IN DEPTH

Chronic violence and peacebuilding in Eastern African's Pastoralists Lands

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Pastoralism is practised on 43% of the land surface area of Africa[1]. It is estimated that pastoralism – the act of keeping livestock for personal and commercial purposes- contributed up to 44% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of African countries[2] with an increasing trade value of US$ 1 billion per annum.[3]

Pastoralists occupy the drylands of East and Horn of Africa – Eastern Africa. These are large spatial enclaves, and in Kenya alone, these areas account for 89% of the total land occupied by about 16 million people.[4] The value of the livestock trade alone from pastoral lands in Kenya is US$ 1.13 billion, contributing to 28% of all meat consumed in the country.

While pastoralist lands are not affected by armed conflict, they do suffer sporadic outburst of violence, often confronting communities. The cross-border nature of these confrontations, and the fact that many go underreported, adds complexity to the challenge of addressing them. The arid regions of Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya have actually been the theatres of instability and violence for a solid five decades or so, driven by the following main factors: transnational organised crime, climate change, and marginalisation. Consequently, building peace requires addressing these key issues.

Pastoralist lands are often cross border points between countries, for example, the Ilemi triangle or the Karamoja cluster between Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya.

These are disputed areas with porous borders that are used as entry and exit points for transnational criminal activities of trafficking and smuggling of persons and goods. To fully understand the presence of transnational organised crime [5] in Eastern Africa, the ENACT Programme [6] developed an organised crime index, an interactive tool that assesses the level of transnational organised crime in each county, regionally and continentally along three key pillars – criminal markets, criminal actors and resilience. [7]

"While pastoralist lands are not affected by armed conflict, they do suffer sporadic outburst of violence; the proliferation of small arms and light weapons have made these areas a haven of criminal activities"

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons have made these areas a haven of criminal activities by transforming traditional cultural practices like cattle raiding to transnational organised crime of cattle rustling. An illustration of it are the many violent incidents of cattle theft that took place in 2021 alone in Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya and left scores of people dead and property damaged. [8] In 2019, firearms, both licitly and illicitly acquired by civilians in East and Horn Africa, are estimated to be close to 8 million. [9] Most of these firearms are trafficked by criminal actors to pastoralist areas and used to steal cattle. Cattle theft used to take days, sometimes weeks. With massive circulation of illicit firearms in pastoralist areas, criminals steal, transport and sell livestock as far as to overseas markets in less than 24 hours.

Climate change has intensified natural calamities like drought and famine to excessive levels. Arid areas already receive less rainfall, and when it successively fails over some time, vegetation does not grow. This puts pressure on pastoralists to seek their food sources and that of their livestock in other areas, which often results in conflict with other communities. Erratic and prolonged rainfall also results in disasters such as

flooding and outbreak of diseases such as epidemic typhoid and malaria.

And last, continuous marginalisation and lack of affirmative interventions by successive governments have neglected these areas leaving communities to fend for themselves. Lack of decentralisation of state resources such as allocating adequate budget for socio-economic programmes and developing civil infrastructures such as roads and water dams have turned pastoralist lands into 'ungoverned spaces'. In these large spaces, anything can happen, and the governments may not even be aware or rather may not have the capacity to respond.

"There is a need to re-think strategies that can address the chronic violence caused by organised crime, climate change and marginalisation"

These dynamics have seen these areas continue to witness chronic violence. Transnational organised crime, climate change and marginalisation are complex to solve, especially when there is interplay between them. When this complexity is left unaddressed, especially by the duty bearer, which is the nation-state, communities are left in limbo and peacebuilding efforts are jeopardised.

As aforementioned above, successive peacebuilding initiatives by State and non-state actors have often been haphazard and challenges of violence have continued to intensify. There is a need to re-think strategies that can address the structural violence in these areas.

The socio-economic potential of these areas is unquestionable, but sustainable peace must first prevail.

In pastoral lands there is an intersection of cultural, direct and structural violence as conceptualized by Johan Galtung.[10] Cultural violence are societal beliefs and prevalent stereotypes within ethnic groups that are used to legitimise violence among

them. Pastoral groups are a formation of many different ethnic groups with different cultures such as the Pokot and Samburu in Kenya, the Toposa and Nuer in South Sudan, the Daasanach and Nyangatom in Ethiopia and tens of others in different countries in the region. The difference in their customary practices and belief attitudes are often a source of conflict among themselves.

Direct or physical violence manifests itself in forms of crimes such as robbery, fighting and even death. Physical violence in pastoral lands cannot be overemphasised, as it has resulted to the loss of many lives and livestock, and damage to property.

The intersection of direct and cultural violence have resulted to the escalation of structural violence in these regions. Structural violence is embedded in the societal structures and often hidden. Structural violence directly leads to social injustices and a prolonged lack of access to the very basic of needs of a people such as food, shelter, and education. Over decades of violence, these areas have been left in a vicious cycle of conflict and poverty and building peace has been one of the hardest endeavours.

"How can infrastructures for peace be established in pastoralist lands that are areas not in war but constant violent conflict?"

Infrastructures for peace

As developed below, different actors have tried over and again to build peace but with little success. The question then is how can infrastructures for peace be established in pastoralist lands that are areas not in war but constant violent conflict?

Infrastructures for peace is the 'dynamic network of interdependent structures, mechanisms, resources, values, and skills which, through dialogue and consultation, contribute to conflict prevention and peace-building in a society.'[11] The 2002 World Health Organization report on violence and health affirm that violence can be prevented, just as the way public health prevents diseases and illnesses.[12] Infrastructures for

peace alludes to the *raison d'être* that just as health provision requires institutional structures to support it, so does peace.

Thus building peace in areas that are prone to sporadic conflict and complex violence of direct, cultural and structural would require robust planning of peace. This planning by both state and non-state actors, should be multipronged, involving different stakeholders at local, national and regional levels and be flexible to mixed methods of both hard and soft approaches.

Provision of peoples' security and affirmation of peaceful coexistence is a primary function of the State. However, the States' approach to conflict mitigation in these areas has been one-sided and that of a hard militaristic stance. These approaches include cordoning the areas, instilling curfews, enhancing police patrol, and initiating disarmament programmes. While peace prevails instantly due to the use of force, often excessive, these hard militaristic approaches have not worked in the long term.

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The States continue to under look traditional customary institutions headed by elders that exert authority and insist on strengthening its local administrative structures of government officers to oversee dispute resolutions. Softer approaches such as communal dispute mitigation mechanisms and dialogue programmes have been given less emphasis, resources and needed capacity. Thus sustainable peace in these areas has remained a mirage.

A look into peacebuilding programming indicates that there may be close to a hundred initiatives in the pastoralist areas supported by other actors than the State from the local, regional and international levels. These actors include the African Union and regional economic communities such as the East African Community and the

Intergovernmental Authority on Development. They also include other sectoral development partners working on livelihoods programmes such as agriculture, trade, water, sanitation and hygiene. Perhaps the bulk of the other actors are from the civil society, including non-governmental organisations and faith-based institutions.

All these actors have programmatic interventions that are community-centric involving women, youth, herders association (predominantly men) and traditional leaders. Innovative peacebuilding programming such as the use of sports[13] between communities as a tool for peacebuilding have also been adopted and women have been at the forefront as peace brokers urging their men not to engage in violence.[14]

While there has been notable success in some of these innovative approaches, however, these programmatic interventions are often not integrated, short term and thus not sustainable. Peace cannot be quickly fixed, and many actors' presence is not an affirmation that it can be built.

"Sustainable developmental processes will usher in new approaches in peacebuilding in pastoralist areas"

Actors should play a critical role in bridging the divide between the State and the pastoralists – the duty bearer and the right holder. This is a space partially unoccupied, and this is where the genuine peacebuilding dialogue can be found. Peacebuilding should go beyond dialogue and reconciliation between communities to addressing drivers and enablers of conflict. For example, cushioning communities from the glares of climate change by ensuring water and vegetation to pastoralists livelihoods is present even during periods of less rains is a form of peacebuilding.

Conflicts in non-war settings go beyond policy and legislative frameworks to rather development and restorative frameworks. A shift in focus from pacification through conventional securitisation approaches to sustainable developmental processes will usher in new approaches in peacebuilding in pastoralist areas. But these approaches

should be long-term, sustainable, and have both the State and the pastoralists involved.

For this to happen, States must have the political will. Communities should be the primary focus and other actors should work together in supporting this 'peacebuilding dialogue' and work in concert. Pastoralism is a cross border phenomenon and each State has its own approach. More often, these approaches are divergent and do not provide for practical cooperation between and among States.

The 2010[15] African Union policy framework for pastoralism in Africa is a principal reference document on how the pastoral economy can be enhanced to unprecedented levels. But the inherent challenges of chronic violence and embedded complexities of poverty and climate change are hindering factors. Unlike the United Nations Security Council 1325 (2000) which is a localised instrument used by women peacemakers around the world, the 15 year-old African Union Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development policy framework remains a high-level instrument with no pulse in women peacemaking efforts.[16] The AU, thus, needs to implement such frameworks that can speak directly to the realities of peacebuilding – especially in pastoralist areas.

The recently adopted Intergovernmental Authority on Development protocol[17] on Free Movement of Persons and Transhumance ushered in a new regional framework where Eastern African countries can cooperate and harmonise safer passages of pastoralists in the region. It remains to be seen if Member States may develop an implementation action plan that would have components of violence reduction, peacebuilding and climate change mitigation approaches.

Last, organised crime, conflict and violence are increasingly becoming intertwined and this nexus thrives when there is lack of security, access to justice and social services. [18] There is thus a greater need of including the crime, conflict and violence as part of the peacebuilding agenda and not as separate as it currently is in law enforcement strategies. Again, the responsibility lies upon the principal duty bearer that is the State.

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[1] *Pastoralism in Africa's Drylands*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2018, pp13.

[2] *Making visible the 'invisible benefits' of African pastoralism will spur national and pastoral economies both*, International Livestock Research Institute, 2013.

[3] Catley, A, Lind, J, and Scoones, Ian. *Pastoralism and Development in Africa: Dynamic Change at the Margins*, Routledge, 2013.

[4] *Unlocking the Potential of Arid and Semi Arid Lands of Kenya*, United Nations Development Programme, 2018.

[5] The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime defines organised crime as a structured group of three or more persons, existing over time with the intention of committing one or more serious crimes for financial or other material benefit.

[6] ENACT is a European Union Funded programme that enhances Africa's response to transnational organised crime. It is implemented by the Institute for Security Studies, INTERPOL and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

[7] For more information on the ENACT organised crime index, please visit this interactive website.

[8] Daghar, M. and Okumu, W. *Cattle rustling: a flourishing illicit market in East Africa*, 2021.

[9] Small Arms Survey. *Weapons Compass Mapping Illicit Arms Flow in Africa*, 2019, pp 33.

[10] Galtung, J. *Peace by Peaceful Means, Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*, International Peace Research Institute Oslo, Sage publications, 1996, pp 70-114.

[11] During a UNDP facilitated meeting in Naivasha, Kenya, in February 2010, with representatives of governments, political parties, civil society and UN Country Teams from fourteen African countries agreed on the definition of 'infrastructures for peace'.

[12] *World report on violence and health*, WHO library cataloging-in-publication data, World Health Organization, 2002. *Peace can be planned. Just like health*, Open Democracy, 2011.

[13] *A Practical Experience of a Peace-Building Program Targeting the Pastoralists Youth*: Cross-Border Peace & Sports Programme For Youth Warriors Sudan/Uganda/Kenya, PAX,

2009; Beyond Sport; *The Contribution of Sport within the Process of Peace and Reconciliation,* Sport and Dev, 2009.

[14] Khadiagala, G. M. and Mati, J. M. *Conflict Management Mechanisms in Resource-Constrained African Communities,* 2012.

[15] *Policy Framework For Pastoralism In Africa: Securing, Protecting and Improving the Lives, Livelihoods and Rights of Pastoralist Communities,* African Union, 2010.

[16] *The African Union must recognise women's role in peacebuilding,* Institute for Security Studies, 2021.

[17] *Protocol on Free Movement of Persons,* The intergovernmental Authority on Development, 2020.

[18] Christian Altpeter. *Building Peace at the Nexus of Organized Crime, Conflict and Violent Extremism, International Expert Forum on Twenty-First Century Peace-Building,* The Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2015.

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Photography

African Pokot girls leave the market in Amudat, Karamoja, carrying bags with food. Uganda, Africa. By Arjen de Ruiter (Shutterstock).