Challenges and Opportunities in Management of Intercommunal Conflicts in Kenyan ASAL Region[1]

Robert Maina Ndung'u[2]

Abstract:

There are a number of reasons that have shaped the dynamics of intercommunal disputes throughout time in Kenya's ASAL (Arid and Semi-Arid Lands) regions, which provide the historical framework for these conflicts (Mkutu, 2020; Omuse, 2018; Nicholas, 2018). Understanding this historical backdrop offers insights into the complicated intercommunal disputes in ASAL and their underlying causes. With roughly 38% of Kenya's population, the ASALs make up 89% of the nation. More than 90% of the wildlife that sustains the tourism sector and accounts for 12% of Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is found in these regions, while 70% of the national livestock herd, with an estimated worth of Ksh. 70 billion, is located in the ASAL regions (ROK, 2022). The challenges and opportunities in the management of inter-communal conflicts in ASAL regions in Kenya have been extensively studied and discussed by researchers, scholars, and practitioners.

Introduction

There are numbers of reasons that have shaped the dynamics of intercommunal disputes throughout time in Kenya's ASAL (Arid and Semi-Arid Lands) regions, which provide the historical framework for these conflicts (Mkutu, 2020; Nicholas, 2018; Omuse, 2018). Understanding this historical backdrop offers insights into the complicated intercommunal disputes in ASAL and their underlying causes. With roughly 38% of Kenya's population, the ASALs make up 89% of the nation. More than 90% of the wildlife that sustains the tourism sector and accounts for 12% of Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is found in these regions, while 70% of the national livestock herd, with an estimated worth of Ksh. 70 billion, is located in the ASAL regions (ROK, 2022). The challenges and opportunities in the management of inter-communal conflicts in ASAL regions in Kenya have been extensively studied and discussed by researchers, scholars, and practitioners. Here below are some important perspectives.

Conflict Perspectives

Low and unpredictable rainfall, restricted access to water resources, and difficult environmental conditions are characteristics of ASALs in Kenya. These regions, which are home to numerous ethnic communities, have long been the source of strife and stress (Mwangi, 2020). They have experienced Protracted Social Conflicts (PSC) for many decades, and even Low Intensity Conflicts (LIC) are frequent and often exacerbated by proliferation of small arms (Mkutu, 2005; Mwangi, 2020). Despite the fact, that incalculable human suffering and property destruction are brought by these LICs numerous attempts at mitigation and remedies have been made but with some degree of success. Arguably, institutions for conflict management have struggled or refused over time to come up with lasting fixes (Kamais and Mosol, 2022). In context, issues such as colonialism, pre- and post-independence land dispossession and displacement, predisposing factors associated to pastoralist's livelihoods and ethnic and cultural differences have variously played a role in the intercommunal conflicts in the ASAL. Ethnic and cultural divisions, unequal accessibility to development resources and unfavorable government policies and governance are other persisting issues that have had a significant impact on the dynamics of intercommunal conflicts in the area.

Challenges of Intercommunal Conflicts in the ASAL

It is crucial to remember that the conflicts in the ASAL are interrelated and frequently reinforce one another (ROK, 2014). Examples of ASAL regions in Kenya that commonly experience fighting over resources, ethnic tensions, political isolation, and historical grudges include the counties of West Pokot, Baringo, Tana River, Isiolo, Turkana, Marsabit, and Wajir. Effectively resolving these disputes requires an understanding of the challenges and smart use of the opportunities for long-term conflict resolution.

Addressing a number of underlying challenges is necessary for conflict resolution in the area. Some of these challenges are discussed below.

Limited Access to Resources

Intercommunal conflicts often result from the management and access to resources in Kenya's ASAL. Drought and conflict are mutually reinforcing, especially because allocating resources honestly and equitably among competing parties is difficult (ROK, 2014). Drought, which manifests as a lack of vital resources like water, pasture, and grazing land, is a feature of ASAL regions leads to conflicts between various communities who compete for these resources and especially land (Mosol, 2022; Turton, 2017).

Water is essential for home usage, agriculture, and the needs of various ethnic groupings in the ASAL. Communities compete for access when water sources, such wells or rivers, are few or dry up. Conflicts can turn violent, especially when there are unclear rules or processes for allocating water (Seter, Theisen and Schilling, 2018). On grazing land many pastoralist cultures depend on it for their animals. Conflicts between various ethnic groups arise as a result of the shrinking size of acceptable grazing areas caused by climate change, population growth, and land degradation. Conflicts over the limits of grazing land, encroachment, and overgrazing can result in violent encounters that occasionally end in the loss of life and property (Sax, et al., 2022).

Ownership and access to land resources in the ASAL are other difficult concerns related to resources. Different ethnic communities' historical overlapping claims to the same land parcels is a contributing historical aspect. Land tenure and boundary disputes have resulted from this over time. Lack of clear land titles, population increase, and demand on available land exacerbate the problem and frequently result in escalating tensions and ensuing confrontations (Cheruiyot, 2020; Cyprian, 2020; Okomboli, 2019). Possession of priceless natural resources, such as mineral and oil deposits, is a related issue. Conflicts may result from competition for control and access to these resources among various ethnic groups or outside parties. Intercommunal tensions can be brought on by disagreements regarding resource ownership, revenue sharing, and the environmental effects of extraction activities (Sabadash and Denysenko, 2019; Tim and Gerald, 2017).

Land Dispossession and Displacement

Intercommunal conflicts in the ASAL of Kenya are significantly influenced by land dispossession and displacement. It is connected to historical injustices perpetrated since colonial times and competition for scarce resources. Pastoralism, seasonal movements, and political manipulations are other influences (Muchiri, 2015). The marginalization

and deprivation of particular ethnic populations' ancestral lands may be attributed to colonial land policies, coercive evictions, and discriminatory practices (Domínguez and Luoma, 2020). Intercommunal conflicts are stoked by long-standing resentments that have been generated as groups fight to restore their land rights and correct perceived injustices (Rudabeh and Turner, 2022). Despite this, competition for accessible land has increased as a result of resource constraint being exacerbated by population growth and land degradation (Ho-Won, 2017). Conflicts over access to and ownership of land may subsequently arise as a result of displaced communities trying to settle in regions already inhabited by other ethnic groups.

Pastoralist groups in the ASAL areas engage in a practice in which they shift their herds throughout the year in search of pasture and water. Pastoralists may come into conflict with settled agricultural groups as a result of these movements since the latter may believe the herders are infringing on their property or depleting scarce resources (Little, 2019). Conflicts between communities and violent altercations can result from these tensions. Elsewhere, politicians and other powerful people have been known to stir up intercommunal conflict in an effort to seize power, win over supporters from particular ethnic groups, or draw attention away from more urgent problems. Politically motivated manipulation of land disputes worsens already existing tensions and prolongs the cycle of violence and relocation (Menkhaus, 2015). The ongoing conflicts over land displacement and dispossession as a result put a strain on interethnic relations and trust. It frequently causes social networks to be disrupted, community structures to be broken, and traditional livelihoods to be lost. As communities work to reconstruct their lives and assert their rights, these weakened social ties may provide fertile ground for additional intercommunal disputes. Subsequent Retaliations frequently create a cyclical problem.

Ethnic and Cultural Differences

In the ASAL of Kenya, ethnic and cultural differences have a significant role in predicting intercommunal confrontations. Relevant issues include group cohesion and identity, cultural misconceptions and prejudices, as well as marginalization and discrimination (Mutinda, 2019). The ASAL communities strongly embedded ethnic and cultural identities frequently function as indicators of social cohesiveness and group solidarity. However, ethnic distinctions can cause splits and exacerbate conflicts if they are overemphasized. Communities may prioritize their own interests and see themselves as unique, which can cause conflict and tension with other ethnic groups (Ardag, Cohrs and Selck, 2019; Vogt, 2019).

Furthermore, interethnic miscommunication and misconceptions can result from cultural differences, including language, traditions, and customs. These misunderstandings may be exacerbated by bias, inaccurate information, or a lack of

cross-cultural knowledge. As perceptions of the "other" may be clouded or skewed, these stereotypes can foster mistrust and fuel confrontations (Sax, et al., 2022). Ethnic and cultural differences intersect with socioeconomic disparities and marginalization in the ASAL where some ethnic groups may feel marginalized or discriminated against in terms of access to resources, services, and political representation (Wafula, 2020; Cheeseman, et al., 2013). This sense of exclusion can create a fertile ground for intercommunal conflicts, as communities vie for limited opportunities and resources (Mazrui, 2009).

Unequal Access to Socioeconomic Development

In the Kenyan ASAL, unequal access to socioeconomic development can have a substantial impact on conflict dynamics in a number of ways. Certain communities living in the ASAL territories may feel marginalized as a result of unequal access to essential amenities, infrastructure, education, and healthcare. (Mosol, 2022). Neglect and exclusion from development activities can lead to unhappiness and aggravate resentment (Dmello, 209). As communities work to resolve their complaints and demand equitable access to resources, this feeling of exclusion can serve as a trigger for conflict.

In addition, economic discrepancies between various communities in the ASAL lands frequently result from unequal access to development resources. This manifests in the form of constrained economic opportunities, a lack of investment, and inadequate access to markets, which has the effect of increasing poverty rates and economic hardship among some populations (Galvin, et al., 2020). Furthermore, due to competition for few resources and employment opportunities, tensions and conflicts may arise between communities. Unhealthy rivalry for scarce resources in the ASAL lands, such as water, grazing land, and fertile soil, is also sparked by unequal access to development resources (Mwangi, 2020). This may result in disputes and conflicts over the distribution and use of natural resources, as well as conflicts between groups competing for these resources. In the ASAL areas, unequal access to development resources can also result in political fragmentation, whereby marginalized people look for political representation and influence to address their issues. As various groups contend with one another for control over resources, influence, and power, this may result in political tensions and conflicts (Achiba, 2019; East African Development Bank, 2019; Mkutu and Mdee, 2020).

Social cohesion can be hampered and intercommunal conflicts exacerbated in the ASAL regions by political fragmentation. With examples from North Ireland and Spain, literature reveals that communities who feel excluded from resources may grow resentful and hostile toward those who have better access to them (Norat, 2022). This

can lead to heightened ethnic or communal tensions, which, if not addressed, can escalate into intercommunal conflicts.

Unfavorable Government Policies and Governance

Intercommunal conflicts in the ASAL of Kenya are influenced by unfavorable government policies and governance in a number of ways, though they are connected to most of the problems mentioned above. Unfavorable government policies may contribute to the marginalization of communities in the ASAL lands, among other possible results (Kateiya, 2022). For example, policies that fail to consider the particular demands and difficulties that these communities experience may result in restricted access to vital services, infrastructure, and development possibilities (Sewell et al., 2019). As marginalized communities demand their rights and equitable treatment, this may lead to a sense of unfairness, irritation, and discontent, resulting in intercommunity confrontations. The distribution of resources like water, grazing land, or economic possibilities may also become unfair and unequal as a result. When communities compete for the few available resources and fight for their fair share, the sense of resource shortage leads to tensions and conflicts (Nyaoro and Golooba-Mutebi, 2015).

Inadequate governance and policies related to land and resource management do often contribute to conflicts. This Weak land tenure systems, unclear land ownership, and lack of effective mechanisms for resolving land disputes can result in ongoing conflicts over land boundaries, encroachment, and resource extraction (Muok, et al., 2021). These conflicts can be intercommunity in nature, involving disputes between different ethnic or communal groups over land and resources. In addition corruption and patronage in governance can exacerbate intercommunity conflicts in the ASAL lands. When government officials engage in corrupt practices, including bribery and favoritism, it reinforces inequalities and injustices in resource distribution (Haider, 2020; Hanti, 2022). This breeds resentment and mistrust among communities and can escalate conflicts as communities vie for access to resources or demand accountability from the government.

In addition, unfavorable government policies and governance can be exploited by political actors for their own interests. Politicians may manipulate intercommunity conflicts to advance their political agendas, mobilize support, or divert attention from governance failures. By fueling ethnic tensions or exploiting communal divisions, these actors exacerbate conflicts and deepen the mistrust between communities (Mitchell, 2023). Furthermore, inadequate conflict resolution mechanisms and weak institutions for addressing grievances contribute to the persistence of intercommunity conflicts. When communities have limited avenues for peacefully resolving disputes, conflicts are more likely to escalate into violence (Price, 2020). The absence of effective conflict

resolution mechanisms perpetuates cycles of violence, deepens divisions, and undermines trust in government institutions.

Opportunities in Management of Intercommunal Conflicts in ASAL

Resource competitiveness, racial tensions, lax governance, and socioeconomic inequities must be addressed if intercommunal conflicts in Kenya's ASAL regions are to be properly managed. The following are actions that the government and authorities can do to resolve disputes in the ASAL and promote peaceful coexistence.

Addressing Limited access to resources

Authorities and governments should improve accountability, build governance institutions, and ensure fair resource distribution in order to better manage resources. In order to reduce scarcity and encourage equal access to these resources, they should employ sustainable land, grasslands, forest, and water management methods. Following that, they should involve communities in deliberative procedures that guarantee their representation and engagement in resource management and dispute resolution.

Addressing Land Dispossession and Displacement

Government and authorities should consistently ensure that there are land reforms and reparations that address historical injustices in order to resolve land dispossession and displacement. They ought to acknowledge that protecting the rights of marginalized groups is crucial. There are mechanisms in place to settle land disputes and promote restitution processes, as well as transparent land allocation, acknowledgement of and adherence to customary land tenure systems. They ought to promote sustainable land management techniques, such as agroforestry, watershed management, and land rehabilitation, which can lessen resource scarcity and competition, as well as conflicts over land and resources. Development of accountability and openness by the Government should be done in order to strengthen and improve the institutions in charge of land. Conflicts relating to land can be avoided and resolved with the use of clear and accessible land registration systems, effective dispute resolution procedures, and fair land resource allocation frameworks. Additionally, the Government and authorities should support alternate means of economic support. In order to lessen communities' reliance on land resources and increase their resistance to uprooting and economic disempowerment, there should be income-generating activities, vocational training, and market access.

Addressing Ethnic and Cultural Differences

The Government and the stakeholders should encourage conversation and mediation initiatives among various ethnic groups to enhance understanding, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence in order to overcome ethnic and cultural disparities in intercommunal conflicts. To prevent cattle rustling and violent disputes, security measures including law enforcement and community policing should be strengthened. Affected communities must be encouraged to engage in discourse, mediation, and activities for reconciliation in order to firmly establish conflict resolution systems. This can help ease tensions and foster trust, and it should be guided by community leaders, traditional authority, and impartial third-party mediators. To promote understanding, to foster understanding and dispel stereotypes, the government should support polite and open communication amongst ethnic communities. Interethnic dialogue platforms, cultural exchanges, and community-based reconciliation programs can help to establish peace and heal divisions. Promoting actions that support social cohesiveness and a shared sense of identity, citizenship, and belonging could also serve as a guidance in this. It can be fueled by common cultural activities, infrastructural development initiatives, and initiatives that promote interethnic cooperation. To combat stereotyping and lessen prejudice, the stakeholders should advocate for education and raise knowledge about cultural diversity, tolerance, and respect for different ethnicities. This can be accomplished through educational programs, neighborhood workshops, and public awareness initiatives.

Addressing Access to Socioeconomic Development

Conflicts in the ASAL can be avoided, resulting in more sustainable and peaceful communities, by addressing unequal access to development resources and encouraging inclusive development methods. Governments and authorities should invest in infrastructure development on issues like water storage facilities, roads, schools, healthcare facilities, irrigation schemes, and market access in order to improve access to essential services and economic opportunities. This will help address unequal accessibility to socioeconomic development and reduce conflict in the ASAL. Additionally, it should support equitable and inclusive development policies that give underrepresented populations' needs first priority, and if appropriate, it should undertake specialized development programs and efforts to meet those needs. All stakeholders should be included in inclusive and participatory decision-making procedures that are used for resource allocation and development planning in this environment.

Addressing the Influence of Unfavorable Government Policies and Governance

The authorities should establish inclusive and equitable policies that emphasize the interests of communities in the ASAL and address their unique issues if they are to address

negative government policies and governance. This can be accomplished by building governance structures that encourage accountability, openness, and responsiveness to community demands. Governments should strengthen systems for including affected communities in resource allocation and policy formation. In order to increase the understanding of the particular dynamics and requirements of the ASAL communities, it should also make investments in the capacity building and training of government officials and administrators. Through effective anti-corruption measures, transparency, and accountability procedures, authorities should fight corruption and promote integrity in government.

Conclusion

The difficulties of resource rivalry, including land, ethnic tensions, unequal access to socioeconomic development, weak governance, and socioeconomic inequities, must be addressed if intercommunal conflicts in Kenya's ASAL regions are to be managed effectively. Sustainable conflict resolution and peacebuilding in these areas can be achieved by taking advantage of opportunities including sustainable resource management, interethnic dialogue, stronger governance and security, equitable socioeconomic development, and entrenching favorable governance institutions.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

Robert Maina Ndung'u is a PhD Student of the Safety and Security Sciences at Óbuda University. He holds two international master's degrees – MSc Victimology and Criminal Justice from Tilburg University in the Netherlands, MSc International Development (Conflict, Security and Development) from the University of Birmingham UK. The author has got 17 years experiences as a civil servant in Kenya: 12 as a Police Officer and 5 as a lecturer in Public University Kenya.

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