

The Impact of Resource Utilization Practices on Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Nakuru County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Globally, conflicts arising from resource use are increasingly becoming common. This generated inter-ethnic violence that has caused death, strained relations among communities, led to loss of property, displacements, slowed economic growth, and increased sex-related crimes. Despite the government, local communities, and NGOs, among other institutions, putting effort into minimizing conflicts, they have yet to find a lasting solution. The overarching objective of the study was to evaluate the effects of resource-use practices on inter-ethnic conflicts in Nakuru County, Kenya. The study was conducted in Nakuru County and targeted household heads, government officials, civil society organizations, and community members. There were 246 respondents, taken as the sample size for the study. The study found that the major effects of conflicts were loss of life, displacement, loss of property, ethnic differences, and low income. The study concludes that the effects of resource-use practices on interethnic conflicts include loss of life, population displacement, discrimination, loss of property, and loss of market for goods, all of which have a significant impact on the economic status of the affected community. The research suggests that the consequences of resource-use practices on inter-ethnic disputes in the study area should be improved both at the national and county levels. This would make it possible for the people living in the area to advance economically.

Keywords: Economic Impact, Inter-Ethnic Conflicts, Nakuru County, Resource-Use Practices

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic conflict has become a major source of violence in the world today (Hagi, 2023). Although political, social, economic, or religious factors may be the cause of conflict, people living in conflict may actively battle for the role of their ethnic group within society; this differentiates ethnic conflict from other types of conflict. Henderson (2010) defines ethnic conflict as a contest between two or more ethnic groups that results in violence. According to Musya (2023), it refers to disputes between contending groups who identify themselves primarily on the basis of ethnic criteria and who make group claims to resources on the basis of their collective rights.

It is expected that people living in particular areas should have equal access to resources. However, the resources are unequally distributed, with some people having more than others (Ronay et al., 2018). Usually, this leads to competition, conflict, and tension over resources, leading to inter-ethnic conflicts.

Nakuru County has continuously experienced recurrent violence. The political class's manipulation of ethnic differences is what leads to the violence (Wairuri et al., 2020). For instance, during the election period, politicians incite indigenous communities against the migrants, blaming them for the inequitable distribution of natural resources, especially land and water. These conflicts have led to a change in the social-economic growth of the people, leading to a rise in the poverty prevalence rate, making more communities vulnerable to violent conflict and manipulation by the political class.

Initiatives by various leaders and organizations have not yielded much fruit in the area for years, hence the need to find new ways of handling the problem. That is why this study endeavoured to investigate the effects of resource-use practices on inter-ethnic conflicts in Nakuru County, Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in the theory of the incompatibility of a plural society (Barth & Furnivall, 1997).

Incompatibility of plural societies theory asserts that in an ethnically plural society, inter-ethnic conflicts are necessitated by the exclusive allegiance to the interests of one's ethnic nationality and cannot be eradicated (Ryan, 1988). Furnivall and Smith (1997) postulate that ethnic nationalism develops as opposed to civic nationalism or common loyalty because ethnicity takes center stage in all aspects of social, cultural, economic, and political spheres of life in one ethnic group in direct competition against another ethnic community.

The theory of incompatibility of plural societies can provide insights into the dynamics of inter-ethnic conflicts related to resource use. The theory argues that differences in ethnicity are only an excuse to start inter-ethnic conflicts, and diverse communities will always coexist peacefully if economic greed is eliminated through rational and equitable distribution of available economic resources and the political avenue to access the same (Kaufman, 2006). According to Kaufman (2006), scarcity or relative scarcity of resources triggers violence both at the individual and collective level, although it has now become possible to have conflicts provoked by resource appropriation in situations of abundance.

Groups engaging in armed confrontation are often not solely motivated by grievances such as ethnic prejudice, injustice, or historical resentment but ultimately by illegitimate and greedy economic agendas and thus greed (Ryan, 1988). Issues of identity and self-determination are ignored in favour of concentrating on the position that resources, on their own, play as the key goals of warring parties. As a result, resource conflicts can become intertwined with identity, making them more intractable (Ryan, 1988). These grievances can create a backdrop of mistrust and animosity among ethnic groups.

2.2 Empirical Review

According to Klinke et al. (2018), ethnic conflict does not necessarily have to be violent. An ethnic dispute can be a common characteristic of plural societies, as the multiethnic culture ensures freedom of speech. For instance, ethnic conflict can be a peaceful fight for ethnically divided resources. The topic of conflict should, however, be connected to either an ethnic group directly or symbolically. These disputes are typically institutionalized in stable multi-ethnic societies and channeled by legislative and bureaucratic meetings and protests or through non-violent strikes. Ethnic conflicts that are institutionalized mean that ethnic groups can peacefully express their demands, whereas democratic nations can't always help prevent ethnic conflicts from breaking up into violence. This decreases the possibility of violence.

Nepram (2017) posits that many Eastern and South-East Asian countries have shared frontiers, leading inevitably to the sharing of resources, such as water. This can result in disputes and tension when these resources are shared. Some of them are due to overexploitation, for example, of water and inland fisheries, the construction of walls and dams, and contamination caused by agriculture. Additional cross-border challenges emerge from air emissions from forest fires, fossil fuel burning, and deforestation sandstorms.

The sharing of marine resources in the region poses similar problems. The boundaries of the seas are, in many cases, intersecting in all the countries in the area of East and Southeast Asia except for Laos and Mongolia, in particular with the declared economic zones of the individual countries (Odgaard, 2017). Disputes occur in such cases when resources are shared. In some countries, restrictions over sea territories, including islands, reefs, and coral cays, have also been disputed (Spalding et al., 2017).

According to Malaquias (2018), some of Africa's worst battles are not unintentionally fought in nations with abundant natural riches. Many disputes have arisen both directly and indirectly over the ownership and exploitation of natural resources, despite the fact that the ferocity and scope of the conflicts in some African nations are not comparable to similar occurrences in East and Southeast Asia (Nepram, 2017). Natural resource riches in some regions of nations, especially big nations with sometimes inadequate administrative systems in the provinces, may contribute to or perhaps be a key factor in demands for secession and disintegration in some nations. Internal and external military conflicts, terrorism, and the deterioration of their economic structures can all pose threats to a country's security, making it more susceptible to attack.

According to Omeje (2017), the rapacious exploitation of the region's economic resources, particularly in Kenya and Uganda, is what causes conflicts in East Africa. Herders and farmers frequently engage in violent interethnic violence. Cattle rustling is becoming increasingly common and violent, often turning into armed conflicts (Simiyu et al., 2008). The raiders are criminals looking to make a quick buck by pretending to carry out a traditional kind of livestock raiding (Omeje, 2017). These livestock raids occur both locally and further afield, sometimes even crossing international borders.

According to Mumford (2018), inter-ethnic belligerence in Kenya is a product of skewed allocation of economic resources, political underrepresentation, religious ganging, and failed governance, respectively, as causes of



such conflicts. The country's highly ethnocentric population is what fuels these inter-ethnic conflicts.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research design used in the study was a descriptive survey. The study was conducted in Kuresoi sub-counties in Nakuru County, with a population of 239,485. The Krejcie and Morgan tables were used to determine the sample size of 368. The study utilized questionnaires, interview schedules, observation, focus group discussions (FGDs), and secondary sources of data to gather data on the interaction between resource use practices and inter-ethnic conflicts. Quantitative data was evaluated using measures of central tendency, frequency counts, and percentages, while qualitative data was categorized into themes and presented in tables, charts, and graphs. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data through narratives and verbatim quotations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Effects of Resource-Use Conflicts

As shown in Table 1, the study sought to establish the effects of resource-use conflicts in Nakuru County.

Table 1
Effects of Resource-Use Conflicts

Effects of Resource-Use Conflicts	Frequency	Percentage
Loss of life	49	20%
Idps	48	20%
Loss of property	47	19%
Ethnic differences	44	18%
Low income	38	15%
Orphans	19	7%
Total	246	100%

Approximately one-fifth (20%) of the household heads in the study area identified loss of life as a significant consequence of resource-use conflicts. Moreover, 15% of the survey participants reported experiencing reduced household income. The research findings also revealed that 20% of the household heads had been displaced internally due to inter-ethnic conflicts related to resource use. Ethnic disparities were found to influence resource-based conflicts, with 20% of the respondents acknowledging this influence. Additionally, the study indicated that 19% of the respondents believed that loss of property was a major contributing factor to these conflicts. Lastly, 7% of the participants identified orphans as a significant outcome of resource-use conflicts. These findings align with the research by Lafta and colleagues (2015), underscoring that conflict is a development concern with repercussions extending beyond casualties, encompassing aspects like long-term displacement and property damage.

4.2 Effect on Infrastructure

The study sought to establish the effects of resource-use practices on infrastructure development. The results are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2
Effect on Infrastructure

Statistics	Not Destructive	Least Destructive	Moderate Destructive	Destructive	Very Destructive	Percentage
Health centers	0	0	1	119	126	0%
Schools	0	0	1	119	126	0%
Markets	0	0	1	119	126	0%
Roads	0	0	1	120	126	49%
Others	0	0	1	119	126	51%
Total				246		100%

Based on the research findings, it is evident that a significant majority of households indicated that resource-use practices have had a detrimental impact on infrastructure development. Specifically, the data in Table 2 reveals that these practices were predominantly characterized as either "destructive" or "very destructive" to infrastructure development.

Furthermore, one of the opinion leaders and key informants was of the view that:

The ability of the county government and constituency development fund to provide infrastructural facilities has been affected by resource-use conflicts. When you look around, you can see the destruction of markets, roads, clinics, and schools. They are in bad shape. They need improvement (Key Informant 1).

This finding aligns with the findings by Sánchez-Romero and Hakuba (2017), who argue that the effects of resource-use practices on infrastructure are always huge and stifle development. Yet, infrastructure is vital to economic growth because it facilitates the provision of important services such as health, education, and trade. It also promotes regional and international networks (Borgias & Bauer, 2018).

Another key informant pointed out that:

Learning institutions were closed as a result of resource-use inter-ethnic conflicts. The resource-use conflicts were very destructive as they disrupted education. Children, teachers, and doctors were all at risk of being threatened by parties involved in resource-use disputes (Key Informant 2).

These findings are supported by Bristow *et al.* (2019), who argue that resource-use inter-ethnic conflicts around the world are keeping tens of millions of young people from going to school. Many have physical or emotional injuries that make it hard or even impossible for them to learn. Resource-use conflicts also expose boys and girls to sexual violence (Bristow *et al.* 2019).

The findings of this research demonstrate that resource-use conflicts also have an impact on the growth of markets in the region. One of the respondents said:

Conflicts over the usage of resources had a significant negative impact on the local economy as well as the people's ability to make a living. The conflicts had a detrimental effect on the agricultural value chain and other activities that generate revenue, which in turn affected livelihoods and increased poverty levels due to a lack of markets for agricultural goods and cattle. This was because of the restrictions placed on travel, which prevented merchants from going to the market to sell their wares (Key informant 3).

These results show that the respondents believe that the consequences of resource-use conflicts on market growth are detrimental in the research region. These findings were supported by Dickson *et al.* (2021), who argue that resource-use inter-ethnic conflicts around the world are keeping tens of millions of people in poverty.

4.3 Effects on Inter-ethnic Relation

The study sought to establish the effects of resource-use practices on inter-ethnic relation in Nakuru County, Kenya. The results are shown in Figure 1.

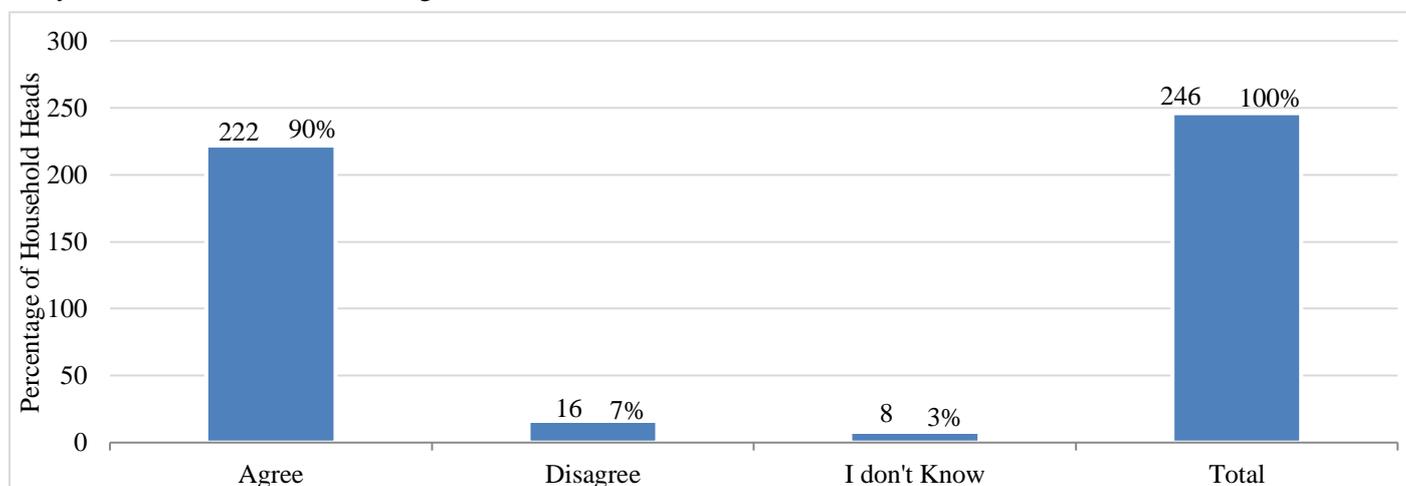


Figure 1
Effects on Inter-Ethnic Relation in Nakuru County, Kenya

Figure 1 shows that most of the people who answered (222 people or 90% of the total respondents) agreed with the idea that resource-use practices that lead to inter-ethnic conflicts are bad for relations between ethnic groups in the study area. The persisting lack of trust between these communities has had adverse consequences for the relationships between different ethnic groups, leading to a reduced likelihood of intermarriage among them. This outcome is in line with the perspective of Rodríguez-García (2015), who argues that ethnic tensions have been a persistent issue in various regions, which, instead of diminishing the probability of ethnic conflicts, has actually reduced the likelihood of intermarriage. This is largely attributed to the fear held by parents and community elders regarding the opinions of the other ethnic group involved in intermarriage, as they believe that such unions may contribute to resource-use inter-ethnic violence. Consequently, people opt to marry within their own social group to avoid potential resource-use conflicts and other forms of violence.

4.4 Effects on Social Inequality

The study sought to establish the effects of resource-use practices on social inequality in Nakuru County, Kenya. The respondents were asked if they agree, disagree or they don't know effects on social inequality. The results were as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3
Effects on Social Inequality

Statistics	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	170	70%
Disagree	35	14%
I don't Know	40	16%
Total	246	100%

The data presented in Table 3 reveals that a substantial portion of the respondents, specifically 170 individuals, which constitutes 70% of the total respondents, concurred with the idea that resource-use practices have an impact on social inequality. In contrast, a smaller proportion of 35 respondents (14%) disagreed with this notion, while 40 respondents (16%) expressed uncertainty on the matter. The majority of respondents clearly indicated that resource-use practices contribute to social inequalities in the study area. This observation is consistent with the findings of Hamza et al. (2023), who argue that inadequate resource management practices are a driving factor behind economic inequality. Interestingly, addressing such inequalities may potentially lead to a reduction in resource-use conflicts in the future.

4.5 Extent to which Resource-use Practices Influence Inter-Ethnic Conflicts

The study sought to establish the extent to which resource-use practices influence inter-ethnic conflicts. The results are shown in in Table 4.

Table 4
The Extent to which Resource-use Practices Influence Inter-Ethnic Conflicts

Statistics	Frequency	Percentage
Very Large Extent	160	65%
Large Extent	84	35%
Very Small Extent	1	0%
Small Extent	0	0%
I don't Know	1	0%
Total	246	100%

The data found that out of 246 respondents, 160 (65%) indicated that resource-use patterns had a very substantial influence on inter-ethnic disputes, while 84 (35%) According to the findings, respondents stated that resource-use conflicts occurred at many levels and involved a variety of players in the research area. They noted that most resource-use disputes are characterized by the existence of many stakeholders, each of whom may have subgroups with varied interests, resulting in inter-ethnic conflict in the region. Respondents specifically stated that

resource-use practices over resources such as huge forests promote inter-ethnic disputes due to the government's lack of adequate management.

Furthermore, it is stated that conflicts over resource use develop as a result of diverse legal orders that are not harmonized and structured, particularly when policies, programs, and projects do not address local realities. For example, without local engagement, the implementation of new policies and initiatives may wind up supplanting, undermining, or destroying community institutions that oversee resource use and practices. As a result, elites prey on the poor, who lack access to law enforcement and jurisdiction. These findings are consistent with those of Tietenberg and Lewis (2016), who claim that contradictions between local and institutionalized management systems result in a few elites exploiting resources to the disadvantage of society. This increases the likelihood of interethnic disputes arising from resource-use behaviors.

4.6 Measures used to Mitigate Effects of Resource-use Practices on Inter-ethnic Conflicts

The study sought to establish the mitigation measures for inter-ethnic conflicts arising from resource-use practices. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Measures used to Mitigate Effects of Resource-use Practices on Inter-ethnic Conflicts

Measures to Mitigate Inter-ethnic Conflicts	Frequency	Percentage
Intervention by government	7	3%
Peace keeping programs	72	29%
Productive youth activities	76	31%
Engaging representatives of different ethnic groups	24	10%
Security by government	52	21%
Joint programs	15	6%
Total	246	100%

According to Table 5, 76 (31% of respondents) agreed on beneficial youth activities in the region as a mitigating approach. This is because youth unemployment is a key source of conflict. The findings were consistent with those of Teffo and Rupiya (2017), who found that preventing an increase in youth crime needs both efforts to alleviate poverty and raise young people's stake in society, such as employment promotion and financial transfers, as well as steps to improve social cohesion. The respondents also agreed on 51 (21%) government security and 7 (3%) government interventions as mitigation options. They observed that during inter-ethnic confrontations, the government and local officials played various roles. Out of 246 respondents, 24 (10%) said that engaging representatives from other ethnic groups was a good way to avoid problems in the region. This is consistent with Wilson's (2019) contention that marginalized groups exist practically everywhere. When one group is targeted or ignored, the entire society suffers.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

In conclusion, the study's findings highlight the enormous impact of resource-use patterns on numerous characteristics of the study area. The majority of respondents agreed that these activities harmed inter-ethnic relations and exacerbated socioeconomic disparities. Mistrust between communities not only impedes relations but also diminishes the possibility of interethnic marriage, adding to the continuance of ethnic hostilities. Furthermore, the data supports the view that inadequate resource management practices are linked to economic inequality, which may influence the occurrence of resource-use conflicts.

These findings highlight the multidimensional character of resource-use disputes and their far-reaching ramifications, which go beyond direct physical and environmental consequences. Effective resource management, recognizing community variety, and encouraging collaboration among different ethnic groups are critical steps in resolving these issues and promoting long-term prosperity.

5.2 Recommendations

Policymakers and stakeholders in the research region should prioritize addressing the core causes of resource-use conflicts, such as social inequality and inter-ethnic hostility. Furthermore, the findings emphasize the importance of comprehensive policies that take into account the different viewpoints and requirements of the communities concerned. It is possible to strive towards a more sustainable and happy coexistence in the region by recognizing the complex dynamics of resource-use conflicts and addressing them holistically.

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