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**INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

**THE ROLE OF ETHNICITY IN THE LAND CONFLICT IN MOUNT ELGON  
REGION IN WESTERN KENYA**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

The study looks at the role of ethnicity in land conflict in Mount Elgon region in Western Kenya. Land-based conflicts occur with rhythmic regulating in Kenya, often in connection with moments of national political importance. The festering conflict in Mount Elgon region, while embedded in post-colonial land politics and other ongoing land conflicts, has erupted disastrously since 2006. During the finalization of land allocations, some settled members of the Soy clan were forced to relocate and formed the Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF). Although the Kenya Defence Force (KDF) have since brutally restored order, this has come at a major human cost and a final resolution remain in doubt.

Within the study, the root cause of conflict in the Mount Elgon region is indisputably land, specifically growing competition and issues of unequal access and distribution. The problem can be traced back to colonial policies of land dispossession and the subsequent inaction of the post-colonial government. The interaction of pre-existing factors; including a history of violence in the region, ethnonationalist politics and local economic prospects, inflamed the conflict. The presence of multiple grievances, and the interrelations of clientelistic networks at the local and national levels, contributed to the geographic reach and duration of the conflict.

It is argued that conflict resolution process involved initial government response centred on a dialogue and a flexible multi-pronged approach. With the failure of this strategy the government deployed the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) in a military campaign, resulting in major success in terms of apprehending militia and recovering weapons.

The challenges of the land conflict as a result of ethnicity can be resolved using the following measures recommended as steps towards restoring community harmony and defusing the land issue; streamlining all military activity and transparently addressing allegations of human rights abuses would restore faith in the working of the state. On the other hand proposals of amnesty for militia risks perpetuating a culture of impunity and are thus inappropriate; border surveillance, and cooperation between Kenyan and Ugandan forces, is another relevant issue. This needs to be addressed in order to prevent militia from re-launching their activities from the Ugandan side; the Kenya government should play a role in aiding displaced persons as they begin their lives again. An important step would be to compensate innocent civilians who lost property as a result of the conflict, through an appropriate mechanism.