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Voices of the People: Understanding Challenges to Peace and Sources of Resilience in Laikipia County

2024



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Cover photo

A glimpse of giraffes in their natural habitat, amidst the stunning landscapes of Laikipia County. Interpeace, 2023.

Back cover

Antelopes grazing across the vast, open plains of Laikipia County. Interpeace, 2023.

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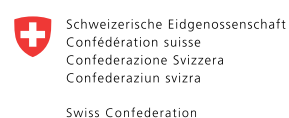


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Job Mwetich
Regional Team Lead
Network for Peace, Cohesion & Heritage Trust

Foreword

Laikipia County is a hub of rich heritage, diverse ecological zones, vibrant communities, and a crossroads of human-wildlife interaction in the heart of Kenya. Beneath this profile of diversity and beauty lies a network of conflicts that have persisted for generations. These complex conflicts are rooted in historical injustices and modern challenges, which continually hinder the region's potential for development and peace.

This research seeks to highlight the main causes of conflict in Laikipia as identified by the communities themselves. By voicing the experiences of the local people and reflecting on their perspectives, it aims to provide a broader and clearer understanding of the multidimensional nature of these conflicts. Major issues include socio-economic and cultural norms and practices, land settlement and migration, insecurity and injustice, unaccountable governance and politics, and environmental stresses and shocks. Each contributing factor is unique, adding to the complexity of the conflict landscape.

Addressing conflict in Laikipia requires more than a piecemeal approach. The prioritised issues in this paper call for the engagement of all stakeholders, from local to state and non-state actors. Key elements for nurturing sustainable peace and development in the region include, just land reform, equitable distribution of resources, good governance, security, and adaptive strategies toward environmental change.

Understanding and addressing the root causes of conflicts from the perspective of those most affected sets the premise for a brighter, more peaceful, and more prosperous Laikipia. This document takes a first step in that direction, emphasizing the importance of a community-based approach and the desire for a collaborative journey toward a better future for all who make up this remarkable region.

Hassan Ismail Mohamed
Country Representative
Interpeace

■ Acronyms and Abbreviations

BATUK	British Army Training Unit Kenya
CBO	Community Based Organisation
KDF	Kenya Defence Force
KWS	Kenya Wildlife Service
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
KII	Key Informant Interview
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
PAR	Participatory Action Research
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
LNC	Laikipia Nature Conservancy
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapon

Executive Summary

The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) and Interpeace joint peacebuilding programme was launched in Mandera in 2014.¹ It subsequently expanded into North Rift, a location traditionally characterised by long standing violence, resource scarcity, and marginalisation. In response to address these insecurity challenges, the NCIC and Interpeace began peacebuilding work in five conflict prone Counties – Baringo, Samburu, Turkana, Elgeyo Marakwet, and West Pokot.² The establishment of these programmes provided opportunities for meaningful peace conversations in the region, with improved relationships between previously warring communities, and the re-opening of roads, schools, hospitals, and markets. Notably, the programme brokered peace agreements between the Turkana and Samburu in 2020, as well as the Pokot and Turkana in 2021 and 2022.

Ahead of Kenya's general election in 2022, Interpeace and Network for Peace, Cohesion and Heritage (NEPCOH) Trust expanded the peacebuilding project into Laikipia County where a complex and longstanding conflict fueled by deep-seated divisions between ethnic communities has been predominant. These conflicts in Laikipia have historically manifested in land disputes, particularly occurring between pastoralists and farmers. Migration, climate change, and irregular settlement patterns are contributing to additional resource scarcity and exacerbating conflict dynamics. The political landscape and governance structures in Laikipia County also play a critical role in driving conflict dynamics, where political rivalries both shape and mirror broader identity-based tensions within society.

It is against this background that Interpeace and the Network for Peace, Cohesion and Heritage (NEPCOH) Trust, programme sought to identify sources of both conflict and community resilience factors in the County. Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, communities from across-conflict affected wards in Laikipia identified a total of 22 causes/drivers of conflict in Laikipia, which the Interpeace and NEPCOH team categorized into five overarching issues: Socio-economic and cultural norms/practices; Land settlement and migration; Insecurity and injustice; Unaccountable governance and politics; and Environmental stresses and shocks. During a validation meeting, participants (including authorities, CSOs, professionals, conservancy leaders and community representatives) identified the following drivers as the main priorities: a) proliferation of small arms and light weapons; b) culture of impunity; c) impact of climate variability; d) migrant herders and farmers from neighbouring counties causing conflict; e) effects of illiteracy; f) disputes over land ownership; g) political marginalisation and historical grievances; h) incitement by elites and political leaders; e) differing socio-economic and cultural norms and practices between ethnic groups; j) human-wildlife conflicts.

The PAR methodology also revealed four valued sources of resilience within communities, each of which play a role in mitigating conflict and preventing escalation: Individual and collective commitments to peace; Local conflict management infrastructures; Responsive governance and inclusive service provision; and Inclusive development. Building on these sources of resilience depends on the commitment of all stakeholders to prioritise and support initiatives that promote peace for all people in Laikipia County. It is our hope that this research report serves as a catalyst for such efforts.

¹ National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), *Voices of the People: Challenges to Peace in Mandera County*, 2017

² <https://www.interpeace.org/2023/04/approaches-to-fostering-peace-in-the-north-rift-region-of-kenya/>

1. Introduction & Context Analysis

Kenya is home to approximately 42 different native ethnic groups with distinct languages and culture.³ Whilst people typically live in peace, Kenya remains fragmented. Socio-economic inequality manifests through significant disparities in wealth, education, and access to basic services (World Bank, 2020). Differences in religious beliefs can flare into violent confrontations, whilst ethnicised political structures can make elections zero-sum and highly fraught. Strong group identities and legacies of intergroup conflict drive cycles of further violence and frame resource-based competition. The frequency and severity of this competition has been exacerbated by growing levels of migration into the County that are causing acute scarcity of land and water. Climatic changes compound the situation, with Laikipia now oscillating between drought and famine.

The areas with the most prevalence of conflicts lie within pastoralist regions of North Rift, Northeastern, and along the borders with Somalia, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. Laikipia County is one of the 14 Counties within the Rift Valley. It borders Samburu County to the North, Isiolo County to the Northeast, Meru County to the East, Nyeri County to the Southeast, Nyandarua County and Nakuru County to the Southwest and Baringo County to the West. It covers an area of 9,462km² and comprises five administrative sub-counties (formerly districts): Laikipia Central, Laikipia East, Laikipia North, Laikipia West and Nyahururu sub-counties. The population has grown steadily, particularly in urban centres, near conservancies, and where there are tourism-related developments.

Laikipia County has a rich pre-colonial history and was home to diverse ethnic groups, notably the Laikipia Maasai and Samburu (Pellis & Duineveld, 2018). Indigenous communities in Laikipia were pastoralists, relying on livestock herding and seasonal migrations (Butt et al, 2009; Galaty, 2013). Land was carefully managed through communal ownership systems, and territorial boundaries were defined by natural landmarks and agreements among diverse groups. Traditional governance structures played a vital role in maintaining order and resolving conflicts.

The colonial era marked a significant turning point in Laikipia's history, as British authorities aimed to consolidate land ownership in the hands of European settlers (Pellis & Duineveld, 2018) and certain areas designated for military use which have continued to be significant post-independence. Following the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902 and the Maasai Agreement of 1904, indigenous communities found themselves dispossessed. This led to intense conflicts that left indelible scars on communities, fostering deep-seated grievances that persisted long after independence. Moreover, the disruption of traditional land management systems and the imposition of Western legal frameworks contributed to the erosion of indigenous land rights, as well as the traditional conflict management systems.

Following Kenya's independence in 1963, the government embarked on a series of land reforms to address these historical injustices (Kibii, 2021). The 2010 constitution introduced a legal framework for land distribution, and in 2016 the government passed the Community Land Act safeguarding traditional systems of customary land tenure (International Crisis Group, 2022). In recent years, the County has gained attention for its innovative community-led conservation efforts. These efforts involve the establishment of wildlife conservancies that aim to promote sustainable livelihoods for local communities through eco-tourism and wildlife management efforts that, at the same time, also contribute to poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation (Western et al. 2017).

3 Samantha Balaton-Chrimes, (2021) Who are Kenya's 42(+) tribes? The census and the political utility of magical uncertainty, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 15:1, 43-62, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17531055.2020.1863642>

While these reforms were designed to rectify past wrongs, they also ushered in new challenges for Laikipia County. For example, given that most of those benefiting from land redistribution belong to the Meru, Kikuyu, or Kisii ethnic groups, there is a sense of alienation among pastoralists belonging to less represented ethnic communities (International Crisis Group, 2022). Further, rapid population growth, increased land fragmentation, and evolving land-use patterns have threatened sustainable land management, and the social structures attached to it. Tensions have been made more dangerous by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which have securitised disputes in a County where security sector responses are already stretched. Gender inequality remains high, as does poverty, illiteracy, and youth unemployment, whilst unaccountable governance delivers services more in accordance with ethnic alignment than need, further entrenching intergroup competition and adding a significant layer of complexity to the conflict context (GoK, 2018).

Laikipia is now a multicultural and cosmopolitan County home to various ethnic communities. The Kikuyu predominantly reside in the southern and central parts, and the Laikipia Maasai, a subset of the broader Maasai community, resides to the north. Notably, their strong inter-cultural ties with the Samburu in the north and east, both of whom are members of the Maa linguistic community, foster unity and collaboration. Heading west, the Pokot community, part of the larger Kalenjin ethnic group, practices agropastoralism. The Turkana community, predominantly in the north and northwest, adopts a nomadic pastoralist lifestyle, showcasing resilience in arid environments. Various Kalenjin subgroups, including the Pokot, Kipsigis, Keiyo, Tugen, Ogiek, and Nandi, enrich the western part of Laikipia, engaging in a blend of agriculture and pastoralism. Originally from Kisii and Nyamira Counties, the Kisii community has extended its presence into Laikipia, actively participating in farming and trading in areas like Ol Moran. Finally, white Kenyans of European descent, work in agriculture, conservation, and business, enhancing Laikipia's economic landscape with their diversity in ages, backgrounds, and professions. Institutions such as County and central government, security actors, the British Army, conservancies, and NGOs/CBOs play vital roles in building peace and security, although it must be noted that this role is not always positive. A holistic understanding of these actors and dynamics is complex but essential for designing effective peacebuilding strategies in Laikipia County.

	Area	Location	Actors
1	Laikipia North & West	Northern and western parts of Laikipia County, including areas around Rumuruti, Ol Moran, and Marmanet	Pastoralist conflicts between the Samburu, Pokot, and Turkana over access to grazing land and water resources. Additional involvement from local farmers and ranchers.
2	Laikipia East	Eastern parts of Laikipia County, including regions around Nanyuki	Conflicts related to land ownership between large-scale commercial farms, small-scale farmers, and herders seeking pasture.
3	Mukogodo Forest	The Mukogodo Forest area, which is a crucial biodiversity hotspot in Laikipia County	Conflicts over access to and use of resources within the forest, involving herders from neighboring counties and local communities. The forest serves as a conflict corridor, providing hideouts
4	Laikipia Central	The plateau region of Laikipia County	Conflicts between commercial ranches, small-scale farmers, and pastoral communities vying for land and water resources. Additionally, tensions between conservation organisations and local communities over wildlife conservation and land use.

2. Impediments to Peace

This section describes the dynamics behind the five key impediments to peace in Laikipia County as identified by the research: socio-economic and cultural norms/practices; land and migration; governance and politics; security and justice; and environmental stresses and shocks.

2.1 Socio-economic and Cultural Norms/Practices

2.1.1 Differing Socio-economic and Cultural Norms and Practices Between Ethnic Groups

This in Laikipia county is a primary driver of conflict. The practice of the pastoralist Pokot, Samburu, Turkana and Laikipia Maasai migrating their herds onto agricultural land belonging to the Kikuyu, Kisii and others has long triggered episodes of violence. On the other front expansion of agricultural land into areas that were traditionally grazing areas often leads to friction between the pastoralist and agriculturalist, where diminishing traditional grazing areas due to change in land value system, and expansion of agricultural land is the case. However, dwindling resources caused by increasingly frequent episodes of drought have made the competing practices of pastoralism and agriculturalism more acute, and consequently exposing Laikipia to witnessing more clashes.

In addition to the pastoralist/agricultural divide, the deeply held cultural practice of Moranism⁴ and cattle raiding drives cycles of violence between pastoralist communities. These competing norms have solidified into deep enmity between some groups. Stereotypes and the use of derogatory names inhibit peaceful co-existence. For example, Samburu's call the Kikuyu "*Kehe*", a derogatory word meaning *one who is not circumcised*. Similarly, the Samburu refer to Laikipia Maasai as *Ndorobo*, meaning *people without livestock and land*.⁵ It is not uncommon to hear of children exposed to these slurs and other influences that cultivate ethnic animosity from a young age. The learnt identities that nurture violence and ethnic hatred from childhood can be difficult to transform as children become youths and adults, and they can serve to justify inter-ethnic intolerance, lack of respect and the normalisation of violence against 'othered' ethnic groups. This othering is made more dangerous by the common cultural practice of teaching children to use weapons from a very young age.⁶ In addition, most children from pastoralist communities do not attend school, and instead work herding livestock, and frequently handling small arms.⁷ Armed identity based conflicts therefore become a norm from early on, for example, between herders from Samburu and Pokot, and the Laikipia Maasai who view Laikipia County as their rightful home, and the Samburu and Pokot as unlawful migrants.

The practices driving violence have clearly gendered elements. Violent masculinities are evident amongst pastoralist communities, with young Morans involved in cycles of raids against one another. These raids can be to demonstrate heroism within one's group, restock lost heads of cattle, or else to acquire more for a dowry payment.⁸ Raiding for a dowry, in particular, motivates raids by young boys from Pokot and Samburu.⁹ Across

4 Young warriors among the pastoralist communities who have come out of circumcision, and aggressive to commit raiding

5 Focus Group Discussion participant, Tura, 19 March, 2023

6 Woman leader, Focus Group Discussion, Ratia, 13 March 2023

7 Female participant, Youth Focus Group Discussion, 12 March 2023

8 Kenya Human Rights Commission, Moran no more: the changing face of cattle rustling in Kenya, Nairobi, 2020. <https://www.khrc.or.ke/index.php/publications/54-moran-no-more-the-changing-face-of-cattle-rustling-in-kenya/file>, accessed Oct 20, 2023

9 Focus Group Discussion, Meringwet, 16 March 2023

communities, women bear the brunt of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the form of harassment, assault, and rape.¹⁰ However, the study also found that women in pastoral communities of Pokot and Samburu often celebrate violence, especially during raids. Young women perceive the act of raiding as heroic,¹¹ and it is reported that during traditional dances, girls and women dance to celebrate the raiding achievements of men and boys and motivate them to fight again.¹²

Youth are also uniquely driving and affected by particular social, economic, and cultural norms that contribute to violence. The central expectation that youth must unconditionally respect elders is slowly fading away. As relationships between young and old disintegrate, this research found that Morans do not just increasingly ignore elders but control them.¹³ This has undermined the traditional practice of elders meeting to mediate peace between their communities, and conflicts that would have once been resolved linger.¹⁴



Figure 1: Community discussion in an FGD at Magadi Survey, Laikipia County

10 Woman Leader, Focus Group Discussion, Solio, Rehema sub-location, 19 March, 2023

11 Belinda Straight, Land conflict, murder, and the rise of "timeless culture" and girl blaming, 2017
<https://journals.openedition.org/ateliers/12553>

12 Speaker of County Assembly, Key Informant Interview, March 2023

13 Focus Group Discussion participant, Mukogodo Forest, 19 March 2023.

14 Deputy County Commissioner, Key Informant Interview, March 2023

2.1.2 Effects of Illiteracy

The study showed that the situation of conflict is made worse by high rates of illiteracy within pastoral communities that also hinders more productive economic opportunities and diversified sources of livelihoods. The lack of exposure to other cultures driven largely by the state of illiteracy makes cattle rearing continue to be the dominant livelihood, in turn drives cycles of cattle rustling that grow in voracity as resources become scarcer. Further, a lack of formal education increases reliance upon oral traditions and cultural norms, which may reinforce old rivalries, stereotypes, and prejudices. It also leaves people more likely to experience fraud if they are unable to ascertain the authenticity of legal documents such as land title deeds, and there have been numerous episodes of duplicitousness. Lastly, illiteracy can hinder people's knowledge, reception, and comprehension of the many existing conflict prevention mechanisms that operate through written materials, leaving them excluded from peacebuilding processes.¹⁵



Figure 2: Samburu community members of Ngarentare Participating in an FGD

¹⁵ , Focus Group Discussion participant, Mukogodo Forest, March 2023

2.1.3 Clash of History and Cultures

Laikipia's land use reflects a rich tapestry of traditional practices, colonial legacies, and modern economic activities. The pastoralist community, known for their nomadic practice, have traditionally grazed livestock across Laikipia's rangelands. They rely on seasonal migration to access water and pasture, maintaining a delicate balance with the environment. Their practices are deeply intertwined with their cultural and social structures. During the colonial period, the British established large-scale ranches and farms, significantly altering traditional land use. The colonial administration allocated vast tracts of land to European settlers, often displacing indigenous communities. Large-scale cattle ranching became prominent, with European settlers introducing new breeds and modern ranching techniques. This legacy continues today with many ranches still operational, some owned by descendants of the original settlers or by local and international investors. The study found that the white Kenyan population in Laikipia own approximately 60 percent of the County's ranches, where they support animal protection as well as social development schemes. Some ranches have been converted into wildlife conservancies, blending cattle ranching with wildlife conservation. However, some communities believe that their own traditions are being eroded by conservancy practices and resent that conservancy areas are private and unavailable for livestock to freely graze¹⁶. Further, wild animals from conservancies such as elephants destroy community crop farms which consequently angers the communities to resort to killing them. Resulting confrontations between white Kenyans and indigenous communities has a potential to turn violent, and respondents noted that peace and cohesion activities such as dialogues, coordination, and communication are limited, making the trust levels low¹⁷. The modern land use has seen a metamorphosis to include a mix of traditional practices and modern and economic activities, including commercial agriculture by farmers who tend to settle in the more fertile highland areas of Laikipia with large farms producing flowers, vegetables, and other high-value crops for export have emerged and smallholder farming utilizing irrigation and modern agricultural technologies. Community Conservancy initiatives have also set in. Modern governance system leading to demarcation of land has not taken into consideration the indigenous pastoral lifestyle and their movement curtailed and now they have become "invaders". This has been made worse with land ownership and tenure issues. Balancing development with environmental conservation is another test due to overgrazing, deforestation, and climate change impacts.

2.1.4 Economic Vulnerability

The long-lasting effects of conflicts on women and children have led to mental health instability and inability to participate in economic activities. Most of them resort to alternative stress relief including alcohol consumption¹⁸. Orphaned children also face challenges in accessing education and healthcare services, impacting their long-term economic prospects. Moreso, displacement and destruction of property has further exacerbated economic vulnerability. Profiling of a community as the aggressor has further created rifts among the communities leaving in Laikipia. In numerous instances, the Pokot's who are perceived to be the aggressors are threatened for eviction and the consequent displacement renders them helpless creating a situation of mental disturbance. All these have enhanced the vulnerability of especially women and orphaned children to exploitation, including forced labour, and sexual violence.

16 Manager, Key Informant Interview, Oljogi Conservancy, March 2023

17 Manager, Mugie Ranch, Key Informant Interview, March 2023

18 Female leader, Focus Group Discussion, Solio, Rehema sub-location, 19 March, 2023



Figure 3: Women engaging the researchers during the study

2.1.5 Misinformation

Laikipia, as in many other regions, technology's impact on conflicts is complex, with both positive and negative aspects. Social media platforms have been used especially by elites to spread rumours, misinformation, and hate speech, escalating tensions between different communities. False information about resource ownership or perceived injustices have often fuelled conflicts. Disparities in access to technology and information has also exacerbate existing power imbalances, leading 'marginalized' communities to feel further disenfranchised and prompting conflict as they seek to assert their rights. Moreover, use of technology has since provided co-ordination between conflict instigators. On the flip side, the locals collude with bandits to protect them from being intercepted by the security agencies by providing information on safe routes and security movements. However, technology has been instrumental in sharing early warning information for early action.

2.1.6 Inadequate Peacebuilding Support

Laikipia county has several peace actors who have been working on resolving conflicts and providing vital services such as healthcare, education, and social support, enhancing the well-being of residents. However, at times, they are under criticism for actions that can contribute to conflict and interethnic tension. For instance, there is misunderstanding of community gains from conservancies and their mandates. The uncoordinated peace initiatives, dialogue and communication among these actors and the communities have created a perception of exclusion thereby impeding the resilience capacities of the community. There is a perception of some of the conservancy owners being backed by security forces, which has led to mistrust between the lo-

cal population and conservancy owners. Sometimes some communities lack access to formal justice systems, leading them to resort to self-help mechanisms to resolve disputes. In the absence of effective peacebuilding support including mechanisms in place to address resource management and allocation fairly, these informal mechanisms perpetuate cycles of violence and revenge.

2.2 Land, Settlement and Migration

The centrality of land to agriculture, livestock management, tourism and conservancy makes its ownership, use, and settlement a contentious issue at the core of tensions between pastoralists, farmers, and conservancies (Crisis Group, 2022). Access to land and water is becoming scarcer as the effects of persistent cycles of drought and flooding take root, and with it driving agropastoral conflict between farmers, mainly represented by the Kikuyu community, and herders from the Turkana, Pokot, Laikipia Maasai and the Samburu's. These communal tensions are further exacerbated by competition ranging ownership of large cattle ranches, and protection of wildlife reserve spaces which have been fenced and covering about 40 per cent of Laikipia land. Moreover, migration into Laikipia mainly by neighboring pastoralists communities and farmers poses tremendous pressure on the scarce resources.



Figure 4: A leader shares his insights during a key informant interview, offering valuable perspectives and experiences

2.2.1 Agro-pastoralist Conflicts

This reflects incompatible interests between pastoralists and farmers. Research revealed a deep-seated perception among pastoralists that all the land rightfully belongs to them and their livestock.¹⁹ On the flip side, sedentary agriculturalists and conservancies believe in the sanctity of private land, and their right to own and work it for a living. This incompatibility incites broader community violence (Kamais and Mosol, 2022), including opportunistic episodes of livestock and goods theft by some pastoral groups when the chance arises,²⁰ but also more dangerous cycles of armed farmer-herder confrontations. For example, we heard how some groups deliberately destroy vital public infrastructure, including schools, farm fences, water sources, and even certain dispensaries as part of calculated efforts to forcibly displace local farming communities from their ancestral land.²¹ This is not one way, and herders are just as frequently victimised by farmers, who have been known to block pastoralist communities' access to water, further reinforcing the incompatibility between them.²² This has severe consequences, with both sides resorting to violence and even killing each other over access to land.²³



Figure 5: Engaging the community throughout the research process

19 Community member, Focus Group discussion mixed group with Samburu, Pokots and Kikuyu, 13 March 2023

20 Religious leader, FGD, Ngelecha, 10 March 2023

21 Elderman FGD, Wangwache Primary school, 13 March 2023

22 Woman community member, Focus Group discussion, Magadi, 14 March 2023

23 Woman community member, FGD, Gathanji Primary school, Lentirangoi, 12 March 2023

Beyond competition between local pastoralists and farmers, the introduction of export-oriented horticulture in Laikipia has intensified the scarcity for resources. Multinational companies have acquired extensive farms in places where there are reliable water sources, meaning agro-industrial horticulture, pastoralism, and small-scale farming now vie for resources.²⁴ Pastoralists feel marginalised by these changes, and blame conservancies and business investors for further limiting their access to grazing lands.

2.2.2 Migrant Herders and Farmers from Neighboring Counties

Migrant herders also add to land scarcity and social tension. Pastoralists from Samburu, Baringo, Marsabit and Isiolo graze their animals on farms in Laikipia, especially during the dry season, destroying farmers' crops.²⁵ Armed with guns, there is little that farmers can do except leave them alone to spoil crops, or else confront them with their own weapons.²⁶ Typically, they choose the latter. Still, despite the risks this is a time of frequent movement. Some ethnic groups are migrating into Laikipia just as others are migrating away and into neighbouring Counties. Whilst some of this migration causes scarcity and conflict as described above, much of the movement is driven by peace needs, such as the Pokot who sought refuge in Laikipia from conflict in neighboring Baringo particularly in 2021.²⁷ In another aspect, Laikipia county has seen an influx of farmers from other parts of the country in search of land for agriculture due to factors like land scarcity, population pressure, and environmental degradation in their home regions. They often acquire and fence large pieces of land reducing the traditional grazing areas, blocking the animal grazing routes and restricting access to water. The aftermath has been competition with local communities, particularly pastoralists who rely on grazing land. This then escalates tensions and disputes over land ownership, boundaries, and access rights.



Figure 6: A community elder actively participating in a focus group discussion (FGD), sharing insights and experiences

24 Council member, FGD, Gathanji primary school, 12 March 2023

25 Elder man, focus group discussion, Ratia, 13 March 2023

26 Focused Group Discussion, Gathanji Primary school, Lentirangoi, 12 March 2023

27 Woman representative from Pokot, FGD, Lonyek/Lera village, March 2023

2.2.3 Disputes Over Land Ownership

Opportunities that previously existed for communities to adapt by migrating away from contentious areas or else sodden or barren land are hamstrung by the proliferation of large-scale private ranches in Laikipia that fence in local communities. These ranches now cover 40.3% of the County and, controversially, many are owned by the descendants of colonial settlers (Letai, 2021). There is a historical injustice to this, with the Laikipia Maasai believing that the ranchers unfairly stole their land by taking advantage of their lack of education. In particular they claim that their ancestors did not fully understand the provisions of the 1904 and 1911 Anglo-Maasai treaty (Mutunga, 2018). As one research participant observed:

“There is a prevalent belief that the land agreements of 1904, viewed as unjust and inequitable, have long been a source of discontent among pastoralists. According to their perspective, these agreements expired in 2004. The Maasai community asserts a historical claim to Laikipia County, contending that it was forcibly taken from them by other ethnic groups. This has led to a fervent desire to reclaim their land from the white settlers who have occupied a huge portion of Laikipia County”²⁸

Subsequent efforts to regain their land through legal channels proved futile, leading to significant frustration and resentment among the Maasai, and occasional confrontations. Maasai appeals to the government have gone unheard, and in some instances, the government are perceived to have intervened to protect the interests of white settlers (Mutunga, 2018).

Many of the newer ranches emerged post-independence as a result of combining multiple small plots into enclosed larger parcels of 500 acres or more. Some parcels were developed, but others were then either sold or used as collateral for other investments (Letai, 2011). This has led to absentee landlordism and, left with few alternatives, pastoralists illegally migrate onto vacant land. As private owners try to prevent this, conflicts, retaliatory violence and property damage result.²⁹ Still, violent conflict rises during extreme drought when pastoralists see their livestock dying and the conservancies remain one of the few places where there is still good pasture.

Another way to adapt is to purchase good land and settle, but this has brought its own sources of conflict. Large-scale land acquisitions are displacing local communities from their ancestral lands and triggering violence. The monopoly of big buyers distorts the land market, making it difficult for smallholders to compete and exacerbating landlessness and economic disparities. In response, and given land is so expensive, it is typical that cooperatives purchase communal land from private investors, subsequently subdividing and selling it to different buyers. When these new owners arrive however, often from other Counties or even countries, they frequently encounter resistance from local communities who believe ‘foreigners’ are taking their ancestral lands. Indeed, an estimated 93% of land in the County is owned by non-residents (Kamais & Mosol, 2022), and an interview with Chairman of *maendeleo ya wanawake* revealed that:

“Land ownership disputes between locals and foreigners are a trigger of conflict. Kenyans from other communities formed cooperative and societies and bought land from some potential land parcels of Laikipia, which they then resell to anyone who is willing to buy and has money, and most instances it will be people coming from far away areas.”³⁰

In addition to these tensions, moves to acquire land have seen a rise in con artists pretending to be land brokers. Such people have on occasion sold fake title deeds using counterfeit documents, the result of which is a

28 Chairman of Council of Elders in Samburu, Isiolo, Laikipia & Marsabit, Key informant interview, Laikipia North, March 2023

29 Deputy County Commissioner, Laikipia County, Key informant interview, 16 March 2023

30 Chairman, Key informant interview, Laikipia North,

crippling loss of both land and money, not to mention pride, that naturally becomes another source of lasting grievance and conflict³¹



Figure 7: A An inspiring young man shares his experiences and valuable insights during the study session

2.2.4 Lack of Resilience to Shocks Amongst both Herders and Farmers

These conflict drivers reveal a lack of resilience to shocks amongst both herders and farmers. In particular, the research revealed that neither livestock nor pasture management are particularly modern, meaning farmers and herders cannot maximise the value of their land or cattle. The higher losses resulting from poor management fuels violent conflict through the need to raid neighbouring communities to replenish dwindling stocks or produce. In response, conservancies have invited communities to come and learn more modern management methods.³² Others, such as Mugie Conservancy, have undertaken significant outreach efforts to address the root causes of conflicts with local communities through dialogue and collaborative partnerships in support of collective community and animal welfare.³³ However, not all is well. Herding communities report that they are required to pay for livestock grazing privileges on conservancies and adhere to strict curfews prohibiting grazing after 6pm. It cannot be overlooked that these regulations disrupt the traditional way of life for pastoralist communities, leading to tensions between them and the rangers responsible for enforcing conservancy

31 Religious leader, Validation Workshop, Nanyuki, April 2024

32 Manager, Key Informant Interview, Mugie Ranch, March 2023

33 Key Informant Interview, Mugie Conservancy

rules.³⁴ Furthermore, conservancy areas are vast places with rough terrain and difficult to govern, meaning some raiders use them as places to hide cattle. Once discovered, confrontation with conservancy rangers is almost inevitable.³⁵



Figure 8: Members of the research team engaging in discussion with a key informant during the research process in Loisaba Conservancy

2.3 Governance and Politics

Governance and politics play a pivotal role in precipitating conflict in Laikipia County, where political marginalisation, unequal distribution of government services, political incitement towards ethnic violence, and disputes over borders and boundaries are common.

2.3.1 Political Marginalisation

Political marginalization in Laikipia is a multifaceted issue rooted in historical injustices and contemporary governance challenges. During the British colonial period, large tracts of land in Laikipia were given to European settlers for ranching and farming. The displacement of indigenous population disrupted traditional land ownership and use, leading to long-term socio-economic challenges for the local populations. After Kenya

34 Ngurare ranch representative, Key informant interview, Ngurare Ranch, 16 March 2023

35 Woman Leader, Focus Group Discussion, Ratia, 13 March 2023



Figure 9: Community leader engaging with the research team during the research

gained independence in 1963, the new government often continued with policies that favored certain groups over others. Land allocation sometimes benefited politically connected individuals, further marginalizing the original inhabitants of Laikipia leading to many indigenous communities not having formal title deeds to their ancestral lands, making it difficult for them to assert their rights and often leading to conflicts with ranchers and commercial interests. Land tenure insecurity has since contributed to economic marginalization and limited political influence marginalized areas, exacerbating tensions, as marginalized groups may feel they have no recourse through formal political channels to address their grievances.

Political marginalisation has been a feature of Kenya's political system that has now infiltrated the counties, where the zero-sum nature of national politics has been replicated at the County level. This manifests as systemic political exclusion of some groups, and especially the perceived less well represented pastoralist communities. The Kikuyu community is the dominant tribe in Laikipia and hold the majority of political offices within the County. This can be traced back to the post-colonial era that allowed the Kikuyu to purchase land from white settlers, after which they flourished. As the Kikuyu's have grown in population and power, other communities have come to resent what is perceived as their dominance over the local government.

Even if the County Administrator felt things were changing for better,³⁶ there is an outcry from an employment perspective, that appointments made by the County administration are still considered subject to political cronyism, elite capture, and ethnic favoritism. When political marginalisation translates into diminished opportunities and material marginalisation, seen for example in how the number of educated people without employment is rising, the result is popular disaffection with local governance policies and structures.

³⁶ Speaker of County Assembly, Key Informant Interview, March 2023

2.3.2 Unequal Service Distribution

Communities who either did not support incumbent politicians, or else who are likely not in the future, experience poorer infrastructure, schools, dispensaries, hospitals, livelihood opportunities, and communication networks. Where schools are present, finding teachers can be a serious challenge. Instead, funds are overwhelmingly concentrated on communities that support the government, who receive an equal proportion of services. This feature of County politics drives a material wedge between communities aligned to the government and those aligned to the opposition. This wedge is also characterised by a rural/urban and farmer/pastoralist divide. To give one example, because County revenues are primarily driven by agricultural commerce and tax returns, there is also a sense that the government is disincentivised to provide services or welfare for pastoralist communities.

In addition to the political roots of this inequality, tough terrain, bad roads, and patchy communication on the border between Laikipia and Baringo, makes physical access challenging. This is also extended to the interior of Laikipia Nature Conservancy, creating an enabling environment for bandits to hide. These areas have experienced years of neglect by first the national government and now the County government. This inequality typically manifests in persistent low levels of education and high levels of unemployment in these marginalised communities. With little opportunities for livelihoods or self-advancement, and with small arms readily available, it is no wonder that this leads to securitised and rent seeking behaviours from a young age. One elder from Lonyek Ward in Lera village lamented that, “we Pokot have no schools, hospital or even a Chief’s office. But we do have guns. We need schools to be built in this area and the government should also work on parallel disarmament exercise.”³⁷

There is little investigation into criminal incidents such as cattle raiding or theft. National Police Reserves are absent or perceived as biased. In Ngaretare, for example, a participant remarked that the National Police Reserves were withdrawn in 2017 and have not been reinstated.³⁸ Unaccountable or absent security actors mean that communities can be incorrectly held responsible for crimes and subjected to retributive attacks. A female leader from the Turkana community in Lonyek remarked that most crimes were attributable to groups from outside of the County. This appears exaggerated, but the sentiment is revealing insofar as how prevalent the practice of blaming ‘others’ has become for what are usually in-County issues.³⁹

Unequal distribution of government services affects how different communities are vetted for national Identity Cards. Respondents opined that less well represented groups like the Pokot face long, difficult, and even corrupt vetting processes, seemingly because the incumbent ethnic group in political office are reticent to issue IDs to some ethnic groups in fear of being outnumbered in subsequent elections.⁴⁰ This can particularly affect youth, who lack the political capital and networks to navigate these processes, and who are often left on the outside of politics.⁴¹

37 Focus Group Discussion participant, Lonyek/ Lera Village, 17 March 2023

38 Focus Group Discussion participant, Ngaretare, March 2023

39 Focus Group Discussion participant, Lonyek, 17 March 2023

40 Speaker of County Assembly, Key Informant Interview, March 2023

41 Focus Group Discussion participant, 11 March 2023



Figure 10: A participant shares her personal experiences during a women-only focus group discussion, fostering connection and insight

2.3.3 Incitement by Elites and Political Leaders

These experiences of marginalisation can and do reinforce ethnic divisions. Unfortunately these divisions, far from being a source of conflict that politicians actively seek to repair, are commonly leveraged by those in office to justify hate speeches and incite ethnic violence in pursuit of political support.⁴² Politicians have been accused of going so far as supplying ammunition and immunity to their supporters to orchestrate cattle raids, with respondents asserting that the political class benefit from the continuation of the violent cattle raiding and trading system.⁴³ For example, a participant in Loisaba conservancy observed that “wealthy individuals who might have stolen public money whilst in government clean it through the purchase of livestock.”⁴⁴ Also, it was registered that most of the livestock found grazing in ranches and conservancies are claimed to belong to senior government officials and the politicians, who use their power to protect the invading herders who herd their cattle in those ranches

Politicians also make dangerous promises of land to specific groups especially during political campaigns should they elect him or her into office.⁴⁵ For example, one MP secured his seat in Laikipia North by promising the Samburu he would “return their land.”⁴⁶ Such campaigns ramp up social tension not only through their sheer antagonism towards whoever is currently living on the land in question, but also later when campaign promises prove unkeepable, which undermines people’s faith in democratic political processes.

42 Focus Group Discussion participant, Residence (LNC), 14 March 2023

43 Murithi Mutiga, Violence, Land and the Upcoming Vote in Kenya’s Laikipia Region, July 25, 2017. International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/kenya/violence-land-and-upcoming-vote-kenyas-laikipia-region>

44 Head of Security, Key Informant Interview, Loisaba Conservancy, 18 March 2023

45 John Letai, Laikipia Land Crisis: A Ticking Time Bomb, The Elephant (Oct 2021) <https://www.theelephant.info/features/2021/10/22/laikipia-land-crisis-a-ticking-time-bomb/>

46 CEO, Key Informant Interview, Loisaba Conservancy, 18 March 2023



Figure 11: A Moran sharing his experiences and insights during the study

2.3.4 Boundary Disputes

The study also indicates that County boundaries are a source of violence. This can take a few different forms. Some pertain to boundary disputes between neighbouring County governments, where disagreements over borders between Laikipia, Baringo, Samburu, and Isiolo can be unsettling.⁴⁷ Another issue is concerning cross-border raids, with pastoralists accused of making forceful incursions into Laikipia and disappearing back over the borders and beyond Laikipia's jurisdiction.⁴⁸ This is a current problem that has historical roots. In 1997, for example, intercommunal conflict erupted along the border of Laikipia and Isiolo after Samburu herders fought with Kikuyu, Turkana, Borana, and Somali communities over boundaries. In the same year, clashes erupted between Samburu's and Kikuyu's that claimed many lives over land dispute feud. With security sector responses scant, communities take matters into their own hands, and violence up to and including killing is not uncommon.⁴⁹ Finally, there is unclarity between Kenya's administrative boundaries and election boundaries. These have not been made definitively clear despite the efforts of the Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission, and some residents of Laikipia County vote in cross-border towns and affect elections where they should, in theory, have no right to do so.

47 Lemparia Nicholas (MCA), Key Informant Interview, Mukokodo West, 19 March 2023

48 Letoiye Morris, (Asst Chief) Focus Group Discussion, Thome, 15 March, 2023

49 Kirian, Focus Group Discussion, Sossian, 15 March 2023



Figure 12: County Assembly member shares valuable insights during a key informant interview

2.4 Security and Justice

The main impediments to security and justice in Laikipia County are persistent episodes of violence and human rights abuses that are neither prevented nor resolved owing to poor security responses, a culture of impunity, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

2.4.1 Human Rights Abuses and Violations

Human rights abuses such as enforced disappearances of the civilians by the security forces and arbitrary killings have resulted in growing mistrust of national security forces. Violence increases during general elections,⁵⁰ orchestrated by politicians through hate speeches, importing voters from over County borders, equipping militias, and marginalising residents who do not support them.

2.4.2 Inconsistent Security Responses

Security agencies such as the National Police Reservist (NPR) are thinly spread, skewedly distributed and struggle to respond. Poor coordination among the security agencies, limited access to vehicles, rough terrain and patchy communication networks undermines security responses, leaving communities vulnerable and the crimes committed often unresolved.⁵¹ This appears to be particular the case in places such as in Mwenje and

⁵⁰ White Kenyan, Key Informant Interview, LNC, March 2023

⁵¹ Focus Group Discussion participant, Mwenje, 19 March 2023

Olmoran in Laikipia West.⁵² FGDs in Mwenje in Laikipia west expressed the opinion that there were not enough police posts to protect citizens from banditry activities. When services are provided, a number of research participants suggested that it was dependent upon bribing security officers who were otherwise reluctant to act.⁵³

Furthermore, in locations such as the Pokot dominated Lmarani Mutaro, we heard that the NPR were not merely absent but accused of operational bias towards the Kikuyu.⁵⁴ This perceived partiality undermines the trustworthiness of the NPR, and in doing so severs the social contract with the state. On the critical security issue of stock theft, for example, the NPR anti-stock theft unit has been found wanting, existing more in name than deed.

Still, security forces are in a bind. Where they do deploy against bandits, such as in Tiaty just over the border with Baringo, it often displaces conflict rather than address its sources. This displacement is frequently into Laikipia, for example in 2021 during the security operation in Kapedo in Baringo that displaced tens of thousands of livestock into Laikipia with hugely destabilising effects.⁵⁵

2.4.3 Culture of Impunity

Livestock sits at the core of insecurity and injustice. It is suspected that politically connected and wealthy 'Cattle Barons' launder money through livestock sales. They also supply weapons to herders to guard their cattle and provide impunity from the law for their service.⁵⁶ This impunity is further exhibited among community groups, who continue to protect their own criminals in disregard for the rule of law.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the politicians are believed to occasionally protect criminals from being subjected to judicial processes, and not just for trite offences, either. Respondents spoke of criminals committing enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings and yet still escaping justice based on their political inclinations and connections. Worryingly, when security forces commit crimes, they also tend to escape punishment. The Pokot community in Olmoran in Laikipia west, for example, perceive that security forces deliberately target them and orchestrate abductions, forced disappearances and murder, as did female respondents in Laikipia North near Sosian.⁵⁸ This fog of impunity hangs over Laikipia, driving mistrust between civilians and security forces, and causing a state of insecurity and lawlessness. Moreover, farmers and local administrators impose hefty fines accompanied by threats for livestock that trespass into farms. Part of confiscated livestock also disappear mysteriously under security watch.

2.4.4 Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

Factors incentivising community armament have not been adequately addressed including guarantee of personal and property safety. While the national government has made efforts to mitigate the proliferation of weapons in the region, challenges remain at the County level, where both herder and farmer communities are typically well-armed, they only vary in the mastery of its usage⁵⁹. This fuels cycles of violence and is indicative of a disarmament process that has achieved minimal success. The process is hampered by poor access to remote

52 Focus Group Discussion participant, Mwenje, 19 March 2023

53 Focus Group Discussion participant, Olmoran, 12 March 2023

54 Focus Group Discussion participant, Lmarani-Mutaro, 11 March 2023

55 White LNC Owner, Key Informant Interview, March 2023

56 Focus Group Discussion participant, Mwenje, 19 March 2023

57 Focus Group Discussion participant, Moworak/Posta, 17 March 2023

58 Member of County Assembly, Key Informant Interview, Mukokodo East, March 2023

59 Religious Leader, Stakeholder Validation, Nanyuki, 30 April 2024

territories along County borders, as well as politically motivated disarmament efforts that can leave weapons in the hands of politically aligned groups at the same time as taking them away from others. Thus disarmament, far from being an issue of collective importance and a shared first step towards less securitised interactions between groups, is instead a source of contention not just between groups, but with the state. We were told that “People say that they have ‘no government’ and will use firearms and steal until such a time there is.”⁶⁰ It is reported that thieves have ready markets for stolen cattle⁶¹ and other goods.⁶² Perhaps of most concern is how deeply engrained the use of SALW remains. It can be said to pose a transgenerational challenge, with FGDs in Laikipia North around Sangaa and Waso revealing that young people, including children, typically own small arms despite government and NGO efforts to limit their acquisition and use.⁶³

2.4.5 Retaliatory Attacks

Flush with small arms and light weapons, patterns of retaliatory attacks among the pastoral and agricultural communities in Laikipia and the bordering Counties have long been incendiary and are symptomatic of accumulated feelings of injustice held deeply by each ethnic group. This has posed vicious cycle of trauma and revenge and hence resulted to collective and individual grievances that are unresolved. As shown by the deadly clashes between Kukuyu and pastoralists in 1982, boundary disputes between the Samburu, Turkana, Borana and Somali in 1997, violence between the Pokot and Wangwache in 2002, and killings in Meringwet in 2021, revenge attacks persist. Some episodes are horrific, with reports that Kikuyu farmers killed and threw a Samburu boy in the toilet,⁶⁴ and another claiming Moran youth were burned to death.⁶⁵ Evidently, lack of mechanism and clear policy for reparation for victims of violence has been found to be lacking. Stock piling and bitter accumulation of feelings of injustice held deeply by each ethnic group is a concern that triggers retaliation. These evidently hamper peaceful co-existence among communities, with experiences of killing legitimising seemingly a spate of ‘lesser’ crimes such as livestock, crop, and motorbike theft.⁶⁶

60 Somali Elder, Focus Group Discussion, Lonyek, 17 March 2023

61 John Mwangi & Dennis Muniu, the emerging dimensions of the insecurity in Laikipia County, The Gloceps weekly influential brief <https://gloceps.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-emerging-dimensions-of-the-insecurity-in-Laikipia-County-WEB-2.pdf> Accessed on November 6, 2023

62 Religious leader, Key Informant Interview, Meringwet, March 2023

63 Religious leader, Focus Group Discussion, Ngelecha Ward, 10 March 2023

64 Focus Group Discussion participant, Maundo Mere, 15 March 2023

65 Focus Group Discussion participant, Gathani Pry Sch, 12 March 2023

66 Elder, Focus Group Discussion (Elders), Nkoisusu, March 2023



Figure 13: Focus group discussion in progress at the survey water point

2.5 Environmental Stresses and Shocks

Laikipia faces environmental pressures including land degradation, deforestation, and water scarcity that are being exacerbated by climate change. These challenges have a direct and profound impact on the livelihoods of both pastoralist and farmer communities. As the population grows and land becomes scarcer, competition for these vital resources intensifies, often resulting in conflicts between various ethnic and conservancy groups.

2.5.1 Impact of Climate Variability

Climate variability and extreme weather events have induced migration of pastoralists mainly Pokot from Baringo, Samburu from Samburu, and Isiolo counties into Laikipia in search of water and pasture. This migration has been a source of tension since 2001, when pastoralists first attacked communities in Laikipia.⁶⁷ However, scarcity resulting from climate change including dwindling resources such as pasture and water in quantity and quality cause more frequent episodes of migration, and with it contributing to competition and insecurity. In particular the depletion of ground water for irrigation, soil salinity and the prevalence of pests and diseases are thought to threaten food security and ultimately increase competition over resources. As Laikipia itself begins to suffer from prolonged drought it is unable to support these large migrations. Significant numbers of livestock have died as ecosystems collapse, and with it gutting the cattle trade that is the engine of local com-

67 Chief, Focus Group Discussion, Wangwache primary school, Laikipia County, 13 March 2023



Figure 14: Participant actively engages with researchers during a key informant interview at Oljogi Conservancy

merce. This experience directly triggers violence, with FGDs in Moworak and Posta revealing that pastoralists restock after the loss of livestock through raiding.⁶⁸ Furthermore, once animals have been restocked, limited availability of good land causes pastoralists to graze their stock in protected areas, often by force due to collapse of traditional rangeland adaptive management system.⁶⁹

Some older practices such as charcoal burning, has long been a common means of livelihood in the County, are beginning to have serious environmental consequences. The deforestation that results leaves soil rootless, weak, and more vulnerable to floods. This is made more dangerous given that pastoral lands are overstocked, resulting in land degradation and soil erosion. Many pastoralists have massive herds that cannot be sustained by the available pasture, making incursions into other groups' territories inevitable.

2.5.2 Human Wildlife Conflicts

The conservancies have played a pivotal role in conserving pasture, particularly during drought periods. Nevertheless, while their positive impact on pasture preservation is undeniable, their actions have also sparked conflicts in Laikipia. Furthermore, as the commons are depleted, balancing conservation efforts with the livelihood needs of residents is increasingly challenging. For example, respondents in Laikipia Nature conservancy drew attention to the practice of communities poaching wood from conservancies to make charcoal or sneaking in livestock to illegally graze. Meanwhile, conservancies can be accused of hoarding natural resources and prioritising the well-being of wildlife over livestock thus provoking clash of culture. This causes tensions

68 Community member, FGD, Moworak/Posta, 17 March 2023

69 Elder, Focus Group discussion, Wangwache primary school, Laikipia, 13 March 2023



Figure 15: Animals grazing across the vast Laikipia plains in search of pasture

between the conservancy staff and the poachers that can turn violent, particularly during the dry season on ranches such as Solio, Laikipia, Ol Pejeta, Borana, and Oljogi.⁷⁰ These ranches are fenced off to prevent wildlife encroaching into nearby communities and safeguard animals against poaching. Occasionally, residents tamper with these fences to gain access to valuable pasture. However, these openings also allow wildlife to then venture out, which can trigger conflicts between the wildlife conservancies and local farmers when animals damage crops.⁷¹ This highlights how important migration corridors are, and yet farm investors frequently close them off and instead establish agricultural settlements. This brings humans and wildlife into more frequent and deadly confrontations.

2.5.3 Opaqueness of Carbon Credits Gains

Communities and the County government are trying to adapt to the harsher environmental reality. One initiative concerns carbon credits. Lack of knowledge of carbon credits, benefits and systems of operation remains opaque. This presents a state of pessimism among the residents in Laikipia about the value of the credits. Accusation of brokerage in the carbon credits benefits by some foreign individuals and entities/conservancies raise concern. The NRT's carbon offsetting programme is the largest in northern Kenya, purportedly aiming to remove 50m tonnes of carbon from the environment over the next 30 years, and providing 3.2m carbon credits as a result.⁷² However, despite their innovation, there is pessimism among residents in Laikipia about the value of these credits. The proceeds from the credits are supposedly meant to benefit those working on

70 Laikipia Nature Conservancy staff, key informant interview, 14 March 2023

71 Loisaba Conservancy CEO, Key informant interview, Loisaba conservancy, 18 March 2023

72 Northern Rangelands Trust Carbon Offsetting Programme

<https://www.nrt-kenya.org/carbon-offsetting#:~:text=The%20Northern%20Kenya%20Rangeland%20Carbon,on%20modified%20livestock%20grazing%20practices.>



Figure 16: Elephants roaming freely in the scenic landscapes of Laikipia

the land, but respondents could see little by way of results, suggesting that funds were likely held up for political reasons. Far from being a source of adaptation and conflict mitigation, there is a risk that carbon credits, unless they lead to tangible improvements for people's lives, become a source of politicised rent seeking and competition.

3. Resilience Factors

In order to discern ways to overcome the impediments to peace in Laikipia County, this study also identified the principle factors capable of supporting community resilience during periods of violent conflict.⁷³ Communities in Laikipia identified five major factors that ought to be protected and built upon.



Figure 17: Participant sharing valuable insights during key informant interviews at Laikipia Nature Conservancy

3.1 Individual and Collective Community Commitments to Peace

Despite the prevalence of violent conflict in Laikipia, one source of resilience is that usually communities share peace values and collectively commit to them. Harmony, cooperation, and non-violence within and among communities were common values that when supported were said to foster social cohesion, trust, and a collective sense of purpose, even in the face of adversity. Large numbers of people energetically participate in peace meetings, indicating that people have more in common than what sets them apart. This shared commitment to peaceful coexistence strengthens community resilience by promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and

⁷³ Interpeace “Building Peace by Focusing on People’s Resilience to Conflict.” Interpeace, 3 Feb. 2017, www.interpeace.org/2017/02/building-focusing-resilience/. Accessed 7 Sept. 2023.

conflict resolution. Among the Turkana community, for example, elders convene peace conferences during times of excessive violence. These aim to repair relationships and foster healing. The atmosphere during such meetings resembles a carnival, filled with stories, songs, dances, and proverbs depicting the common peace values ingrained within the different cultures of the communities. These cultures preserve the social orders, kinship, and cultural heritage of not just individual communities, but of Laikipia County itself, solidifying a sense of immutable shared identity that acts as an essential component of resilience.

On a more micro scale, friendships can help people manage episodes of violence by bridging divides, resolving differences, and providing emotional and practical support for each other. Friendships often transcend ethnic, cultural, and social boundaries, fostering a sense of unity that can be crucial in maintaining well-being and resilience in the face of adversity. FGDs conducted in Tura, Mugodo forest, and Songa, for example, all revealed that 'brotherliness' has been pivotal during conflict periods. Furthermore, friendships can develop into collaborative networks that help people pool resources, share knowledge, and provide mutual assistance. Whether it's sharing food, shelter, or access to essential services, friends within and across communities can help each other cope with the challenges posed by conflict, ensuring that essential life support functions continue to operate. Trusted friends can also mediate disputes, facilitate dialogue, and encourage reconciliation between individuals or groups and increase the likelihood that official conflict resolution mechanisms will subsequently take hold.

3.2 Local Conflict Management Infrastructures

The role of religious organisations in supporting resilience through peacebuilding and community cohesion is crucial. In locations such as Olmoron, the Catholic church is partnering with the Ministry of Education to set up mixed schools that children from different ethnicities can attend. This is not without incident – schools may be built but the government supply of teachers can be slow, leaving class numbers large or else certain subjects going untaught. Still, respondents considered the initiative important for peace and resilience insofar as it brought children from diverse backgrounds together to learn and socialise as one. Similarly, churches and other faith centres are felt to support resilience by encouraging attendance by different ethnic groups. At times, the unifying strength of faith can build relationships between individuals and groups that traverse other historical and identity-based sources of enmity between them.

In the Mshipi area within Laikipia National Conservancy, respondents also attested that well-respected and embedded community-based organisations were 'cushioning' communities during conflict. One successful initiative entailed establishing a committee comprising of all neighbouring communities and engaging them in training on peaceful co-existence. This directly helped to avert violence. Similarly, the establishment of a Joint Grazing Committee comprising the Turkana, Samburu and Pokot has been commended for improving community outreach services around Ngurare ranch.

These committees complement other long-used conflict management mechanisms. Perhaps the most important pertains to gatherings of community elders, who use their influence within their communities to support resilience. If not always preventing violence, it frequently mitigates escalation and enables communities previously in conflict to pause and begin to co-exist. Another mechanism is intermarrying, which can play a pivotal role in strengthening cohesion between ethnic groups. By tying one group's destiny to another through marriage, the likelihood of conflict decreases. Each partner in the marriage can keep channels of communication open between the two groups, through which each side can pass information on land, grazing, and other contentious issues to prevent misunderstandings escalating.

NGOs also play a pivotal role in promoting community cohesion across the County. There are too many to name, but some work on niche conflict issues and appear to punch above their weight. Regenesys Limited

and African Wildlife Foundation, for example, have worked with Maasai pastoralists on livelihoods and gender equality for many years, steadily improving opportunities for women and with it their resilience to economic shocks. Also working at that interface of ecology and peace is the Northern Rangeland Trust, a grassroots conservation aimed at “enhancing people’s lives, building peace, and conserving the natural environment.”⁷⁴ The Trust manages the Conservancy Livelihood Fund, which supports local income generating activities. It also administers the Naibunga Central and Lower Community Conservancies, which serve as a safe elephant corridor connecting Laikipia to Isiolo, Samburu, and Marsabit. Also mentioned was the African Conservancy Center, which supports livestock rearing and trade, as well as Twala Women’s’ Groups that work to reduce soil erosion. These last two initiatives have helped communities conserve water and increase crop yield, and in doing so helped prevent conflict over resource scarcity.⁷⁵

3.3 Responsive Governance and Inclusive Service Provision

The provisions of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010, attest that the primary role of the County and national governments is to provide security for its citizens. The research found that where security is invested in in its fullness, meaning security officers are not just present, but well capacitated to understand and respond to people’s diverse human security needs, resilience grew. In Tura and Sosian, for example, respondents commended the GSU contingents for the effectiveness of their security patrols. Similarly, respondents from Ngu-rare ranch and Thome ward confirmed that the introduction of NPR personnel has improved responses to banditry attacks and deterred more from taking place. In addition, community sensitisation efforts by County government officials, especially the chiefs, have helped residents peacefully co-exist. Disarmament efforts, too, have achieved some success in limiting the number of SALW in circulation, but there is a long way to go, and residents feel that the process is largely politicised. When some communities are disarmed and others are not, those left without weapons feel not only unfairly singled out, but vulnerable to acts of violence unless state security actors can protect them.

Developing infrastructures such as roads, schools, water points, and health dispensaries can build social resilience to shocks, as well as lay the educational foundations for future generations to break free from being shackled to livelihoods that are contributing to conflict. Delivering these services can and build trust between the government and communities, which can be leveraged to call for calm during times of political, economic, and social stress. However, service provision must be inclusive or else their unequal delivery can cause more tension than it solves. Participants from Ngarentare, for example, have lamented the persistent lack of infrastructural investment in Laikipia North and East that leaves them cut off from the major economic and political centres. These communities are more likely not just to experience water shortages, food insecurity, unemployment, and community displacement owing to conflict, but also receive slower and weaker government responses.

74 Northern Rangelands Trust <https://www.nrt-kenya.org/>

75 Edwin Ameso, Salome Bukachi, Charles Olunga, Tibias Haller, Simiyu Wandibba, Steve Nangendo, Pastoral Resilience among the Maasai Pastoralists in Laikipia County, Kenya. June 2018, UON. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land7020078>

3.4 Inclusive Development

Like inclusive governance and service provision, the dividends from development must be equal if they are to fully contribute to peace. Initiatives such as mixed schools, churches, *barazas*, and markets were seen to be mending community disintegration and forging a culture of intergenerational solidarity.⁷⁶ In particular, efforts to enrol the Morans in school marks the beginning of a positive transformation that, in theory, should see more young people finding future livelihoods away from cattle raiding. Conducting joint *harambees* for school fees has also supported more resilient communities, bound by a common interest in positive outcomes for their children.⁷⁷ Respondents felt that local leaders should encourage more opportunities for inclusive development in Laikipia County, and in particular those providing opportunities for women. Where women have had the chance to lead development and peacebuilding initiatives, results have been profound, with respondents citing more independence and more resilience.

Tourism is booming in Laikipia, especially to conservancies and national parks hosting the 'big five' animals (Lion, Elephant, Rhino, Buffalo, and Leopard). Other sites, such as Thompson Falls, are also becoming more popular, and with it breathing life into local markets. We heard that some communities previously affected by conflict are now cooperating and pooling resources to sell in these busier markets such as Rumuruti, Oldonyoro, and Kimajo, cognisant that tourism depends upon peace.

As tourism grows, conservancies have become a vital source of employment. And as communities and conservancies have hitched themselves to other more, coordination has increased. We learned of conservancies providing bursaries for children to attend schools to support long term development, as well as assisting with more immediate security and development challenges such as peacefully tracing and recovering stolen cattle. Disagreements do occur, and dialogues between conservancy owners and the community remain paramount. But where agreements have been struck the result has been peace positive developments, such as pastoral livestock permitted access to pasture and water, vaccination drives, and animal health plans, all of which generate resilience to conflict by protecting cattle and improving the relationship between landowners and pastoralists.⁷⁸

76 Huma Haider, Community-based Approaches to Peacebuilding in Conflict-affected and Fragile Contexts, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, 2009 <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/eirs8.pdf> accessed Sep 20, 2023

77 Harambee is a Swahili word meaning 'harnessing financial resources together,' in most cases for supporting educational initiatives

78 Edwin Ameso, Salome Bukachi, Charles Olunga, Tibias Haller, Simiyu Wandibba, Steve Nangendo, Pastoral Resilience among the Maasai Pastoralists in Laikipia County, Kenya. June 2018, UON. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land7020078>

4. Conclusion and Way Forward

The resilience of Laikipia's citizens is evident in their determination to rebuild their lives, foster social cohesion, and seek peaceful coexistence despite numerous personal and structural obstacles. It is evident that there is more connecting residents than separating them. This is demonstrated by the many collective and community-based solutions in operation, such as dialogues and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, that currently support resilience and provide hope for sustainable peace. They are supported by the work of CSOs that have been instrumental in bridging gaps between groups and offering critical services to vulnerable populations in Laikipia. Meanwhile, their ongoing advocacy for peace and social justice has helped empower individuals and communities to begin to confront and address the root causes of conflict in the County. On the structural side, it is effective governance, inclusive policies, and sensitive interventions by responsive institutions that provide sustainable safety and security for citizens. Where equitable resource management and service delivery are pursued, resilience follows. This is buttressed by inclusive development, including equitable infrastructure and livelihood opportunities across the County. Oppositely, where inequality persists and grows, resilience falters.

Of these sources of resilience in Laikipia County, the research highlighted four areas that people felt were contributing most: Personal agency and the capacity to adapt to incidences of adversity; collective action to understand and mitigate the drivers of violence affecting numerous communities; structural elements that provide the spaces, norms, frameworks, and support necessary to prevent conflicts from become escalating; and inclusive development that incentivises peaceful co-existence. Developing these sources of resilience depends on the commitment of all stakeholders to prioritise and support initiatives that promote peace and the well-being of people in Laikipia County. It is our hope that this research report serves as a catalyst for such efforts, to which:

1. Improving the quality and productivity of dialogues between security agencies, farmers, herders and conservancy owners will help prevent conflict escalating and identify areas where inconsistent responses by security forces can be improved or else mitigated through community actions.
2. Necessary infrastructures including roads, schools, and hospitals so that services are accessible by all using community consultations to deduce precisely what infrastructures will best support resilience, and where.
3. Consistent and universal application of the law to address impunity is vital, so that those abusing it are prosecuted. This includes powerful people inciting violence for financial and political gain, as well as ordinary citizens who may be acting illicitly in ways that undermine social resilience.

Community-driven approaches are essential for achieving meaningful and enduring disarmament outcomes. When communities are part of the disarmament process, they are more likely to view it as legitimate and fair, reducing resistance and suspicion. Combined with systematic disarmament exercise without bias including fines for those in illegal possession of SALW, and perhaps offering amnesty from future prosecution to those who surrender weapons the prevalence of firearms can greatly be reduced leading to lasting peace and security.⁵ A well-designed land redistribution scheme can play a crucial role in addressing historical injustices and promote equitable access to land for all communities. By involving communities, ensuring fair compensation, providing support services, and addressing potential challenges proactively, the scheme can contribute to a more just and prosperous Laikipia. Implementing such a scheme requires careful planning, robust legal and policy frameworks, and sustained commitment from all stakeholders.

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Research Methodology

The study sought to use Participatory Action Research (PAR) to foster consensus on both the impediments to peace and key sources of resilience in Laikipia County, and to subsequently validate and prioritise the findings as entry points for Interpeace's ongoing peacebuilding programme.

PAR is an inclusive and participatory approach to gather the necessary research data. It ensures collaboration between affected communities and researchers and motivates communities to take the lead in generating ideas for mutually beneficial social changes. PAR emphasises the importance of evidence and action, meaning that research findings are not just for academic or reporting purposes but serve as a foundation for implementing actions that promote peace. This methodology fosters a sense of ownership among the affected communities, ultimately increasing the likelihood of successful and sustainable peacebuilding interventions.

A Literature Review, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were used to collect data. FGDs brought together a diverse group of community members to engage in structured discussions on peace and conflict-related issues. These discussions allowed the exchange of different perspectives and experiences, providing rich qualitative data. Youth, women, and other vulnerable groups were fully included, allowing the facilitators to build broad consensus on the most pressing conflict issues people face. KIIs are one-on-one discussions with individuals who possess in-depth knowledge and experience related to the subject. Our KIIs were Laikipia County government officials, conservation/ranch managers, traditional leaders, religious leaders, NGOs, members of the security sector, women's' group leaders, and youth leaders. KIIs offer a more in-depth exploration of the topic and access to information that may not be easily obtained through FGDs.

Sampling Process

Respondents were drawn from mainly conflicting villages within five sub-counties in Laikipia: Laikipia North, Laikipia West, Laikipia East, and two conservancies. Researchers used purposive sampling to capture data from those living in conflict hotspots, multi-ethnic zones, administrative headquarters, and border areas. It was important to reach out to the diverse population within Laikipia County and the bordering towns because the preliminary desk research and literature review indicated that issues of insecurity in Laikipia have a cross-border dynamics in addition to resource and political incitements.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interview guide organized around two fundamental questions was used

- A. What are the impediments to peace in Laikipia? This question sought to unravel the main challenges to peace in the county, from the perspective of local people and other stakeholders.
- B. What is preventing things from getting worse? This question was designed to identify resilience factors that might provide common ground, helping to build a foundation for conflict resolution mechanisms based on what local communities and other stakeholders believe are.

The researchers convened 26 Focus Group Discussions and 23 Key Informants Interviews. A total of 466 people participated, of which 263 were men and 203 women.

		Total PAX	Men PAX	Female PAX	MEN-18-35	MEN-ABOVE 35	WOMEN-18-35	WOMEN-ABOVE 35
FGD	26	443	250	193	70	180	57	136
KII	23	23	13	10		13		10

Stakeholders Validation

At the end of the study, stakeholders including community members, state officials, security personnel, political leaders, professionals, conservancy representatives, NGOs, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders gathered for a validation exercise to discuss, validate and rank the findings by priority to support sustainable peace in Laikipia. Prioritised challenges to peace in Laikipia county per thematic area:

No	FRAGILITY FACTOR	GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D	SUM	RANK
A	Socio-economic and Cultural Norms/ Practices						
a	Effects of illiteracy	1	2	1	1	5	1
b	Differing socio-economic and cultural norms and practices between ethnic groups	2	1	2	3	8	2
c	Economic vulnerability	3	3	3	2	11	3
d	Clash of history and culture	4	4	2	6	16	4
e	Misinformation	6	5	4	5	20	5
f	Inadequate peacebuilding support	5	6	5	4	20	6
B	Land, Settlement and Migration						
a	Disputes over land ownership	1	1	2	3	7	1
b	Migrant herders from neighbouring counties	2	3	1	2	8	2
c	Agropastoral conflict	3	2	3	1	9	3
d	Lack of resilience to shocks amongst both herders and farmers	4	4	4	4	16	4
C	Governance and Politics						
a	Incitement by elites and political leaders	2	1	1	2	6	1
b	Political marginalisation and historical grievances	1	2	4	1	8	2
c	Boundary disputes	3	4	2	3	12	3
d	Unequal service distribution	4	3	3	4	14	4

No	FRAGILITY FACTOR	GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D	SUM	RANK
D	Security and Justice						
a	Proliferation of small arms and light weapons	3	1	1	1	6	1
b	Culture of impunity	1	3	3	3	10	2
c	Inconsistent security responses	2	4	5	2	13	3
d	Retaliatory attacks	4	5	2	4	15	4
e	Human rights abuses and violations	5	2	4	5	16	5
E	Environmental Stresses and Shocks						
a	Impact of climate variability	1	1	1	1	4	1
b	Human-wildlife conflicts	2	3	2	2	9	2
c	Misconception of conservancies and matters of carbon credit gains.	3	2	3	3	11	3

Overall Prioritisation

In this section, the top two priorities across all five thematic areas were subjected to prioritization and ranked as below. The identification of these prioritized impediments to peace lays a foundation upon which Inter-peace and its stakeholders, in collaboration with local communities, can build to foster long-term peace in the county.

FRAGILITY FACTOR	A	B	C	D	SUM	RANK
Proliferation of small arms and light weapons	1	6	2	4	13	1
Culture of impunity	4	2	3	5	14	2
Impact of climate variability	3	3	6	3	15	3
Migrant herders and farmers from neighbouring counties	6	1	4	6	17	4
Effects of illiteracy	2	10	1	8	21	5
Disputes over land ownership	7	5	8	1	21	6
Political marginalisation and historical grievances	9	4	7	2	22	7
Incitement by elites and political leaders	8	8	5	7	28	8
Differing socio-economic and cultural norms and practices between ethnic groups	5	9	9	9	32	9
Human-wildlife conflicts	10	7	10	10	37	10

Limitations

The research was conducted amidst a challenging government disarmament operation, which made many participants from the community in the county hesitant to attend interviews at the designated locations. The situation was further complicated by a county wide curfew, which significantly limited movement and extended the data collection period. In addition to security concerns, the team faced logistical challenges such as poor roads, difficult terrain, long distances, and unreliable phone reception. Coordinating interviews with political leaders and community elites required patience and flexibility. To address these challenges, the team relocated some focus group discussions (FGDs) to safer areas where participants felt more comfortable engaging. They also adapted the data collection strategy by conducting FGDs in villages closer to the communities, which helped manage time constraints imposed by the curfew.



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Interpeace Nairobi Office

5th Floor, Priory Place, Argwings Kodhek Road, Hurlingham
P.O. Box 14520 – 00800 Nairobi, Kenya.
Tel: +254202655228
eca@interpeace.org

Interpeace Headquarters

Office 5A, Avenue de France 23,
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

www.interpeace.org  @InterpeaceTweet     @interpeace



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