



The Dynamics of Decision-Making Processes in Sustainable Conflict Management in the Ilemi Triangle

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Abstract

Peace continues to be elusive in the Ilemi Triangle, which is located at the intersection of Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan. This study focused on the Dassanech and Turkana communities due to the increased frequency and intensity of violent conflicts between them. Drawing from the Systems Theory, the study explored how the local social organising through decision making processes impacts on how people respond to the conflict. Using qualitative case study methods, the study involved in-depth interviews with members of the Dassanech and Turkana communities who were purposively selected to include different members of the community structure who engage in intercommunal dialogue. These in-depth interviews were supplemented by focus group discussions (FGD) of participants through quota sampling. Each FGD had members who had been affected by the conflict from four kraals/kebele on either side of the conflict line. The data was subjected to a thematic analysis and organised into themes and sub-themes, from which patterns were identified and used for further research and reporting. Indigenous conflict management through decision making, according to the findings, include identifying the routes to graze, when to or not to fetch water, and how to respond to incidences of conflict involving the other community. The decisions made create strategies that provide security for the community and are the reference point for sustainable peace initiatives involving stakeholders in the triangle.

Keywords: *Conflict Management; Decision Making Processes; Pastoral Communities; Ilemi Triangle*

Introduction

This essay examines how community decision-making processes, contribute to sustainable conflict management among the pastoralist communities in the Ilemi Triangle, with special reference to the Dassanech and the Turkana. In the past ten years, incidences of conflict have increased between the pastoralist communities. Over twelve cases have been recorded from January - December 2023, where people have lost their lives, animals stolen, and property damaged (SCCRR, 2023). Unfortunately, these

sporadic attacks escalate into collective community responses in the form of retaliation, increased animosity and tension. Little progress has been made in finding a long-term sustainable conflict management framework solution. Therefore, an examination of the decision-making processes within the communities can contribute to conflict management amongst the Dassanech and the Turkana. The two themes that emerged from both communities in the course of this research were: collective decision making and decision-making bodies in each of the communities.

In the first theme, indigenous conflict management strategies, include identifying the routes to graze, when and when not to fetch water, and how to respond to incidences of conflict involving the other community. The decisions made create strategies that provide security for the community and are the reference point for sustainable peace initiatives involving stakeholders in the triangle, thus informing. The second theme highlights the decision-making bodies within each community, and which meet daily to respond and create strategies towards mitigating conflict related challenges. It is also pertinent at this state, to understand the context in which decision making happens in the Ilemi Triangle.

Ilemi Triangle was born out of the “scramble for Africa” – a product of the unscrupulous drive by both European colonialists and Ethiopia, to expand their empires, control people, extract natural resources, and fortify their reputations as imperialists (AUBP, 2014). Mburu (2007) and Amutabi (2010) highlight why and how the Ilemi Triangle became a disputed territory and, in Mburu’s words, an ‘unfixed bandit frontier’ claimed by Sudan (now South Sudan), Kenya, and Ethiopia. In the history of the triangle, the British, through the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC), made a foothold in what is known as Kenya today by building a railway from Mombasa to Uganda to claim the territory (Hornsby, 2012). At the same time, Emperor Menelik of Ethiopia, who ascended to power in 1889, had expansionist ambitions to push his southern border to the bottom of Lake Turkana and establish a direct borderline across to the Indian Ocean (Mburu, 2007). This was seen as an attempt by the Ethiopians to deny the Europeans access to more land and steal a march on them in colonizing this particular area.

The first inter-state boundary line was demarcated in 1907 by Captain Philip Maud. It ran from Namuraputh, on the Ethiopian border post, to the border with Sudan, putting the Ilemi Triangle strictly inside the territory of Sudan (Kibon, 2019). This straight line was surveyed by Captain Kelly from South Sudan and Captain Tufnell from Uganda, both colonial administrators. The two desired to protect the grazing grounds of the Turkana while allowing the Sudanese access to Lake Turkana (Snel & de Vries, 2022). With the imperfections of the surveying team, this line was accepted by the colonial administrators of Kenya and the then Sudan, though it did not mark the end of the contestations since further delimitations of the border followed. (Eulenberger, 2013; Waithaka, 2018; Winter, 2019).

Yet, another demarcation was done in 1931 producing what is called the Glenday Line or the Red Line, a more northern line that accommodated the grazing and water needs of the pastoral Turkana (Winter, 2019). Later, at the request of Kenya, and to protect Turkana grazing lands, the Red Line was adjusted into what became known as the Wakefield Line, though it was never formalized (Lopuke, 2019; Winter, 2019). A further line known as the Blue Line was established in 1947, allowing the Kenya Police to be stationed within the Ilemi Triangle (Odote, 2016; Winter, 2019). In 1950, the Sudanese marked the ‘Sudanese Patrol line,’ which established their interests in the Ilemi Triangle. Depending on the origin of geographical maps today, some which originate in Kenya will place the Ilemi Triangle within Kenya, while others will show it as part of South Sudan.

In addition to the Ilemi Triangle being a disputed territory, with disputed borders, contested grazing grounds, lack of state policies, historical marginalization, among other issues contribute to foster conflict in the area. To this day, the Turkana, Dassanech, Nyangatom, and Toposa continue to graze their animals and access water points in the Ilemi Triangle, which has sometimes led to violent skirmishes between each other. The sporadic conflict eruptions in the area are ground for complex situations

affecting the communities as they struggle to defend their customary grazing lands through their traditional mechanisms that they use to resolve conflict between each other.

Together with the local efforts there are also pawns who get involved in greater geo-political intrigues with continued procrastination of states to resolve outstanding disagreements characterized by indifference and reactionary interventions (Snell et al, 2022). Conflict, for one reason or another, has continued to be part of the Ilemi Triangle, thus peace remaining elusive. This research sought to add to the discourse on peace initiatives in the region, with a focus on the role of dialogue within the informal social structures of the Dassanech (Ethiopia) and the Turkana (Kenya).

This research adopted the systems theory which articulates how social organisations are based on norms and values in which individuals who constitute the system function and act within it (Nickerson, 2022). The term 'social organisation' in the study, is understood based on the understanding of social systems, a construct that is often used loosely to imply actions undertaken in various contexts, and involving activities, roles, and interactions among people, communities, institutions, classes, and families (Broom & Selznick, 1963). The term 'organisation' implies how components are constituted as they interact to form a functional entity with some element of unification leading to a shared relationship. Since this research focused on communities in conflict, the functioning of the community, is dependent on the proper assignment of roles and statutes. Furthermore, the structure and its functioning are controlled by a sanction system and, of course, the effectiveness of that same system. Nothing functions within the structure unless there is a response to the calls for individuals to act out their roles and functions.

Literature Review

Decision making is an important process in conflict management. Through the process, individuals and/or groups choose strategies, deciding to trust, evaluating offers, and prioritizing concerns. Decision-making processes within indigenous communities are recognized in a report to the General Assembly of the United Nations (2010). The report upholds the right of communities to maintain their decision-making processes parallel to formally structured decision-making processes associated with the broader society. The declaration affirms that traditional communities often manage their everyday lives, often with reference to customary law (UN, 2010, article 42). This point is confirmed by Kisekka-Ntale (2013) who argues that customary law consists of rules, regulations, practices, and beliefs which are an intrinsic part of a community. This points to a greater understanding of how, and to what degree, indigenous communities decision-making processes influence conflict management.

Indigenous conflict management decision making is not an isolated phenomenon. Gocke (2010) states that there are over 300 million people of indigenous origin living in over 3,000 different communities worldwide, amounting to 5% of the world's population. In his studies, Gocke describes how indigenous communities were systematically marginalized from as far back as the 16th century, right through colonization, and are still fighting for recognition. It can also be presumed that decision-making processes that were indigenous to communities were eroded during this period. Indeed, in many instances, political processes attempted to dismantle these processes if not the very communities themselves.

Proponents advocating informal conflict management structures in Africa point out that most African people are still attached to their traditional decision-making practices. Buckley-Zistel (2008) reinforces this by noting that most conflicts experienced today have a direct continuation of formations and tendencies of the past, expressing the need for having traditional decision-making processes in place. He explains that since many African communities remain committed to their culture and traditions, which are also represented in today's political realm, it is imperative to give prominence to incorporating traditional leaders into conflict management, decision making and resolution framework.

The Setswana-speaking people from north west province of South Africa, otherwise known as the Barolong are an excellent example of a community that is semi-nomadic and has an elaborate indigenous conflict resolution and transformation mechanism (Mesthrie, 1995). Ntsoane (2003) makes a valid point that the community's indigenous conflict resolution model was founded on local actors, that is the chief (*kgosi*); aunties (*rakgadis*); uncles (*malome*); and a traditional community based quasi-judicial system; and a decision-making process that not only managed but also resolved intra and inter-communal conflicts. They also noted that these home-grown traditional methods led to informal arrangements that succeeded in retaining good inter-communal relations. They note that these resulted in inter-communal grazing and fostered social interactions such as trading. The model is lauded as it is geared towards retaining the communal spirit and the community's holistic wellbeing.

In Kenya, among the Samburu, within the community's distinctive clan-based system of governance, the elders had a central role in conflict decision making and resolution. During conflicts and arbitrations, Mkutu (2018) notes that any decisions made by elders were binding. This key mandate led to the elders being central to many community functions these include, the management of the available natural resources and also ensuring that all community members could utilize commonly owned resources and properties.

Consulted literature on the indigenous decision-making processes, involves development projects incorporating communities into the decision-making in implementing these projects. This has been described as tokenism (Gocek, 2010), as it often fulfills the terms and conditions of multimillion-funded projects by large international organisations. Minimal regard is given to pre-existing informal decision-making processes within communities, which have managed conflicts for centuries. This is the gap that the current study sought to address and amplify.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach to investigate the social organising of pastoralist communities and the dynamics of this organising in ensuring sustainable conflict management. The research design was a case study, according to Bromley (1990, p.302), a case study is "a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest". In considering a case study design, the reality is that the conflict under investigation is both unpredictable and exceptional. The conflict is unpredictable when violence takes place. It is exceptional because it crosses an international border in a zone on the periphery of both countries involved, further complicating situational dynamics. Therefore, a case study is deemed appropriate because of the nature of conflict and its unpredictability.

For this study, the target population was made up of members of the Dassanech and Turkana communities, specifically those living on either side of the international border between Kenya and Ethiopia. The study sampled the adult population of the Turkana ethnic group who live in Lapur Ward of Turkana North, and the adult members of the Dassanech ethnic group, who live in Dassanech Woreda, South Omo Zone in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia. The Lapur Ward is 3,241 square kilometres with an adult population of 5,233 (KNBS, 2019). The Dassanech Woreda is an area of 2,000 square km with an adult population of 45,720 (CSA, 2007). Purposive sampling was used to select individuals from the Lapur Ward in Turkana and the Dassanech Woreda considered relevant to the study.

There are two different sovereign jurisdictions that have two different administrative structures in the study area. As this study was located on the conflict line, the nearest and smallest unit of population is the kraal, where the Turkana reside, and the kebele, where the Dassanech live. It is with this in mind that four Turkana kraals and four Dassanech kebele were purposively selected from each side of the

border as they fell on the conflict line and faced each other. The Turkana kraals differ in their geographical location, their power within the community, and their composition, as one is the residence of the Emuron, the traditional Turkana diviner, and decision-making is not always collective. On the Ethiopian side the kebeles act independently of each other. They have some ties to clans which influence their decision-making, and a government official has significant presence in some kebeles.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The research explored the dynamics of decision-making processes in relation to conflict management along the Ilemi Triangle among the pastoralist communities. Responses in regard to this question were addressed through FGDs, interviews and observational data. The major themes that emerged were collective decision making and decision-making body as part of the dynamics in the decision-making. Firstly, it is good to allude to the social structures of each community. The essential social role within the Dassanech community is handled by the *Maanane*, who is seen as the leader of the Kebele. There are other roles that need to be mentioned under the *Maaurama*, *Maafierich*, *Maabierich* and *Maajalaba*, who support the *Maanane* and form, in some cases, his council in fulfilling his roles and responsibilities. In the Turkana community, the research data within the informal social structure brought out two key figures: The Headman and the *Emuron* (deviner).

Theme 1: Collective Decision Making

In relation to collective decision making (the first theme) data suggests consensus reached through the community leadership and involves a process of active participation. Consensus is reached through listening to the opinions and concerns of others before a decision is arrived at. Not everyone is necessarily pleased with the outcome but they realize that it is the best decision for the community.

In the Dassanech community, the participants expressed sentiments that would influence or motivate decision making. The people live on the margins of main stream society and as such struggle for their very existence. As each attempt to meet their basic human needs, many participants related decision making to life and death. A community leader (DA5) explained, “We don’t want to see people to fight and kill each other, we want peace we are human beings, we cannot say fight each other, we need peace through the village for life to continue”. A community leader (DA2) reiterated this by saying, “First, we don’t want people to die, save the life of all people. The second animals, thirdly we want peace, these are the three most important”. The interconnectedness of all three: human, animals and peace, is part of conflict in the semi-arid lands. Another participant (DA11) stated the connection between decision making and promoting co-existence when he said:

So to make a decision among the two communities peace, we need to solve life of people, we need to share the same border, we make business together, we buy motor bikes from Turkana, they can buy fruits, they also bring the ostrich feathers, mutual benefits (October 20, 2023).

Also, motivation towards collective responsibility on peace is brought out. Collective responsibility is connected to the decision making within the community. A community leader (DA6) made a strong point when he stated:

That for peace it is not only the *Maanane* (headman) and *Ara* to call for peace but everyone has that responsibility. When they are fighting each other’s, because I am *Haari* (a group of youths), I am not the one to decide, I will make to stop fighting and take them people to *Maanane* to get good judgement from *Maanane* (October 20, 2023).

In the Turkana community, ultimately, many decisions are made in relation to the conflict environment and what needs to be done at any given time. It also involves what is pertinent on that particular day as a youth leader (TM4) explained:

So what they usually discuss, one person is above them all, they tell will them that when there is a peace, peace will bring everything to be near, god will even hear our cry, so the grass will grow, during the time of a war, they tell each other we should teach our children not to cross over to the other person's land, so that we maintain ours and they maintain theirs (October 24, 2023).

A peace maker (TM2) stated that at "Kraal meetings, the elders make decisions on where the animals will go for grazing and watering. During this time of conflict if enemies take their animals, they tell the boys to go and bring them [back]". The decisions become more salient when there is conflict as reported again by a village elder (TM3), "Previously I could tell children to graze animals, the women to fetch water, but nowadays when peace broke down, everybody is escorted, women are escorted to fetch water with a gun, children escorted to graze animals with a gun". In the conflict environment, for there to be peace, almost all matters relating to grazing and grazing grounds, are directed.

A huge part of the decisions is in view of how they respond to their neighbours and how they relate with them during conflicts and during peaceful times. A herder and elder (TN2) stated, "They will warn the youth not to fight with the neighbours, they will warn the youths not to go there and fight with them". A female mentor (TNA4), reported that "Telling the young is that we need to make peace and ensure it is similar to that of Turkana and Nyany'atom (there is a relative peace between these communities today). I also give instruction to my family members on different roles they need to do for the day".

A female youth (TNA11) stated, "I advise others not to fight with neighbours because their livestock were dying there is drought and the only thing that can help them is to have peace with other neighbours". The same participant went on to state in relation to livestock, that:

The decision that were made is about not to put the livestock together when they were drinking water, The Dassanech, if the Dassanech were the one to be the first in the water point they can, the Turkanas were to wait up to Dassanech finish they go and if Turkana were to be the second to follow that Dassanech. Another decision that were made is about the one who will be found stealing the livestock of Dassanech were to be punished (October 25, 2023).

At the core of the livelihood of the Turkana are the care of the animals, indeed when the animals are happy the people share the happiness; food is plenty and people are free to move.

Theme 2: Decision Making Bodies

This theme emerged in relation to a process where within the informal social structures, is a traditional body which is mandated to make decisions on behalf of the community. In the Dassanech community this is identified as the Ara where leaders meet in the evening to make decisions on matters affecting the community. In the Turkana community, it is the meeting with the headmen under the Edome tree.

A village chief (DAI2) stated that, "The Ara, it is the structure to make the decision". Another participant (DH4) explained that, "If big issues happen, we need first to resolve the problem by our structure". A community leader (DH3) confirmed this reliance on the structure by saying "We will communicate with one point [in one voice] and solve it by our structure". An informant (DHI1) supported the point saying, "I know the community is doing their decisions by their structure but I am not involved

because I am young”. The onus is on the structure to address the issues and resolve in line with the wellness of the people.

This structure was explained by some of the participants among them by participant (DAI1), “When there is a problem, *Maanane* will call those *Maabierich*, *Maaurama*, *Maafierich*, identify the problems and then in the last give a decision”. The participants added that, “So if there is a problem somewhere, we have to inform *Maanane*, from *Maanane* it will go to the elders, so after it has been discussed by the elders maybe it can even be taken to the government”. A community leader (DH1), confirmed this by stating, “When there is a problem happening there is communication, they send someone and they communicate with *Maanane* before decision is made”. A youth leader (DHI1) added in relation to the decisions saying, that not all the decisions are straight forward, “After *Maanane* and *Maaurama* and if they are not agreeing with that they will go to the elders, investigate and get a solution then they go to the Ara”. Within the structure, decisions are made. When in disagreement, the structure has its remedy process of involving other elders. In so doing the structure becomes solid.

A word is necessary here also regarding the role of the clan in decision making. The spiritual power of the Turinyeri and the Fargar is not lost in decision making according to the participant (DHY1) who explained that:

The Turinyeri is the powerful one who makes decision. When they want to go for grazing Turinyeri gives the direction. Dhimi ceremony it is Turinyeri who makes decision. About circumcision, they are the Turinyeri who make decisions. If circumcision is to be done in this place, then it is Turinyeri who will decide (October 21, 2023).

Still on matters decision making a clan leader (DHY4) stated:

When cattle are out for grazing land and Fargar is with us it is still Turinyeri who has power to make decision and they produce fire and are our protector. If Turinyeri decide then we accept. If our cattle is getting sick, even Turinyeri will make the fire, nothing will happen, they are like our protector (October 21, 2023).

The connection between the structure of decision-making body and spiritual mature of decision making is prominent in the Dassanech community.

The Turkana community meet regularly in the evening time to discuss and to deliberate over any decision that need to be made. As reported by a peace maker (TN5):

They will not do anything during the day but wait up to night and call the youth, come together and will told each other, why don't you follow the instructions that you were given, if there is domestic violence, then the elders are called when the issue is bad (October 23, 2023).

Firstly, the decisions are always within the Kraal or amongst the Kraals. A youth participant (TNA6) stated that, “the Kraal elders call meetings for his Kraal”. Another youth (TNA11) emphasizes the place where the meeting takes place as the focal point for the Kraal as under the tree when he said:

If there is no agendas that they usually go to discuss in that tree but they just go there and relax but if matters arise in that their talks, they usually the elderly, among them will have to talk to the others who are still there (October 25, 2023).

The information by peace actor (TNA5) shows that the headman is the one who summons people to the meeting. There is respect to those who may not be available for various reasons:

The headman does not call everyone but only calls those available to the meeting and make decision. The information is communicated to the five places where the people such as in the kraal, farms and even in schools and the message will be delivered to everyone (October 25, 2023).

In these meetings, the decision of the headman is final according to a youth leader (TN6), who stated “they follow what the headman says and the elders meet with him and the decision the headsman says then it is final. The headman is the link with local government (chief)”.

Much of the discussion can often be what the youth are doing and on whether they are obeying instructions and decisions made by the elders. This was indicated by a participant (TNA5):

What they usually do, as the youth are from different Kraals and others from another Kraal so when they meet, ask each other about what happened at your place during the night, did you find any stolen animals in your place belonging to the Dassanech (October 24, 2023).

In cases where the youth do not accept the decision of the headmen and elders, the youth may resort to the *Emuron* or ignore all as stated by a youth (NAI1):

If they (youth) are angry, they will go there alone without even decision of *Emuron*, Sometimes *Emuron* will send them, to go to take, to take livestock of Dassanech there, sometimes they can be leaders in the community, if they call them together and send them as youth to kill the Dassanech and take out the livestock of Dassanech (October 25, 2023).

Discussion

The findings outline the different decisions made, but significantly, both communities demonstrate remarkable resilience by meeting each day to address the day's internal or external issues. The decisions reached are collective; it is the final decision-making body. Once decisions are made, they are communicated to the rest of the community. To external onlookers, decisions made in the village within the community structures may seem mundane. However, for these communities, the decisions impact their lives and are a matter of life and death. Significantly, decisions influenced people's social behaviour during peace and conflict.

Decision-making processes: Many of these community decisions are made traditionally in the evening when leaders meet to discuss the day's events, the problems arising, and the plans for the next day. No recordings or notes are taken, and decisions are communicated to the more significant population by word of mouth. Decisions made with the communities through government initiatives are often many miles away from the communities, where decisions are made in the context of the aftermath of conflict, where there is a need to find a solution to bring immediate peace, and for the most part, can be described as reactionary. This study suggests that decision-making by the community can escalate or de-escalate tensions in the conflict environment. The study also shows that the decisions are not communicated to the relevant authorities on either side of the border.

The most pertinent decisions are those made to address the conflict with the other community. Two issues arise here from the findings: i) the decisions are not made known to the state agents, and ii) the decisions are not made on behalf of the whole community but that of the local kebele or that of the kraals clustered together. This does not take away from the collective nature of the decision-making but highlights the uniqueness of each kebele and kraals, symbolizing a certain autonomy. Furthermore, each unit is addressing its immediate needs daily.

The dynamics of the decision-making process within communities are critical and binding in conflict management (Kaner, 2014). This research sought to understand those processes in the Dassanech and Turkana communities. From data, decisions essentially hover around livelihoods, security, and survival rather than development. While the Ilemi Triangle has not met the threshold of being set aside as a war zone, the inhabitants have been (and continue to be) living in a context of ongoing conflict, where people are maimed, killed or displaced. Decision-making processes from the leaders within the informal social structures and involving the community members of the Dassanech and the Turkana primarily focus on survival.

Both the Dassanech and the Turkana communities have familial intimacy with their surroundings and thus have adapted to the dynamics of living in a marginalized, arid and border setting, as explained by Snel and Vries, (2022). The data collected revealed that managing animal herds, understanding grazing areas, and encountering similar lifestyles have been at the heart of the communities' survival in such an environment for centuries. Catley et al. (2013) allude to this, and rightly so, but there is an absence of literature to delve into the processes of living in such an environment. In this amphitheater, decision-making is crucial and collective decision-making becomes even more salient as communities strive to meet their basic needs. While broad statements accurately describe the lifestyle of pastoralist communities in Africa, East Africa and Ethiopia/Kenya, the intricacies of how a community manages through decision-making are less evident in the literature. Moreover, as their lifestyle goes through some form of inevitable metamorphosis, the discarding of the decision-making process may be lost. Buckely-Ziztel, (2008) agrees with this position, and the data from this research into decision-making processes amplifies this position.

The collective decision-making is internal to each community; the Dassanech and the Turkana have theirs. Therefore, the right for collective indigenous decision-making processes needs to be recognized. This was substantiated by the UN in 2010. This is supported by others such as Wheeler and Root-Berstein (2020). However, from the perspective of natural science, they state that indigenous or local knowledge has an important role, where there is a need to learn from local knowledge and make decisions collaboratively. The United Nations emphasizes its position of seeking recognition of the existing decision-making processes, and the need for such a position needs to be amplified by the relevant governments (Ethiopia and Kenya). The research suggests that identifying and recognizing all stakeholders, especially those holding positions in the informal social structures, are adequately involved and consulted in the decision-making processes involving the two communities. In reality, states will ultimately be responsible for peace and protection of their international borders and desire to defend and secure them. The nature of this conflict is that it is cross border where communities are less aware of what such borders mean, considering that they have traversed what can be described as customary grazing grounds for years.

Such processes in decision making can be borrowed from the United States of America and the Australian government's policy papers (Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge, NSW Aboriginal Affairs). In these papers, decision-making processes involving indigenous communities (the North American Indians and the Australian Aborigine community) and the concerned governments have been conducted. While the papers do not explicitly appraise the internal indigenous decision-making processes that address the people's daily lives and critical issues, lessons are learned from each, leading to some consensus. Much of the emphasis is on oral and written indigenous knowledge, local innovations, traditional practices, and cultural beliefs as a basis for appreciating the power of the local communities in leading sustainable conflict management processes.

Traditional African institutions exist in most African countries in the modern era, if sometimes not in their original state. The AU later adopted the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in 1981, espoused that Africa would rely on its cultural values and institutions to create prosperous communities. This study reiterates this position that communities have an opportunity to take

their destiny into their own hands and build or, in this case, a border between Ethiopia and Kenya as an environment where communities can live and coexist on their terms.

Returning to the Dassanech and Turkana environment, community leaders (the *Maanane*-Dassanech and the Headman-Turkana) have significantly guided their communities in a collective or consensus decision-making process in the best interests of their respective communities. This is the finding from the data. Issues are raised, discussed, and resolved as the community moves towards collective decisions. The process is gradual and takes time. In it, stories are told, opinions are given, concerns are raised, and direction is given. The literature on the Dassanech, especially Almagur (1978) and Sagava (2009) and the Turkana that is Barrett, (1978) and Korube (2022), while giving great insight into the traditional communities of Dassanech and Turkana, respectively, could have given more focus on the decision-making processes as part of the life of people. On that note, this study sheds light on the importance and efficacy of the indigenous decision-making processes within the given informal social structures and contributes to the scholarly world.

Contrary to the democracies of the contemporary world, where the role of the community members in decision-making is often limited to voting every few years and intermittent referendums, data from this research adds a different outlook. For the indigenous communities (Dassanech and Turkana), collective decision-making processes are made daily. Within traditional indigenous decision-making systems, those who follow a leader also assume a responsibility to assist with tasks. Therefore, the consultative forum becomes part of the decision-making process.

Concerning the issue of decision-making, the conversation around the transformation of communities and the need for change among communities is essential. Reflection and awareness by the concerned communities on the efforts that exist within their structures and their shared processes of decision-making would go a long way in assisting the communities in coming up with alternative future modes and creating responses made to the actual trigger event that is, the catalyst of change, a point made by Kutnour (2010). This would go a long way in curbing the non-empirically evidenced reasons given about conflict in the Ilemi Triangle.

Decision Making Bodies

The regular meetings of the Ara for the Dassanech and the Edome Tree for the Turkana are significant in the decision-making process within each community. The issues are first dealt with at the local kebele or kraal level before escalating to the Ara or Edome Tree. Significant is that both communities meet regularly and, most times, at night. It is part of the village life where the leaders meet at night to discuss the day's news and other matters that need attention. Findings suggest this is a valuable meeting where decisions are made concerning many matters, but none more important than the respective Kebele or Kraals response to conflict.

Impact of decisions made: The decision-making processes define the social behaviour of the people within the community. The study suggests that this critical decision-making moment is at the heart of the community. Whether the Ara in the Dassanech community or under the Edome tree in the Turkana community, both play a pivotal role in the community's life. This traditional form of community decision-making, often overlooked, is a tool for the greater good of the community. The study suggests that decision-making has legitimate power in the search for sustainable conflict management. It should be treated as a standalone mechanism that governments and external agents should respect. In that sense, the sharing of decision-making between communities could be explored, and new possibilities could be opened.

The study also revealed that new forms of communication are being used by the two communities. Some participants revealed that they had the mobile numbers of their counterparts on

opposite sides of the border. However, this communication is instead sent to friends or fellow herders and is not part of the communication of decisions between both sides. It may be possible that it will be explored in the process of creating a sustainable conflict management framework.

Composition of meetings and roles in decision-making: The research highlighted the role of elders in decision-making and the communication of the decisions to the youth or the age sets. This issue of communication and acceptance may be around the exclusion of the age set from the traditional meetings under the tree or the Ara in the case of the Dassanech. It is not unusual for such an age set to be described as energetic in the research. It could be described as rebellious – a very youthful characteristic as they are on the frontline when conflict erupts and sometimes the cause of the conflict. More inclusion into the process may lead to greater responsibility and ownership of the decisions that come down to them, offering a hopeful prospect for the future of conflict management.

There are variances between the composition of both meetings within the community. The Dassanech meeting is male-dominated and mostly by elders but allows females and youths to sit nearby. For Turkana, there are variations in who attends. Most men attend as the elders, but some women attend when called, or they can go if they wish. Other women decline because of household chores that have to be attended to. The geographical places of the meetings are significant and play a vital role in the social organizing of the community and the response to conflict.

Inferences on decision-making: One of the challenges about the meetings is that there is more than one but several meetings in each site. On the Dassanech side, several Aras take place in each Kebele. The question from the research that may need further understanding is whether each Ara communicates with the other to have a joint response to a conflict. It appears that each conflict incident is dealt with locally at first. However, news of such incidents travels fast in the case of a significant incident, and there is a collective community response. This aspect of community response was evident in the Turkana community during the research and the Lowoton incident, where four people were killed. While it was an isolated incident, news travelled fast, and a collective community response was to shut down and restrict movement. From a collective decision-making process, the decision-making body instructed the people on how to act and how they should tend to their duties.

The findings suggest that developing a conflict management framework is challenging when nobody represents each community. What is known from the findings is that the Dassanech know who they want to talk to from the Turkana side, but it needs to be clarified who the Turkana want to talk to. Historically, figures within the Dassanech community were known by the Turkana; figures like the Lokitiir (former leader of the Dassanech) were among them. From the data, it needed to be clarified whether such a figure exists today. The decision-making bodies are known, but how they interact with each other still needs to be clarified from the findings.

Further information from data on the consultative meetings is that the forums occur on regular evenings and in particular areas: for the Dassanech, the Ara meet in the Nap, while the Turkana meet as a council under the Edome Tree. This information agrees with that of Zartman (2017), who says restoring good relationships is desired and is a focus of this meeting or council of elders, whether addressing internal or external disputes or conflicts. This tradition provides a crucial normative function and socio-political condition to manage conflict among indigenous communities.

In both communities, the elders play a significant role in protecting the social fabric of Dassanech and Turkana and most African communities. Apiyo (2014) describes the Council of Elders as the traditional African society's utmost institution in conflict management and as a socio-political organization. Similarly, Kariuki (2015) notes that elders are one of the most critical institutions in African societies that are mandated to resolve conflicts. He also notes that even in nations where the institution is not officially recognized, they have remained resilient and independently functional even outside the

state's spheres of influence. The findings confirm that is that elders are respected in societies because their age and experiences accord them wisdom and trust from their community members to represent them and be final decision-makers in conflict management and resolution (Olivier, 2000). Participants' data fully agree with elders' role in decision-making processes. They not only procedurally guide the process but also see its conclusive action plan. The novelty in this current study is that the decision-making processes studied aim at conflict management and peacebuilding. The decision-making processes shed light on the peaceful existence of the pastoral communities in the Ilemi Triangle; the elders play a crucial role in preventing, managing, and resolving intra and inter-communal conflicts through their decision-making.

Conclusion

The findings relate that decisions made by the communities are collective and agreed upon in responding to conflict or advising the herders and all the villagers in their daily routines. From a collective decision-making process, advice and instruction are given out by the leaders. Though decisions address both internal and external issues, collective decision-making in terms of conflict with the neighbouring community is critical.

The findings state that each community has a decision-making body. The Ara is the name given to the council of leaders from the Kebele in Dassanech, while the headmen of the Kraals meet under the Edome tree. These meetings are held each night in the respective communities, and although the constitution is mainly patriarchal, there are times when other members of the community are invited. These meetings in the evening are a means by which the herders report on the day's activities. The findings state that critical decisions are made when conflict occurs, and strategies are agreed upon for the next day with the herders. Communication is also made with other members of the community as the priority for the next day.

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