22. Conflict and cooperation: understanding the spectrum of coping strategies amongst pastoralist communities in Northern Kenya

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INTRODUCTION

The well-being of pastoralist groups, especially those living in arid and semi-arid areas, has received increasing attention from academics, policymakers and NGOs in the past decade. The main reason for this is the intensification of armed violence within these groups and between pastoral and sedentary communities in the Horn of Africa. While some forms of inter-group violence, such as cattle raiding, are accepted as long-standing 'traditions' among pastoralists (Buchanan-Smith and Lind 2005; Davies and Bennett 2007), the number of casualties as a result of such raids has been on the rise due to the wider availability of small arms (Mkutu 2007; Raleigh and Urdal 2007), alongside economic and political insecurities (Benjaminsen and Ba 2009; Berhanu and Beyene 2015; Herrero et al. 2016; Okumu et al. 2017; Catley et al. 2016). Frequent droughts, rainfall variability, and the resulting competition over pastures and water have further intensified resource-based conflicts in Northern Kenya (Opiyo et al. 2012; Raleigh and Kniveton 2012), fostering a policy narrative around enabling and strengthening the adaptation capabilities of pastoral communities to ensure human security and well-being. Defined as the process of adjustment to actual or expected *climate* and its effects, to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities (IPCC n.d.), adaptation measures have included savings schemes, diversification of livestock and investing in children's education alongside strengthening local governance systems in areas inhabited by pastoral communities. The element of conflict, however, has been side-stepped within the adaptation discourse, and it was only at the 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) that the Climate, Relief, Recovery, and Peace Declaration recognized the dimension of conflict within a climate platform (COP28 2023).

Siri Eriksen and Jeremy Lind (2009, 817) note that 'conflict is part and parcel of the adaptation process, not just an external factor inhibiting local adaptation strategies,' pointing to the existence of winners and losers in the process of adaptation. Outcomes are shaped by the power relations within local geographies that mediate the negotiation of conflicting interests. In this chapter, we make two main arguments. First, we present violent armed conflict as one extreme point in a wider spectrum of adaptation responses within individual or group coping strategies, rather than as independent occurrences. Second, we take a gendered lens to uncover the range of interactions and relationships, from conflict to cooperation, between conflicting pastoral groups, and how these are mediated and negotiated. While we recognize that power relations operate across institutional scales, from the household to the state, we restrict ourselves to the 'meso' scale of the community. The chapter is based on extensive fieldwork by

the authors in both rural and peri-urban sites across Isiolo, Samburu, and Meru counties of Northern Kenya between 2015 and 2017.

CONFLICT AND COOPERATION AS A SPECTRUM OF INTERACTIONS IN ADAPTING TO A CHANGING CLIMATE

Resource-based conflicts amongst pastoral communities in Northern Kenya have often been attributed to resource scarcity/degradation, made worse in the context of recurrent droughts. While it is evident that changing weather conditions have a crucial effect on the well-being and security of pastoralists in arid and semi-arid areas, there is little evidence to suggest that climate change is the sole (or even the main) reason for the increased vulnerability of pastoralist communities in East Africa (Gleditsch 2012). Rising conflict and insecurity are mediated by a range of factors including the absence of strong local institutions that enable inter-community resource-sharing (Berger 2003), the loss of livelihoods and poverty, especially amongst young men (Opiyo et al. 2015; Rao 2019), the easy availability of small firearms (Mkutu 2007), corruption, lack of political representation, and limited access to education, amongst others. Interestingly, the direct connection between drought, resource scarcity, and conflict has been challenged by several authors claiming that scarcity might actually foster cooperation, with conflicting groups reconciling their differences and sharing resources to survive (Adano et al. 2012; Schilling et al. 2014). What we see today is akin to what Mary Kaldor describes as the 'new wars', a shift from fighting led by the state's armed forces to a range of private actors with varying agendas, often based on exclusionary identity politics, combining violent acts with organized crime and the violation of human rights to create 'fear and hatred' (2013, 9). Such wars tend to spread and recur as each side gains in economic or political ways from violence, rather than establishing a decisive victory. Violence here often coexists with 'pockets of peace', making armed conflict and inter-group cooperation two ends of a spectrum of coping strategies.

To better understand this spectrum of cooperation and conflict, we adapt Amartya Sen's (1990) cooperative conflict approach, and his ideas of well-being, perceived interests, and contributions, developed to explore intra-household bargaining, to the wider community scale. The basic premise of this framing is that two parties with differing interests will use both cooperation and conflict as tools in the process of negotiation to ensure that both sides do not end up worse off. Pastoralist coping strategies have included diversifying their herds, herd-splitting, forming economic alliances with non-pastoral communities, and engaging with farming and trade (Wasonga 2009). The role of culture and social dynamics in understanding these pastoral responses has been emphasized (Benjaminsen and Ba 2009; Catley, Lind, and Scoones 2016; de Bruijn et al. 2016), yet what is missing is an acknowledgement of the role of intersectional gender identities (see also Detraz, Aslam, and Urzola and Gonzales, this volume) in mediating coping strategies, and equally the spectrum of interactions ranging from full cooperation to armed violence, often simultaneous between members of the same or different groups.

While pastoralist women's economic and social contributions are recognized (Lesorogol 2008; Furusa and Furusa 2014; Omolo 2011; Balehey et al. 2018), when it comes to violence and conflict within these communities, the focus is entirely on the actions and strategies of men (Mkutu 2007; Thébaud and Batterbury 2001; Tolossa and Baudouin 2004). Yet, gendered

practices and patriarchal relations, particularly the search for masculine pride in an increasingly conflictual world, or in defining the new wars (Duriesmith 2017), are key to understanding how recent conflicts have played out. Hierarchies are produced and maintained by linking hegemonic masculinity to the 'practices, discourses and institutions linked to hegemonic male power', while sidelining subordinate and marginalized masculinities as well as womanhood/femininities (Parpart and Zalewski 2008, 11). Women can only enter the inner circle if they do not challenge such masculinist power; hence they are largely portrayed as victims by both researchers and policymakers.

Such a 'gender-blind' approach (Furusa and Furusa 2014; Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008; Omolo 2011; Singh et al. 2021), while not intentionally discriminatory, leads to the erasure of women and women-specific issues from mainstream discourse, and consequently, from the political peace-making processes. It also reinforces the stereotypes of pastoralist communities as homogeneously patriarchal and stagnant, in line with the state's attitude towards pastoralists as unwilling to integrate into wider society and participate in development processes (Keane et al. 2016). Pastoralist communities in Kenya are far from homogenous (Keane et al. 2016); rather, power hierarchies, including the divisions of labour and responsibilities, are shaped by the intersections of gender (ibid.), age (Okumu et al. 2017), financial status (Lesorogol 2008), and number and size of cattle (Berhanu and Beyene 2015). 'Sex, gender, masculinity and femininity are implicated in one another' (Parpart and Zalewski 2008, 3) and continue to reproduce particular forms of material and structural violence. Understanding gendered power relations then becomes critical to an analysis of coping and adaptation strategies at the household and community levels. Power operates at multiple levels: enabling an individual to act on their own (*power to*) or as a group (*power with*) to enhance their well-being, but also in reactionary and violent ways (*power over*) (Rowlands 1997, 17).

The gendered division of labour within pastoralist communities in Kenya and elsewhere in East Africa serves as an important determinant for the way household decisions are negotiated (Massoi 2015; Omolo 2011; Owuor, Mauta, and Eriksen 2011). Men, especially older men, are seen as the main decision-makers in households and communities among these groups (ibid). However, it is a mistake to unquestionably assume that women do not have any agency when it comes to choosing new adaptive strategies (Rao 2019). As described by women during a focus group discussion in one of our field sites, children's education is a realm where women are in charge, with men providing money to ensure school enrolment and the payment of fees. Similarly, it is women who build bridges with traders and farmers to ensure their basic needs are met. Women's perception of well-being includes not just themselves as individual women, but their immediate families and children as well, giving them an important, if unacknowledged, say in household decisions. Women's roles at the community level, however, largely remain invisible.

In the absence of any systematic overview of the various ways in which members of pastoralist communities interact with each other, with settled groups in the locality, and with outsiders, especially in circumstances of insecurity and vulnerability (environmental, economic, and political), we provide a simple matrix to enable analysis of the conflict-cooperation spectrum in intra- and inter-community relations, combining concepts of intersectionality, bargaining, and multi-levelled power dynamics as useful tools for informing further research and peace-making efforts. We explore the domain in which the interaction takes place (within the community, between groups, or in a shared territory such as a conservancy) and the mode of interaction, from cooperation to violent conflict. The acknowledgement of this spectrum

of interactions, both short-term coping and longer-term adaptations, raises a question around the key factors contributing to human security, a concept that 'reflects the aggregate gains as a result of the mitigation of each and every factor that contributes to insecurity' (UNDP 2006, 5), with insecurity encapsulating economic, social, food, health, educational, and other dimensions. Here, violent conflict may be a response to a (perceived or real) insecurity, but equally a source of insecurity (Opiyo et al. 2015). Given the centrality of gender in defining the perceptions of individual and group well-being and the choice of short-term coping and longer-term adaptation strategies, and the way in which this intersects with intra- and inter-group power relations, we include the experiences and perspectives of differently positioned men and women in our analysis. While focusing on the meso, community level, we attempt an integrated analysis of various types of interactions, rather than seeing them as independent episodes.

INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

In this chapter, we seek to understand the role of gender in negotiating everyday relations of mutuality, cooperation and violence, to safeguard livelihoods within and between conflicting groups, in a context of pasture and water scarcity. To do so, we critically examine the binaries of masculinity/femininity, protector/protected, and agent/victim to shed light on the agency of both women and men in adapting to change. Relationships of mutual interdependence, as well as violent conflict, are shaped by ideologies of gender and the ways in which they intersect with age, land access, and livestock ownership in particular. Our insights here are drawn primarily from in-depth interviews, life histories, and focus group discussions with both men and women of different generations among the Borana, Samburu, and Turkana pastoralists, and Meru agro-pastoralist communities of Isiolo, Samburu, and Meru counties in semi-arid Northern Kenya. We focused on three rural settlements – one Meru, one Borana, and one mixed ethnicity – two peri-urban settlements, and three conservancies. The data were collected as part of a larger, multi-country research programme Adapting at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions (ASSAR), which sought to provide new insights into the barriers and enablers to sustainable and effective adaptation in climate hotspots. Specific research questions were derived from the contextual realities of each site.

Regardless of their age, social group, or geographical settlement, both men and women testified that life was easier earlier. They spoke of growing conflict over access to water and land for household consumption, livestock grazing, and farming. As an older Borana woman in one of the rural settlements noted, "*Conflict is about grazing and water access for livestock. The main tribes involved include Turkana, Samburu and Borana. In one of the conflicts, a few people and some goats and cows were killed, and houses burned*". Older men in a peri-urban area additionally noted the prevalence of low-intensity conflict even within the community during periods of water shortage. *"Sometimes during the dry season the borehole output drops and the pump delivers less water, leading to people fighting at the water taps and at livestock watering troughs."* As a result of both sporadic violence and local tensions, many households now aspire to provide better education to their children to ensure future employment outside farming and pastoralism, alongside migrating to cities and starting businesses (be it a kiosk or a pharmacy) to help their households achieve better standards of living or even just food security. Yet realizing these aspirations has not been easy, as these are shaped

by household characteristics, including wealth and social support, and involve negotiations at the community level.

Understanding Cooperation at Community Level

As political, social, and environmental conditions and issues of security become more critical in arid and semi-arid areas, members of agro-pastoralist communities such as the Merus expressed feelings of being neglected by the government and NGOs. While a young woman in a rural settlement (G) in Meru County noted not having received any external support, a man in the same community said:

> Whenever the NGOS are donating, they discriminate against us saying that we are from another place and have just come to get free things. There is no state relief programme that my household has accessed for over five years, even though we too are facing the same drought. It has been done for our neighbours, the Boranas (pastoralists) from Isiolo county.

Whether these grievances are real or perceived, the Meru people do feel that all social protection is directed at the mobile pastoralists, while agro-pastoralists like themselves are left to manage on their own, despite confronting the same climatic hazards. Men, largely engaged with livestock raising and the cultivation of *miraa*, an intoxicant, find themselves unable to perform their provider roles. It is women here who have mobilized themselves to work together, organizing self-help groups and merry-go-rounds (Ifejika et al. 2008; Omolo 2011). In fact, in the Meru settlement we studied, we found over 200 self-help groups of women meeting regularly each week on Thursday afternoons in the school compound, to discuss their activities, take loans, make repayments, and plan for the future. Interestingly, Meru women were also willing to include Borana pastoralist women in their groups, an effort perhaps to maintain a degree of inter-group cooperation. An older Borana man living in an adjacent mixed-ethnicity settlement (K) said:

> I opened a kiosk for my wife. She was involved in a women's social group for savings. She borrowed loans from the group and later paid back with interest. Before I opened the kiosk for her, she was not able to keep up with the group, but now that the kiosk has stabilised, she is able to save a lot. We together plan on how to use the money, managing both the interest payments and the business profits.

Participants' statements regarding the impact of such groups (i.e., women using the money they get through the groups to boost their business, as in the quote above, or to pay their children's school fees) correspond with Sen's theory of perceived well-being and the division of household responsibilities. However, the merry-go-rounds and savings groups should not be seen as a panacea against vulnerability due to several reasons. Religion for some Muslim pastoralists, or the lack of capital and assets for others, are potential barriers to participation. It is relatively well-off women who can both participate in communal income-generating schemes and afford education for themselves and their children. In some cases, previously active groups had been dismantled, as business and petty trade were slowing down. In the mixed-ethnicity settlement (K), low-intensity persistent conflict had induced the migration of many households and a consequent decline in market activities. Decreases in income from herding and farming also resulted in the lack of disposable income. One of the women in this settlement said:

> I was in a women's group where I was saving 100 ksh per day. We disbanded the group last year in March, as a lot of people left the village due to the conflict. The miraa business was doing badly and we didn't have enough money to save.

Apart from cooperation between women, focus-group discussions also provided examples of cooperation between women and men of the same group in the process of livelihood diversification, particularly in accessing markets. Amongst the agropastoralist Merus, apart from food production for their homes, women are now also engaging in commercial farming of vegetables in their homestead *shambas* (fields) with the aim of earning some extra money, in a context where male contributions are declining. Constrained by time due to the expansion in their domestic roles, be it for water collection or farming, as well as issues of security linked to the destabilization of 'patriarchal constructions of masculinity' (Duriesmith 2017, 2), women have been actively seeking the support of their men for marketing their produce. While women do instruct them on prices, the performance of this public role ensures that patriarchal gender relations are not publicly challenged (Berhanu and Beyene 2015). Such 'cooperation' could also be seen as a 'patriarchal bargain' (Kandiyoti 1988), wherein women cooperate with patriarchy in exchange for some gains, in this case, peace and security.

Employing casual labourers can be seen as another form of solidarity with those women who do not have the financial means or family networks to support themselves and their children. Amongst the Merus in the mixed ethnicity settlement, a relatively better-off couple were the main support for F, a woman with several young children, but no stable partner. F engaged in a range of casual jobs, from collecting and selling firewood to domestic service, to survive. She knew, however, that in the absence of a man, she was an easy target for violent attackers; hence, she needed the support and 'protection' of a respected, older couple. The issue of intra-group solidarity, structured along gender and class lines, however, calls for further research.

Perhaps the main factor responsible for the rising tensions and mistrust within communities, whether pastoral or agro-pastoral, is rooted in the power structures and hierarchies of decision-making. Communal decisions on issues of grazing, land control, water access, or peacebuilding are made by the council of elder men (and sometimes elder women). Thus, the specific needs of certain groups (i.e., younger women or younger men) may be ignored and have a negative impact on their lifestyle and well-being. During a focus group discussion in a large Borana pastoral settlement, younger women informed us that the local water management committee always gave men priority access to nearby sources of water, even if a woman got to the water first. Especially during the dry season, this inequality in access to services led to tensions both within and between households, as women had to spend more time trying to find water and grass for their small livestock (cf. Nunbogu and Elliot Chapter 33, this volume). The spill-over effect of such decisions is linked to the decreased amount of time women can spend on their independent income-generating activities. This example demonstrates the effect of male hegemonic 'power over' exercised by the community elders to control the agency of pastoralist women. In retaliation, however, we find an increase in solidarity-building activities amongst the women.

The authority that older men have in defining resource relationships with neighbouring communities can itself be a source of intra-group dissatisfaction (Kassahun, Snyman, and Smit 2008; Okumu et al. 2017), especially for younger men, as visible in the re-escalation of conflict between the Merus and Boranas. Younger men of the Meru community complained about the elders who allowed Borana herders to use their lands for grazing. They accused

them of having vested interests, despite assurances by the elders that this was an effort to build peace with their Borana neighbours and reduce conflict. Left jobless or employed as herders on low wages, unable to raise sufficient money to pay the bride-price and marry, many joined gangs of raiders, using masculine logics of violence and domination to establish their identities (Duriesmith 2017).

Mediating Inter-group Relationships in a Context of Conflict

Cooperation appears difficult in a context of armed conflict between pastoralists and sedentary farmers (Butler and Gates 2012; de Bruijn et al. 2016), belonging to different ethnicities. Yet relationships and interactions on the ground are complex. First, there are often no clear borders between territories occupied by people from different ethnic groups. Indeed, in the case of the mixed settlement, at least 10 non-Borana women married to Borana men lived there. The existence of inter-group marriages shows that the farmer-pastoralist conflict is not the only, and perhaps not even the primary mode of interaction between these two groups. Secondly, both pastoralists and farmers living in the same area rely on the same markets, services, roads, and water supplies; therefore, peaceful relationships would ensure the stability of local trade and service provision. As noted in the previous section, petty trade and small businesses play an important role in ensuring the well-being of both pastoralists and agro-pastoralists (especially women) and are instrumental in fostering cooperation within the household and at the community level.

The conflict between the Merus and Boranas escalated in 2015. When asked about the consequences of the conflict, men in the mixed settlement mentioned security issues and the loss of cattle. Women's stories, less heard, placed significant emphasis on the effect the conflict had on their businesses. Large-scale migration followed the outbreak of violent conflict; many Merus and Boranas moved out of the settlement. Women who relied on their shops as a source of income and a space for expressing their agency were badly affected. According to one middle-aged woman, "*business was poor during the conflict, the Boranas left for Kulamawe, the Merians to Meru, only 25–30 households remained. Others all migrated.*" The access to water, which had been previously mostly sold by Merians, also declined, although not fully. According to one Borana woman:

> Even during the conflict, they [Meru] still bring the water because there are still Merians here and they still need it too. The Merians didn't refuse to sell water to us as we live with them, but we started buying from the Borana from a neighbouring village. They didn't refuse to sell, but we decided not to buy from the Merus because we thought if we are not on good terms they may poison the water.

While the example above provides a case of inter-group communication and the continuation of trade, and specifically, its gendered aspects, fieldwork also provided opposite examples. During the conflict escalation between Borana and Meru in 2015, Merian women organized and raided the cattle belonging to Borana men. The latter retaliated by attacking, beating, and raping these women. The women could not tell their men what happened because of the fear of being blamed for provoking the Boranas and intensifying the conflict. Merian women here are deeply involved with farming as well as the sustenance of small cattle. Apart from their homestead *shambas*, they have been clearing common pastureland for extending their farming activities. The Boranas had been objecting to such cultivation and claimed the land as

reserved for grazing. Yet the women were not willing to give up, as they saw this extension of farming as the only way of fulfilling their household duties, given the declining opportunities for independence through petty trade or participation in merry-go-rounds. The resultant violence, however, adversely affected women's long-term well-being outcomes, which included paying fees for their children's education. We found many young boys and girls at home, unable to pay secondary school fees. Here, rather than bargaining with patriarchy, women came together to take aggressive action against another ethnic group of pastoralists, who appeared to be threatening their very survival, alongside well-being aspirations. Differences in social positions and the gendered division of labour and responsibility do create differences in acceptable coping strategies, what Kaldor (2013) sees as the changing social relations of the new wars. Yet, despite this collective 'power with,' their subordinate social status created a situation of double insecurity – from the Boranas and their own men.

Together, these two cases highlight the interconnections between violent conflict and cooperation. While violence is a recurrent element in the relations between pastoral, agro-pastoral, and settled groups, it is not the only way in which the members of the different groups engage with each other. Their interactions range from inter-group marriages to trade, to tensions over grazing. Another important aspect is that intra- and inter-group dimensions are tightly interconnected, especially in how they are mediated by gender. Divisions of labour and the difference in social status (age, level of education, ethnicity) between men and women, their different levels of power and access to resources, shape their relative perceptions of well-being as well as their coping strategies. Instances like this demonstrate the complex nature of inter-group relationships and call for more detailed and holistic approaches to the analysis of the spectrum of interactions ranging from cooperation to armed violent conflict.

THE CASE OF CONSERVANCIES: THE LEGITIMACY OF CLAIMS

An ambitious policy to foster cooperation between communities and their environment is that of conservancies, wherein several local communities are involved in the management and protection of a clearly demarcated area. The main aim is to bring local communities to conjointly conserve wildlife and the rangeland environment with the government, and as a result benefit from it. The harmonious coexistence of wildlife and communities is expected to lead to the enhanced sustainability of the resource base for both livestock and wildlife, security for wildlife that supports tourism, and in turn enables communities to earn incomes, secure their livelihoods, and invest in education. Additionally, the establishment of conservancies was expected to put a stop to ethnic confrontations over grazing lands, water, and pastures. Indeed, we do find evidence of this.

In late 2016, a bus headed to Merti from Isiolo town through Kalama conservancy in Samburu county got stuck in the dry riverbed inside the conservancy due to excess sand deposits. This happened late in the afternoon. The passengers on the bus were mainly Borana, afraid now of a violent attack due to a history of attacks and counter attacks vis-a-vis the Samburu. Conservancy rangers quickly learned of the stranded bus due to their frequent patrols. They reported it to the Samburu elders and conservancy leadership, who agreed to provide safe passage to the Boranas. Knowing their insecurity, and the unpredictability of an attack, they provided them with security at night. At dawn, they helped them pull the bus out of the sand and escorted them out of their territory. Two months after this incident, the

Borana, in a gesture of appreciation to the Samburu, brought two bulls that were slaughtered in a celebration, seeking to bring the two communities together. Since that day, many vehicles have used the Kalama route as it is shorter but also now considered safe.

Yet this is not always the case. In fact, one of the main reasons for conflict within the conservancy is the lack of trust between the members of different groups. In Naasulu conservancy, there was a complaint that some members of the conservancy were not patriotic in the management of resources and often invited their non-member friends and relatives to access the pastures and water without following due diligence through the conservancy office. This simmering dissatisfaction came to the fore in March 2018, when Turkanas, perhaps the poorest amongst the pastoralist groups in the locality, fought with the relatively wealthy Somalis over access to pastures.

While the model of decision-making adopted in conservancies gives more decision-making power to younger people and women compared to the traditional group of elders, all men, however, the reality is often different. In particular, the lack of women's participation in the decision-making process has led to the unintended rise in women's work burdens. Before the setting up of the conservancy, women could collect firewood from the neighbouring areas, but this is now prohibited. In such a situation, women face a hard choice: either risk being caught and paying a fine or go farther from the village in search of firewood. In addition, women living in the conservancies noted difficulties related to farming. In a focus group discussion in Leparua conservancy, they recounted that much of their maize crop is destroyed by baboons and birds, unless they stay on watch to chase them away. After the establishment of the conservancy, considered 'wildlife,' these cannot be shot or killed. A local market, catering to their everyday needs, has now been removed from within the boundary of the conservancy, increasing the cost and time of travel several-fold. What one finds here is the lack of attention to gendered roles and responsibilities in delineating the functions and activities permitted within the conservancy, creating opportunities for conflict.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

By discussing the range of interactions present at the intra- and inter-group levels, we have in this chapter demonstrated that armed violence does not exist separately from other forms of interpersonal and inter-group communication, and equally that gender relations are central to understanding the changing social dynamics of conflict, especially in contexts of climate change. Our conceptual framework enabled us to explore complex and interconnected sets of responses and strategies, differentiated by gendered roles, responsibilities, and well-being aspirations, on the spectrum from cooperation to conflict. Difficult situations emanating from climate stressors provide opportunities for collaboration and cooperation among communities living in precarious environments, competing for scarce resources. These need to be harnessed to enable sustainable adaptation.

The focus on gender, and the concepts of power and well-being, and the way they inform pastoralists' responses to adverse conditions, helped highlight the agency of pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women in contexts of vulnerability. While women often bear the biggest burden of both climate change and conflict, they are also agents of cooperation and peace among communities. We believe that such analysis has important policy implications for conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in East Africa and beyond. National governments and

international NGOs often employ a colonial stereotype of pastoralism as incompatible with official development efforts (Berhanu and Beyene 2015; Hodgson 2000; Catley et al. 2013), and of women as 'victims' in situations of ethnic conflict. What we have shown, however, is that women too are agents, at times initiating conflict in their desperation to fulfil their aspirations and perform their household roles, and at other times, mediating communication and providing support to other women, of their own group and beyond. Peacebuilding efforts could therefore benefit from locally initiated processes that are known to work and take account of gender-differentiated relationships and identities in the local context.

Alongside women's agency, we have also pointed to the gendered logics behind the use of violence, including rape, as emerging from patriarchal social relations and their constructions of masculinity, existing prior to the emergence of conflict. With persistent droughts and the loss of cattle, younger men, in particular, are unable to fulfil their social roles, often failing to even raise the bride-price for marriage. This inability, alongside other triggers, including the easy availability of small arms, local intoxicants such as *miraa*, and the lack of access to credit or capital, has legitimized violent action as a coping strategy. They resent microfinance and other development interventions targeted exclusively to women. Without understanding the social constructions of masculinity and femininity, and the ways in which they are being destabilized in a context of climate change, lasting peace will be hard to achieve.

While we focused only on community-level interactions, further research on micro-level intrahousehold relationships and macro-level state-society interactions would be a next step towards building an understanding of the continuum of violence and cooperation in arid and semi-arid areas of East Africa. Such a research agenda could include detailed analysis of how climate dynamics are shifting gender relations and roles amongst warring communities in arid and semi-arid East Africa, how conservancies are altering relationships between communities, men, women, and youth, and their role in promoting peace or conflict, the role of livelihood diversification in curbing conflicts and enhancing cooperation amongst resource-sharing communities, to name a few. This is because gendered practices and norms within social institutions across scales, from the household to the state shape, and are shaped by, each other. Unless addressed, it will be hard to ensure lasting human security.

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