GLOBAL LIVESTOCK CRSP

Pastoral Conflict and Use of Key Resources along the Ethiopia-Kenya Border: Implications for Policy and Development

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Research Brief 07-04-PARIMA December 2007

The international border between Kenya and Ethiopia occurs in a remote rangeland area. The border has witnessed increased conflicts in recent years, especially between Gabra and Borana pastoralists. The border has also been subjected to heightened political tensions. In this study researchers from both sides of the border have joined together for the first time to conduct extensive field work. General objectives for this research are to characterize key natural resources and pastoral migration routes along the border and better understand elements of cross-border conflict. We interviewed some 200 pastoralists and mapped the area using GPS technology. Research findings indicate that pastoral communities have traditionally moved across the international border primarily in search of forage for livestock during dry periods. Such movements, however, have been recently curtailed due to conflicts. There are many border sites now considered as unutilized "no-man's lands." Ethnic and political tensions have also negatively affected development projects and cross-border trade. There is an ongoing need for the Kenyan and Ethiopian governments, traditional leadership institutions, as well as local development agents and other elites to support peace and reconciliation initiatives if the situation is to improve.

Background

The international border between Kenya and Ethiopia is over 600 km in length from East to West. The border occurs in very remote rangeland locations. Pastoral people often live on both sides of this border. Livestock production is the major economic activity while crop production is practiced in small, arable pockets on the landscape. Livestock plays very important roles including food production, income generation, wealth storage, transportation, draught power, and provision of manure to fertilize fields. The livestock population of northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia is dominated by cattle, goats, camels, and sheep. The major ethnic group that lives on both sides of the border near the town of Moyale is the Boran. The Gabra are another common pastoral group that is found elsewhere in the borderlands area.

Pastoral groups on the border now seem to be locked in perpetual crisis. Challenges include conflicts with neighbors and occurrence of natural disasters such as droughts, floods, and disease. Traditionally pastoralists have coped with forage scarcity by moving herds over long distances across the Ethio-Kenya border. Today, however, international borders increasingly present challenges for pastoralists. Livestock often still must move across the border as before to find forage and water, but this movement is more often blocked by conflict or government intervention compared to that in the past. Variation in natural resources between northern Kenya (lower elevation) and southern Ethiopia (higher elevation) has positive aspects for pastoral resource use overall. Pastoralists from the two countries have traditionally exchanged ideas, shared resources, and engaged in trade. As populations grow and the region becomes more politicized, however, the scope for resource competition and cross-border conflict has increased. Other factors such as livestock disease transmission across the border have received increased attention given the growing importance of livestock marketing chains. If border circumstances could be improved it could have positive implications for people of the region. This brief reports on some preliminary results from cross-border research jointly conducted by KARI and OARI scientists from Marsabit and Yabello, respectively.

This study has many objectives. They include: (1) To identify and map commonly shared pastoral resources along the border; (2) to identify routes and seasons of livestock movement along the border; (3) to assess impacts of livestock on rangeland condition and trend and with respect to the spread of disease; (4) to characterize cross-border interactions among different pastoral communities, both positive and negative; (5) to identify locations, causes, and magnitudes of resource conflicts along the border; and (6) to recommend systems of sustainable rangeland resource management and utilization, conflict management, and improved animal health delivery based on our research findings. A total of 200 respondents have been interviewed for this study from both sides of the border over the past 18 months. The main study sites are the Dire, Miyo, and Moyale districts in Ethiopia and the Dukana and Sololo areas in Kenya. Nearly all respondents have been Gabra or Boran, with

only two from the Gari and Wada communities. We used various research techniques to collect data including semi-structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and direct observation. Mapping has been conducted using GPS technology.

Findings

The Gabra and Borana communities have well-defined, seasonal livestock foraging patterns in the border area. Different livestock species have traditionally used those areas most suitable for their dietary needs (grazing or browsing). It is also clear that neighboring pastoral communities have shared common resources along the border lands, especially during dry seasons and droughts. Shared resources have included water points, pastures, and mineral licks. Some of these resources are in Ethiopia, others in Kenya, and others occur right along the international border line. Some of these resources are controlled by various groups while others are uncontrolled. Respondents report that cross-border movement has greatly decreased in recent years mostly because of tribal clashes between the Gabra and Boran and other political problems. As a result, some traditional migratory routes have become impassable and some drought fallback areas are now considered as "no mans' lands" and hence no longer used. During much of the time of our surveys the official Ethio-Kenya border crossing at Moyale town was closed. Some communities have been acutely affected by the loss of cross-border access. This prominently includes the Gabra at Dukana, Kenya. No mans' lands now dominate the landscape along the border. They include places called Saru, Sabare, Forole, Turbi, Rawana, Basil, Ele Lae, Ele Goff, and Aramsam.

Many factors have contributed to these problems. Resource-based competition for forage and water is central. Traditional livestock raiding by one pastoral group on another continues to occur. Political interference and local businessmen wanting to sustain demand for small armaments have also heightened tensions.

Pastoral communities have many layers of decision-making structures that are related to resource use. These include the herders, household heads, local chiefs, and village committees. These different entities often have overlapping duties and rights. This presents a challenge to understanding community management of environmental resources because it is unclear which level of authority matters in each type of resource- use decision. This is worsened by the fact that pastoralists often do not recognize official boundaries or borders. Diminishing roles of traditional governance and resource management systems have had large effects on the increase in resource-based conflict along the Ethio-Kenya border. According to our research, communities no longer strictly observe traditional norms relating to the use and management of natural resources.

Our interviews also reveal that male youths and middle-aged men are the ones usually involved in violent conflict among pastoral or agro-pastoral groups. Women are key players, however, as they often incite the men (especially husbands and sons) to raid neighbors. Males who do not participate can be labeled as cowards by the women. This agrees with Field (2005) who noted that pastoral males conducting raids are still considered heroes in their traditional cultures.

Resource conflict has serious implications for development in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia. Development is profoundly disrupted by conflict. Problems are common for northern Kenya where development investments (cattle dips, small shops, police posts, and water points) are abandoned because of conflict. Conflict has also disrupted trade between Ethiopia and Kenya. This includes import and export business related to small ruminants, clothing, food, etc. Primary education has been halted in the community of Saru in Kenya when the Gabra community was displaced by violence and their children could no longer attend the local school. This contributes to illiteracy, lack of human capacity, and hence poverty. Respondents also noted that persistent violence between the Gabra and Boran has led to a seemingly permanent dislocation between the two cultures. For example, in times past Gabra and Boran would sometimes inter-marry. This no longer is the case.

Cattle raiding creates absolute poverty for communities when all or most of the animals are stolen and people suddenly become destitute. These people then must move to urban centers where they put added pressure on social services and relief distribution. A case in point is in Dukana town, Kenya, where displaced people have formed a village called *manyatta taka* meaning "displaced people."

Raiding can result in the dispersal of livestock diseases. This was clearly indicated in the descriptions of the spread of various livestock maladies as identified by respondents. There was an indication that some diseases were new to some areas and hence had no local cures. Local access to veterinary support is very poor.

Resource conflicts contribute to resource degradation and resource recovery. Livestock tend to be concentrated in "safe" areas nearer to settlements to reduce the chance they will be stolen. This contributes to local overgrazing that has reportedly led to the disappearance of valued perennial forages including *Cenchrus ciliaris, Chrysopogon plumulosus, Pennisetum mezianum, Echinochloa haploclada, Panicum coloratum, Leptothrium senegalense, Blepharis linariifolia, Aristida adscensionis,* and *Indigofera clifordiana*. In contrast, the no-man's lands where conflict has eliminated a regular presence of livestock appears to improve forage condition because it is rested from herbivory.

Practical Implications

In northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia livestock production is an important economic activity. Pastoralists contribute to the economy of both countries via livestock production. Pastoralists require extensive access to forage and water to be successful. Traditionally, this has included an ability to cross between what is now southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. However, today in a situation of resource-based conflict and periodic border closures the local pastoral production systems have been compromised.

For pastoral communities along the Ethio-Kenya border to better realize their socio economic potential, there is an on-going need for peace and reconciliation. This could be done by developing more avenues for mediation among various communities. Policy makers at local and federal levels should act to help local people solve these conflicts. This effort needs to incorporate traditional conflict-resolution institutions and the input of development agents.

We have observed that the negative impact of cross-border conflicts is enormous. Many of our respondents yearn for peace. There have been efforts to establish cross-border peace committees that have met several times. However, it is the overarching problem of insecurity that continues to constrain these efforts. Our respondents have also noted that insecurity serves the agendas of some local elites including unsavory businessmen and politicians. Are there truly incentives for peace building, or not? Could the social and economic benefits of peace for many outweigh the benefits of conflict for a few?

Our findings reveal that it is possible for the Gabra and Boran to come together as they came up with many independent suggestions that could support reconciliation. According to our respondents, long-term stability should be founded on traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms. It has been said that the power of both *Laduu shanan* and *Dibbee shanan* is key. These are traditional council institutions of the *Gada* system for the Boran and Gabra, respectively. They are chaired by the *Abba Gada* (Boran) or the *Abba Yao* (Gabra). They still represent the final authority for conflict resolution among the indigenous people. Government has a role in facilitating the success of traditional conflict resolution. Another suggestion is to promote mixed settlements of Boran and Gabra along the border to help stabilize the region. It has been proposed that such settlements could create new opportunities for friendship and social interaction. They also recommend more stakeholder dialogue on the major regional and international factors that underpin conflict in the region.

Further Reading

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Acknowledgement

The authors thank the GL-CRSP Pastoral Risk Management Project (PARIMA) for funding our project and the management of KARI and OARI for operating support. Our appreciation is also extended to the communities along the Ethio-Kenya border who provided us with information without reservation. We also appreciate the local administrations for assisting us with security in the field.

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The GL-CRSP Pastoral Risk Management Project (PARIMA) was established in 1997 and conducts research, training, and outreach in an effort to improve the welfare of pastoral and agro-pastoral people with a focus on northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia. The project is led by Dr. D. Layne Coppock, Utah State University. Email: lcoppock@cc.usu.edu

The Global Livestock CRSP is comprised of multidisciplinary, collaborative projects focused on human nutrition, economic growth, environment and policy related to animal agriculture and linked by a global theme of risk in a changing environment. The program is active in East Africa, Central Asia and Latin America.

This publication was made possible through support provided by the Office of Agriculture, Bureau of Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade, under Grant No. PCE-G-00-98-00036-00 to the University of California, Davis. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID.

Design by Susan L. Johnson