



Wildlife and livestock grazing together near Kirimon, Laikipia North, Kenya

# A human security perspective

## on natural resource conflict and rural development

### Introduction

Conflicts in relation to natural resources occur throughout the world in a range of contexts, from rural to urban, and across a spectrum ranging from non-violent conflicts of interest to outright violence. These conflicts may be between specific user groups such as agriculturalists and pastoralists or humans and wildlife, or they may be in relation to the management or policy of a particular resource which is perceived as illegitimate and inequitable. Traditionally, conceptualisations of security have focussed on the nation state. Viewing natural resource conflict from a human security perspective, on the other hand, puts humans as the reference point, acknowledging that national security may not ensure the security, wellbeing or freedoms of citizens. It allows for the various intersecting factors of conflict to be seen from the perspective of the human, as either an individual and/or a community. This

perspective aligns with the conceptualisation of development as rights-based, rather than as pure economic growth.

Various natural resource conflicts persist in Laikipia County, Kenya, including agro-pastoral conflicts, cattle rustling and human-wildlife conflicts. While the existence of these conflicts is well-known, the underlying dynamics seen from the perspectives of various actors involved and the cross-cutting issues common to the conflicts are insufficiently understood. This research aimed to investigate the dynamics of cattle rustling, human-wildlife and agro-pastoral conflicts from the micro-level perceptions of stakeholders, and link these to macro-level phenomena such as policies, politics and international networks.

## Policy recommendations

- Natural resource conflicts, e.g. cattle rustling, agro-pastoral conflict, and human-wildlife conflict, are manifold and their impacts cannot be seen in isolation from each other and should therefore be analysed in a broader human security context
- Beyond visible impacts (physical and economic injuries), conflicts have 'hidden' psychological impacts on humans which need to be acknowledged and addressed
- While rooted in historical grievances (land distribution, resource access, colonisation), the contemporary contexts of natural resource conflicts are often global and interconnected (commercialisation of cattle rustling, links to international markets and illicit networks) and approaches to alleviate and manage such conflicts must be equally holistic

## Methodology

### Study area

Laikipia County is situated in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya and is a mixed zone of arid pastoralism in the low-lying drier areas and high potential farming in the higher, wetter areas. Prior to British colonisation, the area of Laikipia was under pastoralism, primarily by the Maasai community. During the colonial period the area was known as part of the 'White Highlands', under pastoral production and later cropping in the higher-rainfall areas to the South-west of the county, exclusively for European use. Contemporary Laikipia is a multi-ethnic county with the majority of Kenya's tribes resident in the area. Laikipia faces several development challenges including insecurity (caused by cattle rustling, illegal firearms, unoccupied parcels of land and limited security personnel), human-wildlife conflicts, high poverty levels (related to limited employment opportunities, poor access to markets and a population growth rate higher than the national average), frequent droughts, high HIV/AIDS prevalence, environmental degradation, gender inequality, negative cultural practices, and negative parental attitudes in relation to education. Between 2006 and 2009 there were skirmishes between the Samburu and Pokot pastoral tribes in Laikipia West and northern areas such as the neighbouring Samburu and Baringo counties. Violence was perpetrated through cattle rustling and armed 'battles', which culminated in the 'Kanampiu Massacre', in which over 30 pastoralists were killed, including women and children.

### Data collection

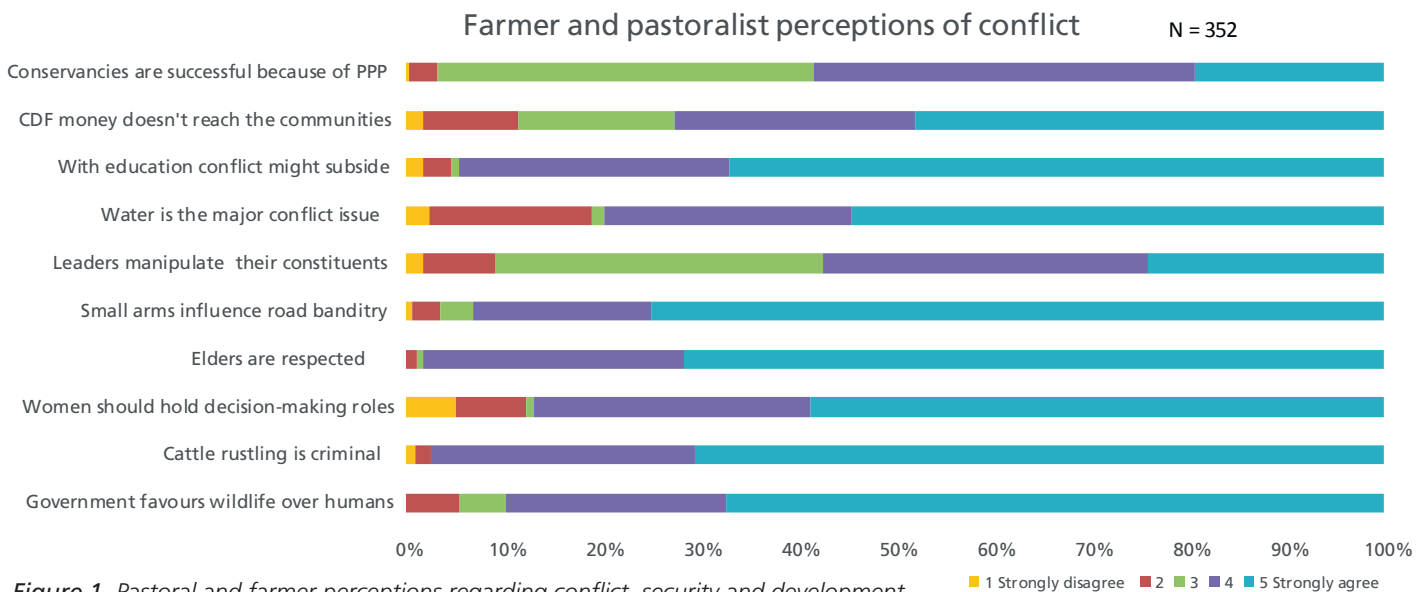
This case study is based on qualitative and quantitative primary and secondary data to holistically understand the conflict perceptions of farmers, pastoralists and extension professionals regarding conflict, security and development in Laikipia.

## Findings

### Perceptions of conflict

Figure 1 provides an overview of some of the key perceptions of farmers and pastoralists in Laikipia. Respondents perceived wildlife as both destructive to livelihoods and as providing opportunities for development and perceived their inclusion in wildlife management as key for maximising benefits and minimizing costs.

Cattle raiding had been a traditional cultural rite sanctioned by community elders in the area. However, the current system of cattle rustling was perceived as a criminal activity, because it is often perpetrated by non-pastoralists for commercial purposes rather than cultural motives. Strained relations between farmers and pastoralists revolved around resource access and the ability to exclude other groups. In some areas, these strained relations held an ethnic dimension as livelihood strategies are commonly differentiated by tribe (i.e. generally particularly tribes align with pastoralism and others with farming). However, respondents noted previous times of amicable relationships and suggested that much of the animosity between groups was fuelled by politicians and leaders pursuing their own agendas. The marginalisation of rural populations, particularly in pastoral areas, was perceived as a major barrier to development and subsequently to sustainable peace. Specifically, education was highlighted as crucial for communities in Laikipia to break the conflict-underdevelopment spiral by increasing competitiveness in the job market but also as a means of developing an understanding of political manipulation and an ability to move away from this form of subjugation. Respondents had low levels of trust in traditional security personnel and instead favoured 'homeguards' (volunteer community security personnel). Police were regarded as lazy, corrupt or simply under-resourced to provide sufficient



**Figure 1.** Pastoral and farmer perceptions regarding conflict, security and development in Laikipia (PPP – Public Private Partnership, CDF – Community Development Fund).

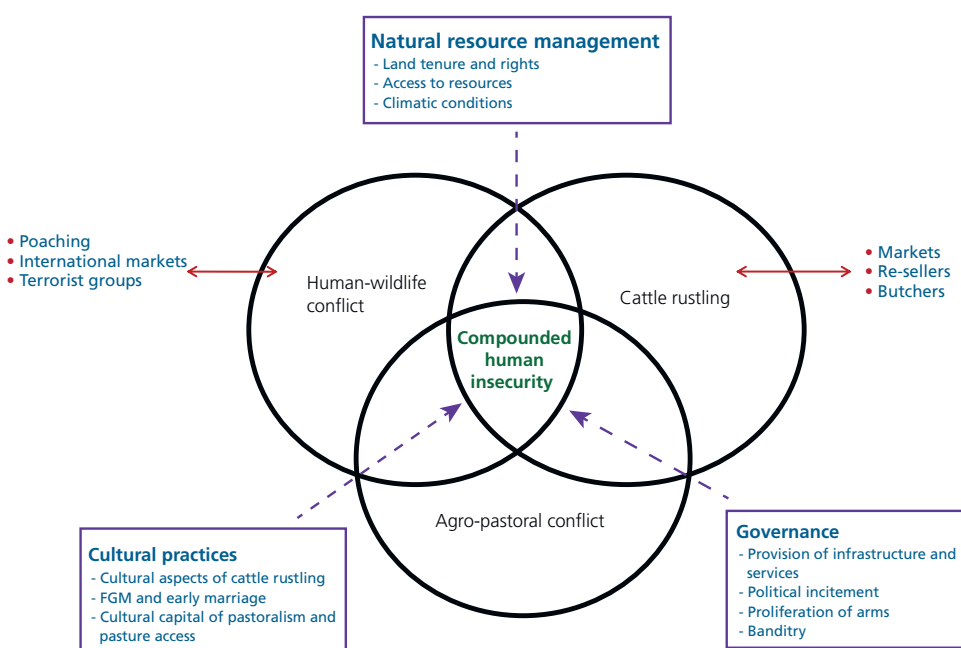
security. Due to the increased commercialisation of stock rustling, respondents perceived homeguards as more efficient in both patrolling and responding to security issues. However, the research also highlighted an area of concern for security where many homeguards in Laikipia are hired by wildlife conservancies (either private or community based), thereby making these guards armed by the state but accountable to private entities.

### Human security

Natural resources, cultural practices, insecurity and governance cut across each of the conflict cases which are 'glocal' in nature, i.e. local level conflicts are influenced by and perpetuate global level phenomena (figure 2). The conflicts play out and influence security, tourism and development in Laikipia, but the commercial nature of cattle rustling, terror-

ism, and the trade in wildlife trophies add an international dimension to them.

Each of the conflict types (cattle rustling, agro-pastoral conflict and human-wildlife conflict) compounds the impacts of other conflict types on humans, decreasing their wellbeing, often in 'hidden' ways. Specifically, the research found that while respondents' crop yields (and hence food security and income) were destroyed by crop-raiding elephants, the loss of their stock through cattle rustling further compounded these visible losses but also impacted their mental health. Due to the double loss from both human-wildlife conflict and cattle rustling, respondents lost self-esteem derived from being self-employed and providing for their households. Instead they would have to engage in casual employment which is often seasonal, physical labour.



**Figure 2.**

The 'glocal' nature of human security in Laikipia. The 'cross-cutting' themes of cultural practices, governance and natural resource management are represented by the purple boxes, with the dotted arrows representing the space where they compound the various conflict types (green). The red bullet points and arrows represent the 'glocal' nature of conflict in Laikipia connecting to regional and international networks.



## Concluding remarks

Analysing individual natural resource conflicts in isolation from each other and the broader human security context will miss the linkages between them and the hidden costs of these conflicts on humans. The limited provision of services, such as health care and education, and infrastructure such as roads marginalises rural communities. It impinges on their ability to move away from the conflict-underdevelopment cycle. This marginalisation is further compounded by the misappropriation of funds by elites and political incitement which promotes arming and competitive relations between communities thereby fuelling tensions between pastoralists, agriculturalists and wildlife. Beyond arguments

of resource scarcity, the case of Laikipia illustrates the relevance of a human security perspective, to holistically view conflict as human-human conflict incorporating both structural and physical violence. Viewing natural resource conflicts holistically can provide insight into the mechanisms through which they compound each other and impact on humans in often 'hidden' ways. While cattle rustling, agro-pastoral conflict and human-wildlife conflict are distinct conflict types, they are plagued by several cross-cutting issues related to culture, the natural environment and governance, which in turn perpetuate, link and compound the impacts on humans.

## Further reading

- Bond, J. (2014). A holistic approach to natural resource conflict: The case of Laikipia County, Kenya. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 34(0), 117-127. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2014.01.008>
- Bond, J. (forthcoming). Human insecurity at the agro-pastoral-wildlife periphery: The case of Laikipia County, Kenya. *Journal of Development Studies*.
- Bond, J. (forthcoming). Making sense of human-elephant conflict in Laikipia County, Kenya. *Society & Natural Resources*.
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Herding livestock near Magadi, Laikipia West, Kenya



### Author

Jennifer Bond  
Department of Food and  
Resource Economics  
University of Copenhagen  
E-mail: [jen.bond@hotmail.com](mailto:jen.bond@hotmail.com)

### Series editors

Jens Friis Lund, Sabrina Tomasini &  
Siddharth Sareen  
Department of Food and  
Resource Economics  
University of Copenhagen  
[www.ccdr.ku.dk](http://www.ccdr.ku.dk)  
[www.ifro.ku.dk/english](http://www.ifro.ku.dk/english)

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