

### Pastoralists, politics and development projects: understanding the layers of armed conflict in Isiolo County, Kenya

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# Pastoralists, politics and development projects

Understanding the layers of armed conflict in Isiolo County, Kenya

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Collaborative Research Center 228  
Future Rural Africa: Future-making and  
social-ecological transformation



## SUMMARY

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Pastoral counties of northern Kenya are expected to undergo massive change in the coming years due to the government's ambitious infrastructural development agenda. However, the area frequently experiences violence as a result of conflict between pastoralist communities, and also due to ethno-political contestations. Isiolo County is one such place where planned development projects and conflict risks coincide, making it an important case study for understanding how the future may unfold.

This *Working Paper* is written in the framework of a larger project called "Future Rural Africa: Future-making and social-ecological transformation" by the Universities of Bonn and Cologne and BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion). BICC is interested in the kinds of claims that are being made on land and its resources and how these may change the existing dynamics of organised violence. The *Paper* explores the complexity of existing conflict in Isiolo and the emerging effects of new plans and land claims. At its most basic level, conflict between pastoral groups, or between pastoralists and farmers is motivated both by survival (pastoral mobility and access to water and pasture in a climatically challenging area) and the accumulation of livestock wealth. Politics, which is generally extended along ethnic lines, adds another layer to the inter-communal conflict through the need for political survival and the accumulation of personal wealth. The devolution of many powers and budgets to county level since 2013 has then raised the stakes for political power. Since plans for infrastructure have been made known, tensions have emerged, and fears of exclusion and dispossession of customary land users through speculative land-grabbing and uncompensated state acquisition. With Isiolo being a hub of the illicit small arms trade, guns have become a conflict multiplier at every level.

The county is highly securitised with several specialised police units. However, they lack capacity and their actions have tended to be either inadequate or overly reactive and their relationship with communities is poor. As a result, day to day security of pastoralist communities and their livestock relies on the rather informal and unprofessional National Police Reserve, who are armed by the state, and community members, who purchase their own arms through illicit markets. Politicians on occasion have also supplied arms and ammunition to communities. The *Paper* concludes that the various layers of conflict should be considered and addressed simultaneously, and that development is a new and potent factor in conflict at both political and community levels. A careful, inclusive conflict-sensitive approach to development is essential, but this is unlikely to happen if leaders look for personal power and gain.

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## Main findings

### **Various layers of conflict may be observed in Isiolo County, from inter-communal resource-based conflict to political conflict and conflict over the benefits of new resources and development**

These are often expressed at the community level and have led to deadly clashes in the distant and recent past. The county has several contextual factors which contribute to conflict, including a history of mutual animosity between the inhabitants of the area and the state encapsulated in the Shifta War; a semi-arid climate which leads to pastoralist movements into the county from more arid areas; a diverse population comprising five main ethnic groups which have seen intense political competition; and most recently, the anticipation of large-scale investment and development projects which raise the stakes for power and control.

### **Small arms proliferation is a result of its free supply into Isiolo and the high demand for arms, as well as the creation of community armed militia by the state**

Isiolo pastoralists are well armed, and localised arms races usually result from their need to protect herds, particularly where state security structures are not functioning to protect people. National Police Reservists are one solution to this, but the force has a reputation for unprofessionalism, and their governance is flawed.

### **Community conservancies are a relatively recent development and are bringing about new concerns about resource conflict and security governance**

Increasingly, local community members are being recruited as National Police Reservists to guard them. And more communities are forming conservancies, partly to benefit from this. Thus, the function of conservancies has gone beyond the conventional model of wildlife protection. Sometimes, conservancies and their designated National Police Reservists contribute to resource-based intercommunal conflict.

### **Probably the most significant conflict risk is the struggle for political power and control over the benefits of development, along with the danger of displacement and exclusion of pastoralists by those same developments.**

Isiolo has communities whose economic, political and security needs are not met, and several indicators exist that this might lead to conflict in the future. Communities along the Isiolo-Meru border in particular, are already engaged in low-level but deadly inter-communal conflict. This is fuelled by a politicised inter-county boundary conflict, which in turn is exacerbated by the desire to control the benefits of the Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor and associated developments.



## Introduction

In July 2018, three people died in a violent confrontation between police and members of the ethnic Turkana community in Ngaremara ward near Isiolo town. The case vividly illustrates the complex multi-layered nature of armed violence in a county that represents the gateway to Kenya's northern region. According to an administrator, cattle which had allegedly been stolen some months previously from Samburu pastoralists were found in a Turkana area.<sup>1</sup> The national government together with some local community organisations had attempted a dialogue and peace initiatives, but ultimately the Turkana community refused to give up the cattle, which led to the deployment of regular police and General Service Unit (GSU) forces, with armoured vehicles to villages in the area. Women recalled running to hide in the bush with children, fearing the added threat of wild elephants<sup>2</sup>, while some community members used their guns to resist the operations.<sup>3</sup> According to media reports, three community members were killed, some were injured in the crossfire, and an estimated 3,000 people from three villages were temporarily displaced (Dibondo, 2018). At some point in the confrontation, an Administration Police (AP) officer within the local AP camp was also brutally attacked and killed by the Turkana community.<sup>4</sup> People suspected that the raid might have had less to do with recovering cattle, and more to do with displacing them to make way for development projects (Dibondo, 2018). Local politicians who encouraged the community members to hide the cattle further complicated the situation.<sup>5</sup>

This *Paper* examines the multiple layers of armed conflict in Isiolo county, as illustrated by the opening example, against the background of planned new investments in the area. Isiolo, in Kenya's geographical centre (see Map 1) is a county in which the various types of violence are showcased, while at the same time being a centre of planned development to be

traversed by one of Vision 2030's flagship projects, the Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor, which is intended to connect Kenya's coast with the country's northern interior and with neighbouring countries. The county is also regionally important as a transport hub, as several roads link it to Nairobi and South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia and is set to be the site for a future oil refinery. Isiolo is a member of the Frontier Counties Development Council (FCDC), whose members have collectively received nearly KSh 120 billion (US \$1.2 billion) worth of funding for various large-scale projects (Abdimalik, 2019). The confluence of planned development and conflict risks justifies showcasing Isiolo as a representative case-study for understanding how the future may unfold regarding claims that are being made on land and its resources and how these may change existing dynamics of organised violence.

The opening scenario illustrates the complex nature of armed conflict evident in Isiolo (see Figure 1). The range of actors involved is broad and includes both state security personnel and non-state militias, most of whom are armed, which intensifies conflict and its impacts. This study proposes to analyse multi-layered conflict in Isiolo. At its most basic level, conflict in Isiolo is often an inter-communal resource-based conflict between different ethnic pastoral groups or between pastoralists and farmers, driven by the need to survive and the motive to accumulate wealth. Livestock is wealth and carries status and cultural value. Compared to cattle, camels and goats have recently gained in currency in Isiolo, as they are more resistant to drought. Politics, which is generally extended along ethnic lines, is the next layer of the conflict typology and brings in factors such as group interests, for which the politician has promised to act, but also personal interests of politicians such as political survival and personal wealth. This leads to a range of actions (including violent manipulation of voting blocks and creation and arming of militias) which play into conflict dynamics at the lower levels.

1 \ Senior national government administrator, Isiolo town, 23 November 2018.

2 \ Interview, elderly Turkana woman, Ngaremara. 18 August 2018.

3 \ Phone interview, conservancy staff, 23 November 2018.

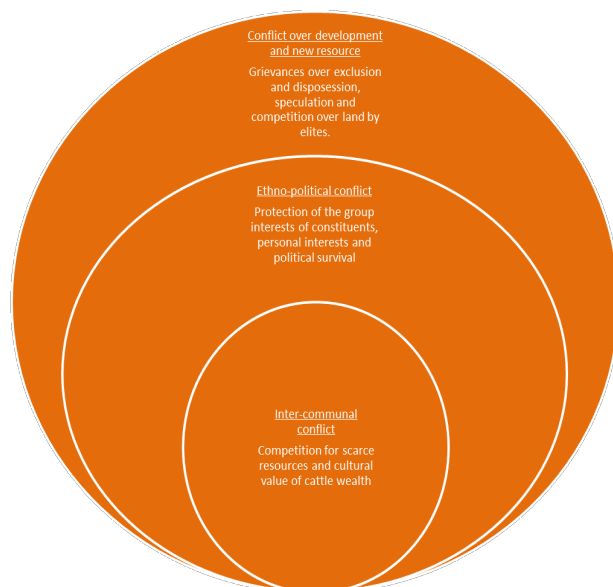
4 \ Phone interview, District Peace Committee member and fellow church member of the deceased, 23 November 2018.

5 \ Noted in interviews with peace workers and a high-level administrator, Isiolo, September 2018.



Devolution to county level since 2013 has reduced the “winner takes all” dynamics at the national level but has created new county wealth and new positions, new power balances and new conflicts instead. Finally, new types of resources and benefits of local development provide another focus for ethno-political competition over control of the new wealth and generate grievances about exclusion and dispossession. Small arms are part of the picture, intensifying every level of conflict.

**Figure 1: Layers and factors in the conflict in Isiolo County**



Source: Mkutu, 2019

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Some specific aspects of this multi-layered model must be emphasised. Climatic pressures (frequent drought) make land and water sources to be the object of competition between pastoralist groups. Further, Isiolo is inhabited by several large ethnic groups. At the same time, the informal land tenure system, which applies to most land occupied by pastoralists in Kenya, makes land an easy target to be taken for public and even private use, displacing customary users and increasing competition and conflict. Last, Isiolo has a history as a small arms hub which enables and exacerbates conflict.

This *Paper* examines the phenomenon of armed conflict in Isiolo, its nature, characteristics and actors, and in particular the various causes or factors in the conflicts and their relation to each other. Both historical and recent phenomena are explored. The work documents how the marginalisation of Isiolo and other northern counties in conjunction with civil war in several neighbouring countries have influenced both the unhindered supply of arms and the demand for them as a consequence of the fact that the state does not protect communities from cattle raids.

This work is the result of desk-based research and visits to Isiolo County, during which the author carried out interviews and focus-group discussions with local and county administrators and community members including youths, women and elders from Borana, Somali, Turkana, and Meru communities, national government, civil society and faith-based organisations (elders) peace organisations and conservancies. Regular phone contact with some of the respondents has assisted in keeping the work up-to-date in view of new emerging conflicts in Ngaremara where LAPSET is anticipated. It also draws on the author’s extensive previous fieldwork in the county and the region on conflict, violence, policing and peace-building and therefore refers to the reports ensuing from this (Mkutu & Boru, 2018; Mkutu, Otieno, Gioto, Wandera, Kajumbi and Palmreuther, 2017; Mkutu, 2008). Desk-based research made use of the Kenya National Archive, parliamentary proceedings, the Armed Conflict Location Data Project (ACLED)<sup>6</sup> and media articles, various reports by government and civil society, and academic papers.

6 \ The main limitation of the highly informative ACLED database is that it relies on media reports, which may be imprecise or inaccurate in terms of details and geographical location, especially in remote and conflict-prone areas. Occasionally, local media reports are not included.

## Features of Isiolo County

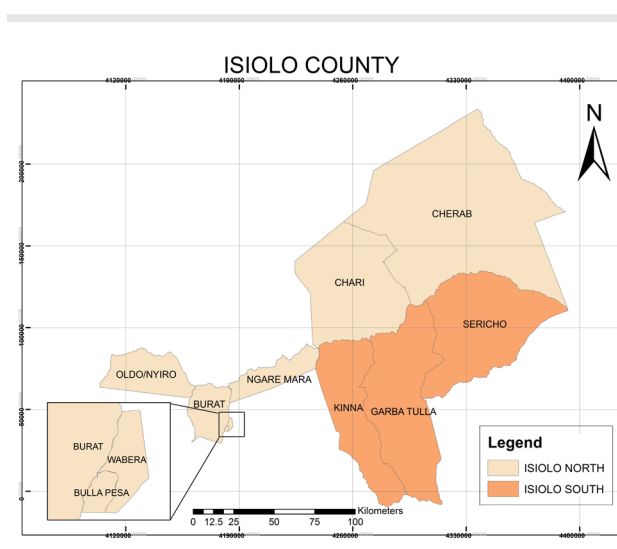
Isiolo County is located in the centre of Kenya, almost directly north of Nairobi. Its county capital—Isiolo town (see Map 1)—has long been considered by successive governments as a strategic “gateway” to the vast semi-arid and arid northern reaches of the country, and beyond, connecting Kenya to the Horn of Africa.

Isiolo is a highly ethnically diverse county, with five main ethnic groups and several minorities. The Borana are the majority and occupy the largest share of land, while the Somali, Samburu and Turkana people are also pastoralist livestock keepers, as befits the semi-arid climatic conditions. The Meru, however (who are the majority in Meru County to the south), are settled farming people. These communities compete for scarce resources and also differ from one another to greater or lesser extents in terms of perceived indigeneity, livelihood strategies, religion and custom, and favour shown to them by colonial and post-colonial governments, which have often pitted them against each other as will be described. Most land in the county is community land, held in trust by the county government for the collective land-holders.

The location of Isiolo between the fertile south and the arid north makes Isiolo a site for seasonal migration of nomadic pastoralists. Further, the unique narrow panhandle in which Isiolo town is located gives the county extensive borders with other counties. These geographical features influence conflict dynamics as will be described. The Ewaso Nyiro River traverses most of the county and forms the border between Merti sub-county (containing Chari and Cherab wards) and Garbatulla sub-county (containing Sericho, Garbatulla and Kinna wards) to the east. To the west, it forms the border between neighbouring Samburu County and the third sub-county also known as Isiolo (containing Ngaremara, Burat, Bulla Pesa, Wabera and Oldonyiro wards) (see Map 1).

The county is by no means the worst in Kenya in terms of development indicators, but it is below average (the Human Development Index is 0.333 as compared to the national average of 0.555) (KNBS, 2009), and 65 per cent of its population live below the poverty line (national average 45%) (Wambui Mwang, T., 2014). The county is a major site for planned large-scale national developments. The LAPSET Corridor is planned to traverse the county, and there is a possibility for a resort city in either Kipsing Gap, Oldonyiro ward, Kula Mawe, Kinna ward, or possibly in the north of Meru County, that is to contain high-end shopping and tourist hotels. The city’s water needs are to be supplied by the creation of dams on the western section of the Ewaso Nyiro River. There have been major road-building projects such as the recently completed Isiolo-Moyale road, which proceeds to Moyale on the northern border with Ethiopia and beyond, and an East-West highway which is still in progress. The new developments herald opportunities for residents, but also dangers of dispossession from community- owned land and resources, exclusion and other unwanted socio-cultural impacts.

**Map 1**  
*Isiolo County wards*



Source: *Isiolo County Integrated Development Plan 2019*

## History of armed conflict in Isiolo

Under colonial rule, until 1928, Isiolo was a depot for ox-trains supplying Kings African Rifles (an African military force formed in 1902) (Clayton & Killingray, 1989) stationed in the Northern Frontier District (NFD, comprising Garissa, Mandera, Wajir, Moyale, Marsabit and Isiolo districts). Some ex-soldiers were settled in Isiolo by the British following their service in World War I; these were from the Isaq and Herti Somali clans (Whittaker, 2012),<sup>7</sup> and other residents from these clans also settled in the town. In 1929, Isiolo was formed as a district and became a strategic base for patrols into the NFD (KNA, 1932).

Hjort (1979, p. 16) commented on the marginalisation of the district and the entire NFD which was geographically and climatically challenging, a land of “heat, wind and dust” which was “... administered at minimal cost, at least up to the Second World War, with the sole intention of keeping ‘Pax Britannica’ sufficiently effective to prevent the expansion of Ethiopia and other interests in the area” (Hjort, 1979). Isiolo gradually developed, with a growing trade in livestock and maize meal amongst other goods, which was controlled mainly by Somali and Asian traders (Hjort 1979). Other inhabitants of the now Isiolo County included nomadic Samburu, Ndorobo (Laikipia Maasai) and some Somalis in the Isiolo town area before the Europeans arrived. The Borana and Turkana both migrated south into the Isiolo area, specifically near the Ewaso Nyiro River in the early part of the 20th century, the former from Ethiopia and the latter from Turkana in north-west Kenya. The first wave of Meru, some of whom had been rendered landless by the titling of clan land in Nyambeni Hills came in as labourers for the elite of Isiolo town, and later waves after independence arrived having been encouraged to claim parts of Isiolo as a result of the already simmering boundary dispute (Hjort, 1979).

Colonial records mention intercommunal conflicts between the Borana and Samburu. The Kom hot spring on the Isiolo-Samburu border was a site of conflict even at that time, and there was also conflict between the Borana and Somali but less consistent (KNA, 1949 p.4). The problem of permanent land for

Isaq and Herti Somali who had begun to encroach upon European farms was an ongoing issue (KNA, n.d.), leading to the creation of the quarantine area adjacent to Isiolo town, which kept cattle of the two groups apart. Some incidents of arms smuggling (KNA, 1938; 1942) and armed poaching (KNA, 1931; 1932; 1937) by poachers from Italian Somaliland and Italian administered Ethiopia were also described during the colonial administration. Later, the Isiolo District Annual Report for 1954 states that Isiolo was affected by the [Mau Mau] Emergency:<sup>8</sup> Armed groups resisting operations in Meru and Laikipia counties made their way into Isiolo, or into the northern grazing area of Meru. Some Meru in Isiolo were involved in sheltering Mau Mau fighters (KNA, 1954).

### Shifita War and massacres

The people of the former Northern Frontier District (NFD) have suffered both neglect in terms of service provision and heavy-handed control by the colonial and post-colonial government which continues to be remembered bitterly by elders. During colonial rule, the NFD was a “closed district” in part to control inter-ethnic conflict (KNA, 1931).

The District was initially continuous with a larger part of Somalia up to the Jubba river, but a portion was transferred to Italy by the British after World War I as a reward for their support, leaving inhabitants divided from their kin (Menkhaus, 2015). Before independence, residents of the district formed a Somali Separatist Movement which campaigned to join a “Greater Somalia”; while the British considered this, the idea was abandoned when the transfer of power took place (Whittaker, 2012). Dissatisfaction led to the creation of the Northern Frontier District Liberation Front (NFDLF) under the leadership of Wajir-based Somali, and later a Garissa-based Sultan and its campaign which was suppressed by the new Kenyan government in the so-called “Shifita War”

<sup>7</sup> \ The Isaq and Herti were known in colonial records as “alien Somali” (as opposed to Somali from Kenya who migrated to the area later.

<sup>8</sup> \ A state of emergency was declared in 1952 against the Mau Mau militant movement which advocated violent resistance to British occupation. The majority of militants were drawn from the Kikuyu ethnic group and had been subject to the administration of ritual oaths. See Encyclopaedia Britannica (n.d.).

(bandit war) which commenced in 1963. The war contributed heavily to the militarisation of Isiolo and the rest of the North Eastern Province (NEP) as it became known after independence. The NFDLF acquired small arms, explosives and land mines from Somalia, also training guerrillas in Somalia for use in northern Kenya and winning local support (Whittaker, 2012). Their main headquarters in Kenya was in Garbatulla (KNA, 1965). They attacked administration offices, police and army camps as well as collaborators with the Kenya government and ambushed police and military convoys and patrols. According to the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC, 2013),<sup>9</sup> the state then declared a state of emergency, which included curfews, movement restrictions and forced villagisation. Villages were cramped and disease-ridden and prevented pastoralists from practising their pastoral livelihoods. At least 2,000 people and probably many more were killed over these four years in the NEP (TJRC, 2013 Chapter 4). There were confiscations and slaughter of livestock, rapes, extrajudicial punishments and killings and other forms of brutality. Residents were severely weakened and impoverished (Whittaker, 2015). Further, collective punishment was administered following the pattern of response by the colonial government to the Mau Mau insurgency ten years previously; while some non-Somali joined the liberation movement, others suffered still from the indiscriminate brutality directed towards all the inhabitants of the region (Whittaker, 2015).

In 1967, Isiolo District became the centre for a Special Operations Committee “to coordinate and direct all anti-shifta operations” (KNA, 1967). “Villages” or concentration camps in Isiolo were in Merti, Garbatulla, Bulla Pesa and Modogashe; here women recall daily beatings, rapes and killings of their children. A man recalls those who could not move into the camps—the weak, sick elderly and young—being shot.

9 \ The Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) was created by Parliament through the Truth Justice and Reconciliation (TJR) Act 2008. Its objective was to promote peace, justice, national unity, healing and reconciliation, among the people of Kenya by: investigating and establishing a record of human rights violations by the State since Kenya's independence in 1963 to 2008; explaining the causes of the violations; and recommending prosecution of perpetrators and reparations for victims.

People now name these events which took place from 1965 to 1967 as the Daaba Massacre, where Daaba means “when everything stopped” (Hussein, 2013).

Following the end of the conflict in 1967, there was no disarmament or demobilisation, and some of the old arms were used for banditry and cattle rustling (Mburu, 1999; Whittaker, 2012). Further, oppressive emergency rule continued for three decades during which the state was responsible for several horrific massacres of inhabitants of the north-east, the worst being the Wagalla Massacre in 1984 of an estimated 2,000, mainly Degodia, pastoralists on an airstrip in Wajir (Whittaker, 2015; TJRC, 2013). Emergency rule ended in 1992 when the democratic space in Kenya was opened by the advent of the multi-party system, and the heavy state security presence was withdrawn. However, law and order in the north-east was left to customary law and tribal or clan militia (Whittaker, 2015). These events have been blamed for contributing to the current poverty of the Borana, and community members in Isiolo complained that they are still affected by the period of the Shifta War and are still viewed as “Shiftas” (bandits).<sup>10</sup>

10 \ Focus group discussion with Elders, Kula Mawe, 18 October, 2018.

## Current armed conflict in Isiolo County

Media reports compiled by the ACLED project offer an overview of conflicts in the county. ACLED records 33 separate incidences of violent conflict in Isiolo or involving Isiolo borders in the 10-year period preceding the writing of the Report (Raleigh, Linke, Hegre & Karlsen, 2010). The search also revealed some incidences in Meru and Laikipia counties due to cross-border conflict involving pastoralists from Isiolo. 189 deaths were reported over this period. The most deadly incidences (five or more deaths) are recorded in Table 1.

In total, just over half of the total incidences and the greatest proportion of the deaths (103) were related to pastoral inter-communal conflict (highlighted), while a significant number (22) were due to the border conflict between Isiolo and Meru counties. The magnitude of the two types of conflict is evident and will be investigated further below. The problem of the East Africa-based terrorist organisation, Al Shabaab, is also highlighted here, which is particularly active in carrying out attacks against civilians and state security in north-eastern and coastal areas of Kenya.

**Table 1**

*Most deadly incidences of armed violence in Isiolo or its border areas, November 2008–November 2018.*

Date	Type of conflict/ violence	Armed groups	Ward	Location	Deaths
September 2008	<i>Cattle raid</i>	<i>Unidentified militia</i>	<i>Bulla Pesa</i>		5
January 2009	<i>Clashes between pastoralists</i>	<i>Somalia and Samburu militia</i>	<i>Bulla Pesa/Oldonyiro</i>		15
June 2009	<i>Cattle raid</i>	<i>Samburu and Turkana militia</i>	<i>Wabera</i>		5
June 2011	<i>Cattle raid (on a village)</i>	<i>Samburu militia (attackers)</i>	<i>Bulla Pesa</i>		10
January 2012	<i>Attack on civilians</i>	<i>'Bandits'</i>	<i>Garbatulla</i>	<i>Kaningo</i>	5
November 2014	<i>Clash between pastoralists</i>	<i>Turkana and Samburu militia</i>	<i>Burat</i>	<i>Leruko</i>	8
June 2015	<i>Clash between pastoralists</i>	<i>Isiolo herders and Laikipia residents</i>	<i>Laikipia county</i>		10
March 2017	<i>Attack on civilians as part of pastoralist conflict</i>	<i>Auliyani Somali militia (attackers)</i>	<i>Kinna</i>	<i>Duse</i>	8
March 2017	<i>Clashes between pastoralists</i>	<i>Borana and Samburu militia</i>	<i>Chari</i>	<i>Kom</i>	10
May 2017	<i>Clashes between pastoralists and 300 militia from Samburu/ Rendille</i>	<i>Borana and Samburu/Rendille militia</i>	<i>Cherab</i>	<i>Barchuma</i>	10
June 2017	<i>Clash between police and over 70 Samburu raiding militia</i>	<i>Turkana and Samburu militia</i>	<i>Burat</i>	<i>Mlango</i>	5
July 2017	<i>Border conflict</i>	<i>Meru and Isiolo residents</i>	<i>Meru county</i>		13
November 2017	<i>Attack on civilians</i>	<i>Unknown armed group</i>	<i>Cherab</i>		8
November 2018	<i>Clashes between pastoralists</i>	<i>Laghdera and Uchana</i>	<i>Sericho/ Garbatulla</i>	<i>Garissa border</i>	5

Source: Own compilation of data based on ACLED (Raleigh et al., 2010) and Abdille (2017).

## Inter-communal resource-based conflict

Various studies on the Horn of Africa reveal that pastoralist conflict is an age-old and perennial phenomenon and is fundamentally related to survival amidst harsh climatic conditions and the need to move with herds in search of water and pasture, which then leads to competition for those resources and conflicts over territorial control. Cattle raiding itself, which is the predominant form of pastoralist conflict is also bound up with the pastoral economy and culture, in particular, rites of passage for men and the acquisition of livestock to pay the bride price.<sup>11</sup> However, several “new” factors, such as the availability of modern firearms from both government sources and illicit markets, and markets for cattle meat (including black markets) have exacerbated these conflicts allowing a situation of commercialised cattle raiding to emerge, in which local elites can mobilise men for raids or men organise independently to sell the cattle for cash (Krätli & Swift, 2003; Hendriksen, Mearns, & Armon, 1996). Alongside this, raiding has, to some extent, moved out of the control of community elders, whose influence has waned in many communities (Lamphear, 1992). Political leaders may also become involved in incitement to raids and supplying arms to control territory or resources. Although, conversely, politicians sometimes become important ambassadors for peace. States have been involved in arming communities to protect them from their neighbours and disarming communities, often forcefully. At times this leaves communities unprotected, inviting attacks by neighbouring groups and fuelling the acquisition of illicit arms for protection (Wepundi, Nthiga, Kabuu, Murray, & Alvazzi del Frate, 2012).

Land acquisitions in the name of conservation, development and investment, to be discussed in the section of that name, have a direct impact on pastoralist conflict as they displace people from pasture, mobility routes and water sources and increase competition for available resource (Schlee, 2013;

Brockington, 1999; Fratkin, 1997). Peacebuilding processes do exist between pastoralist groups but are often strained in the presence of the new factors noted and the involvement of external actors (Mkutu, 2018).

Isiolo has a relatively better supply of water than several of its neighbouring counties and, as a result, pastoralists migrate there from Marsabit, Wajir, Garissa, and Samburu counties during the drier seasons, which often contributes to conflict (Saferworld, 2015). Some negotiation between the usual occupiers and incoming pastoralists appears to be the norm. However, the latter sometimes fail to honour traditional systems of the host communities, namely the Borana elder-led *Dedha* system which governs the sustainable use of land and water resources among the Borana (Mkutu & Boru, 2018).

One hotspot of intercommunal conflict where repeated clashes have occurred is the Kom triangle at the Isiolo-Samburu/Marsabit border. In May 2017, Borana clashed with Rendille or Samburu herders at a time of drought at the Har Kori water pan. Nine hundred or more cattle were stolen, and seven people were killed (Jebet, 2017). Another area of contention is on the Isiolo-Samburu border at a natural spring in Kom, where over the years several clashes between Borana and Samburu community militias have occurred (KN, 1991;1949). As noted above (Table 1), ten people died in a clash in March 2017 when drought led them to converge upon the area. On the Isiolo-Madogashe road, which proceeds eastwards towards the border with Garissa, there is tension between Borana and Somali pastoralist communities in various places including Kampi Samaki (Garbatulla ward) and El Dera (on the Garissa border). Somali pastoralists had not only moved in during dry times from Garissa County but had also begun to settle there. The issue is not only about pasture and water resources, but also about territorial claims; since the road is expected to be improved by the World Bank.<sup>12</sup>

11 \ Herskovitz's work (1926) among the Turkana refers to the “cattle complex” in which cattle are the foundation for cultural life and prestige. On bride price as a motivation for raids, see Bollig (1990). On rites of passage see Lamphear (1992).

12 \ Interview, Guyo Haro, Parliamentary Service Commission, Isiolo North Constituency office, Isiolo, 20 October 2018.

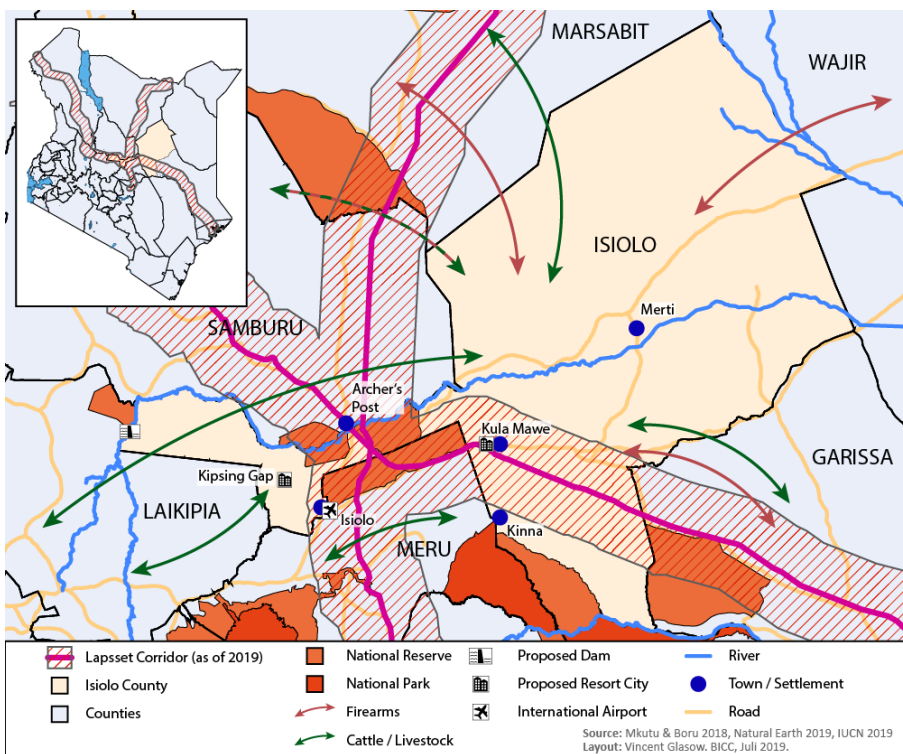


Kula Mawe in Kinna ward is a Borana-occupied area which also has a reputation for cattle raiding between all groups. Idafin on the Meru border is where Turkana and Samburu pass to raid the Meru farmers,<sup>13</sup> as noted in “The Samburu see Meru cattle rustling as their ATM.”<sup>14</sup> In Kinna, there is also conflict over the use of the River Bisanadi whose source is in Meru (Mkutu & Boru, 2018). There is inter-communal conflict in Burat ward (see below) and all along the Meru border (see Section on boundary conflict below), and lastly the border with Laikipia County has seen some deadly violence as noted (see Table 1, p. 12).

**Isiolo Holding Ground and peri-urban conflict**

Isiolo Holding Ground (IHG, also known as Live-stock Marketing Division) is a 124,200ha site adjacent to Isiolo town, occupying parts of Burat and Oldonyiro wards, and bordering Laikipia, Samburu and Meru Counties (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock Development and Marketing, 2006). It has historically been used as a buffer zone for disease control and an area for quarantining and livestock marketing purposes. In the present day, it is occupied by a number of users including different armed pastoral groups who often dispute with one another over pasture and water. Ownership is complex and is a “blend of legal government ownership and traditional pastoralists’ claims

**Map 2**  
Isiolo County showing proposed LAPSSET corridor route



13 \ Interview, sub-county administrator in Kinna, 16 October 2016.  
 14 \ Focus group discussion with Isiolo Peace Secretariat, 19 October 2018.  
 The Peace Secretariat is a governmental Institution that brings different community tribes together to address peace.

of ownership” (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock Development and Marketing, 2006) given that several groups including Ndorobo (Laikipia Maasai), Samburu, Turkana, Meru and settled Somali communities were displaced when the holding ground was first established. Other occupiers of the land include the Kenya Wildlife Service and Leparua Conservancy as well as the Kenya Defence Force and its affiliates (School of Artillery, School of Infantry, School of Combat Engineering, 78th Tank Battalion) and also the British Army, police and paramilitary forces (to be mentioned). There is some conflict between community members and the Kenya Defence Force over the School of Infantry in the IHG and over the School of Artillery which is claiming land in Ngaremara. Some suspect that the army is being used as a proxy for well-connected people to acquire land.<sup>15</sup> Ndorobo (Laikipia Maasai) pastoralists demanded through the National Land Commission that 10,000ha of Leparua conservancy within the IHG should be recognised as their community land, but this was another source of conflict and was halted after protests by other communities, who use the area and use it for grazing.<sup>16</sup> Development assistance, including the building of schools and facilities on the IHG has also been provided to pastoralists by faith-based organisations, and there is also some sand harvesting. The holding ground continues to be used for quarantining and disease screening, as well as fattening and watering, but has for some years not been operating as effectively as intended, due to poor management, land claims and overgrazing. A new abattoir is currently near completion, but as a Ministry of Livestock official warned, if not well managed, the improved market for livestock could exacerbate cattle raiding for cash.<sup>17</sup>

Inter-communal conflict is common on the outskirts of Isiolo town. In June to July 2009 in Wabera ward, six people died in raids by Turkana and Samburu.<sup>18</sup>

15 \ Focus group discussion with Turkana youths Isiolo Holding Ground, 19 October 2018.

16 \ Interview, an administrator, County Cohesion Department, Isiolo, 17 October 2018; confirmed by additional interviews in Isiolo in March and May 2019; Memorandum by Leparua community to National Land Commission, dated 25 April 2018.

17 \ Interview, official from Ministry of Livestock and Agriculture, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

18 \ ACLED data.

Burat ward is also a conflict hotspot, being peri-urban and multi-ethnic and also part of the contested IHG. All pastoral groups and the Meru are armed, and inter-communal conflict in the form of cattle raids and grazing conflicts is high.<sup>19</sup> In the past, peri-urban conflict has also taken a political dimension. Conflict in these areas is likely to be exacerbated by the planned new developments, which is fuelling land acquisition.

## Ethno-political conflict

Ethnicity-, politics- and inter-communal resource-based or land conflict are very closely related issues. As a youth pointed out, “Cattle rustling started long ago, alliances and election make the situation worse.”<sup>20</sup> The migration of pastoralists from other electoral divisions has at times been suggested to be voter importation, rather than mobility for the sake of pasture or water (UNDP, 2010).

Ethno-political competition has led to severe violent armed conflict. From 1996 to 2002, there were approximately 1,200 fatalities, and 300,000 animals were stolen. Local militias perpetrated unprecedented violence, burned villages and targeted women and children (Cox, 2015 quotes CEWARN, 2004; Goldsmith, 1997). There were violent clashes in the lead up to the 2007 elections due to irregularities in the nomination process (KHRC, 2018). In the same elections, the Borana hold on power was loosened a little, as Turkana candidate Joseph Samal came a close second to the Sakuye winner Mohammed Kuti (the Sakuye are ethnically close to the Borana). This close call increased tensions significantly in the county, leading to an escalation of inter-communal violence amidst the post-election violence in the country (Ruto, Musoi, Tule & Kirui, 2010). The overall conflict situation in Isiolo in 2007 and 2008 was recognised as being political but expressed in local resource-based (cattle raiding) conflicts (Ruto et al., 2010). As Cox (2015, p. 207) notes regarding 2007/08, “Political alliances shaped violent behavior. Seemingly traditional pastoralist acts of raiding cloaked politically motivated violence

19 \ Interview, an administrator, County Cohesion Department, Isiolo, 17 October 2018.

20 \ Focus group discussion with youths, Isiolo Holding Ground, Burat, 2018.



designed to undermine Borana power, dominance, and territorial control". Elsewhere, he describes how, at this time, arming National Police Reservists and disarmament operations were suspected to be politically motivated.

Burbidge (2017) notes that violence was particularly intense between 2009 and 2012, with causes including political campaigns oriented towards ethnic voter bases, land disagreements, cattle rustling, security vacuums and small arms. As a result of inter-group clashes in Isiolo North constituency from 2009 to 2012, between 165 and 300 people died (Cox, 2015). In 2011 to 2012, Turkana villages on the outskirts of Isiolo town were frequently targeted by the Borana, in a move believed to be spurred by fears of Turkana voter strength in the upcoming general elections (Sharamo, 2014 quotes Huka, 2013; Alternet, 2011). The Borana also feared that mobility into Isiolo by Samburu and Rendille pastoralists in 2010 was more a case of voter importation than a matter of pasture and water (Ruto et al., 2010).

## Recent ethnopolitical tensions and devolution

Under Kenya's 2010 Constitution enacted in 2013, 47 county units were created, each with elected county governors and their governments. Several fiscal, judicial and administrative functions were devolved to bring government and its services closer to the people. In the lead up to the 2013 elections, intense competition for posts of governor and senator emerged. This prompted the candidates to build ethnic alliances between the main groups (Sharamo, 2014), possibly influenced by similarities along cultural and religious lines (Ruto et al., 2010). The Turkana and Samburu allied together in an attempt to challenge the Borana candidate for governorship. The Borana were being weakened by inter-clan competition (Abdille, 2017), however, a Somali-Borana alliance was able to maintain Borana (and Sakuye) dominance (Godana Doyo and Mohammed Kuti took governor and senator positions respectively), while the Turkana candidate finally got the Isiolo North constituency seat in

parliament (Saferworld, 2015; Sharamo, 2014). Cox (2015) notes that although violence was expected during this election, it did not occur; perhaps because of peacebuilding initiatives by the county government in partnership with the District Peace Committee.

The 2017 elections were also mostly peaceful, and the governor's seat was taken by an independent candidate of Sakuye ethnicity (who had been senator previously) while the senator position was taken by the female Borana candidate Dullo Fatuma Adan on a Jubilee-allied Party for Development and Reforms ticket.<sup>21</sup> However, following these elections, there has been bad blood between the Samburu and Turkana because the Samburu no longer supported the Turkana candidate whom they had voted in previously.<sup>22</sup> As a consequence, some politicians engaged in arming their communities as will be explored (see Section on the current state of the arms trade).

## County boundary conflict

The Meru-Isiolo County boundary (previously the district boundary) is a source of bitter contention, both at the political level and the community level between Meru farmers and Isiolo-based (Borana) pastoralists who bring their animals to graze on disputed areas where crops are grown (Mwitu, 2014). The boundary is formally unmarked, but locally known and disputed. There is no constitutional requirement in place for people to stay within their counties. Disputed areas along the border include Kiwanji, Gamba, Epiding and Kachuru among others and the newly constructed airport which is in both counties. This conflict has led to several killings, hundreds of displacements and the massive destruction of property, as well as livestock theft. As a result of the insecurity, the Meru have requested more armed National Police Reservists to match the numbers in Isiolo (Mutembei, 2015).<sup>23</sup> Although the dispute is longstanding, it has

21 \ In the 2017 elections, the main parties were the incumbent Jubilee Alliance, a coalition of several smaller parties in 2013 (attracting mainly Kikuyu and Kalenjin voters) and the National Super Alliance (NASA) coalition formed in 2017 to unite mainly Luo, Luhya and Kamba voters under their respective leaders in an attempt to counter Jubilee's strength.

22 \ Interview, official from Parliamentary Service Commission, Isiolo North Constituency, 20 October 2018.

23 \ This was supported by many interviews.

been exacerbated by the planned developments (LAPSSET and related projects) which lie in the disputed areas, leading to land claims by all of the main communities, and even the county governments, as they hope to benefit from compensation (Mutembei, 2015).

Meru representatives have consistently appealed to honour the colonial boundary demarcation which originated in 1924, but their Isiolo counterparts argue that this itself was erroneously marked and that Isiolo district was left out of the deliberations of the Boundary Commission in 1962 because of the Shifta War.<sup>24</sup> In 2015, the Ministry of the Interior created a task force for surveying and demarcating boundaries. However, a petition by Isiolo county government and others stated that it was unrepresentative, tribal and also not the mandate of the Ministry of the Interior who convened it.<sup>25</sup> The dispute has been exacerbated by devolution which has raised the stakes for the political control of land and key installations, in particular, the planned large-scale developments and the recently built international airport.<sup>26</sup>

The 2013 Nanyuki Accord attended by elected leaders and community leaders of Isiolo and Meru counties sought to calm tensions arising from the historical boundary demarcations.<sup>27</sup> It was agreed *inter alia* that the dispute would be resolved through institutional mechanisms and that activities taking place would be stopped until the disputes had been resolved.<sup>28</sup> However, agreements were broken, and conflict continued. In June 2017, Isiolo county won a significant victory when High Court Justice Lenaola ruled that an independent commission be set up to resolve the dispute and that the status quo should remain in the interim (Abdi, 2018).

It was reported, however, that the Meru county government is carrying out surveys and adjudication, placing beacons and giving title deeds in disputed areas. Meru county government has now openly created a “special” Ngaremara ward, extending from Tigania East sub-county of Meru (on the border with Isiolo) into parts of Ngaremara ward of Isiolo sub-county, where titling and various development projects including boreholes are being carried out (Meru County Government, 2018) to cement land claims in the area. In a bold move by Meru county to stake a claim on the area, Shaba conservancy was created (a different entity to Shaba National Reserve) and 60-armed rangers have since been stationed there.<sup>29</sup> Job creation through the borehole projects and the potential for farming, together with the offering of illegal title deeds by the Meru county government (contrary to its remit and the court ruling above) is influencing some (mainly Turkana) residents and local leaders to support the actions of Meru county.<sup>30</sup> This is leading to tensions between these beneficiaries and other Turkana residents who have lost community land.<sup>31</sup> There is also some evidence of acquisition of title deeds by private individuals.<sup>32</sup>

Borana elders talking about the road construction in the area by the World Bank, voiced their anger and fear,

*The road being made is Meru, the Borana are not known by the Meru; the Meru now claim up to Gotu, Ngaremara is their own. They think they will just take. Borana, we are in trouble... The Meru have woken up because of the road; all the jobs, benefits will go to the Meru... They want to snatch our land; blood will be poured if they want to take our resources.*<sup>33</sup>

Further, it was noted that the “tyranny of the majority” is in operation in Meru County, which has a higher population of voters and therefore more clout with the ruling party which would desire to please them when it comes to disputes over land in

24 \ Constitutional Petition No. 551 of 2015 County Government of Isiolo & ten others v Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of the Interior and Coordination of National Government & 3 others [2017] eKLR <http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/137183/> Accessed 14 November 2018.

25 \ See footnote 24.

26 \ See footnote 24.

27 \ See footnote 24.

28 \ Resolutions of the Meru/Isiolo leaders’ meeting held at Sportsman Arms Hotel, Nanyuki, 20 December 2013.

29 \ Interview, an administrator for civic education, County Cohesion Department, Isiolo, 17 October 2018.

30 \ Interview, peace actor, Isiolo town, 20 October 2018.

31 \ Focus group discussion with elders in Isiolo, 17 September 2018.

32 \ See footnote 31.

33 \ Focus group discussion with elders in Kula Mawe, 19 October 2018.

preparation for the 2022 election.<sup>34</sup> Finally, with regard to the Meru-Isiolo border, the national parliament is currently in debate over the suggestion that the number of counties is reduced, resulting possibly in the merging of the two counties. This move would be likely to see strong resistance by Isiolo and other northern counties who fear that they might be marginalised again in terms of development (Daily Nation, 2018).<sup>35</sup> Some Borana elders, feeling that their livelihoods would not be respected, said that in the event of such a merger with Meru they would move into Ethiopia.<sup>36</sup> The conflict demonstrates the intercommunal and political layers of conflict, complicated by self-interests of leaders.

There is also a boundary dispute between Isiolo and Garissa County governments concerning an area near Modogashe on the Isiolo-Garissa border. This has contributed to severe inter-communal conflict over pasture and water in 2019 between Somali pastoralists from Garissa County and Borana from Isiolo (Jebet, 2019). Conflict on this border is also exacerbated by the discovery of oil, announced in 2013 (Menkhaus, 2015; Salesa, 2013). Further exploration has currently stalled due to a legal battle between the company and the Kenyan government (Business Daily, 2014). This discovery has the potential to cause inter-communal/ethnopolitical conflicts over jobs and benefits which may ensue.

## Land tenure, development and conflict

Development projects cause conflict in several ways. Given the nature of land tenure in Isiolo, which is largely community land held in trust by counties, it is relatively easy for the rights of communities, as opposed to private landowners, to be disregarded through displacement with inadequate or slow compensatory mechanisms. The intention of the Community Land Act (2016) is to make this more difficult, as it follows the Land Act (2012), which recognises the

rights of community land rights-holders as being equivalent to those of private landowners. The Community Land Act makes provisions for group registration of communally owned land and compensation directly to the registered group. However, registration is complex, public sensitisation on the Act has been weak, and most community land has not been registered. As development projects move ahead, the land rights of indigenous communities have been entrusted to county governments to make agreements and to receive compensation on their behalf, a far less secure arrangement which is prone to corruption. Further, most communities are not even aware that there are legal provisions to protect them.

The main development project affecting land rights in the area is the (planned) Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor. According to LAPSSET Development Authority (2017), the corridor is planned to pass through Garbatulla and Kinna wards in Isiolo County, then through nine wards of Meru County, then back into the pan handle of Isiolo County through Wabera, Burat and Oldonyiro wards. A resort city has been planned for the Kipsing Gap (to the west of Isiolo town and part of the Isiolo Holding Ground). However, following an environmental impact assessment, there are suggestions that this may change (Abdi, 2017). Communities, and even administrators, are not in the loop on information about where the LAPSSET will pass; a county official noted that the LAPSSET issues go through the county commissioner's office (the national government representative) and leave out the county government.<sup>37</sup> Participation has been poor, with public meetings held in Isiolo town, which is inaccessible for most.<sup>38</sup> This situation is leading to fear and suspicion, particularly relating to the allocation of some title deeds to elites, and adjudication by Meru County in disputed areas, considering that Isiolo land is largely community land.

34 \ Interview, official from the Parliamentary Service Commission, Isiolo North Constituency, 20 October 2018.

35 \ Concurred in an interview, sub-county administrator in Kinna, 16 October 2018.

36 \ Focus group discussion with elders in Kula Mawe, 19 October 2018.

37 \ Interview, sub-county administrator, Kinna, 16 October 2018.

38 \ Interview, officer in the County Cohesion Department, Isiolo, 17 October 2018; concurred by sub-county administrator for Kinna, 16 October 2018.

An administrator voiced the various concerns of people regarding the LAPSSET developments in a comment which illustrates how fears of displacement and exclusion are joined by a myriad of other potential grievances which may precipitate community-investor conflict.

*People do not have title deeds; people are worried as there will be no compensation. People fear that they will be displaced and that locals will be a minority as an influx of people come in. We will lose our lifestyle; our culture will be affected. We hear that a five-star hotel will be constructed, [we fear] bad sexual diseases. So many things; people are living in fear. The awareness has not reached the grassroots.*<sup>39</sup>

When communities are displaced as a result of investment or development, this may lead to direct protests and even violent action against the investor, or as noted, increased competition and conflict between pastoralist groups over shrinking rangeland and water sources. It may even more often lead to a general increase in crime and violence in developed areas as a result of grievances, new targets for theft, harmful social changes and loss of viable alternative occupations (Peters, 2013; Bourguignon, 2000; Ikelegbe, 2005; Mkutu, 2017). An official predicted similar outcomes for Isiolo, “the pastoralists are losing vast [amounts of ] land and are not being prepared for alternative livelihoods. They will resort to other measures for survival, and they will frustrate the so-called development projects”.<sup>40</sup> Such projects are attractive targets for various armed groups to air their grievances against either the Kenyan state or the investor. One example of this is the attack of a Chinese road construction site by eight militants in neighbouring Garissa County in which four people were injured before the militants fled. The police and Kenya Defence Force soldiers had been warned of this attack and defended the site (Kunow, 2018).

Conflicts are also triggered by rumour and speculation at the local level. Elders in Kula Mawe, Kinna ward, believed that communities could only be compensated if they were settled, while the same belief is

triggering Somali pastoralists from Garissa County to create bomas (homesteads) and dig boreholes along the Isiolo-Madogashe road which traverses Garbatulla sub-county.<sup>41</sup> However, this belief does not correspond with the law on the transformation of community land for other purposes. In a focus group discussion, participants reported: “The Somalis have moved to the main road claiming it’s their land. They have built schools, [their] chiefs are employed, it is a distribution point for relief food. Isiolo people are against it...people claiming the rangeland.”<sup>42</sup> A similar dynamic is happening further west along the road as it cuts through Meru county, triggered again by the planned LAPSSET development, anticipating looming displacement, lack of compensation, and a rise in the value of the land. Therefore, development has created a new kind of pastoral conflict over rights to settlement for the sake of compensation, as opposed to access to pasture and water.

Extensive land speculation has taken place along the LAPSSET route and the Kipsing Gap site, which has increased land disputes and resource conflict<sup>43</sup> and is connected to inter-county boundary dispute as noted previously. A review of court records and interviews with Isiolo court officials revealed that immigration due to the planned economic growth has led to an increased number of court cases involving land disputes.<sup>44</sup> The case of Isiolo International Airport continues to be a source of bitter contention, following the slow and disorderly compensation/relocation of those who were displaced, the confusion brought by the transition from the former administrative structures to the County government in 2013 and the corrupt acquisition of land by elites (Mkutu, Otieno, Gioto, Wandera, Kajumbi and Palmreuther, 2017). Displaced Meru, however, were more easily compensated given that the area is titled on the Meru side.

41 \ Focus group discussion with elders in Kula Mawe, 19 October 2018.

42 \ Focus group discussion with elders in Kula Mawe, 19 October 2018.

43 \ Focus group discussion with Turkana youths in Isiolo Holding Ground, Burat, 17 September 2018; this was also acknowledged in an interview from the Somalia side of the holding ground with a Somali youth, Burat, 17 September 2018.

44 \ Environmental and Land Court Isiolo register 2016-2018 and interview with court official, Isiolo, 19 September 2018; the Court was set up in 2016 and was frozen by a moratorium on all land cases in the country during part of 2016 and 2017.

39 \ Interview, local administrator in Burat, 19 October 2018.

40 \ Interview, officer in the County Cohesion Department, Isiolo, 17 October 2018.

A number of specific cases of elite land acquisition have seen locals shaking their heads, perplexed by the ease with which their land can be taken; in Wabera ward, an official mentioned the case of around 45 households, a primary school and prisons on a site which is being claimed by a wealthy businessman from outside the county.<sup>45</sup> It is said that in Gambela (Ngaremara ward), an area disputed between Isiolo and Meru Counties, a wealthy Somali investor has been able to acquire 78 acres of land for irrigation farming.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, an elder, discussing the marginalisation of Isiolo (especially Borana) pastoralists compared to settled people, spoke ominously of the severe conflict which might arise:

*They got an education, but the government did not care about us. We were marginalised and we did not get what other Kenyans got. In terms of education, we are behind. The people to benefit are educated.... where LAPSSET passes we do not know. Our neighbours are pushing us so that they can get compensation.*

**Table 2**  
**Planned large-scale development projects in Isiolo and their conflict-related impacts**

Development project	Impacts and conflict risks
<p><i>Highways:</i>  <i>Lamu-Garissa -Isiolo road (530 km in progress)</i>  <i>Isiolo-Maralal road (156 km not yet started)</i>  <i>Isiolo-Moyale road (470 km)</i>  <i>Isiolo-Wajir-Mandera road (700 km not yet started)</i></p>	<p><i>Improved access and service delivery</i>  <i>Boost to the local and national economy</i>  <i>Land-use changes and immigration</i></p>
<p><i>Isiolo International Airport</i></p>	<p><i>Increased tourism revenue and boost to the local economy</i>  <i>Conflict due to displacement, irregular compensation and land allocations</i>  <i>Isiolo/Meru boundary conflict</i></p>
<p><i>Railways:</i>  <i>Lamu - Nakodok (Turkana) through Isiolo,</i>  <i>Isiolo - Moyale (not yet started)</i></p>	<p><i>Conflicts due to displacement and land speculation, especially Isiolo/Meru boundary conflict</i></p>
<p><i>Pipelines</i></p>	<p><i>Conflicts due to displacement and land speculation, especially Isiolo/Meru boundary conflict</i></p>
<p><i>Isiolo dams (Crocodile Jaw and Ngarendare)</i>  <i>(13,000 hectares in project preparation phase)</i></p>	<p><i>Anticipated reduction of downstream water by 62 per cent</i>  <i>New agricultural projects upstream</i>  <i>Pastoralist displacement likely</i>  <i>Increased intercommunal, community vs. investor and community vs. state security conflicts.</i></p>
<p><i>Resort City (6500 hectares)</i></p>	<p><i>May be moved, possibly out of the county</i>  <i>Boost to the local and national economy through tourism and investment</i>  <i>Land conflict due to speculation and politics</i>  <i>Isiolo/Meru boundary conflict</i></p>
<p><i>Oil refinery</i></p>	<p><i>Planned for Isiolo sub-county, may be moved (GOK Ministry of Energy and Petroleum, 2016)</i>  <i>Pastoralist displacement and risk of land conflict</i></p>

45 \ Interview, Yusuf Huka, Coordinator Civic Education, County Cohesion Department, Isiolo, 17 October 2018.

46 \ Focus group discussion, elders in Kula Mawe, 19 October 2018.

Source: Adapted from Mkutu & Boru, 2018.



*For us to get the benefits of LAPSET, it's going to be blood.*<sup>47</sup>

Judging by Isiolo's history of deadly conflict and the several layers of conflict evident in this scenario, these comments deserve careful consideration.

Table 2 summarises current information on mega-projects expected in Isiolo and the potential impacts and conflict risks, which one administrator likened to "a bad tsunami".<sup>48</sup>

## Conflict surrounding conservation areas

Conservation areas are an important issue in land-use conflicts. There are three national reserves<sup>49</sup> in Isiolo (Bisanadi, Shaba and Buffalo Springs) in well-watered areas, and the county borders Meru National Park. There is conflict between communities and Kenya Wildlife Service Officers over the encroachment of community members into the park and into Buffalo Springs for grazing during the frequent droughts. This has led to some violent deaths (see Section on armed groups).

Conservancies are another type of conservation area, and an increasing phenomenon in Kenya's northern counties. They are areas of land set aside for conservation purposes, ecotourism, collective rangeland management and other livelihood-related functions. They may be privately or government-owned, or (increasingly) run by a board of community representatives. There are five conservancies in Isiolo, all of which are community conservancies: Biliqo-Bulesa, Oldonyiro, Leparua, Nasuulu and Nakuprat Gotu<sup>50</sup> and under the umbrella of the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT). NRT is a non-governmental organisation which helps to establish and support conservancies, and assists in several functions including the training and resourcing of security guards. Locally recruited armed National Police Reservists may be allocated to conservancies to safeguard wildlife and for other

conservancy security functions—a controversial issue that will be discussed in the Section on armed groups.

By reinforcing land claims and restricting access to certain areas, conservancies may sometimes lead to conflict with pastoralist groups outside of the conservancies (Greiner, 2013), despite the fact that they have peacebuilding functions, too, particularly between different ethnic groups within the same conservancy.<sup>51</sup> Some respondents in Isiolo expressed the view that conservancy management structures are dominated by the Samburu (Waso Professional Group, 2019); this is the case partly because conservancies arrived much earlier in Samburu and Laikipia Counties,<sup>52</sup> and 95 per cent of Samburu County land is now under conservancy management (Pas Schrijver, 2019). Also, many residents in Isiolo feel that the arming of conservancy rangers in neighbouring Samburu County has been to the detriment of Borana pastoralists in Isiolo County.<sup>53</sup> A report by a group of Borana professionals concurs that since the formation of Biliqo-Bulesa conservancy in 2007, 63 people from the Borana community have been killed in nine raids by the Samburu who had been well resourced by NRT (Waso Professional Group, 2019, p. 7) (see Section on armed groups below).

There have been occasions when communities have conflicted with NRT, perceiving that their land is being taken, or decisions are being made without consultation. In 2018, the community in Biliqo Bulesa conservancy was divided when some asked NRT to leave as they were worried about losing control over their rangeland whose use is carefully planned. They were also concerned that a proposed lodge would displace them from the Kuro Bissan Owwo hot springs in the area which are famed for their medicinal value.<sup>54</sup> By May 2019, the divisions between pro- and anti-NRT positions had reached the wider Isiolo society, with demonstrations of supporters and opponents of NRT

47 \ Focus group discussion, elders in Kula Mawe, 19 October 2018.

48 \ Interview, peace worker, Ngaremara, 9 May 2017.

49 \ In parks, natural resources are fully protected, and the only activities allowed are tourism and research. In reserves, on the other hand, human activities are allowed under specific conditions. <http://www.kws.go.ke/content/overview-0>; Accessed 23 November, 2018.

50 \ Interview, County Secretary for Tourism, Isiolo town, May 10, 2017.

51 \ Interview, Josephine Nkiru, NRT, Isiolo, 17 August 2018.

52 \ More research is needed here to verify this allegation in view of its sensitivity.

53 \ Interviews in Isiolo in March and May 2019.

54 \ Phone correspondence and phone interview, local administrator, 15 November 2018.

operations taking place in Isiolo town in April and early May, and Isiolo politicians openly criticising NRT (Muchui, 2019; NFD Dispatch, 2019).

In summary, the presence of conservancies in Isiolo may lead to conflict as they exclude certain groups from accessing land (and water) within that conservancy and reinforce and cement what were previously more fluid land claims over portions of community land. By having a well-trained security team, there may be an increased potential for ethnic conflict between armed conservancy scouts and community militias on the outside of conservancies, or with scouts from other conservancies. However, conservancies may also contribute to peace by providing a wider range of livelihood activities thus reducing the reliance upon livestock-keeping and consequently potentially reducing competition and conflict over scarce resources. Conservancies also provide a platform for shared decision-making between communities within the conservancy area and also with those from other conservancies.

# Main formations of organised violence

## Armed groups

It is difficult to classify the armed groups currently active in Isiolo County because people may act in more than one capacity and use their weapons for more than one purpose. National Police Reservists (NPR) are known for using their arms in banditry and cattle raiding as are community armed militias (Mkutu & Wandera, 2013). In newspaper reports, criminal activities are often said to be perpetrated by bandits, but these are not usually a distinct group of their own. One interviewee called armed actors “herders by day and bandits by night”.<sup>55</sup> The term bandit or *shifita* has conveniently been used to describe irredentist insurgents in the past, so it is a vague and loaded term. As a further indication of the fluidity of terms, ‘poachers’ are often community members, but sometimes separate groups and even police reservists who are known to use their arms to steal cattle. Cattle raiding and other inter-communal violence may be conceived of as criminal acts, but these are also age-old cultural practices, legitimised by communities and tolerated by law enforcers.

The term ‘militia’ is used here to describe local community fighters who are mainly herders, but who are also responsible for community security (they may also be referred to as herders, warriors or morans). They are also known to mobilise in groups to raid other ethnic groups.

Sometimes, they are supported by politicians who, for instance, provide them with small arms and ammunition. Kalyvas (2006, p. 107) notes that militia are part of local rule and state-building and that amongst pastoralists they are “a key tool for enforcing occupation”. Table 3 shows the armed groups present in Isiolo.

## State-armed groups

### POLICE

In 2011, the National Police Service was formed from the Kenya Police (KP) and the Administration Police (AP) as a result of the restructuring of Kenya’s security forces. Both services have separate histories. Under colonial rule, the KP had been assigned to areas settled by the British, while the AP were more informal and responsible for the “native reserves” (Mkutu & Wandera, 2013). The AP was professionalised as time went on but remained separate from the KP until constitutional reforms merged the two services under a single Inspector General of Police while keeping their functions separate (Waller, 2010). According to the National Police Service Act (2011) both have roles in law and order, preservation of peace, protection of life and property and the apprehension of offenders, but the regular police are responsible for criminal investigation, while the AP are responsible for border control, the protection of strategic installations and managing stock-theft.

**Table 3**  
**Armed groups in Isiolo**

State armed group	Para-state armed group	Community armed militias	Insurgents and terrorist groups	Criminal groups
NATIONAL POLICE SERVICE <i>Police</i>	NATIONAL POLICE RESERVISTS <i>Community-based</i>	<i>Pastoral community security groups</i>	<i>Oromo Liberation Front</i>	<i>Bandits</i>
<i>Administration Police</i>	<i>Conservancy Rangers (NPR)</i>		<i>Al Shabaab</i>	<i>Poachers</i>
<i>General Service Unit</i>	<i>Conservancy Rapid Response Militias</i>			
<i>Anti-Stock-Theft Unit</i>				
<i>Anti-Terrorism Police Unit</i>	<i>Conservancy Rangers (non NPR)</i>			
<i>Rapid Deployment Unit</i>				
<i>Camel Patrol</i>				
<i>Military (training camps)</i>				
<i>Rangers in national parks (Kenya Wildlife Service)</i>				

55 \ Interview with a senior sub-county administrator, Kinna. 16 October 2018.



Police posts are thin on the ground in Isiolo, and the relationship between the police and communities is poor (Mkutu et al., 2017). This is in part still a legacy from the Shifta War days, but it is also a response to the lack of capacity of the police, who do not leave main roads and are unable to recover stolen cattle or respond quickly to cattle raids. It was noted that the police do not usually move at night, and that cattle raiders take advantage of this knowledge. In Kinna ward, the state of the Administration Police was poor, both in terms of personnel and housing. The duty station consisted of tin shacks, exposing the eight officers to the sweltering heat. They were rotating in shifts to manage a conflict hotspot (Mkutu & Boru, 2018). A beaten-up Land Rover which could no longer move was serving as a temporary holding cell. These officers are vulnerable; in Ngaremara in 2018 as noted, Turkana community members overpowered and killed an officer who they believed had sided with the government against them (when the latter mounted an operation to remove livestock allegedly stolen from the Samburu).

People remarked that the Administration Police were more in touch with what happened on the ground since they had historically been based in communities. However, since 2010, under the new Constitution of Kenya, this force has no longer been under the command of the provincial administration, and chiefs have been unable to mobilise officers when they saw fit. While the previous system had the potential for abuse (and indeed has been grossly abused in many instances such as regime protection and corruption and partisanship) (Government of Kenya, 1992; Ghai & McAuslan, 1970), it did allow for a more rapid response by those who were on the ground. Chiefs in Isiolo complained, “we had guns, but three years ago they were taken away. With guns and National Police Reservists (NPR,) we could push back cattle raiders, but now we cannot”.<sup>56</sup> In general, the community members voiced that they would rather have armed NPR to protect them (see Section on para-state armed groups below).

56 \ Focus group discussion with chiefs from Isiolo town, 8 May 2017.

A local administrator noted:

*Rapid response is critical, but this does not occur. Even intelligence by the state is very slow. People wonder why there is no rapid response. There is no trust in government; small arms are their security and [community members] help each other. Neighbours have guns, how do you disarm? In my location, we have only one NPR and the place is a hotspot with 300 households...So we need [sufficient] NPR.*<sup>57</sup>

This statement is indicative of the problem of inadequate state security presence in Isiolo and its relationship to the presence of community militia. The restructuring of the NPS has exacerbated this problem.

*The General Service Unit (GSU)* is a special police unit established as a sub-unit of the Kenya Police Service (Section 24 of the National Police Service Act, 2011) whose mandate includes, amongst others, the provision of security to strategic points and vital installations and containing of banditry and cattle rustling (Kenya Police Service, n.d.). In Isiolo, the unit has been involved in several cattle recovery operations to back up regular police. For example, in July 2018, they were part of the operation to recover stolen livestock in Ngaramare, noted in the introduction (K24 TV, 2018). The GSU have been accused on occasion of using excessive force; examples include the one mentioned early in the Paper in Ngaremara and an incident in 2018, when the force was on duty during a rally by President Uhuru Kenyatta in Isiolo, and one officer fatally shot a young man who, according to media reports, was unarmed (Kenyans.co.ke, 2018).

*The Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU)* is a new unit and a subset of the GSU (above). An office was placed in Isiolo in 2016 to respond to problems of radicalisation and recruitment into Al Shabaab. The unit has been accused of taking a heavy-handed and indiscriminate approach and making enemies of communities, thereby hindering the gathering of intelligence.<sup>58</sup> This echoes the findings of Human Rights Watch (2016) which implicated the Kenya Defence Force and the ATPU in the disappearances of 34 people between 2014 and 2016.

57 \ Interview, administrator in a remote location, 18 October, 2018.

58 \ Interview county administrator, Isiolo town, 7 May, 2017.

*The Anti-Stock Theft Unit (ASTU)* was established to support the Kenya Police Service in accordance with Section 24 of the 2011 National Police Service Act in anti-stock theft operations, stock-theft investigations, preventive work on stock-theft and crowd control using horses (Kenya Police Service, n.d.). The ASTU is stationed every eight km along the Isiolo-Meru border but not in other hotspots of Isiolo.<sup>59</sup> Some have commented that ASTU's deployment is politicised and/or commercialised. Others say that it is lax and unresponsive to the needs of communities being raided (Waithaka, 2018; Daily Nation, 1999).

The Camel Patrol<sup>60</sup> was set up in August 2018, to patrol the Kenya-Somali border and insecure parts of the north and are currently being trained in Isiolo. This will assist police who are vulnerable to attacks on their cars, to take previously inaccessible routes (Ombati, 2018b).

#### RANGERS IN NATIONAL PARKS AND RESERVES

Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) rangers guard Meru National Park, while Shaba, Buffalo Springs and Bisinadi reserves (in the north of Isiolo sub-county) are run by the county that employs its own 68 rangers, some of whom are armed. Positions to increase the number to 128 have been advertised, but these new rangers do not carry arms, because rangers are supposed to be removed in the restructuring of the police service (although some may later become armed NPR).<sup>61</sup>

To curb poaching, parks and wildlife reserves since 2013 do not permit grazing by communities (Ringa, 2013). Unfortunately, these parts contain some of the best water and pasture. There have been violent confrontations between communities and Kenya Wildlife Service guards when the former have entered against orders with their livestock, or have been accused of poaching. One person was killed by wildlife rangers and several injured in Kinna ward in 2016, and up to eleven others have allegedly been abducted

by KWS guards.<sup>62</sup> The situation became so severe that Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) was involved in mediating a peace meeting in 2016 in which KWS apologised and paid three million Kenya shillings (US \$30,000) to the community as compensation.<sup>63</sup>

In summary, several different police units operate in Isiolo under the National Police Service. These are quite thin on the ground and have somewhat overlapping roles, with the Kenya Police being more urban-based than the Administration Police. The GSU and ASTU reinforce the police in specific roles, and the ATPU have their own specific role in counter-terrorism. These are entirely separate from the KWS rangers in national parks and rangers in national reserves.

#### Para-state armed groups

##### NATIONAL POLICE RESERVE (NPR)

National Police Reservists (NPR)<sup>64</sup> are community members, armed by the Kenyan state to supplement the police in the provision of security. The force was established as the Kenya Police Reserve (KPR) in 1948 to protect settlers' interests and supported the National Police in the suppression of the Mau Mau rebellion (Clayton & Killingray, 1989). In recent decades, NPR have been a volunteer force recruited from amongst rural (mainly pastoral) communities and armed to protect the livestock of that same community while in camps or on the move. They are well acquainted with the areas in which they operate and used to the challenges of terrain and climate; thus, they can rapidly respond to danger in the interests of protecting their cattle wealth. By the nature of their location—often on international border areas—they inadvertently also provide cross-border security and also often operate in rural towns, doing the work of the police.

59 \ Interview, county official, Isiolo town, 19 October, 2018.

60 \ At the time of writing, the unit had not been operational.

61 \ Phone interview, senior national government administrator based in Isiolo, 12 January 2019.

62 \ Focus group discussion with peace committee members, Kinna, 9 May 2017; FGD with county ward administrators, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

63 \ Focus group discussion with county ward administrators, held in Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

64 \ This section draws on Mkutu & Wandera, 2013 unless otherwise specified.

Until recently, NPR were not paid and had inconsistent and highly inadequate arrangements for training, supervision and monitoring of firearms. Training may be limited to a few weeks or even days, and it was noted in Isiolo as elsewhere, that bribing the authorities was one way to acquire a gun.<sup>65</sup> Sometimes, recruitment is subject to political interference as politicians request their own community members to be armed.<sup>66</sup> This calls into question the selection of recruits which should be transparent and representative. Owing to the NPR's mobile livelihoods, the police only track their arms on an irregular basis. NPR have until recently also lacked IDs and uniforms and were commonly dressed in traditional attire and thus identifiable only by their government-issued guns. They have referred to themselves as *Askari ya Deni* ("security on credit") and joked that KPR stands for *Kufa Pamoja na Raia* ("die together with the citizens") (Mkutu & Wandera, 2013). Such conditions have hardly fostered a sense of professionalism.

The NPR are notorious for using their arms for other income-generating activities, including private security work and road escorts, and this is unofficially tolerated because of the acknowledgement that they are often unpaid. Sometimes they are created, deployed and paid to protect the private interests of elites and politicians, while more obviously illicit activities may include cattle theft, banditry and terrorising those who have no escorts into using their services—thereby operating as a kind of protection racket. In neighbouring Laikipia County, the administrators accused the NPR of colluding with the cattle rustlers (Eastern Post Magazine, 2018).

In its attempts to deal with rural insecurity, the Kenyan state at various points in time have both created and disarmed the NPR. In recent years, however, it has made moves towards professionalising the force in view of their apparently crucial albeit corruptible role. Several counties are now paying NPRs

and the County Commissioner for Isiolo has stated that they are now being paid 5,000 KSh (US \$50) per month to defend their communities,<sup>67</sup> although reservists noted that this only comes every three to four months.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, community members who came forward to register their arms were also being prioritised in the move to recruit 500 new NPR in the county.<sup>69</sup> Some community members are afraid to come forward as they believe that this may be a ploy to disarm them, leaving them vulnerable.<sup>70</sup> In 2019, Isiolo disarmed many NPR in an attempt to vet personnel and track arms, following a decision by the national government.<sup>71</sup> At the time of writing, Meru County was demanding more NPR personnel following a week of conflict on the Isiolo–Meru border area between *miraa* (*khat*) farmers and pastoralists from neighbouring counties. In which six people had died (Wanyoro, 2019).

#### CONSERVANCY NPR

Within conservancies, there are rangers (also known as scouts) many of whom are NPR, which allows them to carry a government-issued weapon. Yet, somewhat confusingly, some conservancy rangers who are not NPR are also armed (see above). In recent years, the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) who provides uniforms, vehicles and tracking devices and other support has been resourcing and supervising most of these conservancy NPR. Some NPR rangers have been organised by NRT into rapid response teams known as "9-1, 9-2..." teams, whose members receive special tactical training (NRT, 2017, p. 42)<sup>72</sup> by British ex-army personnel (Mkutu & Wandera, 2013) and private security personnel with family links to Kenyan elites within the conservancy movement.<sup>73</sup>

Despite efforts to make the teams multi-ethnic, some Borana community members perceived that they were dominated by Samburu.<sup>74</sup> Another source

65 \ Interview, official, name withheld, October 2018; this finding has been replicated another study in Kenya's northern counties, where prospective NPR may pay up to 30,000 to get a gun (Aridi, 2013).

66 \ Interview George Natembeya, County Commissioner, 9 May 2017.

67 \ Interview George Natembeya, County Commissioner, 9 May 2017.

68 \ Interview, National Police Reservist, Gotu, Isiolo 7 May 2019.

69 \ Interview George Natembeya, County Commissioner, 9 May 2017.

70 \ Group interview, chief and assistant chief in Duse, 19 November 2018.

71 \ Peace worker and researcher, email communication 13 June 2019.

72 \ Interview, conservancy staff member in Laikipia County, 19 June 2019.

73 \ Interview senior county administrator Isiolo Isiolo, 17 October 2018.

74 \ Several interviews conducted with civil society, individuals and faith-based organisations noted this fact; interviews August and October 2018. But also during interviews in April 2017, this was noted.

felt that the Samburu were able to use the conservancy security to their advantage to recover stolen livestock, while Borana cattle were rarely recovered.<sup>75</sup> It was not entirely clear, but interviewees suggested that conservancy teams were also assisting with security outside conservancies when the need arose, as noted by youths, “[NPR] are in every village; we have four to five, when cattle rustling occurs we combine with the conservancy. We get help from [Lewa conservancy].<sup>76</sup> Interestingly in Biliqo in Chari, the communities were informed that the conservancy ‘guns’ are supposed to provide them with security.<sup>77</sup> Previous research concurred that conservancy teams at times do assist the police since they are better equipped (Mkutu & Wandera, 2013).

In the conservancies run by NRT, there are 814 rangers, of whom around half are said to be armed. Table 4 gives the numbers of rangers in each conservancy in Isiolo in 2016. However, this does not give the number of those who are armed.

**Table 4**  
**Rangers in conservancies in Isiolo in 2016**

Conservancy	Number of rangers
<i>Oldonyiro</i>	21
<i>Leparua</i>	16
<i>Nakuprat-Gotu</i>	28
<i>Nasuulu</i>	26
<i>Biliqo-Bulesa</i>	36
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>127</b>

Source: Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, 2016.

According to an interview with a local administrator working with Isiolo County in 2018, these numbers may have slightly increased and are expected to increase further in view of the advertised recruitment of 60 rangers.<sup>78</sup> There is also the disputed Shaba con-

servancy created by Meru County in which there are 60 armed rangers.<sup>79</sup>

The arming of rangers in conservancies poses several potential and real challenges. First, as noted, although care has been taken to ensure ethnic balance within rapid response teams, other ranger teams are not necessarily ethnically mixed, since not all conservancies are. In the past, there have been instances of ethnicised conflict involving conservancy ranger teams. Following a drought in the first half of 2013, Kom, the site of a natural spring on the border of Biliqo-Bulesa conservancy in Chari ward and Sera conservancy in Samburu County, became the site of conflict between the Samburu, Isiolo Borana and also herders from Marsabit County, in which ten people were killed. A conservancy staff member commented: “In Kom, rangers were used. Each ranger decided to join his own community so that it was conservancies fighting instead of communities fighting”.<sup>80</sup> As noted previously, an elder concurred that since the formation of Biliqo-Bulesa conservancy (in 2007), 63 people from the Borana community have been killed in nine raids by the Samburu who had been well resourced by NRT (Waso Professional Group, 2019, p. 7).

Second, managing security in vast conservancy spaces has been a matter which the Kenyan state has been happy to cede to the conservancy management teams and NRT. Kenyan elites, who naturally also pursue their private interests in land, resources and security, have mainly been the leaders of such teams. There is a partnership with the state through KWS training, but very little direct police supervision of NPR and their arms in conservancies, and conservancy security forces are superior in terms of resources and even training.

Third, and related to this, conservancies rely to a significant extent upon outside donor support which in part derives from foreign taxpayers, to pay and provide resources to NPR, which may not be sustainable or ethical, given that they are armed security actors.

75 \ Interview senior county administrator Isiolo Isiolo, 17 October 2018.

76 \ Focus group discussion with youths, Isiolo Holding Ground, Isiolo, 2018; Ian Craig is the founder and former director of NRT. This needs further research.

77 \ Peace worker and researcher, email communication, 13 June 2019.

78 \ Phone interview, county government official, 22 November 2018.

79 \ Interview, administrator within the Department of Tourism, Isiolo, 18 October 2018.

80 \ Interview, worker in conservancy, Ngaremarra, 10 May 2017.

When NPR's contract with the investor ceases for whatever reason, it is possible that they turn to other income-generating activities such as private security work, for which they can use their security training—a widely observed phenomenon among demobilised armed actors elsewhere on the continent. Such a development raises concerns about the militarisation of society (Ogwang, 2018).

Four, this privatised model of security provision may not be in the interests of everyone. There are human rights concerns about the conduct of rangers; conservancy rangers have been accused of “killing a lot of people”<sup>81</sup>, an allegation which deserves further examination. Finally, conservancies are becoming desirable for communities specifically for their security function and the ability to cement land claims through armed security; this has already led to an increase in the militarisation of the county and hence, the potential for violent conflicts. As one official put it “NRT has a standing army...Borana are accepting conservancies out of fear, out of the need for arms”.<sup>82</sup>

### Community armed militias

Many residents in Isiolo are armed.<sup>83</sup> In terms of their numbers and availability, guns were at times likened to Panadol (painkillers which may be purchased at any small kiosk) and water.<sup>84</sup> Illegal guns are an open secret, usually overlooked by the state, and considered absolutely essential for pastoralists of all ethnic groups due to aggressive cattle theft and lack of state security protection. Youths in the Isiolo Holding Ground explained:

*It's for protecting our wealth...the Samburu come with guns, and there is no government, no police, they only pick when we have deaths. Instead of waiting for the police, you have the gun to help you.*<sup>85</sup>

81 \ Interview, Borana elder, Isiolo, 19 October 2018.

82 \ Interview, a civic educator, County Cohesion Department, Isiolo, 17 October 2018.

83 \ Focus group discussion, county ward administrators, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017; Interviews Kinna and Duse by local administrators and youths. 10 May 2017; Interview a senior national government officer, 9 May 2017.

84 \ Interview, Administration Police officer, Kinna, 10 May 2017.

85 \ Focus group discussion with youths, Isiolo Holding Ground, Isiolo, 2018.

An administrator said:

*They are illegal, but the government knows this. Without small arms you cannot keep cattle; you will not move with the rest. You call a peace meeting, and you see guns.*<sup>86</sup>

A peace worker explained that gun owners are not usually organised into a force but will organise themselves when necessary.<sup>87</sup> Amongst the Borana, elders play an important part in mobilising and guiding raids, conflict resolution with neighbouring groups and in collecting and enforcing penalties against community members accused of crimes.

“Young people cannot raid on their own,” said an elder, although they sometimes do, as happened in the notable Kom case in 2017 above. In one instance during a drought in 1999, when the community was preparing to move into Samburu, in anticipation of conflict, elders made inventories of guns, ensuring that every boma (homestead) had at least one gun and 100 bullets.<sup>88</sup>

The use of guns may be subject to strict community norms and rules, but sometimes still allows youths to steal independently.<sup>89</sup> It was noted, for instance, that Samburu youth use the generation gap and act, using their arms, independently of elders.<sup>90</sup> The Borana eldership structure, however, is still strong; it is known as the *Gadaa* which has a committee and system known as the *Dedha* to govern grazing decisions. This highlights a level of local leadership which is relevant to the complex “layers of conflict” and also in peacebuilding, since Borana elders have often been involved in the latter.<sup>91</sup>

Guns play an important role in exacerbating cattle raiding conflict and its impacts. Militias may organise to raid large numbers of cattle, or small raids may be organised as the ‘need’ arises, and these are often met by revenge raids. Furthermore, in previous studies, guns have been seen to facilitate market-

86 \ Interview, county administrator, north Isiolo. 7 May 2017.

87 \ Interview, peace worker, Isiolo, 19 September 2018.

88 \ Phone interviews with Borana Council of Elders and a peace worker in Isiolo, 3 December 2018.

89 \ Focus group discussion with chiefs from Isiolo town, 10 May 2017.

90 \ Interview with senior government administrator, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

91 \ Focus group discussion with elders, Kula Mawe, 19 October 2019.



driven raiding activities, managed by elite beneficiaries, and even create a class of “warlord” elders or elites who hire young men and arm them for this purpose (Krätli & Swift, 2003).

Kula Mawe in Kinna ward, near the Meru border, is an example of an area with a reputation for its fierce and well-armed militia. Elders said:

*All the brave men come from Kula Mawe. They are the only people that take everyone head on. They own a lot of arms, move around with livestock frequently. They move to Meru, Samburu and take them head on.*<sup>92</sup>

A local administrator in this area confirmed this, noting: “You will not find a *manyatta* (settlement) without ten or more guns.” “These”, he added, “were seasonally used to attack the Meru (people)”.<sup>93</sup>

Another administrator concurred and also revealed that these militias are receiving political support:

*In Kula Mawe, we have Borana and Somali militias for hire or a standing force. They are funded by all of the leaders in /from Isiolo. Here, cattle rustling is also a major problem, and it is believed that militia from Kula Mawe steal your cattle and then disappear into thin air.*<sup>94</sup>

The high number of arms in Kula Mawe is linked to the historical Shifta War,<sup>95</sup> since it was a settlement where some people were able to find refuge and escape forced villagisation. As an elder said, “1967 finished people... *watu waliuawa* (people were killed)...only a few people came here”.<sup>96</sup>

Armed community militias are a longstanding phenomenon in all communities, fulfilling both defensive and aggressive functions. Their persistence is related in part to the lack of state security structures in remote areas (Human Rights Watch, 2002a). The role of elders is important in the organisation, resourcing and community legitimacy of these militias, but at times, these act outside of the authority of elders. Sometimes political leaders assume an “eldership”-type role in providing arms, and probably in directing their activities.<sup>97</sup>

92 \ Focus group discussion with elders, Isiolo, 17 September 2018.

93 \ Interview, local senior national officer on the ground, Kula Mawe, 18 October 2018.

94 \ Interview former senior county government administrator, Isiolo town, 8 May 2017.

95 \ Interview, security guard, Idafin, Isiolo, 18 August, 2018.

96 \ Interview with an elder aged 70, Kula Mawe 18 October, 2018.

97 \ Interviews with elders, names and place withheld, Isiolo 19 October 2019.

## Insurgents and terrorist armed groups

### AL SHABAAB

Isiolo has become one of the recruiting grounds for Al Shabaab due in part to its status as a major town with good road links with the north-east and Somalia. In 2018, a car was apprehended in Merti and found to be carrying seven AK47s with 30 fully loaded magazines, 18 IEDS, 36 unprimed grenades and paraphernalia associated with Al Shabaab en-route to Nairobi (Ombati, 2018a). Activities by Al Shabaab take place undercover where they actively radicalise and recruit young people, mainly boys/men. According to a local community-based organisation, as many as 40 youths are estimated to have left schools in Isiolo, such as Isiolo Boys, St. Paul’s and Barracks schools, to join Al Shabaab in Somalia, with a few joining ISIS.<sup>98</sup> The leader of the most recent January 2019 attack on a hotel in Nairobi, in which 21 people were killed, was said to have been raised and later radicalised in Isiolo (Reuters, 2019; Malalo, Humphrey, & Duncan Miriri, 2019). Recruiters play on grievances of young people and often use marginalisation and other injustices perpetrated against Muslims to make them join up. It is possible that the Meru-Isiolo border conflict and dispossession from pastoral land will feed into recruitment narratives and push more young people into accepting the usual offer of money by recruiters since similar factors of exclusion and cash incentives are observed elsewhere.

### OROMO LIBERATION FRONT (OLF)

The Oromo Liberation Front has a presence in Merti and also Wajir County.<sup>99</sup> The OLF was established in 1973 by the Oromo nationalists in Ethiopia to promote self-determination for the Oromo people within the Oromia region. They hold that they have been oppressed by the Amhara. Amnesty International (2014) notes that the OLF (and its armed wing, the Oromo Liberation Army, OLA, formed in the 1970s), was one of several armed groups that fought against the previous Ethiopian government of Mengistu.

98 \ It should be noted that though the youths were recruited from schools within Isiolo County, not all of them were from the county. Sensitization of Communities on Radicalization and Empowerment Solutions (SCORES).

99 \ Interview, peace worker, Isiolo, 19 September 2018.

When Mengistu was overthrown in 1991, the OLF was briefly part of a transitional government led by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition. However, the OLF has always had an uneasy relationship with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the most influential political party in the coalition, leading to fragmentation in 1992 and the outlawing of the OLF as a terrorist organisation (Amnesty International, 2014).

The OLF in Isiolo had a loosely organised structure and a reputation of having well-trained fighters who, are generally inactive and integrated with communities. They also mobilise to reinforce Borana community militias when necessary.<sup>100</sup> At the time of writing, however, the OLF has recently been granted political space and given an office in Addis Ababa, which may provide the incentive to demobilise its fighters (Associated Press, 2018).

### Organised crime and banditry

Banditry has been part of the security landscape for decades (KNA, 1989) and is most common along the Kinna-Garbatulla road and the Isiolo-Madogashe Road. Small arms facilitate it (KNA, 1992), and unemployment and poverty exacerbate the situation. Trucks carrying *miraa* (Khat) are the main targets. It is said to be a business worth an estimated KSh 50 million (US \$500,000) per day.<sup>101</sup> Transportation has to be rapid and efficient as the leaves rapidly lose their potency (Anderson, 2009). The trading route begins in Maua (Meru County) where trucks are piled high with large bundles and proceed along the Isiolo-Madogashe road to trading centres in Wajir (Liboi) and Mandera,<sup>102</sup> and also to the Somalian and Ethiopian borders. On rare occasions, the *miraa* trucks also carry arms on their return.<sup>103</sup> Bandits are very active along the Isiolo-Madogashe route, such that night travel is almost impossible.<sup>104</sup> The brewing of the

potent and illegal *chang'aa* (local brew) is another type of organised crime in Isiolo. A county administrator noted that Bulla Pesa in Isiolo town was a hot-spot for brewing, which may be contributing to rising crime in the area including prostitution, thefts and killings (Mkutu et al., 2017). Some poaching is also taking place in the county.<sup>105</sup>

In summary, the picture of armed actors in Isiolo is a colourful one, with state and non-state actors, acting both within and outside of their "legitimate" roles as protectors of communities, using defensive and aggressive violence. State actors are generally perceived as inadequate but also guilty of reactive and indiscriminate violence. The NPR are positioned in a grey area between state and non-state and are more trusted to protect community interests, while communities also rely upon their militias for defence, as even the NPR are thin on the ground. These militias and other illicit actors are well armed: How and where they acquire their arms is a matter of great interest, which will be explored in the following chapter.

### Arms trade

The Small Arms Survey (2018) notes that Kenya is ranked 9th on the list of the largest holdings of civilian firearms in Sub-Saharan Africa, with an estimated 750,000 firearms in civilian hands.<sup>106</sup> Only 8,136 have been registered by the licensing authorities (Small Arms Survey, 2018). The majority of guns are owned by pastoralists who carry them fairly openly and consider them essential for self-defence (Wepundi, Nthiga, Kabuu, Murray, & Alvazzi del Frate, 2012). Between 2013 and 2015, Kenya mainly imported assault rifles (from a variety of countries), 10,719 in total (Holtom & Pavesi, 2018). While this section describes the details of the arms supply into Isiolo, it is worth taking a historical and regional view first.

100 \ Interview, peace worker, Isiolo, 19 September 2018.

101 \ Interview, sub-county administrator in Kinna, 16 October 2018.

102 \ Peace worker and researcher, email communication, 13 June 2019.

103 \ Peace worker and researcher, phone communication, 13 June 2019.

104 \ Interview, sub-county administrator in Kinna, 16 October 2018.

105 \ Interview, ward administrator, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

106 \ Nigeria, South Africa and Angola rank 1st to 3rd respectively. Kenya's neighbours South Sudan and Somalia from where many of Kenya's illicit arms are believed to stem take 6th and 7th place. Ethiopia and Uganda do not feature in the top 10.

Guns have been present in East Africa since the late 19th century. They were brought in by Arab merchants and traded for local goods (Wepundi et al., 2012), mainly since the 1866 Italo-Abyssinian war (Lamphear, 1994). During the post-colonial period and the Cold War period, a succession of civil wars and interstate wars in the Greater Horn of Africa countries, namely Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Uganda and South Sudan led to a massive number of small arms making their way into illegal local markets. Some arms in use date from as far back as the colonial period. Somalia and South Sudan still remain unstable: African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)<sup>107</sup> forces have been stationed in Somalia from 2007 onwards, and it was intended to withdraw them from 2017 on, while the Kenyan forces carried out their own offensive in 2010 (Healy & Bradbury, 2010). Al Shabaab continues to make regular incursions and has undercover cells and domestic links in Kenya (Anderson & McKnight, 2014). South Sudan is also unstable, and there are ongoing refugee movements (Moschetti, n.d.) and arms supplies from the country (Mkutu, 2017). The Ethiopian-Eritrea peace accord signed in July 2018 ended two decades of enmity. The demobilisation of the Oromo Liberation Front bases at Sololo (in Moyale town on the Ethiopia border) and around Merti (Saa, 2019) may also lead to arms sales. Regarding Uganda, which has been a source of arms in the past, the Ugandan government has currently created military posts every eight kilometres, which has reduced cross-border conflicts and arms movements considerably (Mkutu & Lokwang, 2017).

### Arms trade in Isiolo County

#### TYPES OF ARMS AND PRICES

The most common guns in civilian hands are listed below. The G3 is a semi or fully automatic German-made assault rifle which is highly accurate and powerful but has the disadvantage of being heavy. It is

issued to the Kenyan armed forces and some police personnel, as well as NPR. The Russian-made AK47 is also semi or fully automatic and is the most widely used assault rifle in conflicts worldwide. It was distributed widely by the then Soviet Union to sympathetic rebels and regimes (Killicoat, 2007). It is light, simple to operate and versatile, being able to withstand a range of conditions while other guns overheat and malfunction. The M16 is also an automatic assault rifle which is issued by the British Army; it is not clear how these arrive in Kenya. Pistols are small guns which can be semi-automatic, and also have the advantage of being easily concealable, while carbines are short-barreled versions of standard rifles (Small Arms Survey, n.d.).

Prices (see Table 5) vary according to a number of reasons, including conflict or threat of conflict, often due to upcoming elections, which increases demand<sup>108</sup> and hence the price. It has been said that currently there is high demand which may be due to fears of loss of land to mega-projects and immigration<sup>109</sup> and could also relate to the border conflict with Meru. Table 5 shows a drop in price for the AK47 from 2014/2015 which may be related to a slowly increasing availability from South Sudan after the onset of war in December 2013. The G3, being a government-issued weapon, tends not to fluctuate in price because it is

**Table 5**  
**Estimated prices of arms 2014–2018**

Type	Year and costs in KSh (US dollars)		
	2014/15	2017	2018
AK47	150,000 (1500)	80,000 (800)	120,000 (1200)
M16	150,000 (1500)		120-150,000 (12-1500)
G3	150,000 (1500)	150,000 (1500)	120-150,000 (12-1500)
Carbine	100,000 (1000)	60,000 (600)	100,000 (1000)
Pistol	-	-	70,000 (700)

Sources: Mzee wa kijiji (village elder) FGD, peace group, Kinna, 9 May 2017; Interview, name withheld, peace worker, Isiolo, 20 November 2018; Mkutu et al., 2017 and Mkutu & Boru, 2018.

<sup>107</sup> \ AMISOM is a peacekeeping mission operated by the African Union. It was created by the African Union's Peace and Security Council in 2007. Its largest component is military, with troops drawn from Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Djibouti and Ethiopia. It is now in the process of handing over to Somali security forces. See [www.amisom-au.org](http://www.amisom-au.org).

<sup>108</sup> \ Focus group discussion with Interfaith Network, Isiolo town, 8 May 2017.

<sup>109</sup> \ Interview, peace worker, Isiolo town, 20 November 2018.



less subject to market forces. Guns may also be paid for in animals, as has often been the case in times past, but cash is preferred.<sup>110</sup> Ammunition is expensive at around 150 to 200 KSh (US \$1.50-2) per bullet.<sup>111</sup> Prices can go up to 300 KSh (US \$3) at times of conflict.<sup>112</sup>

#### ILLICIT SOURCES, ROUTES AND MEANS OF TRANSPORT

Isiolo town is a small arms hub, together with Moyale (on the Ethiopian border) El Waq (on the border of Mandera County with Somalia), and Mandera town itself (Sabala, 2002). It is well recognised that with its strategic location, Isiolo serves Nairobi and other parts of the country, as well as the county itself with a ready supply of arms from its neighbouring northern countries. Improvements in road links have made this easier. In 1997, a market known to be a “small arms supermarket” was closed down by the Kenyan police, but this did not stop the illegal trade (Human Rights Watch, 2002b). Known routes into Isiolo include Ethiopia through Moyale and Marsabit, Somalia through El Waq and Wajir, and South Sudan through Turkana and Samburu (counties) (Mkutu, 2008). A peace worker said that South Sudan is now becoming the most prominent source.<sup>113</sup> More specifically, there is a route into Kinna and Kula Mawe through Legdera in Garissa County<sup>114</sup> and another from Dadaab refugee camp to Madogashe on the (Isiolo-Garissa border) and into Garbatulla and beyond. Burat was said to be an important site for arms sales.<sup>115</sup>

The most common guns, the G3, AK47 and pistols are said to be mainly trafficked by *boda boda* (motorcycle taxis) from Ethiopia through Marsabit, and are sometimes trafficked by refugees.<sup>116</sup> At times, cars are used for two purposes: *miraa* is sent by landcruiser/

jeep from Meru to Garissa and Moyale, and arms are carried in the same car as it returns.<sup>117</sup> From Garissa, they may be carried on camels, while from all areas they may also be carried on foot through open bushland. On the route from Dadaab, an interviewee noted: “There is open space, there are no roadblocks, it is just bush, one can just carry arms with no problem”.<sup>118</sup> Near Isiolo town, guns are transported by *boda boda*. A member of a *boda boda* association revealed:

*The kids go to Ameret, Isiolo and Ngaremara forests and transport guns. You are paid five to ten thousand [KSh] for transporting one gun to Meru side...This is how the Meru are able to rustle cattle in Turkana County.*<sup>119</sup>

He added that sometimes the same riders are victims of theft and even murder in Meru. A peace worker concurred that especially pistols arrive from Ethiopia into Eremet near Ngaremara and the *boda boda* riders then transport them into Isiolo town and other areas.<sup>120</sup>

State and para-state armed groups within Kenya may often supply citizens with illicit arms. Arms may be borrowed from friends or hired from police or NPR.<sup>121</sup> Because NPR are poorly tracked, arms are rarely recovered once a reservist has retired or died. Instead, it is passed on to a male, or even a female relative (Mkutu & Wandera, 2013).<sup>122</sup>

A few examples illustrate the movement of weapons in Isiolo. In October 2017, a police driver and his boss were stopped at a roadblock along the Northern Bypass in Nairobi and arrested for allegedly trafficking illegal firearms from Isiolo to Nairobi. In their government car was a sack of charcoal that contained AK47 rifles with no bullets; notably, these types of rifles are not registered in Kenya (Ghetto Radio, 2017).

110 \ Mzee wa kijiji (village elder) in FGD with peace group, Kinna, 9 May 2017.

111 \ Comment made by Chairman of Minorities in FGD, county ward administrators, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

112 \ Interview, sub-county administrator in Kinna, 18 October 2018.

113 \ Focus group discussion with the Peace Secretariat, 19 October 2018.

114 \ Interview, peace worker, name withheld, Isiolo town, May 2017.

115 \ Interview, county administrator, County Cohesion Department, Isiolo, 17 October 2018.

116 \ Interview, peace worker, name withheld, Isiolo town, May 2017; it was not clear whether these are genuine refugees or arms traders hiding amongst refugees.

117 \ Mzee wa kijiji (village elder) in FGD with peace group, Kinna, 9 May 2017; FGD with Interfaith Network, Isiolo town, 8 May 2017.

118 \ Interview, sub-county administrator in Kinna, 18 October 2018.

119 \ Interview, *boda boda* operator, Isiolo town, 8 May, 2017.

120 \ Phone communication, peace worker, 19 November 2019.

121 \ Interview with a village elder, Kinna, 9 May 2017. This has been observed in previous research in other counties, see Mkutu & Wandera, 2013.

122 \ This was said by a district administrator in Laikipia in 2012.

Respondents recalled an incident in the previous week in which a fight broke out between two men, one of whom was a Borana and the other a Somali. One was an NPR and produced a weapon. When he was arrested, it was found that he had 16 bullets of the type given to KDF personnel.<sup>123</sup>

Several respondents believed that the British Army is inadvertently a source of arms to locals. “They leave a lot of firearms and ammunition, and the community get them.”<sup>124</sup> Some even seem to suggest that British Army personnel passed on the M16 arms present in the community.<sup>125</sup> There have also been reports of thefts (Webb, 2016; Daily Nation, 2004). These allegations are worth further research.

Arms may also be sourced and given out by politicians.<sup>126</sup> A peace worker noted that this had happened in Ngaremara and Kula Mawe.<sup>127</sup> A politician had used funds from the Community Development Fund to do this<sup>128</sup> particularly for the Turkana.<sup>129</sup> According to one informant, Meru communities have been given large numbers of guns (between 200 and 1,000 were noted) to guard their cattle, but some have used these to raid.<sup>130</sup> According to an interview, they were provided with a further 35 guns in late 2018, but these were taken by Borana pastoralists from Kula Mawe, an audacious act which has triggered a localised arms race between the two groups.<sup>131</sup> The following comment from a senator during parliamentary proceedings acknowledges the open secret of arms transfers by politicians.

*...it is time for us, as leaders, to look at the role we have played in inflaming sensitivities and arming some of the communities that have lived in peace with each other for a long time. I was told that there*

123 \ Interview, an administrator, County Cohesion Department, Isiolo town, 17 October 2018.

124 \ Interview, senior county official, Isiolo town, 8 May 2017. Interview, peace worker, Ngaramare, 18 November 2018; Comment made by Chairman of Minorities in FGD, county ward administrators, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017. A conservancy worker also noted this in an interview.

125 \ Interview, a peace worker, Ngaramare, 18 November 2018.

126 \ Interview senior, county official, Isiolo town, 8 May 2017.

127 \ Interview, peace worker, name withheld, Isiolo town, May 2017.

128 \ Interview senior county official, Isiolo town, 8 May 2017; corroborated by a manager of a private security company, Isiolo town, 16 October 2018.

129 \ Interview, Chair of *boda boda* association (Mosque side), 12 May 2017.

130 \ Interview, an elder, name withheld, 19 October 2018; Interview, a county official, name withheld, 20 October 2018.

131 \ Interview, official, name withheld, October 2018.

*is one former member of parliament (MP) whose animals are being guarded by illegal arms. I have asked for details and evidence on this, but I have not gotten it. However, where there is smoke, there is fire...*

*When the county administrators say that we are the ones who are arming these people, then we must look in the mirror and find out what our role is in all this and how we can help....Recently, we have seen an increase in the number of small arms infiltrating the different communities... My appeal is that, as leaders, even as we hold our other arms of government accountable, we should also look at ourselves and see what role we have played in inflaming insecurity in our areas. We should hold ourselves with the same accountability that we demand of our policemen and county administration (Hansard, 2018).*

Last but not least, elders may also be involved in sourcing arms for youths.<sup>132</sup>

Ammunition is worth considering separately because understanding its sources and routes can provide efficient opportunities to address conflict, which relies on its steady supply, (even though addressing supply is inadequate without addressing factors which lead to the demand for ammunition). Bevan (2008) in his study of ammunition supply in Turkana in north-western Kenya notes that almost 50 per cent of ammunition in the hands of pastoralist militia come from Kenyan government sources through transfers involving the police. Cross-border ammunition trade from South Sudan and Uganda is another significant source. In 2010, 100,000 rounds of ammunition were seized from the house of a businessman in Narok town, much of it bearing the mark of the government-owned Kenya Ordnance Factories Corporation in Eldoret (Wepundi et al., 2012). This raises many questions about state transparency and controls. It must also be noted that in the North Rift areas of Kenya and Uganda, ammunition has become ‘convertible currency’ that is exchanged for alcohol or goods sold by local women (Mkutu, 2008).

132 \ Interview, former cabinet secretary for Isiolo County government, Isiolo town, 10 May 2017.

While the police are responsible for the supply of ammunition to NPR—ostensibly to protect against neighbouring pastoralist groups—it may give or sell some ammunition illicitly. The same is true for KWS rangers, Kenya Defence Force soldiers and prison officers, or the NPR who sell on or distribute it to other community members.<sup>133</sup> Politicians are also involved in supplying bullets to their constituents.<sup>134</sup> Some unspent ammunition is collected from the grounds of the British Army Training Unit in Kenya (BATUK) opposite Nakuprat-Gotu conservancy and sold on.<sup>135</sup> Wepundi et al., (2012) record in focus group discussions in Samburu County that ammunition may be given (similar to the Kenyan military) or sold at low prices from BATUK grounds.

In summary, there are large numbers of civilian arms in Kenya's pastoralist counties, Isiolo included. These are usually acquired illegally mainly from South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia through established routes into Isiolo markets. A comparatively small number of guns arrive through licit channels, through the arming of NPR and conservancy rangers (though this is on the increase), raising concerns about the ceding of a public good such as security into the hands of community members and elite actors with their own set of interests and better resources than the police. Ammunition arrives through both licit and illicit channels (which include state actors and politicians) and often from within Kenya itself. Arms and ammunition complicate conflict dynamics at every level and have an unfortunate link with politics as they facilitate the achievement of political objectives. Thus through the availability of small arms, the relationship between ethnicity, political power and armed violence is deepened further, as the author demonstrated in the Ngaremara case at the beginning of the *Paper*, in which politicians had a hand in manipulating the inter-communal conflict.

133 \ Interview with a village elder, Kinna, 9 May 2017.

134 \ Interview senior county official, Isiolo town, 8 May 2017.

135 \ Interview senior county official, Isiolo town, 8 May 2017; Interview peace worker, Ngaramare, 18 November 2018. (He managed to buy some of the bullets for us to be able to witness this.); Comment made by Chairman of Minorities in FGD, county ward administrators, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

## Conclusion

Isiolo has been a violent county with a history of inter-communal resource-based conflict and state-sanctioned violence from the colonial regime to date. The Shifta War and massacres carried out during the years which followed remain in the consciousness of many older residents, while ethno-political conflict between the many ethnic groups has long been an important dimension of inter-communal conflict when politicians inflame local feelings and sponsor arms and ammunition to communities. There are new emerging violent conflicts related to Vision 2030 and the development of infrastructure, while devolution has raised the stakes in existing land and boundary conflicts with counties hoping to benefit. Altogether there is a complex layering of factors which are difficult to separate, but which tend to produce conflict between different ethnic groups on the ground. The various “layers” or levels should be considered and addressed simultaneously.

The county is awash with arms which complicate conflict at every level; there is nearly one gun per civilian household. The county is highly securitised with several specialised police units, but this does not necessarily translate into greater effectiveness in terms of security. The regular police lack the capacity and resources to deal with cattle theft and other challenges consistently. They have tended to be either inadequate or overly reactive in a manner that recalls collective punishment from the colonial era. Communities and state security have a relationship of mistrust and sometimes animosity; they do not work together; the gathering of intelligence becomes harder, and crime is not dealt with.

In terms of small arms supply, illegal arms originate from state actors within Kenya and from countries bordering Kenya including Somalia, Ethiopia and Southern Sudan, travelling the few long roads which converge upon Isiolo, a hub for the transfer and sale of arms. Ammunition is acquired from state security, amongst other sources, through mismanagement and corruption. On the demand side, the main motive for the acquisition of arms or deploying armed police reservists is to establish a balance of power with other ethnic groups in the protection of

property (cattle), in the absence of an effective state presence. As a northern pastoralist said: “our ATMs are our cattle”, and ATMs need guards, of course. This is not to say that aggression is not also a motive for acquiring arms, but often, arms races are driven by fear and the need for self defence. The fact that there are many arms in the community which are not in active use supports this assertion. It is essential to look at those factors which create a high demand for arms. Short-term strategies to manage the leak of ammunition may provide a useful mechanism for reducing the magnitude of armed conflict.

Conservancies are quietly becoming another means of arms proliferation and sometimes a contributor to resource-based intercommunal conflict. The conservancy model is actually placing arms directly into the hands of people who are community members, albeit professionalised ones. The model is increasing in popularity partly for the sake of its security dimension and has gone beyond the conventional model of wildlife protection, raising several security governance concerns. This is an area which deserves further research work.

In conclusion, the *Paper* suggests that while there are many arms in the county that escalate conflicts, more attention needs to be paid to the various layers of conflict, in particular, the emerging factors which could lead to those arms being used. Probably the biggest conflict risk is the struggle for political power and control over the benefits of development, along with the danger of displacement and exclusion of pastoralists by those same developments. Isiolo has communities whose economic, political and security needs are not being met, and increasing outbreaks of conflict are likely. A careful, inclusive conflict-sensitive approach to development is essential but is unlikely to happen if leaders look for personal power and gain.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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<i>ACLED</i>	Armed Conflict Location Data Project	<i>ACLED</i>
<i>AP</i>	Administration Police	<i>AP</i>
<i>ASTU</i>	Anti-Stock-Theft Unit	<i>ASTU</i>
<i>ATPU</i>	Anti-Terrorism Police Unit	<i>ATPU</i>
<i>DC</i>	District Commissioner	<i>DC</i>
<i>FGD</i>	Focus Group Discussion	<i>FGD</i>
<i>GSU</i>	General Service Unit	<i>GSU</i>
<i>IHG</i>	Isiolo Holding Ground	<i>IHG</i>
<i>KNA</i>	Kenya National Archives	<i>KNA</i>
<i>KNBS</i>	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics	<i>KNBS</i>
<i>KPR</i>	Kenya Police Reserve	<i>KPR</i>
<i>KSh</i>	Kenya Shilling	<i>KSh</i>

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