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Study report

Boundary-Making in a Contested Space.
Food Security and Conflict Dynamics in Marsabit, Kenya

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Executive Summary

This study reports on the results of a pilot study on food security and conflict dynamics in northern Kenya conducted by BICC in collaboration with Caritas Germany and its Kenyan partners Caritas Marsabit and PACIDA in 2022. The objectives were to identify the interrelationships between food crises and violent conflict in Marsabit and to identify opportunities for conflict transformation, including through humanitarian actors.

Brief Description of the Local Context

Marsabit, the second largest county in Kenya, has experienced regular violent conflicts and food crises over the past two decades. It shares an international border with the Federal Republic of Ethiopia. Marsabit is sparsely populated with a population of around 515,000—but with high population growth rates. Various ethnic groups inhabit the area, the largest being the Borana, Gabra and Rendille. The low population density is due to the fact that the district is located in the most arid region of the country. Eighty per cent of the county's inhabitants are pastoralists whose livelihoods mostly depend on grazing livestock in the rangelands that cover about 75 per cent of the county. In the few humid and sub-humid mountain areas, agro-pastoralism is the main source of livelihood. There is a trend towards sedentarisation and increasing urbanisation in Marsabit Central and Moyale. (Agro)Pastoral livelihoods are under stress due to climate change, one of its effects being recurrent droughts.

Recent years have seen a spike in violence and a prolonged drought with an exceptional five-season drought sequence of well below-average rainfall since the short October to December rainy season in 2020. Marsabit has experienced cyclical violent conflict since the advent of multi-party politics in Kenya in the 1990s, with increased atrocities and heightened political tensions since the early 2000s. In the years before the 2022 general elections, rival communities regularly engaged in armed clashes and targeted killings in and around Marsabit town.

Methods Used

To answer the research question: "What are the interrelationships between food crises and violent conflict in northern Kenya?", we combined a desk-based review of literature and conflict event databases with qualitative empirical research using a mixed methods approach. BICC, Caritas Marsabit and PACIDA worked closely together to conduct qualitative empirical research in Marsabit in November 2022.

The research team conducted focus group discussions (41) with members of local communities and internally displaced people (IDPs), as well as observations, including transect walks and participation in a regional peace meeting. We visited destroyed villages, boreholes, and other critical infrastructure, as well as a border post with Ethiopia to develop a better understanding of the drought situation, the (visible) impact of violence and the daily lives of pastoralists in Marsabit. We also conducted semi-structured interviews (6) with community members and key informant interviews (13) with experts (local community leaders, state representatives, religious leaders, humanitarian workers, members of peace initiatives). In total, we directly engaged with around 350 persons using a variety of methods.

The empirical study was conducted in 19 locations in Saku, North Horr and Laisamis sub-counties. Besides Marsabit town and surrounding communities in Saku, we visited several rural towns and villages along sub-county boundaries as these can be considered ethno-political conflict hotspots, namely around Forole and Turbi or Horonderi and Jaldesa. The research team leaders purposefully chose the study sites to capture locally specific conflict histories, the perspectives of different ethnic groups and different livelihood systems. Security considerations, existing contacts and prior involvement by Caritas Marsabit and/or PACIDA staff, and therefore access and time constraints, also influenced the choice of study sites. We sought to mitigate the risk of a study bias arising from contacts made in the context of humanitarian work through the desk study and BICC's long-term research experience in northern Kenya.

Key Findings

Violent conflict in Marsabit is largely driven by intensified ethno-political boundary-making, as both the desk study and the results from the empirical study show. This is explained by the territorialisation of ethnicity since the colonial era and the increasing wealth of resources to be fought over in recent decades, especially since Kenya's 2010 Constitution and the devolution of state budgets in 2013. With the value of land increasing due to large-scale national infrastructure projects such as the LAPSSET Corridor this has contributed to intensified competition over such territories. Conflict trends evident in conflict event databases provide further evidence for the political nature of most violent conflicts in Marsabit: a tendency for violent conflicts to move to urban areas (Moyale and, more recently, Marsabit) where elections are largely decided and the location of conflict hotspots along (unclear) ward, sub-county and international borders. People have experienced and suffered multiple forms and impacts of violence, including loss of family and community members and injuries sustained in violent attacks, loss of livestock in raids, looting of property, destruction of homes, key infrastructure and development projects, and forced displacement.

Following the failure of five consecutive rainy seasons, the drought in Marsabit county has worsened and reached an emergency level of food insecurity (by the end of January 2023). Due to massive livestock deaths, pastoral communities' food and income provision, as well as the rural economy itself, is on the verge of collapse. Despite various coping strategies (agro)pastoralists, were heavily dependent on external assistance such as cash transfers, food aid and water trucking and still faced hunger and malnutrition.

The empirical analysis shows how violent conflict and drought undermine pastoral livelihoods and food security in Marsabit, and how different groups in Marsabit cope and adapt to both. There are no simple linear relationships between these variables (drought, conflict and food security), which means that prolonged drought does not directly lead to violent conflict, nor do both necessarily lead to a hunger crisis. The central intermediating variable between violent conflict and food insecurity is the livelihoods of the local population. The two main channels of impact observed between violent conflict and food insecurity were the destruction of people's livelihoods and displacement. Mobility is key to pastoral livelihoods and has emerged as a central intervening variable in understanding both violent conflict and food security. Conflict-induced internal displacement is a reality in Marsabit that cannot be ignored. Entire villages have been destroyed or cleansed of certain groups, leading to homogenous settlements and spirals of mutual fear and mistrust that undermine prospects for peace. The study does not show a direct link between drought and violent conflict. On the contrary, we have observed how drought and food insecurity in recent years have contributed to a bottom-up peace process in Marsabit. Not only in the Kenya–Ethiopia border region but also in the sub-county most affected by violence in recent years, Saku sub-county, the suffering of the people and the local economy from rising levels of violence and prolonged drought has led people to initiate peace processes to regain access to pasture, fallow agricultural land and markets that were inaccessible during the recent years of intense conflict.

The empirical research found ongoing 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' peace processes in Marsabit, which are disconnected from each other. Previous 'top-down' peace processes have failed to effectively bring peace due to the insincerity of political leaders and elders, the commercialisation of the peace process and the neglect of interests and needs of conflict victims and IDPs. A 'bottom-up' peace process has several advantages, including a more sustainable commitment to peace, greater trust and contact between communities, more participation of women and young people, and directly accountable local leaders. Crucially, however, these bottom-up peace processes can only be sustained and make a significant contribution to lasting peace if they are supported by official 'top-down' peace processes and if physical security is provided by state and para-state security agents.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Database
ASAL	Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
BICC	Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies
CDF	Constituency Development Funds
CIDP	County Integrated Development Plan
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GSU	General Service Unit
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IEBC	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
KNUT	Kenya National Union of Teachers
KPR	Kenya Police Reservists
LAPSSET	Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport Corridor
MCA	Member of County Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
NCIC	National Commission for Integration and Cohesion
NDMA	National Drought Management Authority
NFD	Northern Frontier District
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
PACIDA	Pastoralist Community Initiative and Development Assistance

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Introduction

Since 2014, the number of people affected by hunger worldwide has increased, with violent conflicts playing a critical role in current food crises. In 2021, out of 193 million people globally facing acute food insecurity at crisis or worse levels, more than 139 million people (i.e. 72 per cent) in 23 countries were affected by conflict-related food crises, up from 77 million people in 2019. Africa was the most affected continent in that regard (FSIN & GNAFC, 2022). Prolonged drought and sharp increases in food prices as a result of the war in Ukraine further exacerbate food insecurity and conflict constellations around the world, including in eastern Africa. In Kenya, 4.4 million people were facing an acute food crisis and in need of humanitarian assistance (of which a record 1.2 million or 27 per cent were in Emergency/ IPC Phase 4), particularly in the drought- and conflict-ridden northern region as of February 2023. The government of Kenya recorded a shocking 2.5 million livestock deaths since the beginning of October 2022 (Government of Kenya, 2023, pp. 5–6).

Populations affected by hunger and conflict are highly dependent on external assistance. However, the food crises of the last decade have highlighted the weaknesses in mitigating food crises in conflict situations. While national governments or warring parties are often unable or unwilling to respond adequately to food crises, humanitarian responses face a major challenge in reaching those most in need without perpetuating or exacerbating conflict (Grebmer et al., 2015; Jaspars, 2021). Academic attention to the links between food crises and violent conflict is growing (see section 3.1. below). However, the multiple interrelations are far from being fully understood and the challenge of how to address food crises in particular conflict contexts remains (Brück & d'Errico, 2019).

Humanitarian and development actors have increasingly recognised that violent conflict is a major cause of food insecurity worldwide. The so-called triple nexus highlights how humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions should work together to enable humanitarian and development interventions to contribute to improved livelihoods even in the context of ongoing violent conflict and to avoid humanitarian and development projects fuelling conflict (Staes, 2021).

While the integration of peace into humanitarian aid and development has gained much momentum since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, it also raises concerns, particularly because of the different mandates of humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding (Kemmerling, Schetter, & Wirkus, 2022, pp. 5–6; Steinke, 2021). Humanitarian organisations may be overwhelmed by the task of conflict analysis and peacebuilding or see their principle of political neutrality compromised.

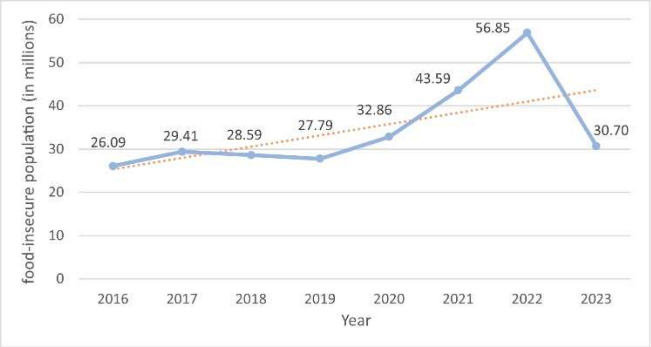
This study aims to provide a situated analysis of the complex interrelationships between food security and violent conflict. It contributes to a better understanding of these relationships in northern Kenya and to thinking about how humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts can work together in a context of combined food crisis and violent conflict (so-called complex emergencies).

Food Security and Conflict Dynamics in Northern Kenya

The arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) of northern Kenya regularly experience droughts and food crises that require relief assistance. In recent years, the eastern Horn of Africa has experienced an exceptional five-season drought sequence with well below-average rainfall since the short

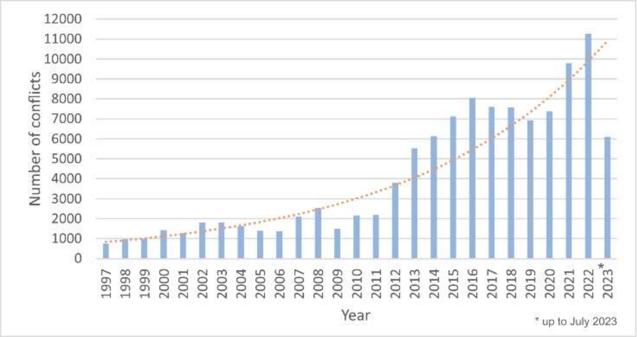
October to December rainy season in 2020—a climatic event not seen in the last four decades. The 2022 March to May rainy season was one of the driest on record (IGAD, 2022, p. 34). Over 90 per cent of Kenya's surface water sources have dried up due to poor recharge in all counties (Government of Kenya, 2023, p. 6). As a result, the number of food insecure people is now at its highest level in over a decade (Government of Kenya, 2023, p. 6)—a trend shared with the Horn of Africa more generally (see Figure 1). At the same time, pastoral communities have adapted their livelihoods to this arid environment, relying on their intimate knowledge of the northern rangelands (Abbink et al., 2014). It is important that aid agencies are aware of those livelihood strategies to tailor their aid to complement rather than replace people’s livelihoods.

Figure 1: Food Insecurity in the Horn of Africa



Adapted from Numbers of people by phase of acute food insecurity, 2016–23 by FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises, 2023, https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC2023-compressed.pdf

Figure 2: Conflict Incidences in the Horn of Africa



Adapted from Summary of Conflict Incident Trends in the Region from 1997 to 2021 by IGAD, 2022, p. 47,, https://www.icpac.net/publications/report-on-state-of-climate-peace-and-security-in-the-horn-of-africa/

Kenya’s ASAL regions cover 80 per cent of the country's land mass and account for 70 per cent of national livestock production, estimated to be worth US $1 billion. The areas contribute about 16 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Mwangi, 2006, p. 82). However, violent conflicts involving pastoralists have become widespread and more severe in northern Kenya—a trend shared with the Horn of Africa more generally (see Figure 2). Governed as the 'Northern Frontier District' since colonial times, the region remains politically marginalised to this day, and the so-called Shifta War of 1963–67 between the government of Kenya and secessionist groups from the region has left a deep mark on the collective psyche of the region’s population (Branch, 2014). While conflicts among pastoralists have traditionally been associated with conflicts over the scarce resources of water and pasture (Schilling, Opiyo, & Scheffran, 2012), the politicisation and commercialisation of livestock raiding, especially under the conditions of political devolution since 2013, is of increasing concern (Okumu, 2016; Österle & Bollig, 2003).

Marsabit county was among the Kenyan regions most affected by drought and violent conflict in recent years. It has been identified as one of the high-risk areas for electoral violence in the run-up to the 2022 general elections (NCIC, 2022). BICC, therefore, partnered with Caritas Germany to conduct a study on the interrelations between food crises and violent conflict in Marsabit, in collaboration with Caritas Marsabit and PACIDA, two NGOs involved in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work and local partners of Caritas Germany in Kenya. This study report is the result of joint research conducted in Marsabit county in November 2022. Its purpose is to inform organisations and individuals from the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors about the links between food security and conflict in Marsabit and to stimulate discussion on how these links can be addressed in the interest of enhancing the well-being and peace of people in Marsabit and other regions affected by food crises and violent conflict.

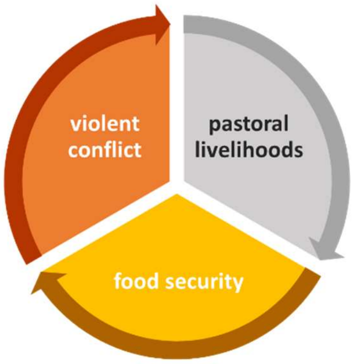
The study begins with an overview of the relationships between violent conflict, drought and food crises in East Africa in general and Marsabit in particular, introducing the main conflict trends in Marsabit and providing a historical analysis thereof (section 3). This is followed by a description of the empirical research findings, which provide local perspectives on the impact of drought (section 4) and violent conflict (section 5) on local livelihoods and food security. We conclude with a synthesis of the empirical research findings and recommendations for practitioners and policymakers (section 6).

Methods and Study Sites

Our research aimed to answer the following question:

What are the interrelationships between food crises and violent conflict in northern Kenya?

To answer this question, we combined a desk study of literature and conflict event databases with qualitative empirical research in a mixed methods approach. We chose to focus on pastoral communities in Marsabit county, which are highly affected by food crises and conflict. The idea was to explore the triangular relationship between pastoral livelihoods, food security and violent conflict.



For the empirical study, we decided to further disaggregate the above overarching research question.

Pastoral Livelihoods	Food Security	Violent Conflict
/ How have the pastoral livelihoods changed in the last 20-30 years? And what is driving these changes?	/ How do members of the communities perceive persistent food insecurity, and what defines an acute food crisis from their perspective?	/ Where and when do violent conflicts occur in the region, and who are the main actors involved?
/ What are the main risks faced by different pastoral communities? And how do they respond to them?	/ What strategies and practices do different pastoral communities use to secure their food in the short and long term?	/ What are the origins, key drivers and impacts of these conflicts?
/ To what extent have the traditional mobility patterns of pastoral communities changed and why?	/ What role, if any, do food-securing practices play in the dynamics of violent conflict?	/ What is the relationship between violent conflict and the mobility and immobility of pastoralists?
/ What is the economic, social and political role of livestock raiding for pastoral communities? And what are its implications?	/ What external interventions to improve local food security have taken place recently, and what has been their impact?	/ What internal and external conflict resolution strategies exist, and what has been their impact?

This report addresses these questions based on a review of the literature on conflict, drought and hunger in northern Kenya, a secondary analysis of available conflict data for the region and own qualitative empirical research.

In November 2022, BICC, Caritas Marsabit and PACIDA worked closely together to carry out the empirical research in Marsabit county. The international and transdisciplinary research team consisted of seven people—one team leader/researcher from BICC, two team leaders/researchers from PACIDA and Caritas Marsabit, and four trained facilitators/translators/enumerators. The directors of PACIDA and Caritas Marsabit supervised the study and other staff from both organisations, including two drivers, helped to facilitate the research process.[1]

The following research methods were used in the three-week empirical study:

- **Forty-one focus group discussions (FGDs)** with members of the local communities members and internally displaced people (IDPs), where possible separated by gender and age. A total of 312 people participated in the FDGs of whom 37 per cent were women and nine per cent were youth.
- **Thirteen key informant interviews (KII)** with local community leaders, state representatives, a religious leader, humanitarian workers, members of peace initiatives and other key actors. 14 experts participated in the KIIs, including one woman.
- **Six semi-structured interviews (SSI)** with eight people, including one woman, in selected communities.
- **Observations** with photo documentation in villages and in (former) conflict areas, including nine transect walks with around 30 participants in rural communities.

In total, we directly engaged with approximately 350 people in our study using a variety of methods (see Table 2 in the Appendix for an overview). We also participated in a regional peace meeting attended by over 100 people from various communities, particularly from Saku and North Horr sub-counties.

Study Sites

We conducted our empirical study in 19 locations in Saku, North Horr and Laisamis sub-counties (see Map 6 and Table 2 in the Appendix). In addition to Marsabit town, where six FGDs and 11 interviews took place, we worked in 18 other communities, mainly in rural towns and villages along the boundaries of the (sub)counties as these can be considered as hotspots of ethno-political conflict, namely around Turbi and Forole.

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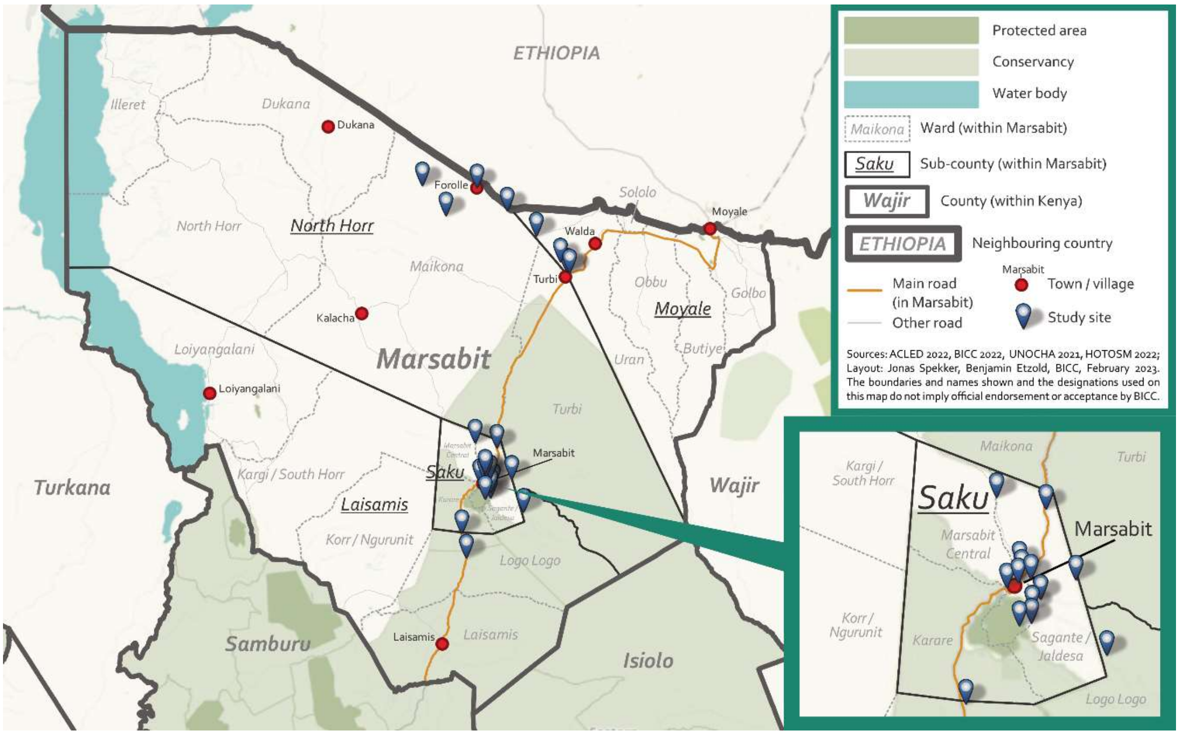
[1] We would like to thank Caritas Germany for funding this study and to acknowledge the crucial contribution of the following people to this study report. From Caritas Marsabit: Isacko Jirma, James Kunni Dido, John Abdub Wako, Arbe Galgalo Kiti and our driver Justus Muthoka. From PACIDA: Patrick Katelo, Godana Said, Adan Galmagar, Gumato Robale, Michael Loitemu Orguba and our driver Amos Adano. We would also like to thank the local contacts who facilitated the research in several locations and the research participants who shared detailed information during focus group discussions, key informant interviews, semi-structured interviews and transect walks.

Map 1: Overview of Marsabit County and our Study Sites


ETHIOPIA
Illeret
Dukana
Dukana
Forolle
Sololo
Moyale
North Horr
North Horr
Walda
Maikona
Turbi
Obbu
Moyale
Golbo
Kalacha
Marsabit
Loiyangalani
Loiyangalani
Uran
Butiye
Turbi
Marsabit
Saku
Kargi / South Horr
Turkana
Laisamis
Wajir
Korr / Ngurunit
Logo Logo
Samburu
Laisamis
Laisamis
Isiolo
Protected area
Conservancy
Water body
Maikona Ward (within Marsabit)
Saku Sub-county (within Marsabit)
Wajir County (within Kenya)
ETHIOPIA Neighbouring country
Main road (in Marsabit)
Other road
Marsabit Town / village
Study site
Kargi / South Horr
Saku
Maikona
Turbi
Marsabit
Marsabit Central
Korr / Ngurunit
Karare
Sagante / Jaldesa
Logo Logo

Sources: ACLED 2022, BICC 2022, UNOCHA 2021, HOTOSM 2022; Layout: Jonas Spekker, Benjamin Etzold, BICC, February 2023. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by BICC.

Research team leaders purposively selected the study sites to capture the locally specific conflict histories, the perspectives of different ethnic groups (most notably the Gabra, Borana and Rendille), and different livelihood systems, including pastoralists, agropastoralists and city dwellers. Security considerations, existing contacts and previous activities by Caritas Marsabit and/or PACIDA staff and, therefore, accessibility as well as time constraints also influenced the selection of study sites. We sought to mitigate the risk of bias in the study due to contacts established in the context of humanitarian work through the desk study and BICC's long-term research experience in northern Kenya.

In addition, we visited multiple other sites, such as destroyed (IDP) villages, boreholes, watering points and other critical infrastructure, as well as a border post to Ethiopia to develop a better understanding of the drought situation, the (visible) impact of violence and the everyday lives of pastoral people in Marsabit county.

3\ Overview: Conflicts, Drought and Food Insecurity in Marsabit

3.1 Rains and Raids in East Africa

The links between food crises and conflict are multifaceted and depend on many factors (Kemmerling et al., 2022; Martin-Shields & Stojetz, 2018). On the one hand, the combination of food insecurity with sudden price shocks for staple foods, changing environmental conditions or structural inequalities in access to key resources such as land and water can trigger conflicts or exacerbate existing ones. On the other hand, violent conflicts can trigger food crises, for example, when looting, destruction of infrastructure and displacement deprive affected populations of the means of subsistence. The destruction of agricultural land and infrastructure, as well as reduced access to seeds, fertiliser and capital, can force farmers to convert or abandon agriculture (Eklund, Degerald, Brandt, Prishchepov, & Pilesjö, 2017). The impact on food security is particularly severe when war causes the displacement of large parts of the population. In extreme cases, starving populations is used as a strategic tool in warfare (Waal, 2018).

The links between food insecurity and conflict are usually analysed in terms of specific variables that are thought to have a significant impact on the relationship; climate change is one such variable that is often used to understand the relationship between food insecurity and violent conflict. A review of literature on East Africa finds that climate variability can contribute to conflict by worsening livelihood conditions; by increasing migration, thus triggering in-migration tensions with the host communities; or by pushing pastoralists to move beyond their traditional routes, bringing them into conflict with other pastoralists or farmers (Abshir 2020, p.4; van Baalen and Mobjörk 2016, vi; cf. SIPRI 2023). Socio-political framework conditions, however, are crucial to understand why conflicts escalate (Van Baalen and Mobjörk 2016, vii).

Quantitative studies regarding rainfall patterns/ droughts and conflict show inconclusive results for East Africa. While some studies show a clear link between dry periods and violent conflict (Maringa, Mugambi, Nathan, Njoka, & Ouko, 2018), others are more cautious and point to other factors that have more explanatory power for conflict than weather patterns (Seter, Theisen, & Schilling, 2018; van Weezel, 2019). Some studies also find increased conflict just before and/or during rains (Galaty, 2016, p. 109; Schilling, Akuno, Scheffran, & Weinzierl, 2014). In an attempt to explain these contradictions, Schilling et al. (2014) suggest, based on their case study of Turkana county, that cattle rustling during droughts is different from cattle raids during rains:

> In regular years with sufficient rain, raiding is mostly conducted before and during the long and short rains to make use of the fortunate raiding conditions (healthier animals, vegetation providing cover, own herds need less attention). But when rains partly or completely fail and a certain threshold of resource scarcity is reached, raids are conducted despite the less fortunate restocking conditions (…). While the rainy season is used for restocking herds, raiding in dry periods is mainly an instrument to control or gain access over water and pasture resources (p. 251).

There are also variations according to regional climates and pastoralist groups with different traditions of livestock holding and raiding (Ember, Skoggard, Adem, & Faas, 2015; Galaty, 2016). The 'nature' of cattle raids is changing, as Mwangi (2006) reports for Marsabit:

> Traditional conflicts normally occurred after drought, during periods of serious impoverishment, following age-set initiations, and at the beginning of the rainy season. While commercial raids occur when livestock prices are high in large markets, in the case of political conflicts, timing is dependent on strategic considerations (p. 82).

Below, we describe and analyse the main drivers of recent conflicts in Marsabit that are partly but not exclusively linked to cattle raiding.

3.2 Conflict Trends in Marsabit County

Geography and Population

Marsabit, the second largest county in Kenya after Turkana, covers an area of almost 71,000 square kilometres and is inhabited by around 515,000 people (Government of Kenya, 2023, p. 9) (460,000 as of the 2019 census)[2]—but with high population growth rates, up from 291,000 people in 2009. It shares an international border with Ethiopia and borders Turkana county to the west, Samburu county to the south and Wajir and Isiolo counties to the east. The low population density is due to the county's location in the driest region of the country. The lowest and highest elevations see between 200 mm to 1000 mm of rainfall per year. Almost all of Marsabit’s territory and climate is arid (predominantly bushland) and very arid (scrubland), except for sub-humid, semi-arid woodland in Mount Kulal (close to Loyangalani), Mount Marsabit (where Marsabit town is located) and Hurri Hills (in North Horr) (Czuba, 2018, p. 3; Government of Kenya & County Government of Marsabit, 2018, p. 2). Human settlements are concentrated in these humid and sub-humid mountain areas. Here, the main source of livelihood is agro-pastoralism, with about ten per cent of the total population engaged in subsistence agriculture and seven per cent in trade. A trend towards sedentarisation and increasing agglomeration around towns is evident in Marsabit Central and Moyale (Adano & Witsenburg, 2005, cf.; cf. Adano & Witsenburg, 2005; Government of Kenya & County Government of Marsabit, 2018, p. 6).

Marsabit is inhabited by a variety of ethnic groups, with the Borana constituting a significant majority, along with the second and third largest groups, the Gabra and Rendille (see Map 6 in the Appendix). They share the county with smaller communities: the Burji, Dassanech, El Molo, Garre, Samburu, Sakuye, Turkana and Waata. The Borana are traditionally cattle-keepers and are sometimes referred to as agro-pastoralists because they do some small-scale farming in their main camps in the highlands (Ember et al., 2015). The Gabra and Rendille mostly keep camels and cattle. The Burji, concentrated on Mount Marsabit, are mainly engaged in agriculture and trade. Despite being a very small community, they have emerged as powerful actors in county politics alongside the Borana, Gabra and Rendille (Czuba, 2018, p. 3).

Livelihoods in a Changing Climate

Eighty per cent of the county's population are pastoralists who make their living from livestock on the rangelands that cover about 75 per cent of the county’s area. About ten per cent of the total population is engaged in subsistence farming, while seven per cent is engaged in trade (Mwangi, 2006, p. 83). (Agro)pastoral livelihoods are under stress due to climate change, which manifests itself in recurrent droughts, generally declining water availability and diminishing grazing lands. Social infrastructure was almost non-existent a few decades ago but has increased significantly, with the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) for 2018–22 noting 70 per cent of the population having received primary education. The Human Development Index (HDI), which measures human development in key areas such as health, knowledge and income (an ideal HDI is close to or equal to 1), was worse than the national level in 2013, scoring 0.348

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[2] The CIDP 2018–2022 projected the population in Marsabit to be 335,238 in 2022 (Government of Kenya & County Government of Marsabit, 2018, p. 6; Adano & Witsenburg, 2005).

in Marsabit county compared to a national HDI of 0.520 (Government of Kenya & County Government of Marsabit, 2018). In the county, 31 per cent of the children under the age of five are malnourished, while 26.5 per cent are stunted (Government of Kenya & County Government of Marsabit, 2018, p. 34).

During the research visit in November 2022, we found that the sedentarisation of pastoral communities, which had started earlier, is expanding and accelerating during the current drought. Previously only parts of mobile pastoral communities had settled (the elderly, women and children, few men; while most younger men continued to move with their livestock) or entire communities (giving up long-distance mobility) in certain locations due to the development of infrastructure such as boreholes, schools and roads, and thus easier access to towns and markets. Access to external support from the state or NGOs is thus another factor that keeps pastoralists in one place (Adano & Witsenburg, 2005; Galaty, 2005).

There is a general shift among pastoralists in the region from cattle to camels and goats, as the latter are more resistant to drought. There is comparatively little diversification of livelihoods. Whole communities are predominantly dependent on livestock, with few alternative sources of income. There are few translocal support networks to other places—very few have sons or other relatives who work in towns and can provide reliable support in times of crisis.

Agropastoralists are currently shifting from small-scale food production to cash-crop production, i.e. *mirah*/*khat*, partly because *mirah* is more drought-resilient and cash-income is needed to cope with the impact of drought. Agricultural production in the more environmentally friendly agro-ecological zone is mainly for home consumption and sale on the local market. However, there is an interest in and need for larger agricultural production projects (some of which were destroyed in the violent conflict or are not operating successfully). Livelihood transformation and diversification is reported to be driven by political influence and investment by powerful actors (including politicians) in certain locations. Political influence has led to the establishment of some new villages (settlement of Jaldesa or Horonderi on the boundaries of Saku sub-county).

Conflicts: Actors, Dynamics of Violence and Regional Complexity of Drivers

Marsabit has experienced cyclical violent conflict since the advent of multi-party politics in Kenya in the 1990s, with increased atrocities and heightened political tensions since the early 2000s. The upsurge in violent incidents in recent years in the run-up to the 2022 general elections has made violence, including killings, theft of property and livestock, a daily occurrence and brought regular armed confrontations between warring communities and targeted killings to Marsabit town and surrounding areas (Catholic Diocese of Marsabit, n.d.; NCIC & Interpeace, 2022). The nature of the violence appears to have gradually changed. There have traditionally been occasional armed clashes between pastoralist groups during cattle raids, but the commercialisation and politicisation of cattle rustling have contributed to increasing levels of atrocities committed: “people no longer raid just to replenish their stock but to kill and maim while enriching themselves” (Mwangi, 2006, p. 83). Furthermore, highway banditry and the recent outbreaks of urban violence in Moyale between 2012 and 2014 and most recently in Marsabit town (see Map 4 below), have added new forms of violence; this urban violence appears to be an expression of increased politicisation.

As in previous incidents, the latest escalation of violence in the run-up to the 2022 general elections was only stopped by military intervention by the Kenyan government, which imposed a six am to six pm curfew and launched a disarmament operation in Marsabit county on 2 May 2022 (Catholic Diocese of Marsabit, n.d.). Local security personnel in Marsabit is regularly overwhelmed by the fighting power of militia groups armed with automatic weapons due to the legacy and continuation of gross state neglect of northern Kenya, the former Northern Frontier District (NFD) (Mwangi, 2006, p. 83; Whittaker, 2012), and the regional links to war zones in neighbouring countries of Somalia and Ethiopia, through which weapons of war and fighters with military training are channelled into Kenya.

The conflicts in Marsabit are complex because they have a regional dimension. The Borana and Gabra communities share a common cultural history with the Ethiopian Oromo as part of the larger linguistic Oromia community, which straddles the Kenya–Ethiopia border. The war between the Ethiopian government and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a guerrilla militia, has partly spiledt over into Kenya, with the OLF using Kenya as a safe haven. In the words of a peace worker: 'In Ethiopia, the Oromia community feel marginalised and have always wanted a Borana state. The trouble is that the Gabra refused to join in the initiative while the Borana agreed, and this has created enmity that spills across the border and involves their brothers on the Kenyan side' (Mwangi, 2006, p. 88). The fundamental objective of the Oromo liberation struggle, which is led by the OLF, is to exercise the Oromo people's inalienable right to national self-determination[3]. Since 2004, the OLF has been involved in armed confrontations with the Ethiopian Army and Kenyan security forces in Marsabit county in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2010 and 2015 (Raleigh, Linke, Hegre, & Karlsen, 2010). Borana warriors and Ethiopian Borana living in Marsabit are often suspected of being OLF by their ethnic counterparts.

The drivers of violent conflict identified in the literature are many: stock theft and cattle rustling (Bollig, 1992)[4] proliferation of illicit arms; inadequate policing and state security arrangements; a declining role for traditional governance systems; competition for control of and access to natural resources such as pasture and water; land issues; political agitation; ethnocentrism and increasing levels of poverty (Galaty, 2016; Mwangi, 2006; Schlee, 2013; Scott-Villiers, 2017). Of these, two sets of conflict drivers stand out: cattle raiding driven by tradition and commercial incentives and politically driven conflict. These two strands of conflict overlap significantly; any cattle raid is quickly interpreted through an ethno-political lens, making it difficult to clearly disentangle the two strands. However, the continuing tradition of cattle raiding for warrior age initiations and commercial incentives adds to the conflicts' complexity, as they cannot be reduced to ethno-political competition alone. This complexity of conflicts is captured in the contradictory narrative of conflicts in the county's 2018–2022 CIDP, which states: 'The conflicts are usually fuelled by competition for grazing land and water sources but mostly politically instigated' (Government of Kenya & County Government of Marsabit, 2018, p. 10).

The actors in Marsabit's conflicts include the Rendille, Gabra, Garre and Turkana, all of whom live in the county, and the Borana (from Kenya and Ethiopia) and Samburu, who are known to also graze their cattle in the southern part of the county (Mwangi, 2006). So-called ethnic militia from various groups are composed of warriors[5] from the respective communities. Kenya Police Reservists (KPR), who are armed by the national government (though disarmed in 2019 and 2022) to help with rural security, sometimes side with their own communities when attacked (Mkutu, 2008; Mkutu, 2020). The main political conflict is between the Borana and the Gabra (and their respective allies) for political supremacy in Marsabit county.

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[3] http://oromoliberationfront.org/english/mission/, accessed 27 January 2023.

[4] Cattle theft and cattle rustling are two forms of violent conflict among some pastoral groups in Kenya: Theft involves the theft of a few animals by a few individuals whereas rustling refers to the organised theft of large herds by up to several hundred warriors overseen by community elders (see Bollig, 1992, pp. 247–248 for the Pokot). As groups of warriors increasingly do raids without the elders' oversight and blessing in recent times, this distinction tends to get blurred.

The ethnic population of Saku constituency, which is the main area of recent conflict, is geographically divided between Samburu/Rendille-speaking communities on the southern flank of Mount Marsabit and Borana-speaking communities on its northern flank. The northern flank has a relatively high population density and is inhabited by a mix of Borana, Gabra, Waata, Konso and Burji, Sakuye, Garre and Sidam, while the southern flank was previously more ethnically homogenous (Adano & Witsenburg, 2005, p. 117). Following devastating droughts in the early 1970s (notably the 1973 drought, which resulted in the loss of 40 per cent of the livestock in the district), several settlement schemes were initiated by Kenyan churches and UNHCR on Mount Marsabit for impoverished pastoralists, including displaced Gabra (see section 5.2 below). Demonstration farms in the schemes were intended to show nomadic families how to cultivate (Adano & Witsenburg, 2005).

Spatio-temporal Evolution of Conflicts

To analyse some trends in conflict dynamics over time, we analysed the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) project's conflict data (Raleigh et al., 2010) using a relational conflict database with geographical maps showing conflict events in Kenya over the period 2004-2022, which BICC created by merging several conflict databases.[6] For conflicts in Marsabit over the period 2004–2022, a visual comparison of state vs. non-state involvement shows that the vast majority of events were violent and did not involve state security actors (see Maps 2 and 3 below).[7]

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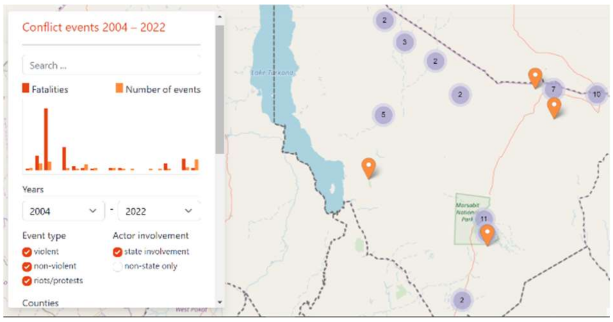
[5] Male youth from pastoralist groups in northern Kenya are traditionally initiated into warrior groups, called *moran*, whose role it is to provide security for the community and to engage in raids for livestock and wealth accumulation.

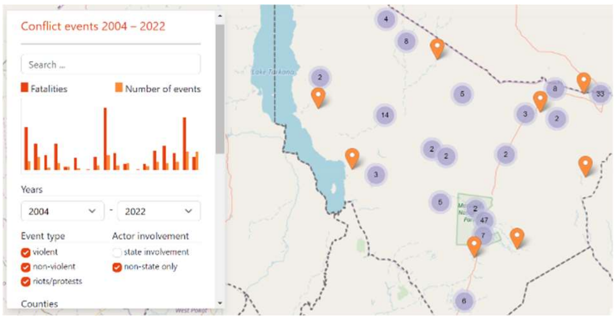
[6] https://violent-futures.bicc.de/#/; The database allows the reader to select specific geographical regions, time periods and types of violence and to search for specific themes. ACLED categorises conflicts into three main types: non-violent ‘strategic developments’, demonstration events (protests; riots) and violent events (battles; explosions/ remote violence; violence against civilians). BICC has introduced a categorical distinction between events with and without the involvement of official state security actors, based on the ACLED conflict actor coding. The database was created as part of the DFG-funded research project “Violent futures? Contestation along the frontier” (2018-2021; 2022-25) in the collaborative research centre (CRC) 228 “Future Rural Africa”.

[7] As ACLED relies on press reports, conflict events are generally under-reported in ACLED. During our interviews and focus group discussions, respondents mentioned many violent incidents, including killings and cattle raids that were not included in the ACLED database.

Map 2: Conflict Events in Marsabit 2004–2022: with State Involvement

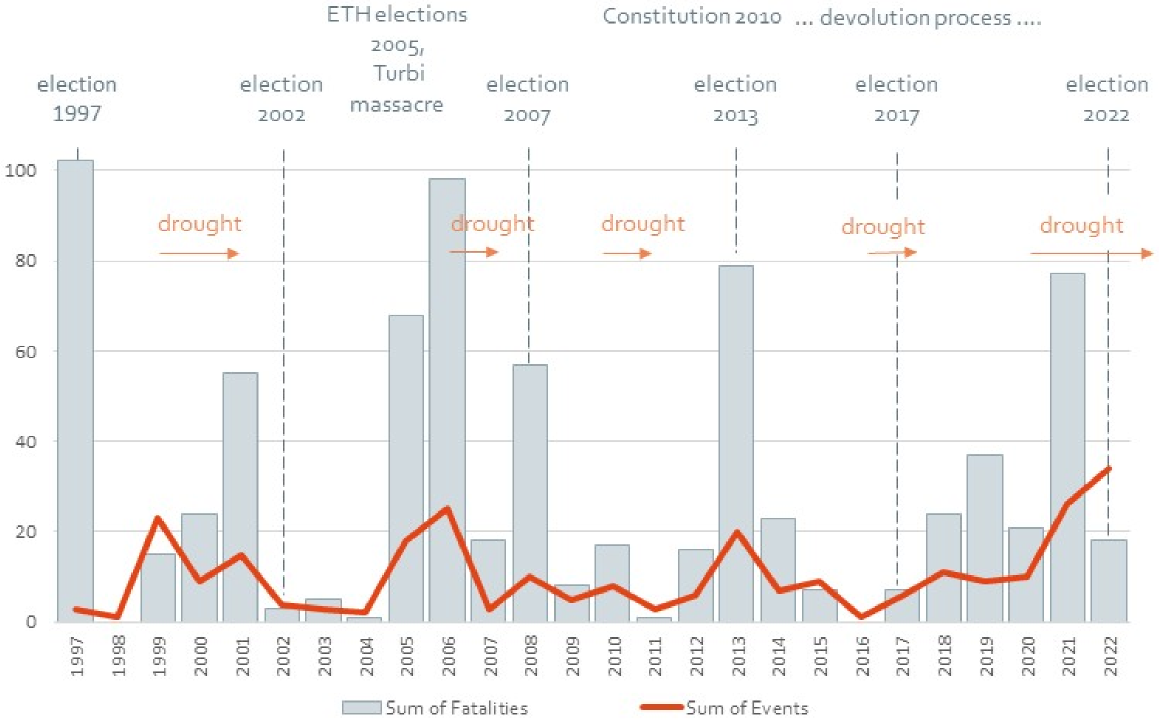

Conflict events 2004 – 2022
Search ...
Fatalities
Number of events
Years
2004
2022
Event type
Actor involvement
☑ violent
☑ non-violent
☑ riots/protests
☑ state involvement
○ non-state only
Counties

Map 3: Conflict Events in Marsabit 2004-2022: Without State Involvement


Conflict events 2004 – 2022
Search ...
Fatalities
Number of events
Years
2004
2022
Event type
Actor involvement
☑ violent
☑ non-violent
☑ riots/protests
○ state involvement
☑ non-state only
Counties

Sources: https://violent-futures.bicc.de/#/;
ACLED: acleddata.com, accessed 4 November 2022

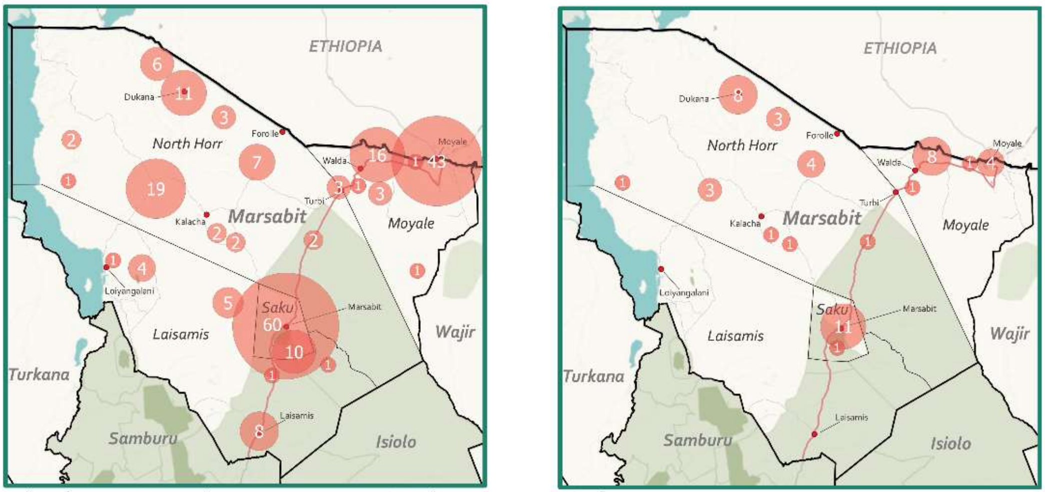
Figure 3: Temporal Evolution of Conflicts in Marsabit 1997–2022



Sources: ACLED: acleddata.com, accessed 4 November 2022; Mwangi, 2006, p. 89, IGAD, 2022, pp. 32–35.

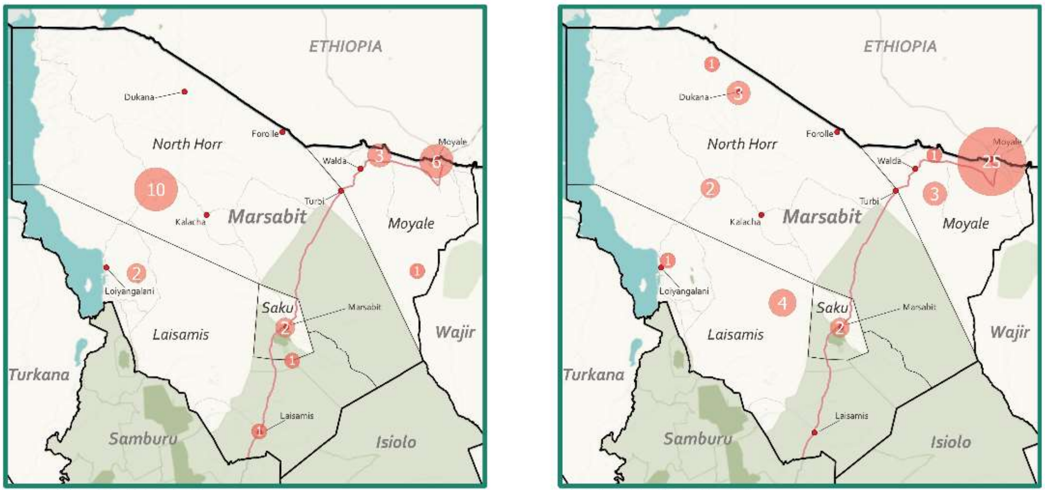
The temporal development of the number of events and fatalities from 1997 to November 2022 shows a cyclical development of conflicts, with regular ups and downs (see Figure 3). The peaks in the number of deaths and events are mostly around the Kenyan elections. One major incident, the Turbi massacre in 2005, does not appear to be linked to a Kenyan election but rather to the general elections in Ethiopia in June 2005 (Mwangi, 2006). This suggests that factors other than drought and food insecurity are significant determinants of conflict in Marsabit.

Map 4: Geographical Distribution of Conflict Events in Marsabit County (2004–22)


ETHIOPIA
Dukana
North Horr
Forolle
Walda
Moyale
Turbi
Kalacha
Marsabit
Moyale
Loiyangalani
Saku
Marsabit
Laisamis
Wajir
Turkana
Laisamis
Samburu
Isiolo
6
11
3
2
7
16
43
1
19
3
1
1
2
2
2
1
4
5
60
10
1
1
1
8
8
3
4
3
1
1
8
1
4
1
1
1
11
1

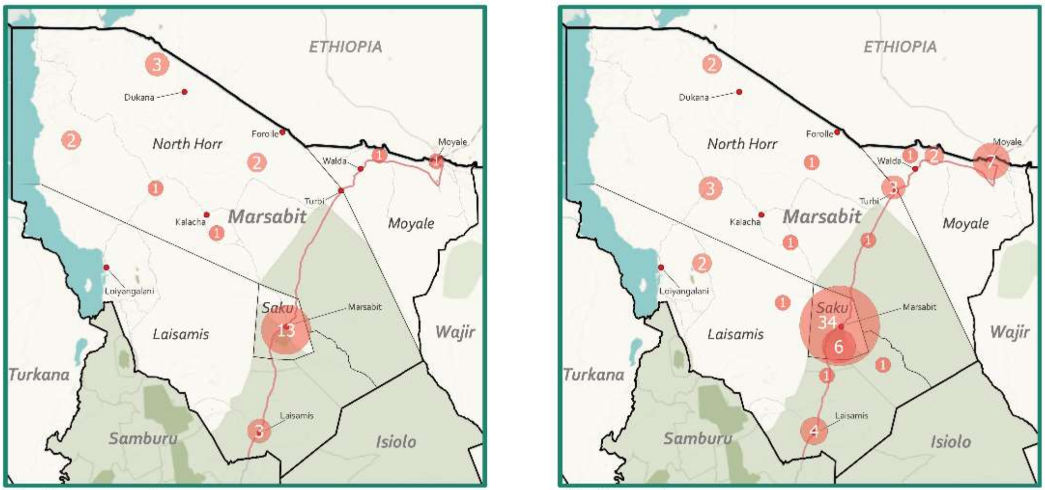
All conflict events in Marsabit county 2004 - 2022 (ACLED data)

Conflict events 2004 - 2007


ETHIOPIA
Dukana
North Horr
Forolle
Walda
Moyale
Turbi
Kalacha
Marsabit
Moyale
Loiyangalani
Saku
Marsabit
Laisamis
Wajir
Turkana
Laisamis
Samburu
Isiolo
3
6
10
2
1
2
1
1
1
3
1
25
2
3
1
4
2

Conflict events 2008 - 2011

Conflict events 2012 - 2015


ETHIOPIA
Dukana
North Horr
Forolle
Walda
Moyale
Turbi
Kalacha
Marsabit
Moyale
Loiyangalani
Saku
Marsabit
Laisamis
Wajir
Turkana
Laisamis
Samburu
Isiolo
3
2
2
1
1
1
1
13
3
2
1
2
7
3
3
1
1
2
1
34
6
1
1
4

Conflict events 2016 - 2019

Conflict events 2020 - 2022

🟩 Protected area

▨ Conservancy

🟦 Water body

Saku Sub-county (within Marsabit)

Wajir County

ETHIOPIA Neighbouring country

— Main road (in Marsabit)

— Other road

● Marsabit Town / village

● 6 Number of conflicts

Sources: ACLED 2022, BICC 2022, UNOCHA 2021, HOTOSM 2022; Layout: Jonas Spekker, Marie Müller-Koné, BICC, February 2023. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by BICC.

The spatial configuration of conflicts between 2004 and 2022 (see Map 4) shows that conflicts along the Ethiopian border dominated until 2015 (even though some of the confrontations had already taken place in Saku constituency around Marsabit town). This suggests a stronger influence of regional links to Ethiopia at that time. Since 2016, there have been far more reported incidents of violence in Saku sub-county. Overall, violence has shifted to urban centres and their environs (Moyale, Marsabit) in the last decade, suggesting heightened stakes due to the new 2010 Constitution and the political devolution implemented in 2013. The last three years (2020–2022) were the most violent but not the most deadly, coinciding with unprecedented years of drought in the region. It is interesting to note that conflicts are increasingly occurring along the Isiolo–Moyale highway, which was completed in 2014. Possible explanations for these shifts in conflict formations are analysed below. Ethnopolitical competition for political office and land rushes in the wake of infrastructure plans are two main lines of explanation that will be pursued below.

3.3 Conflict Analysis

Ethnopolitical Competition for Resources in Marsabit (Theoretical Framework)

The ethnographic and political science literature on conflicts in Marsabit identifies ethno-political competition as a major driver of conflict. Ethnopolitics in Marsabit is characterised by shifting inter-ethnic alliances, as no ethnic group has an absolute majority in the county (Czuba, 2018; Galaty, 2016; Schlee, 2013). A recent conflict assessment (NCIC & Interpeace, 2022, p. 10) also identifies 'existential ethno-politicization' as a key problem, alongside government inaction and impunity. In another assessment, the Catholic Diocese of Marsabit agrees: 'If violence is territorial (contest over Marsabit mountain) and includes the aim of gaining exclusivity in use of resources, then it must be seen as a competition for power and a means to rally collectives (ethnic groups) into a common agenda' (n.d., p. 6). The literature also notes a major contradiction in that the main competing groups in Marsabit, the Gabra and Borana, are traditional allies who speak the same language and have maintained a 'long standing symbiotic relationship” that includes mutual support during episodes of environmental stress (Mwangi, 2006, p. 89; Schlee, 2009). During the long drought of 1999–2001, for example, many Gabra migrated across the border into Kenya, and the very parties involved in the 2005 Turbi conflict peacefully coexisted in the Borana plateau.

Theories of ethnic boundary-making and resource-making are useful in understanding this puzzle. **Ethnic boundary-making** suggests that it is not the actual cultural differences between ethnic groups that cause conflict between them but the benefits that political leaders and their supporters derive from the process of boundary-making itself, of distinguishing between 'us' and 'them' (Barth, 1998; Schlee, 2013; Wimmer, 2002). This means that ordinary people can live together peacefully and exchange in everyday lives but can still be mobilised to use violence against the other group in certain situations. **Resource-making theories** from a political ecology perspective (Li, 2014; Tsing, 2003) emphasise that resources, including natural resources, never exist objectively as such from the outset but must first be perceived as useful and valuable by societies and must be produced and made accessible through various management practices (this is particularly true of mineral resources).[8] 'Land' is a good example of how a stretch of landscape has been transformed from being perceived as somewhere to live or graze one's livestock to a territory that can be acquired, controlled and ultimately fenced off for the exclusive use of one particular owner. A piece of land has been transformed into a resource. These processes of 'making' ethnic groups and resources are very power-laden, meaning that different social groups have different capacities to influence these processes. We will therefore refer to 'ethnopolitical' competition throughout the text.

The benefits that ethnopolitical groups derive from boundary-making consist of different kinds of resources. One key resource that ethnic groups fight over is territory. Land issues are thus directly linked internally to ethnic boundary-making practices. In the case of Marsabit county, the concept of 'contested space' seems very apt. This does not necessarily have to be the case: Boundary-making can be limited to issues of language and culture, as would be the case for cultural minority group rights in a multicultural setting. However, the idea of the nation-state has come to associate ethnic groups closely with a particular territory. In rural Africa, access to land is often still organised through membership of particular groups that claim priority over the location (autochthony/ indigeneity), such as in communally managed rangelands in northern Kenya. Other resources over which groups compete include natural resources needed to sustain livelihoods, such as water and grazing for pastoralism, but also political offices and the money that flows through them. In addition to government positions, community conservancies are another channel for development funds that has become increasingly important in northern Kenya in recent decades.

The extensive literature on resource conflict (Braun, Held, Brickwedde, Neugebohrn, & Uexküll, 2009; Le Billon, 2012) has shown that competition over scarce resources such as water or grazing land are less likely to lead to large-scale violence than resource wealth, which generates competition over access to benefits. This suggests that it is not competition over scarce resources such as water and pasture that is generating most of the violence in Marsabit but competition over new wealth to be distributed in the form of devolution money, the construction of new infrastructure and the economic benefits that come with it, such as sub-contracting and compensation for land lost to new infrastructure.

3.4 History of Conflict in Marsabit

Colonial Roots

The history of Marsabit county shows that processes of political boundary-making, not only between ethnic groups but also between political entities at different geographical scales, have gained in importance and complexity over time. Since the beginning of British colonial rule, ethnicity has become increasingly territorialised, with ethnic groups claiming a clearly delineated territory with more exclusive claims to access, belonging, and ownership. In pre-colonial times, the various pastoralist groups in the region were highly mobile. They did not adhere to a spatially fixed territory, but territorial control was centred on the management of water points: In the wet season, people and herds mixed widely, but in the dry season, the Borana exercised some control over access to pastures through control of wells (Galaty, 2016; Schlee, 2013). The Borana, whose cultural leader is based in Ethiopia, dominated the area: 'It was a system organized along differences … without separation' (Schlee, 2013, p. 860). The inter-ethnic system, the Boran-centred alliance known as *Worr Libin,* performed ritual, military and resource management functions. Ethnic group membership was more fluid than today. Interestingly, many clans (organisational sub-units) today still identify with several ethnic groups rather than just one (Czuba, 2018, p. 5).

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[8] The attention by these approaches to historical processes of 'making' ethnic groups and resources does not imply that ethnic groups and resources do not exist as such. In everyday lives, they appear very much as a fixed reality to most people.

The northern political border with Ethiopia has divided previously shared socio-linguistic groups into 'Kenyan' and 'Ethiopian'. The creation of the Northern Frontier District as part of the British Protectorate in 1909 was a response to the southward expansion of the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Empire. A rough boundary agreement with the Abyssinians had been reached two years previous, in 1907. Then, the British colonial government had attempted to separate the Borana and Gabra in Kenya from their Ethiopian counterparts, thus pushing them further south, which had a domino effect on the Rendille, Ariaal (mixed Rendille and Samburu) and Samburu, who were pushed further south (Galaty, 2005, p. 57). When the British administrators arrived with their ideas of the nation-state, they saw the administrative units they created as essentially 'belonging' to particular ethnic groups and were keen to keep supposedly 'alien' elements out of the districts’ boundaries. In neighbouring Isiolo county, the Borana claim that the British gave them exclusive grazing rights (Boye & Kaarhus, 2011). Some Gabra in Marsabit, therefore, claim Marsabit as their homeland, as Isiolo is already considered Borana land (for the Waso Borana).

Boundary-making in Marsabit since colonial times has been a state-driven process, first by British administrators and then in the post-independence period (after 1963) by Kenyan administrators and politicians. As a result of colonial boundary-making, ethnicity became 'ossified', in contrast to the earlier fluid ethnic identification, as evidenced by ethnic maps that have changed little since the colonial period (Czuba, 2018, p. 6) (see Map 6 in the Appendix). Colonial rule brought about a territorialisation of ethnicity that linked collective identity to land.

Post-independence

A key issue of ethnic conflict in post-independence politics has been the attempt by smaller communities to overcome the continuing dominance of the Borana. In the centralised political system of the decades after independence, political influence and access to resources could be gained through parliamentary seats. Constituencies were divided so that a Rendille or Aarial member of parliament (MP) generally represented Marsabit South, and a Gabra and Moyale constituency (since 1966) or a Borana MP represented Marsabit North. The Borana's ability to dominate Marsabit politics has been limited by their geographical distribution in Marsabit, which is split between Mount Marsabit and the southernmost reaches of the Ethiopian highlands around Moyale and Sololo. In 1988, the Borana succeeded splitting Marsabit North into North Horr and Saku constituencies. As they dominate Saku constituency, they have always managed to get a Borana MP elected, increasing their parliamentary representation to two. In turn, as constituencies became ethnically more homogenous, intra-ethnic competition grew in parallel, especially among the Gabra clans (Czuba, 2018).

Political competition was also taken to other fora, such as the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT). There, the three smaller groups, the Burji, Gabra and Rendille leaders, launched an inter-ethnic alliance called ReGaBu after 1988, which dominated KNUT structures in Marsabit county for the next few decades (Czuba, 2018, p. 10). With the advent of multi-party politics in Kenya in the 1990s, inter-ethnic hostilities increased and inter-ethnic clashes occurred repeatedly in the 1990s (Salvadori, 2000) and in 1999/2000. The creation of the Constituency Development Funds (CDF) in 2003, which MPs used to channel resources to their co-ethnics, further exacerbated tensions (Czuba, 2018, p. 11).

One of the most tragic events in this growing conflict was the Turbi massacre that occurred on 12 July 2005 despite public warnings of an impending attack and calls for help from MPs in June 2005 that went unheeded by the state security forces. Tensions had been high in the run-up to the attack, with several Borana having been killed by Gabra and vice versa. A group of around 1,000 Borana attacked the Gabra settlement in the Didigalgalo–Turbi area, which lies close to the boundary between the North Horr and Moyale constituencies on the main Marsabit–Moyale road, killing many of its inhabitants and looting its cattle. The victims, between 70 and 95 people, including 21 to 23 children, were indiscriminately killed that day by fighters armed with automatic rifles, *pangas* (machetes) and spears (Czuba, 2018, pp. 10–11; Mwangi, 2006). The attack was planned and carried out with military precision. Most younger men had left the village at the time of the attack as they were expecting attacks at the grazing fields. Victims reported that OLF fighters were among the Borana. In the end, 2,000 soldiers, troops from the paramilitary General Service Unit (GSU) and police officers had to be flown into Marsabit to disperse and track down the attackers. More than 6,200 people, mainly Gabra but also Borana, were displaced as a result of the Turbi massacre and subsequent revenge attacks (Mwangi, 2006, p. 81). The IDPs then had to seek refuge, permanent settlement and new pastures for their animals in other parts of Marsabit (see section 5.2).

The number of people killed and the brutality of the Turbi attack stand out to this day. However, the targeted killing of people in settlements extending to women and children, and the level of cruelty continues, albeit on a smaller scale. The memory of the Turbi massacre is very much alive and is being kept alive in public discourses, such as a recent hearing on the Marsabit conflicts by the Kenya National Assembly in November 2021 (Government of Kenya, 2021). The atrocities committed, the displacement endured and the impunity of the perpetrators (NCIC & Interpeace, 2022) have become an additional factor perpetuating conflict in Marsabit.

Post-devolution

Political devolution, enshrined in the 2010 Constitution and implemented with the 2013 elections, has brought about a major change in the political scene. Although the parameters of ethno-political contestation had arguably been set before, 'the stakes of political contestation increased dramatically' (Czuba, 2018, p. 11; Lind, 2018). Governors, county assemblies and municipal councils were now elected and allocated their budgets for specific state functions such as health, livestock and local transport.[9] Before devolution, centrally administered funds appear to have been negligible. In contrast, between 2013 and 2017, more than KES 20 billion (approximately

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[9] The national state administration still exists in parallel: from provincial (Eastern Province) to county (county commissioner), sub-county (ass. CC), ward and location (chief).

US $195 million) was allocated to county governments, with the most recent allocation of more than five billion KES per year (Czuba, 2018, p. 13).

Northern Kenya's electoral importance also increased dramatically in 2010, as the new constitution required a successful presidential candidate to win 25 per cent of the vote in at least 24 (out of 47) counties. Political parties could no longer ignore the region as they had in the past (Czuba, 2018, p. 16). As a result, the 2013 elections were preceded and followed by a surge in inter-ethnic clashes (see Figure 3). The ReGaBu alliance managed to elect a Gabra as governor (Ukur Yattani) in 2013. However, in the 2017 elections, a Borana politician won the governorship (Mohamed Muhamud Ali) and was re-elected in the 2022 general elections. While the Borana felt that Ukur Yattani had favoured his people in the allocation of development projects and administrative posts, the same is true for Muhamud Ali, who is perceived to favour the Borana. This type of ethnic favouritism is reported to be pervasive: in matters that determine the location of development projects[10] (Czuba, 2018), the appointment of chiefs and other administrators, including the County Security Committee, the issuance of national identity cards, and even in the distribution of humanitarian aid (Government of Kenya, 2021, par.100; interviews November 2022)(see examples in section 5.1 and 5.2).

The recent Kenya National Assembly hearing report on the Marsabit conflict is replete with mutual accusations by Borana and Gabra of attempting to ethnically cleanse certain areas to achieve ethnic homogeneity and increase voter numbers. While Gabra political leaders are accused of forcibly evicting Borana from locations in North Horr such as Hurri Hills and Forole (Government of Kenya, 2021, Government of Kenya, 2021, par.182), Borana political leaders are accused of displacing the Burji community from the slopes of Mount Marsabit in the 1990s, and of planning to displace other communities, notably the Gabra from Marsabit Central, Kenya–Ethiopia border towns and rangelands along the Marsabit–Moyale highway (Government of Kenya, 2021, par.113-114). Following the 2005 Turbi massacre, the Gabra living in Sagante/Jaldesa were displaced and forced into five settlement schemes for security reasons, according to Gabra witnesses (Government of Kenya, 2021, par.116) (see section 5.2).

Boundary disputes between administrative units are also part of the new political landscape. The constituency boundaries between Moyale and North Horr and Saku and Norther Horr remain unclear and contested (Government of Kenya, 2021). The creation of new administrative units (chiefdoms; wards) has become part of the ethnopolitical competition in the county after devolution. As soon as a new settlement reaches a certain number of inhabitants, the national administration will appoint a chief for the community. The bone of contention is the question of which administrative area the new settlement will be assigned to. New villages are established by one community in an area the other community perceives as traditionally theirs 'since time immemorial', or in a constituency dominated by the other community. This concerns the Horonder sub-location in Marsabit Central Division, the Elle Bor location and the Elle Dimtu sub-location in Sololo sub-county (Gazette Notice No. 5853 Vol. CXIX-No.80, 21 June 2017). In Horonder, it appears that leaders of both communities attempted to settle their people there, which eventually led to violent inter-communal clashes and killings in July 2018. Both the Borana and the Gabra claim that Horonder area is within their territorial boundaries (Government of Kenya, 2021, pp. 80–83) (see section 5.1).

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[10] Funds from the National Government Constituency Development Fund NG-CDF; Affirmative Action Fund, etc.

Ethnopolitical competition over land and boundary disputes is partly fuelled by new infrastructure investments. In addition to county budgets, large-scale infrastructure projects in the Kenya Vision 2030 and like the Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor have brought new government investment to Marsabit. Major parts of the LAPSSET project, namely the proposed standard-gauge railway and pipeline running from Lamu Port through Marsabit county into southern Ethiopia and South Sudan, are not yet implemented, but the construction of the Great North/Isiolo-Moyale road (Highway A2) was completed in 2014. This is the first tarmac road for Marsabit county covering a distance of about 500km. It has a major impact on the county's economic development as well as on the environment and conflicts. Some of the impacts of the A2 Highway in terms of conflict are that it facilitates attacks because attackers can leave very quickly (interviews, November 2022). Some of the new administrative units are created along the new highway.

In summary, perceived ethnic favouritism and an exclusionary, 'zerosum' approach to power and resources (NCIC & Interpeace, 2022), are fuelling ethnopolitical competition and conflict in Marsabit. Despite the predominance of Gabra–Borana competition in the county, the multi-level political institutions (national and devolved state institutions from county to village level) create a complex mosaic of spheres and zones of influence. Ethnopolitical alliances have also shifted over time.

Infrastructures of Peace

Due to the long history of armed conflict in northern Kenya, Marsabit has a diverse institutional landscape of peace institutions and initiatives. These range from non-state traditional elders, religious leaders and national and international NGOs to government-established district peace committees, the county administration with the county commissioner, the county security committee and the county cohesion office, which aims to establish a County Peace Forum to coordinate peace efforts.[11] In June 2022, the National Commission for Integration and Cohesion (NCIC) opened an office in Marsabit together with the Swiss-NGO Interpeace.[12] State and non-state actors have been involved in numerous peace and reconciliation meetings and initiatives. However, efforts at inter-communal reconciliation and sustainable peacebuilding in Marsabit have not been fruitful. The Modogashe Declaration from 2001 seems to have lost its impact. A recent study identifies 14 agreements that have been signed over the past decade but have failed to bring about lasting peace (Catholic Diocese of Marsabit, n.d.).

The national and county governments have been criticised for appearing to side with one party to the conflict, a stance that has contributed to fuelling the conflict. Similarly, NGO actors are linked to the conflict because of their ethnicity and are therefore not seen as neutral actors, although they are increasingly recognised by the government as important actors for local social development and peace (Hassan, 2015).

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[11] For a comprehensive overview of existing peace and security infrastructures see Catholic Diocese of Marsabit (n.d.) and Hassan (2015).

[12] https://theinformer.co.ke/48471/ncic-opens-office-in-marsabit-amid-ongoing-security-operations/, 12.06.2022; https://www.kenyanews.go.ke/ncic-devolves-services-to-marsabit-to-enhance-peace/, 16.11.2022; 2022-11-16-KII-Interpeace-NCIC

Finally, new peace initiatives are underway, both bottom-up, at the local level (see section 5.3), and top-down, led by the government (NCIC) and international organisations (NCIC & Interpeace, 2022). NCIC convened a meeting in 2021 with the Cabinet Secretary for the National Treasury and former First Governor of Marsabit, Ambassador Ukur Yatani (representing the Gabra community) and the current Governor of Marsabit, H.E. Mohamed Mohamud Ali (representing the Borana community), who committed to promoting peaceful coexistence between their communities. A 14-member Peace and Mediation Committee from the two communities was formed to spearhead the process. However, the process stalled due to the operationalisation of two administrative units in North Horr sub-county, which angered the Borana community (Government of Kenya, 2021, p. 80). It will arguably be crucial to establish institutional linkages between these top-down and bottom-up peace processes.

4\ Living with Drought and Food Insecurity: Local People's Perspectives

This chapter summarises the key findings of the empirical study on people's perceptions of the ongoing drought, the prevailing conditions of food insecurity, the measures they have taken to cope with the worst impact of the crisis and the extent to which they have benefited from food aid or other humanitarian interventions. While describing key trends across all study sites, it highlights the diverse impacts of the drought and food crisis and the responses of different groups, including pastoral, agro-pastoral and urban communities, women and youth.

4.1 Impacts of the Current Drought and Experiences of Hunger

In 2022, the rainfall in Marsabit county was well below the long-term average for most of the year. The cumulative effect of five consecutive rainy seasons with far too little rainfall has led to a worsening vegetation condition, which is now classified as extreme drought for the whole county (NDMA, 2022, pp. 2–4). People living in pastoral and agro-pastoral communities, who are directly dependent on rainfall and available pasture for their livelihoods perceive the prolonged drought as an existential crisis. Both pastoralism and agriculture are under extreme climatic stress—in many locations, (agro)pastoral livelihoods are on the verge of collapse, if not already beyond it. The cumulative impact on people’s lives is manifold. The drought has not only led to a significant loss of livestock and thus of income and animal products that form the basis of pastoralist diets, but has also directly affected alternative livelihoods in rural and peri-urban areas. Despite the adoption of a range of coping strategies to address this food emergency, and despite food aid reaching the affected communities but not all households, the food security situation has progressively worsened over the past months and years. Where hunger and malnutrition were previously chronic in many places, they have worsened and are now acute. According to one of the latest NDMA bulletins (NDMA, 2023b, p. 17; 2023a, p. 17), 20 per cent of households in Marsabit county are currently experiencing a ‘food emergency’—where they have large food consumption gaps equivalent to Phase 4 in the international ‘Integrated Food Security Phase Classification’ (IPC)—while a further 48 per cent of all households experience a ‘severe food crisis’ (IPC Phase 3). Accordingly, 19 per cent of children under five in Marsabit county are at risk of malnutrition by January 2023, while the long-term average across wet and dry years is 15 per cent (NDMA, 2023b, pp. 17–18). Food insecurity is unevenly distributed across the county: While pastoral, agropastoral and urban communities are affected, the prevalence of hunger and malnutrition is higher in those pastoral communities located in more remote areas (NDMA, 2023a, p. 17). This also reflects unequal access to food aid and other forms of assistance.

How do Local People Perceive the Drought, its Severe Impact and Food Insecurity?

> The drought situation is dire, livestock and people are dying. We have seen droughts like this before but not to this extent (2022-11-07-FGD-Jaldesa-Men).
>
> This is the worst drought we have ever seen. We have no milk, no meat. We depend on the government and humanitarian actors to give us food (2022-11-14-FGD-YaaGaara-Women).
>
> Even now when it rains, the problem of hunger is still on the verge of killing people (2022-11-15-FGD-Forole-Men).[13]

While pastoralists have experienced droughts and overcome periods of food insecurity in the past, these quotes from FGDs conducted in different rural study sites across the county indicate the exceptional nature of this crisis. Even older community members had never experienced such a prolonged and severe drought in their lifetime. As the drought continues, they fear for their lives and for the future of pastoralism as a major source of livelihood.

The immediate **effects of the drought** include a loss of livestock, loss of agricultural production from small fields and kitchen gardens, and consequently—as most are directly reliant on subsistence production—a lack of income and food. The scale and severity of the **massive loss of livestock** is evident as one travels through the rural areas, particularly as one passes water boreholes or remote villages. During a transect walk after an FGDs, men in Funan Qumbi, a pastoral village on the Ngaso Plain west of Turbi, not only showed us the empty animal enclosures where they normally kept their cattle, sheep and goats but also led us to the sites where they were dumping the animals that had died in recent weeks. Hundreds of carcasses were piled up—and these were just the ones they had tried to get through the drought with extra feed near their homesteads. The rest of the animals were in a very poor condition and were likely to die soon. A village elder reported:

> In the region, we were known for the huge number of cattle we kept, but the drought has taken so many of our animals (…). I used to have 170 cattle, and now I am left with two cows. That old man there had 400 to 500 cattle, and now he has only 10 cows left (2022-11-12-FGD-Funan-Qumbi-Men).

He also mentioned that they had always travelled long distances with their animals in search of pasture—including crossing into Ethiopia—but that for the past four years it had been difficult to go anywhere else, either because of ongoing violent conflict with other groups and the high risk of cattle raiding, or because a lack of rainfall had severely reduced the grazing in areas they could safely reach. Now, there would be no animals left to take anywhere—and the men who identified themselves as herders would be left idle, with no alternative means of earning a living.

This massive livestock mortality is not confined to a single area but is affecting the whole county as recent data collected by the NDMA clearly shows. Between October 2022 and January 2023, more than 1.2 million animals—82,841 camels, 122,780 cattle, 511,054 sheep and 535,972 goats—were reported dead in Marsabit county (NDMA, 2023b). At the community level, these staggering figures are easier to understand. In an FGD in the village of Horonderi, close to the A2 highway on the northern border of Saku county, we had asked the older men present how many animals they had owned in the past and how many they had left. While the men had owned different numbers of camels and cattle—representing their respective wealth and social status in this pastoral community—all had suffered significant losses. Overall, the number of cattle owned by just nine members of this community of 58 households has fallen from over 860 (more than five years ago) to around 210 now, while the number of camels has fallen from 370 to 110 (see Table 1). In total, around 25 per cent of the large animals were still alive, and the numbers of goats and sheep had also declined significantly.

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[13] Please note that the FGDs and interviews were mostly not recorded. The quotes reprinted here do not necessarily reflect the respondents' exact wording (most often in Borana, sometimes in Kiswahili, Rendille or English). Compared to the quotes in our notes (we wrote notes in English), these quotes have also been slightly edited (grammar) for better readability. The code after each quote indicates the date, type of research method, location, and sub-group. 2022-11-07-FGD-Jaldesa-Men thus means that we conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) with a group of men in Jaldesa on 7 November 2022.

Table 1: Large Animals kept by Selected Households in Horonderi Village

	Camels		**Cattle**	
	5-10 yrs ago	Present	5-10 yrs ago	Present
P1	40	20	100	20
P2	20	0	40	0
P3	20	0	60	30
P4	100	20	120	0
P5	50	10	100	20
P6	-	-	100	40
P7	100	40	140	40
P8	-	-	80	20
P9	40	20	120	40
all	**370**	**110**	**860**	**210**

Source: 2022-11-05-FGD-Horonder-men

The men were asked to place one stick for 20 camels and one stone for 20 cows they owned on the mat (5-10 years ago on the left and currently on the right) and then explain what this loss meant to them, their households and the whole community.

In the FGDs, women and men directly addressed the implications of this massive loss of livestock on the **food security of pastoral households**:

> We are pastoralists, but now since the long drought, we have lost almost all our livestock. This village is full of animal carcasses around (…). We used to eat our animals and their products. (…) We used to sell milk in Turbi and Marsabit and buy maize, beans and rice. No one went hungry. Now, because of this drought, we have nothing to eat, not even milk to drink. (…) The little we have is not enough for everyone. We sacrifice our food so that the young children can eat, but they still cry for food. Many sleep hungry (2022-11-12-FGD-women-Funan Qumbi).
>
> Most of our cattle have died, we used to buy cattle feed, but now most of them are dead, and the rest are weak and cannot be sold. Now, we can no longer afford the feed. Nobody wants to buy these weak animals. With the little money we get from selling some weak animals, we buy food for

> ourselves and our children. (…) Most of the time, we go hungry (2022-11-05-FGD-Horonderi-Women).

These quotes indicate the direct impact of livestock deaths on the wealth, well-being and food security of pastoral households. Affected household members eat much less overall and have been forced to change their daily diets: They consume much less meat and milk now. As a direct result of the drought, cow milk production has ceased or significantly decreased (NDMA, 2022, p. 11)—even where there is adequate access to water and where people can afford supplementary feed. Milk is also often not available for direct consumption—which is particularly detrimental to children's nutritional needs—and for processing because cattle and camel herds have been driven to far more distant pastures than under normal conditions, for example to Ethiopia from pastoral communities in the North Horr sub-county (NDMA, 2022, pp. 8–11).

The **commercial value chains that depend on healthy livestock** have also broken down. Milk cooperatives do not receive enough milk to process or sell, nor do potential customers have the money to buy it. Women in the (agro)pastoral communities near rural towns have lost an important alternative source of income, as women in Turbi and Kamboe told us. Skinny and weak animals cannot be sold at a reasonable price on local markets. Prices for cattle, sheep and goats are currently well below the long-term average (NDMA, 2022, pp. 11–14). Cattle prices, for instance, have been 20 to 40 per cent lower than normal throughout 2022. As a result, many pastoralists did not consider selling their cattle at all, even if they were still comparatively healthy. One village elder in the Hurri Hills argued that all the pastoralists in his community wanted to keep their cattle against the advice they had received from NGOs (during training on a livestock marketing project) to sell some of their livestock earlier on and use the income to secure food during the emerging drought. They had not believed the forecasts but wanted to maintain their wealth by keeping as many animals as possible. Now they regretted not following this advice (2022-11-14-FGD-Gandille-Men).

The loss of livestock, and therefore income, for pastoral households has serious implications not only for families' food security in the present but also for their **long-term prospects**. We were told that investments in businesses have been lost or had to be withdrawn, marriages of younger community members have been postponed,[14] and children's education has been severely affected. Pastoralists are aware of the importance of higher education for their children for the survival of the whole community, and many send, or want to send, older children to secondary schools in distant locations—for instance, from small villages near Turbi to Marsabit and even Meru. But postponing secondary school enrolment and dropping out of school simply for economic reasons is a common side-effect of this prolonged drought:

> The only way out (for a better future for us) is to educate our children. They will get jobs and support us. But it is a problem for us to get a good education and to pay for it. (…) Now that my cattle are dead, I do not know how to secure the money to pay for my children's education (his daughter is in a secondary school in Marsabit town, where fees can reach KSH 23,000 per term) (2022-11-12-FGD-No1-Funan Kumbi-Men).

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[14] On the other hand, there have been reports of early child marriages of girls as a coping mechanism to the drought. https://www.kenyanews.go.ke/dont-marry-off-young-girls-in-the-pretext-of-drought-warns-dcc/ , 14.12.2022

A secondary, yet common effect of drought and the collapse of pastoral livelihoods is the inability of **other livelihoods** to provide a supplementary source of income. In some villages, local people, mainly women and youth, run small grocery shops, barbershops or hairdressing salons, mobile phone charging stations or repair shops. Businesswomen in Ellebor, a village midway between Turbi and Forole, complained that their sales volume had dropped from up to KSH 6,000 per day under normal conditions to just KSH 2,000 during this drought. Local people prioritise food over other expenses. Those who do buy food also face rising prices—one kilogramme of maize sold for KSH 80 in December compared to an average of KSH 47 over the previous five years (NDMA, 2022, p. 15). As a result, people can only buy products of lower quality and in smaller quantities, such as small 200g plastic bags of poor quality maize flour or rice instead of the larger five- or ten-kilogramme bags of better quality that they used to buy. People increasingly buy on credit and find it then difficult to pay back their debts. This means that some shops cannot replenish their stocks or have to close down altogether, leaving the shopkeepers struggling to feed their families. Because of the drought, many people have given up their secondary livelihoods, such as small vegetable gardens and raising chicken. Only growing and/or selling khat/mirah, the local drug that helps people get through a day of hunger, still works (2022-11-13-FGD-Ellebor-Women). The *boda boda* riders, young men who use their motorbikes to transport people, goods and animals, face the same problem as the shopkeepers, as there is little money circulating in the pastoral communities. The massive death of livestock and the resulting disruption of livestock markets means that local people's mobility needs and their ability to pay even KSH1,000 for a trip to Turbi or KSH2,000 for a trip to Forole have also diminished. Business is limited to occasional trips for the shopkeepers or to taking people to see doctors or officials. Most of the trips would be relatively short, just to transport water from the nearby borehole to the village (2022-11-13-FGD-Ellebor-Youth).

Obviously, the lack of **freshwater availability** is also a direct consequence of the drought. Past infrastructural developments have been crucial in providing sufficient fresh water for people and their animals. But there are clear differences between villages: While some, such as Logologo, Jaldesa, Funan Qumbi and Ellebor, have direct access to a borehole, other villages have only water pans, underground tanks and water drums on their homesteads and rely solely on rainwater collection. Now that five consecutive rainy seasons have failed, only the former is a reliable source of water, while the latter provides no water security at all. In many communities we visited, all existing water pans, rainwater and underground tanks were empty, leaving local communities heavily dependent on water trucking. In addition, the water harvesting infrastructure is often very old and in desperate need of repair. Organising such repairs and paying for water trucking is currently beyond the capacity of many pastoral communities, such as those in Honderi, Funan Qumbi, Elledimtu, Gandille or Yaa Gaara. They are, therefore, heavily dependent on the government and humanitarian organisations, not only for food aid but also for the provision of life-saving water. A reliable source of water is an important reason why some pastoral communities, which traditionally moved around, have settled more permanently in certain locations, such as Jaldesa or Funan Qumbi. A lack of secure access to water can, in turn, motivate entire villages to relocate, as was noted in the village of Elledimtu, which can then contribute to further local conflicts over land and water with other communities.

The severe effects of the drought are not confined to the pastoral communities of North Horr and Laisamis but are also being felt by the **agro-pastoral communities in Marsabit town and its environs** in Saku. For example, respondents in Adi Hukha and Manyatta Jillo, two villages of

Gabra and Borana people on the northern outskirts of Marsabit town, told us how their lives had changed and their livelihoods had been severely affected by the drought and the ongoing violent conflict over the past five years (see section 5.2 for details of the conflict history). For them, the impact of the drought and the conflict are closely linked:

> People have been killed, livestock lost and property taken (in the recent conflicts). The livestock that are left have all been taken by the drought. It is better for the cattle to be stolen by the enemies than to be taken by drought. (…) We are the ones who could feed the people here in Marsabit, but now we depend on donations and relief food. (…) We now fear for our lives (2022-11-09-FGD-Manyatta Jillo-Men).
>
> Before the conflicts, we lived on our farms and grew maize, beans, wheat, sorghum, vegetables and fruits. We had plenty of food and did not know what hunger was. Since the conflicts and the drought, we have no source of water around us. (…) The high cost of living makes it difficult to buy food in the town. We have no farms where we can grow food ourselves. There is never enough food in our homes. (…) It is the conflict and the prolonged drought that have brought about this change (2022-11-09-FGD-IDPs-Women-Athi Huqa).

These quotes illustrate that the effects of violent conflict and drought are mutually reinforcing. The loss of livestock to cattle raiding (see also section 5.2) is a severe blow to individual households but pales in comparison to the massive numbers of animals that have died during the drought in recent months. With little rainfall and insufficient fresh water for irrigation, agriculture has come to a standstill, even in areas that have provided a steady livelihood for agropastoral communities for generations. During the last short rainy season (October to December 2022), the delayed onset of rainfall and minimal rainfall received in the agropastoral areas of Marsabit led to the drying up of young crops that had just germinated. As a result, crop production failed completely for the fourth consecutive season (NDMA, 2023b, p. 11). On a smaller scale, kitchen gardens have been successfully established in some agro-pastoral communities, particularly in places where a permanent water source is secured, such as in Songa or Jaldesa, but they cannot compensate for the massive losses in rainfed agriculture. In many cases, however, kitchen gardens, shed nets and irrigation systems have also been destroyed in violent attacks, or people have been forcibly displaced from their villages and no longer have access to their fertile land and agricultural projects (see section 5.2). The drought and the violent conflicts have increased the dependency of previously almost self-sufficient agropastoral households on local food markets, which have become highly volatile also due to international market developments such as the global food and energy price crisis and on food aid.

4.2 Coping with Hunger and Adapting to Change: People’s Own Strategies

The (agro)pastoralists of Marsabit county are not helpless in the face of drought. In the previous section, we have already identified some common strategies that households are using. It is important to distinguish between short-term *coping strategies,* which simply enable people to survive, and *adaptation strategies,* which reflect a more systematic change in livelihoods, behaviour and community structures in the longer term.

Which Coping Strategies are Used in Pastoral Communities to Secure Food in the Short Term?

Almost all the people we spoke to have had to **change their food consumption patterns**. The simplest measure is to reduce food intake. In all of the field sites, respondents said that they and their families often **skip meals** and go hungry as a result. It was often mentioned that when food is available at all, priority is given to feeding children regularly, especially the youngest, while the adults often go through the day without having eaten anything substantial. As result, many said they try to go to bed earlier to shorten the ‘hunger hours’. However, many children still go to school on an empty stomach and rely on school meal programmes as their only proper meal of the day. Another common strategy was to **consume less preferred and culturally less valued foods**. Many interviewees reported that they now eat very little meat and milk compared to the comparatively food-secure period during and after the 'normal' rainy seasons. Some also noted that they were now eating cheaper imported rice or *sorghum* provided by emergency food aid instead of locally produced wheat and maize (flour), even though they traditionally do not eat the former (sorghum) (FGD in Gandille).

Food insecure households are not alone in this acute food crisis and can rely on **local solidarity systems—**in rural and urban communities. In Marsabit town, for instance, the Gabra IDPs are living in highly precarious conditions and have been constantly experiencing hunger since their forced displacement from their villages and since their agro-pastoral livelihoods were destroyed in inter-ethnic violence (see section 5.1). Despite this, they try to share resources as best as they can. In one FGD, a displaced man told us that although the Gabra IDPs in Marsabit do not live closely together but are scattered across town, 'so far, we have not heard of anyone dying for lack of food because we do share what we have with anyone who asks for help' (2022-11-04-FDG-IDPs-Men). In our rural study sites, it was often reported that slightly more affluent villagers were very responsible and helped ‘weaker’ community members. Furthermore, close neighbours would support each other by sharing what little food they have, including food aid, which often reaches only a few—the so-called most vulnerable—in a village (as argued by respondents in Horonderi, Funan Qumbi, Songa, Kamboe, Yaa Gaara, and Gandille). However, there is fine line between the cultural norm of mutual support within a community and the sheer necessity and personal humiliation of having to beg for money or food. Buying food on credit from local shopkeepers seems to be a culturally accepted alternative. But this too has its limitations due to the long-term negative impact on the local economy, as noted above and as explained by a woman who participated in an FGD in the village of Funan Qumbi:

> When we don't have food, we go to the shops and buy food on credit. We pay them back after a long time (with income from charcoal production). We also beg food from each other, but begging is very hard for us. You cannot beg every day. Sometimes our neighbours also do not have enough food for their children. Taking food on credit from shops has caused bad blood with shop owners (2022-11-12-FGD-women-Funan Qumbi).

In addition to this local support, there are also **translocal exchange relations and solidarity mechanisms**, but these have been used less frequently than initially expected to deal with this food emergency. During the FGDs in the rural communities, we asked respondents whether they received support from family members living elsewhere. But very few responded positively, for instance, by saying that they had sons working in various jobs in Marsabit town or as soldiers in another region of Kenya. 'Some of us get little help from our children and few relatives in town. We buy food with the little money we get from our family' who live elsewhere (2022-11-14-FGD- YaaGaara-Women). Some villagers expressed great disappointment that even though they have close relatives living in towns, they do not benefit from this: 'Some have (family living elsewhere) and some don't. But those who are in other towns don't care and don’t help us. There is no good help from the town. It is only our children who go to other towns now, but for education' (2022-11-05-FGD-Horonder-Men).

Which Longer-term Adaptation Strategies are Used in Pastoral Communities to Secure a Living?

Adaptation strategies refer to practices that do not only affect household food provisioning in the short term but also imply longer-term changes in behaviour and food-securing practices. In our study, we found that the most commonly observed adaptation strategies to drought and food insecurity were the establishment of alternative sources of income, changes in (agro)pastoral production systems, new infrastructure to secure access to water and regional mobility.

While pastoralism is the main source of livelihood for most food-insecure households in Marsabit county, many families **use alternative sources of food and income**. However, rural livelihoods here are not as diverse as in other parts of rural Kenya. The county government has initiated some pilot projects in rural areas to promote alternative or complementary strategies to pastoralism, such as poultry rearing and beekeeping. Despite some visible successes, it has so far not been possible to scale these up to a substantial extent (2022-11-04-KII-CountyGov). Besides the livelihood alternatives mentioned above, which have been directly affected by the massive loss of livestock, such as shopkeeping, small cooperatives processing animal products and motorbike couriers, a range of adaptation strategies to drought and longer-term climate change used have a detrimental impact on the environment. In rural communities, many women reported that they fetch water and collect firewood for others in their village in exchange for food, or they walk over larger distances into the bushes to cut trees and burn charcoal to earn a meagre cash income (as noted in FGDs in Manyatta Jillo, Jaldesa, Kubi Qallo, Funan Qumbi and Funan Idha). Firewood and charcoal are either sold to passers-by along the main roads or transported to urban centres by the younger *boda boda* riders. While many seemed unaware of the negative environmental impact of these practices, others reflected on them but justified them out of the sheer necessity for survival:

> Because of hunger and this prolonged drought, many people have changed their livelihoods and started burning charcoal to survive. We used to survive on livestock for a long time, but now we survive on trees. We know it is bad for the environment, but we have no other choice. (…) Caritas supported women's business groups by giving them grants and training. The group then gave loans to their members. These revolving funds helped the families buy food, pay school fees and meet other household needs. They repaid the loans through their earnings from the charcoal burning business (2022-11-11-FGD-Kubi Qallo-Men).

This adaptation strategy is not only highly damaging to the environment, it is also economically unsustainable and borderline illegal.[15] As firewood collection and charcoal burning have become an important source of livelihood for hundreds of thousands of Kenyans, and many more during the drought, the price of a sack of charcoal has plummeted in Marsabit county, leaving (agro)pastoralists with little substantial additional income. What is also noteworthy about the above quote is that a development intervention that aimed to diversify rural livelihoods and promote women's adaptive capacities is actually fuelling such an environmentally and economically unsustainable practice.

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[15] The Kenyan government has recently imposed a number of bans on charcoal production and trade, but both continue nonetheless. https://theconversation.com/kenya-has-been-trying-to-regulate-the-charcoal-sector-why-its-not-working-154383

FGDs in rural settings hardly addressed **labour migration to urban centres**. Only some herders in a village in North Horr indicated that they had gone to the city searching for work (Turbi and Marsabit) but had returned empty-handed as there seemed to be no opportunities for casual work (2022-11-12-FGD-Funan-Qumbi-Men). On the other hand, respondents who live in or near a town or city see **casual labour** as an important coping and adaptation strategy. For younger men, the motorcycle transport business is often the only additional income available, but this is also affected by the drought and the violent conflict (see section 5.1). Other men also work in town as well, for example as security guards, but earn a meagre income. Women from agropastoral households near Marsabit and female IDPs living in the town reported doing casual work such as cleaning houses or washing clothes to earn money to buy food for their families. Interestingly, in both women's groups—both members of the Gabra community—it was argued that they only 'go around Gabra houses' asking for work as they were afraid to work for members of the Borana community (2022-11-09-FGD-IDPs-Women-Athi Huqa; 2022-11-04-FDG-IDPs-women-KonsoB). Ongoing ethno-political violence in the region thus significantly limits people's ability to cope with and adapt to droughts.

Changing (agro)pastoral production systems is another important adaptation strategy. In recent years, pastoralists have already changed the composition of animals in their herds. In response to more frequent droughts, they are keeping more camels and goats, while the number of cattle and sheep is likely to decrease as they seek more reliable water sources and better pastures. As one herder in the drought-stricken village of Funan Qumbi told us: 'The future of herding is uncertain. Only those with camels and goats will survive this drought, all others will lose out' (2022-11-12-FGD-Funan-Qumbi-Men). A similar pattern can be observed in agricultural practices. In many agro-pastoral communities in Marsabit county, farmers have replaced more rainfall-sensitive food crops such as maize, wheat, beans and vegetables with the cash crop mirra/khat. Not only is this cash crop more drought-resistant, providing an additional and more stable income, but using this stimulant also helps the farmers themselves to cope with hunger. A more promising and sustainable adaptation strategy is the establishment and maintenance of kitchen gardens near the homesteads or smaller shed net 'greenhouses' in the community. These small-scale projects, initiated with the support of development NGOs are usually, but in some villages not exclusively, run by women. They are often combined with self-help, savings and micro-credit groups. Using irrigation techniques that require systematic rainwater harvesting or access to groundwater sources, the women grow a variety of vegetables, fruits and staple foods that are consumed by their families or sold at local markets. In some locations, the women also run small nurseries to sell seedlings and plant young trees in and around their communities. In others, the gardens are combined with chicken or poultry rearing and beekeeping. In the agropastoral communities of Kamboe and Songa, two Rendille villages on the southern slopes of Mount Marsabit, female group members told us that the kitchen-garden projects have significantly improved their food supply and reduced their households’ dependence on pastoralism as their sole source of livelihood. In addition, they flexibly use the financial resources of their savings and loan associations flexibly for other business investments or to pay for food, school fees or health expenses. These self-help groups not only contribute to the empowerment of women in traditionally patriarchal pastoral communities, where only men are usually allowed to own animals or property, but also serve as an important buffer mechanism in emergency situations such as the current drought (2022-11-08-FGD- Kamboe-women; 2022-11-10-FGD-Songa-Women). Such projects have also been initiated by NGOs outside the mountain ranges of Saku sub-county. However, in the drier areas, where there is no permanent access to water, where it is not possible to collect large quantities of rainwater or where water resources have simply dried up, we have, however, also seen the collapse of such kitchen garden projects (such as in Kubi Qallo and Funan Qumbi).

Not only for direct human consumption and livestock watering but also for complementary agricultural practices, **maintaining and building new infrastructure to secure access to water** is an essential drought adaptation strategy. While water trucking, that is the commercial transport of fresh water from reliable yet distant groundwater sources, is very common across the rural communities in Marsabit county even under ‘normal’ dry season conditions, it can hardly be considered an adequate and economically sustainable practice. For reasons of convenience and the high costs of water trucking, which can quickly escalate in times of drought, most households prefer systems that guarantee permanent access to fresh water in or near their villages. Throughout Marsabit, the state, the county or international organisations such as USAID, Food for the Hungry, CARE, Plan International, Caritas or PACIDA have invested heavily in water infrastructure. Development projects have included drilling new boreholes and repairing older ones, replacing fuel-powered pumps with solar-powered systems, building dry water pans and large underground tanks for rainwater collection and storage, and distributing smaller household tanks for rainwater collection. While these projects have been vital in providing water to rural communities, the water infrastructure that relies directly on surface run-off has now also stopped working after five consecutive failed rainy seasons. Entire communities such as Horonderi, Funan Qumbi, Gandille or Yaa Gaara now rely solely on emergency water trucking organised and paid for by humanitarian actors. Despite the benefits of permanent access to water provided by boreholes, the long-term impacts of such infrastructure must be considered. Overgrazing and severe land degradation in the areas around boreholes are evident. In addition, most pastoral communities have by now settled more permanently in one place, and their traditional patterns of mobility have changed fundamentally.

The last, yet not least significant, adaptation strategy to drought is **mobility**. Moving with one's animals and following the available pastures and water sources through the seasonal cycle is the essence of pastoralism. In the more distant past (more than 30 years ago), whole communities regularly moved with their herds to different locations throughout the year. Today, this is rare. Usually, only the male herders are highly mobile, while the women, elderly and children live in (newly) established villages close to boreholes or other more stable infrastructure. This is also a lesson learned from previous droughts, as Horonderi villagers who settled in their current location near a main road after the 2015 drought told us (2022-11-05-FGD-Horonder-men; 2022-11-05-FGD-Horonder-women; see also section 5.1). Some older men who used to live in the so-called Old Gabra scheme near Marsabit town, established by a catholic priest in 1977 in response to a severe drought at that time, also said that giving up mobility and settling permanently in one location was a life-saving decision for them (2022-11-03-FDG-IDPs-Men). Giving up their current mobile lifestyle altogether or migrating to another location was, however, was only mentioned as a realistic option in two FGDs n. In Funan Qumbi, some women said, 'if the drought continues to persist, we plan to move to town and look for alternative livelihoods' (2022-11-12-FGD-FunanKumbi-Women), while pastoralists in Elle Dimtu also spoke of permanently migrating elsewhere due to the lack of a reliable water source in their current village (2022-11-13-FGD-Elle-Dimtu).

In addition to permanent settlement or relocation, the mobility patterns and distances that pastoralists travel with their livestock have also changed significantly. According to an expert on pastoral livelihoods working in the county government, 30 years ago, the distances covered by pastoralists were much shorter because of the availability of nearby fallow areas, which were used only occasionally during the dry season (by fewer communities and animals). Today, however, pastoralists and their animals travel much longer distances (NDMA, 2022, p. 8). This would be due to the sheer increase in livestock numbers (before this drought), which has exacerbated competition over nearby grazing lands and the much-improved water availability due to many more boreholes. Cattle and camels from Marsabit county are now often moved far into Samburu county (south-west), Laikipia county (south), Isiolo (south-east), Wajir county (east) and across the international border into Ethiopia (north) (2022-11-04-KII-1-CountyGov-BE). As illustrated below, the full or partial sedentarisation of pastoral communities and year-round mobility across different landscapes and communities has fuelled the highly politicised conflicts over access to land and other resources. In turn, mobility patterns have significantly been affected by these conflicts.

4.3 Securing Food: Relying on External Interventions

What has been the Impact of External Interventions to Improve Communities' Food Security?

> We receive food aid from the government. NGOs have given us financial support. (…) the food aid reduces the number of hungry households. The money given by well-wishers is used to buy other types of food (2022-11-08-FGD-Kamboe-Women).
>
> We take our grievances to the organisations there. (…) Once, Caritas brought us food. Pacida built underground tanks to store water. The county government built an underground tank for us (2022-11-05-FGD-Horonder-Women).
>
> We have been relying on our elites and NGOs, (…) but it is not enough. Out of 196 households (in our village), only 90 received support. The remaining 100 families then borrowed from those who had been given help. (…) The aid we get is very small, like two kg of rice per household. That takes two days to eat, and we are back to the same scenario of hunger. (…) It is because of this kind of support from NGOs that we are still surviving (2022-11-14-FGD-Gandile-Men).
>
> There were water trucks, but we don't know which organisation it was. But even that has stopped because of the water shortage. (…) Even for food, we are just waiting for donations, but we have nowhere to get food. Sometimes food aid (for us) is dropped off in Forole but we can't transport it here. The distance is too far. The donations are ours, and we can't get them. (…) They distribute our food to their people in Forole—many times (2022-11-14-FGD-YaaGara-Men).

All around Marsabit county, (agro)pastoral communities and urban dwellers alike are now heavily dependent on food aid and other forms of humanitarian assistance to survive. The county drought coordinator at the NDMA told us that the number of people directly in need of assistance has increased from around 60,000 people in 2020 to over 258,000 people in November 2022 (2022-11-04-KII-2-NDMA-BE). Following another failed rainy season, the Kenya Food Security Steering Group (Government of Kenya, 2023, p. 9) estimated that more than 283,000 food insecure people in Marsabit county (that is 55 per cent of a projected total population of 515,000) would be in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

Direct **food aid**, **cash transfers**, **emergency water trucking**, and **livestock feed** are being provided to rural communities by diverse actors, including Kenya's national and Marsabit county government, international relief organisations such as the World Food Programme, USAID and the German Welthungerhilfe, national NGOs like Caritas Marsabit, PACIDA or SND (Strategies for

Northern Development), churches and mosques and individual politicians. In addition, many **health interventions** are underway (the Annex of the NDMA's monthly drought early warning bulletin always contains a list of ongoing drought interventions by diverse actors across the county).

Humanitarian aid has reached all the communities we visited and, as the quotes above show, the drought- and conflict-affected people consider it very important for survival. In particular, respondents saw c**ash transfers** as very supportive, for instance, in Horonderi, Kamboe, Funan Qumbi, Turbi, IDPs in Marsabit, as these allow the households to prioritise spending according to their most pressing needs. However, it was also mentioned that the sharp increase in market prices for food, linked to the local drought and global food market developments, would also limit the food securing impact of cash transfers.

In many locations, respondents criticised the fact that **food aid** was being targeted at a very small number of people—the so-called most vulnerable individuals—when in fact everybody in the communities was now severely affected by this extreme drought. As a result, food provided by the government or NGOs is shared within the community, according to respondents in rural villages and urban neighbourhoods of Marsabit. Ultimately, the amount of food distributed is simply not enough to meet everyone's urgent food needs. Where they existed, **school feeding programmes** were seen as vital (e.g. in Funan Qumbi, Gandille). They helped ensure children's nutritional intake and kept them in school as many households were simply unable to pay for the school fees themselves. However, in several communities, people complained that the school feeding programmes had stopped and should be resumed as a matter of urgency (e.g. in Funan Qumbi).

The problem of access to food aid also emerged in our study. Communities closer to the main roads are more visible and therefore have better access to aid, while those living in more remote areas are the last to be reached and face difficulties in organising the transport of food and water (see quote above from YaaGaara). In turn, the need to be closer to the essential **infrastructure of humanitarian aid** has led some communities to settle permanently near (tarmacked) roads (e.g. Horonderi). Many communities also saw **mobile phone networks** as a crucial element in accessing external support. In the more remote rural areas in North Horr sub-county, where there is no network connection, the experience and fear of missing out on aid was also higher (e.g. in YaaGaara, Elle Dimtu, Ellebor and Funan Qumbi).

Only a few people said that they had never received any assistance, particularly from the state. In one community, people complained that not food aid had reached them since the last general elections (in August 2022). They now felt that the politicians were not interested in their actual situation but only wanted to 'buy their votes' with the previous food donations (2022-11-13-FGD-ElleDimtu-Men). However, in other locations, particularly those with ethnic minorities, some attributed the lack of or low support they had received to the **political dynamics** in Marsabit county. Persistent divisions along ethno-political lines, the lack of minorities' representation in the constituencies and the **preferential treatment of 'their own' by politicians and county officials appeared to influence the distribution of aid by state actors**. This was particularly noted by Gabra IDPs living in Marsabit town, who claimed that their needs were deliberately overlooked by those in power in Saku because of ethnicity, despite their history of displacement and precarious living conditions.

> During the conflict (and after their displacement to Marsabit), we received KSH100,000 cash support from the MCA (Member of County Assembly) for Bubisa, and Ambassador Ukur Yattani (a prominent Gabra politician, the former governor of Marsabit county from 2013-17) supported us by paying our children's school fees and with cash support. A cash transfer of KSH 8,900 for each of us from PACIDA helped us to start small businesses. (… but) the food aid from the (current) county government has not reached us (2022-11-04-FDG-IDPs-Men).
>
> We are denied food aid even in this drought season. The government, led by the local chiefs, distributes the food aid unfairly. They claim that we do not need such assistance. But, we are displaced people without even a place to sleep. Above all, we have very old men and women and other vulnerable people to look after (2022-11-03-FDG-IDPs-Men).
>
> Now we are largely dependent on food aid, which is hard to come by. (…) Even now, we do not get relief food from the county government because we do not have elected leaders (representing Gabra communities) in Saku sub-county. We met with the county commissioner in his office about not getting relief food, but we were not successful (2022-11-03-FGD-IDPs-Women)

In contrast to these Gabra IDPs, IDPs belonging to the Borana community (the majority ethnic group in Saku), who were displaced when their settlement of Manyatta Daaba was destroyed in ethno-political violence, indicated that they had recently received food aid from the county commissioner and the county government, although it was not enough (2022-11-10-FGD-IDP-Manyatta Daaba-Women).

Summary

Following the failure of five consecutive rainy seasons, the drought in Marsabit county has worsened to the point of emergency. Our study can only confirm this official assessment by the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA, 2023b). The vast majority of study participants perceive this food crisis as an emergency of catastrophic proportions. Massive livestock deaths have brought pastoral communities' food and income provision and rural economies to the brink of collapse and in many places beyond. Agropastoral communities and urban dwellers are also severely affected by the drought, but seem to be able to cope to some extent due to a more diversified livelihood structure. Hunger and malnutrition were found to be widespread. Despite a variety of coping strategies that (agro)pastoralists are trying to apply, the dependence of households on external assistance has steadily increased as the drought emergency has deepened. Cash transfers, food aid and water trucking by government and non-government organisations are currently the main humanitarian interventions, but their delivery also seems to be politicised. Longer-term adaptation practices and alternative livelihoods that can adequately complement pastoralism are underdeveloped. The local population of Marsabit county is, therefore, far from being drought resilient, particularly due to the additional negative impacts of violent conflict.

5\ Living With Conflicts, Urging for Peace—Local People's Perspectives

This section summarises key findings from our empirical research in Marsabit county on pastoralists' perceptions and experiences of violent conflict, their perspectives on the main drivers of violence, the impact of conflict on their lives and their respective coping strategies[16]. It concludes with their perceptions of existing conflict resolution mechanisms and the peacebuilding activities undertaken by violence-affected groups themselves. While describing general trends across all study sites, we will attempt to highlight the differentiated impacts on and responses to violent conflict of different groups, including (agro)pastoral communities and internally displaced people (IDPs) with distinct ethnic identities. In particular, we will highlight differences and similarities in the experiences of those living in rural and urban areas and between Gabra and Borana. Analytically, we will regularly distinguish between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processes of violent conflict and peacebuilding: Ethno-political violence and territorial boundary-making instigated by political elites will be contrasted with the (agro)pastoralists' experiences and perceptions of violence and insecurity as well as conflict resolution.

5.1 Experiences, Causes and Effects of Violence in Rural Areas

In our focus group discussions and interviews, we asked the respondents whether and how they had experienced violence and encouraged them to explain the drivers and impacts of violent conflict. People responded quite openly, revealing the high levels of violence, the local histories and cultures of violence, and the severe impact on their lives. Local people have experienced many forms of direct violence in the past, including loss of family and community members and serious injury in violent attacks, loss of livestock in raids, looting of property, destruction of homes, key infrastructure and development projects and forced displacement.

The following cases from rural areas on the boundaries of Marsabit's sub-counties provide an indication of local experiences, histories and drivers of violence. The areas we studied can be considered as 'conflict hotspots' because they regularly experience violence and because they are located on the borders between the spheres of influence of Gabra and Borana politicians (NCIC & Interpeace, 2022, p. 5).

Competition Over Resources and Ethno-political Violence *Along North Horr's Northern Boundaries*

In North Horr, the Ngaso Plain lies between the Hurri Hills to the west, Turbi to the east, Maikona to the south and the Ethiopian border to the north. The plain is part of a sparsely populated, arid savannah that has been used for centuries by pastoralists as grazing land. We conducted research in the Borana communities in Funan Qumbi, Elle Bor and Elle Dimtu, all close to the Ethiopian border and close to the sub-county border between North Horr and Moyale, as well with Gabra in Turbi, the villages of Gandille and Yaa Gaara in the northern parts of the Hurri Hills, and in the rural town of Forole, which borders Ethiopia. Interviewees from both communities shared their experiences and the causes of conflict between them. It became clear that contestations over land and water are at the heart of the conflict dynamics. Closely linked to this, fear mongering, incitement to violence against the other groups and ethno-political boundary-making have increasingly challenged land management strategies that have traditionally helped pastoral communities to cope with drought over generations (see section 4.2).

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[16] *Disclaimer:* It is important to highlight here that we are well aware that the ethnic groups at the centre of our (re)presentation of the conflict dynamics, namely the Borana, Gabra and Rendille, are not monolithic, homogeneous and static blocks but rather quite heterogeneous socio-political constructions with a unique history. We have tried to understand how local people negotiate their belonging to one group or another and have also noted the fluid boundaries between them in familial, social, political, cultural, and linguistic terms. However, an anthropological re- and deconstruction of the meaning and role of ethnicity, identity and ethnic boundary-making and how ethnic belonging has become politicised in local conflicts (for Marsabit, see e.g. Schlee, 2009; 2013) was not the aim of this study. In our conflict analysis, we draw on the more or less clear cut distinctions between the different ethnic groups as they were used by the respondents themselves. This does not mean that we understand them as given entities that are not subject to contestation and change.

About 240 households live in **Elle Dimtu**, a relatively new village, founded seven years ago by Borana from Magado and Liche areas (and further Borana who had resettled from the Hurri Hills, Forole and Moyale sub-county). They came to the area because they saw it as good grazing land. Since they settled there, their community has often experienced violent conflicts with the Gabra community living in Turbi, Hurri Hills and Forole. According to respondents, herders were often attacked in the *for a* (grazing lands) and their livestock stolen. As a result, they have taken up arms to protect their animals and their lives. Over the past four years, they have limited their movements to certain Gabra-dominated areas for fear of violent encounters. Despite this, their village has been directly targeted on least three occasions by 'hit and run tactics' or by machine gun fire from the top of a nearby mountain. Recently, a worker was killed at a construction site for an earth pan rainwater harvesting system, which they desperately need as they have no direct source of water in their village. In total, eight people from their village lost their lives, several were seriously injured, and some are left disabled as a result of these attacks. The villagers believe that these attacks were intended to instil fear in them to prevent them from further consolidating their settlement and land claims. 'Competition over water and pasture for livestock' would drive these conflicts. In fact, 'the Gabra want the land where we have settled' (2022-11-13-FGD-ElleDimtu-Men).

Funan Qumbi is another 'Borana village', some 40 km to the east, which has been severely affected by the ongoing drought (see section 4.1). Elders told us that people of different origins used to live peacefully in this 40-year-old settlement, but then, territorial conflicts then led to separation along ethnic lines. About 20 years ago, a tribal conflict between the Gabra and the Borana in the Bule Dera plains in Moyale sub-county triggered the regional conflict dynamics. Following the 'Turbi Massacre' in July 2005, thousands, both Gabra and Borana from previously quite heterogenous areas were displaced, violence escalated, and ethnic segregation increased (see section 3.3). Borana from Funan Qumbi temporarily settled in Walda in Moyale sub-county but returned around 2008. Since then, they have frequently lost livestock and some family members to raids in the grazing areas. Their village has also been attacked several times in the past three years by 'people armed with machine guns'. On one occasion, they lost 400 goats in an attack, allegedly by 'Gabra from Turbi village'. They had always reported these violent encounters to the police but to their knowledge, no one had ever been arrested and prosecuted. According to the locals, these conflicts are caused by competition for grazing land and water. The 'Gabra thieves' benefit from this because they sell the stolen livestock. Alongside these narratives of criminal and resource-scarcity-related violence, some elders also highlighted the wider political changes that have fuelled boundary-making and ethnic violence in their region: 'We pastoralists have a lot of problems, but the conflict has really been brought to us by this devolution policy. Both the Borana and the Gabra want the governorship and are campaigning along tribal lines. That is why everyone is competing for land and pasture' (2022-11-12-FGD- Funan Qumbi-Men/Women).

It is important to contrast these dynamics of violence in the Ngaso Plain with the Gabra perspective. Women in **Gandile**, a Gabra community in the Hurri Hills, told us that they had never been attacked in their village, partly because they had strategically chosen this location far from the border 'because of cattle raiding around us'. Nevertheless, they said that they often feared for their lives. 'There are always rumours that the Borana are here to attack us and steal our cattle. We run away and spend the night in the nearby bushes' (2022-11-14-FGD-Gandile-Women). Older men confirmed this perception. They added that the current conflict dynamics in their region had been encouraged by politicians in Kenya and Ethiopia. According to them, the violence escalated when a Borana politician became governor of Marsabit county in 2017 (replacing a Gabra leader who was in power between 2013 and 2017). He allegedly 'incited people to come and settle on our land'. Purportedly, this settler policy—that is the relocation of Borana to certain areas previously occupied exclusively by the Gabra—had begun in Horonderi but had met with resistance (see below). In the village of Elle Dimtu mentioned above, people from Ethiopia were deliberately settled to displace Forole people, i.e. Gabras. They complained that neither the national nor the county government had stood up against them and that, in general, they had failed to provide adequate security for the Gabra people in the rural areas. The disarmament of the KPRs (Kenyan Police Reservists)—a semi-professional auxiliary police force that recruited and armed local people from the regions—shortly after the new governor came to power would be an indication of this. According to one of the elders, 'the governor's main aim is to drive us Gabra off our land' (2022-11-14-FGD-Gandille-Men).

This fear of being evicted from 'our land' is widespread among the Gabra and the Borana. In an FGD in the border town of **Forole**, a man involved in the cross-border peace process summed up the logic of these territorial ethnopolitics, which demand exclusive claims to land and water, rather than shared access and resource management:

> Politicians have branded land boundaries for different communities. For example, leaders will come and say Forole is 'Borana land', another will say it is 'Gabra land', and another will say it is 'Rendille land'. And so they bring these communities into conflict. (…) Sometimes a borehole (that used to be freely accessible) is marked as a 'community borehole', and then other communities are denied the right to drinking water (2022-11-15-FGD-Forole-Men).

As we also learned, standing up against this ethno-political boundary-making, local (re)settlement dynamics, the daily violence of cattle raids and the significantly reduced spaces for herders' mobility can be dangerous. In May 2019, 11 elders from different communities around Forole who were trying to negotiate a peace deal between the Borana and the Gabra were killed while attending a cross-border peace meeting in Ulani Dera, close to the Ethiopian border (ACLED Database, KEN6880). The Ethiopian militia OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) was allegedly involved in this attack, which led to a significant deterioration in regional security and undermined the local peace process between Kenyan and Ethiopian pastoral communities, which was only resumed after the 2022 general elections.

Violent Contestation Over (Re)settlement: Cases Along the North Horr-Saku Sub-county Boundary

> The conflicts started because we settled here. After we had settled here, the Borana came and settled. The fight started because all wanted to inhabit the land (2022-11-05-FGD-Horonderi-Women).

> The reason for this conflict is land expansion. Everyone wants to own the land. You are warned not to graze in certain areas; if you do, you will be attacked' (2022-11-05-FGD-Horonderi-Men).

Horonderi is a relatively new village of around 350 people, located close to the A2 highway on the border of Saku and North Horr sub-counties. According to interviews with residents, Gabra pastoralists from the Bubisa region, some 25km to the north, had settled there around the time of the drought in 2015 to access the better grazing land in this region. With the support of the government and local NGOs, permanent infrastructure such as a mosque, a primary school and an underground water tank were gradually built. These have helped to consolidate the settlement. In 2018, three years after the Gabra families formed this settlement, around 300 Borana also came to settle at Horonderi. Allegedly, they had been encouraged to move there by others—in 2017, when a Borana politician became governor of Marsabit county, having replaced a Gabra politician. Rising ethnic tensions between these groups and ongoing competition for resources—pasture, water and local infrastructure—led to local violence, with dozens of people injured and several killed in shootings. Homes were looted and burned. Children were unable to attend school for many months due to the constant insecurity. Travel along the highway to nearby Marsabit town was disrupted, making it difficult for households to access food and services. Pastoralists could not move their herds to pastures across the highway to the east (towards Kubi Qallo, see below) and into North-Horr for fear of being attacked along the way and at water points. They tried anyway and lost dozens of camels, sheep and goats. While it is clear that the boundaries between grazing areas that different groups use are fluid—'livestock knows no boundaries' as one county government pastoral expert noted (2022-11-04-KII-CountyGov)—the unclear boundaries between different electoral and administrative areas and the location of settlements or infrastructure such as boreholes, are more problematic. A village elder previously involved in peace dialogue in Saku sub-county explained the politics of (unclear) boundaries:

> A Gabra politician will tell his community that this location is administratively in his territory. The Borana leader will tell his Borana community the same thing. This is what really drives this never-ending conflict. These areas have chiefs, for instance, Horonder has a chief and an assistant chief and is under Bubisa location, which is in North Horr sub-county. At the same time, it is said to be under Qilta location, which is in Saku sub-county (…).
>
> The people are innocent and don't know the boundaries. They only need land for grazing and water for cattle, but they are told by the leaders not to allow people from other communities to pass through their land. They are used and armed to fight each other. (…)
>
> Undefined boundaries are the biggest problem. When we ask about this (in peace dialogues), we are told that the leaders will take the matter to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), the body responsible for dealing with boundary and demarcation issues in Kenya. The government knows about it, but is not prepared to resolve it. If you really want to know when this conflict will end, ask the government. But we think they are part of the problem (2022-11-07-FGD-Men; site anonymised).

Another case along the border between Saku and North Horr also illustrates how local communities navigate 'unoccupied' land and unclear boundaries in their search for a safe place to live and a more sustainable livelihood. **Kubi Qallo** is a small village not far from Horonderi, about 20 km to the south-east. About 90 Borana households settled there in 2014 because they felt excluded, intimidated and even persecuted by the Gabra majority in their former homes in the Hurri Hills of North Horr. An elderly Borana man, who had grown up in the Hurri Hills and felt that they had always lived together peacefully and that ethnicity had never been an issue, as many families had roots in the Borana and the Gabra communities, told us that in 2014,

> there was no armed attack or conflict. It was just like a cold war. We didn't have any freedom of speech. In a meeting, there was public incitement,, and we were then told by the Gabra people to leave Hurri Hills. (…) After that (meeting), we could no longer live well. We were even denied CDF (constituency development fund) money to pay for school fees. We could not get any help (from the state or NGOs), and we finally decided to leave (2022-11-11-FGD-Kubi Qallo-Men).

They settled in Kubi Qallo because they had often passed through the area with their herds, because there was already a borehole and thus a reliable source of water and because 'no one inhabited this area' and 'Kubi Qallo is a Borana land' (2022-11-11-FGD-Kubi Qallo-Men). While their situation in the new location was initially good and peaceful, the ethno-political violence escalated at the same time as the conflict in Horonderi. In April 2017, five herders from their community, including four young boys, were killed while grazing their animals in the area, and their cattle and camels were taken (see ACLED KEN5378, KEN5380). Then herders were attacked at the local water point, and 30 of their houses around the borehole were destroyed. Again several people died, and livestock was stolen. These violent cattle raids by the Gabra, described by local residents as 'armed people who all had guns' and in official reports as 'ethnic militia' continued frequently. Occasionally, police forces fought back and attempted to recover stolen animals (see ACLED KEN7971, KEN9492). Most of the time, however, the villagers hid in the bush or temporarily sought refuge in another Borana settlement nearby to escape the violence. As a result, the school had to remain closed for many weeks. The women told us: 'our children were traumatised by these events'. They also said that many other livelihood activities around their village, such as collecting firewood, making charcoal and a small agriculture project had to be stopped (section 4.2). It was also too risky to go to the market in Marsabit town to sell or buy food (2022-11-11-FGD-Kubi Qallo-Women). And like for the Gabra pastoralists from Horonderi, the conflict over the past five years has severely restricted Borana pastoralists' freedom of movement. From their location, the A2 highway to the west marked a red line they could not cross with their animals.

As shown, regular cattle raids and frequent violent clashes limit the herders’ access to grazing land and water points and make movement over longer distances less safe. This also limits their ability to cope with the ongoing drought.

'People are Becoming Poor Because of this Conflict'—Impeded Development in Saku

The impact of ethno-political violence is felt not only in the rural peripheries of Marsabit county but also by communities living on the slopes of Mount Marsabit and the plains of Saku sub-county and who are farmers and pastoralists. The cases of Jaldesa and Songa illustrate the impact of violence on food insecurity in the context of agropastoral livelihoods.

Jaldesa is a comparatively new settlement located on the eastern side of Mount Marsabit and along the ill-defined border between Saku and neighbouring Laisamis sub-county (see Map 1 of field study sites). Jaldesa was established in the late 1990s on the initiative of a Borana politician who had asked poorer Borana families from the Manyatta Jillo, Dirib and Badasa area to settle near the Jaldesa water borehole, which used to be an established watering point for Gabra, Borana and Rendille herders. The creation of Jaldesa village was intended to consolidate the Borana communities’ claim to the land and access to local water while preventing the advance of Gabra herders and settlers from the Shurr area (to the east) into Borana-dominated Sagante /

Jaldesa ward.[17] From 2013 onwards, when a Gabra politician became the governor of Marsabit, Gabra also settled in Jaldesa. This was initially peaceful, as 'local Gabra' from nearby areas built their homes, but later became more contested as Gabra from 'further afar' and 'other tribes from Somalia' were helped to settle. We were told that during the tenure of this county governor (2013–2017), 'the resources from his government never helped the Borana community but only his own people. County money was used to arm the Gabra community' (2022-11-07-FGD-Jaldesa-Men). The conflict was also made more complex by the fact that a new high-speed railway line as part of the LAPSSET regional transport corridor, announced in 2008, would pass not far from Jaldesa.

Despite previously good relations between the two groups—locals referred to their common ancestry and the joint mobility of Borana and Gabra herders with their animals—ethno-political tensions increased in the following years. Cattle raids were politically exploited, as local political actors did not call for peaceful coexistence, the return of animals or compensation for those who lost livestock but rather for revenge attacks and the exclusive control of land and water points by 'their' group. The spiral of violence in and around Jaldesa led to the deaths of at least 20 people between 2018 and 2021 (see ACLED, e.g. KEN7037, KEN7970). In December 2021, there was a series of livestock raids in which about 3,500 sheep and 1,200 cattle were stolen from Borana herders. Eventually, on 18 December 2021, Jaldesa was attacked by 'ethnic militias' (according to the locals, these were 250 'hired assailants from 'more distant' Gabra areas): More animals, motorcycles and other valuables were stolen, houses were destroyed, the primary school, health centre and police post were vandalised and have not been repaired or rebuilt since. Eight herders were murdered in the grazing areas, while six villagers and four police officers were killed in Jaldesa.[18] Consequently, 260 Jaldesa residents fled to relatives in nearby villages or temporarily hid in the bush, fearing renewed attacks. Almost a year later, about two-thirds of the displaced had returned, but many, especially those with children, waited for the security situation to improve, at least until the school reopened—which it did in January 2023.

Besides the fear, suffering and hardship of the local population, this violent attack and the insecurity in the run-up to the 2022 general elections have left deep scars on the local economy. Not only has the mobility of pastoralists in the region been severely hampered—with an invisible border for Borana herders who cannot go east (into 'Gabra land') and south (into 'Rendille land'). In Jaldesa, the **destruction of vital economic infrastructure** such as a large-scale irrigation project, a solar-powered water pump, and local greenhouses had effectively destroyed local food production and wiped out local employment opportunities. On the ground, the national government and the African Development Bank had invested heavily in fodder production and a large-scale hay storage facility as part of a 'Drought Resilience and Sustainable Livelihoods' Program. The production of fodder, maize and vegetables using drip irrigation had only started in 2020 in a fenced-off area of 50 acres. As the site was vandalised and workers had to flee elsewhere, the local fodder and food production came to a standstill at a time when the drought-affected community most needed the supplementary animal feed, food and alternative source of income. In an FGD with elders, they summed up the impact of violence on their lives: 'Conflict has brought a lot of destruction of property, livestock stolen, people killed, others displaced, living in fear, schools closed. You have a farm and you cannot farm because you are afraid. There is no development with this conflict' (2022-11-07-FGD-Jaldesa-Men).

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[17] This Borana politician, MP for Saku county, later died along 13 others in a plane crash on Mount Marsabit in April 2006, which became a pivotal event in the regional peace processes. National and local politicians representing different ethnic groups had been called to Marsabit for a high-level peace meeting to end ethno-political violence and displacement following the Turbi massacre in July 2005. After the accident, ethnic tensions eased considerably, allowing for the establishment of IDP villages for displaced Gabras near Marsabit town (see below). https://nation.africa/kenya/news/marsabit-peace-still-a-tall-order-three-years-after-crashed-mission--588208; https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/10/world/africa/14-killed-as-plane-carrying-kenyan-politicians-crashes.html

[18] 'On 18 December 2021, suspected ethnic militias attacked a *manyatta* (homestead) in Jaldesa area (Dukana, Noth Horr, Marsabit County) and made off with 1,000 head of cattle and 300 goats and sheep. Police forces pusued and clashed with them, which resulted in eight deaths and three injured. All the stolen livestock was recovered' (ACLED, KEN7970, 18 December 2021).

Another way in which agropastoral communities have been hard hit by the ongoing violence and high levels of insecurity is through **denial of access to land and markets**. We heard this often in our interviews and group discussions in relation to grazing land and pastoralists' mobility, but it was also evident in non-pastoral products. In times of conflict, the transport of goods such as agricultural produce, firewood or charcoal to urban markets not only becomes more risky and costly, but direct routes are completely blocked as it is not safe for people of certain ethnic backgrounds to travel through areas controlled by others. In addition, there have been a number of attacks on *boda boda* riders, trucks, buses and pedestrians—many of them fatal—along the main roads in Saku county, particularly in Marsabit National Park.[19]

Women we spoke to in Kamboe and Songa, two Rendille communities on the south-western and south-eastern slopes of Mount Marsabit, also highlighted that NGOs had trained them to grow vegetables in kitchen gardens, raise tree seedlings in greenhouses, process milk from cattle and camels and produce local honey. They value these alternative livelihoods as they directly increase their income, provide better nutrition for their children and also empower them in a patriarchal society that traditionally revolves around livestock production. However, if they are unable to sell their products in town, transport goods due to road insecurity or visit other communities to learn from their projects, much of this investment and new knowledge is lost. In addition, women in Songa reported that they are currently unable to access fertile land about five kilometres south of their village, which they have traditionally used to grow maize and other food crops, due to the constant fear of attacks from the Borana and Gabra and the general lack of security since the disarmament of the KPR. As a result, fertile land now lies fallow, and only herders would graze their animals in the area, whilst always fearing violent livestock raids. The total amount of food they can produce in their community both for their own consumption and for the market has decreased significantly. 'People are becoming poor because of this conflict', said one woman during the discussion. Another mentioned that several families had moved completely to Karare, Kamboe and Logologo because of the high level of insecurity and the loss of agricultural livelihoods in and around Songa (2022-11-08-FGD-Kamboe-women; 2022-11-10-FGD-Songa-Women).

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[19] According to a respondent in Songa, up to 110 people from her (Rendille) community have been killed along the roads through Marsabit forest over the past 30 years (2022-11-10-FGD-Songa-Women). Men in Songa told us that on Easter Sunday in 2005, five children were 'senselessly killed' on their way home from Marsabit to Songa on a road that passes through Marsabit National Park (ACLED-Database, KEN1499, 18.04.2005). And in June 2020, four students on their way from Marsabit to Songa were 'mercilessly murdered' in the forest near Badasa junction (ACLED-Database, KEN7416, 08.06.2020). According to the locals, hired OLF fighters killed the boys to spread fear among the Rendille and to 'drive this community out of the fertile land of Songa' (2022-11-10-FGD-Songa-Men). The Kenya National Assembly Hearing Report (2021, pp. 58–60) lists 96 people from Rendille communities in Songa and other places who were killed from 1978 to 2020.

These examples show the severe impact of blocked or restricted access to land for farming and to markets due to insecurity. Poverty and food insecurity of agropastoral households are then further deepened, not primarily due to the ongoing drought but due to persistent ethno-political violence in highly contested rural areas.

5.2 Experiences, Causes and Effects of Violence in Urban Areas

In the (peri-)urban areas,[20] the forms of violence and their impact on the people are different from those in rural areas, even though they involve some of the same actors and have the same roots—ethno-political hatred and contestations over land. While cattle raids also regularly take place on the outskirts of urban centres and occasionally lead to potentially fatal shootouts between herders from different communities and of different ethnic identities, most of the violence that has occurred in urban areas in recent years has been linked to ethno-political party politics, violent protests and land disputes.

Land values in the (peri-)urban areas of Marsabit have risen significantly over the past decade due to population growth and demand for housing, infrastructure development, particularly along the fully paved A2 highway that passes through Marsabit town and expansion of agricultural land to meet the food needs of a growing urban population. As a result, land use and settlement dynamics in and around the town have become particularly contentious.

Political competition has intensified since the start of the devolution process in 2013 (see section 3.3). The demographic composition of constituencies becomes a political issue, as power and resources are distributed according to ethno-political alliances in a 'winner-takes-all' electoral system, where politicians are seen to represent particular ethnic groups rather than specific policy agendas. As a result, elections to the national parliament, county assemblies and municipal assemblies, which take place simultaneously every four years, are highly critical and often violent times, when the power struggles over the future distribution of resources come to the fore. Moreover, the (re)settlement and displacement of certain ethnic groups from certain areas has become a crucial strategy of political elites to gain votes and thus win elections and power. The violent rivalries between certain villages and neighbourhoods, the destruction of many houses and entire villages around Marsabit town and the displacement of their inhabitants are indicative of this trend. The experiences, causes and effects of violence in the (peri-)urban areas of Saku sub-county are detailed below.

Violent Contestations Over Land in the Peri-urban Space of Marsabit Town

As in many rural areas in Marsabit, it was common for different ethnic groups to live side by side in the same part of Marsabit town and in the villages surrounding it, as the following case illustrates. Manyatta Jillo—now, a Borana-dominated settlement—and Adi Hukha—a 'Gabra settlement'—are two villages situated closely together on opposite sides of the A2 highway on the northern edge of Marsabit town. While these peri-urban villages are now ethnically homogenous, this was not the case in the past. For generations, people who identified themselves as Gabra and Borana lived peacefully side by side in Manyatta Jillo, maintaining small farms in the surrounding fertile areas and moving their herds together to more distant pastures. Intermarriage across ethnic groups and tribal lines was normal, so many had a 'Borana uncle' or a 'Gabra aunt' and vice versa. We were told that ethnicity became a major issue in local politics and that tensions between the different groups emerged around 1997, when a Borana MP's request to clarify the location of a village on the contested border between Saku and North Horr sub-counties failed to gain the support of the Gabra communities, who were, in turn, dismissed by the MP as 'enemies'. This led not only to the first ethno-politically motivated killings in Marsabit town in 1997 but also to a more intense verbal boundary-making between the two groups (distinguishing between 'us' and them', including territorial discourses stressing exclusive access to 'Gabra' or 'Borana' land, and repeated incitement of violence by politicians against the other group to protect the respective claims.

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[20] Besides Marsabit town, the second largest town of Marsabit county with approximately 30,000 inhabitants, we also visited Turbi and Forole, partially urbanised settlements that play key roles as administrative and trading centres for their respective regions.

While these ethno-political divisions did not seem to matter much in Manyatta Jillo at first, they eventually led to an **ethnic division and homogenisation** of this village. Even before the Turbi massacre in July 2005, some Gabra were attacked and displaced from Gar Qarsa, Goro Rukesa and other locations east of Marsabit and began to settle near Manyatta Jillo, but on the opposite side of the road in Adhi Huka (see Map 5). They were mobilised to settle there by a Gabra politician, an MP for Saku county and supported with aid provided by the Kenyan Red Cross. After the 2005 Turbi massacre, animosity between the Gabra and Borana in Manyatta Jillo. However, this did not lead to direct violence within the village or between the local Borana and the newly resettled Gabra IDPs. Local political tensions grew following the change of governor in the 2017 elections and the outbreaks of violence around Horonderi and Kubi Qallo in 2017 (see section 5.1). The longstanding but simmering conflict between the Borana and Gabra in Manyatta Jillo then escalated, resulting in many deaths and the displacement of Gabra from the village, who then joined others in nearby Adhi Huka. From 2017 until the state’s security operation ahead of the 2022 general elections, **neighbouring villages fought each other across the highway with machine guns**. Not only were people killed—especially on the highway to Marsabit town—but the lack of security prevented people in both communities from fully exploiting their livelihood potential and better coping with the drought:

> Immediately after the new governor took over the county (in 2017), conflicts started. In October 2017, we were attacked with sophisticated weapons. The Borana were singing on the highway (to celebrate the attack). (...) Later, in 2021, three children from our village were killed on the highway. After that, the Borana fought us when we went to Haro Gotha to fetch water. When three children were killed, we fought with our neighbours all night. The killers of the children drove away in a black car and shot at other people from the car. Two men were kidnapped from our village during a big fight, and we never saw them again. Often, we could not go to town to buy food. Most of our livestock was stolen from our village (2022-11-09-FGD-IDPs-AdhiHuqa-Women).

During the hot phase of the conflict, families in both villages lost loved ones, and property was damaged; agropastoralists in both villages lost livestock and were unable to cultivate their fields as before; children's schooling was affected; other economic activities such as trade and the business of *boda boda* riders were disrupted due to insecurity along the main road; and food security deteriorated significantly as a combined effect of drought and conflict (see section 4.2). Despite the considerable violence that the villagers of Manyatta Jillo and Adhi Huka had inflicted on one another and the enormous physical, psychological and social damage that had resulted, the local people of these two villages nonetheless played a very prominent role in the peace process that became possible once the public order and security were restored with the pre-election curfew (May-July 2022), and life slowly returned to normal after the August 2022 elections (see section 5.3).

Protracted Internal Displacement in Marsabit County

In the pastoral areas of northern Kenya, more than 160,000 people have been displaced, at least temporarily, by violent conflict. The Turbi massacre in 2005 alone resulted in the internal forced displacement of at least 6,200 people (see (Mwangi, 2006, 81,83). Most of these IDPs were Gabra, who fled from Turbi and surrounding areas, but Borana in and around Bubisa were also forced to flee due to revenge attacks. As told by Gabra IDPs we spoke to in Marsabit, IDPs from different locations, mainly from the current North Horr constituency, resettled in other locations in Saku sub-county (see Map 5) and tried to rebuild their lives—often alternating between pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods. However, their new 'IDP villages' and the land they cultivated and used for grazing was once again contested by the ethno-political dynamics of violence. Violence escalated after the 2017 elections when a new governor from the Borana community came to power, replacing the previous Gabra governor. Subsequently, tensions between the Gabra and Borana increased in Saku sub-county, with dozens of people from IDP villages killed between 2018 and 2021. By February 2021, four of the five villages of the Gabra IDPs (Isacko Umuro, Konso Banchale, Old Gabra scheme, Salesa Wako) had been looted and completely destroyed in consecutive attacks, and all the IDPs—this time around 300 families—were again displaced from their homes. Since then, these IDPs have been trying to eke out a living in Marsabit town in precarious conditions. Only the village of Adhi Huka remains, but it has been involved in fierce fighting with the neighbouring Borana settlement of Manyatta Jillo (see above).

A 60-year-old man who used to live in the village of Isacko Umoru recalled the **long history of violence and multiple displacements of the Gabra IDPs**:

> Yes, our community has experienced violent conflicts. It all started in 2005 when we became internally displaced after the Turbi massacre. On the day of the massacre, many of us were in Marsabit to attend to some business. Others fled from our home villages where we had lived peacefully with the Borana for fear of their lives. Our houses were burnt down, our livestock and land stolen. The investments we had made over many years were gone in a single day. We lived in Marsabit town for a few months. In May 2006, we established five new villages near Marsabit town (Isacko Umuro, Konso Banchale, Old Gabra Scheme, Salesa Wako, Adhi Huka) because we could not return home. The purpose of these five villages was to maintain our community structure. People came to settle with those they were close to before (in the previous location). All displaced people were from the Gabra community.
>
> As we continued to settle, the aggression continued, and we were denied aid, food, water, access to some of the paths we had to pass and many more resources that should be shared among communities. All this aggression continued until 2018, when the conflict became even more violent. You could easily be killed by assassins in the town. In 2020, the conflict escalated, and we lost 160 goats and 80 cattle. In February 2021, all our remaining livestock was stolen. Fearing for our lives, we had to abandon our homes and move to the town. We took only our wives and children and whatever we could carry. Later even the houses that were left behind were vandalised and burnt. (…) Many people were left injured or disabled, and many were killed. Everyone is still suffering from the attacks. Being displaced and living in rented houses (in Marsabit town) has been very expensive. It has been very hard to maintain our way of life (2022-11-03-FDG-IDPs-Men, text edited for easier readability).

Further interviews and FGDs revealed that IDPs from the Gabra community have not only endured a lack of physical security and repeated violence that has resulted in the loss of dozens of lives, hundreds of animals and their property and multiple enforced relocations to other places, but have also experienced **a lack of post-displacement support from the state**. In addition, although they sometimes knew who had attacked them and destroyed their lives and villages, the perpetrators of the violence whom they claimed were Borana, including local youth as well as heavily armed members of the Ethiopian OLF (Oromo Liberation Front), were not legally prosecuted and convicted, leaving the victims of these violent attacks without justice or compensation. In an FGD with displaced Gabra, one woman said bitterly: 'We sometimes see them (the attackers) on the street (in Marsabit town). When we see them, we are very sad, sometimes we cry and get angry. Not one of them has ever been arrested or convicted', Another woman added, 'we don't think we can ever forget and forgive what happened to us. After the repeated attacks, we cannot risk going back there. We have suffered violence not once but many times (inflicted by the Borana) (2022-11-04-FDG-IDPs-Women). These quotes are indicative of the deep scars that repeated violence and the constant sense of insecurity and injustice have left on the bodies, minds and hearts of many individuals and an entire collective. **Hundreds of IDPs living in Marsabit are burdened with the trauma of ethno-political violence and protracted displacement**.

Many Gabra IDPs also expressed that they would continue to face multiple **barriers to rebuilding their livelihoods** in Marsabit town (as well as elsewhere) and that they would be strategically excluded from food aid and other humanitarian assistance during this drought (see section 4.3). They argued that their lack of political representation and participation had exacerbated their social, political and economic exclusion. As a minority group in Saku sub-county, which is dominated by politicians affiliated with the Borana, the voices and needs of the (displaced) Gabra were systematically sidelined. Although they have repeatedly voiced their grievances to national and local politicians as well as humanitarian actors, most recently in a letter to the Marsabit county senator, governor and development NGOs working in the region (October 2022, see Appendix), their plight would continue. Despite recent peace efforts, neither a return and reconstruction of their former villages nor a relocation to another secure location—wishes that many of our respondents expressed and clearly preferred to continue their lives in Marsabit town—seemed conceivable at present.[21]

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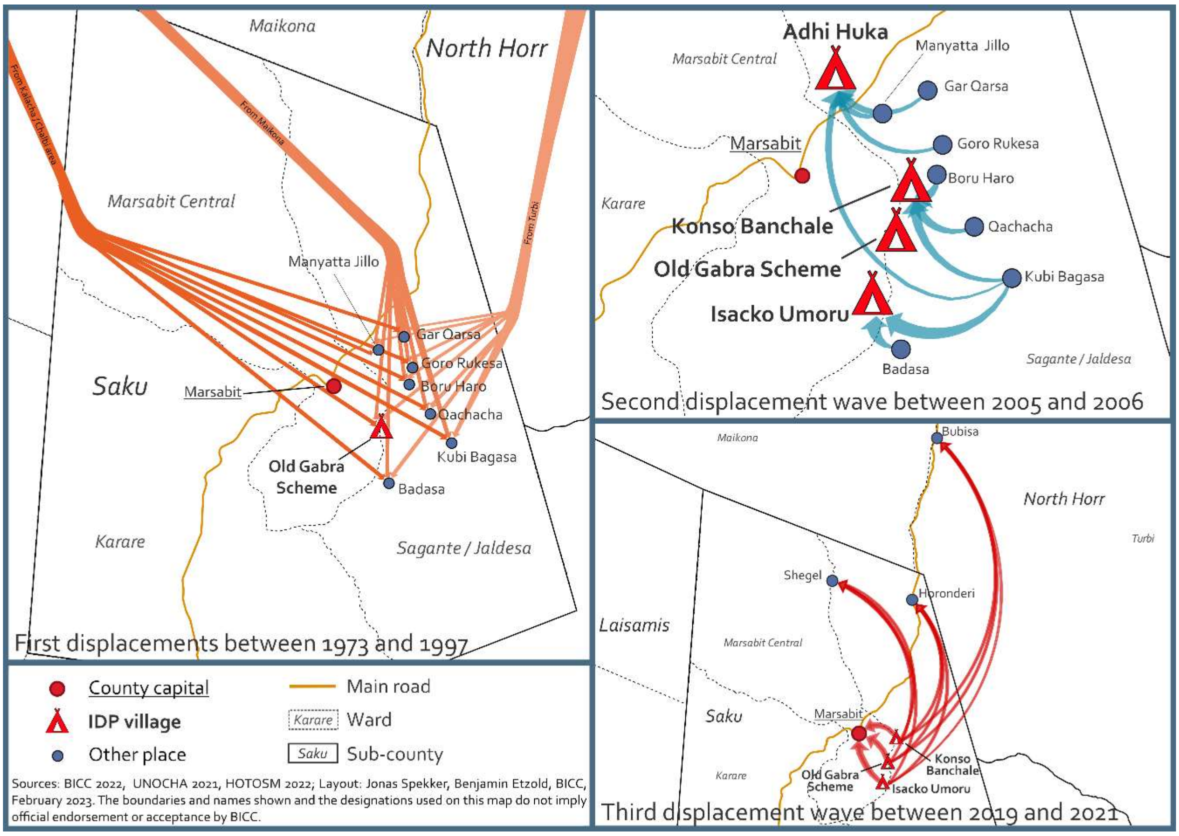
[21] *Source*: Seven FGDs from 3 to 9 November2022 with Gabra IDPs, both women and men, from Isacko Umuro, Konso Banchale, Old Gabra scheme and Adhi Huka; see also Government of Kenya, 2021, pp. 26, 27, 43).

Map 5: Internal Displacement of Gabra to and Within Saku Sub-county


First displacements between 1973 and 1997

Second displacement wave between 2005 and 2006

Third displacement wave between 2019 and 2021

Sources: BICC 2022, UNOCHA 2021, HOTOSM 2022; Layout: Jonas Spekker, Benjamin Etzold, BICC, February 2023. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by BICC.

Maikona
North Horr
From Kalacha / Chalbi area
From Maikona
From Turbi
Marsabit Central
Manyatta Jillo
Gar Qarsa
Goro Rukesa
Boru Haro
Qachacha
Kubi Bagasa
Badasa
Saku
Marsabit
Old Gabra Scheme
Karare
Sagante / Jaldesa
Adhi Huka
Konso Banchale
Isacko Umoru
Bubisa
Turbi
Shegel
Horonderi
Laisamis
● County capital
IDP village
● Other place
Main road
Karare Ward
Saku Sub-county

It should be noted that not only Gabra have been displaced in Marsabit county in recent years but also Borana and other ethnic groups. In and around Marsabit town, violence has severely affected members of the Borana and the Burji communities, and many have been forced to flee and to abandon their homes (Government of Kenya, 2021, 25,38). **Daaba village**, a peri-urban neighbourhood in the north of Marsabit town, is another telling example of how **ethno-politically motivated violence can affect an ethnically diverse community and ultimately lead to destruction, displacement and ethnic homogenisation**. On 8 July 2021, over 100 people, allegedly an 'ethnic militia' made up of Gabra from 'other areas', attacked the village. Armed Borana fought back (see ACLED Database, KEN7735, KEN7741). In the course of the fighting, seven people were killed, including an innocent elderly woman, 57 houses owned by members of the Borana community were set on fire (while the few houses owned by Gabra community members were left untouched), and all Borana fled from the village in fear for their lives. They fled either to Marsabit town or to relatives in Manyatta Jillo or Gar Qarsa area (east of Marsabit). The violent attack on Daaba village appeared to be directly linked to the conflict between the neighbouring villages of Adhi Huka and Manyatta Jillo, which had been embroiled in fierce fighting over the previous months resulting in the deaths of 18 people in June 2021 (see ACLED, KEN7729).

According to displaced former residents of Daaba village, there had been rumours of an imminent attack on them, and their elders had even gone to the police station in Marsabit town on several occasions to demand better protection for themselves. And yet, the police did not take any precautions or try to intervene in the fighting. They only came to collect the bodies of those killed in the fighting. What weighs heavily on the minds of the Borana villagers is that the state did nothing to prevent the looting and further destruction of their homes in the weeks and months that followed the attack. Houses were further vandalised, remaining valuables (including tin roofs) were stolen, and graffiti of ethnic hatred was left on the walls of the burnt houses. The fertile agricultural land around the homesteads remains fallow. Even 18 months after the attack, the former villagers are afraid to return and rebuild their homes because of ongoing ethno-political tensions and the lack of security guarantees from the government. While residents from Daaba village were not initially involved in the peace dialogues between the Gabra and the Borana, an inter-village peace meeting was held there in January 2023, paving the way for further trust-building and the potential return of displaced villages to their former place of living (2022-11-10-transect-Daaba; 2022-11-10-FGD-Daaba-women; 2023-03-03-KII-IFPC).

5.3 Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding from Below

Existing Peacebuilding Initiatives and Their Limitations

Given the long history of violent conflict in Marsabit county, there is also a distinct history of peacebuilding efforts in the region, albeit embedded in the deeper ethnopolitical struggles for power, positions and territory (Golicha, 2017; Hassan, 2015; NCIC & Interpeace, 2022; Scott-Villiers, 2017). Put simply, top-down approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, which are implemented by state actors and formal institutions—and thus driven by their respective agendas—coexist with bottom-up initiatives, which are driven by conflict-affected communities and that are owned by local people themselves (Ndunda & Mkutu, 2022). In Marsabit, both approaches are being pursued simultaneously, but often with significant contradictions.

The Marsabit county commission's efforts provide an example of a top-down approach. After many years of violence, the county government created its Department of Cohesion in 2014 as part of the nationwide political devolution process with the sincere aim of building a bridge between national institutions, in particular the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), and local peace initiatives. Besides continuously gathering information on conflicts and related risks, it has initiated several dialogues at the county level as well as peace committees at the ward level, but some of the local actors have questioned its impartiality and neutrality. Several respondents noted that such state-led peacebuilding efforts have sometimes failed and, in some cases, even fuelled conflict and continued violence rather than bringing peace: The absence of the state and the consequent lack of physical security, particularly in remote areas, a lack of trust in state authorities, the exclusion of certain groups, such as IDPs, from official peace dialogues, local people's experiences of mismanagement and corruption; and 'peace talk' by political actors that is not followed up by 'real peace action' were identified as key reasons why top-down peace processes could not be sustained and violence continued to erupt in the county.[22] Inflammatory public discourses, such as speeches by politicians during election campaigns but also around any cattle raids, which are often publicised and heatedly commented on on social media (Facebook and WhatsApp), were also recognised as fuelling ethnic hatred and driving violence rather than peace.

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[22] For an example, see the commentary on the failed peace talks between the Borana and the Gabra initiated by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) in December 2020, which failed prevent further violence. *The Nation*, 12.02.2021. https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/marsabit/skewed-resource-allocation-to-blame-for-killings-in-marsabit--3289476

Religious actors play a crucial role in peacebuilding. In the aftermath of the 2005 Turbi massacre, Catholic and Protestant bishops and Muslim sheikhs formed the so-called interfaith council, which has since then been very active across the whole county in (re)building trust and promoting peace, mutual respect and non-violent conflict resolution. For example, at the end of 2018, during a particularly violent episode, the interfaith council conducted a 90-day reconciliation field mission across all conflict-affected communities. In July 2021, they published a report and directly addressed the president of Kenya and regional political leaders with demands and recommendations but never received an adequate response.[23] According to the current chair of the interfaith council, the religious leaders are using their own money to facilitate dialogues wherever they can, but these funds are simply not enough to organise the larger peace process that is urgently needed. Moreover, all the efforts of civil society mediators and religious leaders will be in vain if they are not adequately supported or followed up by the state or key political actors. Instead of cooperating with civil society peace initiatives, the main political actors in Marsabit would create differences between the ethnic groups and then exploit them for their own political gain: 'They constantly divide people instead of reuniting them' (2022-11-17-KII-interfaith). Respondents from the local communities did acknowledge the many efforts of the interfaith council, but some noted that such interventions often came too late and at a time when many people had already been killed. Another criticism was that simply holding peace meetings and asking people to remain peaceful was not very 'effective'. Local representatives and the chair of the interfaith council agreed that new approaches to conflict resolution, reconciliation, and trust-building were needed. A broader and more inclusive peacebuilding process should then be led by local leaders, with state and civil society actors playing a more facilitative role.

The traditional councils of elders (Gadha and Yaa) have been and continue to be essential for strategic decision-making and conflict-resolution, both within and between communities. However, in some places, the authority of the elders has been weakened, either because local political leaders have gained power through the devolution process or because they have lost some of the respect of the youth and the Morans. Yet, it is they who are now driving the renewed peace process.

> There is a Borana proverb: 'Where there are elders, the land cannot split, and if it splits, the elders know how to mend it'. If the traditional council of elders declares peace and tells their people, they will keep the peace (2022-11-07-FGD-Jaldesa-Men).

We found a broad consensus across the study sites on three aspects of peacebuilding. First, **there is good momentum for a sustainable peace process** after the 2022 general elections if all actors and key institutions work together. Second, **the current peace process is being driven by the local communities** themselves who are tired of the effects of protracted violence and years of drought. They just need to work together and peacefully share scarce resources to survive with their livestock and as communities. Third, despite a strong demand for security to be provided by the state, **there is a growing aversion to top-down peace processes** and the involvement of 'urban elites', linked to the fear that peacebuilding will be counteracted by political agendas that do not meet local needs. Two examples from our empirical study underline these points.

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[23] See, demands by Bishop Peter Kihara, chair of the interfaith council (2020-25), to the national government and political leaders on 05 July 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKAykRKfuGg

'The Peace Came From the Herders': Experience-driven Peacebuilding From Below

A common argument in public and academic debate is that scarce resources can lead to violent conflict between competing parties. In northern Kenya, this would seem to be partially true when pastoral communities are politically incited to maintain 'exclusive' access to certain land or water sources. At the time of our study, however, we observed the opposite: More than two years of drought had depleted all natural resources and their herds to such an extent that communities were now forced to cooperate and had neither the means nor the interest to fight their competitors. In several study sites, we heard from our respondents that **the drought had finally brought them peace**:

> The herders called the chiefs after their peace meeting to tell them that they were living and grazing together in peace. (…) The herders told us chiefs that we should plan peace meetings and bring our people together (2022-11-07-FGD-Jaldesa-Men).
>
> There is no one who brought this peace. The herders just sat together, and that's how they called for the for elders, and they came to an understanding and talked. Now we can move freely in the Borana areas, and they come to us (2022-11-05-FGD-Horonder-Men).
>
> Peace started when herders from both communities (Horonderi and Kubi Qallo) met and started grazing together. They talked to each other and later met with the community elders. That's how the peace started to grow (2022-11-11-FGD-Kubi Qallo-Women).
>
> There is peace because of the severe drought and the herders who came and started grazing together. Later, they talked to each other to make peace. The Ethiopian government then brought the elders and the herders together to start the peace process. We can now drink water peacefully in Ethiopia and live together well (2022-11-14-FGD-Gandille-Men).

As the latter quote illustrates, the drought was a key factor in the **cross-border peace process** between the Borana and the Gabra near Forole. As in other rural areas, pastoralists living along the Kenya–Ethiopia border have been severely affected by the drought (see section 4.1) and violent conflict (see section 5.1), which have continually restricted their mobility and thus their ability to cope with the effects of the drought and to maintain their livelihoods. While the northern part of Kenya has hardly received a drop of rain in recent months, the situation in Ethiopia's southernmost provinces has been better. Access to this grazing land, which is dominated by Borana groups was, therefore, a crucial survival strategy for the pastoralists from the Gabra communities. Although a cross-border peace committee had long existed, its work came to an absolute standstill in 2019 after 11 Gabra elders were killed by militia whilst they were on their way to a peace meeting near the border town (see section 5.1). Officially, due to the security situation, border crossings were not possible for the past six years, but Kenyan herders have always grazed their livestock on both sides of the border (which is a vast and badly signposted border area anyway). For the Gabra herders we spoke to, it was clear that their security could be provided neither by a distant Kenyan nor the Ethiopian state but by their own people and their own networks. They also realised they had much more in common with their Borana neighbours while politicians had instigated conflicts along ethnic lines and over land access. At a meeting in the Ethiopian grazing lands, elders from different origins sat down together and agreed to work together rather than continue to fight:

> We as elders decided on these by-laws to avoid any conflicts 1) If someone steals a cow, you have to give back 30 cows; and if it is a camel, you have to give back 35 camels. 2) If an Ethiopian kills a Kenyan, the murderer is arrested and imprisoned in North Horr, on the Kenyan side. If a Kenyan kills an Ethiopian, he will be imprisoned in Dhilo, on the Ethiopian side. 3) To strengthen this meeting and peace, we decided to meet every week (2022-11-14-FGD-Yaa Gara-Men).

This agreement was reached shortly after the Kenyan elections in late August 2022. By mid-November 2022, six meetings had taken place between chiefs and elders from five districts in Ethiopia and from communities in North Horr. Importantly, the bottom-up initiative of the herders was logistically supported by the Ethiopian government and transformed into a more formal peace process. On the Ethiopian side, district and police officials, as well as elected representatives participated in the peace dialogues, but on the Kenyan side, there was no equivalent participation from the national, county or sub-county level nor the local police. Because of this imbalance—high-level dialogue versus low-level/bottom-up initiative—the Kenyan community elders and the village chief of Forole felt not only disadvantaged in the negotiations on cross-border issues but also neglected by their government. They also lacked the basic resources to facilitate the transport of peace committee members or to provide food to host meetings. This neglect by the Kenyan state has the potential to derail the promising peace process that the herders and community elders have brought about (2022-11-14-FGD-Yaa Gara-men; 2022-11-15-FGD-Forole-Men).

Building Peace From Below Through Community Dialogue

We have briefly outlined the history of the conflict between the peri-urban villages of Manyatta Jillo and Adhi Huka (see section 5.2). While the violent conflict led to enormous suffering and many deaths, the example of these two communities also shows how vicious cycles of hatred and violence can be overcome, and how a **bottom-up peace initiative** eventually evolved into a **regional peace process**.

> This conflict is bad, and that is why people wanted peace. Peace started when some of our women were attacked near Mata-Arba. We called Chief XY (a Borana chief). We said this is not good, let us make peace. The elders then sat in the Jirime hotel for 11 days. We had continuous meetings and agreed to make peace. After the Jirime meeting, we met at Manyatta Jillo, then in Mata-Arba, then in Adhi Huka , then in Segel (…). At the meetings, we agreed that no politician should be present. We agreed to forget the past and concentrate on the future. If we talk about the past, it will open the wounds of the past conflict, and (this situation) will be hard to solve (2022-11-09-FGD-Adhi Huka-Men).
>
> We hold peace meetings every weekend in different places. We don't want to involve the townspeople. (…) The peace initiative has been a great success, we can now go out and look for food for our children. We can now reunite with our lost relatives from the Gabra side. We can go to town freely without fear (2022-11-09-FGD-Women-Manyatta Jillo).

Nine days after the 2022 general elections and three days after the end of the government's three-month-security operation and curfew that had stopped the local fighting in and around Marsabit town, young armed men, allegedly Borana, attacked Gabra women from the village of Adhi Huka on the highway. The women ran away, and no one was injured. However, this incident triggered a 'spiral of peace', as many local peoples, including elders and, most importantly, a Borana chief from the neighbouring Manyatta Jillo, immediately rushed to the scene of the attack, all agreeing that the constant insecurity, hatred and fear between the Gabra and the Borana was unbearable and had to stop. Two days later, the first larger **inter-community peace meeting** was held at nearby Jirime hotel, a venue all perceived as neutral. This was followed by successive meetings at the same hotel between representatives of the Gabra and the Borana communities from 11 villages in Saku—hence the name 'Jirime Community Peace Forum'. From then on, due to strong interest from other communities and an obvious need, community dialogues were held almost every Saturday from October 2022 to January 2023 across Saku sub-county (namely in Manyatta Jillo, Waqo Kubi, Adhi Huka, Qalich Huka/Godana Duba, Segel, Horonderi, Kubi Qallo, Chorora and Manyatta Dabaa).

Between 150 and 300 people from different communities attended in these inter-village forums, which were often the first occasions when members of opposing communities who had fought each other met and engaged with each other peacefully. But the meetings were not just about rebuilding social relationships and trust between neighbouring communities as the locals also discussed the root causes of the violent conflicts between them. These included the incitement of hatred and violence by elected politicians and the urban elites; the fuelling of conflicts by women through song, dance and other cultural practices; the failure of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and the resulting irresponsibility of some elders; government inaction and police indifference and inability to provide security. Importantly, four key reasons for the failure of previous 'top-down' peace processes also emerged in the community dialogues: First, **'insincere peace declarations'** by leaders and elders without changing their course of action; second, a **'commercialisation of the peace process'** as some community representatives had received substantial allowances for attending peacebuilding forums held in large hotels and major towns but did not disseminate information in their communities; third, the **'sidelining of the interests and needs of conflict victims'** and the displaced; and fourth, a **'divided loyalty of the council of elders'** to Gabra and Borana politicians rather than to their own communities. In addition, the local residents unanimously decided to continue these inter-community peace meetings, to expand them by reaching out to communities in the Shurr and Bubisa areas, to increase the participation of women and youth in the dialogues and not to allow 'their peace process' to be hijacked and dominated by 'the elites' and politicians. Furthermore, the locals agreed to become ambassadors for peace themselves by consistently spreading messages of peace and coexistence, not tolerating political incitement to violence and disruptors of the peace, thereby ensuring that violent conflict does not flare up again. As a direct result of these peace meetings, new trust has been built between neighbours, separated families who have relatives in a Gabra or Borana village can visit one another again, road travel has become much safer, grazing lands in the northern and eastern parts of Saku sub-county are being shared again, and there has not been a single violent incident (between the Gabra and the Borana) resulting in serious injury or even death of a community member since August 2022 (2022-11-05-Observations-Peace Meeting-Segel; Jirime Peace Accord Progress Report, Oct-Nov. 2022; personal communication with the programme's coordinator of the Initiative for Progressful Change (IfPC) that helps to facilitate the forums, 17.02.&03.03.2023).

Reflections on the Sustainability of Peace Processes from Below

Overall, the success of the peace processes initiated or revived in Marsabit county since the last general elections has been remarkable. The key to this success has been strong community involvement and a high level of identification with and ownership of the process as such. There are several advantages to having peacebuilding largely driven by local communities themselves. The first is the **sustainability of peace engagement**. If the local actors have initiated and 'owned' the peace process, they are much more likely to remain engaged and continue dialogue and cooperation in the longer term. Second, self-organised and direct interactions between many members of different communities, including women and the youth and 'not just male community leaders, are much more likely to **build trust and lasting contacts** than top-down and high-level dialogues to which only a small and carefully selected number of—mostly male—representatives are invited. Third, the local leaders—be they elected chiefs or community elders—can be held **directly accountable** as many of their community members are witnesses of their contributions and commitment to the peace dialogue. Moreover, their (potential) collegiality and cooperation with leaders from other ethnic groups can serve as role model for the behaviour of others. Fourth, the **agreements and self-defined bylaws** that are negotiated at peace meetings are crucial tools for managing conflicts, creating local security and justice and preventing retaliation against individuals who might harm a community or the peace process as a whole. However, such by-laws are, however, only effective if they are enacted and do not remain ideas on paper (see, for example, the 2001/2011 Modogashe Declaration, the 2009/2017 Dukana-Dillo-Maikona Declaration).[24]

However, **community-led peace processes cannot resolve conflicts on their own.** First, while such community-driven peace initiatives can contribute to conflict resolution and peace advocacy, they certainly cannot compensate for the **lack of physical security,** a service the government must provide impartially to all citizens. The security infrastructure in many parts of Marsabit county is clearly inadequate, as evidenced by the limited number of police posts, destroyed police stations that remain vandalised and empty months after violent incidents, and the lack of adequate transport for security personnel to quickly reach remote areas off the main roads. Interviewees noted that state actors often ignored violence in remote areas because it is simply not important. Action is only taken when violence occurs 'in the town', affecting the lives of the middle class and elite. Several respondents argued for the (re)establishment of the Kenya Police Reserve (KPR), which many see as a key 'hardware' for peace and security in rural areas, but which has been disarmed in several campaigns over the past 15 years because of the alleged involvement of these 'community police' as perpetrators of ethno-political violence, rather than as a security force to prevent violence or defend locals in the event of attacks. In the absence of the state and the KPR, many see self-armament as the only option to protect their community and livestock. Community-led peace processes will not last long if the related issues of public security, the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons and the (dis)armaming of locals are not addressed.

Second, there is **no sustainable peace without justice, reconciliation and restitution**. We have often been told that there are no criminal investigations into the theft of cattle, targeted killings, the destruction of people's homes or the looting of their belongings. As a result, perpetrators of violence thus continue to roam freely without fear of arrest, prosecution or conviction, with the law seemingly only selectively enforced. A former county government official remarked that the police have completely failed, also referring to the national government's monopoly on violence and the inadequacies of the formal legal system. While both are beyond the mandate of the county government, the latter could play a crucial role in directing funds for restitution. By-laws on livestock theft (see above) are often unenforceable by the affected communities themselves, but county funds could be used to help the former owners to recover from their losses and thus prevent counter-attacks. IDPs in particular need attention and some form of compensation. Some link their own commitment to the peace process to their legitimate demands for justice, compensation, reconciliation and the (lack of) long-term solutions (to stay, return or relocate?) available to them: 'We all demand fair and equal treatment in any distribution of resources and aid (…). How can there be an unfair distribution of resources and we still accept peace? But if everyone is treated equally, then peace may come' (2022-11-03-FDG-IDPs-Men).

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[24] The 'peace agreements database' (https://www.peaceagreements.org) provides access to these and other relevant peace agreements in Kenya.

Third, the **growing divide between rural people and urban 'elites'** makes the integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches to peacebuilding all the more difficult. There is widespread doubt among rural communities about the capacity and willingness of the state (both national and county government) to support them effectively. There is often a lack of trust in elected political leaders, who are seen to pursue their own agendas rather than act in the 'interest of local communities'. This mistrust, growing scepticism and potential resistance to 'the elites (often, 'the educated' and 'those in town' have been used as synonyms for people whose reality is far removed from the lived experiences of violence—and drought—of (agro)pastoralists) is also evident in the peace process. At a peace meeting in Segel, participants unanimously agreed that 'the elites' were the main agitators of violence, while the 'rural people' had suffered most from the effects of violent conflict. As one Borana elder put it: 'We now know that the elites, the police and the politicians do not have our interests at heart'. These groups should therefore be excluded from 'their' peace process (2022-11-05-Observations-Peace Meeting-Segel). This perception of class-based differences—not between different ethnic groups or political factions, but between the 'educated elites' in the city or town and the ordinary people' in rural communities—should be taken very seriously in the peace process. Overcoming these divisions, for instance by building trust in each other, in honest political agendas and state institutions as such, will be crucial to restoring peace.

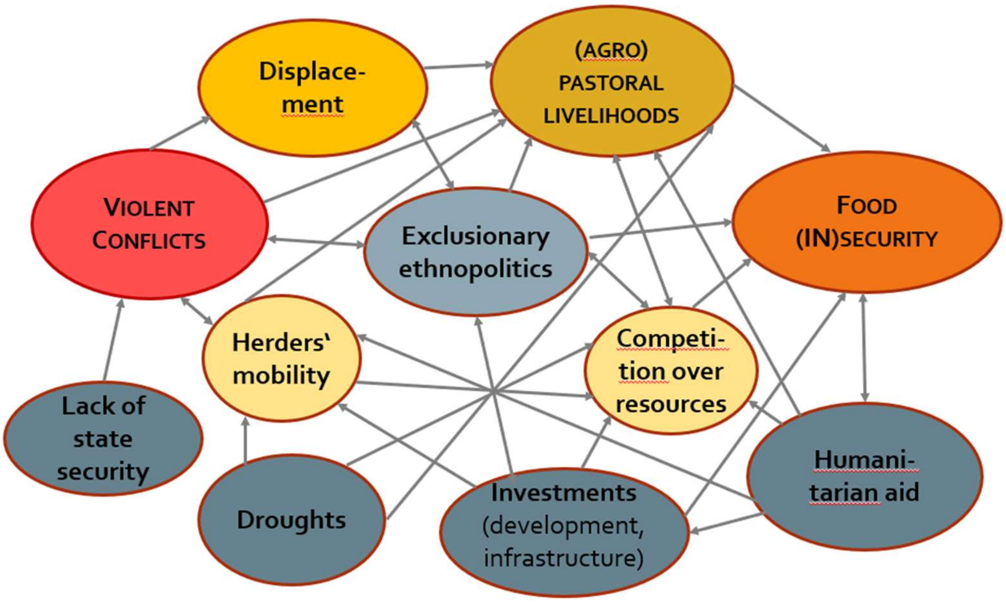
Fourth, it became clear throughout our study that the 'small wars' (Scott-Villiers, 2017) in Marsabit can be ended comparatively quickly if the state takes a firm stance against violence and uses its monopoly on violence, for instance through a large-scale security operation, curfew and disarmament campaign as it did before the 2022 elections. However, beyond restoring security at one point in time, what is needed is a **genuine and long-term commitment to peace** that integrates aspects of physical security with issues of social cohesion, trust-building, cooperation and reconciliation on the one hand, and fair distribution of (development) resources, livelihood opportunities and food security on the other. Respondents repeatedly told us that consolidated efforts are needed not only to 'build' peace, but also to 'sustain' it in the longer term. Transforming local 'cultures of violence', i.e. moranism, and promoting education, social cohesion and a common identity among children, for instance, through sports and other play events, were seen as crucial to a sustainable peace process.

6\ Conclusions: Building Peace While Responding to Drought (and Vice Versa)

6.1 Lessons Learned From Our Study

Our study sought to answer the question of the interrelations between food crises and violent conflict in northern Kenya. Our analysis focussing on Marsabit county has shown how violent conflict and drought affect people's food security and how different groups cope with and adapt to both. There are, however, no simple linear relationships between these variables (drought, conflict and food security), which means that prolonged drought does not directly lead to violent conflict nor do both necessarily lead to a hunger crisis. The two central mediating variables between drought and violent conflict and food insecurity are the **livelihoods** of the local population and the **exclusionary ethnopolitics** that shape people's lives, as outlined in Figure 4. The two most relevant impact channels we observed between violent conflict and food insecurity in Marsabit were the degradation or total **destruction of people's livelihoods and the displacement** of local populations, which is also associated with the destruction of their resource base (Kemmerling et al., 2022).

Figure 4: Analytical Synthesis Showing the Interrelations Between Violent Conflict and Food Security



As for the impact channels in the other direction, from food insecurity and drought to violent conflict, we see only very weak links: **There is no direct link between drought and violent conflict**. Drought contributes indirectly to conflict by forcing pastoralists to move further into other people's territories in search of pasture for their cattle. However, the need to cope with the drought by reaching greener pastures and watering points in other regions has also **led herders to engage in bottom-up peace processes** at multiple sites, including in the Kenya–Ethiopia border region over the past year (see section 5.3). Overall, d**rought and food insecurity have hence rather contributed to instilling a bottom-up peace process in Marsabit** in the past year. Not only in the Kenya–Ethiopia border region but also in Saku sub-county, which has been most affected by violence in recent years, we have seen how the suffering of the people and the local economy from the increasing levels of violence has led people to initiate peace processes to be able to regain access to to pastures, fallow agricultural lands and markets that were inaccessible during the recent years of intense of conflict.

Violent conflict in Marsabit is largely driven by the intensification of ethno-political boundary-making. This can be explained by the territorialisation of ethnicity since colonial times and the increasing wealth of resources (state budgets, political offices, infrastructure projects, land) over the past decades following political reforms that introduced multi-party competition in the 1990s, the higher stake of northern counties in national politics with Kenya's 2010 constitution and the increased financial resources and political functions of Marsabit state institutions through the devolution of state budgets since 2013. Major national infrastructure projects such as the LAPSSET corridor, with the construction of the A2 Marsabit–Moyale highway completed in 2014, have built up territorial competition by raising the value of land. Multiple case studies from our research clearly show how ethno-political dynamics lead to inequitable distribution of resources between communities, how violence is politically instigated, how local people perceive and suffer from exclusionary ethnopolitics and associated violence, and how they seek to overcome violent conflict and the ethnopolitics that underpin it (see section 5).

Mobility is key to pastoral livelihoods and has emerged as a central factor in understanding violent conflict and food security. The impact of violent conflict, drought and humanitarian and other development interventions on the mobility of pastoral communities deserves further research. We have observed **contradictory developments in relation to mobility**:

On the one hand, we observed a long-term trend towards **reduced mobility** of a part of the pastoralist population, which is partially sedentary, leaving herders mobile only over longer distances. For some time now, scholars have observed **expanding sedentarisation** among pastoralist communities in Marsabit due to past droughts and conflicts, as well as more social infrastructure in larger settlements following humanitarian and development interventions (Adano & Witsenburg, 2005; Galaty, 2005). The recent escalations in violent conflict have exacerbated this trend and have made people in one area afraid to go to certain grazing areas for fear of physical attacks by other groups (see section 5). The progressive territorialisation of ethnicity further restricts the mobility of pastoralists, as certain areas are increasingly seen as belonging exclusively to one group or the other, in contrast to the resource-sharing practices of the past (which continue to some extent). The increasing ethnic homogeneity of settlements, at least in perception, also contributes to mutual fears and suspicions that limit mobility (see sections 3 and 5).

On the other hand, recurrent droughts have forced pastoralists to move further and further afield, **increasing their mobility**. At the same time, this is facilitated by the water infrastructure improved by humanitarian projects, especially boreholes, which in many areas are the only remaining reliable source of water in this prolonged drought that has dried up other water sources (see section 4).

So in essence, humanitarian and development interventions contribute to increased semi-sedentarisation of pastoralist families and increased mobility of herders at the same time. **Increased sedentarisation and increased herders' mobility can both spur conflict**: The concentration of people in one place can lead to more competition for space and resources in the long term, while the increased mobility of herders can lead to more competition for grazing land in the short term.

Underlying these contradictory trends in pastoralist mobility are significant **social inequalities**: Wealthy pastoralists with large herds, capital to pay herders and physical security (aided by automatic weapons) may be able to afford more mobility, while the mass of semi-sedentary agro-pastoralists with little livestock are likely to be more restricted in their mobility and increasingly limited in their ability to live off their livestock (cf. Adano & Witsenburg, 2005). In addition, an increase in herd size was reported to us before the last drought decimated a large proportion of livestock. Given the frequency of droughts in recent decades, this implies considerable financial capacity on the part of some large livestock owners who are not entirely dependent on livestock but have other sources of income, i.e. urban political-administrative elites.

Displacement was another important intervening variable revealed by our research that mediates between violent conflict and food security. The statement on displacement in the 2018-2022 County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) no longer seems valid: 'Due to frequent conflict, communities get displaced but normally return to their land after the situation revert to normal' (Government of Kenya & County Government of Marsabit, 2018, p. 10). Displacement due to violent conflict, as a result of a direct attack, for fear, or even as a deliberate political strategy of 'ethnic homogenisation' in certain constituencies, is a reality in Marsabit that Kenyan and international policymakers and practitioners of humanitarian and development aid can no longer ignore. Entire villages have been ethnically cleansed, leading to increasingly ethnically homogenous settlements and a spiral of mutual fear and mistrust that undermines prospects for peace (see section 5.2). The humanitarian and political consequences of displacement require urgent attention.

There is currently momentum for a sustainable peace process in Marsabit county if all actors and key institutions work together. Following the Kenyan state's security interventions in May 2022 and the national elections in August 2022, ethno-politically motivated violence has decreased significantly. However, inter-ethnic tensions remain, particularly between the Rendille and the Borana or the Gabra (and vice versa), and violent cattle raiding continues. In contrast to previous peace initiatives, which were organised by state institutions, the current peace process is largely driven by local communities, who are tired of the effects of protracted violence and years-long drought. They increasingly recognise the need to work together and share scarce resources to cope with the drought and sustain their livelihoods in the longer term. It is important to note, however, that community-led peace processes alone cannot resolve the underlying ethno-political conflicts in the county, nor can they guarantee overall physical security. Bottom-up and top-down approaches to peacebuilding need to be integrated and coordinated, and this will first and foremost require new alliances between the state, ordinary people and organised civil society. Reconciliation and trust-building will be the basis for a more durable peace and thus for improved enhanced drought-resilience of (agro)pastoral communities and sustainable development in Marsabit.

6.2 Recommendations for Policy and Action

While the drought in Kenya has temporarily subsided by the time this report will be published, the immediate challenges of alleviating hunger, rebuilding livelihoods and maintaining the fragile peace in Marsabit remain. In a collaborative effort, we have formulated recommendations to address these challenges. On 2 March 2023, county officials, NGO representatives, religious leaders and researchers—35 people in total—attended a dissemination and reflection workshop organised by Caritas Marsabit, PACIDA and BICC. The recommendations are organised thematically around the action areas of 'food security and livelihoods','peacebuilding' and two cross-cutting issues that stood out in our study, namely 'land and territorial boundaries' and 'internal displacement'.

(A) FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

1. **Emergency response: Extend food aid, cash transfers, and water trucking from special targeting to ALL affected groups and households in drought-affected communities once food insecurity reaches emergency status (IPC Phase 4).**

To civil society actors in Marsabit

/ Continue to raise awareness with the national government and international donors of the magnitude of food insecurity in Marsabit and its secondary effects.

To county and national state institutions

/ Scale up support in terms of quality, quantity and reach.

To international donors

/ Substantially increase assistance to affected communities. Use co-financing mechanisms.

2. **'Do no harm' and conflict sensitivity: Reflect, monitor and mitigate (potential) effects fuelling conflict of own crisis response and livelihood support action.**

To civil society actors in Marsabit

/ Ensure impartiality, accountability and transparency in local distribution.

To county and national state institutions

/ Ensure impartiality and transparency in local distribution.
/ Strengthen humanitarian response and peacebuilding activities through a County Steering Group (CSGs) to oversee and coordinate activities and reduce the risk of bias and duplication of efforts.

To international donors

/ Insist on impartiality and transparency in local distribution.

3. **Livelihoods and Development: Implement short-term income- and employment-generating rehabilitation activities and build long-term skills, capacity and market infrastructure, taking into account environmental sustainability and the empowerment of women and youth.**

To civil society actors in Marsabit

/ Link emergency relief with medium-/long-term capacity and skills-building (e.g. cash-for-work programmes with a training component).
/ Promote a wide range of complementary and diversified local livelihood opportunities in (agro-) pastoral communities that are context-specific, while avoiding deforestation and local charcoal production (e.g. charcoal made from organic waste or briquettes made from waste as an alternative).
/ Build on existing knowledge and scale up sustainable agricultural practices (e.g. shed nets, agroforestry, bee-keeping) and help to (re-)build relevant rural value chains.

To county and national state institutions

/ Implement short-to-medium-term rehabilitation works that generate income and employment in rural communities, including for idle youth and women.
/ Improve local and regional value chains to facilitate the marketing and valorisation of livestock and other products of (agro)pastoral communities.

To international organisations and donors

/ Fund short-to-medium-term income- and employment-generating activities.
/ Fund long-term projects to build and sustain rural livestock value chains and alternative livelihoods.

4. **HDP Nexus: Integrate humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities within projects where there are opportunities in local situations and funding lines to exploit synergies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding.**[25]

To civil society actors in Marsabit

- Integrate local conflict analysis into the planning and implementation of all activities.
- Identify opportunities for conflict resolution and peacebuilding through humanitarian and livelihood support activities. Design conflict-sensitive programmes.

To international organisations and donors

- Develop funding lines along the HDP nexus that support the integration of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities in one project.

(B) PEACEBUILDING

1. **Multi-level peace processes: Integrate peace initiatives by national and international agencies with local, bottom-up peace processes.**

To civil society actors in Marsabit

- Engage with, support and actively promote local, bottom-up peacebuilding initiatives, in rural and urban settings and encourage broad participation of diverse actors and groups, including women, children and youth.
- Work closely with the media (journalists and social media) to promote conflict sensitivity, prevent hate speech, reduce social incentives for violence (warrior culture and capital accumulation), and disseminate information about peace gatherings.

To county and national state institutions

- Establish a working coordination forum for peace actors at county and sub-county levels with revolving budgets that are not dependent on international donors.
- Support (logistically, financially and politically) Kenyan communities involved in existing cross-border peace initiatives with neighbouring countries.
- Promote non-violent (e.g. sports), alternative forms of coming-of-age ceremonies, as in other counties in Kenya.

To international organisations and donors

- Encourage the design and funding of long-term peace and conflict resolution programmes that integrate local and national efforts and a wide range of stakeholders.

2. **Restitution, justice, trauma: Focus on healing the wounds caused by violent conflict, reparations for victims and prosecution of perpetrators.**

To civil society actors in Marsabit

- Provide psychosocial support to families who have lost loved ones or suffered serious injuries as a result of violence.

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[25] See the OECD. Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, February 2019: OECD Legal Instruments, accessed 20 February 2023.

- Systematically document incidents of violence, including cattle raiding with information on locations and groups involved to provide independent data.
- Strengthen and support local human rights knowledge and advocacy to address blatant corruption and disregard for the rule of law.

To county and national state institutions

- Ensure that cattle rustlers, killers and instigators of violence are legally prosecuted and brought to justice. Tackle corruption in this area.
- Strengthen the capacity of cohesion and integration offices at the county and national levels.
- Create and support cultural festivals that bring communities together and showcase the diversity of Marsabit's peoples.

To international organisations and donors

- Fund psycho-social support and healing activities by civil society and faith-based groups.
- Fund local initiatives desired to address human rights activism at the county level.
- Increase pressure on the national government to prosecute violence against civilians.

3. Post-conflict reconstruction: Rapidly repair and reopen damaged schools, health centres, police posts, etc., and involve parties to the conflict in the equitable distribution of funds for relevant (re)development and infrastructure investment.

To civil society actors in Marsabit

- Monitor government and INGO post-conflict reconstruction efforts and the transparent and appropriate use of resources so that not one community/conflict party benefits while others increasingly lose out.
- Develop or support local initiatives geared towards post-conflict reconstruction and the rebuilding of destroyed livelihood systems.

To county and national state institutions

- Use county development funds to systematically rebuild and invest in conflict-affected communities.
- Ensure equitable distribution of resources, including employment opportunities, to reduce risks of bias and opacity.

To international organisations and donors

- Take responsibility for previous projects, i.e. donor-funded infrastructure destroyed in the conflict and work with county and national governments to repair or rebuild it quickly.

(C) LAND AND TERRITORIAL BOUNDARIES

1. **Create transparency about administrative and electoral boundaries and the location of planned investments.**
2. **Promote multi-ethnic institutional arrangements in all matters relating to land administration and infrastructure investment.**
3. **Acknowledge pastoralists' mobility as a normal and sustainable livelihood practice rather than an exception to sedentary agriculture and guarantee the right to mobility.**

To civil society actors in Marsabit

- / Design and implement *inclusive* or peace dividend projects in areas where boundaries between groups are contested, rather than defining boundaries by a clear borderline and projects on one side or the other. Include trust-building, conflict-resolution, non-violent communication and social cohesion components in such 'ethnically diverse' projects.
- / Support multi-ethnic administrative units/communities to register community land in multi-ethnic institutional arrangements, including community conservancies.

To county and national state institutions

- / Provide transparency on existing local administrative and electoral boundaries and on the location of planned investments (e.g. LAPSSET).
- / Support multi-ethnic administrative units to register community land in a multi-ethnic institutional arrangement.
- / Incorporate the AU Declaration on Land Issues and Challenges in Africa and the IGAD Protocol on Transhumance into national law.

To international organisations and donors

- / Take into account boundary issues and related ethno-political conflicts when allocating funds, planning projects, etc.
  - / Support and fund civil society organisations to implement conflict-resolution and peace-building tools in relevant development and infrastructure projects in contested areas.

(D) INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

1. **Recognise the relevance of internal displacement as a key driver of conflict in Kenya.**
2. **Support durable solutions for IDPs, including local livelihoods and integration assistance and compensation for lost land and assets.**

To civil society actors in Marsabit

- / Include IDPs in emergency response and provide local livelihood and integration assistance, including social-psychological counselling.

To county and national state institutions

- / Commission independent studies to document the extent of internal displacement in Marsabit.
- / Include IDPs in emergency response and provide local livelihood and integration assistance at the place of residence.

- Consider relocation to new locations and compensation for lost land and assets where return is not feasible.
- Improve security for IDPs to enable them to return to their previous places of residence and provide assistance to rebuild their homes and livelihoods.

To international organisations and donors

- Commission independent studies to document the extent of internal displacement in Marsabit.
- Fund local livelihood, return and (re)integration assistance, including social-psychological counselling, for IDPs.

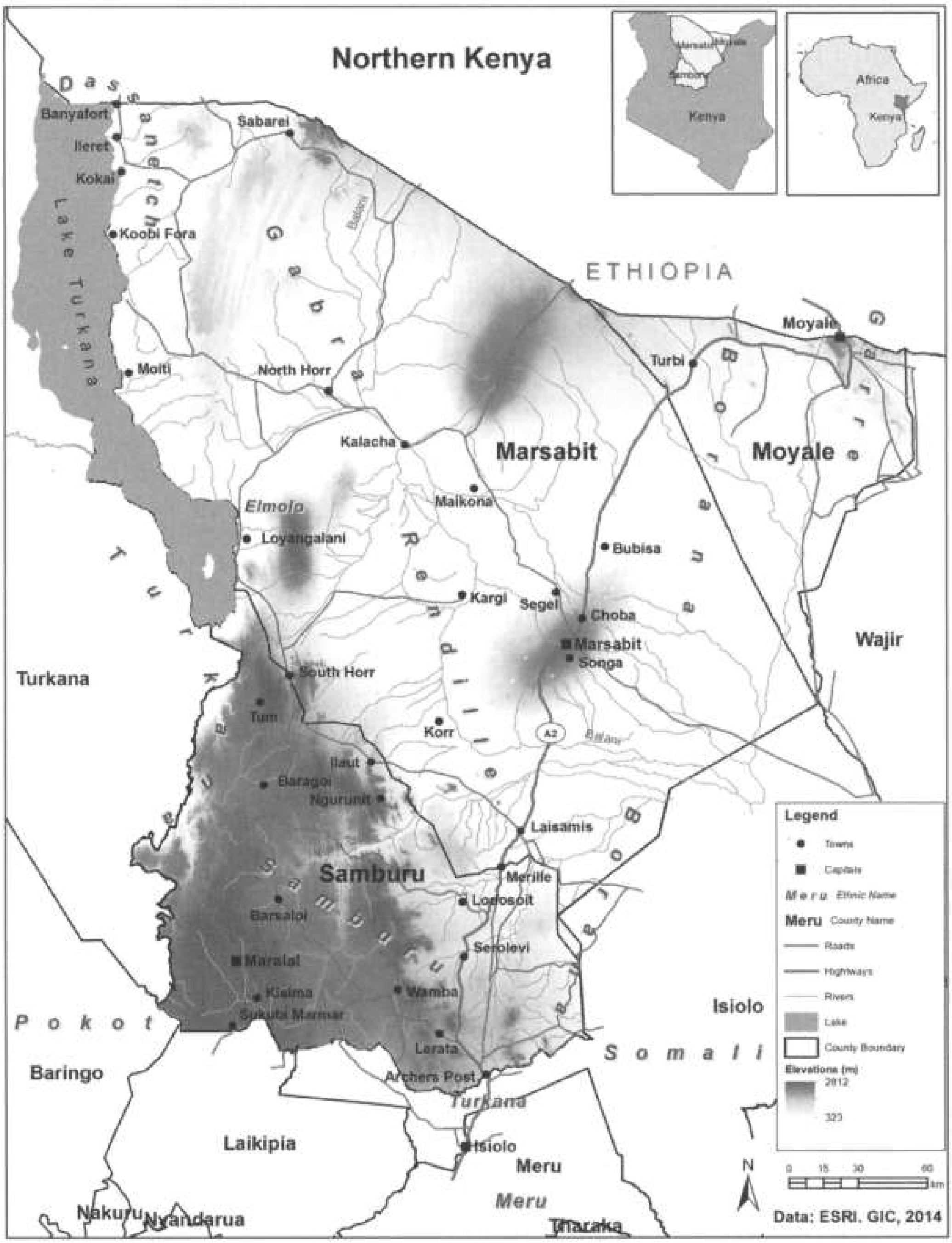
Appendix

Table 2: Overview of Study Sites and Field Research Activities

Date(s)	Sub-county	Site	Research tools used	Participant(s)	Number of people
03., 04, 10., 16., 17.11.2022	Saku	Marsabit	FGDs, SSI, Obs., Pics	IDPs in Marsabit (men, women; Gabra community)	28
04, 09., 16., 17.11.2022	Saku	Marsabit	KII	Deputy county commissioner, other county officials, NDMA, interfaith council; NGO representatives	9
04.11.2022	Saku	Konso Banchale	Obs., Pics	Site visit, destroyed Gabra village	
05.11.2022	Saku	Haro Bota	Obs., Pics	Site visit, destroyed Gabra houses	
05.11.2022	Saku	Horonderi	FGDs, KII, SSI, transect, pics	villagers (male, female; Gabra community)	20
05.11.2022	Saku	Shegel	Participation, Obs., Pics, SSI	Community Peace Meeting (from diverse villages); interview with an IDP woman	1 (over 100 p. at meeting)
05.11.2022	Saku	Jaldesa	FGDs, Obs., Pics, transect	Men & women (Borana community), destroyed infrastructure	9
07.11.2022	Saku	Isacko Umoru	Obs., Pics	Site visit, destroyed Gabra village	
07.11.2022	Saku	Old Gabra Sch.	Obs., Pics	Site visit, destroyed Gabra village	
08.11.2022	Laisamis	LogoLogo	KII, FGDs, SII, Obs., Pics	Elders (Rendille), young herders, chief, observation food distribution	18
08.11.2022	Laisamis	Kamboe	FGD, pics	Women (Rendille community)	13
09.11.2022	Saku	Manyatta JiIllo	FGDs, pics	Men/elders, women, youth (Borana community)	16
09.11.2022	Saku	Adhi Huka	FGDs, Obs., Pics	Men and women (Gabra)	22
10.11.2022	Saku	Songa	FGDs, Obs., Pics	Men and women (Rendille)	19
10.11.2022	Saku	Daaba village & Marsabit	transect, obs., pics, FGD	Transect in destroyed village w. men, FGD w. women (Borana community)	7
11.11.2022	North Horr	Kubi Qallo	FGDs, Obs., transect, Pics	Men and women (Borana community)	7
11./ 12.11.2022	North Horr	Turbi	FGDs, transect, Obs., pics,	Chief, elder men, womens' group, youth (all Gabra), cath. Priest	20
12.11.2022	North Horr	Funan Qumbi	FGDs, obs., pics, transect	Men and women (Gabra community)	13
12.11.2022	Moyale	Funan Ida	transect, obs., pics	Men and women (Borana community)	5
13.11.2022	North Horr	Elle Bor	FGDs, obs., transect, pics	Men/elders, female shopkeepers, youth (all Borana), herders at borehole (Borana and Gabra)	35
13.11.2022	North Horr	Elle Dimtu	FGDs	Men and women (Borana community)	30
14.11.2022	North Horr	Gandille	FGDs, obs., pics, transect	Men, women, and youth (Gabra community)	19
14.11.2022	North Horr	Yaa Gaara	FGDs, pics	Men, incl. chief, and women (Gabra community)	32
14./15.11.2022	North Horr	Forole	FGDs, obs., pics, transect	Men, women, youth, traders; cross-border peace committee (Gabra)	22
21./22. 11.2022	Nairobi	Nairobi	KII	RECSA (Regional Centre on Small Arms): regional advisors; Civil peace services, GIZ Germany	3
					348

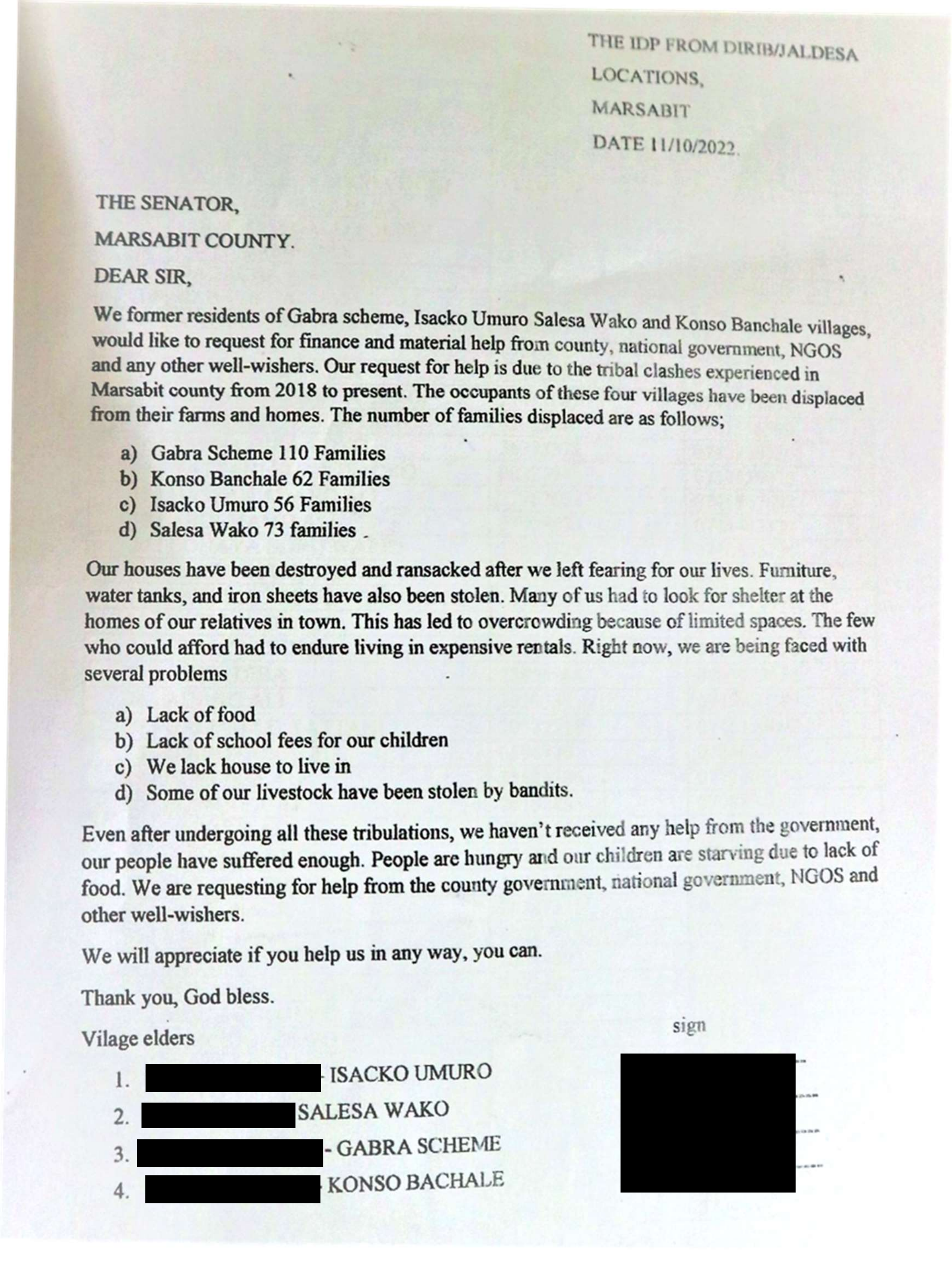
In total: 41 FGDs = focus group discussions; 13 KII = Key informant interviews; 6 SSI = semi structured interviews; Obs = Observations; transect = transect walks undertaken with local community members; pics = pictures taken

Map 6: Geographical Distribution of Major Ethnic Groups in Marsabit County


Northern Kenya
Marsabit
Moyale
Samburu
Kenya
Africa
ETHIOPIA
Dassanetch
Gabra
Rendille
Borana
Garre
Elmolo
Turkana
Samburu
Pokot
Somali
Turkana
Meru
Banyafort
Ileret
Kokai
Koobi Fora
Sabarei
Lake Turkana
Moiti
North Horr
Kalacha
Maikona
Loyangalani
Bubisa
Turbi
Moyale
Kargi
Segel
Choba
Marsabit
Songa
South Horr
Tum
Korr
A2
Ilaut
Baragoi
Ngurunit
Laisamis
Merille
Logologo
Serolevi
Barsaloi
Maralal
Kisima
Suguta Marmar
Wamba
Lerata
Archers Post
Isiolo
Wajir
Turkana
Isiolo
Baringo
Laikipia
Meru
Nakuru
Nyandarua
Tharaka
Legend
Towns
Capitals
Meru Ethnic Name
Meru County Name
Roads
Highways
Rivers
Lake
County Boundary
Elevations (m)
2812
323
N
0
15
30
60
km
Data: ESRI. GIC, 2014

Source: Galaty, 2016, p. 105; *Note*: The map reflects a rough representation of demographic majority and political dominance in Marsabit and Samburu counties. This does not imply that other ethnic groups are not present in the respective areas, too.

Letter From IDPs to Marsabit County Senator and Other Organisations



THE IDP FROM DIRIB/JALDESA
LOCATIONS,
MARSABIT
DATE 11/10/2022.

THE SENATOR,
MARSABIT COUNTY.

DEAR SIR,

We former residents of Gabra scheme, Isacko Umuro Salesa Wako and Konso Banchale villages, would like to request for finance and material help from county, national government, NGOS and any other well-wishers. Our request for help is due to the tribal clashes experienced in Marsabit county from 2018 to present. The occupants of these four villages have been displaced from their farms and homes. The number of families displaced are as follows;

a) Gabra Scheme 110 Families
b) Konso Banchale 62 Families
c) Isacko Umuro 56 Families
d) Salesa Wako 73 families .

Our houses have been destroyed and ransacked after we left fearing for our lives. Furniture, water tanks, and iron sheets have also been stolen. Many of us had to look for shelter at the homes of our relatives in town. This has led to overcrowding because of limited spaces. The few who could afford had to endure living in expensive rentals. Right now, we are being faced with several problems

a) Lack of food
b) Lack of school fees for our children
c) We lack house to live in
d) Some of our livestock have been stolen by bandits.

Even after undergoing all these tribulations, we haven't received any help from the government, our people have suffered enough. People are hungry and our children are starving due to lack of food. We are requesting for help from the county government, national government, NGOS and other well-wishers.

We will appreciate if you help us in any way, you can.

Thank you, God bless.

Vilage elders

sign

1. [redacted] - ISACKO UMURO
2. [redacted] SALESA WAKO
3. [redacted] - GABRA SCHEME
4. [redacted] - KONSO BACHALE

[redacted]

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