

## Effects of Interethnic Conflicts on Rural People's Livelihoods in Kenya - Case of Kenyenyia and Rongo Sub-Counties in the Lake Victoria Basin

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### Abstract

This study sought to establish the effects of interethnic conflict on Rural People's Livelihoods in Kenyenyia and Rongo Sub-counties, Lake Victoria Basin, Kenya. The specific objective was to investigate the effects of interethnic conflicts on livelihoods of people along the border. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target Population consisted of 3940 households along the borders of Kenyenyia and Rongo Sub-counties. 434 households consisting of 10% of the target population were selected using simple random sampling and while 32 key informants were purposeful selected. Data was collected from primary source using the local people who have been affected by the ethnic conflict. Data was collected using questionnaire and interview schedules and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic data analysis (content analysis) while the quantitative data was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. The findings were presented in frequency distribution tables and graphs. It was established that there is ethnic conflict along the borders of Kenyenyia and Rongo borders involving the Luo, Kisii and Maasai Communities. The findings established that inter-ethnic conflict along the borders affected the smooth running economic activities of the people. The inter-ethnic conflict caused loss of income to the victims of violence. There was also disruption of trade during the conflicts. The study recommended the need to establish a peace building process along the borders of Kenyenyia and Rongo Sub-counties among grass communities to improve their role in ethnic conflict resolution. Since historical days, traditional institutions were important in creating peace, security, law and order.

**Keywords:** Interethnic conflicts; Rural people's livelihood; Socio-economic development and conflict resolution strategies

### Introduction

Ethnicity has been cited as being a major cause for the inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa [1]. In the Kenyan context, Barasa [2] asserts that most Kenyan districts are haunted by actual or potential ethnic conflicts. This is partly because of the fact that different communities continue to consciously or unconsciously rely on ethnicity to perpetuate their dominance and hegemony in an atmosphere characterized by scarce resources, fear and prejudice. The proliferation of ethnic conflicts in the country is so widespread that there is hardly any region where the problem has not reared its ugly head: Western, Rift Valley, Nyanza, Coast, Central, North Eastern, Eastern and even Nairobi are such areas. The necessity for a new vision in approaching the issue of ethnic conflicts and their management cannot therefore be overemphasized in this context. From the recent experience as well as studies carried out on ethnic conflicts in Kenya and the Greater Horn of Africa, there is increasing evidence to suggest that even where it has been brought under control psychological trauma (i.e. fear and suspicion) left behind are seldom healed, especially among children and women.

A comprehensive study on the conflicts has been done by Oucho who not only cites land grievances, but also environmental and demographic issues especially population pressure and environmental

degradation, as well as colonial legacy among other factors as undercurrents of ethnic conflict in Kenya. This research acknowledges the contribution of the above authors as well as many others in providing significant information about ethnic conflicts in Kenya. Similarly, Barasa [2] in his research on the impact of past and potential ethnic conflicts on Kenyan's stability and Socio-economic development agrees that given the Kenya's diverse ethnic and cultural features and the impact of colonial principle of divide and rule as well as the impact of the recent introduction of multi-party politics, there is an urgent need to examine the potential dangers of inter-ethnic animosity in Kenya. Of this research conducted, none has been conducted in south Nyanza region and in the current political and economic setup.

The effect of interethnic conflict in Kenya has been felt in the South Nyanza region, in this region the Maasai, Kisii and Luo communities share boundaries. These communities have lived with a number of stereotypes. They engage in different economic activities; the Maasai engage in livestock keeping while the other communities in crop farming. For a long time, there has been ethnic tension among the tribes which has resulted in interethnic conflict. One such conflict was witnessed in 1992 where a number of lives and property was lost. Equally, in 2014 conflict between the Kisii community and the Maasai which led to loss of life and property. Most of the authors have however, focused more on the Rift Valley Province of Kenya.

The clashes at the South Nyanza region for example have received little attention. In addition the issue of inter-ethnic conflicts as a recurrent phenomenon with multifaceted dimensions since the early

1990s has received little focus in most research. The frequent occurrence of violent inter-ethnic conflict and its devastating impact on human security and well-being make this problem an important matter for study. At the same time, the persistence of inter-ethnic violence suggests that there is still much work to be done in terms of understanding why such violence arises, effects on socio-economic activities and how it can be resolved. Therefore it is against this background that this study seeks to establish the effects of interethnic conflict on the Socio-economic development along the Kenyena and Rongo borders of Nyanza region, Kenya.

### Statement of the problem

The effect of interethnic conflict in Kenya has been felt in the South Nyanza region, in this region the Maasai, Kisii and Luo communities share boundaries. For instance in the year 1999-2000, clashes along the Kisii-Transmara led to death of 14 people, in 2000-2001 the clashes were experienced among the Kisii and Luo communities killing at least 26 people along Kenyena-Rongo border. Equally, in 2012-2013 conflict along the borders of Kisii South, Rongo, Kenyena and Transmara between the Kisii, Luo and Maasai communities, leading to 33 people losing lives and over 200 having their property destroyed. The communities live in antagonistic relationships which over the years have resulted to sour relationships more especially along the Kisii South, Kenyena, Transmara and Rongo borders in South Nyanza region. It's against this background that this study sought to establish the effects of interethnic conflict on rural people's livelihoods and identify the inter-ethnic conflict resolution applied along the borders of Kenyena and Rongo Sub-Counties in Kenya.

### Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study were to;

- Establish the effects of interethnic conflict on rural people's livelihoods in Kenyena and Rongo Sub-counties, Lake Victoria Basin, Kenya.
- Find out the interethnic conflict resolution strategies applied along the borders of Kenyena and Rongo Sub-counties.

### Literature Review

#### Effects of interethnic conflict on rural people's livelihoods

Livelihood failure can contribute to the emergence of conflict by weakening the social fabric of a community making people resort to inter violence in order to obtain necessary resources, and increasing individuals' vulnerability to those with an interest in promoting conflicts for political or economic gain [3]. At the same time, conflict is a major threat to livelihoods. Conflict restricts or blocks access to one or more of these assets. When this happens, people try to find other ways of obtaining those resources, or compensate for the loss of one resource by intensifying their efforts to secure another.

Wars and conflicts in Africa have combined to compound the problem of unemployment in the continent. Today, throughout Africa, high rate of unemployment, particularly of youths, is a major source of concern. It has been growing at an annual rate of 10%. In countries coming out of conflict, many young people not only lack employment; they have also been denied education and economic empowerment because of war. It is instructive to note that without other means of economic support, there is a danger that unemployed former

combatants will engage in criminal behavior, especially with the many small arms in circulation in war-torn countries.

Continued strife and political instability in most countries of Africa hurt the continent's economic fortunes. Indeed, the disruptive impact of war and crisis on the economy of Africa has been considerable. The political stalemate and periodic eruptions of violence have resulted in significant cumulative declines in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This problem has been compounded by the frequent recurrence of drought in some sub-regions of Africa. Prospective investors in Africa have been turned away of fear of instability, low profit and loss of investment to looting and arson during wars. Hence, the persistent failure to raise investment rates have translated into low GDP growth rates which had ranged between 3 and 4 percent for several years as against the 7 percent annual growth required to reduce poverty and reach the Millennium Socio-economic development goals. This has promoted poverty across Africa. As at 2003, an estimated 340 million Africans were living below poverty line. In all, the persistence of low growth rates across Africa means that most countries will not be able to make significant reductions in the 50% of their populations that fall below the poverty line.

#### Interethnic conflict resolution strategies

According to other critical scholars like, Baldwins, Markakis, Murungi and Amutabi [4,5] numerous resolutions or management strategies have been attempted, but none of them seems sustainable in creating an atmosphere for peace, security and inter-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic co-existence in Africa. As Markakis [4] put it, ethnic conflict in Africa is a many sided violent struggle waged at several levels. It involves nations, regions, ethnic groups, clans, lineages, and is fought between and within states, religious and ethnic groups. Amutabi [5] cautions us from viewing ethnicity as a scourge only in Africa. To him, this is basically a Eurocentric interpretation of the African lifestyle. He adds that, "We need to move away from the state of despair and hopelessness towards more practical solutions by enhancing the existing positive ethnic structures.

According to Gertzel [6], it is the primary task of the leadership to integrate the many groups in society, divided though they may be on class, ethnic, regional, economic, political and religious lines into a new national entity. He, like Amutabi, holds the point of view that it would be too much if politicians were to be relied upon in eradicating ethnic tensions as these underlie their survival, Amutabi [5].

Peace building is a process that needs trust and confidence. If this trust and confidence has been damaged due to decades of violent conflict, how are family disputes or disputes between communities being dealt with? There is growing recognition that an important part of the answer lies in the customary role of elders and village chiefs as peacemakers. Traditionally, the chiefs or village elders were either asked to intervene or respond to different levels of conflict and they acted as a channel of communication between the parties including family members, communities or clans. They were also responsible for negotiating and implementing deals, including the collection of fines. If a deal or agreement involved the payment of blood money or return of stolen cattle, it was the chief or elder who supervised the 'transaction'. Community support for a peaceful solution to the problem was nurtured through discussions. More effort now needs to be made to revitalize and strengthen these traditional approaches for conflict resolution, as these will be important foundations for other civil administrative and community-based approaches for sustained peace building, ICG report. Other players have also put in place a

number of interethnic conflict resolution strategies. Some of the players are faith based organizations such as the churches, the Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the Government.

International and local actors' attention has been focused on dealing with conflicts in Africa. Conflict management and prevention are carried out by many actors (domestic and external) in the international arena to deal with conflict issues in Africa. Actors such as the United Nations Organization, African Union, Economic Community of West African States, individual states or groups of states, Religious Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), among others, have been involved in conflict prevention in Africa. This was done in many ways including the use or deployment of security forces for peace-enforcement purposes. In the 1990s alone, "the United Nations Security Council has sent nine peacekeeping missions to Africa" [7]. The continent itself has also played a prominent role in organizing peacekeeping forces to forestall conflicts in many parts of Africa [7].

According to Mc Onyango [8], African inter-ethnic conflicts are not as a result of the mere fact that the continent and national boundaries are brackets enclosing multi-ethnic groups. To him, the question of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts are issues of ethnic grudges. He asserts that the past inter-ethnic conflict management strategies in Africa have tended to concentrate on symptoms of the effects and not the root causes. He further postulates that there are numerous socio-economic and political grudges between or within the numerous ethnic communities in African states. His work augments the earlier works of other scholars like (Achebe and Nyong'o) [9,10].

According to other critical scholars like Markakis, Amutabi and Owen [4,5,8] numerous resolutions or management strategies have been attempted, but none of them seems sustainable in creating an atmosphere for peace, security and inter-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic co-existence in Africa. As Markakis put it, ethnic conflict in Africa is a many sided violent struggle waged at several levels. It involves nations, regions, ethnic groups, clans, lineages, and is fought between and within states, religious and ethnic groups.

Tishkov and Rupesinghe explore conflict and conflict resolution approaches in the Horn of Africa, former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, India, the Basque region of Spain among other areas. They argue that historically disputed territories can bring about conflicts between ethnic groups. The authors also note that uneven development within a country can create tensions between ethnic groups especially if there are perceptions that one of the groups is favoured by the state. Another core argument contained in this work is that political elites have been found to play a critical role in inter-ethnic conflicts. The idea of historically contested areas, uneven development as well as the role of political elites will be useful in understanding the causes of violence in the area of study.

## Methodology

This study was conducted through a descriptive survey research design. The design involved establishing the effects of interethnic conflict on Rural People's Livelihoods in Kenyena and Rongo Sub-counties, Lake Victoria Basin, Kenya. The specific objective was to investigate the effects of interethnic conflicts on livelihoods of people along the border. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target Population consisted of 3940 households along the borders of Kenyena and Rongo Sub-counties. 434 households consisting of 10% of the target population were selected using simple

random sampling and while 32 key informants were purposeful selected. This sample size was appropriate according to Gay and Dielh, who states that for descriptive research a sample of 10% of the large population is considered minimum while a sample of 20% may be required for smaller populations. Data was collected from primary source using the local people who have been affected by the ethnic conflict. Data was collected using questionnaire and interview schedules and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic data analysis (content analysis) while the quantitative data was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. The findings were presented in frequency distribution tables and graphs

## Results and Findings

### Effects of inter-ethnic conflict on economic activities and development

It was in the interest of the researcher through this study to establish the effects of inter-ethnic conflict on economic activities and people's livelihoods in the study area. The results are as indicated in Table 1.

Economic Effects	Frequency	Percentage
Loss of Income	391	91.8
Disruption of Trade	378	88.7
Disruption of Agricultural Activities	385	90.4
Other effects	145	34

Source: Based on Field Data, 2015

**Table 1:** Effects of inter-ethnic conflict on economic activities and development.

The result in Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents observed that inter-ethnic conflict affected the smooth running economic activities of the people. 91.8% of the respondents observed that the conflict caused loss of income to the victims of violence. Also 88.7% of the respondents reported that there was disruption of trade during the conflicts. There was disruption of links to major markets such as Rongo town, Kilgoris, Etago and Riosiri for their farm produce and commodities. The lack of markets for their agricultural products made many people to abandon farming during the conflict periods. Also 90.4% of respondents reported that there was disruption of agricultural activities while 34.0% reported that there are other effects such as loss of employment and increase in household poverty levels. One of the effects of the ethnic violence was that land that was previously used for farming and keeping was abandoned by the owners because of frequent clashes along the borders. The frequent disruption of farming activities led to poor yields and loss of income to a majority of the small-scale farmers. Due to border conflicts, many victims spent little time cultivating their farms and reduced the number of their livestock because they feared losing them to cattle rustlers.

The majority of key informants and opinion leaders reported frequent inter-ethnic violence affects the livelihoods of the border residents in many ways. It affects the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in the sense that when clashes break out most of them are unable to access their farms to cultivate, plant or harvest their crops. Secondly, access to nearby Rongo, Riosiri and Kilgoris market centers

is a major problem during clashes. Farmers who are able to harvest their crops are faced with the problem of getting their farm products to the markets because the road network is also disrupted. The disputes over farmlands among the Luo and Kisii communities along the border have cost many residents their livelihoods.

The findings are in agreement to Kusimi and Brukum [11], in a paper on conflicts in Northern Ghana, have expressed the view that violent clashes in that part of the country affect economic development (destruction of farms and produce; prevents cultivation of lands; disrupt economic activities; discourage investment, labour flow and tourism). They also assert that conflicts in the region affect educational levels and divert government's attention from tackling pressing national issues relating to development, to restoring peace and order.

These findings also concur with Awedoba that economic activities such farming and trade ground to a halt as people lived in constant fear in Nigeria. Sale of yams produced by the majority of farmers became a

problem because the yam buyers who were mostly from the South feared to go to the area. The glut of the produce significantly reduced rural incomes. Crops could not be harvested and many of the harvests were left on the farms to rot. It also agrees with Mbowura [12] that some farmers in Nigeria could not prepare land for the cultivation of foodstuff. Obviously, in the short and long runs, this affected agricultural activities in the area due to lack of planting materials and incentives, neglect of farms and many others which had serious implications for the country at large.

### Effects of Inter-ethnic conflicts on infrastructure development

The study sought to establish the effects of inter-ethnic conflicts on health facilities, schools, markets, roads and other infrastructures. The results are as indicated in Table 2.

Infrastructure	Not Destructive		Least Destructive		Moderately Destructive		Destructive		Very Destructive	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Health Centers	5	1.2	18	4.2	23	5.3	44	10.2	337	79.1
Schools	8	1.8	9	2.2	60	14	89	20.8	261	61.2
Markets	12	2.9	13	3.1	29	6.9	50	11.7	321	75.4
Roads	6	1.5	14	3.3	39	9.1	130	30.4	237	55.7
Others	2	0.4	8	1.9	12	2.9	144	33.7	260	61.1

Source: Field Data, 2015

**Table 2:** Effects of Inter-ethnic conflicts on infrastructure development.

Majority of the households reported that the ethnic conflict is either destructive or very destructive to the infrastructure as shown in Table 2. The infrastructural facilities in the borders of Kenyena and Rongo Sub-Counties have clearly been affected by the frequent inter-ethnic violence.

The opinion leaders and key informants were of the view that ability of the county government and constituency development fund to provide infrastructural facilities has been affected by the frequent ethnic conflicts. Observation at such facilities as markets, roads, clinics and schools in the study area shows that most of them are in a bad situation and need improvement.

### Stakeholders and mechanisms in conflict resolution in the study area

The study sought to establish the mechanisms and the stakeholders that could be used to resolve the ethnic conflict along the borders of Kenyena and Rongo Sub-Counties. The suggestions were made in both closed and open ended questions in the questionnaire.

Majority the respondents (98%) were of the opinion that the conflict along the borders of Kenyena and Rongo Sub-Counties could be resolved. The result further indicated that 73.4% of the respondents suggested that the national government should be involved in conflict resolution, 46.7% said that the county government should be involved, 88.9% suggested local community leaders, 93.7% suggested community

members, 58.3% suggested that the church could help to resolve the conflict while 91.5% said involving the NGOs/civil societies and 33.1% indicated other stakeholders such as the business community who could help in the inter-ethnic conflict resolution along the borders of Kenyena and Rongo Sub-Counties. The involvement of the national government, local community leaders, community members themselves and civil society organizations was the most highly supported strategy to the inter-ethnic conflict resolution. This would help the stakeholders to own the resolution process.

The findings concur with Adan and Pkalya [13] that council of elders were given much respect and recognition both at the local and government level because these elders were regarded as trustworthy and knowledgeable people in community affairs and thus were placed in a position to make binding decisions. In a bid to fuse traditional mechanisms into modern conflict management strategies, the council of elders was given an upper hand under the Land Dispute Tribunals Acts of 1990 to take final decisions on matters of land.

### Conflict resolution initiatives to address the inter-ethnic conflict in the study area

The research sought to establish the current conflict resolution initiatives available to address the inter-ethnic conflict in the study area. The results are as shown in Table 3.



The study revealed that various initiatives have been put in place to resolve the conflict. Majority of the respondents (91.3%) observed that the community based initiatives through community policing and council of elders who involved the residents in electing other elders and youth from every ethnic group in the area to oversee peace meetings and reconciliation. The committees have achieved some significant results especially in the border of Kenyena and Transmara. 58.5% of the households indicated the national and county governments established police posts manned by the Administration Police (AP) in several parts of the borders so as to keep peace in the area. Such a state sponsored peace process has had several weaknesses for example community could not trust the police officers to maintain peace. 23.1% indicated cross-border sports, 15.0% indicated reconciliation of communities, 58.5% indicated job creation for the youths in the area, 91.5% of households indicated peace building initiatives and 34.0% indicated other initiatives such as the need for residents of Kenyena and Rongo to change how they relate to, and direct their attitudes towards one another. The culture of suspicion, fear, mistrust and inter-ethnic violence among the tribes need to be broken down (Table 3).

Conflict resolution initiatives	Frequency	Percentage
Community Based Initiatives	389	91.3
Government Initiatives	249	58.5
Cross-border sports activities	98	23.1
Reconciliation of Communities	62	15
Job Creation for Youths	249	58.5
Peace building initiatives	390	91.5
Other Initiatives	145	34
Source: Based on Field Data, 2015		

**Table 3:** Resolution initiatives to address the inter-ethnic conflicts.

Key informants were of the opinion that the involvement of the council of elders and boundary arbitration committees were crucial in the ethnic conflict resolution. It recognizes the importance of indigenous institutions in conflict resolution. Among the resolutions made by the elders, on behalf of their communities, was a promise to respect each other's culture, traditions and freedoms enshrined in the constitution.

These findings agree with Masinde [13] who recommended in their analysis of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms among the Pokot, Samburu, Marakwet and Turkana. They advise that provision of water, education; sanitation and food security projects by governmental and non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in inter-ethnic conflict resolution among these communities. Drawing from their experience in Kerio Valley, SNV, NCKK and SARDEP [14-28] concurs with the implementation of development projects that improve livelihoods and reduce chances of inter-ethnic violence, further it adds implementing agencies to establish shared resources such as schools and dispensaries between communities as a starting point of inter-community peace-building [29-52].

## Conclusion

The study findings established that inter-ethnic conflict along the borders affected the smooth running economic activities of the people. The inter-ethnic conflict caused loss of income to the victims of violence. There was also disruption of trade during the conflicts. There was disruption of links to major markets such as Rongo town, Kilgoris, Etago and Riosiri for their farm produce and commodities. The lack of markets for their agricultural products made many people to abandon farming during the conflict periods. The frequent disruption of farming activities led to poor yields and loss of income to a majority of the small-scale farmers. Due to border conflicts, many victims spent little time cultivating their farms and reduced the number of their livestock because they feared losing them to cattle rustlers. The findings established that frequent inter-ethnic violence affects the livelihoods of the border residents in many ways. It affects the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in the sense that when clashes break out most of them are unable to access their farms to cultivate, plant or harvest their crops.

On current initiatives on inter-ethnic conflict resolution put in place to resolve the conflict the national and county government have been engaged in many local barazas in effort to resolve the conflict. The involvement of the council of elders and boundary arbitration committees were crucial in the ethnic conflict resolution. It recognizes the importance of indigenous institutions in conflict resolution.

## Recommendations

There is need to strengthen a peace building process along the borders of Kenyena and Rongo Sub-counties among grass communities to improve their role in ethnic conflict resolution. Since historical days, traditional institutions were important in creating peace, security, law and order. The role of council of elders, clan elders and community policing need to be strengthened as they lead groups in making decisions on basis of consensus a factor which both subordinates the interests of the rich and the marginalized. The indigenous conflict resolution institutions operating in the Luo, Maasai and Kisii community need to be recognized and strengthened instead of being ignored as they can be consulted on their view concerning cattle rustling, land, culture conservation and conflict resolution.

The government, Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society groups need to consider offering civic education to Luo, Maasai and Kisii communities on peaceful co-existence and the need to shun ethnic conflict. There is need to offer vocational skills to the youth who are always used to fight wars through incitement from political leaders.

Those political leaders who incite ought to be disqualified from seeking or holding any political and public office in Kenya. There is need for the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) and the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to institute criminal proceedings against some politicians for hate speech and incitement. There is need to improve infrastructures such as access roads along the borders of Kenyena and Rongo as well as with improving the social facilities in this area. This will facilitate accessibility to remote areas hence quick response by law enforcers in case of outbreak of ethnic conflicts in those areas. It was also recommended that there is need to explore new income generating activities in the area.

Finally, perceived historical injustices revolving around land issues and boundary disputes ought to be redressed. The National Land

Commission and IEBC ought to move with speed and streamline land controversies that have haunted residents of the borders of Kenyena and Rongo Sub-counties for many years.

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