



**Drylands Learning
and Capacity
Building Initiative**



Pastoralist Parliamentary Group
Pastoralism: Our Pride and Life!

DISCUSSION BRIEF: Facilitating intractable community cohesion, peace, and reconciliation in Marsabit County

**By Jarso Mokku, Chief Executive Officer, DLCI and PPG
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Introduction

The National Integration and Cohesion Commission (NCIC) commissioners mobilized a team from its partners Frontier Counties Development Council (FCDC), Drylands Learning and Capacity Building Initiative (DLCI) and Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) to Marsabit County for a follow-up peace mission from 8th to 14th July 2020. The visit aimed to facilitate dialogue in an intractable conflict that has rocked the county and to reconcile the communities of Rendille, Gabra, and Borana. Before this rapid response visit to the county, the NCIC commissioners were in the county two weeks earlier in which they organized highly successful meetings that resulted in peace and cohesion between Degodia and Borana communities. This followed the deadliest clashes of the year in June 2020 that resulted in the killing of 20 people and the theft of more than 600 camels that were returned to the owners after peace was restored.

DLCI and FCDC prepared an information brief that was edited by NCIC before this field visit to Marsabit county. The brief provided context to the current conflicts in Marsabit, with a chronology of the conflict flare-ups in June and resultant death and destruction. It highlighted responses and interventions by key actors in peace and security in the county; and recommendations for moving beyond intractability.

NCIC commissioners, Dr. Danvas Makori and Hon. Abdulaziz Ali Farah led this visit that focused on Saku constituency. DLCI and PPG were represented by CEO, Mr. Jarso Mokku and Program Assistant, Mr. Gayo Wario. FCDC was represented by CEO, Hon Mohamed Guleid, Livestock Programme Manager, Mr. Abdirahman Abass, Policy and Governance Advisor, Dr. Achiba Gargule and Peace and Cohesion Sector Coordinator, Mrs. Farhiya Abdi. NRT was represented by Josephine, a Peace Coordinator for the region. The team was supported by two Directors and other staff from NCIC.

The process started in Nairobi with three meetings with the professional associations for the Rendille, Gabra, and Borana ethnic groups. Some groups presented a written memorandum, while others talked through their issues with the Commission in which they highlighted the background to Marsabit conflict, the current conflict situation, and their ethnic group grievances. They also made recommendations on what they think should be done to build peace and enhance inter-community cohesion in Marsabit county.

During the visit to the county, the team took adequate time to listen to all groups involved in the Marsabit conflict and key duty bearers including the national government administrators, County Assembly and County Executive. The engagement started with meetings with each Council of Elders (Borana, Gabra, and Rendille) and women leaders from the three groups. All the Gabra groups meetings from the professional association, council of elders, and women leaders asked for all the partners except NCIC commissioners to leave their meetings. Even when the Commissioners were hesitant to grant this request, the partners FCDC, DLCI, and NRT positively persuaded the NCIC commissioners to accept this request especially after each group, including the Gabra elders said that their information is highly classified and confidential. However, even after all partners were ejected from the Gabra meetings, the Gabra groups did not provide any unknown new information to the NCIC commissioners.

The team also met with the County Assembly of Marsabit led by the Speaker, attended by the Deputy Speaker, Leader of majority Party in the house, and Leaders of the minority. The Speaker on his behalf and behalf of the MCAs presented a written memorandum. The team also met with the County Government under the leadership of Vice-Chair FCDC Peace and Sector Forum - CEC, Hon. Amina who brought a delegation that includes the Chief Officer, Director, and Assistant Director from Department of Peace and Cohesion. Other meetings included with the national government administrators, Deputy County Commissioner, senior and locational chiefs from Saku sub-county and senior officers, and key staff from the Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) and Kenya Forest Service (KFS) who are managing the Marsabit Forest and Marsabit National game reserve where illegal arms are believed to be hidden and regularly used by criminals to kill many people.

The team made rapid visit to displaced Borana villages in Elle Borr, and Elle Dimtu and observed conflict hotspots area and meet with villagers that were evicted from the North Horr constituency- Maikona, Dukana and Forrole territories that is now exclusively controlled by the Gabra community along the Kenya-Ethiopia border. The team also visited three Gabra schemes in the midst of Borana that was devastated by inter community clashes in Badasa location in the Sagante/Jaldesa Ward of Saku constituency. The team also visited the Rendille area, the actual site in the Karani Ward in which the people are aggrieved that community land has been acquired by the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) without following due process of the law. The Community Land Act 2016 regulations set out clear conversion procedures that include public participation for the government to acquire the community land compulsorily. The team visited the KDF new camp and met with the camp commanders. The NCIC commissioners at the end of trip held debriefing session with the County Commissioner of Marsabit that was attended by the Acting CEO for National Land Commission (NLC) who joined the team during the consultation processes.

A comprehensive field report is being prepared. Meanwhile, a quick analysis has established a deep hatred that has existed between these three communities living in the Marsabit county. The conflict is bloody and deeply entrenched. It is fueled by ethnic competition over land boundaries and politics. Combative fighting has created exclusive access zones to rangeland resources, water and pasture for each group. A bloody battle for expansion of ethnic territorial boundaries is ongoing. The laxity and lack of appropriate responses by the county security has made it worse. The ethnic politics in Marsabit was initiated in 1992 around Saku constituency and have since devolution, entrenched by aggressive competition over the position of the Governor that has sharply divided the Borana and Gabra people in Marsabit county and become the Centre of Marsabit blood-stained conflict action. The apex of the battleground that has killings of more than 150 innocent people that includes recent Rendille university student and high school pupils is now within less than 10 km radius of the Marsabit town.

Entire Marsabit town dwellers is disheartened by targeted killing and invigorated to get involved due to ever raising stakes related to fight over the seat of Marsabit County Governor and Saku Member of Parliament. The Gabra, Rendille, and Borana conflicts is vicious and hurtful to the lives and livelihoods of the pastoralists communities in the region. In Songa Ward of Saku constituency, 110 people were killed between 1992 to June 2020. In a new emerging hotspot around boundary contest of Horonder between the sub-counties of North Horr and Saku situated in Kilta location where the fighting is still actively ongoing, so far 38 people include older persons of over 80 years of age and younger children aged less than ten years that have been brutally murdered between 2015 and June 2020. In one situation, the county security agencies were not able to recover bodies of dead persons.

It is an alarming situation that requires urgent national attention. Conflict in Marsabit requires a multi-agency approach to deal with issues of illegal arms, drug trafficking, targeted killing, livestock thefts and peace building and bring together for dialogue the warring communities some who have massed themselves with highly sophisticated illegal small weapons and machine guns. The county security agencies appear to have surrendered to the situation and the main concern looks like focused on internal protection of its officers. The communities say that the issue of disarming KPR-NPR and conservancy rangers have worsen the increase of

illegal arms and drug trafficking is now perceived to be a segment of ongoing Marsabit inter-community conflicts.

DLCI, FCDC, NRT and NCIC have resolved to develop a year joint work plan to facilitate this intractable inter community conflicts in order to build sustainable peace, and cohesion by influencing policy, and practice change, and support effective response strategies to end the inter community conflicts in Marsabit County.

A concept note has since been developed to address immediate issues that will go a long way into building long-term sustainable positive peace in Marsabit county. The partnership will initiate intensive engagement with other stakeholders to highlight the situation in Marsabit county and mobilize critical momentum for restoring peace, and eradicate inter-community conflict and build cohesion in this troubled county. Continue to organize and facilitate Inter- and intra-ethnic meetings and inter-generational dialogues and bring on board other stakeholders e.g. Kivulini Trust and reach out to Gabra led CSOs to build their community confidence of this process. The partnership developed will continue to work together, share widely the issues, build and deepen relationships between the warring communities in Marsabit county through finding with them the solution to their conflicts related to land and political that has deeply divided them. Bonding meetings amongst the professionals will continue to be organized so that they can work through their grievances as representatives of their respective ethnic groups.

