



# Absorbing Climate Shocks and Easing Conflict in Kenya's Rift Valley

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**What's new?** A protracted drought in the Horn of Africa is exacerbating land use conflict in the north of Kenya's Rift Valley region. Longstanding tensions between herders and landowners have led to increasingly organised and violent attacks, heightening intercommunal strife. Cattle theft and banditry are also on the rise.

**Why does it matter?** The increase in violence shows how climate shocks such as droughts can magnify local tensions or conflict, particularly harming those who earn an income through agriculture. Droughts and floods also accelerate environmental degradation, which in turn intensifies disputes over land and water.

**What should be done?** Nairobi should step up aid delivery. It should also de-escalate the violence through community-led peace initiatives. In the long term, the Kenyan government and donors should invest in drought adaptation measures. They should also make use of existing early warning systems to help communities better anticipate and absorb climate shocks.

## I. Overview

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A record-breaking drought in the Horn of Africa has fuelled violence in the north of Kenya's Rift Valley. Herders must now travel longer distances in search of pasture and water, which can pit them against other herders and owners of large farms and conservancies. The conflict is longstanding, rooted in grievances over land, political disputes and semi-nomads' impoverishment by years of state neglect, but today drought, along with cattle overstocking and the proliferation of illicit firearms, has sharpened it. Fighting involving pastoralists, landowners, criminals and security forces has killed more than 200 people since May 2021. Kenyan leaders and outside partners should step up emergency aid to drought-stricken regions and encourage sustainable grazing and migration agreements between landowners and herders. They should keep pushing for community-led peace talks. Kenyan authorities should act against perpetrators of attacks but not herders armed only to protect livestock. With donors' support, they should help pastoralist families cope with increasingly frequent climate shocks and reduce incentives for violence.

At the root of the multifaceted conflict lies competition among semi-nomadic herders, who are mostly men, and between these pastoralists and landowners over land and water. Overstocking, which occurs when herds are too large for the available pasture, recurrent droughts and floods, and deforestation that leaves grassland exposed to heavy rains have degraded grazing areas. Pastoralists, mostly in the west-central counties of Baringo and Laikipia, have long complained that the most abundant water sources are located on private land – from wildlife conservancies to farms or cattle ranches. Another of their grievances is the chronic lack of public investment in education, health care and infrastructure in the semi-arid and arid regions where they reside. Finally, cattle theft has evolved into an organised enterprise, with rustlers staging many more and more violent raids than just a few years ago.

The unprecedented drought affecting the Horn of Africa has made things worse. Between 2020 and 2022, Kenyan herders lost at least 2.5 million head of cattle, decimating incomes and pushing some to let livestock graze on land belonging to commercial farms and conservancies. Gradual impoverishment has made young pastoralist men particularly vulnerable to recruitment by crime rings, especially in Baringo county. Local politicians, meanwhile, exploit tensions around land to rally voters. The effectiveness of traditional dispute resolution mechanisms has dwindled, and existing grazing agreements are inadequate to mitigate the drought's harmful effects, let alone stop the ensuing conflict. Despite a robust police and army response to local flare-ups, clashes involving herders, landowners and armed criminals continue to claim lives.

With help from external donors, Kenyan national and county authorities should take steps to reduce the drought's impact and ease tensions. These measures should also address grievances related to land access, overgrazing and the insecurity caused by heavily armed criminal gangs. Meanwhile, the state and its partners need to work to mitigate the consequences of future droughts.

*To curb the violence right away:*

- ❑ Kenya's government, with support from donors, should deliver more humanitarian aid through cash transfers to pastoralist families, in counties afflicted by drought.
- ❑ The Kenya Defence Forces and police should go after only the gunmen responsible for attacks, rather than also targeting herders who carry arms only to guard their livestock, so as not to enflame the situation further. They might also invest in local intelligence gathering to identify those responsible for violent banditry. The government should equip police adequately to confront heavily armed perpetrators.
- ❑ The authorities should continue to encourage inclusive, locally led initiatives to de-escalate tensions among communities and with the police. For instance, county governments could financially compensate cattle rustling victims to break the cycle of revenge. This step could help authorities win pastoralists' trust.
- ❑ The Kenyan police should investigate and prosecute those financing gunmen responsible for deadly cattle raids, including community leaders, politicians and businesspeople. Kenya's Directorate of Criminal Investigations should assist units on the ground tracking weapons dealers, as well as the source and destination of illicit small arms and ammunition.

- ❑ Authorities should facilitate the negotiation of migratory corridors with landowners, if necessary providing beefed-up security in the vicinity.

*In the medium to long term:*

- ❑ National and local governments, aided by donors, through grants and perhaps debt swap schemes, should invest in climate adaptation measures such as water storage, irrigation systems and cultivation of drought-resistant grass.
- ❑ With donor assistance, Kenya's National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) could encourage landowners to set aside fenced land for pasture by financing new water points and repairing existing ones.
- ❑ National authorities should also step up investment in health, education and infrastructure in areas populated by semi-nomadic herding families, to make these vulnerable communities more resilient to climate shocks.
- ❑ The government should also publish, in local languages, the early warning rainfall data it receives from the NDMA and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) on climate and conflict risks. Both systems offer real-time information that can help predict which areas will need urgent investment to cope with extreme climate events. But for early warning to be effective, national and county governments that receive the information need to act upon it as well as communicate efficiently with people at risk of harm.

## **II. Underlying Tensions**

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Competition over land and livestock in the Rift Valley, and more particularly in Laikipia and Baringo counties, stretches back centuries. Semi-nomadic pastoralist peoples like the Maasai, Pokot, Samburu, Turkana, Tugen and Il Chamus have long quarrelled over access to grazing areas and engaged in small-scale cattle theft among themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Today, however, extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, as well as government and private owners' use of land and water, are reducing the availability of grassland in the region. Shrinking resources are driving competition among herder communities, as well as feeding herders' frustrations with wealthy landowners who hold large, well-watered farms and conservancies in the central highlands and parts of the Rift Valley. People, especially young men, in the area are increasingly tempted to resort to violence to gain the upper hand in that contest or to join crime rings as an alternative source of income. As frustrations accumulate, fighting can break out among herders, between herders and landowners, between herders and security forces or between security forces and cattle thieves known generically to local authorities as "bandits".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kenya has a population of approximately 56 million, according to the UN Population Fund, comprising 45 ethnic groups. According to the country's 2019 census, it has 1,189,522 Maasais, 1,016,174 Turkana, 778,408 Pokots, 333,471 Samburu, 197,556 Tugens and 32,949 Il Chamus. The small-scale farmers in Rift Valley counties are mainly Kikuyu, Meru and Kisii.

<sup>2</sup> Kenyan officials, security forces and local communities distinguish between armed herders defending themselves from attack and those responsible for criminal acts, commonly referred to as bandits.

The latest cycle of violence erupted in May 2021 at the border between Laikipia and Baringo counties, when herders invaded the Laikipia Nature Conservancy, Kenya's largest private conservancy. Since then, at least 239 people, the majority of them also men, have been killed in a swathe of the northern Rift Valley including the counties of Laikipia, Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet, Turkana, Samburu and West Pokot.<sup>3</sup> The police and army have deployed to curb the fighting, but to little avail, except for a brief lull around the August 2022 elections, when security was particularly tight.

#### A. *Baringo's Changing Landscape*

Previously similar landscapes in the neighbouring counties of Laikipia and Baringo have undergone drastically different evolutions over the past twenty years. Situated at the foot of Mount Kenya, Africa's second-highest mountain, Laikipia is celebrated for its lush greenness and abundant water. In contrast, Baringo, which lies west of Laikipia and at a lower altitude, is semi-arid.

Some two decades ago, Baringo's landscape resembled Laikipia's – but not anymore. Recurrent droughts and floods, as well as deforestation and overgrazing, have degraded its soil.<sup>4</sup> The invasive shrub *Prosopis juliflora* is edging out endemic plants and grazing grasses, worsening the area's overall environmental health.<sup>5</sup> In parallel, Lake Baringo, the northernmost of Kenya's Rift Valley lakes, is rising dramatically, submerging homes and uprooting thousands every year.<sup>6</sup> On top of that, sinkholes

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In practice, many herders claim, security forces nonetheless wrongly target them as bandits for carrying weapons to guard their livestock. Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, March 2023. "We will be decisive in stamping out banditry, President Ruto says", *Capital News*, 10 March 2023.

<sup>3</sup> This number is based on Crisis Group interviews with conservancy owners, politicians and civil society figures in both Laikipia and Baringo, as well as on newspaper reports and data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), a non-governmental organisation specialising in disaggregated conflict data collection. Interlocutors in Laikipia highlighted the deaths of at least thirteen people, mainly herders, in violence in and around the conservancy between August and December 2021; the killing of a police officer by armed bandits in Laikipia West in February 2022; and the murder of a ranger the same month. Additionally, Baringo residents told Crisis Group that cattle-related violence in the county had killed approximately one person per week between April and June 2022. See also Cyrus Ombati, "Chaos as 2 KDF, 2 GSU officers are killed in Laikipia ambush", *The Star*, 11 November 2021; James Munyeki, "Bandits ambush village in Laikipia and burn classes as police operation starts", *Standard Media*, 20 October 2021; Joseph Kangogo, "Banditry deaths hit 20 this year, Baringo begs for help", *The Star*, 18 May 2022; "Police launch manhunt for bandits who killed 11 in Turkana," *Citizen Digital*, 26 September 2022; and "4 suspected bandits gunned down in Laikipia", *Citizen Digital*, 6 February 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Crisis Group interviews, conservationists, Ngazi Initiative for Minorities Trust representatives and county officials, Baringo, June 2022. See also Will Brown, "How the cradle of mankind has descended into climate conflict", *The Telegraph*, 13 July 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Crisis Group interviews, representatives of the charitable trust Rehabilitation of Arid Environments, Baringo, June 2022. See also Purity Rima Baabu, "Kenya faces devastating *Prosopis* invasion: What can be done", *The Conversation*, 14 July 2019.

<sup>6</sup> There are several theories as to why the lake is rising. The salient one, advanced by Kenya's Meteorological Department, a government body affiliated with the World Meteorological Organisation, blames a combination of climate change, human activity and tectonic plate movement. "Assessment of Rising Water Levels of Rift Valley Lakes in Kenya: The Role of Meteorological Factors", Kenya Meteorological Department, Institute for Meteorological Training and Research, 11 November 2021. See also Carey Baraka, "A drowning world: Kenya's quiet slide underwater", *The Guardian*, 17 March

that geologists blame on extreme weather patterns, such as droughts and floods, and borehole drilling have swallowed up precious land.<sup>7</sup>

Baringo's shrinking pastures are increasingly pushing members of its herder communities – notably Pokot, Tugen and Il Chamus groups – to encroach on private property in search of water and grassland, stoking land use competition in neighbouring Laikipia.

## B. *Vulnerable Communities*

Although semi-nomadic herders account for half of Kenya's rural labour force and the livestock sector accounts for 12 per cent of the country's GDP, pastoralists are among Kenya's poorest communities.<sup>8</sup> Along with remittances from citizens working abroad, wildlife tourism and commercial cash crops – tea, coffee, flowers and, more recently, avocados – are Kenya's biggest foreign exchange earners.<sup>9</sup> The government's focus on the latter two lucrative industries, centred in the fertile Mount Kenya area, has slowed development of arid and semi-arid regions. Baringo county's Tiaty constituency, for example, spans over 2,100 sq km, but has only two major roads, which discourages investment and constrains the police in providing security. The social effects are injurious: more than two thirds of adults in Tiaty cannot read or write.<sup>10</sup>

The 2010 constitution aimed to bolster local economies by allocating more resources to county governments, yet many health facilities, schools and roads in arid and semi-arid regions remain grossly inadequate.<sup>11</sup> Kenya's controller of budget reported in September 2022 that some counties, including Baringo, spend less on education and development than what they receive for the purpose from the national government.<sup>12</sup> The reasons for the discrepancy are unclear. In the 2021-2022 fiscal year, seventeen of Kenya's 47 counties spent only half the funds earmarked for development projects while spending on salaries increased.<sup>13</sup>

Years of poor governance and economic hardship have left semi-nomadic communities mistrustful of a state they perceive as having neglected them and ill prepared

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2022. Rising lake waters have displaced more than 75,000 households. Scoping Report, Kenyan Ministry of Environment and Forestry in partnership with the UN Development Programme, 5 July 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Kang-Chun Cheng, "Sinkholes emerge in rural Kenya after series of floods, droughts", *Mongabay*, 30 December 2021.

<sup>8</sup> The Kenya Livestock Master Plan aims to enhance sustainable development and investment in the livestock sector. International Livestock Research Institute, 24 May 2021. Vision 2030 Development Strategy for Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands, National Drought Management Authority, March 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Kenya needs foreign exchange to service high debt costs, which are projected to consume about half the revenue in the 2022-2023 budget. "Senate projects Kenya's debt to hit Sh8.7trn by end of 2021/22", *The Star*, 15 October 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Baringo county officials, June 2022. See also "Minority Rights Group Briefing on Access to Health and Education among Minority and Indigenous Communities in Kenya", Minority Rights Group, 6 May 2021. Between 2019 and 2021, Baringo county allocated 7 per cent of its budget to education and information technology. In the end, the county spent only around 30 per cent of these funds.

<sup>11</sup> "Editorial: Military not solution to Laikipia clashes", *The Star*, 9 October 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Kibet, "Counties' development spending drops", *Standard Media*, 27 September 2022.

<sup>13</sup> "County Governments Annual Budget Implementation Review Report", Office of the Controller of Budget, September 2022.

to face growing climate-related insecurity. As incomes dwindle and disputes over fresh grazing land increase, pastoralists are acquiring more and better firearms to protect their herds or avenge what they see as wrongs inflicted upon them by authorities, farmers or armed men whom the police call bandits. A Tugen leader told Crisis Group that cattle theft has left his community on edge, spurring them to arm themselves.<sup>14</sup> Most of those taking up arms are young men, though women and older men sometimes encourage them to do so, including through stories celebrating masculine ideals of heroism.<sup>15</sup> Failure by local or national authorities to manage conflict over land use feeds a dangerous cycle of violence.

### C. *Laikipia's Land Grievances*

Land tenure is contentious in many parts of Kenya, but tensions are particularly high near Laikipia's border with Baringo. Large cattle ranches and wildlife reserves, most of which have fences, cover about 40 per cent of Laikipia, with the remainder a patchwork of farms, ranches, government-owned plots, protected forests and grassland.<sup>16</sup>

Laikipia's land tenure system has roots in British colonial rule. In 1904 and 1911, colonial authorities pushed thousands of pastoralists out of the Rift Valley and onto reserves in southern Kenya, mainly in today's Narok county. They then converted swathes of fertile grazing land into private ranches that were allocated or sold to British settlers, especially in what is now Laikipia.<sup>17</sup> After independence in 1963, President Jomo Kenyatta encouraged white settlers to stay in the country, preserving the colonial system of freehold land titles and private property rights.<sup>18</sup> To this day, many settlers' descendants own land or have long-term leases with the government, typically operating wildlife conservancies, ranches or farms. The government also bought some of the settlers' land and redistributed it to Kenyans looking to grow flowers or other cash crops.

While the Kenyatta government's arrangement helped maintain economic stability and retain important sources of foreign exchange, as many of the white settlers were large-scale farmers, herders tend to see it as a historical injustice that deprived them of ancestral grazing land. Intercommunal tensions also play a role. Most of the farmers who benefited from land redistribution in Laikipia are Meru, Kikuyu or Kisii, alienating the pastoralists, who belong to other ethnic groups.

The Kenyan authorities have adopted various measures to make land ownership more equitable. The 2010 constitution, for instance, introduced a new legal framework

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<sup>14</sup> Crisis Group interview, advocate for victims of cattle rustling, Baringo, June 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Regional conflict expert, speaking at IGAD Consultative Workshop on Integrating Climate Risk Management into the Security Sector, Nairobi, 26-28 July 2022.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix B for a map of Laikipia County. The data is provided by the Centre for Training and Integrated Research in ASAL Development. For more on cattle ranches, see Veronica Mwangi et al., "Beef Production in the Rangelands: A Comparative Assessment between Pastoralism and Large-Scale Ranching in Laikipia County, Kenya", *Agriculture*, vol. 10, no. 9 (July 2020).

<sup>17</sup> See Murithi Mutiga, "Violence, Land and the Upcoming Vote in Kenya's Laikipia Region", Crisis Group Commentary, 25 July 2017; John Letai, "Laikipia land crisis: A ticking time bomb", *The Elephant*, 21 October 2021; and Eliud Kibii, "White settlers, black colonialists and the landless majority", *The Elephant*, 4 September 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

for the distribution of land.<sup>19</sup> In 2016, building on the revised constitution, former President Uhuru Kenyatta's government approved the Community Land Act. The law recognises and protects the legal regime of customary tenure, which enables local communities to collectively own land and administer it in accordance with their traditional practices.

Implementation of the 2016 act has stumbled over bureaucratic hurdles, however. According to the law, the Ministry of Lands must register land as community-owned before property rights can be transferred from the county governments that previously owned them.<sup>20</sup> Yet, six years on, county governments still own much of Kenya's arid and semi-arid land.<sup>21</sup> One reason is that the Community Land Act allows government to exclude unspecified areas from the possibility of transfer as public lands. Consequently, authorities sometime claim lands as public, without consulting communities. Moreover, the application process is long and complicated, consisting of several levels, which can discourage potential applicants. Regulations also require communities to notify the public in a national newspaper and via a nationwide radio broadcast before they apply for a given transfer. The cost is often prohibitive.<sup>22</sup> As a result, communities in Laikipia county exercise limited control over land or natural resources management.<sup>23</sup>

Against this backdrop, frictions between herders and ranchers have soared in recent years. Many herders in and around Laikipia believe they are being unfairly denied access to lands owned by conservancies and commercial farms, which they see as grazing areas lying idle.<sup>24</sup> Conservancy owners and ranch managers, for their part, allege that pastoralists tend to acquire too many animals for the available grassland, especially during dry spells. They argue that smaller herds would be healthier and easier to manage for herders coping with climate shocks.<sup>25</sup>

Local politicians have, at times, stoked these tensions for electoral purposes, tapping into pastoralists' demands for access to or restitution of what they consider their ancestral lands. During the 2017 elections, and again in the run-up to the 2022 polls, government officials accused politicians in eastern Baringo and northern Laikipia of

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<sup>19</sup> The 2010 constitution's Article 60 reads: "Land in Kenya shall be held, used and managed in a manner that is equitable, efficient, productive and sustainable, and in accordance with the following principles [including] equitable access to land".

<sup>20</sup> The Community Land Act's Article 6 explains the role of county governments. "Upon registration of community land, the respective county government shall promptly release to the community all such monies payable for compulsory acquisition".

<sup>21</sup> "The challenges of implementing the Community Land Act in Kenya", video, *The Elephant*, 25 February 2022. See also Letai, "Laikipia land crisis: A ticking time bomb", op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Crisis Group interviews, community leaders in Baringo, June 2022. "Critical Issues on Community Land and Legislation, Kenya", Drylands Learning and Capacity Building Initiative for Improved Policy and Practice in the Horn of Africa, June 2019; Liz Alden Wily, "The Community Land Act in Kenya Opportunities and Challenges for Communities", *Land*, vol. 7, no. 1 (January 2018).

<sup>23</sup> "The challenges of implementing the Community Land Act in Kenya", op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Crisis Group interviews, herders and community elders, Laikipia and Baringo, June 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Crisis Group interviews, conservancy owners, ranch managers, Laikipia, June 2022. See also "Woman injured as bandits strike Mbogoine village in Laikipia West", KBC, 3 September 2022.

exploiting land grievances, notably encouraging herders to let their cattle graze on private property.<sup>26</sup>

Mounting tensions around land use have led to bloodshed in Laikipia and Baringo since 2017. For instance, during a severe drought in March that year, armed Pokot pastoralists from Baringo drove their herds into Laikipia Nature Conservancy, Kenya's largest private reserve, in search of pasture.<sup>27</sup> They let their herds graze in the area for several weeks, without permission from the conservancy's managers.<sup>28</sup> During this time, the reserve's owner, the well-known Kenyan conservationist Kuki Gallman, was shot and wounded by pastoralists while patrolling the area.<sup>29</sup> An ensuing intervention by security forces to push out the herders resulted in several fatalities on both sides.<sup>30</sup>

A 2019 grazing agreement between herders and ranchers provided a short respite, but it failed to durably reduce the acrimony between them. Under the deal, land-owners let herders' cattle graze on private property, including Laikipia Nature Conservancy, and gave them access to water, fodder and veterinary services in return for a small fee.<sup>31</sup> But between May and August 2021, cattle raids and other incidents caused violence in the region to spike again.<sup>32</sup> During this three-month period, herders from Baringo county and its surroundings led thousands of cattle back into Laikipia Nature Conservancy and other reserves nearby, in contravention of the grazing agreement.<sup>33</sup> The mainly Pokot groups of armed men also evicted ethnic Kisii farmers living close to the reserves and burnt down their houses.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Crisis Group interviews, community elders, conservancy owners, community conservancy chairperson, local security officials, Baringo and Laikipia counties, June 2022. See also Mutiga, "Violence, Land and the Upcoming Vote in Kenya's Laikipia Region", *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Laikipia Nature Conservancy stretches over 107,000 acres (433 sq km) of land. It is Kenya's largest private reserve. It is nonetheless tiny in comparison to many community conservancies, for example Sera, which is one of the country's largest at approximately 839,000 acres (3,395 sq km).

<sup>28</sup> Crisis Group interviews, community members, Laikipia, June 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Tristan McConnell, "Who shot Kuki Gallmann? The story of a Kenyan conservationist heroine", *The Guardian*, 18 June 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Clashes among pastoralists, farmers and conservationists in Laikipia were triggered by drought but worsened by political tensions linked to local elections in August 2017. Murithi Mutiga, "As drought sweeps Kenya, herders invade farms and old wounds are reopened", *The Guardian*, 19 March 2017.

<sup>31</sup> The deal gave 5,000 herders, with around 15,000 head of cattle among them, grazing rights in return for a fee of between \$3 and \$5 per cow per month, depending on the type of extra service provided. Crisis Group interviews, local sources with knowledge of the agreement, Laikipia, June 2022.

<sup>32</sup> In May 2021, Gallmann was shot for a second time after encountering a group of bandits in the conservancy's Ol Moran zone. Jane Flanagan, "Kuki Gallmann shot again by bandits on her reserve", *The Times*, 13 August 2021; Cyrus Ombati, "2 GSU officers killed by bandits at Laikipia Nature Conservancy", *The Star*, 10 November 2021; Laban Wanambisi, "Laikipia conservationists decry increased insecurity fueled by banditry", *Capital News*, 14 August 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Some community members say the conservancy's grazing fees were too steep. Crisis Group interviews, herders, security officials and community conservancy owners, Laikipia and Baringo, June 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group interviews, farmers and local security officials, Laikipia, June 2022. Security forces reportedly seized about 200 cows from a local Pokot elder to give to Kikuyu farmers demanding compensation for stolen livestock. "Laikipia Nature Conservancy under night curfew for major security operation", *Capital News*, 6 September 2021.



Today, violence still plagues Laikipia and Baringo, despite the deployment of police and army units.<sup>35</sup> In January, police killed four suspected cattle rustlers in a firefight in Laikipia.<sup>36</sup>

#### D. *The Changing Nature of Cattle Raiding*

Small-scale cattle rustling, with rudimentary weapons such as spears or clubs, has been a fixture of pastoralist culture for centuries.<sup>37</sup> Livestock is both a symbol of prosperity and a repository of wealth for herders, who rarely have bank accounts or insurance.<sup>38</sup> As a result, pastoralist men are under constant pressure to accumulate more animals and replace those that have disappeared or died. It has traditionally been considered justified for herders to steal small numbers of livestock from other ethnic groups in order to keep their herds intact.<sup>39</sup>

In recent years, however, the nature of cattle rustling has changed. Small raids have been replaced by large, premeditated attacks that may spiral into intercommunal clashes. For example, in Laikipia and Baringo, the Tugen and the Pokot have fought often over resources and cattle.<sup>40</sup> There are several reasons for this shift. First, the drought has caused massive livestock deaths, increasing pressure on pastoralists to replenish their herds. Secondly, illegal firearms, smuggled in from South Sudan, Uganda or Ethiopia, have become easily available.<sup>41</sup> Herders are better armed – including with assault rifles such as AK-47s and G3s. It is thus much harder for authorities, including security forces sent to curb the violence, to draw distinctions among pastoralist men who carry weapons to protect their livestock, cattle thieves, some of whom belong to criminal gangs, and heavily armed men who commit other crimes, like ambushing and robbing motorists, to supplement their income.<sup>42</sup> Women do not usually take part in raids or other attacks, but they sometimes give the men food when they are hiding out beforehand or afterward.<sup>43</sup>

With climate change, more and more of cattle rustling appears to be morphing into an organised criminal enterprise. Before 2017, young herders mainly stole cattle during rainy seasons, when they were certain to find sufficient water and fresh pasture for the animals. But raids now also occur during dry seasons, when livestock are more

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<sup>35</sup> Brian Okoth, “How Interior CS Fred Matiang’i plans to end Laikipia violence”, *The Standard*, 10 September 2011; Eric Matara, “CS Matiang’i deploys more officers to Laikipia, orders non-residents to leave”, *Daily Nation*, 12 October 2021.

<sup>36</sup> “Cattle rustlers strike again in Laikipia”, KBC, 6 January 2023.

<sup>37</sup> Kang-Chun Cheng, “Conflict over resources in Kenya hits deadly highs with firearms in play”, *Mongabay*, 19 May 2022.

<sup>38</sup> “Looking for solutions to the cattle rustling crisis”, Africa Defense Forum, 6 July 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. See also comments by Professor Kennedy Mkutu Agade in a webinar hosted by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 23 June 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, “How the cradle of mankind has descended into climate conflict”, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> Crisis Group interviews, conservationists, Ngazi Initiative for Minorities Trust representatives and county officials, Baringo, June 2022. See also Brown, “How the cradle of mankind has descended into climate conflict”, *op. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Joshua Changwony, Tugen community member, and advocates for victims of cattle rustling, Baringo, June 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Baringo-based conflict prevention organisation representative, April 2023.

likely to die of thirst or disease. Some regional observers believe that cattle thieves have affiliated with criminal gangs to sell their loot to meat cartels.<sup>44</sup> Many say the stolen livestock is not used locally but slaughtered and sold in markets in the capital, Nairobi, or even outside the country.<sup>45</sup> This change is important, as the thieves are looking not to replace lost cattle in their own herds but to reap large profits. Large-scale, organised cattle rustling could also be driving some of the violence and demand for small weapons.

Armed criminal gangs compound the insecurity. In February 2021, for instance, gunmen attacked a school bus in Elgeyo Marakwet county, killing the driver and injuring children and teachers. The ambush was the latest in a series of similarly brutal attacks that had already prompted the interior minister to lay the blame on a “criminal organisation disguised as cattle rustlers”.<sup>46</sup> Some believe that these gunmen receive money or firearms from “conflict entrepreneurs” – wealthy politicians or businessmen who want to gain influence or invest in illicit enterprises.<sup>47</sup>

As poor rainfall wrecks livelihoods and illicit firearms proliferate, cattle-related incidents have become deadlier. In 2021, at least sixteen people died in nineteen livestock raids in Baringo county. During the first quarter of 2022 alone, the number of fatalities more than doubled to 39.<sup>48</sup> That June, Baringo residents told Crisis Group that raids were occurring almost weekly.<sup>49</sup> In March 2023, a peace elder described the attacks as more frequent still, blaming the continuing dry spell.<sup>50</sup>

Today, the cattle-related insecurity has spread to most counties in the northern Rift Valley. After a brief lull during Kenya's August 2022 elections, when police and army units were on high alert, since September there has been a notable increase in violence in northern Laikipia, along the Baringo-Turkana boundary, and in parts of Samburu and Elgeyo Marakwet. Government officials, police and members of the Samburu, Turkana and Tugen communities blame Pokots, particularly those from Tiaty in Baringo county, for some of the worst acts of violence.<sup>51</sup> There have been numerous deadly attacks. Among the most brutal took place on 3 January, when gunmen killed

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Crisis Group interviews, local security officials, Tugen and Turkana community members, politicians, conservancy workers, Laikipia and Baringo, June 2022. See also “Looking for solutions to the cattle rustling crisis”, op. cit. Crisis Group interview, peace mediator, Nairobi, March 2023. The mediator said his investigation of cattle theft in Laikipia led him to Nairobi, where the meat was sold.

<sup>46</sup> Prudence Wanza, “CS Matiang’i: Pokot warriors to be declared an outlawed group”, KBC, 18 February 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Crisis Group interview, local security official, Laikipia, June 2022. David Ayega, “Kindiki vows to expose politicians and spiritual leaders financing bandits,” *Capital News*, 12 March 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Cheng, “Conflict over resources in Kenya hits deadly highs with firearms in play”, op. cit.

<sup>49</sup> Crisis Group interviews, community members, conservancy manager, county officials, security and police officials, Baringo, June 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Crisis Group interview, peace elder, Nairobi, March 2023.

<sup>51</sup> Crisis Group interviews, community members, conservancy manager, county officials, security and police officials, Baringo and Laikipia, June 2022. Police and community leaders say cattle stolen in deadly raids are often tracked to Tiaty. According to a community organisation in Baringo, cattle rustlers sometimes call their victims' relatives by telephone to taunt them, sometimes even revealing their ethnic identity. “Residents living in fear despite beefed-up security in Turkana”, *The Standard*, 26 February 2023.

two teenage sisters looking after their parents' animals in Kerio Valley.<sup>52</sup> On 7 February, four people were killed and two injured when gunmen suspected to be from Tiaty raided a village in Turkana East, riding away with an unknown number of cattle.<sup>53</sup>

Security personnel responding to the threat are also in the line of fire. On 24 September 2022, for example, gunmen killed at least eight police officers in Kapedo, on the county line between Turkana and Baringo.<sup>54</sup> Police blamed Pokots for the ambush, and President Kenyatta sent reinforcements to the region.<sup>55</sup> In February, gunmen killed three police officers in Turkana county, stripping them of their uniforms, shoes and mobile phones, just hours after a senior government official visited the region.<sup>56</sup>

### E. *Hotly Contested Elections*

Local politics aggravate violence in Laikipia and Baringo. The 2010 constitution's devolution of powers and resources to local governments has raised the stakes for county politicians jockeying for seats. Kenyans generally regard devolution as a change for the better: the government now allocates significant resources to previously neglected regions and presidential elections are no longer zero-sum contests. But the intensified local competition that accompanies devolution has driven up tensions during election campaigns, particularly in ethnically diverse areas.<sup>57</sup>

As local campaigns become more heated, politicians have been accused of using emotive land and ethnicity issues to rally support. In interviews with Crisis Group, local security officers, county government officials, conservancy owners and community organisation members all pointed the finger at two politicians in particular: Mathew Lempurkel, a former parliament member for Laikipia North, and William Kamket, a parliamentarian from Tiaty.<sup>58</sup> Police arrested Lempurkel on 8 September 2021, charging him with inciting violence in parts of the Rift Valley. The former director of prosecution added charges of hate speech, after comments the former MP had made aired on television. Lempurkel denied the charges, and a Kenyan court later cleared him. Kamket was also acquitted of formal charges of using hate speech to stoke conflict among herders, security forces and landowners.<sup>59</sup> But, locally, the suspicions persist: several officials and landowners say Kamket in particular has curried favour

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<sup>52</sup> Stephen Rutto, "Sad new year for village as girls killed, cattle stolen by bandits", Standard Media, 3 January 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Sammy Lutta, "Four people killed, two injured in Turkana East bandit attack", Nation Media, 7 February 2023.

<sup>54</sup> "Cattle rustlers kill at least 11 people during ambush in Kenya", BBC, 25 September 2022.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> "Bandits make a mockery of Kindiki tour by killing three police officers", *The Standard*, 12 February 2023.

<sup>57</sup> See Mutiga, "Violence, Land and the Upcoming Vote in Kenya's Laikipia Region", op. cit.

<sup>58</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Baringo and Laikipia, June 2022.

<sup>59</sup> "Lempurkel free of incitement charge", *People Daily*, 5 August 2023. In April 2022, a civil society organisation launched a campaign to block Lempurkel, along with 24 others, from standing for election again. It did not succeed. He ran in the August general elections. "Laikipia North MP retains seat after trouncing rivals", *The Star*, 11 August 2022; "Tiaty MP William Kamket acquitted of incitement charges", *Nation*, 27 June 2022.

with the Pokot herders by encouraging them to forcibly occupy land.<sup>60</sup> Kamket denies the accusation.<sup>61</sup>

### III. A Historic Drought

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The drought the Horn of Africa is suffering is among its longest and most severe ever. Since 2020, the region has seen an unprecedented five failed rainy seasons in a row (rainy seasons in Kenya run from mid-March to May and November to December). The Climate Hazards Center, an international alliance of scientists and food security analysts, labelled the March-May 2022 rainy season as the driest on record for the region. Parts of Kenya received sporadic rainfall in November, but not enough to blunt the drought's impact. The Kenya Meteorological Department noted that by late November rainfall was below average in most parts of the country, a trend it said would likely continue in the north and east.

Some rain fell in the northern Rift Valley in March 2023 and into April. There are signs that rains have reached near-average levels in parts of Turkana County. Yet analysis from IGAD's climate prediction centre and Kenya's Meteorological Department suggests that the outlook for the March-May 2023 rainy season is still poor overall, endangering an increasingly vulnerable population.<sup>62</sup> The UN estimates that over 4.1 million people in Kenya already face hunger.<sup>63</sup>

The drought has made herders' lives particularly tough. Between 2020 and November 2022, at least nine million animals died in the Horn of Africa, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. As herders travel longer distances to find pasture, their goats, sheep and cows lose weight and value. In parts of Kenya, livestock prices are down by as much as 90 per cent from the post-drought period in 2020. Herders at a market in Ol Moran village, in Laikipia, told Crisis Group that cows which previously sold for \$200-\$300 are now fetching only \$40-\$60 per head.<sup>64</sup>

Women and children in herder families face particular challenges amid the drought. As livestock are an important source of nutrition for mothers and children, losing so many animals hits them especially hard: the UN estimates that around 884,000 children under age six and more than 115,000 pregnant or breastfeeding women are acutely malnourished and in need of treatment.<sup>65</sup> Women usually buy food for the

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<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group interviews, conservancy workers, local officials, county officials, politicians, community leaders, women's organisation members, Baringo and Laikipia, June 2022.

<sup>61</sup> Crisis Group interview, William Kamket, MP from Tiaty, Baringo, June 2022. "Tiaty MP William Kamket acquitted of incitement charges", *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> "Forecast Update – East Africa Likely to Experience Six Droughts in a Row", Climate Hazards Center, 19 September 2022. The March-May rainy season will most likely be below normal to normal, and is unlikely to be above normal, according to forecasting experts. "Sustained 'No Regrets' Humanitarian Efforts Urgently Needed in Response to Drought in the Horn of Africa", joint alert by meteorological agencies and humanitarian partners, 16 February 2023.

<sup>63</sup> "Kenya Drought Response Dashboard", UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, August 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Crisis Group interviews, herders, Laikipia, June 2022.

<sup>65</sup> "Kenya Drought Response Dashboard", *op. cit.*

family and collect drinking water, supplementing their incomes with firewood they gather along the way. The drought's impact on earnings has meant that women can often only provide one meal a day. They also have less energy to search for firewood because they are hungry or have to walk farther to find water. When a husband dies and the children are young, a brother-in-law may take charge of a family's land and livestock. The boys will assume responsibility when they come of age.<sup>66</sup>

The gradual impoverishment of herders during protracted dry spells is worsening insecurity. As droughts become more frequent and more intense – nine of the 28 droughts Kenya recorded in the past 100 years occurred after 2004, a trend that is expected to continue in the coming years – their magnifying effect on violence seems set to grow accordingly.<sup>67</sup>

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#### **IV. A Mixed Bag of Interventions**

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Authorities, civil society representatives and mediators have all stepped in at various times to tackle insecurity or mitigate the drought's harmful effects in the northern Rift Valley. These efforts have had varying levels of success.

##### *A. Security Response*

The government has devoted much of its effort to short-term security measures to tackle violence in Laikipia, Baringo and surrounding counties. In January 2021, it rolled out a disarmament campaign, despite previous such initiatives having fallen well short of targets. The results were lacklustre, with reportedly only about 80 fire-arms seized.<sup>68</sup> It then sent an additional 2,000 police officers as well as extra soldiers on a temporary mission to stem local flare-ups prior to the August 2022 elections.<sup>69</sup> After a brief decrease around the elections, violence resumed, prompting the deployment of police and army units in September. This measure restored calm only in small areas around certain bigger settlements and failed to curb frictions, either among herders or between herders and landowners.<sup>70</sup>

The new president, William Ruto, has ordered another security campaign. On 13 February 2023, Ruto deployed the defence forces, along with a multi-agency team comprising the Rapid Deployment Unit, the Anti-Stock Theft Unit, the General Service Unit and regular police, in drought-affected counties in northern and central Kenya.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, women leaders and conflict prevention organisation representative in Baringo, April 2023.

<sup>67</sup> "Kenya Climate Risk Country Profile", World Bank, 2021; "Emergency Events Database", Université Catholique de Louvain, undated.

<sup>68</sup> The 2,000 police officers were deployed to all polling stations across Baringo county. Flora Koech, "Inside the government's failed disarmament in banditry-prone North Rift", *Daily Nation*, 23 June 2021. A 2012 study estimated that between 530,000 and 680,000 firearms are held illegally in Kenya. "Availability of Small Arms and Perceptions of Security in Kenya: An Assessment", Small Arms Survey/Kenya National Focus Point on Small Arms and Light Weapons, June 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Eric Ombok, "Attacks by bandits prompt Kenya to deploy military in the north", Bloomberg, 14 February 2023.

<sup>70</sup> Cheng, "Conflict over resources in Kenya hits deadly highs with firearms in play", op. cit.

<sup>71</sup> Ombok, "Attacks by bandits prompt Kenya to deploy military in the north", op. cit.

Operations began on 17 February, with a three-day amnesty for civilians who turned in firearms. Police have recovered a small number of weapons and arrested more than 100 people thus far.<sup>72</sup> It is a drop in the bucket, given the scale of insecurity.

Geographical factors help explain why these security measures do not succeed. Herders often roam expanses hundreds of kilometres wide. Kenya's borders with its north-eastern neighbours South Sudan and Uganda are porous, and herders often cross back and forth, making them still harder to track when they are on the move.<sup>73</sup> Further, cattle rustlers like to hide in valleys and forests that are hard to reach by road, adding to security forces' struggles to dismantle criminal gangs.<sup>74</sup> Police are vulnerable to ambush in remote areas: gunmen have killed dozens of officers since 2017.<sup>75</sup>

On top of that, mistrust of security forces is high, not only because of the fraught relationship between the state and herders, but also because the security forces are sometimes heavy-handed. In March, for example, Turkana county's governor had to condemn the army for using artillery in civilian areas.<sup>76</sup> Pastoralists also argue that security forces make no distinction between herders holding weapons as a way of defending their animals and large-scale cattle rustlers or other criminals.

Intercommunal tensions also hinder efforts to secure the region. Notably, police and soldiers have met with resistance from the Pokot. Pokot leaders sometimes hold the security forces responsible for killing or stealing their cattle, which makes them reluctant to assist the authorities' attempts to gather intelligence on cattle thieves' identity and movements.<sup>77</sup> Other ethnic groups as well as the government tend to see the Pokot as the principal perpetrators of large-scale cattle raids and ambushes on members of the security forces.<sup>78</sup> Feeding this perception is the fact that the Pokot are better armed than most of their neighbours, particularly the Tugen. The Tugen also believe that authorities historically favoured the Pokot.<sup>79</sup> Conversely, some Pokot leaders allege that police officers kidnapped at least two Pokot herders from Ol Moran market in September 2021, stirring tensions.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, March 2023. See also "Guns surrender amnesty yields poor response as crackdown begins in restive North Rift Crisis", *The Nation*, 16 February 2023; and Stephen Rutto, "Why fighting North Rift bandits will not be a walk in the park", *The Standard*, 20 February 2023.

<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group interviews, county and local security officials, former security adviser, Laikipia, June 2022. See also "Influx of firearms a challenge to North Rift security, Matiangi says", *Capital News*, 5 April 2022.

<sup>74</sup> Crisis Group interviews, county officials, Laikipia, June 2022; Small Arms Survey contributor, Nairobi, August 2022. See also "Police must disarm Laikipia invaders", *The Star*, 16 July 2021; and Cheng, "Conflict over resources in Kenya hits deadly highs with firearms in play", op. cit.

<sup>75</sup> Ombok, "Attacks by bandits prompt Kenya to deploy military in the north", op. cit. As noted above, herdsman also injured Gallmann, whose family runs the big private conservancy in Laikipia. McConnell, "Who shot Kuki Gallmann? The story of a Kenyan conservationist heroine", op. cit.

<sup>76</sup> Lucas Ngasike, "The governor of Turkana county condemned the army's use of artillery on civilian areas in March this year", *The Standard*, 6 March 2023.

<sup>77</sup> Crisis Group interviews, county security officials, community leader, conservancy worker, Laikipia and Baringo, June 2022.

<sup>78</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Tugen and Pokot community members, security officials, county officials, Laikipia and Baringo, June 2022.

<sup>79</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Tugen community members, June 2022.

<sup>80</sup> When Crisis Group visited Laikipia Nature Conservancy's Ol Moran zone in June, dozens of gunmen were still present in and around the reserve. Several herders complained about the insecurity, while officials told Crisis Group that security forces were trying to flush out the "bandits" operating

## B. Drought Response

Besides the security intervention, local and national authorities have tried to mitigate the impact of extreme weather patterns on the livestock sector by various means.

At the local level, the Rift Valley counties of Laikipia, Baringo, Samburu and Isiolo teamed up during a severe drought in 2017 to launch an independent economic bloc called the Amaya Triangle Initiative. Funded through the Northern Rangeland Trust, a European Union-backed environmental organisation that works on rangeland management and provides anti-poaching training and security to conservancies, the initiative aims to help herders grow and store fodder to cushion the blow of prolonged dry spells.<sup>81</sup> Five years on, however, with only four staffers embedded in one county government, Amaya's leadership admits that it is nowhere near its goal of tackling the growing poverty among Rift Valley herders.<sup>82</sup>

At the national level, several government agencies have tried to address the drought's effects. Kenya's NDMA, for instance, has distributed livestock feed supplements to counties including Laikipia and Baringo. It has also repaired water points and delivered food and cash to herders and poor farmers in parts of the Rift Valley.<sup>83</sup> In 2021, the defence ministry-run Kenya Meat Commission, with support from Kenya's Red Cross, started purchasing thousands of cattle from herders and farmers, slaughtering the animals and donating the meat to people in need. Though the scheme has undoubtedly boosted rural incomes, some herders complain that it started so late that the animals purchased were emaciated and worth next to nothing.<sup>84</sup> Yet herders are reluctant to sell when their animals are healthy and worth more. They can also mistrust extreme weather predictions.<sup>85</sup> The long distances between cattle markets are another concern – in Baringo's most populous constituency Tiaty, for instance, there are only five – which drives up transport costs for livestock sellers.<sup>86</sup>

The government's emergency aid has thus proven insufficient. County and local security officials say a concerted push for drought relief is overdue.<sup>87</sup>

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in the area. In November 2022, gunmen shot a child in a village near Ol Moran and stole 200 sheep. "Bandits steal 200 sheep, injure pupil in Laikipia," *The Standard*, 12 November 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Crisis Group interview, Amaya Triangle Initiative representatives, Laikipia, June 2022. See also Eliud Waithaka, "Amaya Triangle seeks Sh6bn to fight rustlers' bandits", *The Star*, 4 August 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group interview, Amaya Triangle Initiative representatives, Laikipia, June 2022. In May 2022, Ndiritu Muriithi, Laikipia's governor at the time, promised to invest in various market and trading centres to help pastoralists sell their cattle locally and pledged to build more dams to create water points for livestock. It is unlikely that the incoming county government will be able to do fulfil these pledges without seriously scaling up investment. See Ndiritu Muriithi, "Amaya Triangle's quest for lasting peace through trade, education", *Nation*, 7 May 2022.

<sup>83</sup> Crisis Group interview, NDMA representative, Baringo, June 2022.

<sup>84</sup> Crisis Group interview, IGAD Centre for Pastoral Ares and Livestock Development representative, Nairobi, October 2022.

<sup>85</sup> Crisis Group interviews, herders Laikipia, June 2022. "Drought hits hard as cows worth Sh20,000 now sold at Sh500," *The Star*, 30 October 2022.

<sup>86</sup> Tiaty is 4,540 sq km. Peace mediators suggest that markets can calm tensions, as they provide communities with a safe space to interact on a regular basis. Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, October 2022. John Mugonya, "Kenyan pastoralists: How changing livestock markets could reduce conflict", *The Conversation*, May 2022.

<sup>87</sup> Crisis Group interviews, county and security officials, Laikipia and Baringo, June 2022.

### C. Community Approaches

In recent years, the region's traditional dispute resolution mechanisms have eroded. For years, Kenya's herders settled disputes over cattle theft or access to land and water among themselves. Community elders with the authority to negotiate access to resources or calm tensions over cattle theft usually led such talks. They also regulated the use and maintenance of open grasslands, ensuring the availability of pasture to accommodate grazing animals in drier periods. Community elders' status has waned, however, undermining their ability to manage disputes. The proliferation of weapons and criminal groups has further diminished the impact of local dialogue.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the diminished authority of elders, a number of locally rooted initiatives have recorded success, helping establish migration corridors to give herders access to safe pasture and avert violence. In Isiolo and Marsabit counties, for example, some communities are effectively managing drought and conflict through indigenous knowledge and traditional resource governance structure known as *deedha*.<sup>89</sup> The *deedha* system, which tends to be dominated by men, is about give and take. It encourages the sharing of resources among pastoralist groups during drought.<sup>90</sup>

Elsewhere, the Il Ngwesi community, a member of the grassroots Laikipia Conservancies Association, opened migration corridors for herders in late 2021, allowing thousands of cattle from the neighbouring county of Isiolo to graze in the area and helping prevent land invasions.<sup>91</sup> While providing immediate relief, this type of informal agreement may not be durable, however, if the drought continues well into 2023 as forecasted.<sup>92</sup> Given the rise in tensions, and shrinking resources, informal agreements such as *deedha* may no longer be feasible, either. There may be a need for more formal deals backed up by adequate financial assistance and government enforcement.<sup>93</sup>

There are few alternatives to herding and farming as ways to make a living in Kenya's Rift Valley. Projects like the Ruko conservancy on the shores of Lake Baringo are promoting peace while providing alternative livelihoods, too. Elders from the Rugus and Komolion areas of Baringo county set up the conservancy in 2006, to prevent conflict between the Il Chamus and Pokot communities.<sup>94</sup> The conservancy is split between the two ethnic groups. The project, which is supported by Northern Rangeland Trust, protects the Rothschild giraffe and uses visitors' contributions to train herders in fishing, farming, beekeeping and masonry. It also teaches women tailoring so that they may supplement their incomes.

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<sup>88</sup> Crisis Group interview, William Remoi, peace elder in Ol Moran, Laikipia, June 2022. According to the Small Arms Survey, Kenya has 740,000 illegal firearms – the most in East Africa. “Estimating Global Civilian-held Firearms Numbers”, Small Arms Survey, June 2018.

<sup>89</sup> Crisis Group interview, peace ambassador in Samburu, March 2023. See also Guyo Haro, “Deedha: How pastoralist communities are effectively managing drought and conflict”, *The Elephant*, 30 July 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Crisis Group interview, Kip Ole Polos, chairman, Il Ngwesi Community Conservancy, Laikipia, June 2022. See also Letai, “Laikipia land crisis: A ticking time bomb”, *op. cit.*

<sup>92</sup> “Sustained ‘No Regrets’ Humanitarian Efforts Urgently Needed in Response to Drought in the Horn of Africa”, *op. cit.*

<sup>93</sup> Crisis Group interview, peace mediator, Nairobi, March 2023.

<sup>94</sup> Crisis Group interview, manager of Ruko conservancy, Baringo, June 2022.



Local and international aid groups have also launched a number of peace efforts in the region, often with short-term success. The UK-funded Reinvent program, for instance, organises meetings among herders that begin with the ritual of sacrificing a bull.<sup>95</sup> Prior to the August elections, Reinvent brought together religious leaders, security officials, politicians and community elders to encourage dialogue and cooperation with candidates for office in Laikipia. Some women politicians and elders participated in the initiative. The dialogue, combined with a heavy security presence, ensured that the elections went off largely peacefully in the region.

The Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT), an organisation headquartered in Laikipia, also works on gender-inclusive peacebuilding and climate change adaptation in central and northern Kenya. Among other initiatives, IMPACT has appointed eleven “environmental fellows” from pastoral communities who speak to a range of men and women to understand the roots of intercommunal conflict. Gatherings and training sessions convened by such organisations, which include herders, elders, local chiefs and security officials, also helped ease tensions in the village of Ol Moran, which bore the brunt of the violence in 2021.<sup>96</sup> As of March, the cattle market was operating and farmers were in their homes.<sup>97</sup>

While such efforts help with dispute resolution, they often fail to address gender inequalities that climate shocks are set to worsen. Women leaders in Baringo say that they are rarely represented in community peace forums.<sup>98</sup> Much of the land ownership, meanwhile, remains in the hands of men, as does decision-making about livelihoods. (Although the Land Act approved some years ago by President Kenyatta says communities cannot discriminate based on gender, it says nothing about how to ensure that women also have more land rights.) Climate-induced resource scarcity could widen the gaps. As families struggle harder to earn a living, for example, it is likely that more girls will drop out of school to help at home. Early marriage will also likely increase.<sup>99</sup>

The peace forums usually do not include many young men, either, which is a problem since they are the ones most likely to take up arms and perpetrate violent acts.<sup>100</sup>

#### *D. Regional Approach*

East African attempts to tackle the cross-border nature of cattle rustling have yet to substantially reduce banditry. In 2008, eleven East African countries signed the Mifugo (“livestock”, in Swahili) Protocol, which endeavoured to encourage enhanced cooperation, joint operations, capacity building and exchange of information among cross-

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<sup>95</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Reinvent representative and local security official, Laikipia, June 2022. Reinvent is a five-year program supported by UKAid focusing on efforts to increase security and stability in northern Kenya.

<sup>96</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Reinvent representative and local security officials, Laikipia and Baringo, June 2022.

<sup>97</sup> Crisis Group interviews, community members with access to the market, March 2023.

<sup>98</sup> Crisis Group interviews, women leaders, Baringo and Laikipia, June 2022.

<sup>99</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, woman leader in Baringo, April 2023. Crisis Group interview, woman leader, Laikipia, June 2022. See also “Child marriage on the rise in Horn of Africa as drought crisis intensifies”, press release, UNICEF, 28 June 2022.

<sup>100</sup> Crisis Group interviews, women leaders, Baringo and Laikipia, June 2022.

border police agencies and agricultural ministries.<sup>101</sup> Faced with the original agreement's failure to yield the desired results, ministers and police chiefs from signatory countries in October 2021 signed an updated protocol aimed at standardising legislation in member states and adopting means of identifying livestock moving internally and across borders – through microchipping of animals, among other methods.

## V. A Hotter, More Volatile Future

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Local and national authorities in Kenya should craft policies to respond to the climate crisis, including some tailored to conflict-prone settings. Droughts and floods are likely to become the norm rather than the exception. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that temperatures in Kenya will have risen by around 1.7°C by the 2050s, and by approximately 2.8°C at the end of the century. Rainfall is also set to be extremely variable and uncertain.<sup>102</sup> As temperatures rise and droughts become longer, water will keep getting scarcer, grassland sparser and soil less fertile, hurting farmers and herders alike. Addressing the consequences should go hand in hand with the Kenyan government's attempts to tackle cattle-related insecurity. Efforts to manage climate change are an integral part of providing security, given climate shocks' magnifying effect on conflict drivers.

### A. *Curbing the Violence*

Kenyan authorities and their external partners actors should first focus on reducing the drought's impact and easing intercommunal tensions, which will lessen the temptation to resort to violence. First, foreign partners should help national and local authorities maintain the emergency relief momentum and provide cash assistance and food to people in the northern Rift Valley. They should waive school fees, particularly for girls, in drought-stricken areas, which would reduce the number of children forced to drop out of school to work or girls who face early marriage.

Secondly, with donor assistance, Kenyan authorities should address water shortages through urgent rehabilitation of water points for both people and livestock. Pumping systems at water pans and boreholes often fall into disrepair or break down completely due to overuse. Bureaucratic delays often make it hard to get them fixed.<sup>103</sup> Funding has also been a problem. In March, the National Drought Management Authority announced that it will step up delivery of water and build additional water tanks and fuel pumps at boreholes, focusing on repairing facilities in drought-stricken areas.<sup>104</sup> Donors should support this project.

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<sup>101</sup> See "A Unique Protocol on Cattle Rustling in Eastern Africa", Institute for Security Studies, 11 February 2008. The protocol also emphasises the involvement of civil society, notably in conducting public education and awareness programs with the aim of empowering pastoral communities. See also "Looking for solutions to the cattle rustling crisis", *op. cit.*

<sup>102</sup> See "Sixth Assessment Report, Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability – Working Group II, Chapter 9: Africa", Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 27 February 2022.

<sup>103</sup> Crisis Group interviews, environmentalists, Nairobi, October 2022.

<sup>104</sup> Tweet by National Drought Management Authority, @NDMA\_Kenya, 12:04pm, 7 March 2023.

Lastly, authorities and aid groups should push landowners to agree on specific migration routes for cattle and to restore access to dry season grazing. The government could guarantee sceptical landowners protection of their property as part of such agreements. To that end, it could beef up donor-led schemes for transferring cash to pastoralist families.<sup>105</sup> This measure would allow pastoralists to peacefully coexist with ranchers and farmers, while also helping them absorb the double blow of extreme weather patterns and vanishing resources. Gender-responsive cash transfer scheme design would also ensure that women can use these funds as they adapt to these challenges.

In parallel, the Kenyan government should tighten up its security operations, which have so far failed to stem the violence. There is deep mistrust of police in the region, and the government should ensure that operations do not aggravate the situation further. The army should avoid the use of heavy artillery in areas where civilians live and ensure that security forces pursue only perpetrators of attacks and not pastoralists who, in bearing arms, are merely trying to protect their herds. There are ways to distinguish between the two groups: criminal gunmen tend to operate near busy trade routes unlike herders; they are active all year round rather than seasonally, and also target villages and even schools. Greater investment by the police in grassroots intelligence gathering would help identify those responsible for the violent banditry. The government should also equip its security forces properly so that they are not outgunned.<sup>106</sup>

Kenya's police should arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of organised crime, which could help curtail the violence. In parallel, the government should ensure that the Directorate of Criminal Investigations in Nairobi uses its resources to help track the key weapons dealers, as well as the source and destination of arms. Furthermore, disarmament should not be forcible; it should be backed up with awareness campaigns led by community leaders. Lessons from previous processes suggest that negotiated, consultative disarmament efforts involving engagement with pastoralist communities are more effective than militarised ones. Disarming one community can also tip the balance of power and leave the unarmed community vulnerable to attack. Authorities can avoid this problem by ensuring that disarmament drives happen in counties at similar times.

The government should also continue attempts to de-escalate tensions by encouraging peace talks with active participation from women and youth leaders, building on existing women's groups such as the one Crisis Group spoke to in Baringo county. They should consult councils of elders in the affected communities through locally rooted structures such as *deedha* in Isiolo and Marsabit counties, while making sure not to exclude women or youth from decision-making. These talks should aim to negotiate the return of stolen animals, thus breaking the cycles of vengeance that begin when communities that lose herds stage counter-raids. These talks could also help elders identify young herders at risk of turning to violence and, with support from

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<sup>105</sup> Today, there is only one such lifeline: a monthly World Food Programme cash transfer to some 11,000 pastoralist families, amounting to \$54 over six months.

<sup>106</sup> Eric Matara, "Kenya: Revealed – how bandits obtain M16 rifles", *Daily Nation*, 18 October 2021. "Three police officers feared dead, 8 injured after bandit attack in Turkana," *The Standard*, 11 February 2023.

local governments, offer them alternative sources of income. For their part, donors should support community conservancies such as Ruko in Baringo, which offer pastoralists alternative livelihoods. County governments, potentially with support from donors, could also give communities money to compensate victims of cattle rustling, which would help win back trust.

### B. *Looking Ahead*

In the medium to long term, all Kenyan and foreign actors should invest in climate adaptation measures to mitigate the effect of future droughts. Local governments, conservancies, conservation donors and climate adaptation funds should help support local initiatives to restore degraded rangelands, improve access to water sources and offer alternative sources of income to herders. So far, resources for Kenya have been in short supply. The government is considering debt-for-nature swaps to construct dams. Under such an arrangement, Kenya would in effect see its debt obligations to participating Western countries reduced as part of nature conservation agreements. Authorities would be expected to spend the saved funds on mitigation measures such as the construction of dams, which could, among other benefits, help remove the need for herders to drive their cattle over long distances, reducing deadly resource competition.

Restoring grasslands does not require huge investments. For instance, Rehabilitation of Arid Environments, a civil society organisation in Baringo county, distributes drought-resistant grass seeds to farmers and pastoralists. The seeds grow long grass that can be harvested and sold or stored as hay. The grass also produces new seeds that farmers can sell back to the group, guaranteeing them a profit.<sup>107</sup> Though attempts to replicate the scheme in neighbouring Samburu county were less fruitful, mainly because encroaching cattle ate up the grass, it has reportedly persuaded some herders in Baringo to try their hand at farming.<sup>108</sup>

At the local level, conservancies are well positioned to enhance their rangeland management practices. Notably, they could work to set aside land as pasture and restrict other areas to prevent overgrazing. These steps would go some way toward restoring degraded soil and easing land use tensions, but they would require buy-in from locals.

Local authorities, through projects such as the Amaya Triangle Initiative, should apply for grants from the African Development Bank, World Bank or green climate funds, to build small dams and canals that can improve water storage and irrigation. A community-designed canal that would channel water from Lake Baringo through a natural outlet to irrigate farms in drier areas is one such proposal. The canal could relieve pressure on farmers and herders alike.<sup>109</sup>

The Kenyan government should act, through the Kenya Meat Commission, to preserve herders' livelihoods through gender-sensitive awareness campaigns and financial support. The commission should help county governments establish additional cattle

<sup>107</sup> Crisis Group interview, Rehabilitation of Arid Environments representative, Baringo, June 2022.

<sup>108</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Northern Rangeland Trust representative, June 2022.

<sup>109</sup> The canal project was proposed by the former senator for Baringo, Gideon Moi. Crisis Group interview, Rehabilitation of Arid Environments representative, Baringo, June 2022. See also Julius Chepkwony, "Gideon to engage Government in exploring digging of a 9 km tunnel to control floods", Standard Media, 12 August 2020.

markets, particularly along the volatile boundary between eastern Baringo and western Laikipia. It should also purchase animals early in the drought cycle, before they are weak and dying, so as to be able to offer herders a reasonable price for their livestock. Local government backed by donors could support a new plan by the IGAD Centre for Pastoral Areas and Livestock Development to expand a specialised insurance index for smallholder herders.

More broadly, authorities will need to step up investment in health, education and infrastructure to make vulnerable communities more resilient to climate shocks. For instance, school breakfast and lunch programs would encourage herders to enrol more children, girls in particular. During drought periods, many herders and farmers are unable to afford school fees and some families suffer from hunger. Rehabilitating the existing unpaved roads in the Rift Valley could bring improved security and therefore investment in climate adaptation.<sup>110</sup>

Finally, East African countries should build on the Mifugo Protocol to tackle cattle rustling and protect the free movement of herders. Governments should as a priority safeguard pastoralists' right to move safely across borders, as outlined in the African Union's 2010 Policy Framework for Pastoralism, which recognises that pastoralists migrate, often across borders, in search of grazing land and water.<sup>111</sup>

### *C. From Early Warning to Action*

Preparing to face future climatic extremes, including droughts, will require reinforcing states and international bodies' ability to act quickly and efficiently on early warnings. Early warning systems monitor risks and warn decision-makers and communities in a timely enough fashion for them to take action. Responding requires contingency planning and real-time forecasting information, both of which are insufficient in Kenya at present.<sup>112</sup>

Nairobi, with the support of donors, climate-financing funds and regional bodies such as IGAD, needs to ensure that the information from existing early warning systems reaches the hardest-hit communities quickly. IGAD was created in 1996 to succeed the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development, which was founded in the 1980s to deal with desertification in the Horn Africa. Its mission includes assisting its member states with food security and environmental protection, as well as peace and security. IGAD already shares data from its separate climate and conflict early warning systems with Kenyan authorities, but the two should be combined. The links between climate change and conflict are complex and multidimensional, meaning that efficient solutions will require close integration of climate predictions with policy insight.

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<sup>110</sup> Climate and Security Community Adaptations Interactive Workshop, Life and Peace Institute, Nairobi, October 2022. A 507km road from Isiolo to Moyale, for instance, has bolstered the local economy and given herders easier access to cattle markets. Jacinta Mutura, "Great North Road that changed fortunes of dry northern Kenya", Standard Media, 18 October 2022.

<sup>111</sup> "Equipped to Adapt? A Review of Climate Hazards and Pastoralists' Responses in the IGAD Region", ICPALD and International Organization for Migration, March 2022.

<sup>112</sup> Crisis Group Interviews, Nairobi, July 2022. See also "Strengthening the Concept of Early Warning and Early Action for Disaster Risk Reduction and Food Security", Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and University of Nairobi, African Drylands Institute for Sustainability, December 2016.

Kenyan authorities should also ensure that early warning data is disseminated widely and in local languages, preferably by text message or radio. Having a reasonable sense of where and when drought will strike enables humanitarian agencies to pre-position supplies, provide cash, and deploy technical support and machinery. Communities can avoid the worst by, for example, selling livestock before drought hits or moving families away from places facing imminent floods.

Research bodies such as the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre and the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism should also further investigate the links between political contestation, climate disasters and violence at the local level, so officials can better prepare for what the future may bring with mitigation strategies that address the risk of violence.

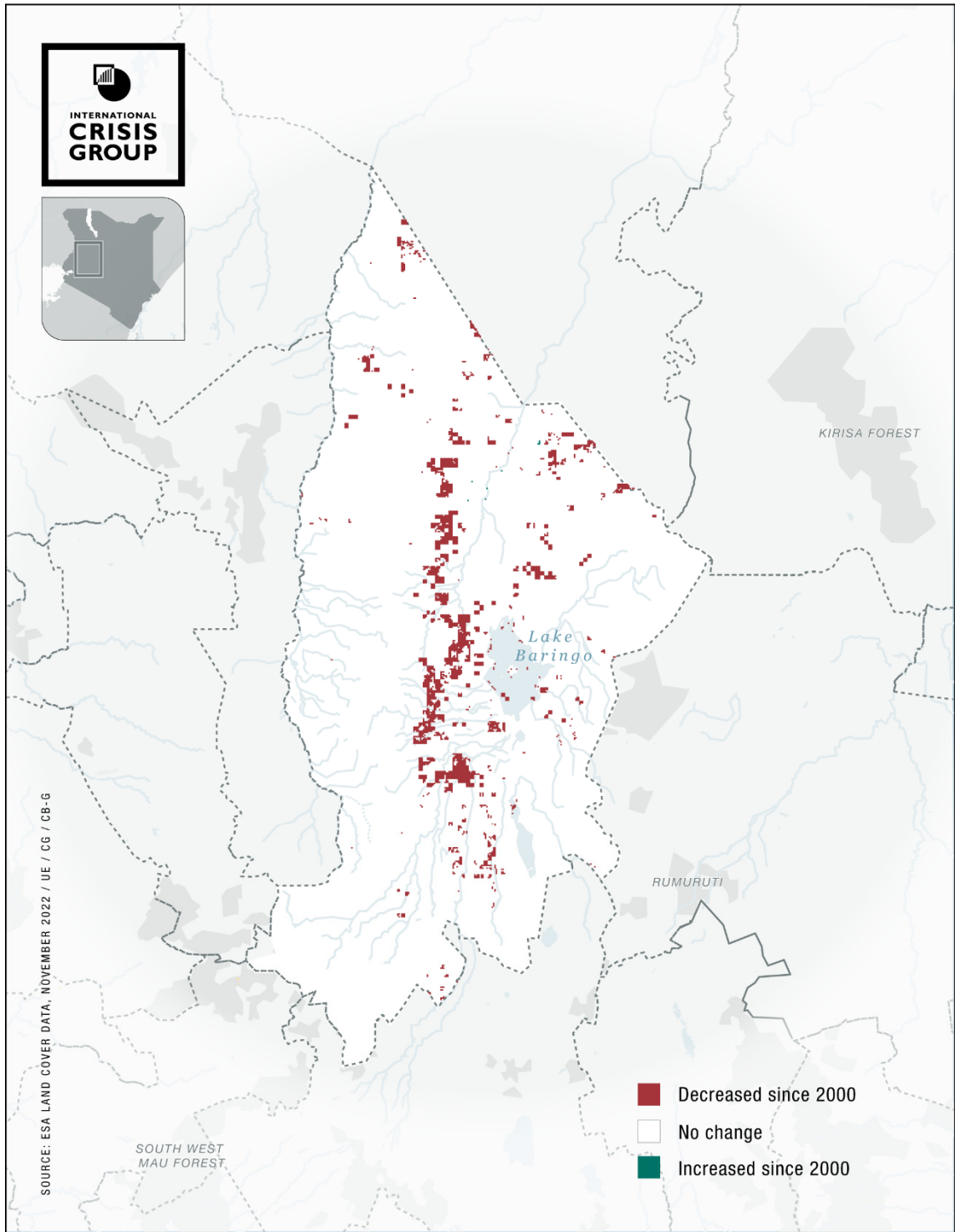
## **VI. Conclusion**

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Clashes involving herders, farmers, armed cattle thieves and security forces are taking a mounting toll on Kenya's Rift Valley counties of Laikipia and Baringo, even as the region is among the hardest hit by a historic drought. A surge in aid to people suffering from hunger is urgent. State and regional bodies will also need to invest in solutions to adapt to droughts, which are expected to become more frequent in the coming years. While these measures might not themselves address the root causes of insecurity in west-central Kenya, they will give national and local authorities more space to do so.

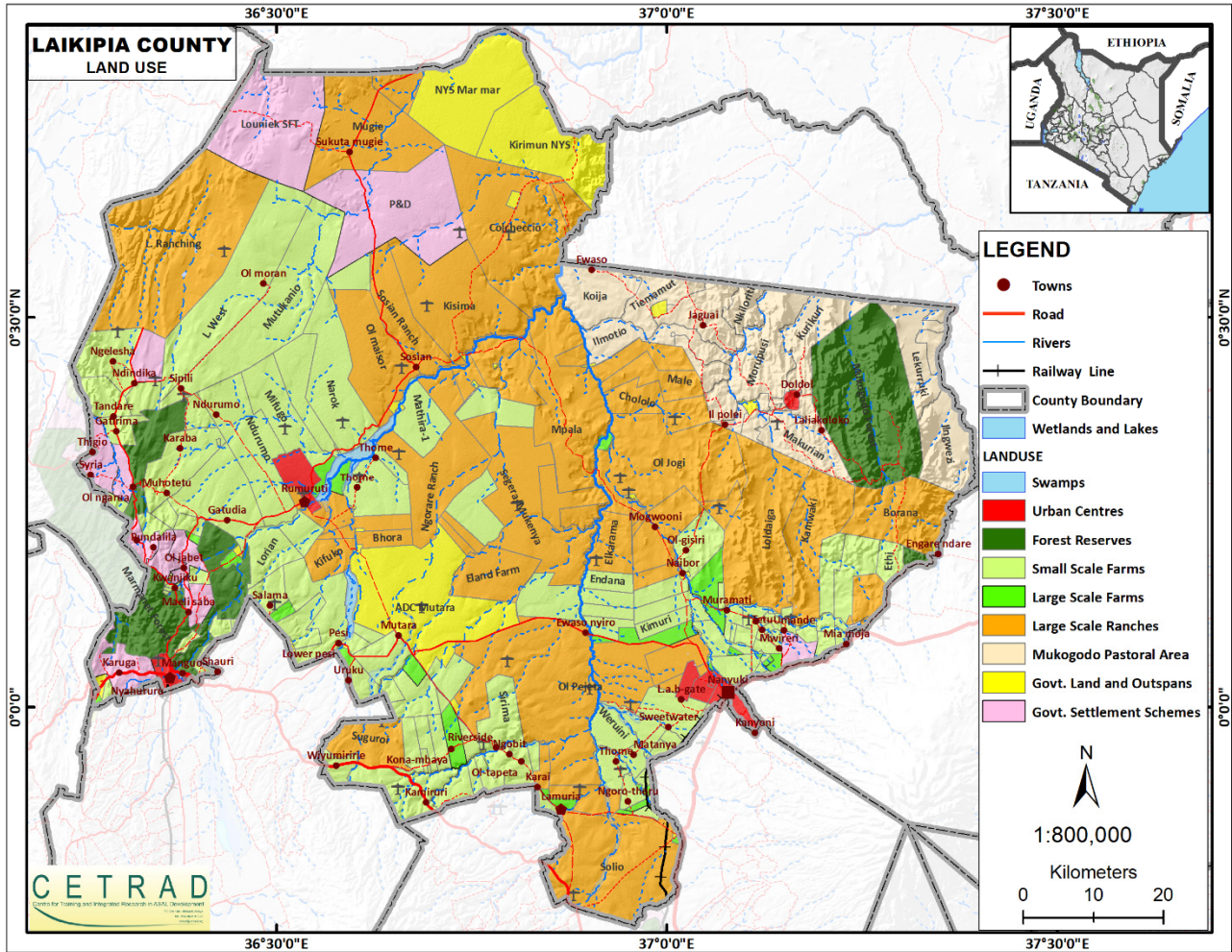
**Nairobi/Brussels, 20 April 2023**

Appendix A: Change in Grassland Cover in Baringo County,  
2000 vs. 2020



**Source:** The map depicts the change in grassland in Baringo county by comparing grassland cover in 2000 vs. 2020, based on ESA Land Cover CCI data at a spatial resolution of 300m. Data on the increase of grassland is included, even though negligible.

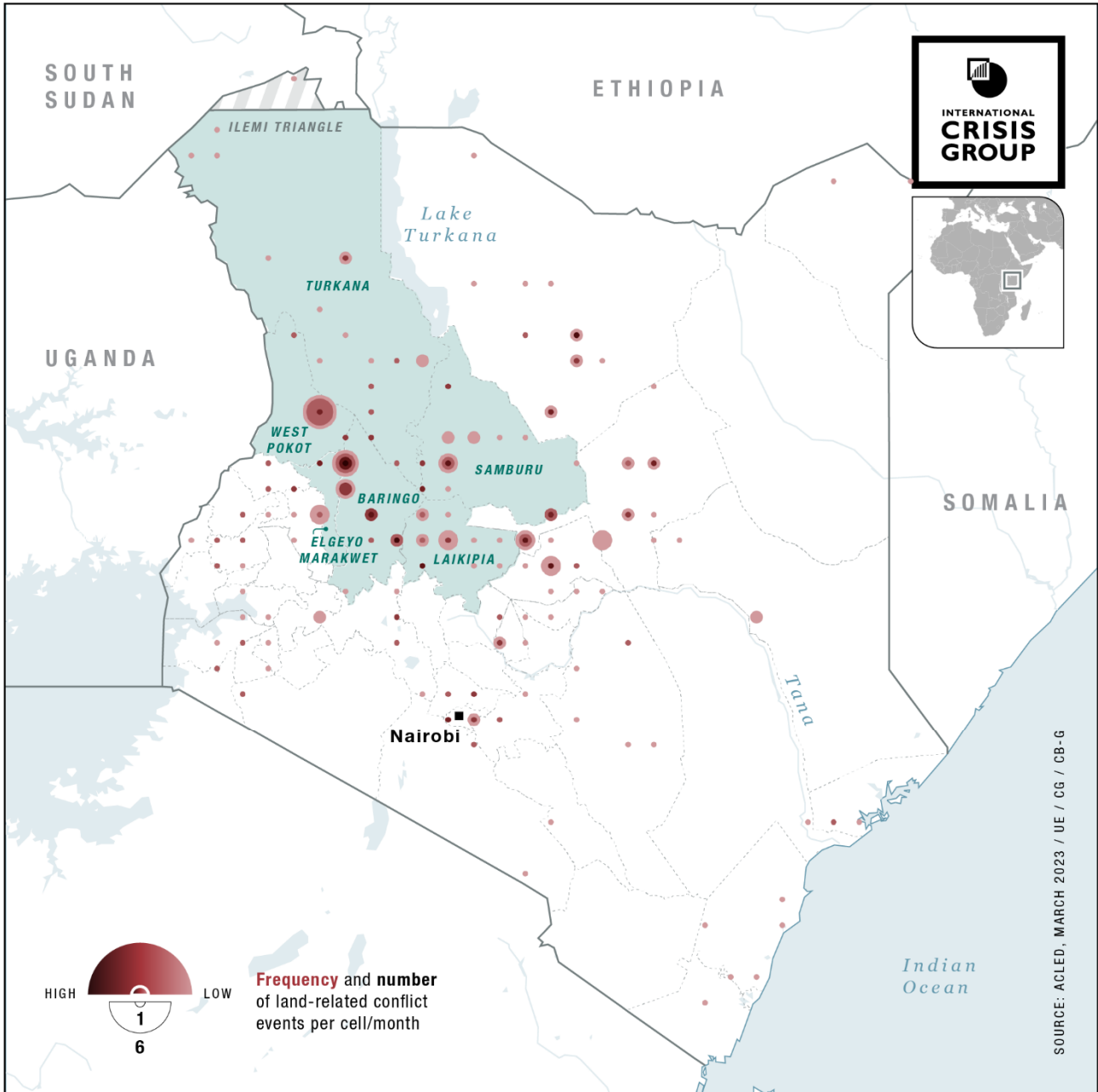
Appendix B: Laikipia Land Use



Source: CETRAD

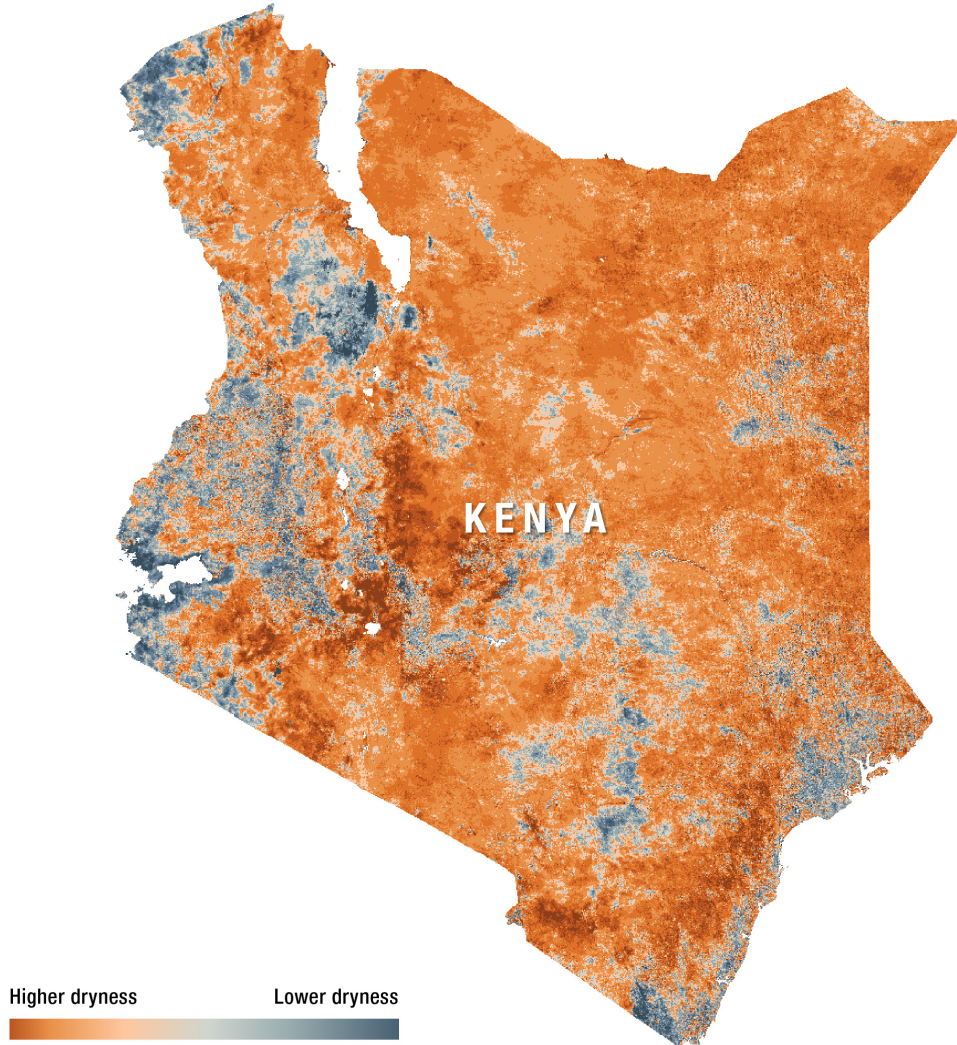


Appendix C: Land-related Conflict in Kenya, May 2021  
to January 2023



**Source:** ACLED event count over the period May 2021 to January 2023, aggregated to the month-25km grid cell level. Only events classified as "battles", "riots", "violence against civilians" or "strategic developments" are considered. Additionally, events are filtered by a land-related keyword search, based on variable "notes" in ACLED, following the methodology in Eberle, Ulrich J., Dominic Rohner, and Mathias Thoenig. 2020. "Heat and Hate: Climate Security and Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Africa." The events identified via the keyword search are checked manually for false positives which are then excluded.

Appendix D: Abnormal Dryness in Kenya, August 2022



**Source:** The map depicts vegetation anomalies for August 2022, based on MODIS NDVI data at a spatial resolution of approximately 1km. Z-scores are considered, comparing the August 2022 average NDVI to the average of months of August in previous years, 2000-2022.  $Z\text{-score} = (\text{mean August 2022} - \text{mean August 2000-2022}) / (\text{sdAugust 2000-2022} + 0.01)$ . A small value of 0.01 is added to the denominator, to avoid high z-scores in areas with low inter-annual vegetation density variability.

## Appendix E: About the International Crisis Group

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The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes CrisisWatch, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former Foreign Minister of Argentina and Chef de Cabinet to the United Nations Secretary-General, Susana Malcorra.

Comfort Ero was appointed Crisis Group's President & CEO in December 2021. She first joined Crisis Group as West Africa Project Director in 2001 and later rose to become Africa Program Director in 2011 and then Interim Vice President. In between her two tenures at Crisis Group, she worked for the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kiev, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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