

Resource-based conflicts in drought-prone Northwestern Kenya: The drivers and mitigation mechanisms

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Abstract

The theory of “resource scarcity” dominates the debate on “ecoviolence” in pastoral areas, where conflicts among communities have traditionally been linked to competition over scarce resources and invariably drought because of its role in resource depletion. However, the notion that climate change and resultant resource scarcity directly prompt violent conflict has been challenged by the notion that conflict actually coincide with periods of resource abundance. These contesting views point to nondeterministic linkage between resource availability and conflicts and, therefore, the complexity of pastoral conflicts. This is the scenario hypothesized for the vast pastoral areas of Kenya where violent conflict has become a chronic characteristic. While focusing on drought-induced conflicts over grazing resources, this paper takes cognizance of other factors that trigger and perpetuate violent conflicts in arid north-western Kenya. We present an insight on the nature, causes, dynamics and mitigation strategies of conflicts between the Turkana and Pokot pastoralists based on research study focusing on the linkages between resource availability and conflict. The findings suggest that violent conflicts in pastoral areas result from a myriad of socio-cultural, economic and political factors that reinforce one another by limiting availability of, depleting and reducing access to natural resource base. Competition for scarce natural resources triggered by frequent droughts and exacerbated by weak local institutions, proliferation of small firearms, political incitements, unclear property right regimes and cattle-raiding, was considered central to the violent conflicts observed in the area. The authors conclude that developing integrated policies and strengthening local governance institutions that are rooted in traditional practices for managing resources and inter-community conflicts is integral to the solution.