

CHAPTER SEVEN

NORTH RIFT

The Rift Valley Province of Kenya extends from the border with Tanzania in the south to the borders of Ethiopia and Sudan in the north. More than half of the western border of the province is shared with Uganda, with the lower third of the border shared with Western and Nyanza provinces. On the east, it borders Central and Eastern provinces. The North Rift region is generally accepted to comprise the districts of Turkana, West Pokot, Trans Nzoia, Uasin Gishu, Marakwet, Baringo, and Samburu. This area suffers from developmental and educational neglect, and violence from cattle rustling both within Kenya and across the border with Uganda, Ethiopia, and Sudan. Marginalized under the colonial government and isolated politically and developmentally after independence, the North Rift shares characteristics of pastoralist poverty with other Arid Lands districts such as Marsabit, Moyale, Mandera, and Wajir.

The North Rift shares more international borders than any other province in Kenya. Uganda, Sudan, and Ethiopia have all had or are currently having volatile civil wars, leading to easily accessible arms. While in Northeastern province it is not unusual to find AK-47s manufactured in the 1960s, in some parts of West Pokot and Turkana much newer models are on the market. The Heckler and Koch G3 assault rifle is also common. This is partly as a result of a larger selection from more conflicts, and partly because government raiding in an attempt to disarm communities in these districts has led to what residents call 'forced upgrades'. The loss of old guns spurs the demand for newer ones, creating a refresher market for dealers on routes as far away as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

As in other parts of the arid North, Kenya's national government has responded in part by arming Kenya Police Reservists (KPR). These are civilians who are given guns but are not supervised or paid for their work. In some ways, the KPR legitimises 'civilian' gun ownership and use in insecure areas. However, the KPR system does not establish a viable system of registration, leading to the perception by some communities that the government allows some civilians' use of guns and not others. Those with government-issued

guns often also have personal weapons (deemed illegal under Kenyan law), which are often better models and better maintained than the standard government-issue G3. It has been recognized even at the government level that reservists can be converted into private militias or criminal activity using their 'government' status as a cover.

Marakwet and West Pokot

Marakwet and West Pokot are neighbouring districts, sharing a border and a history of violent conflict between the two ethnic groups. As one report stated:

“The gun culture has impacted very negatively on this region. Education standards, where they existed, have generally gone down as more and more schools are abandoned due to insecurity. More and more professionals are deserting this region, drawing back any progress previously achieved in agriculture, education and administration. The fertile Kerio Valley has been abandoned and no grazing or farming has taken place, especially between the Marakwet and Pokot... More community resources than ever before are channelled to security-related matters such as purchase of guns and ammunition at the expense of food and health.”¹

Since the national elections in December 2002 and the change of government from the long-reigning KANU (Kenya African National Union) to the new NARC (National Rainbow Coalition), there seems to be some hope for peace among NGOs and CBOs working with affected communities. This dramatic shift of attitude with the change of national government is an indicator of how important politics is to peace.

World Vision Marakwet

World Vision Tot, Koloa, and Lokori works directly with communities, with activities happening at least once a month. They work in collaboration with the NCKK, traditional leaders, and at the district level participate in the district development committee meetings. In 1997, the area development programme (ADP) was founded in Tot. Before that, World Vision sponsored a family development programme. In July 2003, a cross-cutting peace initiative began to integrate peace and conflict issues throughout development projects.

The ADP focuses on water, sanitation, education (including child sponsorship), food security, and other specific community needs such as HIV/AIDS education and advocacy, environmental projects, child rights, and support for Christian impact groups. Because of increasingly violent cattle rustling and danger in the valley, most of the organization's activities were interrupted. The office was closed because of conflict, and there was a clear challenge to start a peace project to address these issues. The peace initiative will focus on awareness building, targeting the main actors in conflict and attempting to change attitudes using development as an incentive.

The conflict in the area is characterized by Marakwet and Pokot hostilities and Turkana and Pokot hostilities. In a World Vision evaluation of the area development programme, it became clear that the root cause of failure was insecurity. Communities involved in the ADP request urgent assistance with peace building activities, prioritizing this as the only way for development to succeed. The goal of the ADP is to transform communities' ability to tackle illiteracy, water-borne diseases, and food insecurity. Vaccine administration, animal health training, reading projects, and small-scale entrepreneurship are included in the staff's community-based activities. The peace project will strive to restore the relationship between communities, through sensitization meetings between leaders and peace rallies at which everyone, including and especially school-age children, will be encouraged to share poems, peace songs, and engage in friendly competitions.

For World Vision, the long-term goals are to end conflict by creating income-generating activities and creating sustainable livelihoods outside of the pastoralist focus on cattle. They acknowledge that the conflict is rampant because of guns, but prefer to tackle the problem through building peace rather than targeting guns specifically. Until the root causes of gun ownership can be mitigated through restoring community relationships and creating livelihoods, guns will continue to be a perceived necessity for people in Tot, Koloa, and Lokori.

"Conflict is rampant because of these guns,"² said one World Vision worker, referring to the commercialization and increased violence of cattle rustling. Every clan is forced to buy at least one gun for protection, at first. When raids start, driven by the desire for wealth, they start an arms race as well. New gun markets open up, with even ethnically opposed dealers selling arms to 'the enemy'. Businessmen are rumoured to bring free food to the *morans* (warriors) in order to promote their activities, thus creating insecurity and raising food prices.

Many elders are cooperative in peace building activities, encouraging youth to attend rallies. However, there are also some, along with other chiefs and leaders, who are getting dividends out of stealing. Some elders bless cattle raids because they know they will be paid from the results of an attack. The challenge World Vision has posed to itself as an organization is to get pastoralists to think as a group, challenging their chiefs for peace and cooperating with investigations when someone has been killed.

Things have been improving since the new government took power in 2003. People have started returning to the valley and their homes, and now community, governance, and accountability are what citizens in this area hope for in the future. The Kenya Police Reserves are seen to be a problem; the guns have been used for illegal purposes, and the feeling is that they must be returned. However, gun collection can only succeed if the government indicates a capacity and willingness to maintain security.

“Government just needs to maintain security. Pursue and prosecute those who incite violence,” said one field worker. Another added, “When a chief was sacked for not pursuing a killer, we had hope for peace.”³

Pokot: Kenya’s ‘forgotten children’

A meeting with World Vision, Catholic Peace and Justice Commission, Red Cross staff and community members in the Pokot-inhabited town of Koloa rendered some different views on the causes underlying small arms proliferation. A man identifying himself as a ‘local youth’ identified the meaning of peace as “not just the absence of war.” He cited economic, social, and political reasons for the ongoing conflict.

Abject poverty is one of the foremost problems in every pastoralist community in Kenya. Among Pokots, the bride price is so high that young men feel forced into criminal activity to pay for a wife. One example of a bride price for a young woman was 15 cows, 30 goats, and 3 camels, ranging all the way up to 30 cows, 150 goats, and 10 camels. Stealing from within the Pokot community is a sin, and very taboo. But traditionally, stealing from enemies is sanctioned.

Socially, young men must prove their manliness by the number of bulls they own. Singing at traditional dances focuses on how dangerous a man can

prove himself; whether he has killed a lion, leopard, or other wild animal, and how wealthy he is. The entire community, especially potential brides and their families, are involved in rituals that reinforce motivations to raid.

Politically, there is a tendency to use ethnic divisions in order to maintain power. Some politicians offer protection for raiding as an incentive to vote. The alternative is often a government that takes indiscriminate action, confiscating all of the animals in a community that is seen to possess illegal weapons or to have committed illegal actions against a neighbouring tribe. In those instances, said one focus group member, “innocent people end up going to raid their neighbours’ cattle after the government has ransacked their property, to ‘recover’ stock.”

The Pokot, like most pastoralists, are marginalized in the Kenyan social and political context. Each community has its own ‘myth’, or fable, about how guns arrived. The Pokot myth in Koloa is that in the 1970s, the Turkana began mounting armed raids. The Pokot only had bows and arrows, but soon it became necessary for individuals with cows to own guns for protection. When individuals could not afford to buy a personal weapon, the community was there with communally owned firearms for protection. Still, the community describes itself as valuing wealth and achievement, but not guns *per se*. The value is placed on the results that a gun can produce (namely, wealth in the form of cows). Traditional dancing can praise bulls, but not the AK-47s used in the raid that brought the bulls into the tribe. Guns themselves are not celebrated.

The Christian perspective of the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission emphasizes the brotherhood of all people as saved by Jesus Christ, a message which is meant to underscore the lack of true meaning in tribal divisions. However, in an area where people still live by (albeit changing) traditional customs, Christianity is more likely to be adapted to existing norms than to transform them.

The CJPC area co-ordinator described the ritual cleansing of a moran after killing a human being: even that of another tribe. He then went on to explain that guns have made it so much easier to kill from afar, some morans are now rejecting the importance of cleansing, saying that they could not even see the face of their victim.

Kerio Valley Peace and Development Committee (KVPDC)

From 1996 to 2000, the KVPDC was managed by the NCKC (National Council of Churches Kenya) as part of its peace building programme. In 2000, it elected members from the ground up to be volunteer co-ordinators. The Committee operates in West Pokot and Baringo, facilitating peace activities, meeting with chiefs, and approaching outside organizations to help with development projects.

“A man with a gun does not fear an *askari* [guard], chief, or God,” said one member. “Many people die in raids.”⁴ The root causes of the gun ownership according to the KVPDC is poverty. People own a gun for security, but they use it to raid. This perpetuates a cycle of violence, revenge, and wealth that makes guns difficult to purge. Traditionally, elders have been responsible for the security of a community. Now, however, *morans* (warriors) are armed so well that their parents can no longer control them. Only a change in attitude can bring change, but there are few alternatives to the life of the gun. Meanwhile, elders bless raiding expeditions hoping to get a cut of the rewards if it is successful; and when *morans* are determined to attack, they can always find a willing blessing.

The Committee targets women, youth, and elders. The leaders are relatively educated, and so have earned the right to sit and speak with elders about the evils of cattle rustling. Their educational approach is to provide a broader view of the economy of guns, and instil the value that peace is what brings lasting prosperity. They feel that their work has been successful in this regard, but without concrete concessions from the government or outside development projects, it is difficult to sustain the gains in peace.

SETAT Kapenguria

SETAT was founded in 1998 by seven Pokot women and is registered with the Department of Social Services as a CBO. It is a chapter of the National Council on Traditional Practices. The focus was initially on eliminating negative traditional and cultural practices and promoting culture as a positive force for both women and men. The estimated figure for the percentage of women and girls circumcised in West Pokot district is 96 per cent. The type of circumcision practiced is called infibulation, which involves the complete removal of the clitoris and inner labia and sometimes the sewing of the vaginal opening. What does an organization dealing in such issues have to say about peace building and the problem of small arms proliferation?

The problem of guns and cattle rustling is made more deadly by the commercialisation of dowries in the Pokot community. Bride prices are so high as to be impossible to pay without either waiting to become an old man (something SETAT also deals with, when child brides run away from husbands old enough to be grandfathers), or stealing cattle. It is possible to chart the rise in violence following the circumcision ceremony seasonally for girls. High dowries and the guns required to obtain them have also fostered a culture of violence that has led to more and more severe domestic violence. However, traditional punishments (even for elopement) all involve taking someone's animals away. In the current context, this leads to even more violence, raiding, and usually the acquisition of a firearm if there was not one in the household previously. This can often result in a woman being killed.

The SETAT group described the link between dowry prices and guns:

"There are gun problems here that make cattle rustling deadly. Because of population movements and livestock diseases, competition is fierce. Dowries for young men to get married are no longer cultural. The price is based on location: now there is no "acceptable limit" for a dowry. It is based purely on the parents' perceived investment in their daughter. Old men are the only ones who can pay a high bride price without having a gun to raid, but it is young men who want to marry. Guns also help to intimidate competition when vying for a wife. Also, they can be sold to top up the dowry."⁵

It is clear that empowering equality and dialogue between men and women may lead to negotiations on dowry adjustments that do not cannibalize the already scarce resources of a marginalized community.

Turkana

The Turkana District is one of the largest in Kenya, and shares international borders with Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda. Lokichoggio, near the Sudanese border, is a remote but well-developed town where the United Nations bases its Operation Lifeline Sudan. The town is home to as many as 200 aid workers per night, has cell phone coverage, paved roads, and a busy airport. Many major relief agencies operate offices there. The Kakuma refugee camp, slightly farther from the border, houses refugees from Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Somalia. However, the rest of the district is largely undeveloped, and is

extremely arid. Lake Turkana provides some lakeside dwellers with a fishing livelihood, but most Turkana are pastoralists.

Development Case Study: Kakuma Refugee Camp

In the Kakuma refugee camp in Turkana, there is fierce competition between refugees and local Turkana people. The war in Southern Sudan has been raging since the early 1980's. Refugees from that conflict have been living in camps in Kakuma on the Kenyan side of the border for years with no immediate alternatives for the future. At the UN camp, over 70,000 stateless people wait for something to change while food rations get smaller, children are born, and marriages arranged.

The Kenyan Turkana people living in the semi-desert area where the camp is located do not have 25 free primary schools, as those in the camp do. They do not have piped water, vocational schools, or relief food rations. The conflict over resources between the refugees and local people is the biggest challenge facing the UN-headed aid mission. The United Nations and international donors are looking after the refugees according to long-term plans for the camp's existence, while little attention is given to solving what the UN terms "long-term refugee" situations.⁶ The long-term status of refugees ensures the continuing existence and funding of the support agencies. Meanwhile, the Kenyan government has failed to reverse the lack of development by the colonial authority in Turkana, and has little incentive to prioritize this area of the country. The UN and other large NGOs have provided jobs and development simply by paving the road to the refugee camp and hiring some locals in the management of operations there. However, this is not a long-term solution.

Most Turkana are illiterate and, as herders of cattle and camels, they are heavily armed to protect their animals against raids from other tribes (including groups from inside the refugee camp). Peace initiatives among Turkana people range from adult literacy drives to women's groups who teach about the evils of guns. "Literacy opens people up to a worldview that is knowledgeable," says the director of the Turkana Literacy Bureau. "People are able to see what is good in other cultures. If people get basic literacy, they will have freedom: they can apply a new understanding to farming and beekeeping so they are not only dependent on grazing animals. They can be involved in decision making about their own communities. This is what will eventually bring peace."

The way forward for Turkana must involve a harmonization of international, national, and local interests. It is not in the interests of the Kenyan government to leave a historically marginalized part of its population uneducated and isolated from food and human security. The peace education manager at the Lutheran World Federation, which runs the Kakuma refugee camp, said the LWF is targeting refugees and the immediate surrounding communities for peace building activities such as training leaders, facilitators, and planning development projects. He espoused the view that reactive measures such as disarmament do not work, and that the priority is to get communities both inside and outside the camp to understand the importance of peace. He believes this will enable them to disarm themselves.⁷

The Kenyan government police in the vast region of Turkana are, as in other marginalized areas, drastically under-capacitated. The Lutheran World Federation and the UNHCR are lobbying for international organizations to come and do large-scale development projects with the Turkana people outside the jurisdiction of the camp. Targeting and highlighting marginalized regions for outside investment and government commitment to basic infrastructure is the first step towards overcoming a culture of lawlessness and fear.

Turkana Development Organization Forum (TUDOF)

The Turkana Development Organization Forum is an umbrella group founded to empower CBOs to communicate with foreign and international NGOs and connect with funding. It also aims to co-ordinate peace and development activities in the district. One of the members of the organization said, "The community is being put aside in conflict and peace negotiations. The local people who are suffering, are not contributing. They want to come up with a clear strategy." This was partly in reference to government intervention, but is also strongly tied to the ideal of communicating needs and demands from the grassroots level to national and international donors.

According to TUDOF, which has more than 20 smaller groups in its membership, conflict sources vary widely, from environmental damage from the Turkwell dam damaging grazing resources, to the need for education and reconciliation with those dwelling inside the Kakuma refugee camp. The goals around small arms demand reduction are focused purely on empowering the smaller community-based efforts under the umbrella to reach a level of dialogue and access with policy-makers and donors.

Turkana Pastoralist Development Organization (TUPADO)

The Turkana Pastoralist Development Organization (TUPADO) was formed in 1995 with the main goal of offering a micro-credit programme. However, the organization quickly shifted to peace and conflict work, which the staff perceived to be more crucial to development. Now, this small group is under the TUDOF umbrella in the hopes of becoming better networked and funded.

TUPADO characterizes the demand for guns as being largely for self-defence purposes, as in other insecure border areas. One peace worker said:

“Because of pasture and water, livestock and the boundaries just bring about the conflicts. That is why people possess guns for self-defence. When the government became independent, there was not enough security around and by that time is when the conflicts started. So the only way for people to safeguard themselves was to buy arms from the neighbouring countries like Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia. For some people, comparing to different areas even in the west, they talk about how there is hardly any government presence and so they feel they must arm themselves in protection against the Marakwet and Pokot. The government tries to disarm them but they still continue possessing [guns]. Like in West Pokot and Turkana districts, when the neighbouring countries attack us, the government always takes long to react. So we do not wait for their defence.”⁸

To combat the demand for small arms, TUPADO visits border areas to form village-level peace and reconciliation committees, many of them across the international borders. This work is partially funded by Oxfam. Major obstacles include finding transportation to travel to remote areas: but according to the staff, villagers are receptive to peace-building education. The staff describes these activities in their own words.

Reducing Demand: In their own words

We usually visit certain areas, and even last month we were in the northern part of Kimishi division and Kochero. We formed more village peace and reconciliation committees, from each division. Before, it had been difficult for the government to control these people and some organizations. Because when they come, they usually go talk to them and when they leave, the attacks happen the following day. So we sat down and came to a conclusion that we would take this issue to people on the ground, in the village. When we give them the responsibility, they can easily go and talk with their elders in the neighbouring tribes. It is easier for them to come to a conclusion than the government's involvement. When the government goes there, it just threatens them: "if you continue fighting we shall do this or that." So when the committee is formed the elders from both sides talk, they can do some other things which will end the conflicts.

Notes

1. Kamenju et al, *Terrorized Citizens*, SRIC, Nairobi: 2003, p 10.
2. Interview at World Vision office in Tot, July 23, 2003.
3. Ibid.
4. Interview KVPDC, 23 July, 2003.
5. Interview with SETAT, Kapenguria, West Pokot. 24 July 2003.
6. See UNHCR Africa Bureau, Discussion Paper on Protracted Refugee Situation in the African Region, October 2001.
7. Interview with LWF peace education co-ordinator, August 17, 2003.
8. From interview, 13 August 2003.