



# ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY COHESION IN OLDONYIRO (ISIOLO) AND NAIBUNGA (LAIKIPIA) COMMUNITY CONSERVANCIES

December 2023

Regional Pastoralists Peace Link (RPPL), (Formerly Isiolo Peace Link)

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# 1 Context and situational analysis

Our study sites are situated in one of the most environmentally harsh regions of northern Kenya. The two areas under analysis, located in Oldonyiro ward (Isiolo) and Mukogodo East ward (Laikipia), are home to various pastoralists groups, in particular the Samburus and the Laikipia Maasai. These groups share the rangeland with other pastoralist groups including the Somalis, Borana, and Turkana. Falling within the arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL), the two study areas display high temperatures, adverse effects of climate change (e.g. frequent drought), as well as conflicts regarding land, boundaries, and natural resources. Seen from the outside as remote, the region exhibits high characteristics associated with least-development indices. These social conditions are arguably the result of policy failures and a restrictive legislative agenda, especially the so-called Sessional Paper no. 10 issued in 1965, which directed the state to support development exclusively in areas perceived as having high potential. Here, thousands of households support themselves by engaging in livestock production, in particular keeping cows, camels, donkey, goats, and sheep.

Northern Kenya is semi-arid, and supports short, thorny or scrubby vegetation. The landscapes are usually dominated by either grasses or shrubs as the soils usually cannot support forests. Precipitation is less than potential evapotranspiration and what is taken up by vegetation. Because of these characteristics - aridity, less fertile soils, hot temperatures, and lack of water – all of which make crop-growing difficult or impossible, has led to pastoralist livelihood systems being the most dominant livelihood system in the landscape.

Pastoralist herds interact with their environment, and mediate human relations with the environment as a way of turning uncultivated plants (like wild grass) into food. In these regions, grazing herds on grasslands help maintain the grasslands that are critical to all life in the region. As such, these ecological systems have evolved in parallel with pastoralist livelihood systems, and **movement** and **connectivity** across the landscape have been critical to supporting livelihoods and maintaining functional ecological integrity of the land.

Taken together, low-annual-rainfall ASAL areas like these comprise 80% of Kenya's lands.<sup>1</sup>In recent years, the region has attracted increasing attention from the Kenyan government, who plans to build a number of large-scale infrastructure projects – roads, resort cities, and mega dams – in the area. Conflicting claims on the land stemming from tourism operations, conservation NGOs, county and national government, extractive industries, small holder farmers, among other, and a competition for resources between different land users, have led to conflict and multiple differing perceptions of land and resource ownership. An increase in arms ownership has exacerbated these conflicts. Increasing pressure from multiple claims on the landscape is expected to heighten conflict and competition of natural resources if not managed well, to date, cyclic

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iucn.org/our-work/topic/ecosystem-restoration/restoration-initiative/projects/kenya-asal#:~:text=>

environmental shocks (e.g., drought) and population movements have led various pastoralist groups to converge around key watershed areas, with each contesting access and control.

Community Conservancies, in combination with traditional mechanisms, constitute the primary system that govern these lands. Community conservancies are lands protected by communities for the benefit of their livelihoods. Where these landscapes have become degraded, these governing systems aim to rehabilitate landscapes using a hybrid system of traditional and contemporary grazing methods aimed at improving soil health, increasing plant cover, and producing higher-quality pasture for cattle.

Many local herders employ sustainable grazing strategies (e.g. rotational grazing) that allow perennial grasses to regrow, collect carbon from the atmosphere, and store it over time. In addition to pasture and water, it is also important to note that the region and areas under study possess rangeland potentials such as non-timber and forest products (NTFP) – including bee-keeping, gums, and resin – that could provide alternative livelihoods to pastoralists vulnerable to unpredictable environmental conditions, misaligned political will, and asymmetrical growth and development. These conditions continue to fuel marginalization while exacerbating tensions and eroding social cohesion between people and the state and between communities themselves. This lack of social cohesion in a such fragile context threatens pastoralists' well-being by undermining their age-old resilience and survival strategies, such as mobility and migration between community territories as well as maintenance of reciprocity and other key social mechanisms of support.

## 1.1 Project description

The Community Cohesion project was a three-month project supported and implemented by the East Africa Hub of the Wyss Academy for Nature (WA) together with Regional Pastoralists Peace Link (Formerly Isiolo Peace Link), a local grassroot NGO based in Isiolo. Carried out in the five community conservancies of Isiolo and Laikipia counties, our study resulted from collaboration between the Wyss Academy for Nature and the Northern Rangeland Trust (NRT), in which community cohesion was identified as a critical underlying and highly inter-related factor impacting the well-being of pastoralists.

The importance of community cohesion was further reinforced by discussions with other actors in northern Kenya, who highlighted its role in successful human–nature coexistence in the wider landscape. Focused on the community conservancies of Naapu, Nanaapa, Nanapishu, Narupa and Naibunga, our research aimed at supporting Wyss Academy for Nature efforts towards “Healthy and Functional Semi-Arid Landscapes” in northern Kenya and, where possible, in other Wyss Academy for Nature areas of activity based on our synthesis of information on community cohesion in ASALs.

The project seeks to address various existential challenges (climate change, biodiversity loss, poverty, and inequality) and the driving forces behind them by improving the main systems that

determine the relationship between nature and people – such as food, the economy, energy, or urbanization. The study was launched as part of a broader Wyss Academy for Nature vision to generate knowledge and rigorous implementation plans on behalf of solutions that transform the relationship between people and nature.

## 1.2 Purpose of the assignments

The overall goal of the present study was to assess existing approaches to community cohesion in semi-arid pastoral landscapes in Africa, in hopes of identifying supportive or hindering factors as well as effective strategies to promote cohesion in community conservancies of Oldonyiro and Naibunga in northern Kenya.

## 1.3 Specific objectives of the study

- To assess the current state of community cohesion within Oldonyiro and Naibunga community conservancies, including the strengths and weaknesses of existing relationships between different groups and the factors that contribute to these relationships.
- To identify key challenges or barriers to community cohesion, including social, economic, and political factors that may be contributing to divisions or conflicts within the community.
- To identify potential strategies for promoting greater community cohesion within Oldonyiro and Naibunga community conservancies, including best practices from semi-arid pastoral landscapes in Africa and innovative approaches that may be relevant to the local context.
- To provide recommendations for key stakeholders, including the Wyss Academy for Nature, community members, local government officials (national and county governments), and civil society organizations (CSOs), on how to promote community cohesion within Oldonyiro and Naibunga.

## 1.4 Study specific deliverables

- i) An inception report detailing the consultant's understanding of the scope of work, methodology, work plan, and budget lines.
- ii) A draft report summarizing the findings of the study, including an analysis of key factors contributing to community cohesion, challenges to cohesion, and potential strategies for promoting greater cohesion within the Wyss Academy for Nature "Solutionscape" described.

- iii) A final report incorporating feedback from stakeholders on the draft report and including recommendations for promoting community cohesion within the study area.
- iv) A presentation of the study findings to key stakeholders.

## 2 Study methodology

The study employed a mixed-method approach across the three data collection phases. In the initial step, the study team conducted an extensive desk review, focused on the context and cohesion issues, which was then used to develop the research questions. The second phase involved recruitment, training, and deployment of enumerators for field-level data collection through mobile-based *household questionnaires* under the supervision of the consultants who equally led on the qualitative data collection through *key Informant interviews (KIIs)* and *focus group discussions (FGDs)* mainly targeting opinion/local leaders, pastoralist elders, rangeland committees, conservancy employees, and local organizations working in the area.

### 2.1 Geographic locations

The research targeted communities around the four community conservancies in Isiolo's Oldonyiro ward (Nanaapa, Naapu, Narupa, Nanapishu) and lower Naibunga in Mukogode West ward in Laikipia county.

### 2.2 Limitations

Several limitations emerged in the research.

- 1) Distance between households: The first limitation was the major distance between households, sometimes extending as far as a kilometer. This increased the amount of time spent in each of the villages. The one exception was Laikipia Naibunga conservancy where local communities were targeted in a central place as they prepared their land ahead of the anticipated short October-November-December (OND) rains.
- 2) Language barrier: There was also a language barrier between the enumerators and the respondents, leading to engagement of several translators to support the four enumerators in their research work.
- 3) Sampling method: The third constraint was our sampling method. Relying on volunteer survey participants gives rise to risks of positivity bias.



## 3 Findings: Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Demographic Characteristics

Our study size was spread evenly across the five communities of Narupa, Naibunga and Naapu, Nanaapa and Nanapishu.



A total of 148 households participated in the survey against our target of 150 households; 66% (98) female and 34 (50) males.<sup>2</sup>

Naibunga displayed the highest participation of women at 93.33%, followed by Naapu at 86.67%,

**“That’s an interesting observation! In most of our activities, women’s participation is low compared to men. Could there be a reason why women in a patriarchal society are the most respondents in the household surveys? Is it partly by design, in terms of having the voice of women in such an important study? Or by default, as the study targeted households and men were in the field herding or had moved with the livestock?”**  
-Executive Director, RPPL.

Nanapishu at 56.67%, and Naapu at 53.33%. Narupa displayed the highest male participation at 60%. Further, the biggest share of survey respondents were relatively young people under 29 years at 30.67%; followed by 30–39 years at 29.33%; 40–49 years at 20%; 50–59 years at 12.67%; and over 59 years at 7.33%. Livestock keeping was the main economic activity practiced in the study areas at 84%; followed by business at 8% and public service at 1%; while 7.33% of respondents reported having no employment.

<sup>2</sup> Women’s participation in the household survey was greater than men’s. This despite women’s overall limited opportunities in other areas. Reasons include: surveys were conducted at home during the day when men are typically working in the fields; women often hold primary responsibility for managing the household and its resources. The surveys were conducted face-to-face, thus providing women with direct access to information; the survey also offered a platform for women to express their opinions and needs on matters affecting their lives and families.

**Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents**

| Variable                               | Total<br>n=150 | Narupa<br>n=30 | Naibunga<br>n=30 | Naapu<br>n=30 | Nanaapa<br>n=30 | Nanapishu<br>n=30 |
|--|----------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                          |                |                |                  |               |                 |                   |
| Male (%)                               | 34.00          | 60.00          | 6.67             | 13.33         | 46.67           | 43.33             |
| Female (%)                             | 66.00          | 40.00          | 93.33            | 86.67         | 53.33           | 56.67             |
| <b>Age (%)</b>                         |                |                |                  |               |                 |                   |
| Below 29 years                         | 30.67          | 50.00          | 23.33            | 13.33         | 13.33           | 0                 |
| 30–39 years                            | 29.33          | 36.67          | 26.67            | 20.00         | 10.00           | 6.67              |
| 40–49 years                            | 20.00          | 36.67          | 30.00            | 23.33         | 3.33            | 6.67              |
| 50–59 years                            | 12.67          | 20.00          | 30.00            | 13.33         | 13.33           | 23.33             |
| Above 59 years                         | 7.33           | 10.00          | 36.67            | 30.00         | 23.33           | 0                 |
| <b>Education level (%)</b>             |                |                |                  |               |                 |                   |
| None                                   | 64.67          | 26.67          | 66.67            | 66.67         | 73.33           | 90.00             |
| Primary                                | 17.33          | 10.00          | 30.00            | 23.33         | 16.67           | 6.67              |
| Secondary                              | 12.67          | 40.00          | 3.33             | 6.67          | 10.00           | 3.33              |
| College                                | 4.00           | 16.67          | 0                | 3.33          | 0               | 0                 |
| Graduate                               | 1.33           | 6.67           | 0                | 0             | 0               | 0                 |
| <b>Years stayed in the village (%)</b> |                |                |                  |               |                 |                   |
| 1–5 years                              | 2.67           | 0              | 0                | 6.67          | 3.33            | 3.33              |
| 6–10 years                             | 14.67          | 13.33          | 6.67             | 30.00         | 6.67            | 16.67             |
| 11–15 years                            | 10.00          | 6.67           | 10.00            | 10.00         | 10.00           | 13.33             |
| 16–20 years                            | 17.33          | 20.00          | 13.33            | 23.33         | 16.67           | 13.33             |
| Over 20 years                          | 55.33          | 60.00          | 70.00            | 30.00         | 63.33           | 53.33             |
| <b>Occupation (%)</b>                  |                |                |                  |               |                 |                   |
| Livestock                              | 84.00          | 66.67          | 76.67            | 86.67         | 96.67           | 93.33             |
| Business                               | 8.00           | 20.00          | 6.67             | 6.67          | 3.33            | 3.33              |
| Public service                         | 0.67           | 3.33           | 0                | 0             | 0               | 0                 |
| Unemployed                             | 7.33           | 10.00          | 16.67            | 6.67          | 0               | 3.33              |

### 3.2 Contextualizing and understanding cohesion in the landscape

Social cohesion is a product of various social, political, and economic factors. In this study, we explore two forms of social cohesion: vertical cohesion, defined as the relationship between the state and the people; and horizontal cohesion, defined as the relationship between people and groups. In northern Kenya, and by extension the two areas under study – Oldonyiro, and Mukogodo West ward in Isiolo and Laikipia county, respectively – there is a historical disconnect between people and the state, evidenced by weak state presence, high poverty levels, illiteracy, marginalization, and deliberate exclusion of the region from development agendas.

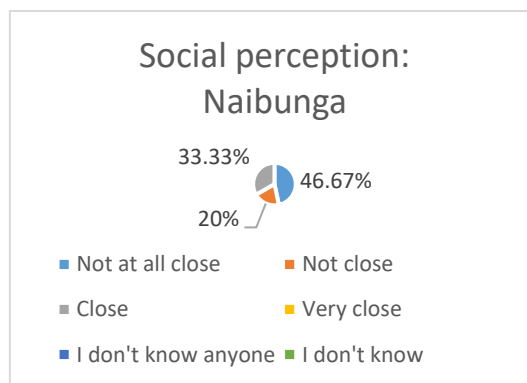
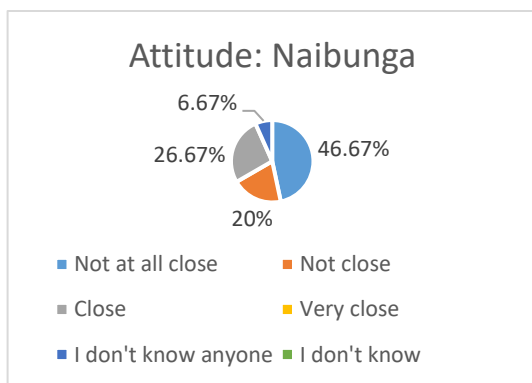
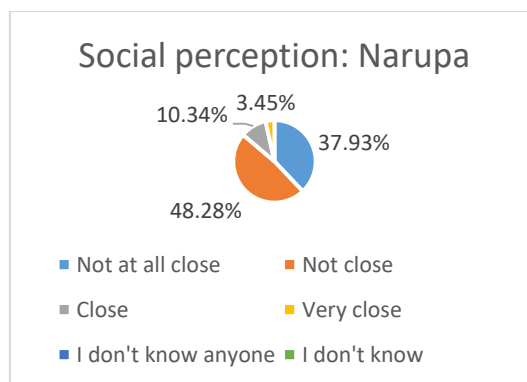
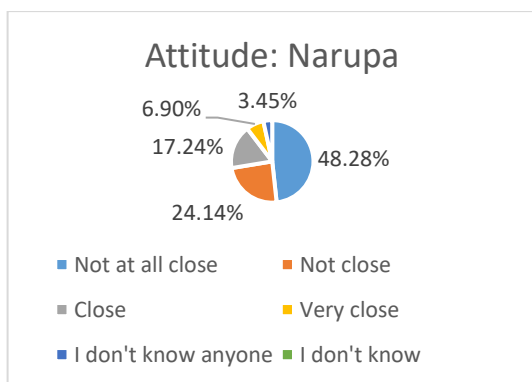
Trust in government, a key issue in vertical cohesion, is generally lacking. This can be attributed to the state’s closure and “securitization” of the region; government inability to provide services to

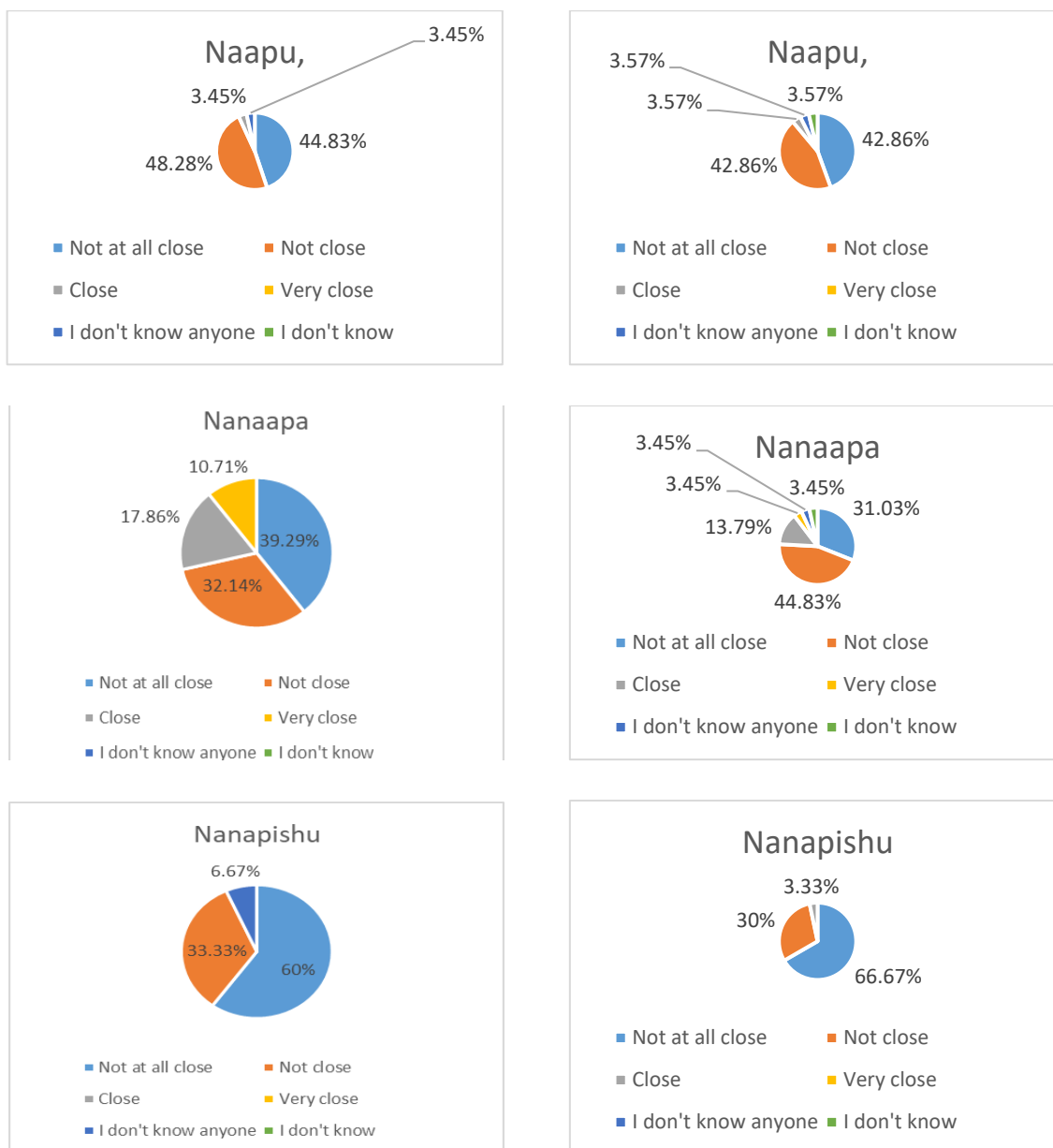


people living there; and exclusion of people and the region from decision-making, producing and reinforcing legislation and policies that “starve” the people–state relationship. Kenya’s change in governance approach enabling devolution and “self-government” has also been detrimental; county governments in the region, now with locals at the helm of leadership who control budgets encompassing billions of shillings, have been causing even more disfranchisement and division between various groups and authorities due to identity politics and clientelism. Originally conceived of as redress for historical state neglect of the region, devolution transforms counties into frontiers of contestation as more ethnic groups compete for county leadership. This has significant implications for cohesion, as some groups lose trust in the devolved unit and rivalries arise between various groups that make up the population of the county. In the last three elections, shifting alliances have emerged in these frontier counties as a result of mistrust and greed. Individual local elites have become the face of these trends, churning out toxic narratives that harm social cohesion. The divisive messages and perceptions created negatively impact vertical cohesion, as communities increasingly lose trust in their local government and amongst themselves. Receiving billions of shillings from the exchequer, the devolved political-administrative units perpetuate dynamics of exclusion when one group enjoys leadership, employment, and business opportunities while discriminating against others. The situation has led to loss of faith in political leaders at all levels, from the ward level to the national level.

### How do you feel or relate to political leadership in your county?

#### Political leaders: Self vs. social perception





Our second analytical lens focused on horizontal cohesion, that is, cohesion between individuals in a group or between one group and other external groups. In particular, we sought to examine whether and how conservancies support cohesion by enhancing interactions, trust, and people’s sense of belonging internally and externally. Notably, we looked for these potentially beneficial dynamics despite existing assumptions that conservancies fuel inter-clan conflict between different groups, particularly in the case of Samburu and Isiolo counties. In both study areas, cohesion is evident and is largely internal. The Samburu in Isiolo and the Laikipia Maasai in Laikipia have held together based largely on ancestral ties, clans, and kinship (in-group) allegiances. Both groups also have similar traditional values and their languages exhibit only minimal dialectical differences. In assessing horizontal cohesion, we considered the output of a sensitivity analysis exercise undertaken by WA and NRT. It synthesized observations on the topic

of “Insecure and degrading landscapes threatening the coexistence of nature and people” and what must be done to enable better nature–people coexistence in Oldonyiro and Naibunga.

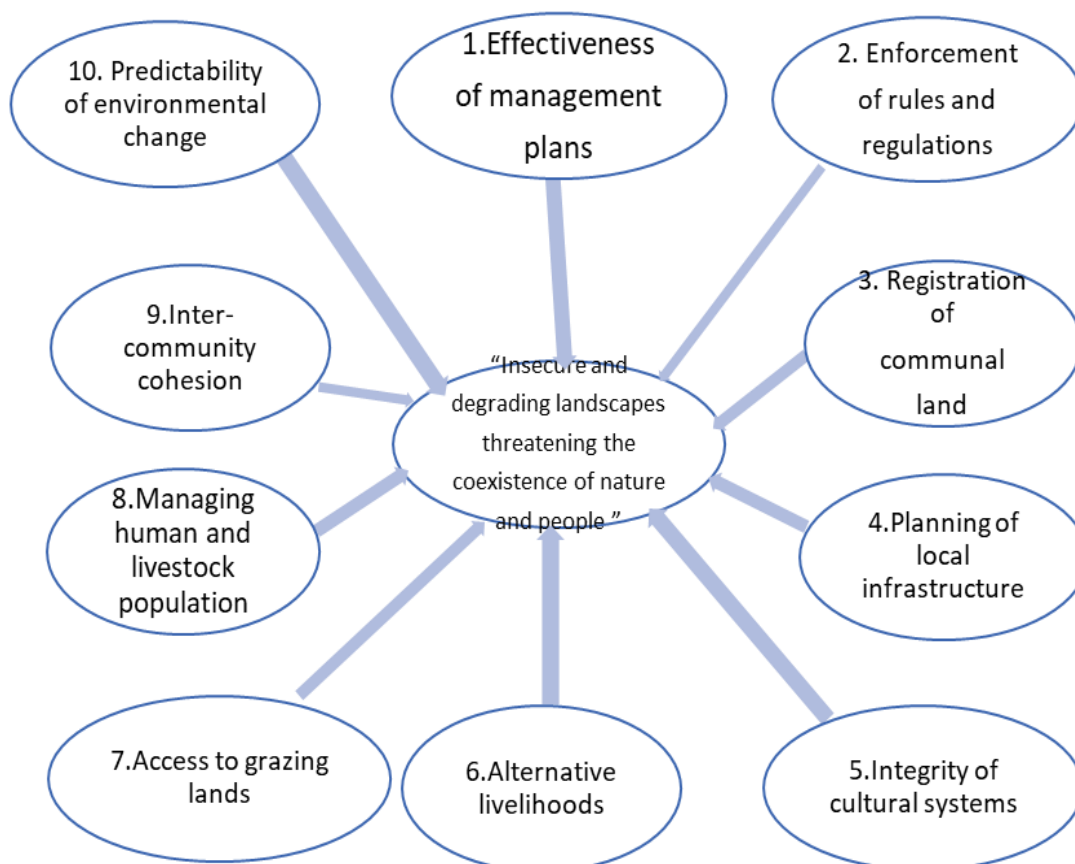
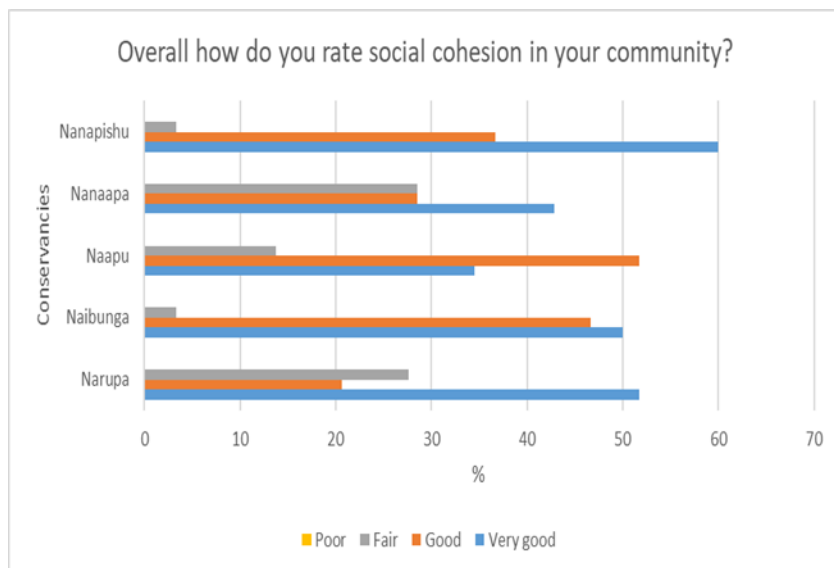
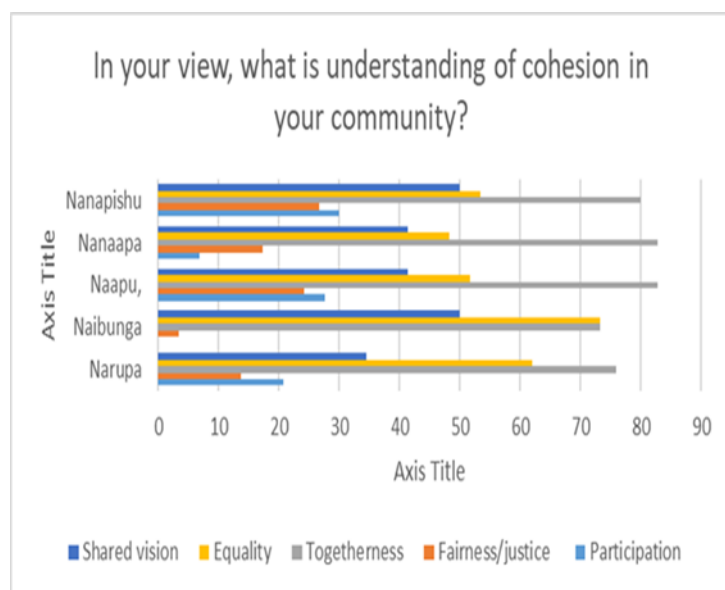


Figure: Adapted from the sensitivity analysis by the Wyss Academy for Nature and the Northern Rangeland Trust (NRT) in view of a shared understanding of system dynamics.

In both wards (Oldonyiro) and Mukogodo West, various smaller groups live amongst the more populous Samburu and Laikipia Maasai groups. In Kipsing area, for example, significant numbers of Turkana live side by side with Samburu, though their relationship is strained due to political conflict and revenge cycles.

Considered distant cousins, the Samburu and Turkana make up significant population shares in Isiolo, Oldonyiro, and Ngaremara ward respectively. Similar to other pastoralist communities, their relations are characterized by on and off feuds, fueled by raids and counter raids as well as contestation over rangeland resources in the Mlango area. Samburu and Turkana communities also live alongside one another in Burat ward. The last two elections point to growing tensions between these communities due to escalating conflicting over Mlango, an area rich in resources (especially pasture and water), as well as to the decisive role played by the Turkana in election rivalries between two large clans, the Psikishu and Lukamtu. This is despite them not fielding a candidate but supporting any other Samburu clan. Views of the Turkana community as an outgroup have also resulted in inequalities, with Turkana sometimes locked out of opportunities for employment or even from participation in development programs.



In 2015, a Turkana community living in Kipsing were chased out in retaliation for a raid at Mlango, in which Turkana’s overpowered the Samburu. For three months, the displaced Turkana community stayed at a General Service Unit (GSU) camp, with their children missing classes, houses burned down, and livestock stolen. These conflicts and inequalities harm well-being and social cohesion.

Our study also assessed community understanding of cohesion. In each

of the five conservancies under study, large percentages of respondents cited “togetherness” as a key ingredient to cohesion, namely 82% in Nanaapa and Naapu, 80% in Nanapishu, 76% in Narupa, and 72% in Naibunga; this was followed by “equality” at 72% in Naibunga, 62% in Narupa, 53% in Nanapishu, 52% in Naapu, and 48% in Nanaapa. Our qualitative data showed that respondents view “togetherness” as involving living together, upholding the same social values, using the same language, and embracing the same culture. In the case of pastoralists, social cohesion among members of the same in-group typically involves joint rangeland resource exploitation, joint migration, reciprocity, as well as defense of their community, land, and livestock against external aggression (from out-groups). However, it is important to note that social cohesion is weak between the host (in-group) and other communities, including those living in the host territory or those they meet when the groups “converge” in the strategic

rangelands. This is particularly the case in and around Mukogodo, which is highly resource endowed and provides opportunities for free mobility, unlike other parts of Laikipia that are “closed” due to land ownership issues and economic activities such as ranching and crop production, as well as conservation.

### **3.3 Factors eroding cohesion among communities in the five conservancies**

#### **3.3.1 Ethnic strain in the landscape**

The largest groups in the Oldonyiro and Mukogodo west ward in Isiolo and Laikipia county are the Samburu and Laikipia Maasai. Other smaller ethnic groups co-exist alongside these larger groups within the conservancies. The most diverse setting is Nanapishu, whose proximity to Burat ward and Mlango, in particular, makes it a meeting point for various ethnic groups (Samburu, Turkana, Ndorobo, Somalis, and Borana) who frequently migrate and utilize existing rangeland resources found in the area during periods of (e.g. climactic) stress. In this context, resource access and utilization are greatly determined by relationships between the groups; this makes Mlango area a critical site of cohesion or fault lines between the various groups in Oldonyiro (Isiolo), Mukogodo (Laikipia), and even Samburu County. The area is well-endowed with pasture and water, attracting each of the pastoralist groups into the landscape. It is characterized by two landscape features: a plain land and underdeveloped rift valley, moving from Karandare (Burat) to Kipsing (Oldonyiro). A typical example of African savannah, the area features a warm year-round climate and a landscape sparsely dotted with trees, wildlife, and edible grasses and shrubs suitable for all the livestock species (cow, shoa, and camels). These characteristics make it a haven for pastoralists, with diverse groups moving into the area whenever drought occurs. This influx and subsequent concentration increases contact between the various groups, often resulting in violent clashes as each group competes for the scarce and fast-diminishing natural resources. However, the seasonal violence in Laikipia has a range of causes. In addition to location and geography, the cynical manipulation of politicians plays a role in the conflicts. Probably the biggest factor, however, are the opposing viewpoints held by farmers, on the one hand, and pastoralists, on the other.<sup>3</sup> So, what complicates cohesion in Nanapishu and other neighboring conservancies? Firstly, Mlango area is contested in terms of ownership, with different groups laying claim to it. For instance, the Somalis consider the area their traditional grazing area (Isiolo West); this claim is reinforced by their continuous utilization of the area since colonial times and subsequent recruitment of Somalis as administrators (chiefs). Their renewed ownership claim is also enhanced by the suitability of the area for camel production at a time when there is increased demand for camel products (milk and meat) and the location also provides easy access to high-end markets in Eastleigh, Nairobi. Meanwhile, however, the Turkana community claims a place in the territory called Biliqo, which over time could lead to increasing contestation. Secondly, Mlango is bordered by several conservancies. The proximity of these conservancies also impacts cohesion because it places constraints on the mobility of pastoralist groups. Each group must migrate

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<sup>3</sup> [Decades old tensions are driving the conflict in Kenya's Laikipia region \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/decades-old-tensions-are-driving-the-conflict-in-kenya-s-laikipia-region-2017-01).



within the landscape in search of pasture and water in the face of climate change and intensifying drought cycles, which have shifted from 5–10 years to every 1–2 years in the last two decades.

### 3.3.2 Natural resources

Landscapes in ASAL feature vital natural resources such as pasture, water, trees. Already relatively scarce, these resources are diminishing further in such settings due to the impacts of climate change and drought. In the areas of both Oldonyiro and Naibunga, resource scarcity is worsening as a result of overgrazing, unregulated livestock movement, and uncontrolled pastoralist influxes that occur during drought periods when mobile groups migrate into the Oldonyiro from Laikipia and Samburu County. Migration, while key a drought survival strategy, presents a significant risk of conflict and contributes to erosion of social cohesion. In pastoralists areas, interactions related to natural resource access, use, and ownership can be positive or negative. On the positive side, we have reciprocity, where communities share resources. On the negative side, we have denial of access and fighting ensuing between host communities and incoming groups (migrants), often resulting in loss of lives and livelihoods. This contested relationship in a highly fragile ecosystem further undermines pastoralists' general well-being, diminishing their resilience and increasing vulnerability. These tensions and conflicts hinder sustainable use of rangeland resources, which vary across three “seasons” – wet, dry, and drought reserves.

There is evidence of shrinking rangelands in all the communities studied. This reality calls for a new resource management regime based on the following three governance aspects: *land and natural resource ownership, regulation of natural resource access and use, and the provision of services to support and improve natural resource management.*<sup>4</sup> Overall, resilience and survival in the area depend on mobility and migration, an effective strategy of reciprocity and facilitative co-existence between groups, and creation of room for inter-community and transboundary resources. This strategy will also support the growth of healthy rangelands.

### 3.3.3 Land and boundary contest

Land is a critical resource influencing pastoralism and its future. There is wide outcry across northern Kenya over changing land use and demographic shifts that are fueling tensions internally and externally. Land is an emerging arena of significant contestation, causing a lot of strain between communities. Pressure on land resources has led many communities to call for land registration as a protection strategy against encroachment from others as well as to enhance their own traditional resource governance and undertake investment in conservation as source of revenue from eco-tourism. While each conservancy area is relatively homogeneous internally in terms of community composition, land- and conservation-related tensions have emerged between communities in the counties of Isiolo and Laikipia. Indeed, land and boundary contestations between the two counties flared up in 2019/2020, leading to death of over 10 people, including a chief, after the Laikipia community launched conservation efforts in their rangelands that were rejected by the Oldonyiro community. The Oldonyiro began invading areas that the Laikipia

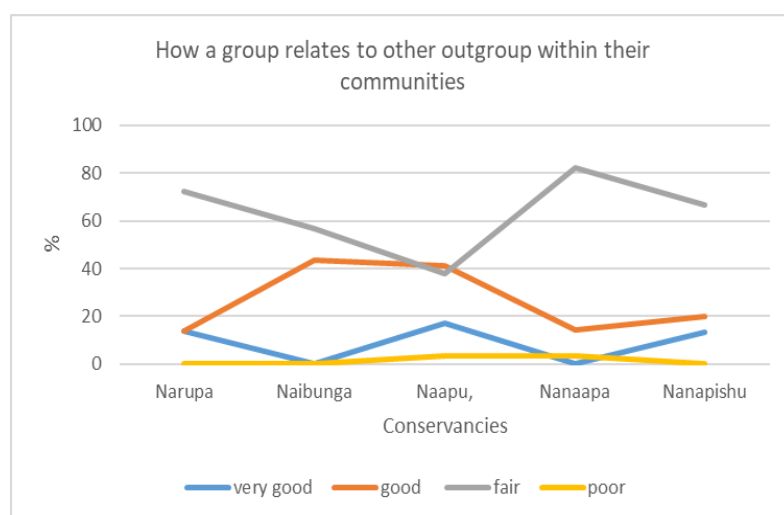
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<sup>4</sup> IUCN report 2013: Strengthening natural resource governance in Garba Tula ESARO Regional.

community considered their strategic and/or drought grazing reserves. Notably, there is also difference in land tenure system in Laikipia and Isiolo. In Laikipia, land is mostly held in the form of community ranches. In Isiolo, land is held in trust, such that most conservancies in Isiolo lack direct investment from donors who demand land security in the form of an official title or deed. There is on-going sensitization and training of community members on land registration in line with the Community Land Act 2016, with organizations like NRT, the FAO, and a host of other community-based organizations supporting the program.

### 3.4 Research questions

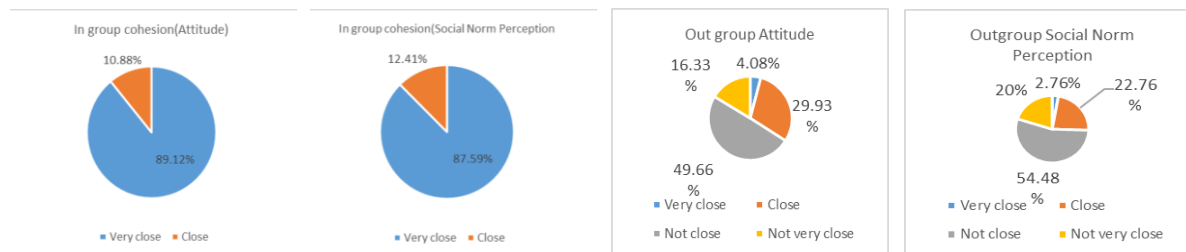
**Assessment question: How do you feel or relate to a member of your group and other community?**



All five communities reported good levels of internal social cohesion. This can be attributed to the high homogeneity (>90%) of these communities. Key factors behind these positive social cohesion ratings are shared identity, high levels of internal trust, as well as bonds facilitated by kinship ties, language, culture, and shared faith (bonding social capital). There were also

indications of assimilation of “outgroups” such as Turkana into Samburu in Naapu and Nanapishu. Some outgroup members, for example a speaker of Ngiturkana, had adopted Samburu tradition and culture including establishment of new social ties through intermarriage, for example. The overall social cohesion rating (in-group) was 89.12%, as well as 87.59% for social norm perception. Though they subscribe to the same part of the larger Maa group, in-group bias was evident between the Samburu and Ndorobo, with Samburus viewing the latter as outcasts based on their livelihood mechanism (hunting and gathering). We also found that in-group cohesion resulted from shared language, with overall 95.25% of respondents citing language as determinant of how they related with a group; followed by identity/sharing of cultural practices at 89.80%, trust at 70.07%, and faith at 17.01%. We also assessed how respondents (in-group) relate to major outgroups living in the same area, with most citing fair/moderate relations, including 82.14% of respondents in Naapu, 72.14% in Narupa, 66.67% in Nanapishu, 56.67% in Naibunga, and 37.93% in Naapu. Significant shares of respondents reporting good relationships with outgroups were found in Naibunga (43.33%) and Naapu (41.38%); in the three remaining conservancies, less than 15% of the respondents cited good relationships between ingroups and outgroups. Notably, we found that language plays a key role in maintaining distance between groups, with 95.24% of

respondents using language as a yardstick for how or whether they can relate with an individual or a group; followed by identity/culture at 63.27%, trust at 56.46%, and faith at 8.16%.



## Who occupies the landscape and how do different groups fair in terms of cohesion and related issues?

### i) Samburu vs. Turkana

The Turkana and Samburu both belong to the plain Nilotes, practicing pastoralism and featuring similar adaptive capacities. Both are highly mobile, continually moving in search of pasture and water for their livestock. Each group places a lot of value on livestock, particularly cows, as a symbol of wealth; this attachment to livestock as wealth can contribute to tension and conflicts between pastoralist groups. Occupying Isiolo, Samburu, and Laikipia, the groups display a strained historical relationship, with tensions rising and falling depending on various risk factors. Available evidence suggests that they are embroiled in conflict due to contestation over rangeland resources. The Turkana accuse the Samburu of not respecting other communities' boundaries, property, and lives (enforcement of rules and regulations). Conflict between the Samburu and Turkana transcends the borders of Isiolo and Laikipia, extending as far as Samburu County; aspects of Samburu culture arguably fuel conflict, such as the belief that a young person (Moran) can gain the right to marry or transition to adulthood by participating in raids, killing, and/or stealing from neighbors. The conflict in Loruko undermines cohesion between the two communities. It is believed their initial migration into Isiolo originally occurred in the 1940s following conflicts between various pastoralist groups over natural resources and drought moving down to Kerio valley. A violent conflict eventually erupted between the Turkana and Samburu in Baragoi, culminating in a Turkana defeat. This defeat resulted in their losing livestock wealth and land in Marti, Baragoi, and Kowalop. The Turkana were forced to disperse eastward and occupy areas of Laikipia, taking up jobs as herders and producing dairy for the white settlers in Laikipia.<sup>5</sup>

### ii) Samburu vs. Somali

Samburu and Somali communities have a longstanding history of conflict, mainly centering around Mlango, in the vicinity of Nanapishu (Oldonyiro), Nasulu (Burat), Leparua (Burat), Samburu (West Gate), and Lekuruki (Laikipia). The main cause of conflict between the Somalis and Samburu is contestation of rangeland resources in Mlango. During periods of drought and

<sup>5</sup> Guyo Haro (2023) unpublished report, "Documentation of Indigenous Turkana community knowledge and tradition in Ngaremara Ward, Isiolo County".

scarcity, huge influxes of these groups into Mlango lead to competition over rangeland resources and opposing territorial claims. The result is often violence, loss of lives and livestock, and vicious cycles of revenge.

### iii) Somali vs. Turkana

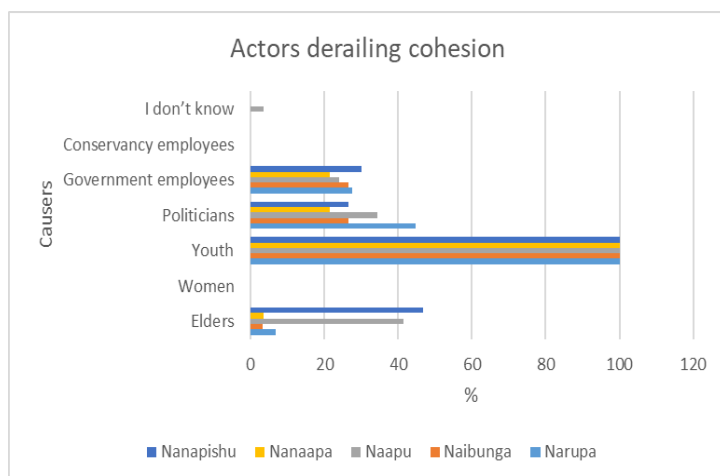
The relationship between the Turkana and Somalis was previously strained but has been better in recent years (≈3 years). They display something of a partnership that is partly rooted in their historical relationship from the colonial era. The origins of the Turkana in Isiolo include, firstly, their migration in the 1940s from Lodwar through Lomelo and down to Kapedo, Kerio valley, and Baragoi before dispersing into Laikipia and Archers Post; and, secondly, to Somalis who brought them into Isiolo as porters and livestock herders. Their relationship is thus anchored in history, with some young Turkana men still herding Somali livestock today. While conflict is occasionally reported between the two groups, they have developed an alliance over the last few years, including sharing of rangelands, herding, and even kraal. In this way, the Turkana have distanced themselves from the Samburu, due the periodic raids of the latter, and formed a pact with the Somalis. Conflict in Loruko, a sub-location in Burat ward, has also pitched the Samburu against the Turkana, displacing many and leading the latter to ally with the Somalis.

### iv) Somali and Turkana vs. Ndorobo

The Ndorobo belong to the larger Maa-speaking group. They live in Leparua (Isiolo) and Mukogode East (Laikipia). The relationship between the Ndorobo and Somalis is fair and may be attributed to their avoidance of direct involvement in recent raids, except for a few incidences of livestock theft. Nevertheless, while the Ndorobo do not involve themselves directly in fighting, they have been accused by the Somalis and Turkana as providing the Samburu with information about livestock numbers and strength of defenses, as well as providing food, water, and a safe exit route during and after raids.

### **Assessment question: In your view who are the Individuals or group involved in causing violence (lack of cohesion) in your community?**

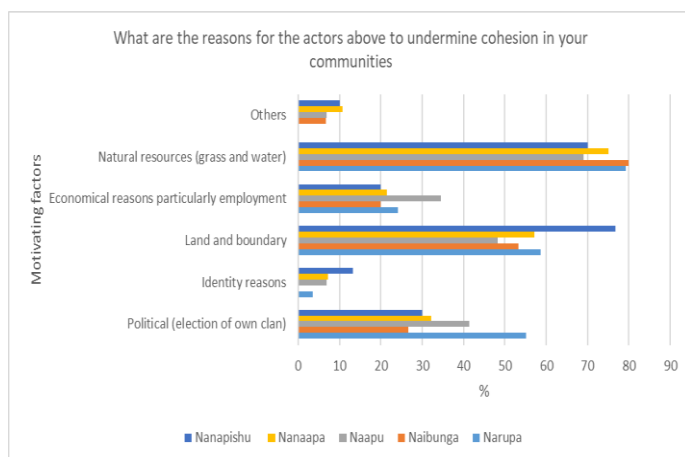
Different actors have different motivations for undermining cohesion. In all the five conservancies, there is consensus that young people (youth) are behind most conflicts in the landscape. Our qualitative data findings suggest a change in the traditional role of youth in these societies. In the past, young men were viewed as a collective army, with the role of providing the first layer of defense. Raids were organized to assert the power of the group. Today, by contrast, respondents view the youth as motivated more by personal aims and opportunities for social gain, with raids organized as means of accumulating personal wealth and fulfilling desires such as building a home or acquiring a motorbike. Still, some respondents also cited elders as contributing to lack of cohesion, including 46% of respondents in Nanapishu, followed 41% in Naapu, 8% in Narupa, and 5% in Nanaapa and Naibunga respectively. Respondents also cited political leaders as



contributing to lack of cohesion, namely 46% of respondents in Narupa, 34% in Naapu, 23% each in Nanapishu and Naibunga, and 21% in Nanaapa. Finally, some respondents pointed to government employees as undermining cohesion, for example in their delivery of services. In particular, actors working in the security sector were cited, including chiefs and the local police network who were seen as

harassing locals – especially youth – and/or enforcing no-longer-valid laws that local communities find inappropriate. A total of 26% of respondents cited these actors and dynamics in Nanapishu, 24% in Nanaapa, 23% in Naibunga, 22% in Naapu, and 21% in Nanaapa. Women, as a group, were not cited as undermining cohesion in our household survey. However, qualitative data suggested that some women may play a role mainly according to age; for example, elder women acted to “bless” male raiders and young girls were involved in performing songs of praise to highlight the place of brave men in society.

**Assessment question: What is the motivation of the individuals or groups in undermining cohesion in your community?**

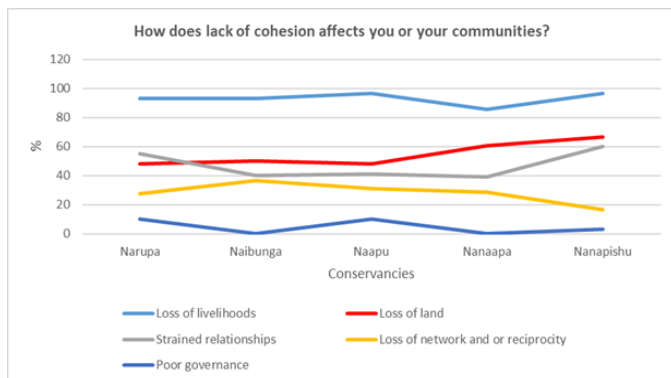


Across the communities, different actors were attributed various motivations for undermining social cohesion. In Nanapishu, 76% respondents identified land and boundary disputes as the biggest motivation factor derailing cohesion (vs. Narupa 56%, Nanaapa 54%, Naibunga 52%, and Naapu at 48%). Even more significantly, across all four conservancies, natural resources

(pasture and water) were named as major motivation factors (Naibunga 80%, Narupa 79%, Nanaapa 74%, Nanapishu 70% and Naapu 68%). Finally, politics were named as a key motivating factor harming cohesion (Narupa 54%, Naapu 41%, Naapu 32%, Nanapishu 30% and Naibunga 27%).



**Assessment question: In your view, what is the impact of lack of cohesion in your community?**



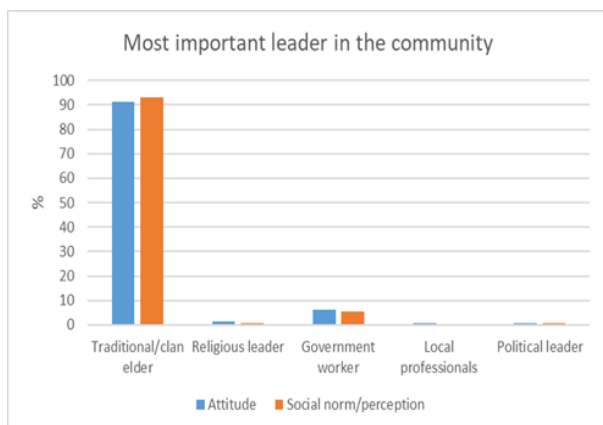
In all the conservancies, respondents cited loss of livelihood as a negative impact of poor cohesion (Nanapishu 96.67%, Naapu 96.5%, Naibunga 93.33%, Narupa 93.2%, Naapu 87.5%); followed by loss of land/rangelands (Nanapishu 66.67%, Nanaapa 60.71%, Naibunga 50%, Naapu/Narupa 48.28%); strained relations (Nanapishu 60%, Narupa 58.12%, Naapu 41.38%, Naibunga 40%,

Nanaapa 39.29%) and loss of social networks and/or reciprocity (Naibunga 36.67%, Naapu 31.03%, Nanaapa 28.57%, Narupa 27.59%, Nanapishu 16.67%). In summary, taken together, 93.15% of respondents cited loss of livelihoods as a key impact of insufficient cohesion, followed by loss of land at 54.79%, strained relationships at 47.26%, loss of networks at 28.08%, and loss of reciprocity at 4.79%.

In Oldonyiro, lack of cohesion was blamed for a rise in highway banditry; this has forced all vehicles – including those involved in humanitarian/development work – to use Isiolo, Nanyuki (Laikipia) road instead, then Oldonyiro, resulting in many productive hours lost, extra fuel consumption, and wear and tear on vehicles. Lack of cohesion has also impacted Kipsing market, with several instances reported of vehicles attacked en route to or from the market as well as ambushes of traders whose goods or cash were stolen. Such incidents also help explain the very bad relationship between the Samburu and Somalis, as Somali traders were among those targeted and the livestock, they bought at the market were stolen (bridging social capital). Apart from impacting social cohesion, these incidences also harm the local economy.

**Assessment question: Who is the most important leader in your community?**

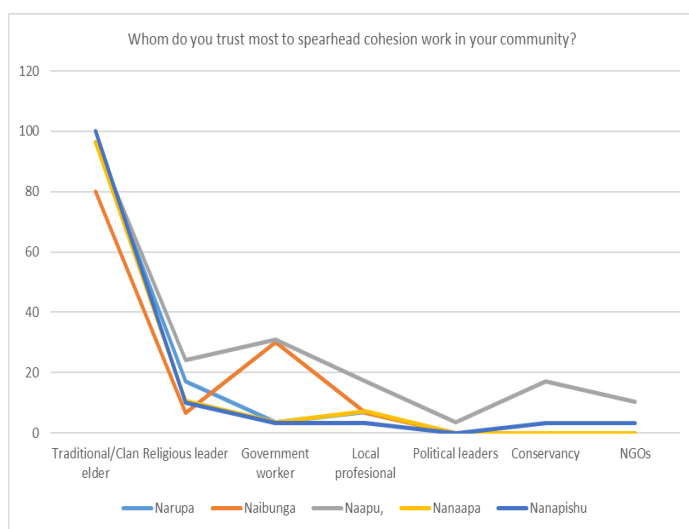
This question was asked to help identify what community leaders could be trusted in terms of spearheading cohesion. Taken together, 91% of respondents cited traditional/clan elders as the



most important leaders, demonstrating the high level of respect accorded to the institution of elders in such communities; elders are usually viewed as the custodians of critical unwritten rules and regulations regarding resource management. In pastoralist communities, elders also serve as judges and repositories of knowledge, roles that inculcate respect for elders in the young. Finally, government employees were cited as

important leaders by 6%, whereas only 1% cited religious leaders, politicians, or other professionals. This shows that the government can play a relatively critical role in building social cohesion through service delivery and by spearheading inclusion of communities in development programs.

**Assessment question: Whom do you trust most to spearhead cohesion building in your community?**

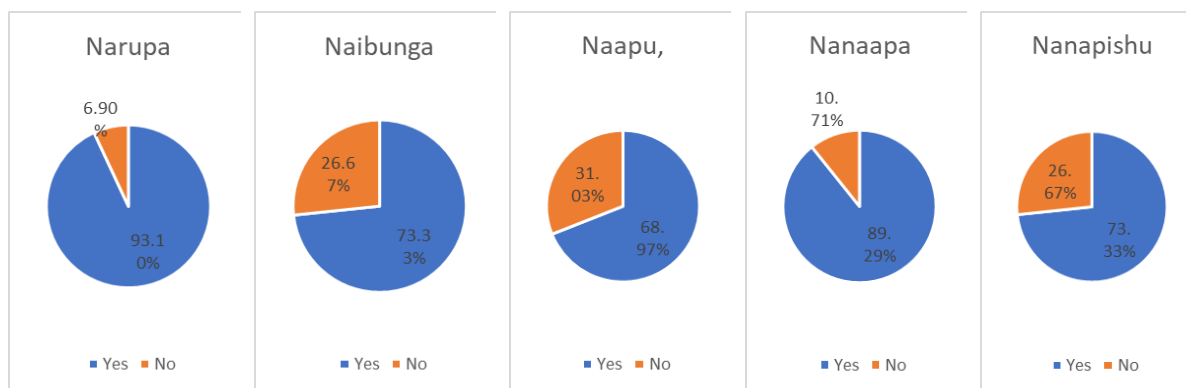


In pastoralist communities, elders bear significant authority and assume various decisive roles. Despite the outside introduction of new governance systems aimed at shifting decision-making authority to structures such as politicians and administrators (including chiefs), the institution of elders continues to enjoy overwhelming faith and respect among pastoralists at the local level. Indeed, 100% of respondents in Nanapishu expressed high trust in elders, followed

by Narupa at 96.55%, Naapu at 96.43%, Nanaapa at 96.43%, and Naibunga at 80%. The second institution in which local communities put their trust is religious leaders, as seen in Naapu at 24.14%, Narupa at 17.24%, Nanapishu at 10.71%, Nanaapa at 10%, and Naibunga at 6.67%.

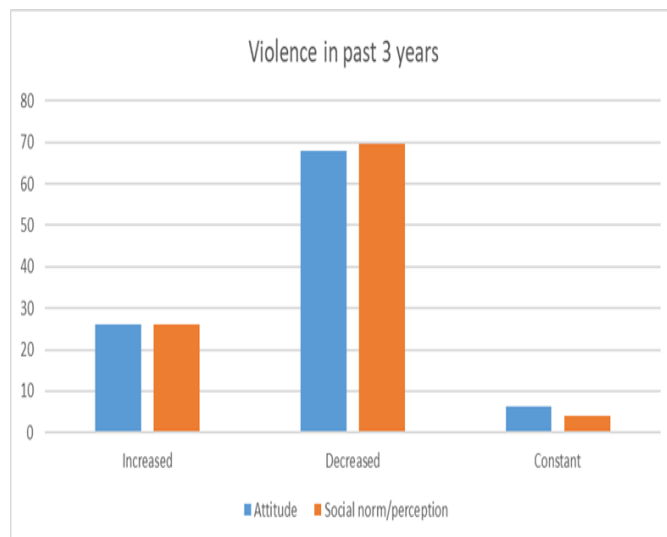
In terms of cohesion building, respondents put almost no trust in political leaders. This can be explained from two perspectives. First, political leaders have very little presence in these areas; they might come seeking votes during a campaign and then disappear after winning elections. Second, these communities are separate from main communities/towns and practice shows that political leaders tend to work with gatekeepers who are remote from local communities. Out of all five communities surveyed, only Naapu had a tiny minority of respondents (3.45%) who felt political leaders could play a role in cohesion building. Government workers were cited as trusted leaders by small minorities in Naapu and Naibunga (31.03%), but only by 3.45% in Narupa and 3.33% in Nanapishu and Nanaapa respectively. Local professionals were cited as trusted in Naapu by 17%, followed by Nanapishu at 7.14%, Naibunga at 6.67%, Narupa at 6.9%, and Nanaapa at 3.33%. Overall, the staff of conservancies and NGOs were generally not cited as trusted to spearhead cohesion, except in Narupa (10.34% conservancy; 3.33% NGO) and Nanaapa (17.24% conservancy; 3.33% NGO).

**Assessment questions: Do you think local actors have means to resolve conflicts peacefully or can foster cohesion through mechanisms such as pastoralist elders and clan structures/institutions?**



In pastoralists communities, internal social cohesion is largely a product of traditional ties of kinship, language, and identity. The results of our survey demonstrate the importance of working with traditional pastoralist elders and clan structures in order to solve conflicts and foster cohesion, as seen in Narupa at 93.1%, Naibunga at 73.33%, Naapu at 68%, Nanaapa at 89.29%, and Nanapishu at 73.33%.

**Assessment question: How do you rate the level of cohesion in your community?**

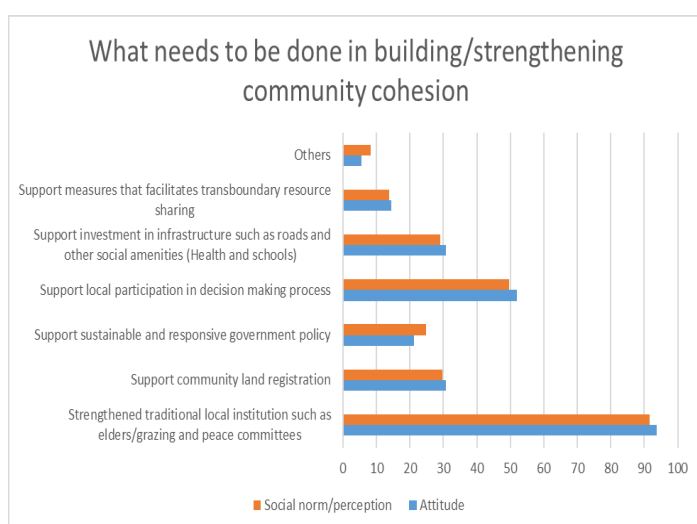


Despite the recent severe drought experienced in the area, our study findings point to significant cause for optimism, with 67.81% of respondents pointing to a decrease in violence in recent years. Only 26.03% felt there was an increase while 6.16% felt the situation had remained constant. In all the communities, this positive development (i.e. decrease in conflict) was attributed to the work of local community conservancies involved in capacity building activities such as facilitation of

peace meetings, provision of rangers for local security, and rangeland planning in collaboration with local pastoralist communities. Notably, the responses to this question referred to internal and not external cohesion. Regarding cohesion between the Samburu and other communities, such as Laikipia Maasai, conflict unfortunately increased. For instance, the Laikipia Maasai accused the Oldonyiro Samburu of being involved in raids and as well providing information and safe exit to raiders from Samburu County.

Nevertheless, the perceived decrease in intra-group conflict is a welcome development. It may partly be attributed to a rise in available pasture across all the five conservancies following good rainfalls received during the October–November–December (OND) period. It may also be attributed to a relatively peaceful election experienced in Laikipia North. This is despite rising political tension and cattle wars around western Laikipia county, where the immediate trigger for fighting often involves cattle rustling by rival communities (mainly Pokot, Samburu, and Turkana) or herders moving their cattle onto private ranches, conservancies, or cultivated land. Clashes like this have killed at least 35 people since September 2021 and the army has been deployed in the area.<sup>6</sup>

**Assessment question: What do you think needs to be done to build or strengthen cohesion in your community?**

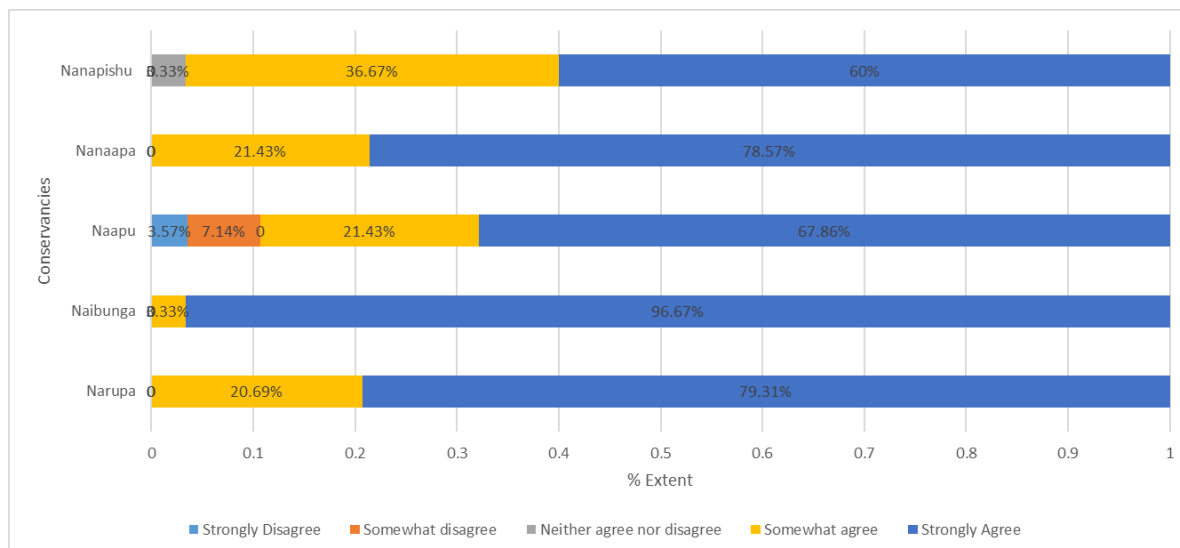


With this assessment question, sought to identify what drives social cohesion and what interventions could be used to improve it. In the project area, 93% of respondents felt that strengthening traditional local institutions – i.e. elders, grazing, and peace committees – holds the key to cohesion, followed by 51% who cited supporting local participation in decision-making processes (vertical cohesion) as critical to cohesion. Another 30% of survey respondents felt that supporting

community land registration processes and investment in critical infrastructure would improve community cohesion.

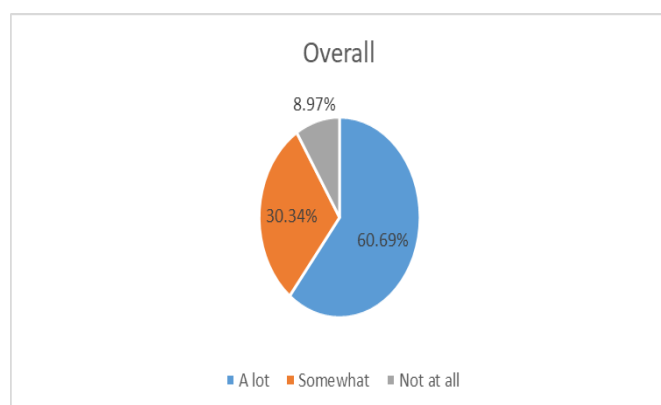
<sup>6</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/kenya/drought-violence-and-politics-inside-laikipias-cattle-war>.

**Assessment question: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I am optimistic about my community achieving cohesion in the future?**



A remarkably high level of optimism regarding future cohesion was found in all communities. This could mainly be attributed to intra- and inter-group (Samburu and Maasai) community homogeneity based on similarities in culture, traditions, and language (despite dialectical differences). High optimism was expressed by the Naibunga community at 96.67%, followed by Narupa at 79.31%, Nanaapa at 78.57%, Naapu at 67.86%, and Nanapishu at 60%. At the same time, it is important to note that tensions exist between the host communities (Samburu and Laikipia Maasai) and other smaller groups living amongst them. These tensions stem from language and cultural differences, as well as perceptions of outsiders capturing economic growth, acquiring land, pursuing political interests, influencing the outcome of elections. However, when grievances are suitably managed and positive social contacts are established between the in-group and outgroups, optimism prevails.

**Assessment question: To what extent do wildlife conservation projects contribute to your community?**



An impressive 60.69% of respondents perceived their community conservancy as improving their overall socio-economic status. This can be attributed to the economic initiatives of conservancies such as employment opportunities for locals (e.g. as rangers, conservancy managers), increased security, resilience-building through development of grazing plans, rangeland reclamation, investment

in education through school construction, as well as health and water projects. Importantly,



conservancies have also played a key role in the development of infrastructure in the region, including construction of roads, which improve the delivery of services. New roads such as Leburki and Ngorika have also improved security by enabling interception of raiders, facilitating security patrols, and expediting recovery of stolen animals. Local communities in Oldonyiro, for example, highly rated conservancies for implementing programs that deliver high social returns. Examples include conservancy efforts to facilitate livestock markets where animals can be sold at a fair price as well as facilitation of negotiations between local communities and private ranches to protect a nuclei herd during drought. For instance, Oldonyiro community was able to negotiate an agreement with a private ranch that took in about 400 heads of cows for Ksh 500 per month, covering grazing fees and all vet services required for the well-being of the animal. Local communities also cited conservancies as driving change by supporting new livelihood opportunities, including Ujuzi Manyatta, eco-tourism, artefact and/or financial inclusion programs such as a village saving and loan group aimed at women.

### 3.5 Stakeholder mapping

In this study, we also assessed the linking of social capital, understood as establishment of connections between communities and other external actors such as the government or other development partners.

| No. | Partner  | Type          | Thematic area of interest   |
|-----|--|---------------|---|
| 1.  | Northern Rangeland Trust (NRT)   | NGO           | Conservation, natural resource management (NRM), security   |
| 2.  | Nawiri   | International | Nutrition, peace building and NRM   |
| 3.  | Wyss academy for Nature  | International |   |
| 4.  | The Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT) | Trust         | Human rights, lobbying and advocacy, peace building and transformation of conflict, livelihoods and economic empowerment, land rights and natural resource management |
| 5.  | Regional Pastoralists Peace Link (RPPL), formerly Isiolo Peace Link                | Local NGO     | Peace building and conflict management/PCVE, human rights and advocacy, NRM, and governance   |
| 6.  | Merti Integrated Development Programme   | Local NGO     | Peace building and conflict management, livelihoods and economic empowerment  |
| 7.  | Action Aid   | International | Environmental conservation  |
| 8.  | Food and Agriculture Organization  | International | Natural resources and environmental conservation  |
| 9.  | Laikipia Wildlife Forum (LWF)  | National NGO  | Conservation and natural resource management initiatives  |

### 3.6 Key sustainability issues

#### What are the high impact interventions delivered by conservancies?

Conservancy enjoys a high positive rating in the Oldonyiro and Naibunga communities. This is largely due to its presence at the local level, filling a void left by government absence. In particular, conservancies have helped to improve natural resource planning and governance, including zoning of community land into areas for grazing or conservation, with the latter closed to livestock until severe drought periods when it is reopened to members. The conservancies also support rangeland rehabilitation programs, including efforts to mitigate against invasive species such as *Opuntia stricta* (prickly pear) and *Sansevieria* which overtake rangeland and cause severe gullies and soil erosion. In Nanaapa and environs, for example, the conservancy hired local communities to reclaim 2,800 acres of land, and this ended up supporting livestock for four months. Conservancies have also supported development of functional and healthy rangelands through programs such as grass reseeding (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) and use of semi-circular earth bunds for water conservation, soil water retention, and management of rainwater run-off. For instance, the Wyss Academy for Nature and Laikipia Wildlife Association supported local communities through training and development of circular bands encompassing over 6,000 acres of land, completed in about four months by approximately 300 community members hired at a cost of Ksh 500 per day.



Overall, in Oldonyiro, conservancies have employed about 70 people and provided four land cruisers for security, rangeland patrols, and community needs such as emergency medical evacuation as ambulances are unavailable in the area. In addition, Oldonyiro community has benefited from a carbon credit project, which in the last two years alone earned Ksh 72 million for the four conservancies to share; another Ksh 10.3 million was received and distributed between the four conservancies as bursary, easing

burdens on community members harmed by the recent drought, which decimated many livestock. Finally, Oldonyiro also hosted the annual rhino charge event, generating about Ksh 4.6 million over three days on behalf of conservation of water reservoirs.

The funds produced have also been used to construct classrooms, ECDs, and dormitories to increase the enrollment, retention, and transition of children who typically lack such facilities, must move with their parents, and thus miss out on education. Further, the conservancies have

conducted a number of capacity building and training activities, including exchange visits to Amboseli and Mara North, covering topics such as how to make a conservancy self-sustaining, how to build peace, and how to develop an ease-of-movement plan in which corridors are marked for wildlife and livestock movement, also earning communities some compensation. The ease-of-movement plan thus results in efficient, long-term land planning and use which, in turn, reduces risk of outward migration into other communities' territory and, consequently, reduces conflict.

### **3.7 Key emerging issues**

#### **Recommendations and what do we need to address?**

##### **1. Simmering tension between in-group and outgroup**

There is a simmering tension between the Oldonyiro and Mukogode west communities due to competing livelihoods and land use. The Naibunga communities are more inclined to sustainable land use, including conservation based on governance structures such as grazing plans and by-laws. The Samburu community lack these motivations and often invade and graze on these lands without any attempt to negotiate with the land owners. Other factors aggravating relations include local Laikipia north politics, where the Samburu desire county political power and appear to look down on the Laikipia Maasai.

##### **2. High poverty levels and exclusion**

Exclusion of local communities coupled with high poverty level harms both horizontal and vertical cohesion. This is evidenced by local communities' lack of trust in both tiers of government (national and county). In all the communities studied, we found that NGOs such as conservancies fill void left by government absence, providing essential services such as education, health, water, and security. There is a need to map out actors and to support young people in undertaking new livelihood opportunities; this will help to reduce their actions that are harming both in-group and outgroup cohesion. In all the communities, poverty is perceived as pushing young people into violence, including thefts and raiding of other people's property and livestock. This can best be addressed by creating shared wealth, diversifying people's livelihoods, and capacity building of local communities in exploitation of non-timber and forest products (NTFP) such as gum and resins, beekeeping and ecotourism.

##### **3. Strengthen traditional resource governance while supporting development of NRM governance and mechanisms for inter-communal resource sharing**

The Community Land Act 2016 provides a basis for NRM regulation, ownership, and use. A broad land use planning and management strategy is needed that addresses issues of resource scarcity and degradation, cultural customs, and human-wildlife conflict. It should provide a platform for engagement between different actors and communities aimed at sharing resources and solving any grievances that arise. This should include strengthening of customary governance institutions, as these have proven effective in enabling cohesion while managing conflicts.

**4. Develop and align vertical and horizontal cohesion building to existing national and local goals**

There is need to foster dialogue between local communities and state. Creation of corresponding platforms will help to build trust between the state and local communities and will enable the state to understand the needs of local communities and work towards fulfilling them. Similarly, there is need to enhance interventions that support horizontal cohesion particularly between core in-groups and various outgroups, which usually meet in the rangelands during drought periods. Finally, there is a need to resolve local land and boundary disputes, for example by means of community land registration.

**5. Support development of cohesion strategies and build the capacities of peace committees and rangeland management committees**

Efforts towards development of peace and cohesion strategies can reveal innovative ways of building peace. Building the capacity of peace and rangeland management committees will enable them to intervene and diffuse conflicts early, drawing on their network and influence. Such committees possess local knowledge, experience, and contextual understanding. This enhances their legitimacy and acceptance by locals. Finally, there is a need to build their rapid response capacity and corresponding contingency funds.

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### Regional Pastoralists Peace Link

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