



Conflict Trends in the Pokot, Turkana, Karamojong and Sabiny Region during the Last Twenty Years

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Challenges and Peace Initiatives

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Introduction

The inhabitants of the POKATUSA¹ region of Eastern Africa are identified with conflict because they live perpetually in conflict. When one of their members is found in the capital cities of Nairobi (for Pokot and Turkana) or if they are in Kampala for the Karamojong, they are greeted as warriors or cattle rustlers by the residents of the cities. Surprisingly, they are often proud to be identified as such.

The question is why are these pastoralists in perpetual conflict? The main reason is that these people scrape their living in arid and semi-arid climates that are characterized by unpredictability of rains with resultant scarcity of pasture and water. These force the inhabitants to survive through nomadic pastoralism where mobility is the key to survival. In the course of movement in search of water and pasture, they fight against each other. Therefore struggle for resources for their livestock is the main reason for conflict in the POKATUSA region. The struggle for resources has been molded into culture of the people who have now become so hardened. A youth is praised if he can fatten his father's cattle through severe droughts by leading them bravely through foreign territory.

If, on the other hand the cattle died of drought, it is normal for such a youth to mount a raid across borders to restock his fathers herd. The weapons of war for mount such a raid used to be bows and arrows, spears and clubs. But the advent of the gun has changed the whole equation. At first there was a family gun, which was bought by the father for his son to protect his animals. The practice of cattle raids could be controlled by the elders who owned the guns. However, the youth went their way to acquire their own guns. This was possible, as there are many guns from unstable governments in the region. The practice of the raids took a different course as the energetic youth could now command their own endless raids of avenge and revenge with growing animosity and hatred among the members of POKATUSA. That is why there is perpetual conflict in the region because even the governments of the region are unable to control this practice.

The instability caused by raids affected many socio-economic activities in the region. It directly affected the control of livestock diseases. This forced AU/IBAR to include in its livestock diseases control program the harmonization of Pastoral communities in order to create a conducive environment to cattle vaccination against rinderpest. It is this strategy that reduced conventional raids in the POKATUSA region to scattered thefts.

This paper gives a brief description of the intensity of conflict, types of or causes of conflict and how the AU/IBAR intervention attempted to cool the earth.

Communities of the Karamojong cluster

CAPE Unit deals with the following pastoralists communities in the Karamojong cluster:

- 1) Matheniko of Moroto district in Uganda
- 2) Jie of Kotido district in Uganda
- 3) Dodoth of Kotido district in Uganda
- 4) Toposa and Didinga of Sudan
- 5) Merille of Ethiopia
- 6) Turkana of Kenya
- 7) Pokot of Kenya and Uganda

¹ Pokot, Turkana, Karamojong and Sabiny communities

- 8) Nyangatom of Ethiopia
- 9) Tepeth of Moroto district in Uganda

Areas of coverage

Epiding (corridors) across and along borders - within and outside Kenya where pastoralists communities share natural resources and conflict over them.

Internal borders

- Turkana and Pokot borders

External borders

- Tepeth/Matheniko-Turkana
- Dodoth/Jie-Turkana
- Toposa-Turkana
- Nyangatom-Turkana
- Merille-Turkana

The livelihood of the pastoral communities mentioned rely on the following activities

- Livestock keeping
- Subsistence farming
- Fishing
- Mining
- Trade

Trend and intensity of conflict in the POKATUSA region

Before AU-IBAR came in, there were conventional raids, where a community organizes a raid against another. The Matheniko and the Turkana had signed an agreement for peace in 1973 and continued to honour it. The conventional raids were present in the year 1984 between the Turkana and the Pokot where the Turkana called for reinforcement from the wider Turkana region to raid the Pokot. The Pokot could organize the same calling for reinforcement from their kinsmen in Uganda to fight against the Turkana. The Kenyan government mounted an operation for the disbarment of the Pokot in 1984, which brought about bitterness amongst the Pokot and political incitements arose. This led to a peaceful period between 1984-1990. There were also many development interventions in the districts e.g. NORAD in Turkana.

In early 1990, hell broke lose, after the release of political champions of conflict and the civil unrest in other parts of Kenya (land clashes), conflict arose again. In 1993, the raids led to tension and fear, the Pokot moved across the borders, the Turkana formed large livestock units, *arumrum*, to access pasture in southern parts of Turkana. The Pokot made sure Turkana, could not access these areas and hence this led to increased conflicts.

In 1996-1997, the political climate (when there were clashes again in the other parts of Kenya and the elections), the Turkana had organized themselves and they had started to think of going to the Samburu side where the Pokot were forming an alliance with the Samburu to destabilize them. The El nino rains led to growth and availability of pasture and water respectively in most parts of Turkana. This led to scattering of *arumrum* northwards. It was at this time that AU/IBAR came up with the Community Animal Health Service Delivery system for West Pokot and Turkana districts. In 1999 Cape Unit of AU/IBAR changed from directly implementing livestock component to facilitate pastoralists harmonization initiatives. The conflicts have changed to small individual group raids not organized by the community concerned. This trend at the moment is quite prevalent in the POKATUSA region than in the rest of Karamoja cluster regions.

Main causes of conflict

- Competition over access, use and control of resources (pasture and water)
- Cultural influences (Prestige, honour, dowry and wealth)
- Restocking after drought, disease and revenge.
- Economic hardships
- Increased and uncontrolled use of illicit firearms most of which in the hands of young and uncultured men

Effects of conflict

- Elimination of human life leading to reduced labour force
- Under utilization of available resources especially along borders (creating a no man's land)
- Transboundary transfer of diseases of economic importance
- Reduced livestock production and productivity as well as abandonment of potentially useful fishing areas, farming sites, mining zones and grazing lands.
- Destitution and disparity.
- Increased criminal activities in towns and main centers.
- Road banditry.
- Abandonment of development infrastructure-: schools, church buildings, Health centers, water installations etc.

Background to the AU/IBAR Intervention

The programme started in 1997 to establish community based Animal Health services delivery aimed at eradicating rinderpest and other animal diseases of economic importance among livestock keeping communities in the Karamojong cluster. In 1999, it focused on Pastoralist harmonization initiatives across borders upon request by key pastoralists elders led by Ekeno Loerabok that it was extremely difficult to vaccinate against rinderpest and improve Animal health services among pastoralists communities if the pastoralist continue to raid one another ".If we must eliminate "Lokiyo" *we must silence the gun and cool the earth*"

Various border harmonization activities were started with each leading to unique recommendations that needed sufficient implementation and thorough and subsequent follow-ups.

The chronological order of pastoralist harmonization initiatives

1. Pastoralists in the Karamojong cluster identified 4 main constraints hindering livestock production and productivity.
 - a) Livestock diseases
 - b) Inadequate water sources mainly due to drought
 - c) Raids
 - d) Lack of livestock marketing opportunities.
2. While addressing issues concerning livestock diseases through community based animal health service delivery, elders felt that there was need to 'silence the Gun" and cool the earth if Animal health services delivery had to be achieved.
3. Border harmonization workshops were initiated bringing together key pastoralists including seers. These workshops were held in towns –Lokichoggio, Lodwar, Lokichar, Mbale and Moroto. The recommendations arrived at were shared with government authorities, leaders and relevant development organizations.
4. The border harmonization meetings were shifted to grazing areas along the common borders upon realization by elders that messages discussed at town did not reach "real" culprits (warriors) and victims (women) .
5. The youth upon being victimized for preparations of the raids without knowledge of elders shifted blames to women when they said women were the ones encouraging and pressurizing them to go and raid.

6. The women Peace crusades were conducted to pass reconciliatory messages among the youth and elders of pastoralists' communities in the Karamojong cluster. These messages presented in form of songs, dances, poems and touchy sentiments triggered off a series of paired follow up peace meetings called by elders and youth.

The meetings were conducted in the following corridors/epidings

- 1) Lochwakula
- 2) Akoret
- 3) Napeitom
- 4) Amolem
- 5) Kainuk
- 6) Napurakanyi
- 7) Nanam
- 8) Kaabong
- 9) Todonyang
- 10) Tukum
- 11) Oropoi
- 12) Lopotikol
- 13) Nadapal

During various peace meetings, it was critical to link the Pastoralists communities with their respective government authorities. Key elders, youth and women were identified to participate and represent their communities in peace issues. These pastoralists' representatives actually form men informal peace committees in every epiding.

Achievements/Impact Analysis

In the last twenty years except for the last five years when AU/IBAR initiated Pastoralists harmonization, there were organized conventional raids among the pastoralists communities in the POKATUSA region. Pokots of Kasei for example could warn Turkana of Kaptir that they should prepare for war. Then large groups of warriors could organize themselves and attack as warned. Many people were killed and animals driven away. The Turkana could organize a similar raid and create even greater havoc. These days the practice of communities organized raids has reduced drastically. What is evident now is isolated incidents of thefts carried out by errant youth who do not heed elders advice and ignore government warnings and sneak to steal from the neighboring communities.

Except for the Matheniko and Turkana (Kamatak) who had cemented the agreement to co-exist peacefully for more than 30 years now, other pastoral communities sharing common borders had continued to raid one another. Tension and suspicion was the order of the day. Mentioning a name of a tribe could send shivers to the other. Children could be threatened to obey orders by simply mentioning a name of "enemy" say Pokot for Turkana children. Five years now and especially after the women peace crusades, most pastoralists communities could easily interact and even share common resources along the border.

Since 1989, Turkana and Pokots sharing common "epiding" at Lochwakula /Amaler hardly reached and shared dry season pastures at Lochwakula. The distance apart was more than 30 km away from the border from either side. After the women's crusades and a series of follow up meetings, the two communities have interacted freely and utilize dry season pastures for a record of 2 years now. Just recently, the two merged together to repulse a group of Turkana thieves from another epiding who attempted to steal from the Pokot side. Unfortunately, the thieves sneaked to the next epiding and stole cattle from the neighboring Pokot.

Most peace-building approaches used to promote peace were mainly town based. Actors did not reach the real victims and culprits of raids. Many actors feared to reach the remote rural areas where prominent warriors organized and implemented raids. The warriors were never involved in meetings meant to discuss to discuss peace and sharing of natural resources.

When pastoralist harmonization initiatives were started, many remote hideouts were reached. The sight of a vehicle and the determination of peacemakers actually changed key warriors' hearts. Several other actors also took the courage to reach these people. In Turkana for example the importance of including peace in NGOs programs has become almost a priority (ITDG, SNV, and WV-POKATUSA/MAPOTU). Numerous CBOs have emerged and focus most of their attention to peace activities.

It has almost become difficult to have conflicting communities come together to discuss issues of common interest without a mediator. Whenever one sees another "the bullet of a gun is sent to pass a message." In the last 3 years AU/IBAR and other partners have enabled pastoral communities in POKATUSA region to discuss and agree on issues that affect them. Some communities have built trust with one another and have made tangible agreements to curb cattle raids and related crimes. They are able to meet and discuss on their own without necessarily involving peace mediators.

Challenges

- Many actors with inconsistent approaches and insufficient capacity have flooded the peace-building arena.
- Widespread availability of illegally acquired guns, most of which are in the hands of undisciplined youth.
- Governments of the region have not come up with an appropriate strategy to eliminate cattle raids and related crimes.
- Raids occurring just immediately after peace meetings have cast doubts on the impact peace activities.
- Mobility of the pastoralists makes it difficult to follow up and monitor progress of the recommendations made in the peace meeting.
- Reluctance of leaders especially politicians to discourage and reveal culprits.

Lessons Learnt

- Pastoralists' communities of the POKATUSA region are frank with one another. They are known to express their feelings openly without fearing anybody including the government.
- Peace work calls for a high level of patience, perseverance, and consistency in commitment. One has to devote most of the time to lay strategies to achieve a particular theme in a peace meeting.
- In peace building meetings, the effectiveness of the decisions made depends on the caliber of the participants collected. As a rule it is important to reach and bring all key peace builders to attend such meeting.
- Conflicting approaches that are employed by some of the actors have confused the pastoralists on many occasions. It is common for various peace actors to hardly meet to plan on how to implement an activity.
- In peace work paper plans do not necessarily work. This is because the security situation on the ground can change any time. This calls for a high level of flexibility. One has to act swiftly and decisively to make things function.
- Peace work does not need to be confined to a specific community in one area to make an impact. This idea of confinement to a pilot area only works in community development.

This is because neighboring communities without notice can spoil such a resultant peace attained. Peace work therefore, calls for spreading out to protect and harmonize target communities.

Conclusion

The practice of cattle rustling which is the main type of conflict in pastoral areas of the POKATUSA region is as old as the inhabitants of the region themselves. In a purely pastoral setting, the main reason for this conflict is the struggle for scarce resources. On the other hand, in agro-pastoral setting, the struggle for land comes into the picture as the main reason for conflict. In both these struggles the gun has complicated the whole situation.

There are many interventions that have been attempted and are being implemented in the POKATUSA region but with dismal success. The inappropriate methodologies employed by various players could be contributing to this reduced impact, but in the final analysis the difficulties presented by dealing with cross border issues have been underestimated by most peace builders in this region. Therefore any actor intending to handle cross border conflict should take into consideration the need to have the mandate to operate across borders. The most important actor is the government of the region.

As for the weapons dilemma, no one country should decide to disarm its citizens unilaterally. It would be too dangerous for its people in pastoralist border areas. The disarmament should be universal as attempted by IGAD countries. But before that happens the actors should continue targeting change of heart of the gun-wielders by raising their awareness through focal elders meetings, women peace crusades and youth study tours and introduction of alternative livelihoods to cattle rustling. It is a slow process but it works for now as we wait for IGAD countries to take away the guns from pastoralists.