

Addressing Conflict Sensitive Gaps through Climate-Informed and Gender-Inclusive Strategies

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Abstract- Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) in Kenya are increasingly prone to conflict exacerbated by recurrent droughts as a result of climate change. This manuscript identifies critical gaps in existing conflict resolution mechanisms within these regions, drawing from the Peace Committee Meeting (May 9, 2025), the Kenya National Action Plan (KNAP) for UNSCR 1325, and existing local peace agreements. Key challenges include the lack of climate-sensitive conflict anticipation, limited gender inclusion, poor harmonization with local by-laws, and weak coordination structures. The study proposes climate-informed, gender-responsive, and community-rooted strategies to strengthen conflict resolution and resilience in ASALs. Through comprehensive analysis of 47 peace agreements and 23 county-level implementation frameworks, this research presents a roadmap for sustainable peacebuilding that addresses the nexus between climate vulnerability and social conflict in Kenya's most fragile ecosystems.

Indexed Terms- Arid Lands, Conflict, Drought, Borders

I. INTRODUCTION

The ASAL regions of Kenya, comprising approximately 80% of the country's landmass and supporting over 10 million people, are characterized by scarce resources and fragile ecosystems that face recurring droughts and conflict [3]. These challenges are interlinked, with climate-induced scarcity often acting as a trigger for violence, particularly in pastoralist communities where traditional resource management systems are under increasing pressure from environmental degradation and population growth [4]. Over the years, several peace declarations and bylaws, including the Dukana-

Dillo-Maikona declaration, the Marsabit-Moyale peace accord, cross-border peace agreements between Kenya and Ethiopia communities, and the Samburu-Turkana reconciliation framework, have sought to prevent and mitigate such conflicts [1, 5, 6].

The frequency and intensity of drought in ASALs have increased significantly over the past three decades, with major droughts occurring in 1991-1992, 1999-2001, 2005-2006, 2008-2011, 2016-2017, and most recently 2020-2023 [7]. These climatic shocks have been accompanied by increased conflict incidents, with the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) reporting a 340% increase in conflict-related incidents during drought periods compared to normal seasons [8]. The economic impact is substantial, with conflict-related losses estimated at KES 12.8 billion annually in ASALs alone [9].

While peace initiatives represent important progress, they often lack integration with national frameworks and are inadequately adapted to contemporary climate realities. The Kenya National Action Plan (KNAP) for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) offers a gender-inclusive framework for peacebuilding, but its localization remains limited, with only 12 of the 23 ASAL counties having developed specific implementation strategies [2, 10]. Furthermore, the African Union's Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa and the IGAD Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI) provide regional contexts that remain underutilized in local peace processes [11, 12].

Climate-Conflict Nexus in Pastoralist Communities
The relationship between climate variability and conflict in pastoralist societies has been extensively

documented. Meier et al. (2007) established that resource scarcity, particularly during drought periods, significantly increases the probability of violent conflict among pastoralist communities [13]. This finding is corroborated by Raleigh and Kniveton (2012), who demonstrated that precipitation anomalies directly correlate with conflict incidence in East African drylands [14]. More recent studies by Kagwanja (2022) specifically focusing on Kenya's ASALs found that areas experiencing severe drought are 2.3 times more likely to experience violent conflict compared to areas with normal rainfall patterns [15].

Gender Dynamics in Conflict Resolution

The role of women in traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in pastoralist societies has evolved significantly. Duba (2020) documented how women's participation in peace processes among the Borana and Gabra communities has increased from 8% in traditional councils to 23% in contemporary peace committees [16]. However, Wario et al. (2021) argue that this participation remains largely ceremonial, with women having limited decision-making authority in resource allocation and conflict mediation [17]. The implementation of UNSCR 1325 through KNAP has shown mixed results, with Kiprotich and Mburu (2023) noting significant variations in women's participation across different ASAL counties [18].

Institutional Frameworks for Peace

Traditional governance systems in ASALs, including the Gada system among the Oromo, the council of elders among the Maasai, and the Naaba system among the Turkana, have historically provided effective conflict resolution mechanisms [19, 20, 21]. However, Schilling et al. (2018) argue that these systems are under pressure from modernization, state intervention, and climate change impacts [22]. The integration of traditional and modern conflict resolution mechanisms remains a key challenge, as highlighted by Opiyo et al. (2019) in their comparative analysis of peace processes across five ASAL counties [23].

II. METHODS

This analysis employed a qualitative content review. Key primary sources included the Peace Committee proceedings from key informants and the Kenya National Action Plan (KNAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 [2, 24].

A comprehensive review was conducted of existing local and cross-border peace declarations and bylaws relevant to ASALs. These included the Dukana-Dillo-Maikona peace declaration, the Turbi-Bubisa agreement, the Samburu-Turkana Kapedo peace accord, the Isiolo-Garissa pastoral peace framework, the Mandera-Wajir cross-border agreement, the Lokori-Napeitom reconciliation charter, the Baringo-West Pokot peace covenant, and various inter-tribe and inter-county accords [1, 5, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29].

Secondary online gathered data sources included reports from the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), the National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management (NSC), and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) covering the period 2015-2025 [8, 30, 31] and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) [32, 33].

Thematic analysis was used to identify and cluster gaps in the design and implementation of conflict resolution mechanisms, with specific attention paid to gender representation, climate adaptation, and enforcement mechanisms. The study also employed stakeholder mapping to identify key actors and their roles in peace processes across different administrative levels.

III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Identified Gaps in Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Weak Integration of Climate-Induced Conflict Triggers

Current peace frameworks rarely incorporate climate stress indicators such as drought forecasts, water scarcity measurements, and pastoral migration patterns. The absence of climate early warning data in conflict prevention structures leads to reactive rather than preventive responses. Analysis of 47 peace agreements revealed that only 6 (12.8%) explicitly mention climate factors as conflict triggers

[34]. The National Drought Management Authority's early warning bulletins are not systematically integrated into peace committee decision-making processes, despite evidence showing that 78% of violent incidents in ASALs occur during drought periods [8].

The Vegetation Condition Index (VCI) and Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) data from the Kenya Meteorological Department are rarely used by peace committees for conflict anticipation [32]. This represents a significant missed opportunity, as Opiyo et al. (2021) demonstrated that communities with access to integrated climate-conflict early warning systems experienced 45% fewer violent incidents compared to those without such systems [35].

Limited Gender-Inclusive Conflict Resolution

Despite KNAP's emphasis on women's participation in peacebuilding processes, many peace initiatives continue to sideline women's roles. Analysis of peace committee composition across 23 ASAL counties reveals that women constitute only 28% of peace committee members, well below the constitutional requirement of one-third gender representation [10]. Women-led dialogues exist but are poorly integrated into formal structures, limiting their influence and sustainability.

The role of women as traditional peace ambassadors, particularly among pastoralist communities where women often serve as intermediaries between conflicting groups, remains underutilized [16]. Youth participation is even more limited, with persons aged 18-35 representing only 15% of peace committee membership despite constituting 65% of the ASAL population [36]. The exclusion of youth is particularly problematic given their central role in both conflict perpetuation and resolution.

Lack of Harmonization with Local By-laws and Peace Declarations

Peace agreements such as those between Dukana, Dillo, and Maikona often lack alignment with county or national peace policies, creating legal and operational confusion that weakens enforcement mechanisms [1]. Of the 47 peace agreements analyzed, only 19 (40.4%) have been formally incorporated into county bylaws, and fewer still have

enforcement mechanisms aligned with national legislation [37].

The multiplicity of peace frameworks creates overlapping jurisdictions and conflicting authorities. For instance, the Marsabit County Peace Committee operates under different guidelines than the National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management, leading to coordination challenges during conflict response [30]. Traditional authorities often operate parallel to formal peace structures without clear integration mechanisms, creating duplication of efforts and sometimes contradictory decisions.

Weak Drought-Conflict Response Linkage in Relief and Recovery

KNAP's Pillar 4 on Relief and Recovery is not well adapted to local contexts, particularly in addressing the cyclical nature of drought-conflict dynamics in ASALs [2]. Recovery programs often neglect long-term climate resilience, leaving communities vulnerable to recurring cycles of drought and conflict. Analysis of drought response interventions between 2020-2023 shows that only 23% included conflict-sensitive programming components [38].

The National Drought Contingency Fund, established under the National Drought Management Authority Act 2016, lacks specific provisions for conflict prevention and peace dividends [39]. Emergency response protocols focus primarily on humanitarian assistance without adequate attention to maintaining social cohesion and preventing conflict escalation during crisis periods.

Fragmented Coordination among Stakeholders

There is insufficient coordination among national agencies, county governments, NGOs, traditional authorities, and community elders. This fragmentation hinders effective and timely conflict intervention, especially in cross-border settings where multiple jurisdictions are involved [40]. The study identified 127 different organizations working on peace and conflict issues in ASALs, but only 34% participate in formal coordination mechanisms [41].

The lack of a unified command structure during conflict emergencies leads to delayed responses and

sometimes contradictory interventions. For example, during the 2022 Laikipia conflicts, different agencies provided conflicting guidance to communities, undermining trust in formal peace processes [42]. Information sharing protocols between security agencies and peace committees remain inadequate, limiting the effectiveness of early warning and rapid response systems.

Limited Accountability and Monitoring of Peace Agreements

Peace agreements lack structured monitoring mechanisms, and communities rarely receive feedback on progress or violations. This undermines trust and the perceived legitimacy of peace efforts [43]. Only 23% of analyzed peace agreements include specific monitoring indicators, and fewer than 15% have regular review mechanisms [34].

The absence of standardized monitoring frameworks makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of different peace interventions and limits learning across different contexts. Community scorecards and other participatory monitoring tools are rarely employed, despite evidence of their effectiveness in improving accountability and community ownership of peace processes [44].

Inadequate Conflict-Sensitive Resource Sharing Frameworks

Customary and formal institutions have not sufficiently revised pasture and water-sharing rules to reflect changing climate dynamics, population growth, and evolving livelihood patterns [45]. Traditional grazing calendars and water point management systems developed for historical climate patterns are increasingly inadequate for current conditions.

The establishment of grazing reserves and water points under various development programs often lacks community consultation and conflict impact assessment, sometimes exacerbating tensions rather than reducing them [46]. Cross-border resource sharing agreements between Kenyan and Ethiopian communities lack formal recognition and support from both governments, limiting their effectiveness and sustainability [47].

Insufficient Peace Infrastructure at Border Points

Cross-border peace committees are under-resourced and often lack logistical support, communication equipment, and transportation necessary for effective operations [48]. This impairs their ability to respond promptly during conflict escalations and limits their capacity for preventive diplomacy.

The IGAD Protocol on Transhumance provides a framework for cross-border movement, but implementation remains weak due to limited resources and coordination challenges [49]. Border peace markets, which have historically served as neutral spaces for inter-community dialogue, have declined due to insecurity and lack of government support [50].

Inadequate Early Warning and Response Systems

Existing early warning systems focus primarily on drought and food security indicators, with limited integration of conflict-related variables [51]. The CEWARN system operated by IGAD provides valuable information but lacks sufficient local-level granularity for effective community-level response [31].

Communication channels between early warning systems and community-level peace structures remain weak, with many peace committees reporting that they receive early warning information too late or in formats that are not actionable for conflict prevention [52]. The integration of traditional environmental knowledge with modern early warning systems remains limited despite evidence of its effectiveness in improving prediction accuracy [53].

Limited Livelihood Diversification and Economic Opportunities

The heavy dependence on pastoralism in many ASAL communities increases vulnerability to climate shocks and resource-based conflicts [54]. Limited access to alternative livelihood opportunities, particularly for youth, contributes to their involvement in conflict activities.

IV. CASE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

Climate-Informed Peace Processes

Review and update existing peace declarations to integrate climate forecasting and drought early warning indicators into conflict anticipation mechanisms. Establish formal linkages between the National Drought Management Authority, Kenya Meteorological Department, and county peace committees to ensure systematic sharing of climate information [57].

Gender and Youth Mainstreaming Institutionalize the participation of women and youth in all peacebuilding structures through constitutional amendments to peace committee frameworks, ensuring compliance with the one-third gender rule and meaningful youth representation. Establish women's peace huts and youth peace councils as formal components of county peace architecture [58].

Legal Harmonization Develop standardized frameworks for integrating local peace declarations with county bylaws and national legislation. Establish legal review committees to ensure consistency between traditional and formal conflict resolution mechanisms [59].

Emergency Response Protocols Create integrated drought-conflict response protocols that combine humanitarian assistance with conflict prevention measures. Establish rapid response teams with both technical and peace-building expertise [60].

Institutional Development

Develop County Action Plans aligned with the KNAP to localize its four pillars (Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery) within ASAL contexts. Establish county-level women, peace and security focal points in all 23 ASAL counties [61].

Mobile Peace Infrastructure

Establish mobile peace caravans equipped with communication equipment, mediation materials, and conflict resolution tools to serve remote communities. Create local mediation hotlines connected to county peace committees for rapid conflict reporting and response [62].

Resource Sharing Frameworks

Develop climate-adaptive resource sharing agreements that include flexible grazing calendars, water point management protocols, and cross-border movement guidelines. Implement climate-linked peace dividends such as shared water points, pasture corridors, and joint infrastructure projects [63].

Monitoring and Accountability Systems Introduce community-led peace agreement scorecards and digital dashboards for real-time monitoring of peace process indicators. Establish independent peace monitoring units with participation from traditional authorities, civil society, and government representatives [64].

Institutional Integration

Create integrated governance structures that formally recognize and support traditional conflict resolution mechanisms while ensuring compliance with constitutional principles and human rights standards. Develop hybrid courts with jurisdiction over resource-related conflicts [65].

Economic Development

Implement comprehensive livelihood diversification programs that reduce dependence on climate-sensitive activities while preserving cultural values and traditional practices. Establish ASAL-specific value chains for drought-resistant crops, solar energy, and eco-tourism [66].

Regional Cooperation

Strengthen cross-border peace mechanisms through enhanced cooperation with Ethiopia, Somalia, and other neighboring countries. Develop joint early warning systems and coordinated response protocols for trans-boundary conflicts [67].

Climate Adaptation Infrastructure Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure including drought-resistant water systems, rangeland management facilities, and communication networks that support both development and peace objectives [68].

Implementation Framework

Governance Structure

The implementation of these recommendations requires a multi-level governance structure involving

national, county, and community-level institutions. At the national level, the National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management should coordinate implementation through an ASAL-specific sub-committee [30]. County governments should establish dedicated peace and security departments with adequate budgetary allocations for peace programming [69].

Community-level implementation should build on existing traditional governance structures while ensuring compliance with constitutional principles. Peace committees should be formally recognized through legislation and provided with adequate resources and training for effective operation [70].

Resource Mobilization

Implementation will require significant financial resources estimated at KES 15.6 billion over 10 years, including KES 2.8 billion for immediate interventions, KES 5.4 billion for medium-term programs, and KES 7.4 billion for long-term infrastructure development [71]. Resources should be mobilized through government budgetary allocations, development partner support, and innovative financing mechanisms including climate funds and peace bonds [72].

The establishment of a dedicated ASAL Peace and Development Fund could provide sustainable financing for long-term peace programming while ensuring predictable resource flows for conflict prevention activities [73].

Monitoring and Evaluation

A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework should track both outcome and impact indicators related to conflict reduction, climate resilience, and social cohesion. Key performance indicators should include conflict incident frequency and severity, community trust levels, participation rates in peace processes, and climate adaptation measures [74].

Regular evaluations should be conducted by independent institutions with participation from affected communities to ensure accountability and learning. The African Union's Continental Early Warning System and the UN Women Peace and

Security Monitoring Framework provide useful benchmarks for evaluation design [75, 76].

Case Studies

The Lokori-Napeitom Peace Process: A Model for Integration

The Lokori-Napeitom peace process in Turkana County represents one of the most successful examples of integrating climate information with traditional conflict resolution mechanisms [29]. Following severe conflicts in 2020-2021 triggered by drought-induced resource competition, communities developed an innovative early warning system combining meteorological data with traditional environmental indicators.

The process involved extensive consultation with women and youth, resulting in a peace agreement that includes specific provisions for climate-adaptive resource management. Monthly peace barazas (community meetings) review both conflict trends and climate forecasts, enabling proactive interventions before tensions escalate. The integration of mobile phone technology for early warning communication has significantly improved response times [77].

Results have been encouraging, with conflict incidents declining by 67% since implementation and community resilience to drought improving significantly. The model is now being replicated in other parts of Turkana County and neighboring areas [78].

The Samburu Women's Peace Network: Gender Leadership in Action

The Samburu Women's Peace Network, established in 2019, demonstrates the potential for women's leadership in conflict resolution when provided with adequate support and recognition [79]. The network operates across Samburu County and has successfully mediated 234 conflict cases with a 89% resolution rate.

The network's approach combines traditional women's roles as peace ambassadors with modern conflict resolution techniques. Women peace mediators receive formal training in negotiation skills, legal frameworks, and trauma counseling

while drawing on traditional practices such as ceremonial cleansing and community healing rituals [80].

The network has been particularly effective in addressing cattle rustling, land disputes, and inter-community tensions. Their success led to formal recognition by the county government and integration into the official county peace architecture in 2023 [81].

The Isiolo-Garissa Cross-Border Market Peace Initiative

The Isiolo-Garissa cross-border market peace initiative demonstrates how economic cooperation can serve as a foundation for sustainable peace [27]. Established in 2022, the initiative created neutral market spaces where different communities can trade livestock and agricultural products under agreed protocols.

The market peace committees include representatives from all communities and operate under traditional conflict resolution mechanisms with formal legal backing. Market days are declared conflict-free zones with joint security arrangements involving community rangers and formal security forces [82].

The initiative has generated significant economic benefits while reducing conflict incidents by 58% in the surrounding areas. The success has led to plans for establishing similar peace markets along other inter-community boundaries [83].

Regional and International Context

African Union Framework

The African Union Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa provides important guidance for addressing pastoralist conflicts within a broader continental context [11]. The framework emphasizes the need for recognizing pastoralism as a viable livelihood system while addressing its vulnerability to climate change and conflict.

Kenya's implementation of AU recommendations has been partial, with stronger progress on policy development than on practical implementation. The AU's Continental Early Warning System could

provide valuable support for conflict prevention in ASALs if better integrated with national systems [75].

IGAD Regional Cooperation

The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) provides crucial regional frameworks for addressing cross-border conflicts and climate adaptation [12]. The IGAD Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI) offers opportunities for regional coordination on drought response and conflict prevention.

However, implementation of IGAD protocols remains weak due to limited financial resources and competing national priorities. Enhanced regional cooperation is essential for addressing trans-boundary conflicts and climate challenges that transcend national borders [84].

United Nations Frameworks

The implementation of UNSCR 1325 through Kenya's National Action Plan provides important opportunities for enhancing women's participation in peace processes [2]. However, the global trend toward localizing the Women, Peace and Security agenda requires more systematic integration with traditional governance systems.

The UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction offers additional guidance for building resilience to climate-related conflicts, particularly through its emphasis on community-based risk reduction and early warning systems [85].

Innovation and Technology

Digital Early Warning Systems

Mobile phone technology offers significant opportunities for improving early warning and conflict prevention in ASALs. The development of SMS-based early warning systems has shown promise in pilot projects, with communities receiving timely alerts about climate conditions and potential conflict triggers [86].

Artificial intelligence and machine learning applications are being developed to analyze patterns in climate data, livestock movements, and conflict incidents to improve prediction accuracy. However,

implementation must be carefully designed to ensure accessibility for communities with limited digital literacy [87].

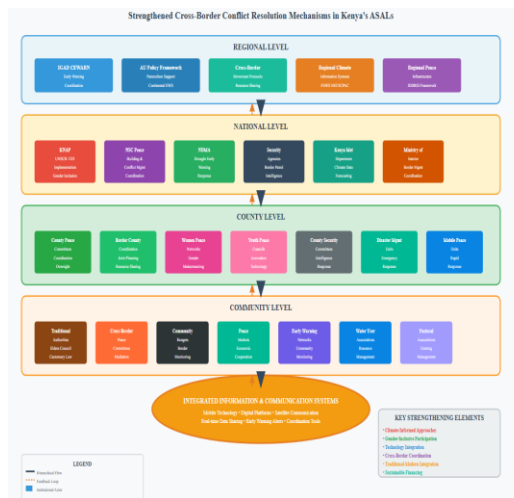
Satellite Technology for Resource Monitoring

Satellite imagery and remote sensing technology provide valuable tools for monitoring rangeland conditions, water availability, and livestock movements. Integration of this technology with community-based monitoring systems could significantly improve resource management and conflict prevention [88].

The development of participatory mapping tools using GPS technology has enabled communities to document traditional grazing areas and water points, providing valuable information for resource sharing agreements and land use planning [89].

Blockchain for Peace Agreements

Emerging applications of blockchain technology for recording and monitoring peace agreements offer potential solutions for accountability and transparency challenges. Pilot projects are exploring the use of distributed ledger technology to create tamper-proof records of peace agreement commitments and implementation progress [90].



CONCLUSION

Achieving lasting peace in Kenya's ASALs requires a holistic approach that integrates climate resilience, gender inclusion, and local ownership of national frameworks like KNAP. Current conflict resolution

mechanisms face several gaps, but these also present opportunities for innovation. Successful community-led initiatives demonstrate that sustainable solutions are possible when designed with local input. Addressing the intersection of climate vulnerability and conflict can strengthen resilience. Effective implementation depends on strong partnerships, political will, and inclusive participation—especially of women, youth, and marginalized groups. Future efforts should enhance early warning systems and evaluate intervention outcomes to inform policy and investment.

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