

The Role Of Informal Intercommunal Dialogue On Sustainable Conflict Management In The Ilemi Triangle

Daniel Kitonga, Oliver Noonan

Institute Of Social Transformation, Tangaza University Kenya
Institute Of Social Transformation, Tangaza University Kenya

Abstract:

Peace continues to be elusive in the Ilemi Triangle, which is located at the intersection of Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan. This study focused on the Dassanech and Turkana communities due to the increased frequency and intensity of violent conflicts between them. Drawing from the Systems Theory, the study explored how the local social organising through intercommunal dialogue impacts on how people respond to the conflict. Using qualitative case study methods, the study involved in-depth interviews with members of the Dassanech and Turkana communities who were purposively selected to include different members of the community structure who engage in intercommunal dialogue. These in-depth interviews were supplemented by focus group discussions (FGD) of participants through quota sampling. Each FGD had members who were immediately affected by the conflict from four kraals/kebele on either side of the conflict line. The data was subjected to a thematic analysis and organised into themes and sub-themes, from which patterns were identified and used for further research and reporting. There is compelling evidence these communities are familiar with each other, and during peacetime the acquaintance is characterized by friendship, visitation, and economic activity, which can facilitate and be a catalyst to sustainable conflict management.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Intercommunal Dialogue, Pastoral Communities, Ilemi Triangle

Date of Submission: 28-10-2024

Date of Acceptance: 08-11-2024

I. Introduction

This essay outlines categories of inter-communal dialogue that contribute to sustainable conflict management among the pastoralist communities in the Ilemi Triangle, with special reference to the Dassanech and Turkana. In the past ten years, incidences of conflict have increased between the pastoralist communities. Over twelve cases have been recorded in the last 12 months where people have lost their lives, animals were stolen, and property was damaged (SCCRR, 2023). Unfortunately, these sporadic attacks escalate into collective community responses in the form of retaliation, increased animosity and tension. Little progress has been made in finding a long-term sustainable conflict management framework solution. Therefore, an examination of the intercommunal dialogue between the communities can contribute to conflict management amongst the Dassanech and Turkana. The themes that emerged from both communities in this research were the following: social interactions; initiating informal dialogue in the conflict environment; and cultural peace through intercommunal dialogue.

In the first theme, face-to-face interactions often in its simplest form of persons from the different communities talking to each other, connects people together in intricate ways that may not be recognized otherwise. There may be hidden rituals, understandings, symbolic exchanges, even calculated strategic maneuverings. The trans-boundary nature of these interactions is what characterizes the engagement between the two communities. Secondly, the theme of initiating informal dialogue is overlooked by many as an important stepping stone in the conflict management environment. It suggests that in a context of the conflict, this initiation of informal dialogue, which may include rituals is necessary and follows a specific pattern where both sides are open to peaceful negotiations after some time of conflict. Thirdly, a theme that runs through the research is the cultural peace which is achieved by the communities through their informal inter communal dialogue. Firstly, a brief history of the Ilemi Triangle is important to put the themes into context.

Ilemi Triangle was born out of the "scramble for Africa" – a product of the unscrupulous drive by both colonialists and Ethiopia to expand their empires, control people, extract natural resources, and fortify their reputations as imperialists (AUBP, 2014). Mburu (2007) and Amutabi (2010) highlight why and how the Ilemi Triangle became a disputed territory and, in Mburu's words, an 'unfixed bandit frontier' claimed by Sudan (now South Sudan), Kenya, and Ethiopia. Other reasons for the conflicts in the area are the Ilemi Triangle's disputed

borders, contested grazing grounds, lack of state policies, historical marginalization, among others. The British, through the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC), made a foothold in what is known as Kenya today by building a railway from Mombasa to Uganda to claim the territory (Hornsby, 2012). At the same time, Emperor Menelik of Ethiopia, who ascended to power in 1889, had expansionist ambitions to push his southern border to the bottom of Lake Turkana and establish a direct borderline across to the Indian Ocean (Mburu, 2007). It was an attempt by the Ethiopians to deny the Europeans access to more land and steal a march on them in colonizing this particular area.

The first inter-state boundary line was demarcated in 1907 by Captain Philip Maud. It run from Namuraputh, on the Ethiopian border post, to the border with Sudan, putting the Ilemi Triangle strictly inside the territory of Sudan (Kibon, 2019). This straight line was surveyed by Captain Kelly from South Sudan and Captain Tufnell from Uganda, both colonial administrators. The two desired to protect the grazing grounds of the Turkana and allow the Sudanese access to Lake Turkana (Snel & de Vries, 2022). This line was accepted together with the imperfections of the surveying team by the colonial administrators of Kenya and the then Sudan but was not the end as further delimitations of the border followed (Eulenberger, 2013; Waithaka, 2018; Winter, 2019). Another demarcation was done in 1931 that produced what is called the Glenday Line or the Red Line, a more northern line that accommodated the grazing and water needs of the pastoral Turkana (Winter, 2019). Later, at the request of Kenya, and to protect Turkana grazing lands, the Red Line was adjusted into what became known as the Wakefield Line but was never formalized (Lopuke, 2019; Winter, 2019). A further line known as the Blue Line was established in 1947, allowing the Kenya Police to be stationed within the Ilemi Triangle (Odote, 2016; Winter, 2019). In 1950, the Sudanese marked the 'Sudanese Patrol line,' which established their interests in the Ilemi Triangle. Depending on the origin of geographical maps today, some which originate in Kenya will place the Ilemi Triangle within Kenya, while others will show it as part of South Sudan.

To this day, the Turkana, Dassanech, Nyangatom, and Toposa continue to graze their animals and access water points in the Ilemi Triangle, which has sometimes led to violent skirmishes between each other. This became and is a complex situation for them as they struggle to defend their customary grazing lands through their own traditional mechanisms and sometimes resolve conflict between each other. Yet they are often the pawns in greater geo-political intrigues, procrastination of states to resolve outstanding disagreements characterized by indifference and reactionary interventions. Conflict for one reason or another became part of the Ilemi Triangle and therefore, peace remains elusive.

This research adopts systems theory which articulates how social organisations are based on norms and values in which individuals who constitute the system function and act within it (Nickerson, 2022). A social organisation based on social systems has often been used loosely to imply that actions undertaken in various contexts implicitly involve activities, roles, and interactions among people, communities, institutions, classes, and families (Broom & Selznick, 1963). The term organisation implies how components are constituted as they interact to form a functional entity with some element of unification leading to a shared relationship. As this research is focused on communities in conflict, the functioning is dependent on the proper assignment of roles and statutes. Furthermore, the structure and its functioning are controlled by a sanction system and, of course, the effectiveness of that same system. Nothing functions within the structure unless there is a response to the calls for individuals to act out the roles and functions.

II. Material And Methods

Intercommunal dialogue is a critical element in the process of peace and reconciliation between communities in conflict environments. Bercovitch (2011) states that this form of dialogue is crucial to communication and is the essence of a good relationship. He further suggests that in environments with a prolonged or habitual confrontation between communities, a culture of dialogue is a gateway to conflict management processes. Furthermore, dialogue improves understanding and cooperation between people, and can create positive relationships. Positive dialogue is characterized by openness and listening, avoiding derogatory comments and assumptions to arrive at the point where contentious issues can be seen in a balanced manner; where the good of each party is acknowledged United Nation Development Program (2016). While these descriptions are admirable, how dialogue is characterized and understood within the context of two communities living on the periphery of society, and how it operates should be of interest and may not follow the structured or formal steps that are outlined in the available literature.

From the dimension of Conflict Management, Resolution, or Transformation, dialogue refers to a method of getting parties to the antagonism "who are involved in an emotional, deep-rooted conflict to sit down together with a facilitator and to talk and listen to increase mutual understanding and, in some cases, coming up with joint solutions to mutual problems" (Spangler, 2017). This description is true but is more designed to a formal setting where processes are organized and well-choreographed. This kind of dialogue has taken place in different conflict environments worldwide and can be recorded as formal inter-communal dialogue. In a more

traditional context, literature can often overlook the indigenous processes of dialogue, which have a critical impact on the lives of the locals.

There are some examples which lend credence to the importance of decision-making by local communities. In central Mali in 2020, land disputes or deep disagreements on the management and use of natural resources was the focus where fourteen communities were involved in an inter-communal dialogue involving traditional leaders, religious leaders, local leaders, women, and young people. The meeting hoped to bring about the restoration of communication and relationships United Nations (2021). In Kenya, the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, is described as local shuttling between the antagonistic groups initiating communication and dialogue in order to address violent extremist activities and terror attacks Wajir Peace Development Agency (2014). These initiatives are generally very well-choreographed in terms of participants, location, and often involving funding to facilitate the intercommunal dialogue. In such cases, there is need to understand if the processes are led by the people or are initiated by outsiders.

Many meetings to unite the different groups in the Ilemi Triangle could be described as intercommunal. On March 10th, 2023, I witnessed an inter-communal dialogue between the Dassanech and Turkana at Todonyang Mission. The gathering was facilitated by PACT Kenya and their counterparts in Ethiopia. More than one hundred people were involved in the meeting. This is common in the Ilemi Triangle where such meetings are organised by NGOs or the government, and can be described as informal or formal. There are also other channels of communication involving intercommunal dialogue between communities which are not documented and of which little is known about.

Particular to this research are not formal processes of inter-communal dialogue that often instigated by governments or INGOs but traditional dialogue, which takes place amongst communities in conflict and is organised between themselves. I describe it as hidden or, as Sagawa (2010) described it, 'local spontaneous initiatives,' which occur in response to conflict or, as Eulenberger (2013) describes, 'invisible.' Furthermore, Baldwin and Myukiyehe (2015) recorded that efforts of this kind by the local community are remarkably resilient. Amutabi (2010) makes the point that pastoral communities hardly recognize international borders. He suggests that informal interactions or intercommunal dialogue between the communities will continue as they have done for many years. While explaining the demarcation of the Ilemi Triangle from a historical perspective, Korobe (2022) alluded to the indigenous control of who is allowed to graze their animals within the boundaries. It is possible to deduct that intercommunal dialogue was present among communities long before states or other stakeholders became present in the Ilemi Triangle.

Intercommunal dialogue, which is traditionally organised by communities, may be unstructured in the eyes of external agents, especially when compared to formal dialogue organised by such agents. Often, little attention is given to the structures used by indigenous community who have engaged with each other in dialogue for decades by national and international actors. The dialogue often aims to gain mutual understanding, build trust and find common or joint solutions to mutual problems (Bercovitch, 2011). Understanding the levels of trust amongst the Dassanech and Turkana is essential to appreciating why the trust is broken, how it is recovered after disagreement, and how dialogue is initiated by both communities.

The focus of this research was on the undocumented informal dialogue between the Dassanech and Turkana. Many of the external interventions described as indigenous or informal are best described as cosmetic because they hardly consider the social organising, informal management by the people, or the dialogue that exists within the communities themselves.

This study adopted a qualitative approach to investigate the social organising of pastoralist communities and the dynamics of this organising in ensuring sustainable conflict management. The research design was a case study, according to Bromley (1990, p.302), a case study is "a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest". In considering a case study design, the reality is that the conflict under investigation is both unpredictable and exceptional. The conflict is unpredictable when violence takes place. It is exceptional because it crosses an international border in a zone on the periphery of both countries involved, further complicating situational dynamics. Therefore, a case study is deemed appropriate because of the nature of conflict and its unpredictability.

For this study, the target population was made up of members of the Dassanech and Turkana communities, specifically those living on either side of the international border between Kenya and Ethiopia. The study sampled the adult population of the Turkana ethnic group who live in Lapur Ward of Turkana North, and the adult members of the Dassanech ethnic group, who live in Dassanech Woreda, South Omo Zone in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia. The Lapur Ward is 3,241 square kilometres with an adult population of 5,233 (KNBS, 2019). The Dassanech Woreda is an area of 2,000 square km with an adult population of 45,720 (CSA, 2007). Purposive sampling was used to select individuals from the Lapur Ward in Turkana and the Dassanech Woreda considered relevant to the study.

There are two different sovereign jurisdictions that have two different administrative structures in the study area. As this study was located on the conflict line, the nearest and smallest unit of population is the kraal,

where the Turkana reside, and the kebele, where the Dassanech live. It is with this in mind that four Turkana kraals and four Dassanech kebele were purposively selected from each side of the border as they fell on the conflict line and faced each other. The Turkana kraals differ in their geographical location, their power within the community, and their composition, as one is the residence of the Emuron, the traditional Turkana diviner, and decision-making is not always collective. On the Ethiopian side the kebeles act independently of each other. They have some ties to clans which influence their decision-making, and a government official has significant presence in some kebeles.

III. Result

In presenting the data, pseudonyms are used to uphold ethical principles by respecting the autonomy, privacy, and dignity of research participants, ensuring social responsibility, and maintaining scientific integrity. The data is representative of both communities and took place between 16 – 28 October, 2023. Focus Group Discussion and Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using NVIVO to develop themes.

Social interactions

Social interaction among the Dassanech and Turkana are illustrated in three main ways mainly face to face interactions, frequent visits and gift exchange. In the Dassanech community, Kirion, one of the respondents and an agro pastoralist, started the discussion by stating: “When we talk to each other, face to face we get long-lasting peace.” This claim was confirmed by Geneko, an assistant chief who in talking about their relationship with the Turkana stated: “We always try to resolve issues. Those other elders from Turkana will see us, let us sit down and we make peace. That is the peace that we want. We talk to them, they see each other and we talk.” The face to face interactions between the Dassanech and Turkana, yield familiarity and thus lasting peace. This familiarity with each other is expressed by Alimo, a farmer: “The following morning we went from here with the elders, when the Turkana came with their elders, we sat and spoke to each other then we agreed. And then the Turkana asked us to go to the Turkana village with them.” This point was also supported by Dehes, another informant and agro pastoralist, in reference to the larger community:

That evening the message will be passed to the elders of both communities who then meet the following day and the Turkana will come with their elders and the Dassanech will do the same. After that meeting the Turkanas will come the following morning with some goats to slaughter talking (October 21, 2023, Harisamony).

Familiarity goes hand in hand with physical meetings, from which discussions on peace follow. Furthermore, the relationship involves specific places, visiting each other and exchanging visits. It is worth mentioning that convening or finding a location is very crucial in conflict resolution. According to Spangler (2003), finding a location remains one of the most important stages if consensus building; it (location) should be neutral enough not only because conflicting parties agreed upon it, but also in order to comfortably accommodate them and eventual mediators. Lokuawui, a police reservist stated:

When they make a big decision between Turkana and Dassanech, there is a selected place for peace meeting to make decision. When if they are out there, there are these men who look to see where the Turkana are and one will go and someone will stay behind. They meet, shake hands and go to the village and later can send the elder to the village for dialogue. After that if they don't refuse we see if we can meet them (October 19, 2023, Harikol).

Buite, a clan representative, confirms the visits to each other: “They come here and sometimes they go to Turkana and make decisions there.” The exchange of visits becomes a significant component of interactions that lead to increased inter-communal dialogue.

The additional information here is from an interview with Lokolom, a female youth leader. She clarified that they not only visited each other but they enjoyed it: “When it is time of peace, Turkana come here and we also go there. When there is conflict is the time when we look for solution. We come together and try and talk, the elders first to talk to them”. Nacheria adds that during these visits, “We cook for them and give gifts to them. There is a shade where we sit and then we bring them in”. During one such visit they traded, as Nafua noted: “Yes, we went to buy beads.”

In reference to relationships, Gnawat, a woman leader, confirmed that:

I have friends. I gave them some coffee and all the discussion was about peace... when we go there we are like their guests, they will welcome us and eat and sleep... [she emphasises that], they are just like us, just what we like then days. We even go and sleep. They will slaughter, we eat. They give us some animals when we leave (October 21, 2023, Harisamony).

Also, in support of the friendship, Nyetakan, an elder added:

One week ago a Turkana friend was in my house. We slaughtered a goat. When this thing happened, I called him in my house. When the problem at the border happened, I called the police to take him back to

Turkana...when we make peace our animals graze near and they also send their children to buy wheat from here (October 22, 2023, Kariwo).

The point made on this quote is that not only was the visitation important but that when the conflict broke out the Dassanech made sure that his Turkana friend was escorted across the border back home and was safe.

For the Turkana, most if not all the visits take place during times of peace, as Loweke, a woman leader, reported: "Okay I have seen Dassanech recently when there was peace. They even came to our place. My father even slaughtered a goat for them. They slept in our Kraal". Ebei, a herdsman, was a frequent visitor to Dassanech as he describes: "You know that time, I will sleep maybe one to two days then I go again like that with the week. I will go there like three times. I stayed two nights." Lotabo, a herdsman shared his experience: "When the elders go to Dassanech, they slaughter goats and when the Dassanech come here, we slaughter goats. They celebrate together." The slaughtering of goats is a sign of friendship and honour that each side accords to the other.

The visits are also very reciprocal as reported by Epae, a headman: "Dassanech came here and slept here when we had this recent peace." Lokiitori was a very famous leader and warrior of the Dassanech whom the researcher met before he died. During the research a story emerged that he had visited the Turkana in the past as recounted by Natoo, a village elder: "When Lokiitori (a famous Dassanech leader) came we talked. Then in the evening he was given goats to eat. They slaughtered some goats. He slept in my house and they bought animals." The visits reinforce the transboundary relationships during peaceful times.

Part of the friendship between the two communities is demonstrated in exchanging gifts with each other during visitations. Nakoda, a housewife said, "I brought my friend here and I gave my friend five goats and beads. The Dassanech like goats. They have very little goats and they give us their cows." During the visitations and the gift-giving, there is celebration as explained by Ekaale, a youth peacemaker: "Many Dassanech came to Turkana and they danced together and stayed for long and they gave them beads." The visits also create opportunities for trade as suggested by Loweke, a woman leader: "We went with them to Kokuro (Lapur Sub-Location) and bought beads and those other things." In addition to trade, there is a reiteration of gift-giving, as Kadoo, woman leader, stated, "We gave them a lot of gifts in terms of foodstuff, beads, rice and sugar when visiting them." Other gifts mentioned are metal boxes. "The Turkana gave them (Dassanech) beads and a metal box" as stated by Lorita, a youth leader. The participants reported buying and selling goods from each other as stated by Nakoda, a woman leader, "When there is peace [I] gets a motorbike with my kids, I go to Damich (a village in Dassanech)."

Both communities are familiar with each other and these interactions happen especially during peace times and build relationships between each community. It is inferred that lack of peace is not welcome since it not only interferes with the social interactions, but also with the trade and thus livelihoods. As noted the social interactions are not seen as a direct instrument that quells conflict, but rather one that enhances and sustains peace.

Initiating informal dialogue in the conflict environment

Herders from both communities have regular contacts with each other in the grazing fields where dialogue often takes place. As Alimo, a herdsman explains, "We [herders] bring our animals there [grazing fields] and we raise our guns and see if they are will[ing] also so to meet if not we come back to our village." This point is supported by Nari, a pastoralist: "Later they [herders] will meet and raise their guns up, then one from the Dassanech and the Turkana will put down their guns and go to meet each other." In these statements it is clear that when herders from the two communities meet the first symbol towards inter-communal dialogue is the raising of the guns followed by the informal meeting.

Dehes, an agro pastoralist explains the rituals that happen in the grazing fields as a way of initiating dialogue among herders from the different ethnic communities:

Whenever peace is broken what brings them together is when people go to graze. Turkana come from that side, and that is when we take a piece of cloth and tie it on a stick and wave it. If they are interested they will respond by doing the same. After that the Turkana will go back to their villages then that evening the message will be passed to the elders of both communities who then meet the following day and the Turkana will come with their elders and the Dassanech will do the same. We will meet at the place where the cattle are grazing. They will make their meeting there. After that meeting the Turkana will come the following morning with some goats to slaughter for eating after talking. Some people who know each other, those who are friends will visit each other, the Dassanech will go to Turkana and the Turkana will go to Dassanech (October 21, 2023, Harisamony).

The narrations can be summarized as follows: (i) meetings still occurred at the grazing grounds despite peace being broken; (ii) waving of the white cloth was symbolic of invitation for inter communal dialogue; (iii) communities responded to invitation; (iv) the message was then passed on to the elders; (v) a meeting was finally held between the two communities after which; (vi.) they ate and talked and friendship was re-instated; (vii) they visited each other. This seven-step initiation of dialogue, though informal, is highly valued by the two communities. Notable is the importance of the shared grazing grounds and the need to get along in order to share the resources, which guarantee the livelihoods of both communities.

There is also the role of the elders in communicating to the herders, as Buite, a police reservist explained: "They will send someone to the village to meet and give the information to the herder." In these statements, the importance of elders in [formally] initiating dialogue is seen as they meet and also communicate to the relevant persons (herders) on decisions made. Further, on communal dialogue relating to the elders, Lomabua, a herdsman explained his responsibility thus: "My role is to go and speak to them (Turkana) and then report that matter to the elders." Besides, when there are discussions with the other (Turkana) community Lokolom, a youth leader noted how "the people involved were elders from Dassanech, Turkana and government officials ... NGO officials". Gnekno, a community leader confirmed this when they said,

We go with the government we are given chance to talk to each other, elders from both communities speak, the government also talks... You [elders from both sides] are the ones to communicate with each other and make peace...the two communities are the ones that have herders and they need to have peace. (October 20, 2023, Adnyangaluk).

In reiteration of the importance of elders it is clear that whatever happens must involve the elders as expressed by Bekele, an agro pastoralist: "That evening the message will be passed to the elders of both communities who then meet the following day and the Turkana will come with their elders and the Dassanech will do the same". On that note therefore, Nari, a pastoralist noted that "The only way to restore the dialogue is to involve the elders from the other community." These statements show the vital role of the elders on inter-communal dialogue.

The Turkana participants narrated the story of the girl with a feather on her head. Having originally heard the story from the Dassanech side, I was interested as to whether it could be confirmed or not from the Turkana side. Lokai, a herdsman corroborated the story by stating, "I remember a girl who was put [wore] a feather on her head."

Lokai, explained further: "When they come here the Turkana will also bring a small lady, a woman and a man and put the feathers on the head and they go to the Dassanech place and this brought long lasting peace". The Turkana added a woman and a man to the story of the girl with the white feather. Eyangon, a village elder, further confirmed the story by saying, "It is the ritual done by Emuron for peace and this girl is sent to the other side and when she comes back then they say that there is peace." This additional symbol of the girl with a feather, indicates efforts on the part of the Turkana to seek peace.

There are other processes in the initiated dialogue. They include waving a white flag, turning the gun upside down and waving branches of the Edome tree. In another context, Lokai, talks of, "Bullet and spear are buried as a sign of the process of long-lasting peace... when the Dassanech friend went and brought many Dassanech and that was the very big peace that lasted for long." The different symbolic gestures indicate the efforts from both sides to reach out to each other. Also, three persons were mentioned by the informants from time to time: herders, elders and government. The three, therefore, play significant roles in initiating dialogue towards resolving conflict and ensuring sustainable peace.

The processes described above are partly ritual and symbolic. However, they add to what is an overall desire by the Turkana to have long-lasting peace, as suggested by a youth leader, Ekaale, "The traditional way that brought long lasting peace can still happen without the government." This situation points towards the realization by the Turkana that though the government is key in the processes that lead to conflict resolution, the local community is capable of initiating the processes that would lead to peace without necessarily involving the government. This is a point that may need further exploration and research.

Cultural peace through informal dialogue

Nagua, one of the informants and herdsman, starts the conversation by indicating who is involved in that peace, "The peace that elders are involved...is the best peace." The elders are involved since they are part of the community, they head the community. Another participant, Gnemakal, a pastoralist said,

We [elders] want peace. We are human beings. We cannot say fight each other. We need peace through the village for life to continue. If they make good peace they will benefit piece of land for grazing together. That is the peace that we want. We talk to them. They see each other and we talk (October 20, 2023, Adnyangaluk).

Therefore, community-driven and integrated peace is preferred. On the other hand, the participants did not find peace initiated by the government to be helpful as noted by Gnekno, a community leader when he said, "The peace we used to get through the government is not lasting but the one we do by ourselves is lasting because the peace they make is because of their livestock."

This desire for peace and who are to be involved in it is also enriched by the way to achieve it, as was expressed by Lobarario, a herdsman:

The peace made last time at Nyenomeri was lasting. The Dassanech agreed with that. Many people came from the Dassanech villages; ... who attended the meeting were many and the government also came to that meeting. This was the peace that lasted. Peace we make with the young girl in a cultural way is the long-lasting peace. They use something to bless people in this peace meeting in a calabash used for milk which has water that

is used to bless the people in the peace meeting. The Turkana also know this. We have a common interest in that and if they are interested we need to go back and do this cultural peace. The cultural peace needs to come inside the village involving all the structure (Maanane, Ara etc.) of the community; everybody involved. If we can agree on this cultural peace because everybody is involved, then we will get long term peace. (October 22, 2023, Kariwo).

Adding to the explanation by Lobarjo, Kirion, an agro-pastoralist elaborated on the process:

The elders (Ara) and then will agree to meet and this peace lasts long. After Ara meets them they go and meet at Kanamuguru and they slaughter animals and it is only men who go for the meeting. Thereafter the Turkana can come to Dassanech and vice versa. When we talk to each other, face to face we get sustainable peace (October 20, 2023, Adnyangaluk).

Blessings and ritual are very important for the Dassanech. These rituals and blessings form part of cultural efforts towards peace in relation to inter-communal dialogue. Gnemakal, a pastoralist confirmed this when he stated that, "The most important thing is peace. They know that Maabierich who is part of the social structure, protects the herders when they take the cattle close to the Turkana when grazing. He will go ahead of the herders and light a fire. Then there is the Ara (the council of elders) as they have the blessing from them. So they send the message back to the elders." The reference here is to the blessings that the Maabierich administers when the herders are out in the fields, with their animals. The blessings would protect the herders and also bring the animals home safely as noted by one Lokolom, a youth leader "Their work is to bless those people in the bush; the blessing is to make sure their animals come home." In support of this claim, Yukon, a police reservist added that: "Maabierich is protector. Just like he has some powers when they are outside there, he will perform some rituals to protect them whenever they are ready to go they get blessed before they go."

For the Turkana the herders are seen as the first contact with the other community. When in the grazing fields, these herders have a system of communication as reported by Lokaala, a police reservist, "The herders are sent to communicate with the Dassanech herders by waving a cloth." Lokai, a herdsman confirmed this process when he stated, "I called a Dassanech; I waved my shirt. I told him to put the gun down and I also put mine down and we went without guns and met". This symbol of waving a cloth, appears famous in engineering peace talks between the adversarial communities.

During interviews and discussions with the Turkana, they spoke of the relationship with the Dassanech being so cordial and engulfed with familiarity. The research findings point towards the process of keeping peace or managing the conflict through sanctifying the peace by local means. There was a mention of sites where peace was sanctified. Lokai said, "All of us know the place called Natade; and a person called Natade was killed there. He is buried there. When there is long-lasting peace the Turkana and Dassanech will go celebrate at Natade".

In Natade peace is celebrated. It is a sanctified place known by the two communities. The researcher visited Natade. Although it is now abandoned, it is as described by Mburu (2007). Natade is the name of a great Dassanech warrior. and peacemaker. On visiting the site, the grove trees that Mburu talks about are visible and it is possible to see where such a celebration of peace could have taken place under these trees. It was also the burial ground of Natade. The researcher had the opportunity to meet the grandson of Natade, who is a very old man (probably in his late eighties) and interviewed him (Nyenomeri Village, February 5, 2022). He informed me that "It is the place of the old men, where my grandfather lived, Dassanech settled there because of water but because of war – the Dassanech moved away from that place. When meetings took place there, a white cow was slaughtered there".

The Turkana talk of the time of peace or when they attain peace and there is great celebration. Lotabo, a village elder said, "Many Dassanech came to Turkana and they danced together". It was an occasion where there was a long lasting-peace as reported by Loweke, "We have brought very big peace; long lasting peace. We danced". Lokaala, a police reservist confirmed the extent of the celebration when he talked about "Celebration [with] bulls and other animals are brought together and they are slaughtered as friends mingle from both sides". He also stated, "We danced at night with them (Dassanech)". These celebrations are marked by feasting. "When the elders go to Dassanech, they slaughter goats and when the Dassanech come here we slaughter goats, then celebrate together," according to Lotabo, a village elder. These activities are ritualistic in nature and are intended to harness peace between the two communities. Within the gatherings, peace is sanctified in their traditional ways.

The findings of this study revealed the traditional reconciliation process of returning to a good relationship. Also revealed in the findings was the desire for peace by both communities when they noted that they were much happier and enjoyed freedom of movement in peaceful times. This process of restoring good relationships could be achieved through traditional means, such as when the herders or youths initiate it in the grazing fields. Later, it would be followed by the meeting of the elders from both communities and, in the past, sanctified by a procession to Natade, the slaughtering of animals, dancing, and the burying of weapons to symbolize the end of conflict and publicly demonstrate that good relationships had returned.

Peace through visitations to a cultural site called Natade is significant. This peace process incorporates the use of rituals and symbols such as the girl with a feather on her head, a sign of long-lasting peace. This particular symbol of the young girl with a feather on her head was revealed through the research and confirmed by both communities, though not practiced now. It sparked emotions in each community and signified the richness of the cultural and traditional practices that, in some cases, get forgotten. These are shared rituals, among others, distinct to each group. These rituals have a vast socio-cultural richness, which can assist in attaining a sustainable conflict management process.

In the entire research process, participants did not point to formal agreements between states and initiatives by external stakeholders such as NGOs. Instead, they paid significant attention to informal interactions and peace processes by local communities. It seems that when and where the state and the external stakeholders intervene in the conflict, their efforts are short-lived. On the contrary, community relationships are celebrated when the two communities come together. They welcome each other in peaceful times, miss each other in times of conflict, and wish for the return of a good relationship when there is conflict.

Through their informal social structures and inter-communal dialogue, the Dassanech and the Turkana have shown potential for sustainable conflict management and peacebuilding. The formal peace processes that governments and civil societies instigate should consider and integrate indigenous knowledge and practices that have served the communities in the past. An amalgam of the formal and informal conflict management processes would go a long way in realizing sustainable peace among the Dassanech and the Turkana, and in general, among communities in the Ilemi Triangle.

Therefore, a cultural process that brings forth an amicable relationship between the Dassanech and the Turkana should be well-documented. There was a strong desire to have long-lasting peace during the research period. This was clearly shown during a standoff between the two communities that happened during the collection of data. During the communities' active re-engagement in dialogue and peace, concerns were raised about increased military activities on the border between Ethiopia and Kenya. Participants in the study revealed that the military interventions disturbed the relationship between the two communities.

While the focus of existing literature highlighted aspects of local conflicts over resources and ethnic divisions (Schilling et al., 2016; Mkutu, 2019), alongside a growing social inequity within the pastoral areas (Catley, 2017; Krätli, & Swift 2014), and presented them as the contributing factors to conflicts, more attention should be paid to what are seemingly informal social structures, their roles and operations in the conflicts between the two communities. Ignoring these informal structures could indirectly contribute to conflict and a lack of sustainable peace.

As far as the inter-communal dialogue is concerned, there are readily available tested and used mechanisms of dialogue that should be adopted. Dialogue can calm conflicts, misunderstandings, and prejudices between people of different cultures, religions, theologies, and worldviews. Dialogue creates a sacred space where interactions between and among people lead to a shared commitment. There is room for sustainable living together when this commitment is geared towards peace. This sacred space in which dialogue happens calls for those involved to be open and willing to be transformed. Therefore, an essential dialogue focus involves mutual exploration of the meaning of that which is to be transformed. This is an ingredient to creating a more sustainable conflict management framework in the Ilemi Triangle.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings suggest that social interaction exists between the Dassanech and the Turkana. The communities are familiar with each other, and the familiarity during peacetime is characterized by friendship, visitation, and economic activity. Respondents narrated how they have friends from either side; and even in times of conflict, the findings showed that such friendship often overrides the hostility, with the friends taking care of each other.

The findings also suggest that initiating informal intercommunal dialogue begins with the interaction of the herders in the grazing field. Both sides observe specific traditional processes to create opportunity for this dialogue. According to the findings, what happens in the grazing field leads to elders from both communities participating in the management of the conflict.

This research underscores the irreplaceable value of inter-communal dialogue as a tool in resolving and creating a conflict management process. Recognizing that conflict is a natural phenomenon, and that managing it requires constant attention, the inter-communal dialogue that exists and is revealed in this research should be nurtured and safeguarded. It should be an integral part of any intergovernmental approach to seeking long-term sustainable conflict management. Making this research available to others working in conflict environments fosters hope and optimism for the future of conflict management.

The processes of traditional conflict management presented in this research and signified by symbolic gestures should be promoted and not confined to historical facts or anthropological investigation. The spontaneous

methods in which people address their conflicts should be acknowledged, and further research into these processes could enlighten the approach to conflict among pastoral communities in other jurisdictions.

The grazing fields are very important in initiating or resolving conflict. However, what happens in the grazing field is sometimes outside the control of informal community structures. How communities can police the grazing fields in collaboration with the state should be the subject of further investigation by conflict management scholars in conjunction with relevant authorities.

References

- [1]. Amutabi, M. N. (2010) Land And Conflict In The Ilemi Triangle Of East Africa. *Kenya Studies Review*, 1(2), 20-36.
- [2]. African Union Border Programme. (2014) Delimitation And Demarcation Of Boundaries In Africa: General Issues And Case Studies. Addis-Ababa: African Union Commission.
- [3]. Bercovitch, J. (2011) Conflict And Conflict Management In Organisations: A Framework For Analysis. Retrieved March 20, 2020, From [Http://Www.Aspheramedia.Com/V2/](http://Www.Aspheramedia.Com/V2/)
- [4]. Bromley, P. D. (1990) Academic Contributions To Psychological Counselling: 1. A Philosophy Of Science For The Study Of Individual Cases. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 3(3), 299-307.
- [5]. Broom, L., & Selznick, P. (1963) *Sociology; A Text With Adapted Readings* (3rd Ed.). Harper & Row.
- [6]. Catley, A. (2017) Pathways To Resilience In Pastoralist Areas: A Synthesis Of Research In The Horn Of Africa. Tufts University.
- [7]. Eulenberger, I. (2013) Pastoralists, Conflicts, And Politics: Aspects Of South Sudan's Kenyan Frontier. In C. Vaughan, M. Shomerus And L. De Vries (Eds.), *The Borderlands Of South Sudan: Authority And Identity In Contemporary And Historical Perspectives* (Pp. 67- 88). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [8]. Hornsby, C. (2012) *Kenya: A History Since Independence*. London: I.B. Taurus.
- [9]. Kibon, J. K. (2019). Examining The Sustainability Of Ethiopia's Embryonic Territorial Claims On The Ilemi Triangle. *The International Journal Of Humanities & Social Studies* 7(8), 65-75.
- [10]. Korobe, B., (2022) The Customary Grazing Grounds Of The Ngiturkana: A Key Factor In The Settlement Of The Kenya-South Sudan Boundary Dispute. *The International Journal Of Humanities & Social Studies*. Vol 10 Issue 1. Doi No.: 10.24940/Thejhs/2022/V10/I1/Hs2201-031
- [11]. Krätli, S., & Swift, J. (2014) Counting Pastoralists' In Kenya. DICI/Reglap, Nairobi.
- [12]. Lopuke L. M. (2019) The Ilemi Triangle: The Shadow Of The Four Lines On The Grassland. Retrieved March 1, 2022, From [Https://Www.Elfs.Org/Design-Post/](https://Www.Elfs.Org/Design-Post/)
- [13]. Mburu, N. (2007) *Ilemi Triangle: Unfixed Bandit Frontier Claimed By Sudan, Kenya And Ethiopia*. United Kingdom: Vita House Ltd.
- [14]. Mkutu, K. (2019) Pastoralists, Politics And Development Projects: Understanding The Layers Of Armed Conflict In Isiolo County, Kenya. (Bicc Working Paper, 7/2019). Bonn International Center For Conversion (Bicc). Retrieved March 7, 2020, From [Https://Nbnresolving.Org/Urn:Nbn:De:0168-Ssoar-68074-](https://Nbnresolving.Org/Urn:Nbn:De:0168-Ssoar-68074-)
- [15]. Nickerson, C. (2022) Social Institutions In Sociology: Definition & Examples . *Simply Sociology*. [Https://Simplysociology.Com/Social-Institution.Html](https://Simplysociology.Com/Social-Institution.Html)
- [16]. Odote, P. O. (2016) Role Of Early Warning Systems In Conflict Prevention In Africa: A Case Study Of The Ilemi Triangle. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. International Studies, University Of Nairobi, Nairobi.
- [17]. Sagawa, T. (2010) Local Potential For Peace: Trans-Ethnic Cross-Cutting Ties Among The Daasanech And Their Neighbours. In E. Gabbert And S. Thubauville (Eds.), *To Live With Others: Essays On Cultural Neighbourhood In Southern Ethiopia* (Pp. 99-127). Rottenburg: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- [18]. Schilling, J., Opiyo, F. E., & Scheffran, J. (2012) Raiding Pastoral Livelihoods: Motives And Effects Of Violent Conflict In North-Western Kenya. *Pastoralism: Research, Policy And Practice*, 2, 1-16.
- [19]. Shalom Center For Conflict Resolution And Reconciliation (2023) [Http://Www.Shalomconflictcenter.Org](http://Www.Shalomconflictcenter.Org)
- [20]. Snel, E., & De Vries, L. (2022). *The Ilemi Triangle: Understanding A Pastoralist Border Area*. Utrecht, The Netherlands: Pax.
- [21]. Spangler, B. (2003) Best Alternative To A Negotiated Agreement (Batna).” In G. Burgess And H. Burgess (Eds.), *Beyond Intractability*. Conflict Research Consortium, University Of Colorado. Retrieved May 16, 2020, From [Http://Www.Beyondintractability.Org/Essay/Batna/](http://Www.Beyondintractability.Org/Essay/Batna/)
- [22]. Spangler, B. (2017) Settlement, Resolution, Management, And Transformation: An Explanation Of Terms. In G. Burgess And H. Burgess (Eds). *Beyond Intractability*. Conflict Information Consortium, University Of Colorado: Boulder. Retrieved April 8, 2022, From Www.Beyondintractability.Org/Essay/Meaningresolution
- [23]. United Nations (2021) Central Regions: Five Dialogues Supported By Minusma To Reunify Communities In Conflict. Retrieved May 16, 2023, From [Https://Www.Un.Org/En/Genocideprevention/Documents/Media/Minusma%20article%20en.Pdf](https://Www.Un.Org/En/Genocideprevention/Documents/Media/Minusma%20article%20en.Pdf)
- [24]. United Nations Development Program (2016). *Community Dialogue For Sustainable Peace: A Handbook For Generating Citizens' Engagement For Sustained Dialogue On Conflict Prevention, Social Cohesion And Integration*. Retrieved June 18, 2003, From [Https://Www.Undp.Org/Content/Dam/Tanzania/Docs/Handbook/Undp%20dialogue%20booklet_English%20version.Pdf](https://Www.Undp.Org/Content/Dam/Tanzania/Docs/Handbook/Undp%20dialogue%20booklet_English%20version.Pdf)
- [25]. Waitthaka, E. L. (2018). Role Of Shared Resource Management In Enhancing Inter-State Cooperation In The Horn Of Africa: A Case Of Ilemi Triangle (2011-2016). Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University Of Nairobi, Nairobi.
- [26]. Winter, P. 2019. A Border Too Far: The Ilemi Triangle Yesterday And Today. Working Paper No. 100. Durham University, Institute For Middle Eastern And Islamic Studies.
- [27]. Wajir Peace Development Agency. (2015). Operation Of The Wajir Peacebuilding And Development Agency. Retrieved February 22, 2024, From [Https://Informationcradle.Com/Kenyadirectory/Wajir-Peace-Development-Agency/](https://Informationcradle.Com/Kenyadirectory/Wajir-Peace-Development-Agency/) National Cholesterol Education Program (Ncep) Expert Panel On Detection, Evaluation, And Treatment Of High Blood Cholesterol In Adults (Adulttreatment Panel Iii) Third Report Of The National Cholesterol Education (