland of Borana, Garii, Burji and Gabra communities in Ethiopia and Kenya.

IV. STUDY FINDINGS

The main drivers of instability and conflict are resource scarcity in particular water and grazing land as well as

increasing pressures placed on livelihoods and food security by development projects and schemes. These pressures make traditional pastoralists more likely to resort to violence to gain access to resources or to retaliate when resources are taken. When conflict becomes protracted, the emphasis tends to shift from resource scarcity to intercultural clan dynamics.

As illustrated in figure 1.2, 13.60% (45) of the respondents averred that clan-based conflict has been experienced. They argued that clan-clan feuds more often than not exacerbated the relatively peaceful co-existence. A whopping 77.90% (258) of the respondents argued that community driven conflict was common and pervaded almost everywhere within the study areas.

This was indicative of the fact that communal issues that go out of hand, are trigger factors to conflicts. Additionally, 6.90% (23) of the respondents reasoned that cross-border conflict was another phenomenon affirmed in the area. Conversely, 1.50% (5) of the respondents did not understand the nature of the conflict. They were vaguely knowledgeable and therefore could not adequately respond to the inquiry.

The unfolding discussion was supported by FGD participants who reiterated that:

Conflict is social. Issues pertaining to equitable distribution of resources characterize conflict. Conflict around the border is clan-based. Various clans muscle power with the aim of dominating others. The Kenya-Ethiopian border has many outlets. It is leaky and therefore catalyzes the unpredictable conflict sometimes (FGD participants in Moyale Marsabit, 9/5/2019).

The foregoing revelation is underpinned by Lund, and Betts, (1999), who argue that the horn of Africa is volatile in nature. The endless conflicts witnessed more often than not pervade the entire fabric of peaceful coexistence of people. The situation is true of Kenyan and Ethiopian border.

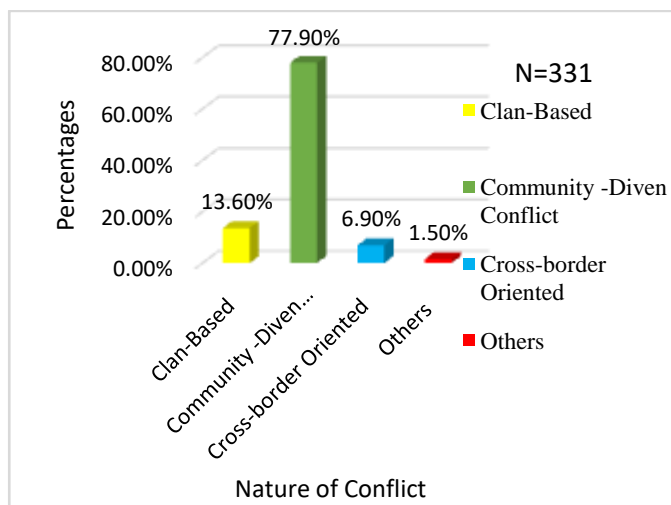


Figure 1.2 Nature of Conflict

Source: Field Data, 2019

The foregoing discussion implied that conflict is endemic and unavoidable. It generates violence which leads to psychological and societal destruction. The Horn of Africa for example is most the volatile and conflict-marooned. Lund, and Betts, (1999), have dubbed it "the hot-bed of the World". Since antiquity, geostrategic significance have heralded a protracted conflict of interest. This scenario has led to massive exodus of refugees thereby culminating to humanitarian crisis. An overview of the horn of Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia included, reveals a porous environment pervaded by incessant acrimony. Shaky relationships exist between Federal Government of Somalai and the militia group-Al Shaabab. South Sudan and Sudan have been embroiled in endless political and ethnic quagmire. In Central Africa Republic the Seleka group have had a series of protracted fight with the government. Belligerency has gained sway. There is a paradigm shift in conflict triggers and propagation.

The state centric view is slowly amorphing into white elephant and new players are rising on board, the non-state entities (Mbugua, 2013).

Conflict Typologies

The study also sought to underscore the types of conflict witnessed in the study areas. Figure 1.3 demonstrates the types of conflict that various ethnic groups have been involved in. The study found out that 79 (23.90%) of the respondents argued that, natural resources were a cause of conflict in the study areas. Additionally, 43 (13%) of the respondents affirmed that politically instigated violence were also a cause of conflict that affect the residents of the study areas. A majority of the respondents, 168 (50.80%) averred that ethnic conflict was more pronounced and ethnic tensions and misgivings caused conflicts. The researcher also found out that 34 (10.30%) of the respondents reasoned that militia groups were a source of conflict. Conversely, only 7 (2.10%) stated that climatic issues were causes of conflict.

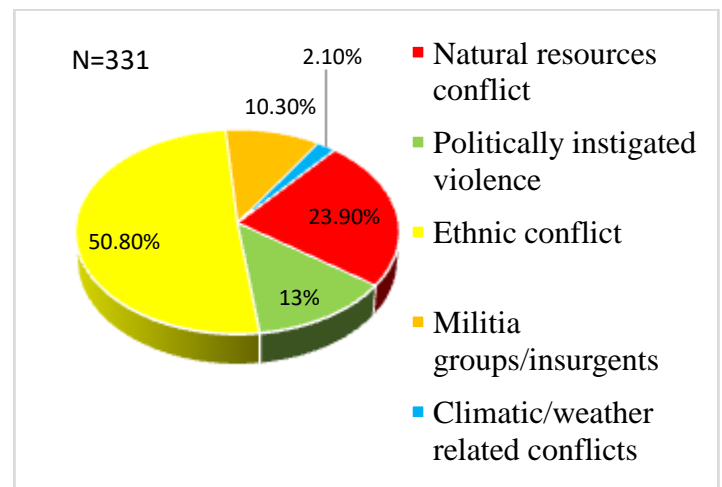


Figure 1.3 Types of conflicts experienced in the study areas

Source: Field Data, 2019.

Natural resource conflict is mainly triggered by scarcity. The findings are in line with Kimani (2008) who denotes that scarcity of resources has attributed to the shrinkage of the resource base and the undermining of seasonal migration as a major coping strategy that has fuelled interethnic /clan conflict. Resource-based conflicts cut across both the direct resource users, including pastoralists, cultivators or developers; as well as indirect users such as businessmen such as those involved in livestock marketing; sale of harvested fodder; harvesting and marketing of natural salt-licks; politicians, warlords, chiefs and other local administrators (Hagmann, 2003). However, the resource-based conflicts have also been linked to increasing frequency and severity of droughts. This is akin to climatic related conflict.

The indications are based on analysis of rainfall amounts and patterns which are seen to have significantly decreased both in amounts, spatial and seasonal coverage within and between years (Homer-Dixon, 1999).

The foregoing findings are further supported by Kane *et al.* (2012) who notes that political competition among political elites, intended settlement of political scores, and political polarization/instigation (for instance when district borders are divided without consideration of pastoralist issues of communal land ownership and access to resources – Kane *et al.* (2012); attitudes, prejudices, cultural beliefs and practices (for instance, taunting of youth by women, insults and abusive songs which incite communities to fight have been listed as causes of conflict.

Poor infrastructure and inadequate basic socio-economic infrastructure development across the border due to political instigation has been cited as one of the key root causes of Borana, Garri, Kona, Gabra and Burji conflict (Gakuria, 2013).

Notably, conflicts have taken political dimensions, particularly when linked to issues of land boundaries and cross-border ethnic representation in the leadership of civic, constituency and administrative institutions (Integrated Agriculture Development Consultant, 2009).

In other studies, Cilliers (2018) avers that though political violence has decreased in the horn of Africa, politics is largely cited as one of the major cause of conflict in Moyale. Clan supremacy and chauvinism plays a big role in any political relations in Marsabit County. People who want political positions rallied their clans against others. Clan affiliation resulted into the politics of exclusiveness, excessive rivalry between clans as they struggled for their favorite's sons to ascend into the national assembly and glory, power, resources and belonging. The political clan affiliations explain the characteristics of violence in Moyale. However, in the face of clan chauvinism, harmonious relationships are destroyed. Chauvinists ally themselves with politicians who are seeking votes and in an atmosphere of divide and rule and complete impunity, violence produces strange relationships.

Militia group across the border have also taken advantage of shaky relations between Kenyan government and the Al-Shabaab. A proliferation of weapons in Moyale has also been blamed as a cause of conflict in the district. As the warlords continue to pursue their personal objectives, the state of affairs in Somalia orchestrated high flow of weapons into Kenya due to the porous nature of the border. Hargesia and Burao in Somalia have become flourishing arms markets from where arms find their way to Kenya. The abundance of weapons changed the face of criminal activities in the region as cattle rustlers, bandits and rebel groups acquired weapons from Somalia. Cattle rustling and banditry have changed from low intensity to high intensity conflict making large areas of the Horn ungovernable. However, the small arms themselves do not cause conflict or criminal activities, but their availability in a volatile environment causes the violence." (Hagmann, 2003)

Furthermore the easy access to firearms accelerated the conflict in Moyale. The weapons are easily traded across adjacent borders of neighboring war-torn countries. Access to arms coupled with poverty increased the scale of cattle rustling, the rate of fatalities in conflicts over pasture and water, and fosters highway banditry. Secondly, the general lack of security since the collapse of the Said Barre regime in 1991, forced herders to obtain arms to protect their livestock. The exact causes of conflict differed from area to area, depending on the conditions of the soil and the amount of water and rainfall. Furthermore, the arid lands are inhabited by various ethnic groups that adhere to different values and socio-political systems. Consequently, their patterns in natural resource usage may be at odds with one another hence leading to eruption of conflict due to environmental pressure (Hagmann, 2003).

Ethiopian government and insurgency-related violence in Kenya is nebulous. Northern Kenya has suffered episodes of insecurity and political violence linked to cross-border spillover of armed struggles in Ethiopia. This is linked to the fact that ethnic-based insurgencies opposing the Ethiopian government have a presence on both the Ethiopian and Kenya side of the border, allowing them to use Kenya as a safe haven and base for recruitment and fund-raising. One, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), is active in Boran-inhabited portions of Kenya, including Marsabit County (Little, 2005).

The other, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), is a Somali insurgency with strong support from the large Ogaden clan that resides in eastern Ethiopia, parts of southern Somalia and parts of northern Kenya (mainly Garissa County and southern portions of Wajir County). The OLF does not directly base operations out of Kenya, but its supporters are able to reside in Kenya, fundraise and do business there. Garissa town is in particular viewed as a hub of OLF sympathizers, Ogaden refugees from Ethiopia and ONLF members (Little, 2005).

The Ethiopian government has sought to neutralize this cross border threat in several ways, all of which produce armed violence inside Kenya. In several cases, Ethiopian security forces have crossed over the border in “hot pursuit” of the OLF, resulting in Kenyan casualties (Abdulrahman, 2006). More frequently, Ethiopian-backed clan paramilitaries composed of communal groups that are rivals of the Oromo are sent across the border to attack the OLF and Boran targets, in the process advancing both their clan interests and those of the Ethiopian government. Northern Kenyans frequently complain that the communal violence that takes place is the result of armed elements from inside Ethiopia (though the narrative on the Ethiopian side of the border is that political and communal violence tends to emanate from Kenya). Operatives or local hit-men have also allegedly been contracted to engage in targeted assassinations and abductions. One of the most dramatic of these occurred in January 2014, when two members of an OLF delegation engaged in low-level talks with Ethiopian government representatives in Nairobi were abducted and transferred to Ethiopia. Subsequently two Kenyan policemen were arrested and charged with aiding in the abductions. The OLF has also been accused of engaging in attacks against rival communities inside Kenya (Abdulrahman, 2006).

The researcher, therefore, argues that, the spillover of Ethiopian government and insurgency violence into northern Kenya is especially dangerous when clan or ethnic paramilitaries are used as tools of government security objectives, as they run a high risk of inflaming wider communal violence in northern Kenya.

Magnitude of the Conflict

In deciphering the nature of conflict across the study area, the study sought to ascertain the magnitude of the conflicts witnessed in the study area. Table 1.1 reveals the extent to which conflict has affected the residents.

Table 1. 1 Magnitude of the conflict

Variable	Category	N	%
Magnitude of conflict experienced	Brutal	276	83.4
	Less Brutal	40	12.1
	None	15	4.5

Source: Field Data, 2019

As illustrated in table 1.1, majority of the respondents 276 (83.4%) contended that conflict meted upon them was brutal. Additionally, 40 (12.1%) stated that conflict was less brutal and 15 (4.5%) did not categorize the magnitude of conflict in the study area. This implied that they have hardly been affected by conflict or are simply unaware of matters pertaining to conflict. In every society conflict occurs, the effects could be devastating or less disturbing. In the case of Kenya and Ethiopia and specifically in the study area, conflict is ubiquitous. IGAD has been lackadaisical and not intervened

appropriately. Other scholars such Mwagiru (1997) have argued that its role is obscure and cannot handle other conflict issues other than drought and climate-related phenomena.

Length of the time lived in the areas

The study also sought to ascertain the duration of stay of the residents in the study area. As illustrated in figure 1.4, majority of the respondents, 217 (65.60%) indicated that they have stayed in the area for less than a year. Besides, 91 (27.50%) stated that they had stayed for one year and 14 (4.20%) opined that they had stayed for more than a year.

These findings indicate that the migratory patterns are nebulous and unpredictable due to recurrence of conflicts. For instance, those who had stayed for less than a year, had just ran from other regions in such of pasture and new habitation.

Some were seeking new hideouts due to several ambushes by both governments to flush out insurgents. Those who stayed over a year demonstrated certain levels of resilience in coping with re-emerging conflicts and had placed several mechanisms of dealing with conflict.

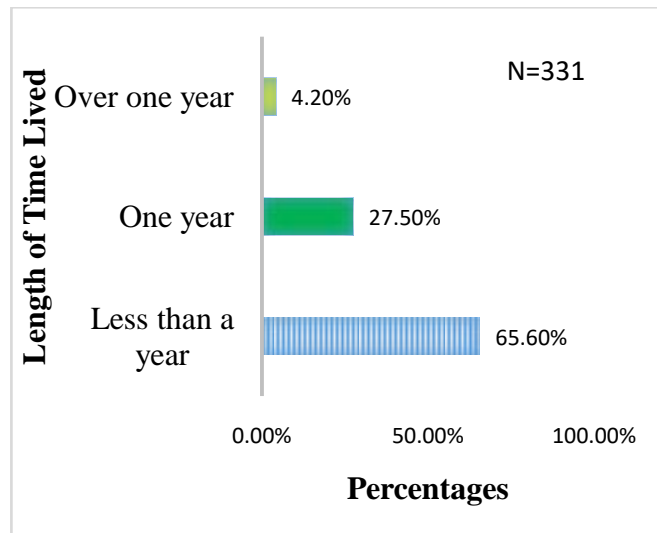


Figure 1. 4 Length of the time lived

Source: Field Data, 2019

The rise in local population and the increasing number of people immigrating into an area in search of pasture and habitation and other business related activities have put pressure on the livelihood systems and pitted ethnic groups against one another and as a result of these socio-economic pressures, ethnic conflict have become inevitable (Bevan, 2007).

This has been the situation in the Darfur conflicts where for over four decades environmental pressures, and population pressure coupled with political marginalization have led to the creation of ethnically distinct militias that have led to the recurrent conflict in the region (Young, 2007).

In support of the foregoing research, one of the chiefs reasoned that:

There are a number of ethnic groups along the border and beyond. Some have stayed over years, some just one year or less. Their presence and interaction with local residents has been a source of conflict and re-occurring conflicts. Those who have stayed for many years feel aggrieved of the newly arrived members trigger conflict. However, the big question circumnavigates around resource. Whose it is? Who should own what, when and why? Are resources communal or individual or state's? (Interview with chief, 10/5/2019, Moyale).

The foregoing revelation is akin to Darfur situation (Young, 2007). Young opines that due to endless conflict there has been witnessed migratory patterns with shifting agenda. Those who move to occupy new territories do so to gain control of those territories. This aggravates the situation and conflict continue.

Common Signs of Conflict

The study sought to find out the common signs of conflict in the study area. As evident in figure 1.5, majority of the respondents, 130 (39.30%) stated that ethnic tensions were an indication of conflict occurring. Additionally, 97 (29.30%) of the respondents reasoned that poverty levels were indicators of conflict emerging in the study area. The study also found out that unemployment was a likely sign of unemployment with 60 (18.10%) of the respondents agreeing to this finding. Synonymous findings of 14 (4.20%) for both government policies and militarization of sub-regions indicated respondents' awareness of the existing relationship between the government and its institutions. The study also found out that refugee migratory patterns were also a sign for conflict within the study areas. Out of 331, 16 (4.80%) of respondents stated that refugee migratory patterns were indeed a sign of conflict.

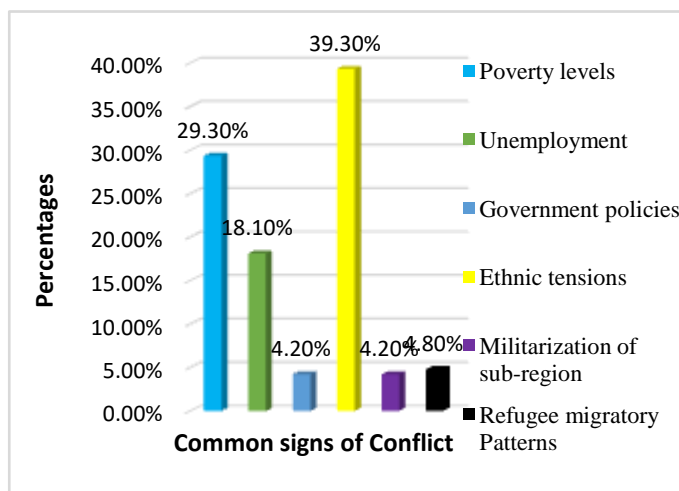


Figure 1. 5 Common signs of Conflict

Source: Field data, 2019

The foregoing discussion was supported by one of the key informants who stated that:

Ethnic feuds are common affair within our communities. They arise from deepening contest over scarce resources and diminishing livestock. For example, the Oromo of Ethiopia raid the Borana of Kenya and this prompts retaliatory attacks. Political outcomes across the border also has triggered ethnic tensions. Apparently no single political leader comes out to ease the tension. Some politician are benefitting from the tensions by courting support from their adherents. Unemployment is another sign for conflict. The economic outcomes affect young people who look for jobs without success. Young people end up being idle. Consequently, they indulge in criminal activities to find something to subsist upon. (Interview with representative at IGAD offices Nairobi, 16/4/2019)

Another discussion from the FGD also reiterated the foregoing interview. The FGD participants opined that:

Frequent migration of the nomad-like groups have occasioned conflict scenarios. The movement destabilizes social structures and this affect the cohesion levels. Consequently, erosion of culture set bounds loose and conflict ensues. The migrations patterns majorly involves the refugees who are seeking asylum. Some of them are reportedly militia's sympathizers. This situation has aggravated the role of the local chiefs and ascertaining the identity of community members. (FGD participants at Moyale, 14/4/2019).

The prevenient discussion is an indication that common signs of conflict in the study area are awash with multiple factors. These factors are cross-cutting and contagious in nature. Besides, government policies such as *Nyumba Kumi* have to certain extent brewed suspicion and mistrust. This has been witnessed amongst Borana, Garri and Kona communities. Whereas Ethiopian government is lauded for putting a robust community policing, border porosity is still a great concern on security mechanism. The foregoing position is held by Botha (2013) who observes that the police have a critical role of engaging with local communities to increase their ability to identify individuals at risk of falling to the hands of the insurgents.

Nyumba Kumi initiative also known as community policing, which is associated with streamlining security matters as well as managing conflict among communities, is a factor bereft with numerous hurdles. The reasons for failing to share information with the police officers included lack of confidence in the country's legal system and fear of intimidation by the police. The respondents believed that some public are not convinced that the witness protection machinery is sufficient enough to cushion whistle blowers. Mkutu's *et al* (2014) argument, correspond to the immediate claim, that, protection Act needs fastening in order to help gathering sufficient intelligence needed to avert conflict. They opine among other issues, that the public complain about

failure of rapid response to crime and police brutality stymies against fighting violence instigated by militia.

Frequency of conflict occurrence

This sought to establish the duration taken between one conflict and another as far as recurring of conflict in the study area, is concerned. The result were as shown in table 4.3

Table 1.2 Frequency of conflict occurrence

Variable	Category	N	%
Frequency of the conflict occurrence	Weekly basis	22	6.6
	Monthly basis	80	24.2
	After for months	59	17.8
	Once a year	94	28.4
	Others	76	23.0

Source: Field Data, 2019

The results revealed that 59 (17.8%) of the respondents were of the opinion that conflicts occurred after several months, 94 (28.4%) indicated that the conflicts occurred every year, 80 (24.2%) indicated that the conflicts occurred monthly while 22 (6.6%) indicated that the conflicts occurred weekly.

In support of these results, the local chiefs reiterated the fact that the porous border is a conduit for conflict due to the fact that the cross-border communities, more often than not, move in search of pasture. They also acknowledged the fact that some communities engaged in cattle rustling. In 2017 and 2018, a number of attacks were orchestrated by Oromo Militias leading to loss of lives and great economic loss.

To support the foregoing discussion, an interview with one of the key informants stated that:

Tunashuhudia uhasama kil awiki ,kila mwezi na kila mwaka.Kundi haramu la Oromo linawashambulia wakenya kila wakati.Tumekosa utulivu.Wakati mwingine mashambulizi yanasababisha vifo na kupotea kwa mali zetu.Hali hii inachangia kutokuwepo kwa usalama wa kutosha.

(We experience conflict every week, every month and every year. Oromo militias invade Kenya every time. We lack stability. Sometimes these invasions cause deaths and massive loss of property. Thus state of affairs has been aggravated by absence of security (Interview with key Informant,9/5/2019).

Just as South Sudan has been dubbed “ellipse of instability”, despite ongoing efforts to return to normalcy, Kenya and Ethiopia border is an example of a region characterized by incessant social and political upheavals. The Borana and Gabri and the Oromo of Ethiopia have continued to fight over resources. As Cilliers (2018) opines, violence is the key denominator of most African borders.

The motivating factors that occasion cross-border clashes

The study sought to investigate what factors have been sustaining the cross-border conflict between Kenya and Ethiopia. Accordingly, the major factor as reported by the respondents was found to be; tribalism/ ethnic intolerance driven by political incitements, this was followed by lack of will from the two crashing parties, external interference, greed for power/power struggle, historical injustices such as marginalization, colonialism, dependency syndrome, social cultural dynamics and IGAD member states and Secretariat display their lack of a genuine grasp of Kenya-Ethiopia conflict (lack of neutrality of IGAD).

As illustrated in figure 1.6, the study found out that historical injustices were more pronounced in the study areas and were largely attributed as trigger factor to conflicts. Out of 331 respondents, 151 (45.6%) of the respondents reasoned that historical injustices were a trigger factor. Additionally, 95 (28.7%) of the respondents argued that resource issues caused conflicts. Besides, 26 (7.9%) of the respondents averred that conflict was triggered by political incitement.

Vigilante groups were also believed to be triggering conflict, with 27 (8.1%) of the respondents agreeing to this. The study also found out that 13 (3.9%) of the respondents stated that discrimination was a trigger factor to conflict in the study areas. Disturbingly, the study found that 12 (3.6%) of the respondents were vaguely knowledgeable about the trigger factors of conflict.

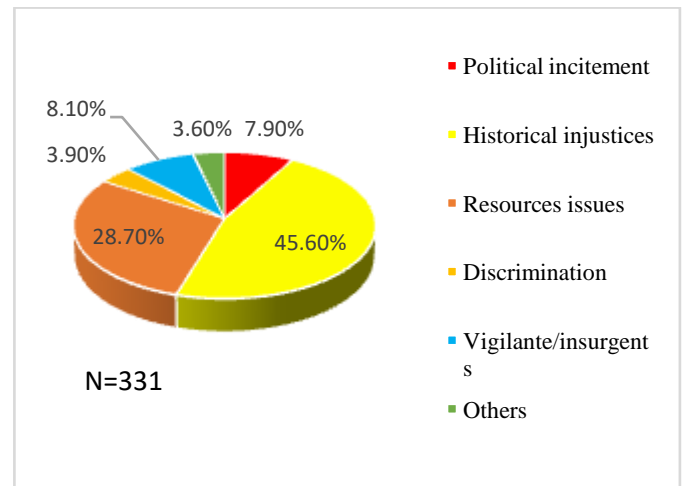


Figure 1.6 Trigger factors that occasion cross-border clashes

Source: Field Data, 2019

The foregoing was reiterated by one of the Key informants who stated that:

While conflicts between groups were managed relatively successful in the past through customary land tenure systems, this is less and less the case today as a result of larger herds, reduced water and pasture, instability and prejudices stirred up by the war, and a proliferation of arms among herders. In addition, patron-client politics, weak natural resource

management and development policies, and top-down government institutions have encouraged ethnic polarization and social divisions. (An interview with key informant at Oromia Region, Ethiopia on 15/4/2019).

The foregoing resonates with Gakuria's finding (2013). Gakuria argues that resources are a major trigger factor to conflicts. People fight over resources. Various groups strive to control and acquire new resources. Historically, this has been the situation for the conflicting groups across Kenya and Ethiopia border. Therefore, people's belief ingrain them to traditions and norms that are hard to change.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the nature of cross-border conflict between Kenya and Ethiopia is community driven and ethnically inclined. Further, the study has underscored salient triggers of conflict as politically motivated, ethnic-based and resource based. The study has also found out that cross-border conflicts are frequently witnessed across the border with common signs seeming inevitable.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that all the major causal factors should be addressed by both Kenyan and Ethiopian governments with the help of community members who are the most affected by the cross-border conflicts. The capacity of security personnel should be bolstered and ethnic groups and community members encouraged to work with the security personnel through community policing and *Nyumba kumi* initiatives.

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