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The Causes and Effects of Conflict between Luo-Maasai Communities of Ogwedhi-Sigawa, Kenya

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Abstract:

This paper examines the causes and effects of conflict between Luo-Maasai (LM) communities of Ogwedhi-Sigawa, Kenya. The study was conducted in Kenya among the LM communities of Migori and Narok Counties. It covered four locations include Sikawa, Upper Suna, Ndonyo, and Masarura. The study was guided by two objectives include to establish causes of conflict between the Luo-Maasai (LM) communities of Ogwedhi-Sigawa, Kenya; and to identify effects of conflicts in Ogwedhi-Sigawa. In an attempt to discover causes and effects of conflict between the two communities. The study adopted a descriptive design and used purposive sampling to select the respondents. The data was collected using questions, group discussion, and oral interviews after which it was analyzed qualitatively (Kombo and Tromp, 2013). It was established that causes and effects of conflict between the LM peoples is founded on the historical past of the two communities; and on wealth and traditional cultural practices of the LM peoples. The research affirmed that mistrust, hatred, loss of property, and fear of attack affects harmony and peace of the two communities.

Keywords: *Ogwedhi-Sigawa, causes, effects, Luo-Maasai, historical past, traditional cultural practices, social issues, political*

1. Introduction

This paper examines causes and effects of conflicts among the Luo-Maasai (LM) communities of Kenya. The LM people of Ogwedhi-Sigawa have suffered conflict since 1970s. Oral and formal reports indicates that the years 1972, 1979, 1982, 2002, and 2012 conflict took place between the two communities (Achar, 2017; Ayindo, 2001). Conflict often leaves families scattered to different places (Mbaro, 2008; Musana, 2013). It negatively slows down the rate of development of the community. Over the years inter-ethnic conflict between the LM peoples has created insecurity and fear of its re-occurring. This paper focuses on causes and effects of LM conflict.

2. The Causes and Effects of Conflict

Conflict is experienced among humanities all over the world which are more or less rooted on ethno-social, political, and social issues (Wolf, 2006). Differences over particular factors and conditions such as past historical memories and competition over resources evoke fear, bitterness and hatred between communities (Blagojevic, 2009). The theory of existence of opposing forces in the life of individuals, groups, social structures ends in conflict (Max, 1818 – 1883). Naturally communities resort to conflicts within, between and among themselves due to struggle over limited resources include water, food, shelter, clothing, power, authority, leisure, among others which when in short supply lead to competition which ends up in conflict (Waltz, 1959; Wallis, 1995). Eruption of conflict signifies a disturbance in the comfort of either an individual, ethnic groups or communities' existence (Mwaniki, 2012). When confronted with challenge, humans tend to behave as if there is no existence of laws (Hobbes, 1991). Conflict results to broken relationship and trust withdrawn from each other.

The place of cattle among the LM communities has traditionally been the center of focus since they are attributed as a way of life and sign of wealth that determining the social and economic status of the community. The practice of cattle rustling by young Maasai men is traditionally accepted by the Maasai people as proof of manhood that ends up to be one of the causes of conflict between LM communities. Clashes over grazing land have also contributed greatly to the conflict between these communities (Ayindo, 2001).

Traditionally, elders are expected to be the bridge between the living dead and ancestors in matters of the society, and if they fail they would anger ancestors that to some extent would result in conflict either with the living dead (ancestors), community itself or from outside the community (Kasomo, 2010; Mbiti, 2015). In Nairobi 'a living dead' refused to be transported from Nairobi to his rural

home in Butere, Kakamega County for burial with members of the family reported saying that he did not want to be buried at home because of a conflict between him and his siblings (*the Kenyan Daily Post*, Sunday March 30th 2014). In December 17th 2013, another living dead refused to be transported home to Busia and it took his age mates to plead with him before he complied. The relationship between the dead and the living can be said to be a source of conflict among African communities, which of course include LM peoples (*The Kenyan Daily Post*, December 18th, 2013).

The African spiritual universe and physical world is one unit in their setting with different communities playing key roles in contributing towards the African belief and social life (Mbiti, 2010). The living dead are still 'people' and they return to their human families from time to time and are concerned about their family and clan especially in conflicts situations and intervene. They are said to cause harm to those who are members of the clan who unjustly harm others (Kasomo, 2010; Mbiti, 2015). Thus, they are aware of everyday life of their respective clans cautioning of looming danger for relatives who interfere with the peaceful co-existence for both individual family members and the community at large.

Abasoga of Uganda proverb states that *Omulamumu 'nswa nonde: tebulamu ka menenuka* "meaning a person is like a white ant which when picked from the ground will not lack some sand". It points to the fact that conflict is expected among people who live together. It is against such background that the Basoga also say *Gw'olya naye; n'akulyamu olukwe* meaning that "the one with whom you eat is the one who betrays you". In addition to that they also say *Abali aghalala birandi: tibiropa kikon'agana* which means "it is difficult for people who live together sometimes not to quarrel each other" (Nkabala, 2013). The fear of interference with community's value systems leads to anger that generates feelings of confusion and conflict (Tarimo and Manwelo, 2008).

Conflicts often leave families in problems as their means of survival taken away from them (destroyed). It breaks relationship in the society and trust withdrawn from each other. The families scatter to different places as their properties destroyed. Conflict slows down development. Over the years inter-ethnic conflict create insecurity based on count attacks (Mbaro, 2008; Musana, 2013; Korir, 2009; Kasomo, 2010). Conflict interrupts formal education of the children and trade between warring communities. It has a great toll on young men who are the providers of security for their respective communities. It is the young people who end up dead, maimed or disabled (Mbaro, 2008; Musana, 2013; Global IDP Data Base of *the Norwegian Refugee Council*, October, 2003).

3. The Research Findings

The findings of this study in line with the objectives of the study are discussed below.

3.1. The Causes of Conflict in Ogwedhi-Sigawa

3.1.1. Background of Conflict over Resources in Kenya

The major part of land in Kenya is arid and semi-arid land occupied by the pastoralists. The nature of pastoralist life is seasonal migrations for the purpose of looking for pasture and water for their animals. Conflict over resources in Kenya was focused on guarding the resources. This conflict started immediately after the World War I. To some extent the shortage of land and fulfillment of social issues became part of the cause of conflict. The first conflict was experienced in 1920 at Iambus the coffee growing District near Nairobi. The Kikuyu rural association protested against the alienation of district land by the colonial powers. This became the beginning of conflict over the resources and properties. Conflicts have impacted on the communities, and families that are involved. It has led to loss of lives, property, displacement of communities and families, and disruption of social-economic activities and livelihoods. It has increased hatred between communities, environment that has threatened the stability of the water catchment areas. This has increased economic hardships because of loss of livelihoods as it has been witnessed in Kenya especially in the year 2007/2008 during the post-election violence, and in the North Rift, Kenya for years. Conflict appear to be in existence due to theorization of political, social and economic systems rooted on the allocation of values, power, resources, and wealth (Mwaniki, Mbuchi, Leleruk, and Mwei, 2012). To some extent the system of allocation of resources leave individuals and ethnic communities experience scarcity of the available resources. There is also the philosophy of keeping the status quo that when disturbed escalates to conflict. Waltz (1959) contribution on background of conflict affirmed that conflict and war is traceable in human nature and behavior. The natural order is that people and individuals resort to violence within, between, and among themselves.

3.1.2. History behind Luo-Maasai Conflict

The study discovered that historically the land on which Luo community live belonged to Maasai people. The Luo settled on this area due to nomadic nature of Maasai and pushed them inside. The Luo people who migrated from Tanzania (Tanganyika) and other parts of Luo-Nyanza settled at Ogwedhi-Sigawa. Struggle for green pasture by the pastoralist, the Maasai people, for their cattle during a dry period has been resulting to conflict. The Luo settlement has become a hindrance to free grazing of the animals. The LM communities have a shared social life where they drink local alcohol together; and when drank they pick grudge with each other that ends to fights and killing one of either LM person. Time and again this has escalated to conflict based on accusation of either community of having killed one of their own.

3.1.3. Wealth and Traditional Cultural Practices

It was established that LM peoples consider cattle as important economic and social part of life. Cattles attribute to a sign of wealth thus determine economic status of the people. The practice of traditional cattle rustling by the Maasai Moran's as a proof of graduation into manhood results in to conflict between the two communities. The traditional philosophy that all cattle belong to Maasai and they can *pecho* (Luo word meaning take forcefully taking of another person's property) wherever they are found and take them to where

they belong, to the Maasai community. In fact, they traditionally believe that their ancestor Maasinta was the first to receive cattle as illustrated by the Maasai legend and tales on the origin of cattle (Maasai in Kenya).

A Maasai elder narrated a legend on the reason why Maasai love cattle. In the beginning, the Maasai did not have any cattle. One-day God called Maasinta, who was the first Maasai and said to him: "I want you to make a large enclosure, and when you have done so, come back and inform me." Maasinta went and did as he was instructed, and came back to report what he had done. Next God said to him: "Tomorrow, very early in the morning, I want you to go and stand against the outside wall of the house for I will give you something called cattle. But when you see or hear anything do not be surprised. Keep very silent." Very early in the morning, Maasinta went to wait for what was to be given him. He soon heard the sound of thunder and God released a long leather thong from heaven to earth. Cattle descended down this thong into the enclosure. The surface of the earth shook so vigorously that his house almost fell over. Maasinta was gripped with fear, but did not make any move or sound. While the cattle were still descending, the Dorobo, who was a house-mate of Maasinta, woke up from his sleep. He went outside and on seeing the countless cattle coming down the strap, he was so surprised that he said: "Ayieyieyie!" which is an exclamation of utter shock. On hearing this, God took back the thong and the cattle stopped descending. God then said to Maasinta, thinking he was the one who had spoken: "Is it that these cattle are enough for you? I will never again do this to you, so you better love these cattle in the same way I love you." That is why the Maasai love cattle very much. Therefore, all other communities are stewards' overs Maasai's cattle.

3.1.4. Land

The study revealed that in 1970s and even earlier Maasai were known as pastoralists who relied wholly on livestock as their livelihood. They lived in open range land then. This did not allow them to settle permanently. The land was not demarcated which was a sign of peace between LM over land boundary. In 1980s demarcation started by the adjudication office, Narok District. This was carried out under the leadership of an established demarcation committee. Land subdivision was done and Maasai peoples were a located parcel of land and outsiders who applied such as Luo, Luyha, and Kisii were equally allocated. The demarcation of land led to identification of the boundary between LM peoples. The boundary conflict became center of attraction when Luo started using traditional burial of their dead relatives as a means to acquire Maasai land as they claimed ownership of the parcels of land because their relatives were buried on them. This has led to LM conflict that resulted to deaths. Therefore, differences over particular factors and conditions such as past historical memories and competition over resources tend to evoke fear, bitterness and hatred between LM communities.

4. The Effects of Conflict in Ogwedhi-Sigawa

It was affirmed that effects of LM conflict usually leaves families without means of survival as properties destroyed and looted; and cattle taken. Social relationships that open door for trade between the two communities closes as enmity become center of attraction; The mutual trust between the two communities withdrawn from each other. The conflict often leads to closer of market; lack of transportation and transactions. These often leave families scattered to different places.

Conflicts between the two communities slow down the rate of development of this area as families become homeless. For a period of time this inter-ethnic conflict has created insecurity rooted on fear of its re-occurring. For an example Luo elder narrated a story saying that one-day Maasai women were sitting under a tree at a border market (Ogwedhi-Sigawa) and a tree lizard fell on one of them who screamed at the top of her voice followed by the rest in their traditional tone of attack by the enemies, the Luo. They claimed that it was the Luo people who threw the lizard to them. They ran into Maasai land unstoppable screaming that led to fights between the two communities because of fear of insecurity and hatred.

Repercussions of this conflict are loss of lives with children being deprived of their fathers and brothers. The two communities traditionally believe that young children and women should not be killed for the purpose continuity of the families and the clan. In this case they are always left without productive men. Conflict often interferes with formal education of the children as it displaces families from Ogwedhi-Sigawa area. It also affects young men who provide security for their respective communities they are killed or live with disability as causalities.

5. Summary and Conclusion

This paper discussed the causes and effects of conflict between the LM peoples. The causes include the historical past between the two communities; wealth and traditional cultural practices. The effects of the conflict include fear of insecurity, mistrust, loss of properties and lives, interruption of education and trade.

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