Managing Conflicts in Pastoralist Communities of Northern Kenya

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Abstract
Arid and semi arid lands (ASAL) cover 80% of Kenya, and 25% of its population lives in these areas (Government of Kenya, 2003). These areas receive 400 to 760 millimeters of rain hence only one crop can be grown per year (Thom & Martin, 1983). Nomadic pastoralism is the main economic activity and primary source of livelihoods for these Kenyans. “Over 50% of the country’s livestock population is based in the ASALs” accounting for more than 90% of the employment and 95% of household income for the inhabitants (Government of Kenya, 2003). The North Rift Valley region of Kenya is an ASAL area with four pastoral groups occupying it, including the Pokot and Marakwet tribes.

Despite the potential for economic growth in these areas, poverty is still rampant, averaging 65%. Apart from the literacy rate being low and poor infrastructure, security has been the most significant driving factor in the manifestation of poverty (Government of Kenya, 2003). Insecurity in the area, especially among the Pokot and Marakwet peoples, has been caused by:

- the loss of traditional grazing land and water;
- cattle rustling;
- inadequate alternative sources of livelihoods for pastoralists;
- non-responsive government policies (Pkaitya, Adan, & Masinde, 2004).

At least 164,457 people have been displaced because of conflicts arising from cattle raiding in the North Rift Valley, including 32,000 Marakwets and 30,361 Pokots (Pkaitya, Adan & Masinde, 2003). As a result of these conflicts, the majority of people depend on food relief and are malnourished. Human rights abuse is on the rise as well.

Following the devastating effect that conflicts have brought to pastoralist communities, the need for intervention exists. Anecdotally, conflict resolution without social, economic, and political empowerment is simply a “band aid” for a gaping wound. The poster presentation will examine pragmatic approaches and potential solutions to solving conflicts such as promoting:

- eco-tourism that is environmentally sustainable;
- small-scale business enterprises;
- irrigation;
- provision of social capital investment for more schools, health facilities, and improved access to water.
A bottom up approach that encourages participatory planning with communities will be applied to ensure that any action or intervention process is community driven. The need to diversify livelihoods will be discussed.

The poster presentation will explain how communities, development agencies, and the government could work together as partners in developing economic opportunities for those people who inhabit the arid and semi-arid lands of Kenya. Strategies for the international community to work together with the Kenyan Government to alleviate the problems of insecurity and conflicts, and concurrently rehabilitate/reorient displaced persons into mainstream society will be outlined in the presentation as well.

**Keywords:** Community Empowerment; Conflict; Kenya; Pastoralists; Poverty Alleviation