

The Application of Collaboration Mechanisms as a Conflict Management Strategy among Pastoralist Communities and Ranchers in Laikipia County (2000-2022)

By

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the collaborative mechanisms in conflict management among pastoralists and ranchers, using Laikipia County of Kenya as the focus. The contention of the study is that conflicts among pastoralist and ranchers due to the competition for natural resources and a thriving network of small-arms trade. The study examined the collaborative mechanisms in conflict management among pastoralists and ranchers. The study objective was to examine the application of collaboration mechanisms as a conflict management strategy among pastoralist communities and ranchers in Laikipia County (2000-2022). Descriptive survey design was used where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to address the research questions. The target population included community leaders, ranchers, pastoralists who lived close by, employees of the Kenya Police Reserve (KPR), officers from the Ministry of Interior and National Administration, county government officials and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in security issues. A sample size of n=106 respondents and key informants was used in the study and this number was determined using the Onwuegbuzie and Collins typology. Field data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires and interview guides. Government reports, e-books, research studies and journals served as the main sources of secondary data. Data was verified, categorized and presented according to themes that aligned with the goals of the study. The study findings contribute to existential knowledge by shedding light on cooperative conflict resolution techniques. All parties involved in humanitarian operations, peacekeeping, conflict intervention and peace and security studies will find the study very interesting. The study found that the main causes of conflict between ranchers and pastoralists in Laikipia County are land conversion, drought, erratic weather, political incitement and the spread of small arms. Although issues like mistrust, competition for resources and political meddling still exist, collaborative mechanisms like community dialogues, cooperative resource management and educational programs have proven effective in lowering tensions. To encourage long-term collaboration and settle disputes, the report suggests concentrating on resource management, tighter regulations on small arms, political accountability and bolstering governance frameworks.

Key Words: Kenya, Collaboration Mechanisms, Conflict Management, Pastoralist Communities, Ranchers & Laikipia County

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Introduction

Collaborative conflict management mechanisms are often undermined by deep-seated mistrust, power imbalances and political interference. Although joint resource management programs and stakeholder engagement forums are meant to promote collaboration, they occasionally work to further the interests of the elite rather than to address issues at the local level (Adan & Pkalya, 2022). Sustainable peace initiatives are further hampered by structural issues like ineffective enforcement systems and competing economic interests (Ochieng, Kariuki & Kimani, 2023). Furthermore, cultural differences and conflicting priorities make it challenging to achieve inclusivity in decision-making, which frequently results in the temporary suppression of conflict rather than its long-term resolution (Kariuki & Mwangi, 2021).

Globally, conflicts over natural resources, such as pasture, water and land, have been resolved through a variety of cooperative strategies adapted to particular environmental and sociopolitical circumstances. Co-management of grazing lands in Argentina's Pampas region is one example of a South American initiative that has balanced indigenous rights with ranching interests (Jordan, 1993). Ranchers, environmentalists and federal agencies have resolved disputes in a structured manner in the United States of America (USA) due to laws like the Taylor Grazing Act (Sheridan, 2007). In a similar vein, the Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) program in Australia combines contemporary ranching methods with Aboriginal land management practices to support ecological preservation and conflict resolution (Msuya, 2015).

In Africa, different contexts have used collaborative approaches. Although the proliferation of small arms continues to cause insecurity, North African peace committees mediate conflicts between Tuareg and Berber pastoralists over limited water and grazing resources (Onyema & Amujiri, 2021). Through both conventional and contemporary mediation methods, East African cross-border peace initiatives, such as the Karamoja Cluster Project, promote regional cooperation (Mkutu, 2005). In Kenya, Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL) regions have implemented co-managed conservancies and grazing committees to reduce tensions between pastoralists and ranchers, with the backing of national policies (Government of Kenya, 2010). However, historical land grievances and competition for resources due to climate change continue to fuel conflicts in Laikipia County and the effectiveness of multiagency interventions is limited by uneven enforcement of policies and weak institutional coordination (Kamais & Okuto, 2024).

Assumptions

The application of collaboration mechanisms has been a significant conflict management strategy among pastoralist communities and ranchers in Laikipia County between 2000 and 2022.

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Statement of Problem

Conflict management in Laikipia County has mostly concentrated on band-aid fixes rather than resolving long-standing structural and historical grievances. Government actions like security deployments and disarmament have frequently increased tensions rather than promoting communication and peace-making. Conventional conflict resolution techniques prioritize preventing violence right away over achieving lasting peace, failing to adjust to the complexity of contemporary land use. Recurrent conflicts have resulted from the failure to address the economic and environmental constraints that fuel resource competition, with tensions being exacerbated by pastoralist incursions into private ranches. For a lasting peace, proactive cooperation through equitable policy creation and inclusive decision-making must replace reactive conflict resolution. Irrespective of cooperative resource management, mediation and stakeholder engagement having the potential, real cooperation is frequently hampered by power disparities, resentments from the past and competing financial interests. Enforceable laws, fair resource distribution and ongoing community engagement are required to guarantee that everyone sees cooperation as advantageous to both sides rather than something that is imposed from without.

Objective

To examine the application of collaboration mechanisms as a conflict management strategy between pastoralist communities and ranchers in Laikipia County (2000-2022).

Review of Related Literature

Collaborative Mechanisms Employed in Dealing with the Pastoralist and Ranchers Conflicts

Environmental and sociopolitical factors influence conflicts between ranchers and pastoralists and different regions use different strategies to resolve conflicts. Without more extensive structural reforms, land restitution programs and mediation efforts proved insufficient in Colombia, where land ownership disputes and poor governance fueled violence during the armed conflict (Triana Ángel, Burkart & Pazos Cárdenas, 2024). Similarly, to handle climate-related conflicts, ranchers in the Western United States have implemented cooperative water-sharing and conservation agreements; however, obstacles like cultural differences still exist (Saliman & Petersen-Rockney, 2022). These incidents highlight the necessity of conflict resolution techniques that are context-sensitive and participatory.

In Europe, sustainable grazing operations have been aided by institutional frameworks like European Union (EU) regulations and local stakeholder engagement, although top-down strategies occasionally overlook regional cultural contexts (Bindi, 2024). Land disputes in Kazakhstan have been lessened by cooperative herding and community-based pasture management since the country's shift from traditional pastoralism to state-controlled ranching (Kerven, Robinson & Behnke, 2021). But these efforts have been undermined by the lack of pastoralist voices in policymaking, highlighting the necessity of inclusive decision-making. Similar initiatives have fostered collaborations between ranchers, scientists and policymakers in Australia through initiatives like Grazing Futures; however, their long-term viability hinges on consistent financial and political backing (Rolfe *et al.* 2021).

North Africa and Kenya highlight the role of socio-economic factors in exacerbating pastoralist conflicts, necessitating holistic solutions. Intercommunal dialogues and agreements on shared grazing have helped ease tensions in North Africa, but issues of

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poverty and resource scarcity still exist (Ntumva, 2022). Adaptive measures such as community grazing plans and drought-resistant livestock have shown promise in Kenya; however, their wider adoption is impeded by policy and financial constraints (Yator, 2024). These incidents highlight the significance of integrated approaches that, in order to maintain long-term stability, combine economic and policy reforms with conflict resolution.

Collaboration among the Pastoralist and Ranchers as a Conflict Management Strategy

Collaboration between ranchers and pastoralists has been shown to be an essential conflict resolution strategy, especially in areas where livelihoods centered on livestock and agriculture coexist. Conflicts over land and resource rights have decreased in the Amazon as a result of cooperative resource management initiatives between cattle ranchers and native pastoral communities (Franco, 2020). These initiatives foster peaceful coexistence by generating financial and environmental incentives through the exchange of knowledge on conservation and sustainable grazing methods. Brazil's creation of cooperative grazing areas, which has enhanced pasture management and reduced land disputes, is a noteworthy example.

In the USA, conflicts in the western states have been successfully decreased by cooperative water resource management models between ranchers and pastoralists. Various stakeholders now have easier access to water thanks to negotiated agreements controlling the use of limited water resources, like the Colorado River (Gunningham, 2021). In order to ensure equitable water distribution and avoid conflicts, these agreements rely on shared governance frameworks and understanding. The effectiveness of these models highlights the wider relevance of teamwork in resource management, particularly in areas dealing with comparable difficulties.

Other countries have also adopted collaborative mechanisms to manage pastoralist-rancher conflicts effectively. In Spain, tensions have decreased and collaboration has improved as a result of multi-stakeholder platforms that involve pastoralists in land-use decision-making (García-Pérez, Ortega & Martínez, 2022). In order to combat resource scarcity brought on by climate change, Mongolia has adopted cooperative livestock management techniques, which have helped ranchers and pastoralists become more resilient (Davaa, 2020). In Australia, community networks overseeing shared grazing schemes have been instrumental in resolving disputes (Fitzgerald & Walker, 2021). In a similar vein, South Africa's joint land management plans and Kenya's community conservancies have supported efforts at land restitution and sustainable resource use, highlighting the significance of inclusive governance in conflict resolution (Njuguna & Waweru, 2021; Mthembu, 2022).

Challenges in the Use of Collaborative Approaches in Conflict Management between Pastoralist and Ranchers

In Laikipia, pastoralists and ranchers must work together to manage conflicts because of structural issues like resource scarcity, environmental degradation and competing land-use interests. Ahmad and Afzal (2021) draw attention to the influence of population pressure and climate-induced desertification on conflicts in Punjab, Pakistan, where comparable tensions are noted. However, important sociopolitical elements that impede collaboration, like uneven power dynamics and long-standing land disputes, are ignored in their study. By taking socioeconomic and environmental barriers into account, this study fills these gaps by analyzing how cooperative mechanisms can be adapted to the unique conflict dynamics of Laikipia.

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In North-Central Nigeria, according to Higazi (2016) and Kodili (2020), tensions between groups, land scarcity and seasonal migrations are the main causes of conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. Similar trends are seen in Laikipia, where tensions are exacerbated by pastoralists' frequent encroachment on private ranches as a result of a lack of grazing land. Conflicts are exacerbated by lax enforcement of grazing laws and unchecked herder movement, which is similar to the difficulties in Nigeria. The results of these studies are applicable to Laikipia, where ecological and sociopolitical grievances impede cooperative conflict resolution, despite their primary focus on Nigeria.

Similar to other areas like Marsabit and the Tana Delta, political meddling and poor governance make cooperative conflict management in Laikipia even more difficult. Martin (2012) highlights the role of outside actors in escalating tensions in the Tana Delta, while Diba (2021) emphasizes how political rivalry and ethnic identity fuel disputes in Marsabit. Similarly, commercial livestock markets, political marginalization and outside dispute manipulation exacerbate land conflicts in Laikipia. Even though earlier studies have identified these root causes, there is still a significant knowledge gap regarding how collaborative approaches can lessen these conflicts, highlighting the necessity of institutional reforms and inclusive frameworks for decision-making.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design, which facilitated the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data without manipulating the participants' responses. This approach was chosen due to its effectiveness in capturing attitudes, perceptions and behaviors, making it suitable for the study's objectives (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The study was conducted in Laikipia County, a region characterized by semi-arid conditions and a diverse population, including pastoralists, ranchers and conservationists. Given the persistent conflicts between pastoralists and ranchers over land and resources, the study sought to examine the socio-political dynamics

The study focused primarily on Laikipia North, where violent conflicts between pastoralists and ranchers are most prevalent. The target population included various stakeholders such as pastoralists, ranchers, opinion leaders, government security agencies and civil society organizations. Stratified sampling was used to ensure a diverse representation of respondents, followed by purposive sampling to select individuals directly affected by or involved in conflict resolution. A total of n=106 participants were selected, with priority given to those with firsthand knowledge of the issues, ensuring an accurate reflection of the situation.

Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources, with semi-structured questionnaires and interviews used to gather insights from respondents. Data reliability was ensured through pilot testing in Ngare Mara, Isiolo County, where adjustments were made to the research instruments to improve clarity and accuracy. The final analysis combined statistical tools for quantitative data and thematic content analysis for qualitative responses, ensuring comprehensive findings to inform policy recommendations.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The study evaluated the application of collaboration mechanisms as a conflict management strategy among pastoralist communities and ranchers in Laikipia County (2000-2022). The study established that in Laikipia County, cooperative methods were essential for resolving disputes between pastoralists and ranchers. The creation of local peace committees to

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promote agreements on land use and grazing, mediation and community dialogues were important strategies. These strategies used structured negotiations to increase coexistence, decrease encroachment and promote mutual understanding. In particular, cooperative management of grazing grounds and water sources contributed to the reduction of tensions by guaranteeing sustainability and fair access. In an inquiry, a key informant (KII 11) opined:

Community dialogues offer a vital forum for voicing complaints and identifying points of agreement, which promotes harmonious coexistence. Neutral third parties facilitating mediation efforts contribute to the efficacy and impartiality of conflict resolution. By resolving disputes over resources like land use and grazing, local peace committees have been essential in lowering tensions and encouraging sustainable community practices (KII 11, 10th June 2023, OI Maisor).

The verbatim note emphasizes how successful community dialogues and mediation efforts are at settling disputes involving resources. By using impartial mediators like local administrators, NGOs and elders, conflicts are resolved fairly and stakeholder trust is increased. This result supports that of Njuguna and Waweru (2021), who emphasize the importance of community conservancies in Kenya as a means of resolving disputes between ranchers and pastoralists. Through the integration of conflict resolution techniques and environmental conservation, these initiatives offer long-term sustainability.

Sharing resources, like water sources and grazing areas, was another successful strategy. Through agreements made possible by NGOs and local governments, rotational grazing systems were established, guaranteeing resource balance and halting environmental deterioration. In order to demonstrate a collaborative approach to crisis management, ranchers set aside portions of their property for pastoralist grazing during droughts. These systems decreased competition for limited resources while increasing resilience and efficiency in impacted communities. Further, another informant (KII 4) stated that:

Conflicts between ranchers and pastoralists over shared resources, such as grazing grounds and water sources, are lessened when collaborative management is used. Local governments and NGOs contribute to ensuring fair access and advancing environmental sustainability by putting in place formal agreements and rotational grazing systems. These cooperative agreements benefit the land and communities by increasing resilience and improving resource use efficiency, as demonstrated by ranchers providing grazing areas during droughts (KII 4, Thome 7th June 2023).

The verbatim note reinforces the importance of shared resource management as a tool for conflict mitigation is emphasized in the verbatim note. Stakeholders promote long-term sustainability by preventing resource depletion and overuse by guaranteeing controlled access to grazing areas. This result is in line with the International Crisis Group's (2022) discussion of how cooperative resource management plans enhance resource distribution and flexibility in areas under environmental stress. By averting conflicts arising from a lack of resources, these mechanisms also foster peace.

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Programs for capacity-building and education were crucial in addressing the dynamics of conflict. Pastoralist communities were given access to training programs that taught them contemporary livestock management strategies like herd size optimization and controlled grazing. Likewise, programs fostered empathy and understanding between ranchers by raising their cultural awareness. NGOs like the Laikipia Wildlife Forum frequently led these initiatives, which were successful in lowering tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence. In an interview, an informant said that:

The promotion of sustainable practices and conflict resolution among pastoralist communities has been successfully achieved through education and capacity-building initiatives. Through training in contemporary livestock management and cultural awareness, these programs improve mutual understanding and promote coexistence between ranchers and pastoralists by lowering tensions and increasing empathy (KII 9, 20th June 2023, Segera).

The sentiments emphasizes how educational programs can help resolve conflicts by promoting technical skills and a common understanding. Training initiatives not only lessen conflicts over resources but also open doors for sustainable business practices and economic diversification. This is in line with Mthembu (2022), who details how comparable programs effectively healed divisions among farming communities in South Africa. Stakeholders enable communities to proactively address conflict triggers by funding knowledge-sharing initiatives.

The study found that in Laikipia County, pastoralists and ranchers could work together in a number of crucial areas as a conflict resolution strategy. In order to prevent livestock loss during droughts, ranchers allow pastoralists limited access to grazing land on predetermined terms. This is an important area. Another crucial area is the management of water resources, where cooperative efforts are made to maintain dams and boreholes to guarantee fair access. By fostering a sense of shared responsibility and lowering tensions, collaborative committees that include both groups aid in the efficient management of these resources.

Another important area of collaboration was livestock health programs, where ranchers and pastoralists collaborated on veterinary outreach campaigns aimed at enhancing animal health and preventing disease. As ranchers help pastoralists access improved markets and infrastructure to sell livestock and dairy products, economic partnerships also offer chances for cooperation. Additionally, community development initiatives like building schools and medical facilities improve ties between the two groups. These cooperative efforts guarantee long-term socioeconomic benefits in addition to fostering peaceful coexistence. In an interview, an informant (KII 4) explained that:

In times of drought, cooperation between ranchers and pastoralists shows a practical approach to resource management, wherein access to grazing land is negotiated to guarantee livestock survival. By deciding on zoned or seasonal grazing, both parties can preserve peaceful coexistence and lessen competition for limited resources. Additionally, collaborative committees that manage water resources jointly help to guarantee fair access to essential water sources, fostering sustainability and reciprocal advantages (KII 4, Thome 7th June 2023).

Another informant (KII 2) opined:

Ranchers and pastoralists can collaborate in veterinary outreach to enhance animal health through livestock health programs, which provide a useful platform for sharing resources and expertise. Mutual growth is facilitated by economic partnerships between the two groups; ranchers assist pastoralists in gaining access to improved markets and infrastructure, thereby enhancing their financial stability. By addressing common needs and boosting long-term prosperity for both communities, cooperative community development initiatives, like constructing schools and medical facilities, further foster social cohesion and peaceful coexistence (KII 2, Mukurian, 6th June 2023).

In view of the verbatim note, pastoralists and ranchers collaboration promotes shared access to vital resources, which makes it a viable conflict management strategy. By reducing resource-based conflicts, cooperative efforts like water management and seasonal grazing agreements allow both communities to live in harmony. Economic alliances and veterinary outreach initiatives also enhance intercommunity relations while promoting livestock health and financial stability. Such cooperative mechanisms, in the opinion of Gunningham (2021), are crucial for guaranteeing sustainable resource use and minimizing conflicts in environments with limited resources.

Collaboration is however hampered by a number of factors, the most important of which is mistrust, despite the advantages. Perceptions of exploitation and historical grievances make people reluctant to participate in cooperative projects, which undermines conflict resolution efforts. Competition for limited resources also increases tensions, which makes it harder to maintain cooperative agreements. Long-term resource management solutions are frequently undermined by a lack of trust and an inability to form structured collaborations, as noted by Adan and Pkalya (2022).

The results are consistent with existing literature that emphasizes how cooperation can reduce disputes over limited resources. Similar to the study's conclusions, Kariuki and Mwangi (2021) stress that collaboration is hampered by deeply ingrained historical grievances between ranchers and pastoralists. Similarly, Ochieng, Kariuki and Kimani (2023) contend that unique land-use practices and cultural differences erect further obstacles to cooperation. The idea that cooperative mechanisms are advantageous but need robust governance and trust-building mechanisms to be sustainable is supported by these insights.

Aloo (2020), who claims that collaborative community development projects greatly improve social cohesion and lessen intergroup tensions, concurs with the study's findings. Both ranchers and pastoralists can promote long-term collaboration by making investments in shared infrastructure, such as schools and medical facilities. However, as this study has shown, poor governance and political meddling frequently cause such initiatives to fail. Resolving these issues through frameworks for mediation and policy changes may increase the efficacy of cooperation as a conflict resolution strategy.

The study found that using cooperative methods to resolve disputes between ranchers and pastoralists in Laikipia County presented a number of difficulties. Significantly, 57% of respondents strongly agreed and 23% agreed that pastoralists invaded private ranches due to drought and unpredictable weather patterns, highlighting the direct correlation between environmental stressors and conflict. Further demonstrating the perceived role of political

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actors in escalating tensions, 30% of respondents agreed and 53% strongly agreed that incitement by the political class influenced insecurity in their area. The conversion of grazing land into commercial ranching, agriculture and conservancies was another significant issue; according to 35% of respondents, this was a major source of conflict between pastoralists and ranchers and 25% strongly agreed. A community leader (KII 11) interviewed in the study highlighted how politicians played a key role in fueling tensions, stating:

In front of the media, politicians made no secret of their belief that foreigners who own large tracts of land ought to turn them over to locals when their leases expire. A significant amount of the ranchers' land, they added, is underutilized and inactive. Given their ties to the land, the locals were justified in claiming ownership of what had once belonged to them (KII 11, 10th June 2024, Ngare Ng'iro).

The sentiment underscores how political rhetoric has been leveraged to exacerbate disputes, portraying ranchers as outsiders and amplifying local grievances. The results show that environmental stressors, especially resource scarcity and drought, are important causes of conflict in Laikipia County. The study supports earlier research by Mkutu (2005) that connected resource-based conflicts, such as pastoralists' invasions of land, to drought conditions. Furthermore, Bond (2014) documented how political leaders use land disputes to mobilize support and widen rifts within communities, which is consistent with the role of politicians in escalating tensions. Grazing land being turned into conservancies and commercial endeavors increases competition for limited resources and complicates efforts to resolve conflicts.

The results support the notion that political manipulation and resource scarcity are major conflict drivers and are in line with a larger body of research on conflict dynamics in pastoralist communities. As demonstrated in Laikipia, where 45% of respondents agreed and 20% strongly agreed that the availability of illegal weapons fueled tensions, the study supports Mkutu's (2005) assertion that the proliferation of small arms exacerbates conflicts in pastoralist regions. Furthermore, Bond (2014) pointed out that politicians use land-related grievances to rally support, a pattern that is evident in the conflict situation in Laikipia. These results imply that resource management and the political exploitation of local grievances must be addressed in any successful conflict resolution plan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study established that although cooperative mechanisms have significantly improved conflict resolution, long-standing issues still impede lasting peace. The effectiveness of these mechanisms in promoting better relationships and agreements for resource sharing was acknowledged by the respondents. However, enduring problems like the spread of small arms, deeply rooted cultural customs like cattle rustling, resource scarcity and political meddling make it difficult to work together over the long term. Aside from historical grievances and governance flaws, environmental factors like drought also heighten tensions and foster mistrust among stakeholders. A comprehensive strategy that addresses both immediate security concerns and the underlying socioeconomic and environmental drivers of conflict, as well as strengthening governance structures and fostering trust, is required to increase the efficacy of conflict management mechanisms.

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Recommendations

In order to effectively reduce conflicts, policymakers should improve resource management by implementing programs like rangeland rehabilitation, water conservation and fair land-use plans. While civic education initiatives can combat divisive rhetoric and promote social cohesion, law enforcement, local authorities and pastoralist communities must work together more closely to combat illegal firearms. In order to lessen reliance on livelihoods based on livestock, the government should also enforce zoning regulations, implement land tenure reforms and incorporate alternative revenue-generating activities. Long-term stability requires active dialogue facilitation, trust-building initiatives and improved conflict mediation mechanisms from local government agencies, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations.

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