

CHAPTER FOUR

EASTERN PROVINCE

The Eastern Province of Kenya stretches from the districts of Makueni and Kitui in the south of Kenya to Marsabit and a long stretch of border with Ethiopia in the north. Shaped like a narrowing stripe through the centre of the country, it is also home to some of the most volatile areas in what was once known as the Northern Frontier District (NFD). The pastoral communities of northern Kenya have a long history of violent conflict that has contributed to significant loss of life and property, increased levels of poverty, and has adversely affected social and economic activities of the over 500,000 people in the region over the last three decades.

Historically, raids and fights among pastoral communities spared human lives, especially those of women and children. Recently, the changing nature of localized conflict has become more violent and resulted in greater loss of life. Raids are no longer conducted with traditional weapons or under traditional mores, but increasingly with the use of sophisticated weapons that have devastating effects.

Nearby borders with Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia put northern Kenyan districts in the thick of violent conflicts and instability. Protracted civil conflict in all three of these unstable neighbours contribute to the steady flow of small arms into the region. Far from becoming passive victims of this regional small-arms trade, some Kenyans in the isolated north have seized the economic opportunity to join an easy market by facilitating or participating in illegal trafficking. The decision to run guns, made in the context of little government presence and few other alternative sources of income to pastoralism, is often one based not on malice or ideology, but on simple opportunism. Automatic guns are now easily available to local communities, where they increase the frequency and intensity of inter-tribal skirmishes, but also serve as protection from cross-border raids that have been subject to little control from the police of any Nairobi Declaration signatory.

Frequent cross-border conflict led both the colonial and independent governments of Kenya to take drastic actions against the people of northern

Kenya. Under the Colonial government, northern Kenya (or the NFD as it was then known) was delineated as a buffer zone between the fertile Kenya Highlands and the Abyssinian Plateau, placing it between lucrative farmland and the Italian invasion. Following the devastating Somali '*shifita*' skirmishes that lasted until 1978, Kenyan security forces were empowered to enter and search households without warrants, seize any property, or detain any person they deemed a suspect. The six pastoral districts of Marsabit, Moyale, Isiolo, Wajir, Garissa, and Mandera were put under a state of emergency until 1992. Only volunteers and missionaries were allowed to operate freely.

In the northern part of Eastern province, including Marsabit and Isiolo, ethnic groups including the Boran, Gabra, Rendille, Samburu, Ariaal, Turkana, and Dasanetch depend on livestock and livestock products for their livelihood. There are frequent cattle rustling raids and conflict over farmlands, grazing areas, and water points. Among the fighting communities, diverse social, cultural and political factors have been identified as contributing to the conflicts in the district. Population pressure and competition over resources are especially volatile during droughts. Banditry and cattle rustling lead to vicious cycles of score-settling and one-upmanship for control of small pieces of territory. Poor dialogue between different ethnic groups and the deliberate sowing of division by political figures result in tribal animosities and violent confrontations. The widespread availability of modern weaponry from across the borders and within other Kenyan districts has made automatic rifles and other small arms and light weapons an integral part of the culture of masculinity. With the escalating degradation of natural resources and a longstanding tradition of political isolation from 'the nation' of Kenya, guns are increasingly seen as necessary not just for self-defence and protection, but for political control and economic survival.

Marsabit

The Marsabit district in the Eastern Province occupies the extreme part of northern Kenya. It borders Ethiopia and the Moyale district to the north, Turkana District to the west, Samburu District to the south and Wajir and Isiolo Districts to the east. The district, with an area of 69,430 sq. km including 4,125 sq. km covered by Lake Turkana, is the second largest in the country after Turkana. The population is estimated at 125,000. Marsabit belongs to the ASALs ("Arid and Semi-Arid Lands") of Kenya. Extremely dry conditions limit the use of over 90 per cent of its area to livestock keeping, mostly organized in the form of nomadic pastoralism. Returns from this type of land-use are low and consequently poverty is rampant.

As a result of inter-ethnic conflict over resources between the Rendille, Gabra, Samburu, Boran, Turkana and Dasanetch, about 60 per cent of the range areas are unutilized and most of the traditionally nomadic communities prefer to settle near 'security zones' such as trading centers. The concentration of settlements exacerbates land degradation. The national parks, game reserves, forest reserve and the Mt. Kulal Biosphere Reserve are protected areas within which no farming activities are permitted, contributing to resource conflicts.

The risks involved in the pastoral lifestyle are extremely high. On one hand, they are caused by natural disasters, particularly by long drought periods. On the other, they arise from conflicts between different migrating groups, who are competing for the use of key resources, mainly water and grazing. Natural and human-made causes for such risks are closely inter-linked; the more adverse the natural conditions, the more frequent and intensive the conflicts arising out of competing demands on key resources. The World Bank-funded Arid Lands project in the Office of the President has both learned from and proved this fact with monthly district reports tracking natural conditions and conflict indices.

One major trait in social organization developed to cope with such conditions is the high significance of weaponry and its use in indigenous cultures. Although there are differences in detail in this regard between nine major ethnic groups, the general socio-cultural traits exhibit a high degree of similarity. All ethnic groups have a basic age group organization within which the young men, commonly known as '*morans*', are responsible for safeguarding their group's property, especially livestock. To shoulder such responsibility, they undergo elaborate training in the use of small arms during the early *moran* stages.

'Modernisation' of weaponry accessible to the local population can be dated back to the so-called Shifta War against groups of Somali origin in 1964. Traditional weaponry was gradually complemented and then replaced by small arms, particularly the infamous AK-47 assault rifle. The current price for an AK-47 amounts to three heads of cattle. Only 20 years ago it was ten times as much.

The increased influx of small arms is taking place at a point when other factors are making violent conflicts even more likely than in the past, as explained by two problem complexes. First, migration patterns have changed. Long and severe droughts in 1992-94 and 1998-2001 initiated these movements. The

expansion of land use for sedentary agriculture or other purposes in the few areas of the district where this is possible also encroached on traditional grazing reserves for the nomads, forcing them to find other alternatives.

Secondly, settlement patterns have changed. Increasingly, families settle permanently near markets and other central locations where they have easier access to basic services. Herds are often moving with only the *morans* (and no elders or other members of the tribe) present to make decisions. The traditional control of the elders over the warrior age groups has been weakened considerably. The absence of families has removed one of the few factors that force *morans* to seek alternatives to violence when it comes to conflict resolution. Consequently, the potential for conflicts to turn violent has increased numerically as well as with regard to scope.

Pastoralist Shelter Organization (PSO) and Peace and Reconciliation Committee

The Pastoralist Shelter Organization (PSO) is a locally registered community-based organization (CBO) and acts as the secretariat for the Peace and Reconciliation Committee. The arrangement of an NGO or CBO being the major organiser and stakeholder in a Peace Committee is a common one in northern Kenya. Such organizations already have the infrastructure and influence to call meetings, although the supposed independence of the Committee can be compromised. (See the section on Garissa in Chapter Five for another example of this arrangement.) A leaders' meeting held in the district in 1998 recommended the formation of the Peace and Reconciliation Committee, which is now managed by the PSO. The objectives of the committee at the time were to:

- Reconcile the warring communities in the district
- Stop the raiding of livestock
- Create awareness among the communities on the role of politicians in the conflicts, who were seen to have taken advantage to fuel conflicts for their own reasons.

At the inauguration of the committee, its major activities were to create a rapid-response mechanism that could respond to the conflicts, especially cattle raids, create awareness, facilitate inter-ethnic meetings, and educate the

Kenya Police Reservists (KPR) who had been accused of engaging in highway banditry and cattle rustling. Since then, the major activities of the Peace and Reconciliation Committee (PRC) have changed to accommodate new perspectives on conflict. While they still facilitate peace building, they also create awareness among specific target groups such as women and youth. Actions have also expanded to include cross-border conflict resolution in neighbouring districts and with groups in Ethiopia.

The major role of the PRC is facilitation and education in peace and reconciliation in order to start, encourage and maintain dialogue. The Committee also encourages the volunteering of peace and security information for cooperation with the government. The majority of the communities involved in the peace and reconciliation activities are the pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, the business community, and communities living along the Isiolo-Marsabit Road as well as the KPR. Elders, youth, and women are treated as special categories given that the youth are the ones mainly involved in banditry activities, the women have the necessary information on conflicts, and the elders have traditional conflict resolution skills.

The Peace and Reconciliation Committee comprises 12 members at the locational level, three members per location at the divisional level and one member from each location at the district level. The representatives at the locational and divisional levels live among the communities holding locational meetings every two weeks, one meeting every two months at the divisional level, and quarterly meetings at the district level.

The major constraints facing the Committee include the large size of the district, which has extremely poor communication that hampers the efficient reporting of cases as well as reaction time to conflicts. Another setback, according to the group, is the laxity among the government and police administration who are slow to act on information provided to them, particularly on early warning of potential conflicts.

The Committee estimates that at least 70 per cent of the families they work with own firearms, which are mainly bought and owned at the family level. They identify the main reasons why families own guns as:

- Self-protection for self and property, particularly livestock
- Absence of effective government presence, hence lack of government protection

- Threat of guerrilla attacks from neighbouring Ethiopia
- Criminal activities like highway banditry
- Political assassinations using firearms, which have recently become 'fashionable'

Traditionally, the warriors were responsible for ensuring the safety of the community, complementing the little-felt government machinery. The elders were responsible for the overall security of the community but were never involved in the actual fighting. The experiences of the PRC point to the need for communities to be more involved and responsible for their security, starting with elders at the village level. The elders feel that they should be empowered to enforce the resolutions arrived at by the Peace and Reconciliation Committees.

Within the Committee, there is no awareness of any national or international instruments on gun control. Some of those interviewed said that even if there was awareness, there is little or no impact of any of these instruments at the grassroots level, given the limited presence of enforcing authorities, including the government. The communities are more familiar with the perceived 'high-handedness' of government interventions using the police, Provincial Administration (PA), the military, or the General Service Unit (GSU) personnel.

The Peace and Reconciliation Committee feels that it has positively contributed to conflict resolution, illegal arms management (providing checks and balances on illegal arms proliferation), and general peace building activities as evidenced by the significant reduction in livestock raids in the district. Highway banditry along the Isiolo-Marsabit road has all but disappeared, and farmers have returned to their farms. Importantly, the price of weapons has gone down as a result of reduced demand. Landmines are available from KSh 1,000 and hand-grenades from KSh 500, but the most important price is that of an AK-47 standard rifle, which has gone from KSh 60,000 down to KSh 15,000. Communities are now selling their firearms to the neighbouring Isiolo and Samburu districts as they no longer need them.

Gun ownership, however, has become a source of employment. Security, once thought to belong only in the domain of state and police, has become commercialized in Marsabit. Gun owners escort livestock across district boundaries and guard commercial enterprises in the district for a fee. In a separate but equally lucrative trade, gun ownership has led to indiscriminate

poaching of wildlife for game meat and sale of animal parts. There are also criminal elements still involved in banditry.

To address these setbacks, the Peace and Reconciliation Committee is encouraging the communities and especially the youth to engage in alternative income generating activities like curing and selling hides and skins. The Committee searches for strategic partners interested in development activities that enhance peace and peaceful coexistence, such as the creation of water pans to provide water and create employment for the would-be conflicting communities. In the absence of willing donors, soft loans are sometimes the only method to help spur economic diversity and development projects. Youth are encouraged not only to participate in income generating activities, but also to form sporting groups that will pull them away from violence.

Catholic Peace and Justice Commission (CJPC)

The Development Office of the Diocese of Marsabit which hosts the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission (CJPC) was previously run from the Diocese of Maralal until the campaign for an office in Marsabit started in 2001. The CJPC office in Marsabit was finally realized in 2003 and was officially inaugurated in September 2003 by the Bishop of the Diocese of Marsabit.

The objectives of the CJPC are threefold and include:

- Capacity building for the people on peace and justice issues
- Lobbying and advocacy targeting the community but using the Catholic fraternity as the entry point into the larger community
- Promoting peace and reconciliation in the district.

The major activities of CJPC include:

- Facilitation of training workshops on peace and reconciliation
- Identification and facilitation by qualified consultants to address specific issues as identified by the communities
- Facilitation by qualified (human rights) lawyers to advise on issues related to justice and human rights

- Advocacy through lobbying and peaceful demonstrations to create awareness of specific issues as identified by the communities.

The primary entry point for the CJPC activities in the district is through the various priests who make announcements and mobilize the catholic fraternity through church sermons. The Catholic faithful are then encouraged to reach out to the rest of the community in the district who are not necessarily Catholics. The CJPC staff based in Marsabit town endeavour to make two-day visits to each parish five to six times a year.

The community where the CJPC operates can be described as mainly pastoralists with a small number of agro-pastoralists to be found on and around the Marsabit Mountain, Hurri Hills and Loiyangalani. All these communities are generally illiterate and their economy is based on livestock. There is a growing group of business entrepreneurs involved in general merchandising. The major challenges facing the CJPC in Marsabit are similar to other organizations in Northern Kenya: the sheer size of the district coupled with its poor infrastructure makes communication to outlying areas difficult, and the organization's young status has made it difficult to attract donor funding.

In the areas where the CJPC works, nearly all the herders and livestock owners possess illegal firearms, although the *morans* and other youth are the ones who use the weapons. Most of these firearms are bought and owned on a clan basis. Ownership can be further broken down into specific '*foras*' (grazing units) in a clan. The clan and/or the *foras* decide on the number of guns to own for their defence. The migrating clans/herders can also decide on the number of firearms to have depending on the security along the migratory routes. Firearms are also owned individually by the business community to protect their businesses or by individuals using the guns for criminal activities.

In traditional settings, before the 'rise of the state', community security was entrusted to the elders, with the youth acting as their 'soldiers'. It is the opinion of the CJPC that the responsibility for securing and maintaining security should again be entrusted to community-level decision-making, although the Provincial Administration would have a significant complementary role. Because the role of the state in providing security is already significantly compromised, legitimising community participation in safety and security measures would be a positive step. In the modern community model, women and youth as well as elders are important players, although all three groups require education and awareness building around how to both promote peace and negotiate conflicts non-violently.

According to the CJPC, besides self-protection, firearms are increasingly being used to settle ethnic and clan scores, mainly incited by the local politicians. The perception of local political involvement is widespread among peace builders in the Eastern Province, and seems largely based on past electioneering tactics that included the tacit approval of community armament. Although the law and the national government policy regarding illegal gun ownership and use has been very strict, there are areas of gun policy that are unclear. There appear to be no clear rules and regulations on the arming and the use of firearms by the home guards or the KPR. Arming of home guards appears to have assumed political and clan dimensions and is “seriously biased.” One peace worker in Marsabit described the political dimension by saying, “Over the years because of politics, the tribal or political interests have arisen. Politicians want the votes from certain groups, and they tend to create ethnic problems.” The police presence in the district is insignificant. The few law-enforcement officers available cannot cope with the magnitude of the problem in the district.

The CJPC sees itself playing a major lobbying and advocacy role to reduce or minimize the gun problem in the district through awareness creation and education of the communities. In order to reach as many people as possible, the CJPC office in Marsabit has identified parish-based Justice and Peace Representatives in every parish to represent the CJPC at the grassroots level.

Community Initiatives and Facilitation Assistance (CIFA)

The Community Initiatives and Facilitation Assistance (CIFA) is a local CBO initiated in 1999 and starting project activities in 2000. CIFA was created in order to take over activities of another regional development organization, Farm Africa, which was phasing out its activities in the district. CIFA's main objectives and activities revolve around the following development aspects:

- Development of the pastoral communities in general
- Support of animal health services to improve the quality and output of livestock
- Conflict resolution and peace building activities
- Promoting gender issues in the district
- Good environmental management, mainly water and pasture resources

CIFA activities are centred on Karacha, Hurri Hills and the Mountain areas of Marsabit district and in Moyale district. The same activities are also carried out with partners in Ethiopia through its cross-border programme. In all these activities, the target communities are the pastoral groups as well as agro-pastoralists in these areas. CIFA acts as a facilitator aiming to build the capacity of and empower communities to promote rational utilization of available resources.

According to CIFA, the gun problem in Marsabit and Moyale districts greatly influences their development work. They believe that communities arm themselves for the following reasons:

- Socio-cultural traditions (pastoral communities were always armed but coexisted peacefully with their neighbours)
- The culture of revenge by communities who have previously suffered from attacks by their neighbours
- The need to balance armed strength with traditional raiding enemies from other districts like Wajir who are heavily armed and exploit Marsabit and Moyale districts
- The availability of large quantities of arms available from the fallen governments of Somalia and Ethiopia
- The existence of similar communities living across the borders, e.g. Borans straddling the Kenya-Ethiopia borders facilitating the arming of their kin in Kenya.

Guns previously owned and used for protection are being used to carry out criminal activities. Attacks and counter-attacks across the districts result in significant numbers of casualties on all sides. However, it is thought that the continuing conflict resolution and peace building activities are bearing fruit, with the communities finally appreciating the need to live in peace.

Traditionally, before the rise of the state and state-based security, communities policed themselves and entrusted elders with various tools and instruments to prevent and mitigate conflicts. These traditional conflict management mechanisms have since broken down or been watered down by the government. There is need for communities to play a greater role in maintaining security, and the government systems should play a complementary role to

the traditional forms of governance. Especially where government presence is unable to provide security or conflict management, the most pragmatic option may be granting legitimacy to councils of elders or other community-based efforts to build peace and settle conflicts.

Although CIFA as an organization is familiar with a number of government rules and regulations on gun ownership and use, it is its opinion that these instruments do not reflect the community needs and nor were they formulated with the communities. As a first step, the governments need to understand why the communities are armed and then develop its policies accordingly. Unfortunately, there is little trust and goodwill existing between the communities and the government and enforcing unilateral government policies will always be difficult.

In their own words: one peace worker on the role of the government

Previously, there were traditional leaders right from the village up to the pasture lands and they were solely entrusted with powers to manage all the community's affairs and they had respect of agreeing or accepting laws. It is now getting complicated because the tendency of the government and its policy is not allowing most of these communities to effectively use their rules and methods that may not be in line with the government's policy. They do not appreciate the views of these leaders on how they can go about issues of peace and so on.

Question: From your experience, who do you think should be responsible for security?

The community should play a bigger role. They can be part of the government machinery and the government structure is supposed to accommodate the views of these communities, then the two can come together and come up with impeccable solutions. For example, the forum we have just had here, there was no representative from the government and here we are talking about the vital role the government is supposed to play. If we do not work together all of us then it becomes very complicated. Really when this peace issue was started in Marsabit it became very difficult to kick off, simply because some government officers, sorry to say, saw it as a threat. Then after that there were the cattle rustling issues, community projects, and people proceeded to raise funds to give to the Peace Commission

and asked them to ensure they did what was required of them. So government could not come on board and even the reports they gave to the Provincial Administration were bad.

CIFA recommends the development of gun control and management mechanisms in consultation with the communities. These could include simple things such as the registration of firearms already in the possession of citizens and the undertaking of extensive community campaigns to raise the level of awareness on the gun problem.

CIFA activities that contribute to gun control in the district include:

- Establishment of water pans and pasture management in order to minimize conflicts and subsequent violence that involve the use of firearms
- Support for conflict resolution and peace building activities
- Establishment and support of cross-border committees to recover stolen livestock

To reach its target communities, CIFA has a professional staff but also relies on external consultants. Work plans are developed and coordinated from the CIFA office in Marsabit except for the programme in Ethiopia (environment and peace building) where CIFA's facilitation is largely funding of partner activities. A cross-border committee is responsible for overseeing these activities.

The main setbacks facing CIFA include the vastness of the district and its poorly developed infrastructure. The illiteracy levels in the district are very high, which makes it very difficult to create sufficient awareness among the communities. There are also natural calamities such as endemic droughts, which affect development activities, forcing CIFA to engage in relief work. In order to address the question of insufficient staff, CIFA trains its staff in diverse fields of work. For example, the livestock-trained staff is also encouraged to attend training in conflict resolution. This way, the few people available can respond to various demands. CIFA illustrates a small-scale example of employing tactics that could also work on a policy level: mainstreaming peace and conflict issues in development, and the 'farming out' of activities to partner groups in areas where CIFA's competency or capacity is lacking. It also represents an instance where traditionally government-related security activities, such as recovering stolen livestock, has been taken over by independent local groups.

Isiolo

Isiolo borders Marsabit to the north, Garissa to the southeast, Wajir to the east, Tana River and Meru districts to the south, and Samburu and Laikipia to the west. The district covers an approximate area of 26,605 sq. km. Most of the land in the district is flat, low-lying, featureless plain resulting from weathering and sedimentation. The plains rise gradually from an altitude of approximately 200 metres above sea level at the Lorian Swamp in the northern part of the district to about 300 metres at the Merti plateau. There are four major rivers in the district: the Ewaso Nyiro, Isiolo, Kinna and the Bisan Adhi. The Ewaso Nyiro drains into the Lorian Swamp and is the main source of water in the district. The plains along the Ewaso Nyiro (referred to as the Chaffa) are the main grazing areas for the pastoralists during the dry season.

The town of Isiolo is often referred to as the 'gateway to the North' of Kenya, and is quite cosmopolitan in its ethnic mix. Significant numbers of Borana, Somali, Turkana, Samburu, Meru and Kikuyu use the town either as a home base or a frequent trading stop. In the western finger of the Ewaso Nyiro, one finds significant concentrations of the Samburu and the Turkana communities. During the dry seasons, Somali herdsman from Wajir and Garissa enter the district from the northeastern side.

Nomadic pastoralism is the major economic activity in the district, with herders raising cattle, sheep, goats, camels and donkeys. There is limited rain-fed and irrigation agricultural activities in the wetter areas of the districts along the rivers. Hostilities to the east have limited the market for pastoralists to areas in the west and in the highlands centres of Meru district. Banditry cases have severely limited infrastructure development. Isiolo, therefore, is vulnerable to both drought and insecurity. The Somali Shifta wars in the 1960s are sometimes cited as the start of Isiolo's troubles. During and after the Shifta war, the government confiscated many livestock as punishment for the insurgency. Continued insecurity and the collapse of regimes in Somalia and Ethiopia have resulted in continuous infiltration of illegal firearms.

Guns are usually owned by the community and are the responsibility of the elders who monitor their use and punish those who misuse them. The guns are used in conflicts in the district. The various communities are usually given early warning signals to prepare their weapons for use in impending conflicts. Every community has its 'Commanders' who are identified by the elders. In conflict situations, it is these commanders who are responsible for the firearms.

Traditionally, the elders were responsible for maintaining security of the communities. In most cases, the guns are also in the custody of the elders and the youth have to justify why they want the guns and bullets. There is still a strong presence and responsibility by the elders for maintaining security in the community. The elders work alongside the Provincial Administration. The communities at large are also involved in security matters by providing information on criminal activities.

Insecurity along the Garissa-Isiolo road has also cut off large chunks of potential grazing land. This has led to large concentrations of livestock along the riverine forest of the Ewaso Nyiro with subsequent overgrazing. The increasing irrigation in the upstream of the Ewaso Nyiro has resulted in reduced water supplies for many pastoralists downstream. This leads to migration to insecure and conflict-prone areas. According to the organizations working on peace and conflict in Isiolo, the major causes and factors contributing to conflicts in the district include:

- Endemic drought and a poor resource base
- Influx of pastoralists from other districts
- Contentious land tenure issues
- Unsustainable natural resource use
- Easy access to illegal firearms
- General poverty and limited economic opportunities
- Marginalization, neglect and general poor governance by the central government
- Lack of trust of the Provincial Administration with accusations of corruption and tolerance of criminal activities for personal gains
- Lack of trust among the communities
- Cultural alliances of communities with relations outside the district who support them during the conflicts
- Divisive politics based on the negative exploitation of ethnic and cultural differences
- Erosion of traditional governing systems and the rebellion of the youth.

Peace and Reconciliation Committee (PRC)

The objectives of the Peace and Reconciliation Committee are to promote and ensure lasting peace in the district, reconcile the warring ethnic groups, research root causes of the problems leading to conflicts, and draw up a peace strategy for the district. The PRC has successfully brokered peace among several of the conflicting communities, has engaged in negotiation and reconciliation, and facilitated the return of over 3,000 stolen livestock. A rapid response team was crucial to the success of these activities, making itself available to go into 'hot zones' whenever a conflict erupts or in response to early warning signals.

The PRC targets the following groups within the district for peace work:

- Elders, who are primarily used to broker peace given their knowledge and power to 'curse' those who do not adhere to the resolutions
- Youth, who are involved in the actual violence
- Women, who have been known to incite the youth to engage in violent conflict through hero-worshipping of 'brave warriors'
- Civil society organizations involved in the mobilization and sensitization of the communities in the areas where they are working
- The government, from whom goodwill ensures legitimacy of the activities of the Committee
- Inter-faith groups: it has been established that religion plays a significant role in the lives of the communities in the district and it is for this reason that it is used as an entry point for promoting conflict resolution and peace building activities
- Schools, another powerful vehicle for promoting conflict resolution and peace building activities where the school-going youth can be specifically targeted
- Politicians, because they are the "main contributing parties to violent conflicts in the district."

To reach its target communities, the PRC works through elders. The local chiefs are also involved in all extension activities. The Peace and

Reconciliation Committee comprises 12 representatives at the locational level (there are six locations in the district), four members from each location at the divisional level and two members from each division at the district level. There are also four *ex-officio* members representing the County Council, religious leaders, and the Provincial administration.

Roots of conflict, in their own words (PRC)

The escalation of conflicts in Isiolo District can be traced to 1992, when the then-sitting local Member of Parliament (MP) brought in people from the Wajir and Mandera districts in order to boost the numbers of voters in his favour. The same thing on a smaller scale happened in 1997 but this time, the settlers were asked to leave and return to their districts of origin after the general elections. To ensure that the eviction took place, the help of the Boran community in the district assisted by their brethren from Marsabit and Ethiopia, was solicited. The forceful evictions resulted in violent conflicts and in October 2000 the District Administration, with support from the local elders and opinion leaders, formed the Peace and Development Committee, which later changed its name to the Peace and Reconciliation Committee in order to reflect more correctly the thrust of its activities.

The major challenges facing the Peace and Reconciliation Committee in Isiolo district are, according to the leadership, “fluid boundaries which expose the district to interference from the neighbouring districts.” The theme of boundaries arises again around the separate but interdependent ethnic groups, most of whom possess at least communal small arms for use in violent conflict. Poverty has led to frustration and desperation, particularly among the youth who are easily recruited into conflict. The Committee maintains that political manipulation is behind most outbreaks of violence, with politicians delineating and pushing youth and ethnic ‘boundaries’ to retain control and political dominance in their constituencies.

The magnitude of the gun problem can be illustrated by the large number of losses in human life, livestock and the extensive destruction of property as a result of violent conflicts. While most of the firearms are illegal, there is also selective armament of different ethnic groups by the state through the Home Guard programme. The Peace and Reconciliation Committee has contributed

to the reduction of conflicts and the use of firearms in conflicts as evidenced by the institutionalization of control mechanisms of livestock movement. Previously, control and monitoring was difficult given the fact that there are no set tracks or routes for driving animals, and *morans* were the ones on foot with the livestock and carrying guns. The new system involves transportation of the livestock in trucks, which are easier to monitor and control.

Unlike in Wajir, the Committee in Isiolo has strived to criminalize the misuse of firearms according to constitutional (rather than traditional) practices. It has advocated holding individuals accountable for their crimes, as opposed to attributing the responsibility to their clans. Fifty firearms have been voluntarily surrendered with the promotion and adoption of interventions, such as peace building activities that reduce the need for armaments by the communities. The Committee has relied on various declarations that have brought together other districts, such as the instrumental Modogashe Declaration reached after negotiations between all the districts in the Northern and Northeastern provinces.

The most interesting aspect is the agreement and acceptance of the PRC as the major stakeholder in the illegal gun business. The leadership maintains an inventory of everyone who has a gun in the district and can trace and punish any offenders. Many in the community have come forward voluntarily for this neutral 'registration' process. The Committee is of the opinion that security should be a joint activity between the Provincial Administration (government) and the community. While the government has the primary responsibility of maintaining law and order, the community can participate by providing information and the maintenance of what they call "good neighbourliness." There will be a need for extensive capacity building among the community for them to effectively participate in these activities. Such capacity is envisaged in the proposed pilot community-policing project to be implemented in the district.

To enhance gun control in the district, the PRC recommends that:

- The rights of every community be recognized under the Constitution of Kenya
- The unemployment situation in the district especially among the youth be addressed
- The creation and promotion of income generating alternatives be promoted

- Already-held firearms in the district are legalized by registering them and letting the community control their use
- Strict and objective enforcement of the existing laws on gun control is undertaken
- The involvement of the community in the development of rules and regulations and their respective enforcement is initiated.

Mandate the Future – Youth Network (MTEF)

The Mandate the Future – Youth Network (MTEF) is a local community-based organization registered with the Ministry of Culture and Social Services since 2000. Its creation following a workshop to combat desertification, facilitated by the Environment Liaison Center International (ELCI). The ELCI encouraged the youth in Isiolo district to form a youth forum primarily to address environmental conservation issues. Since its formation, the MTEF has also engaged in peace education, and advocacy and awareness creation on the prevention and management of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

MTEF draws its membership from among the youth from various communities living in the district including the Somali, Meru, Turkana, Borana and the Samburu. The youth are especially targeted in the peace-related activities because they are easily manipulated to participate in violent conflicts. The activities of the MTEF include environmental conservation and management through awareness creation, dryland management, and the publication of a newsletter. They also engage in peace education through training of youth and women groups on insecurity. Advocacy, peace walks, and community campaigns seek to educate groups that are removed from the more mainstream work like that done by the Peace and Reconciliation Committee.

Another target group for MTEF activities is women, with an aim of identifying key focal persons who can talk to sons and husbands involved in conflict. The policy makers are targeted through the existing district fora such as the District Development Committees (DDCs), District Security Committees (DSCs), District Environment Committees (DECs) and the District AIDS Control Council.

The central division of Isiolo district is the one most affected by conflicts and it is here that MTEF concentrates its activities. The MTEF staff is 'part and par-

cel' of the communities and lives with them. The members are mandated to carry the outreach work to their respective 'Manyattas'. Once in a while MTEF holds 'Peace Days' that bring together the conflict affected communities through rallies and processions. The Provincial Administration is represented in these activities.

In addition, MTEF has held various awareness creation sessions on the gun problem in the district. It has also been involved in the encouragement of income generating activities for the youth to minimize their involvement in violent conflicts. Since its involvement in these activities, the MTEF has succeeded in transforming some of the youth from gun abusers into development workers.

The main challenges facing MTEF include:

- Lack of appropriate incentives for use in exchange programmes for those surrendering their firearms
- Lack of adequate knowledge and capacity to manage and sustain the peace already secured or to intervene when the conflicts are raging
- Weak government policy and lack of assurance of security in general
- Suspicion and lack of trust among the communities themselves and with the government machinery
- Lack of capacity and mandate to identify and apprehend the criminals among the communities.

Friends of Nomads International (FONI)

The Friends of Nomads International (FONI) is an NGO registered in 1998 with the objective of promoting and creating awareness on the Kenyan Constitution, land tenure issues, and civic education in Isiolo district. FONI is trying to revive traditional systems of natural resource management among the different ethnic groups in the district. Its entry point is through the facilitation of activities aimed at mitigating resource conflicts. FONI is a member of the Community Policing Forum and the PRC. Its activities give special focus to women and children. FONI also works very closely with the Provincial Administration.

Understanding the gun problem: In their own words

The gun problem in the district is serious and very complex. The gun problem is simply a question of bad governance, where the government security systems have failed. There is selective justice in the district. The government has commercialized security for their own interests, whether financial or political. This is evident where even reported cases are not followed up and/or criminals are reportedly released in suspicious circumstances due to corruption of those responsible for jailing them.

The communities have, therefore, little confidence in the government and have armed themselves primarily for self-protection. These guns are, however, later used to perpetuate criminal activities. The guns are easily available since the fall of the Somali and Ethiopian regimes in the early 1990s.

Over time and following the bloody violent conflicts, the communities have indicated their willingness to get rid of the guns. The illegal use of guns has resulted in devastating losses of life and property and curtailed business in livestock which is the economic mainstay in the district.

To demonstrate the community willingness to get rid of the illegal guns, a significant turning point was evidenced following the Modogashe Declaration that resulted for example in the removal of all police escorts in the Northeastern Province. This was achieved following an order issued by the then Provincial Commissioner to remove all the road barriers in the district. The PC knew all the clans and also knew the area, and threatened to sack all the government administrators where conflicts were reported. He claimed there would be no more impunity hitherto enjoyed by people who incited and fuelled conflicts in the province.

The gun problem in Isiolo district as well as in other parts of the NFD is also influenced by the existence and operations of the Ethiopian militia, the Oromo Liberation Force (OLM) that operates from bases in Kenya. Ethnic differences in the region also play a key role in the illegal gun problem.

Depending on the community, the guns may be individually owned but all of them are communally controlled. Individual owners include the big herders who have guns to protect their livestock. There are also groups who acquire guns with criminal intent. The gun trade is complex. People initially hired to escort livestock from other districts sell the guns alongside the livestock and trade a significant number of firearms.

According to FONI, the challenges facing gun control and management include:

- Mechanisms necessary to legalize illegal guns already held by the community
- Providing an innovative framework for policing in pastoral areas
- Lack of capacity among the civil society to conceptualize and develop appropriate approaches to gun control
- Inadequate involvement of grassroots based organizations
- Lack of knowledge and capacity to localize national policies, which has resulted in 'boardroom' approaches by the government and other external development agencies.

Isiolo Inter-Religious Council (IIC)

The Isiolo Inter-Religious Council (IIC) was founded in early 2002 after training supported by the Muslim Consultative Council, Kenya Catholic Secretariat, the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK) and an NGO called *Chemi Chemi ya Ukweli* (in Swahili, literally, 'Wellspring of Truth'). The training focused on the improvement of relations between the Muslim and Christian communities following past violent conflicts. The objective of the IIC is capacity building in peace building, conflict management, and mediation and networking. The mission of IIC is to empower the community initiatives through inter-religious dialogue, and its vision is a peaceful Isiolo.

To achieve its objectives, the IIC undertakes to:

- Create awareness on peace issues among communities
- Conduct training on peace building and conflict resolution
- Demonstrate that religion irrespective of the individual faiths is a connector.

The target groups of IIC activities include:

- Youth, who are involved in the actual fighting in the district
- Leaders, who are usually accused of inciting the conflicts

- Community at large since they are the main victims of violent conflicts and should take charge of the peace processes
- Women, who are the most affected by the violent conflicts.

According to the IIC, the gun problem in the district has been brought about by:

- The influx of people from neighbouring districts who come with weapons
- Insecurity in the district that has led people to arm to protect themselves and their property
- Poverty because guns are seen as a way to generate income
- Bad politics leading to armament of communities to protect their ethnic and political interests
- The instability in the neighbouring countries of Somalia and Ethiopia.

The outreach programme of the IIC uses the following avenues to reach its membership:

- Seminars and workshops organized by the three inter-religious stakeholders
- *Barazas* (community meetings) either convened by the Provincial Administration or by any one of the three stakeholders
- Mosques and churches through their respective sermons, preaching and faith teachings
- Processions and marches as the opportunities avail themselves.