

## Stakeholder-Involvement in Water Resource Related Conflict Management in Lake Turkana Basin of Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

Lake Turkana is the largest permanent desert lake in the world and a crucial water source in Turkana County, sustaining thousands of livelihoods. The ethnic groups of Pokot, Turkana, and Samburu are primarily nomadic pastoralists. The region is heavily prone to perennial water related resources-related conflict resulting in the perennial displacement of human beings and animals. Prior studies established that perennial resource conflict is fuelled by stakeholders. The study aimed to determine stakeholders' participation in managing water resource conflict in Kenya's Lake Turkana Basin. A descriptive research design anchored on negotiation theory was applied. A target population of 90 respondents with 30 each from Kolokol, Kainuk and Lodwar was selected. A sample of 36 respondents were contacted through a structured questionnaire, Key Informant Interview (KII) schedule, observation guide and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs). The findings revealed restricted stakeholder exposure to conflict management, biased participation, and exacerbated conflicts due to poor stakeholder identification. In addition, challenges such as underdeveloped road infrastructure and inadequate communication facilities interfered with conflict resolution efforts. Recommendations include amongst others advocating for an all-inclusive stakeholder engagement, use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods such as traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, mediation, and negotiation, as well as addressing infrastructure issues to facilitate effective conflict resolution within the expansive Lake Turkana Basin.

**Keywords:** Conflicts, Management; Water, Resources; Stakeholders; Lake Turkana

## I. INTRODUCTION

Situated in North-West Kenya and bordering South Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia, Turkana is the second largest county in Kenya. Consisting of arid and semi-arid landscapes, and harsh terrain, Turkana is made up of isolated hills, mountain ranges, and low-lying plains. Lake Turkana is the largest permanent desert lake in the world and part of the complex conflict zone known as Karamoja. Kermut (2016) asserted that there is too much tension and conflict including inter-communal conflicts within Turkana particularly Samburu-Baringo and Turkana-West Pokot borders.

The indigenous groups in Turkana County are largely nomadic pastoralists, who move their herds spontaneously across the international boundaries of Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda (Cheruiyot, 2019). Nonetheless, this region is deeply prone to perennial water resource-related conflicts involving several stakeholders. Livestock rustling and raids among the Pokot, Turkana, and Samburu ethnic groups in Kenya and between the Turkana people and the Karamojong of Uganda, the Nyangatom and Dassanech of Ethiopia, the Topasa of Southern Sudan and the Didinga and have been rampant over the years (Kermut, 2016).

Joint partnerships could create stakeholder involvement with the parties having knowledge of their stakeholder status while others do not easily establish this stakeholder status (Nederhand & Klijn, 2019). In other words, stakeholder involvement is questioning the who, why, and what initiatives are in place to make stakeholders active (Boiral & Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2017). This has the implication that stakeholder mapping alone cannot lead to stakeholder involvement. The full involvement of stakeholders requires a deeper understanding of all parties involved (Nyukuri, 2006).

Environmental resources provide a platform for conflict globally with communities coming into conflict with each other, humans against animals, communities against governments, and individuals in terms of business against communities or even governments (Government of Kenya, 2021). When such conflicts become international or cross-border in scope, international laws or treaties become important in their management (Petersen-Perlman, Veilleux, & Wolf, 2017). However, policing or implementing such treaties remains a trust issue as the said international treaties to a large extent remain a gentleman's agreement (Turhan, 2020; Allan et al., 2019).

Lake Turkana basin of Kenya supports a large community of people, plants, and animals. There is however perennial conflict over the scarce water-related resources. This conflict has resulted in the perennial unplanned displacement of human beings and animals. Despite the use of diverse methods of managing water-resource-related conflict, they keep on recurring. Prior studies focusing on resource-related conflict globally have indicated that the difficulties involved in managing the conflict always involve the failure to identify and correctly involve all stakeholders. The main objective of the study was to establish the role of stakeholders and in particular how they are selected, and mapped out and their participation role in the water resource-related conflict management in the vast Lake Turkana basin of Kenya.

This study was guided by the negotiation theory whose main principle is that strategic discussion must bring an acceptable solution to all parties with some give and take that will always have one or some parties believe they have won while others have lost (Brett & Gelfand, 2006).

However, cross-border negotiations can be misused as a cover for continuing activities that fuel conflict. The main assumption of negotiation theory is that the negotiators are skilled intelligent people with the aim of creating an environment that can be shared by all parties (Katz, 2021). To some extent, it has been pointed out that cross-border negotiations can be used to cover the continuing activities that cause the conflict which acts as a bad faith example (Katz, 2021). This means that one party could hide behind negotiations to buy time in exploiting the water resources. In a study from the South East Asia region carried out by Barua (2018), the focus was on the Brahmaputra riparian countries complex that revolves around the Jamuna River which runs through Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, and India linking many communities in the rich river basin with each community apparently feeling threatened on the usage of water by corporates in the region. Through content analysis and data mining, Barua (2018) established that water diplomacy requires openness, and transparent processes that should involve multiple stakeholders across all the regions of the water-resource, as well as the neighboring regional observers. The Israel-Palestinian conflict has been well-documented and some of them revolve around water-related factors. Huntjens (2017) examined the diplomatic solutions in the mediation process of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The study established that trust among stakeholders and determinations of whether previous agreements or policies were implemented were key in the mediation process. Huntjens (2017) also established that it was mandatory to have independent third-party mediators and facilitators who are not affiliated with the conflicting parties in the region.

Regionally, Doring (2020) tested the water related conflict that has always resulted in the use of bullets across the water-scarce regions of the African Mediterranean zone. Using a data set of water-related conflict cases from 1997 to 2009, the scholar applies thematic analysis to identify patterns among the conflicts over the years as well as in specific zones of Mediterranean North Africa. The study also established that the scarcer the water resource was, the more likely that it could be used more as a uniting factor as opposed to a conflicting factor. Doring (2020) also recommends the participation of both the state and non-state actors in conflict management.

Chelang'a & Chesire (2020) sought to establish the Tugen and Pokot communities' conflict dynamics in Baringo County, specifically the hot zones of Baringo North and Tiately sub-counties. Traced back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, these perennial conflicts never seem to end. Using a descriptive approach based on data collected in 2011 across the two sub-counties, the study also made heavy reference to secondary data on the region which detailed many of the conflicts. Chelang'a & Chesire (2020) established that the conflict now involved systematic cattle rustling, property damage, killings, and massive displacements in both counties of Baringo and the larger Turkana with high-security risk. The study recommended more focus on stakeholders on the underlying community perceptions and not on the immediate causes like control of pasture and access to water resources.

Similarly, focusing on the role of inclusivity in policy matters, Nyukuri (2006) based her research on the Beijing Platform in which a declaration to have women included in society's decision-making was central. The qualitative approach of this study aimed to establish the gender involvement of women in important community matters like land usage, accessibility to resources, and involvement in conflict policies, using data over the period 1995 to 2005.

Nyukuri (2006) cited the lack of participation by women in inheritance matters, access or control to important resources including water and forests as well as very low literacy levels implying that it was impossible for women to interact with the outside world. The Nyukuri (2006) study revealed gender disparities, including limited rights, low literacy levels, and women's exclusion from important resource-related discussions.

Most literature reviewed on conflicts lacked the negotiation theory thought to be critical in conflicts. Similarly, whereas other studies have been on cross-border conflicts, the current study was locally based. The role of women in conflicts does not get adequate attention in other reviewed literature thus creating a gap. Additionally, third-party mediation is lacking in most of the reviewed studies as opposed to the current study which has recommended alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Finally, the methodology in this current study was triangulation filling the gap in which other literature had a single instrument in their studies.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a positivist philosophy approach based on the assumption that the study set to empirically and objectively analyse the relationships existing among the variables under the study on water resource related conflicts in the Lake Turkana basin of Kenya. The study employed a purposive sampling technique, specifically seeking respondents who were residents in the conflict zones with a history of perennial water-related conflicts in the Lake Turkana basin of Kenya with a triangulation approach used in data collection.

The study site is characterised by dry sandy soils with sparse shrubs in dry river beds and strong dry winds. Additionally, the study site has limited communication infrastructure with a very low population density of 10 persons per square kilometre. The study's target population comprised of residents in the conflict zones with previous perennial water resource related conflicts, specifically, the Pokots and Turkanas. Through convenient sampling, 30 participants per region targeted 90 respondents across all the three sites of Kolokol, Lodwar and Kainuk in Turkana County. Due to the difficult nature of the respondents in terms of education triangulation was used with data collection tools including a questionnaire, observation guide, key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

All ethical considerations were observed including having a University of Nairobi research authority letter, National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) License No. *NACOSTI/P/21/11060*, Ministry of Education letter and Turkana Country letter. Consent from all respondents was received before the commencement of data collection.

## III. RESULT

The respondents were sampled from 3 different locations in the North East, Central, and South West of the vast Turkana basin of Kenya. The nine written KII responses were transcribed for use in study analysis. Additionally, there were 3 FGDs totalling 27 participants selected from the main sites of data collection, each one from Kalokol on the shores of Lake Turkana, Lodwar village of Kanamkemer, and Kainuk to the South known for extreme violence in fights between the two tribes of Turkana and Pokot. The total number of respondents was thus 36.

### Demographic Information

Data on demographic information was collected by the questionnaire. As indicated in Table 1, a total of 9 key informants with live experience in past conflict management were interviewed. As indicated in Table 1, a total of 9 key informants with live experience in past conflict management were interviewed.

**Table 1:**  
 Key Demographic Data

| Characteristic     | Characteristic Category | Male Frequency | Female Frequency |
|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Age Group          | Below 25                | 2              | 2                |
|                    | 25-35                   | 7              | 4                |
|                    | 36-45                   | 8              | 3                |
|                    | 46-55                   | 4              | 2                |
|                    | Over 55                 | 3              | 1                |
| Level of Education | Primary                 | 12             | 5                |
|                    | Secondary               | 5              | 3                |
|                    | Post-secondary college  | 4              | 3                |
|                    | Degree level            | 3              | 2                |
| Occupation         | House work              | 1              | 5                |
|                    | Farming                 | 5              | 2                |
|                    | Pastoralism             | 11             | 4                |
|                    | Community Leader        | 4              | 1                |
|                    | Fishing                 | 3              | 1                |

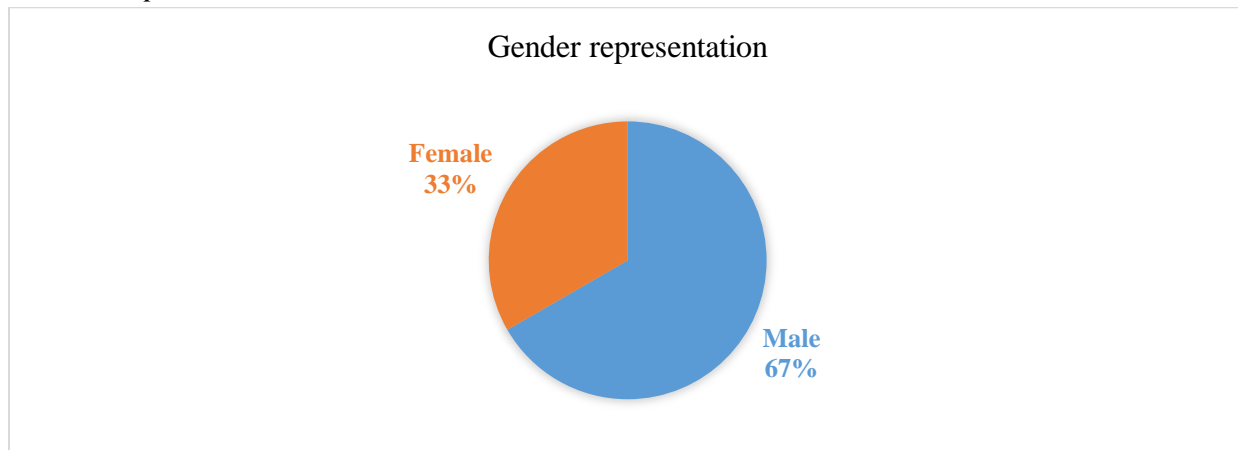
Source: Research Data (2022)

### Selection of Stakeholders in Conflict Management

Results indicate there are various groups of people with varied interests in the wide Lake Turkana basin of Kenya. These categories clearly appear as gender, age, ethnicity, the government and lawmakers as well as non-government or non-state actors all involved in one way or another with the existence and utilization of water resource related activities. In terms of gender as shown in Figure 1, the study revealed that there were more males than female thus revealing a pattern in which perhaps there was unequal representation in stakeholder engagements in the region.

Results in Figure 1 indicates that 67 percent of the respondents were male with minority 33 percent being female. Age also comes into play as both the youth and aged members of the society get involved in the conflicts. Respondents also affirmed that ethnicity was a stakeholder factor as the lake basin borders different ethnic groups from Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Villagers interviewed at different locations identified another stakeholder as government both at central and county levels in general including the security forces and other law enforcing organs of the government.

**Figure 1:**  
*Gender Representation*



### **Inclusivity of Stakeholders**

It emerged from the FGDs that involvement in conflict management by both genders and various age groups was not satisfactory in most communities. Key Informants specifically pointed to the failure to have both genders equally represented implying decisions made as biased solutions. Furthermore, women as traditional minders of the homestead were kept in the dark during negotiations with their contributions if any kept at a minimum. As stated by two other key female informants;

*“Our women do not get a fair chance of giving their views when there is an issue to solve because they are told to take care of children and goats when the men are discussing matters of the community.”*

Similarly, the youth and people living with disabilities were left out of stakeholders’ meetings or discussions on conflict management. According to one FGD discussant who was a parent of a son living with a foot disability;

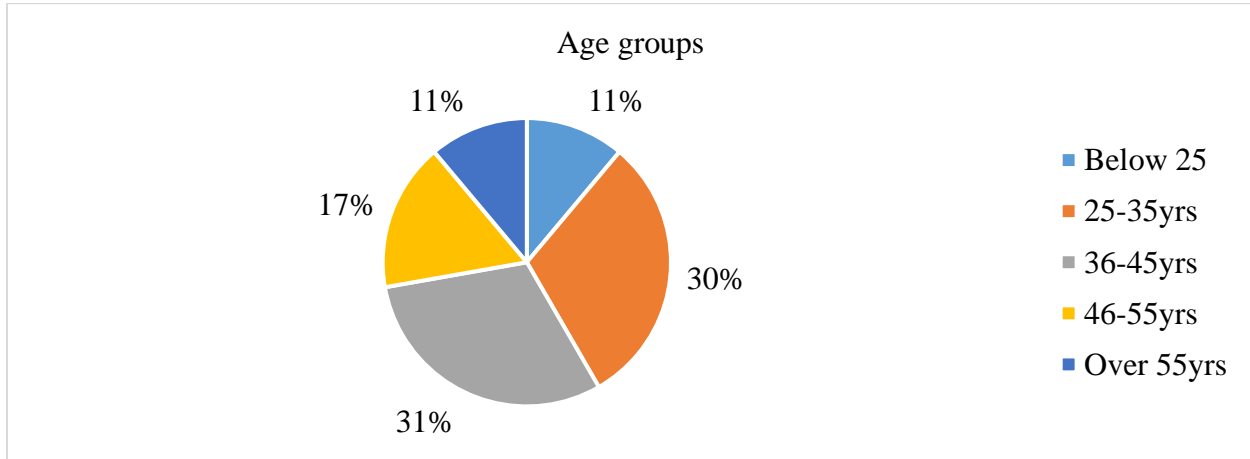
*“My son has tried many times to participate in the conflict management meetings but every time, the elders never select him. This makes it difficult for him to try attending any other meeting called for any other matters including food distribution.”*

If one was perceived as a foreigner to the communities under conflict, they could not be allowed into the negotiations unless trusted by both communities. Additionally, the perennial conflicts will keep arising as long as decision-making stakeholders are not trusted by either side. In addition, some communities felt that the government makes biased decisions in favour of a specific community, as quoted by one key informant;

*“the Kenya government through central governance and county offices appears to turn a blind eye to the disarmament imbalances thus making it difficult to end the perennial water resource related conflicts.”*

From the information presented in Figure 2, there is a high discrepancy of age group involvement in any set up within the study site with the under 25 age group poorly presented at 11 percent yet in practice, these are the real field persons in the grazing lands and water resource points where most of the conflicts start. Equally with low representation are the elders in the age groups of over 55 who in real world are the elders and decision-makers in the land during the conflict resolutions.

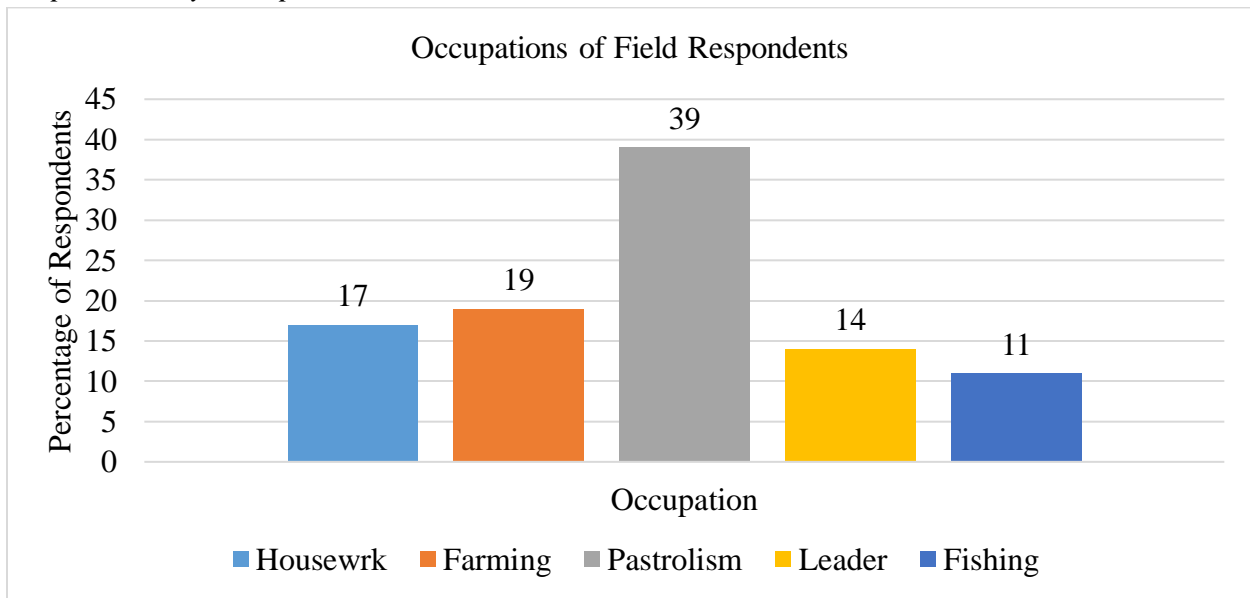
**Figure 2:**  
*Age Group of Respondents*



### Mapping of Stakeholders

The low population density implied that it is hard to get a wider variety of people to come together for any discussion on resolving conflicts caused by a shortage of water and related resources. From observations, not only is it hard to get both genders, but it clearly becomes difficult to try and involve the youth and non-residents in the negotiation table given the low population density. According to one key informant, there were difficulties in identifying the participants for any conflict management forum. From the results presented in Figure 3, there was a majority of pastoralists with 39 percent of them while fewest being the fishermen at 11 percent thus indicating a clear disproportionate presentation of stakeholders. Additionally, the housework at only 17 percent also represents low participation by women and girls as they are associated with housework generally and traditionally in the Lake Turkana region.

**Figure 3:**  
*Respondents by Occupation*



### Active Participation of Stakeholders

The ethnic composition of the Lake Turkana basin was problematic since neighboring countries with their nomadic tribes were never regularly involved in conflict management decisions leaving the locals vulnerable. Specifically, the tribes of Merile from Ethiopia and Karamojong from Uganda were actively related to the perennial conflict and are forever armed, yet they do not actively participate in conflict management on the Kenyan side.

## IV. DISCUSSION

In support of the current study, many water related conflicts across Africa have been linked to external influence. For example, the Arabian community has played the role of interested player in the sharing of water related resource conflict in the African Mediterranean nations (Heibach, 2020). This has the implication that it is indeed fundamental to understand and map out stakeholders in any given conflict as they might just be the very inciter of the conflict or alternatively such a stakeholder to bringing up the much-needed perennial peace.

Another study in Europe has indicated that it is those people who are involved in conflict management that indicate who should participate and who should not (Makhashvili, 2016). Similarly, the need to involve neutral people from those in conflict has been emphasized in the study on public-private participation for the resolution of such water related conflict (Nederhand & Klijn, 2019). This is thought to have a stronger achievement of peace from the conflicting communities especially if the stakeholders demonstrate the need for peace not just to the existing communities, but also indicate the development plan for such conflicting communities.



It was also established in a study on the Amazon basin in South America that once stakeholders are brought into the limelight of a conflict, there is always a high possibility of arriving at a conducive or amicable settlement of the conflict (Ulibarri et al., 2019). In other words, advocacy for stakeholders should be given priority when searching for a long-standing solution to water related resource conflict.

On the contrary, there are studies that oppose the involvement of stakeholders in conflict management. The study of Peruvian mining conflict indicate that the conflicts are prolonged through the involvement of stakeholders with vested interests working against the wishes of the local communities in collaboration with political backers (Tura et al., 2019; Salem et al., 2018). The argument in the study findings was that if the Peruvian mines were equitably shared with the local communities and the government, then there would be no conflict. Instead, the stakeholders who are in the mining business create conditions that make the conflict perennial in the South American country implying that one group of stakeholders has excess authority over others on the water resource.

### **Conclusion**

Gender and age were key factors in the involvement of stakeholders in the lake Turkana basin conflict management. Specifically, cultural customs for most communities in the lake basin prohibited women from participating while only some boys were invited for conflict management talks. In terms of mapping stakeholders, the observed low population density simply means that it is hard to get a large variety of people coming together for any discussion on the resolving conflicts caused by shortage of water and related resources. The under-developed road structures and poor communication facilities make it difficult to mobilize people in the vast lake basin, more so the youth and women as they cannot make long distances to come to a central location as stakeholders in the conflicts. It was established that women continue to remain on the fringes of decision making organ from the traditional links where few of them are given an opportunity to participate in conflict management discussions. Youths were also kept out of discussion forums on the cultural understanding that the elders will adequately present their views. There was thus poor stakeholder involvement in the efforts to have lasting resolutions.

### **Recommendations**

To address the concerns raised, the following recommendations are proposed: -

- i) Improve inclusivity by actively involving all the stakeholders including government and non-governmental actors, women and youth, and persons living with disabilities in all decision-making processes to ensure their inputs are recognized.
- ii) Enhance alternative dispute resolution mechanism which includes negotiation, reconciliation, and mediation processes using trained mediators who understand the local culture in a bid to encourage dialogue amongst communities involved in conflicts.
- iii) Improve infrastructure developments such as the road network and communication facilities in the region to make participation easier.
- iv) Promote education to boost literacy levels among the communities to empower them to effectively engage in conflict management and other development initiatives.

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