Cultural Beliefs as a Source of Ethnic Conflicts: A Study of the Turkana and Pokot Pastoralists of Kenya

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Abstract

Kenya is witnessing an upsurge of ethnic conflicts involving pastoralist communities. Pastoralist communities are most vulnerable to violent conflict resulting in loss of life and property, ethnic polarization, economic instability, displacement and increased poverty levels.This study which focused on ethnic conflicts between the Turkana and Pokot pastoral communities of Turkana south and Pokot Central districts examined the cultural beliefs as source of ethnic conflicts. Most significantly the study explored the various cultural beliefs and how they bring about ethnic conflicts; examined different forms of ethnic conflicts and its impact on the social and economic development indicators of the two pastoralist communities. The study also sought to identify probable conflict transformation mechanisms to enhance peaceful co-existence among these pastoralist communities.

The study was based on conflict transformation theory which is founded on the work of Galtung (1996). The study was conducted in Kainuk area of Turkana South district and Sigor/Orwa area of Pokot Central district. The study population was 5178 residents of Kainuk and 3860 residents of Orwa area. Male and female adults of 18 years and above were targeted. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 103 respondents from Orwa and 104 responents from Kainuk. However, purposive sampling procedure was used to select elders, diviners, warriors, Government officials, NGO and faith based leaders, youth and other key respondents for the study. Questionnaires, interview and Observation schedules and documentary analysis were used to collect pertinent data which was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

The findings of this study are expected to benefit the Turkana and Pokot pastoralists in identifying the root causes that have kept them in persistent conflicts and perennial poverty. Further, the findings are also expected to be useful to policy makers both at the national and district/county levels. It is expected that medium term and long term policy measures identified herein will provide mechanisms for effective conflict management and resolution, enhancement of peaceful culture and promotion of sustainable community governance. It is also expected to add knowledge to the discipline of conflicts resolution.

Key Words: Turkana, Pokot, Ethnic, Conflict, Cultural Beliefs

Introduction

Conflict is one of the devastating phenomena in Africa in the last three decades, with Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) being the most vulnerable grounds (Hussein, 1998).Wolff (2006) notes that it is relatively easy for anyone to determine which conflict is ethnic in nature across the Globe. There have been ethnic conflicts in Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Cyprus, the Israeli- Palestinian dispute, the genocide in Rwanda, the civil war in democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kashmir and Sri Lanka are all in one way or another ethnic conflict. This is because their manifestation is violent and their cause and consequence are obviously ethnic.

The access to and control of land and valuable land based resources including productive pastures, water and farming land is crucial in the occurrence of violent conflicts across the continent of Africa. The Toder massacre of 1991 in Niger where Hausa farmers killed 102 members of a settled Fulani herding community presents a living memory (Hussein, 1998).

Similarly, Franz (1981) in his analysis of the settlement and migration pattern of the pastoral Fulani in Nigeria and Cameroon argues that conflicts among pastoralists and their neighbours are increasing in frequency and intensity. Kenya has witnessed inter-community conflicts of various degrees over the years. These conflicts are initiated and sustained by different actors for diverse reasons.

Conflicts among the pastoralists such as Pokot, Turkana and Samburu have been justified on cultural grounds and often receive little attention from the state and its organs for many years. There is the other conflict between early inhabitants of the Rift Valley province and the late immigrants especially post independence settlers. These conflicts are frequently witnessed between the Maasai and Kalenjin in one hand and between Kisii, Luhya and Kalenjin on the other hand. (Daily Nation, Feb 8, 2008).

The patterns of conflict in the North Rift and North Eastern regions are complex. There are many factors contributing to the risk of violent conflict involving pastoralists, and these have tended to become mutually reinforcing. Some conflicts within and between pastoralist communities, such as raiding and cattle rustling have a long history and have to some extent become an aspect of traditional pastoralist culture.

However, such 'traditional' conflicts have become increasingly destructive and less manageable. The major causes of conflict among the pastoralist include but not limited to intensified cattle rustling, proliferation of illicit arms, inadequate policing and state security arrangements, diminishing role of traditional governance systems, competition over control and access to natural resources such as pasture and water, land issues, political incitements, ethnocentrism, increasing levels of poverty and idleness amongst the youth (Pkalya, Mohamoud and Masinde, 2004).

Hendrickson, Armon and Mearns (1998) in their study of livestock raiding between the Turkana and the Pokot in Kenya, view the aggressiveness of the herders as an attribute of the demand of survival in harsh environments. Turkana south and Pokot Central districts have experienced ethnic conflicts among the pastoralists. These conflicts have thrived for generations which have resulted from raids to counter raids. Recently, access and ownership of land and cattle have become a major trigger factor of conflict in the two neighbouring districts. These conflicts have been pitting the Turkana and the Pokot pastoralists against each other for many years. As much as many studies have pointed many factors contributing to ethnic conflicts among the two pastoralists' communities, cultural beliefs among them could not be underestimated.

This study therefore sought to analyze the ethnic conflicts in Turkana South and Pokot Central districts and especially between the Turkana and Pokot of Kainuk and Sarmach. While trying to find out a long lasting solution to the conflicts, the researcher has also examined the effectiveness of traditional mechanisms in conflicts resolution in the two districts especially between the two warring communities.

It is instructive to note that unresolved conflicts may flare up with renewed vigor. Government interventions have been viewed by many as short lived. Besides, security is a precursor for development and going by the Kenya vision 2030 which is a government of Kenya Long term development blue prints on security, peace-building and conflicts management (GOK, 2008), the governments development objectives in the region are based on strengthening rural livelihoods by ensuring peace and security through the use of traditional mechanisms in conflicts resolution.

The understanding of the role cultural beliefs play in conflicts among the communities particularly of interest between the Turkana and Pokot of Northern Kenya is therefore imperative. The purpose of this study was to examine cultural beliefs as a source of ethnic conflicts among the Turkana and the Pokot Pastoralists of Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on conflict transformation theory. Conflict transformation theory is a recent development in the field of conflict scholarship and practice. To understand conflict transformation theory, the background of the concepts of conflict management and conflict resolution theories must be understood. Conflict transformation theory draws on a variety of conceptual building blocks from recent ideas in conflict, some from other schools as well as incorporating aspects from both conflict management and conflict resolution theories. Conflict transformation theory is founded in the work of Galtung (1996) which offers a rich brew of core concepts. Maill (2001) observes that the works of Clark (2000) contribute to the theory of conflict transformation.

The theory states that Conflicts have both life-affirming and life-destroying aspects. They are formed from contradictions in the structure of society (cultural beliefs). They then become manifest in attitudes and behaviour. Once formed, conflicts undergo a variety of transformational processes: articulation or disarticulation, conscientisation or de-conscientisation, complexification or simplification, polarization or depolarization, escalation or de-escalation.

The incompatibility which arises between parties may be eliminated by transcending the contradiction, by compromise, by deepening or widening the conflict structure, and by associating or dissociating the actors.
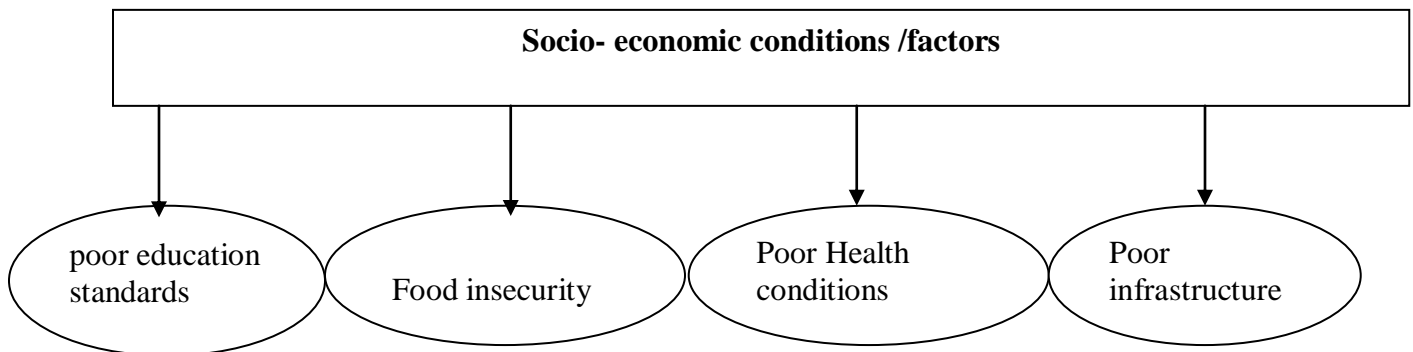
Galtung, Krippendorf and others also emphasise the relationship between conflicts and larger conflicts embedded in the structure of world society and the world economy.

Conceptual
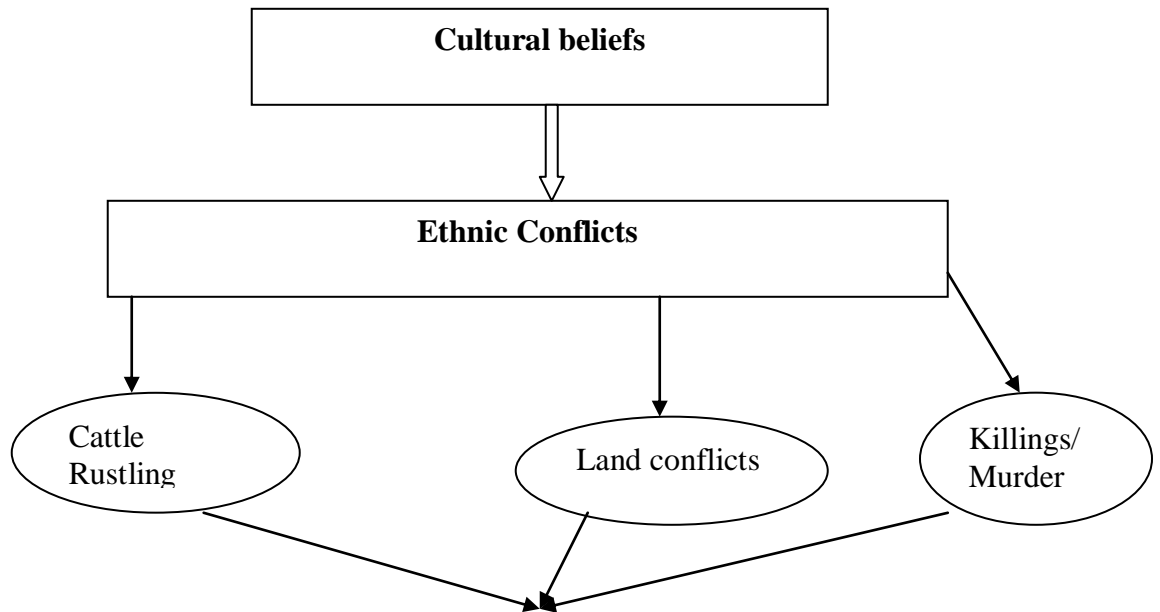
Framework

Source: Conceived by the Researchers

The conceptual framework above illustrates the three main variables of the study which include cultural beliefs, ethnic conflicts and socio-economic conditions of the people under study. A cultural belief is an independent variable in the study. This study was interested in cultural beliefs among the pastoralists such as heroism, cattle raiding, attachment to land, age set and age system, initiation rites among others.

This study was also interested in the ethnic conflicts between the pastoralists. This variable was manifested in cattle raiding, murder/killings and land conflicts.

Kellas (1998) notes that, Ethnicity is the state of being ethnic or belonging to a certain ethnic group.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey design. As documented by Mwiria and Wamahiu (1995), a descriptive survey collects data about variables as they are found in society; Polland (2005) further notes that a survey is an appropriate means of collecting information when both quantitative and qualitative data is required. The design is more concerned with description and narration of facts and characteristics of a given situation. The design was therefore used not only to facilitate data collection but also to assist in measuring, classification, analysis, comparison and interpretation of data.

The design was also preferred because it facilitates accurate collection of views, suggestions and opinions regarding cultural beliefs as source of ethnic conflicts among the pastoralists. The design was ideal to the setting of the research, purpose, objectives of the study. Hence the design met all the conditions of this study.

The study area

The study area was in Turkana and West Pokot districts. The study was specifically carried out in Kainuk of Turkana South district and Sigor in Pokot central district. The Turkana and the West Pokot District development plans 200-2008 provides the profile for the two districts.

Population of the study and sample size

This study focused on residents of Kainuk and Sigor divisions. The study population was 5178 people in Kainuk and 3860 people in Orwa area of Sigor division. The study targeted male and female adult of 18 years and above. The study used the table for determining sample size by Morgan, Krejcie,R and Daryle, (1970) to select sample size of 103 from Orwa and a sample size of 104 from Kainuk.

Simple random sampling technique was used to select the specific respondents for the research. Purposeful sampling procedure was used to select key informants.

The Key informants for this study were drawn from Local provincial administrators, community elders, diviners, youth, NGOs workers, religious leaders and the other villagers. Structured questionnaires, interview schedule, document reviews and observations were used to collect data for the study. Validity and reliability was carried to standardize the instrument. Validity refers to the degree to which the measurement procedure actually measures the concept that it is intended to measure. A test-retest reliability coefficient was used.

Methods of data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used here to summarize and describe the study sample. This entailed the use of measures of dispersion such as frequencies and percentages. This technique was used in the presentation of the data that relate to the variability of the sample. They also aided in the visualization of the results of the research data at a glance in a summarized form. The bivariate and multiple correlation methods were chosen for analysis to ascertain the magnitude of the relationship that exists among the variables under study and the direction of the relationship.

Results, Conclusion and Recommendations

Sources of learning cultural beliefs

> The table below shows that 188 (90.8%) of the respondents said that they have learned Cultural beliefs through their parents, 119 (57.5%) of the respondents learned through their peers while 130 (62.8%) of the respondents said that they have learnt their Cultural beliefs through the general community.

Table 4.1 Respondent sources of learning cultural beliefs

VARIABLE	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (N)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Parents	Yes	188	90.8
	No	19	9.2
Peers	Yes	119	57.5
	No	88	42.5
Community	Yes	130	62.8
	No	77	37.2
Ritual leaders	Yes	69	33.3
	No	138	66.7
All the above	Yes	42	20.3
	No	165	79.7

The table also shows that 69 (33.3%) of the respondents said that they learnt their cultural beliefs through the ritual leaders. To understand this better let's look at the roles of the 'emuron' (ritual leader among the Turkana).

Cultural beliefs promoting ethnic conflicts among the Turkana and Pokot pastoralists

Table 4.2 below show that 119 (57.5%) of the respondents said the attachment to ancestral land promote ethnic conflicts while 88 (42.5%) said that attachment for land was not promoting ethnic conflicts between the two pastoralist communities members. The key informant interview between the researcher and the respondents from members from the two communities revealed the following:

One elder from Kainuk said that the Turkana community belief that the present day Turkana is their ancestral land forever given by 'Akuj' (God) as their inheritance. He said and I quote,

"Even the Kenyan government agrees with this belief and there are no other people who can claim ownership of our land other than the true owners who are Turkanas themselves" lemkol from Kainuk.

The Pokot beliefs that their ancestral land stretches from the mountains to the plains of Lotong'ot near Lobokat game reserve (Turkana south national reserve). One of the residents from Sarmach in Pokot central said the following and I quote.

"When we find anybody has settle within that region (Lotong'ot) we kill or chase away to avoid others from settling their"

This explains why there have been frequent conflicts around kainuk area because the Pokot pastoralist feel that Kainuk provide a strategic point for the Turkana pastoralists to attack them during dry seasons while grazing in Lotong'ot plain which is a disputed land among the two pastoral communities.

Table 4.2 cultural beliefs promoting ethnic conflicts

VARIABLE	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (N)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Attachment to ancestral land	Yes	119	57.5
	No	88	42.5
Cattle attachments	Yes	181	87.4
	No	26	12.6
Dowry payment	Yes	99	47.8
	No	108	52.2
Cattle raiding	Yes	159	76.8
	No	48	23.2
Moranism	Yes	139	67.1
	No	68	32.9
Initiation rites	Yes	58	28.0
	No	149	72.0
All the above	Yes	45	21.7
	No	162	78.3

The table above shows that 181 (87.4%) of the respondents said that cattle attachment among the two pastoralists communities promoted ethnic conflicts while 26 (12.6%) said that attachment to cattle did not promote ethnic conflicts among the two pastoralists communities. The table also reveal that 159 (76.8%) of the respondents said that cattle raiding promoted ethnic conflicts among the two pastoralists communities while 48 (23.2%) said that cattle raiding does not promote ethnic conflicts. This second group of the respondents might be holding this opinion because cattle's raiding was accepted among these pastoral communities as a way of replenishing stocks especially after drought, disease outbreak or raids.

This scenario also explains why pastoralist value cattle and why they are prepared to die because of cattle. "A person stripped of stock is stripped of the most active social relationship and thereby of selfhood and self-respect; so it is no wonder that almost every one strives to keep some livestock and those fortunate few who have incomes from trade and regular employment continue to invest in stock" (Markakis, 1993:148).

Hypothesis Testing

The Hypothesis there is no significant relationship between cultural beliefs and ethnic conflicts among the Turkana and pokot pastoralists was tested using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient (RHO). H1 (Alternative hypothesis): There is significant relationship between cultural beliefs and ethnic conflicts among the Turkana and Pokot pastoralists.

Table 4.3 Hypothesis testing: cultural beliefs and ethnic conflicts

	Cultural beliefs				
Ethnic conflicts	Attachment to Ancestral land	Cattle attachments	Dowry	Moranism	Initiation/asapan
1. Cattle raiding	.500**	.241**	.480**	.761**	.266**
2. Land conflicts	.739**	.165**	.615**	.487**	.350**
3.Killings/murder	.454**	.454**	.395**	.582**	.264**

From the table above, it is clearly shown that cattle raiding and moranism has a strong positive relationship of r = 0.761 which is also significant at two tailed level. Further, it can be deduced from the table that the attachment to ancestral land has a significant influence on land conflicts, the Pearson moment correlation is 0.739**   which is also significant at two tailed level. The table also shows that moranism has a significant relationship with ethnic killings/murders, the correlation r is 0.582, significant at two tailed.

It can be concluded from the table above that cultural beliefs is significantly correlated with ethnic conflicts. The P- values of all the variables is less than 0.05, thus the Ho (Null hypothesis) which states that there is no significant relationship between cultural beliefs and ethnic conflicts is rejected and thus the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between cultural beliefs and ethnic conflicts is accepted.

Summary of findings

The first objective of this study was to examine the various cultural beliefs of the Turkana and the Pokot pastoralists and how they bring about ethnic conflicts among them. The study observed that cultural beliefs among these pastoral communities contribute to ethnic conflicts. It was observed that most of the conflicts that take place among the two pastoralists are associated to their cultural beliefs such as attachment to cattle, heroism, dowry payment, moranism, and initiation/asapan as well as attachment to land.

It was also found out that attachment to land is always not feasible and was hidden but was manifested in cattle raids , killing and displacement of the perceived aggressor. Traditional raiding is motivated by the desire of young men to start their own homestead, increase their prestige and respect within the community, attract girls and be able to afford marriage. It was also found that the impact of these conflicts was very serious and severe. Its implication has lead to deaths, fear, displacement, loss of livelihoods among other impacts. The second objective of the study was to find out the different forms of ethnic conflicts that occur among the Turkana and Pokot pastoralists.

The study found out that the common forms of ethnic conflicts was cattle rustling, Killings and land conflicts. Its impact has been severe with serious implication such as loss of life, loss of cattle and insecurity among the two neighbouring communities. The third objective of the study was to establish the impacts of ethnic conflicts on the socio-economic development of the pastoralist communities in the study area.

It was observed that ethnic conflicts between the Turkana and Pokot pastoralists has had serious impact on the social indicators such education, health and food security situation. It was also found that conflicts have lead to the backward development in these arid areas with poor road networks.

The fourth objective of the study was to analyze the role of government, politician, NGOs, religious organizations, diviners/seers and local elders in conflict management and resolution and identify measures that may effectively and efficiently resolve ethnic conflicts among the two communities. It was found that although it is the government role to protect its citizens, most of the interventions by it in the study area during conflicts worsen the situation by aggravating it.

This was linked to the way government intervene in conflicts which includes favouring one community over the other community. It was also found out that possession of the guns by the pastoralists' communities has been a major challenge to the government efforts to end conflicts in the research area. The government efforts are less aggressive in disarming residents of the two pastoralist's communities and those of other pastoralist's communities in the Kerio Valley and Samburu of Kenya.

It was found that politicians in few occasions play the role of reconciling the two communities when conflicts occur. This explains why their role in solving conflicts was not effective. It was also found out that due to their selfish political interests, politicians openly frustrate government efforts in resolving conflicts as well as reconciling warring communities.

The study observed that traditional methods of conflicts resolution by elders exist among the Pokot and the Turkana communities. However, the diviners/seers among the two communities seem to have reduced the impact of the elders especially on cattle raiding where the warriors (Ng'orokos) believe in the diviners/seers unlike before when elders played key roles in approving raids. Elders still play a big role in conflicts resolution among the two pastoralists' communities.

However, they are limited in that the government does not recognize them in other cases; they may lack the mandate especially on issues which can be legally challenging. It was also observed that conflicts resolution is not coordinated and participatory with majority of the respondents blaming the way some NGOs and government handle conflicts resolution initiatives.

Conclusions

With reference to the objectives of the study, several conclusions are made based on the findings of this study. The study concludes that most cultural beliefs among the Turkana and Pokot pastoralists bring about conflicts between the two communities. The study also concludes that ethnic conflicts among the two pastoralist communities manifest themselves in the form of cattle rustling, ethnic killings/murder as well as land conflicts. The study also concludes that ethnic conflicts among the Turkana and Pokot pastoralists has had serious impact on the socio-economic development of the pastoralists leading to declining health conditions of the pastoralists as a result of food insecurity leading to severe malnutrition. The conflicts have affected the education, road infrastructure, access to clean water, insecurity that has made the investors to fear investing in the pastoralists' area which has made the region to be backward.

The study also concluded that the role of the government and politicians in relation to conflicts resolution among the two communities in the study area has not been effective. Similarly other stakeholders such as religious organizations and NGOs have not also been effective in assisting the government in conflicts resolution in the study area. This can be attributed to the fact that the government has not effectively coordinated their efforts. Government intervention was mainly reactive and they were only addressing the symptoms but not the root causes of ethnic conflicts such as cattle rustling, heroism, the role of diviners in cattle raiding among other issues.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study.

1. The Government could formulate policies that favour the promotion of formal education among the pastoralists. This will help in redefining their world views which will in turn assist in changing some of the cultural beliefs which promote ethnic conflicts among the pastoralist.

2. There is need for government to stump out the culture of impunity among the pastoralist. This can be done by ensuring that all citizens have respect to life and properties of other members of the communities. This can be done by exploring participatory disarmament program in all conflicts areas in Kenya. This initiative has been done by Ugandan government on pastoralists and has been successful.

3. The government needs to develop a policy towards the pastoralists' communities which will aim at promoting meaningful development in key areas such as Education, health, Access of portable water for people and their cattle, roads construction, livestock production and marketing as well as communication. There is need for government to invest in the pastoral zones of Kenya because development will provide an economic diversity that will allow the pastoralists to diversify their livelihoods and hence reduce the chances of ethnic conflicts occurring. Development will also bring the social services such as security closer to the people.

4. The government could strengthen traditional mechanisms and link them up with formal courts and other government agencies. Much as they were found to be effective, traditional mechanisms of conflicts resolution lacked recognition and full support of the state especially when trying to resolve conflicts. Empowering the elders for instance will help in preventing and resolving conflicts among the pastoralist.

5. All stakeholders including pastoralists, the government, politicians, elders, diviners, warriors, the church and NGOs could be involved in conflicts resolution. This is because every stakeholder has either information or a role to play when it comes to causes or resolving conflicts. Parties in ethnic conflicts must be made to feel or appreciate the necessity for peace and must be guided in addressing and coming to terms with fundamental of conflicts.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are important issues that this study was unable to address due to its scope. In view of this, the following are suggested for further research.

1. Role of education in conflicts resolutions

2. The influence of Non-governmental organizations aid on ethnic conflicts among the pastoralists of Kenya.

3. A similar study should be carried out in other violent conflicts prone regions of Pokot and Njemps as well as pokot and Samburu pastoralist.

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Appendix VI: Picture of the Turkana and Pokot Pastoralists in a Peace Meeting.

Source: Researcher.

Appendix VII: Showing Elders from Turkana and Pokot in peace meeting outside the Kraal (Manyatta)

Source: Researcher.

Appendix VIII: Local Provincial officers from Kainuk and Sigor in Peace meeting between the Turkana and Pokot in Amolem area near Kainuk.

Source: Researcher

Appendix IX: Picture of Police officers who were pursuing cattle rustlers near Kainuk area.

Source: Researcher