

EFFECT OF INTER-CLAN COMPETITION OVER RESOURCE DYNAMICS ON SECURITY IN MANDERA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Mandera County, Kenya, continues to experience persistent insecurity witnessed through recurrent violent clashes, displacement of persons and livelihoods destruction. Though there are multiple factors attributed to insecurity in the county, inter-clan conflicts have emerged as among the key drivers. The purpose of this study was to assess the effect of inter-clan competition over resource dynamics on security in Mandera County, Kenya. The study was guided by environmental security theory and human security theory. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study population included 125,763 household heads, 119 chiefs, 174 sub-chiefs and 6 assistant county commissioners. The sample size for the household heads was 399. In addition, 7 chiefs, 10 sub-chiefs and one (1) assistant county commissioner were included as key informants. Data was collected using a questionnaire for household heads and an interview schedule for chiefs, sub-chiefs and assistant county commissioner. Data analysis utilized both quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures. Quantitative data was entered into SPSS version 26.0 for analysis using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics entailed use of frequencies, and percentages to evaluate patterns of inter-clan conflicts and insecurity in Mandera County. Inferential statistics utilized correlations and regressions. The findings revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between resource competition and security in Mandera County, Kenya ($r = .806$, $p = .000$). The study recommends that National and county governments should strengthen policies that promote equitable access to natural resources and inclusivity in political representation. Policies in the governance of resources and public appointment should be designed in a way that reduces clan-based exclusion. The findings of this study will be significant to different stakeholders such as government bodies, policy makers, security bodies, communities, non-government organizations, scholars, academicians and researchers.

Key Words: Inter-clan Competition, Resource Scarcity, Mandera, Kenya

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Across the world, cross-border inter-clan conflicts present security challenges that are persistent. This is particularly manifest in regions where state boundaries cut across traditional ethnic or clan territories (Hussein, 2022). Globally, violent conflict has long been facilitated by competition over resources such as water, pasture, land and political power. This has especially happened in areas experiencing weak governance structures.

In the Philippines, clan conflicts such as *Rido* are driven by family honor, resource competition, and political manipulation, demonstrating the intersection of clan dynamics with broader socio-political conflicts. *Rido* are conflicts between families or relatives that occur in the Maranao community, involving violent acts of revenge between families or kinship groups. These conflicts stem from disputes over land, political power and elections, personal honor, and other issues. One of the most cited reasons for deadly *rido* violence is competition over land (Kadir, 2023).

In Liberia, inter-clan disputes have manifested in various forms including the intra-communal, inter-communal, between a community and a foreign investor or company, or between a community and a nonmember. Intracommunal land disputes lead to a breakdown in a family tie and people tend to harbour grudge against each other after a dispute have erupted. It also undermines community harmonization and cohesion (Kansuah, 2022).

Michael and Alisebh (2025) reported that despite the wealth in the Niger Delta region, there has been persistent conflict and underdevelopment, stemming from intergroup rivalries, resource control agitations, environmental degradation, and marginalization by both state and corporate actors. The Niger Delta has remained a hotbed of unrest, with various ethnic and communal groups frequently engaging in violent and non-violent struggles for recognition, equity, and control over their natural resources.

With abundant natural resources such as oil, minerals, and fertile agricultural land, Sudan has great potential to advance its economic development. Communities dependent on resources

such as oil, minerals, and fertile agricultural land for their livelihood. The communities experience issues related to their exclusion from decision-making, receiving low compensation, and environmental depredation. The conflicts on resource control affects not only economic structures but also have deeper implications for social cohesion and political stability. This competition lead to violent confrontations, undermining social cohesion within communities (Elmakki, 2024).

In Kenya, there has been various incidences of inter and inter clan conflicts especially along the north-eastern and Coastal regions of the country, which host majority of the pastoralist communities in Kenya. Inter-clan conflict remains a persistent feature of local governance and social relations in many parts of Kenya, particularly in regions where historical grievances, resource competition, and political contestation intersect. While such conflicts are often framed as localized disputes rooted in cultural differences or ancestral rivalries, research shows that they are embedded in broader structural and political processes (Kenya Human Rights Commission, 2022; World Resources Institute, 2020). Across Kenya, inter-group conflicts have frequently been linked to competition over land and other natural resources.

The complexity of inter-clan conflict dynamics in Mandera County has also been contributed by the porous borders between Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia. Movement of armed militia and smuggling of weapons into the county is facilitated by cross-border inter-clan identities and lack of effective border control. This has facilitated violence among rival clans. In addition, tracking of the perpetrators and the weapons has been made hard because they easily cross over to neighboring countries further complicating inter-clan conflicts issue (Odwar, 2020).

Due to inter-conflicts complexity, Mandera County continues to face security issues, for example, terrorism and periodic clashes. The relationship between inter-clan conflicts dynamics and security is not well understood. Existing scholarly research has explored insecurity and conflict in northern Kenya. There is limited research systematically

analyzing effect of inter-clan competition over resource dynamics on security in Mandera County, Kenya. This study hence to fill this gap by examining the effect of inter-clan competition over resource dynamics on security in Mandera County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Security is a basic need for sustainable development, social cohesion, and economic prosperity. Ideally, Mandera county should have a secure, stable and predictable environment where the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities live together peacefully while sharing natural resources. In this ideal situation, the use of local customary resource-sharing systems and formal state security systems should effortlessly coordinate access to grazing lands and seasonal water paths, enabling cross-border commerce, a continuous education schedule, and a strong community development. Sustainable resource governance should be the foundation for a long-term economic growth enabling the county and national security actors to effectively maintain law and order on fragile borders in Kenya. However, Mandera County constantly experiences insecurity characterized by recurring inter-clan conflicts, cross-border violence, and displacement.

There has been an increase in competition over scarce resources especially pasture and water which has intensified as a result of the droughts and environmental degradation. ACDI/VOCA (2025) reported that conflicts over grazing land and water point are the key causes of inter-clan conflicts in the County. The inter-conflicts have resulted to property destruction, loss of more than 25,000 livestock, 85 deaths, and disruption of business and learning activities. Despite the deployment of specialized security units, resource-related conflicts continue to threaten peace and security in Mandera.

Despite the evident severity of these clashes, previous research has predominantly framed insecurity in Mandera County through the lens of macro-level cross-border terrorism or broad political ethnic rivalries during electoral cycles. There is a glaring lack of empirical literature that strictly isolates inter-clan competition over resources and maps it directly against security (Abdi & Mwangi,

2023; Karienyee & Warfa, 2020). For other studies, insecurity in North-Eastern Kenya has been examined with no focus on a specific county (Sahgal *et al.*, 2022; Farah, 2021).

Existing studies provide inadequate understanding of how resources scarcity, environmental stress, and clan competition interact to shape insecurity within the county. This has resulted to limited empirical evidence on the effect of inter-clan competition over resource dynamics on security in Mandera County, Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

Environmental Scarcity Theory

Homer-Dixon (1994) developed Environmental Scarcity Theory in his work "*Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict*". The theory laid the foundation where environmental degradation was linked to social instability and conflict. The theory was developed through extensive case studies in Rwanda, South Africa and the Philippines which explored how environmental stress contributed to violence. Based on the theory, the assertion is that scarcity of essential environmental resources such as water, arable land, forests and fisheries can significantly increase the chances of violent conflict.

Three types of environmental scarcity are identified in the theory including supply-induced scarcity, demand-induced scarcity and structural scarcity. Supply-induced scarcity results from degradation and depletion of natural resources while demand-induced scarcity results from population growth and increasing demand for resources. Structural scarcity emanates from unequal resources access as a result of inequalities in political, economic and social aspects. According to the theory, these scarcities interact with weaknesses in institutions to lead to weakened states, migration, insecurity of livelihoods and eventually violent conflicts (Homer-Dixon, 1994).

The theory is relevant in this study in explaining inter-clan conflict dynamics in Mandera County. In this region, environmental stress, pastoralist livelihoods and clan-based social structure intersect. The region experiences droughts and scarce rainfall which leads to scarcity of resources such as water, pasture and grazing land. The structural scarcity

aspect of the theory is also evident in the study area. Access to resources is often shaped by clan-based power relations, marginalization and unequal distribution of public resources such as boreholes, reserves for grazing and security personnel. Therefore, an application of this theory conceptualizes inter-clan conflict dynamics in Mandera County not as isolated communal disputes but as a result of ecological pressure interacting with social structures, identity politics and institutional weaknesses.

Human Security Theory

Human security theory was formally proposed by Mahbub ul Haq in a Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme in 1994. The theory was proposed to outline a people-centered approach to understand security beyond the traditional state-centric approach whose focus was on territorial defense and threats using the military (Haq, 1995). According to the theory, security measurement should be in terms of protection of individuals and communities from threats that persistently threaten their survival, dignity and livelihoods.

Human security is conceptualized across seven interconnected dimensions: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. The central claim by theory is that insecurity does not only arise from armed conflict but also from structural conditions such as poverty, weak governance, inequality, environmental stress and social exclusion.

The theory has been applied in regions that are fragile and those affected by conflict where communal violence, weak institutions and insecurity intersect. While assessing trends of security in the Horn of Africa, Bayeh (2014) established that security threats have shifted from traditional state-centric concepts where the main security concern and referent object was the state to security for humankind. Human Security Theory is highly relevant to this study as it provides an appropriate framework for analyzing the concept of security in Mandera County, Kenya. The theory allows the study to examine security not only in terms of armed

violence, but also in relation to displacement, livelihood disruption, fear, weakened community cohesion, and limited access to protection and services.

Review of Empirical Literature

Inter-clan Competition Over Resource Dynamics and Security

Baah (2025) explored the relationship between abundance of natural resources in Africa and conflict. The findings confirmed that when neighbouring states are rich in resources and experience conflict, it creates opportunities for third parties—mostly other states, to intervene, compete for control of resources, or displace local populations, thus spreading conflict into adjacent areas.

Ayal (2024) assessed inter-ethnic violence occurring between Afar and Somali communities in three zones of Afar Region: Amibara, Mille Woredas and Gewane and the associated causes of these conflicts. Inter-ethnic violence was studied using three indicators: inter-clans conflicts, inter-tribal and violence pitting ethnic groups against each other. The study highlighted factors such as territorial disputes, competition for scarce natural resources, ethnic federalism, small arms trafficking and political manipulation. The study established that competition over natural resources such as water, pasture and land was one of key drivers of violence.

Yusuf, Mohamed, and Omar (2025) examined the clan conflict dynamics and their role in driving displacement in Somalia. The regions experiencing higher frequencies of conflicts exhibited higher levels of population displacement. The findings also revealed a strong correlation between resource scarcity and inter-clan conflicts. Karienyé and Warfa (2020) investigated the dynamics of clan-based conflicts in Wajir County, Kenya. The study's focus was to uncover underlying causes of continuous inter- and intra-clan conflicts. An exploratory qualitative design was used. According to the study, resource-based conflicts in Wajir are rooted in historical marginalization and the failure of state institutions to provide equitable services. Emergence of clan-based militia is fueled by the need to protect access to water points and grazing land.

Chikandah (2021) assessed the effect of resource-based conflicts on security in Tana River County, Kenya. The study employed mixed methods approach. Data was collected using questionnaire, interview schedule and focus group discussion guides. The target population was 8476 and the sample size was 382 respondents. The study established that the natural resources that led to frequent conflicts were water, pasture, and land. Three types of threats were linked to natural resource-based conflicts in Tana River County: personal, community and environmental security. The management of resource-based conflicts in Tana River County was hampered by land tenure system and infiltration of small arms.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study population included 125, 763 household heads, 119 chiefs and 174 sub-chiefs and six assistant county commissioners from the six sub-

counties in Mandera County. Yamane (1967) formula was used to attain a sample of 399 household heads. Stratified random sampling was used in the selection of the household heads while key informants comprising of chiefs, sub-chiefs and an assistant county commissioner were purposively selected. The primary tool for collecting quantitative data was a structured questionnaire, which was administered to the household heads. The study also used semi-structured interviews for collecting qualitative data from chiefs, sub-chiefs, and assistant county commissioners. Quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Quantitative analysis utilized descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations and inferential statistics which included correlation and regression. Qualitative data was thematically analyzed. This helped integrate the findings from both datasets and draw comprehensive conclusions.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Extent of Inter-Clan Competition over Resources

Statement	NAL %	SM%	ME %	LE %	VLE%	Mean	Std.
Clans in this area compete over grazing land.	4.8	10.4	17.2	40.3	27.3	3.75	1.10
Access to water points is controlled along clan lines.	7.0	8.2	19.7	37.5	27.6	3.71	1.13
Clan disputes over land boundaries are common.	3.7	10.4	19.4	43.7	22.8	3.72	1.07
Political appointments often favor specific clans.	3.9	11.8	20.0	40.6	23.7	3.68	1.09
Clans mobilize members to defend access to pasture and water.	3.7	8.7	21.4	41.1	25.1	3.75	1.06
Disputes over natural resource access are frequent.	4.2	10.1	19.2	41.4	25.1	3.73	1.08
Average						3.72	1.09

Key: **NAL**- Not at All, **SM**- To a Small Extent, **ME**- To a Moderate Extent, **LE**- To a Large Extent, **VLE**- To a Very Large Extent, **M**-Mean, **Std.**-Standard Deviation

Competition over grazing resources

Competition over grazing resources was a key driver of insecurity among clans in their area. Respondents indicated that competition over grazing land occurs to a large extent (M=3.75, Std. =1.10). These qualitative findings corroborated these results with informants reporting that disputes occur when

different clans compete or access to communal grazing areas especially during drought. The findings imply that diminishing grazing resources increase inter-clan rivalry and conflicts. Findings support the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA, 2023) that migration of pastoralists during drought results in competition of

pasture and conflicts among communities. These findings agree with Akov and Asua (2021) who established that pastoral communities residing in Sub-Saharan Africa compete over diminishing resources such as pasture and water which result to inter-ethnic and inter-clan conflicts.

Competition over water resources

Competition over water resources emerged as a critical driver of insecurity among clans in the study area. This vulnerability is heavily institutionalized, as respondents indicated that access to key water points is controlled along clan lines to a large extent ($M=3.71$, Std. $=1.13$). Consequently, structural disputes over natural resource access occur with high frequency ($M=3.73$, Std. $=1.08$). When diplomatic boundaries management fail, clans actively mobilize their members to aggressively defend access to these scarce pasture and water reserves to a large extent ($M=3.75$, Std. $=1.06$), transforming resource scarcity into active security threats. Results are in agreement with Kenya National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (NSC, 2020) that competition over water resources are the main drivers of insecurity in Northern Kenya. Ayal (2024) established that territorial disputes are also common between the two communities. Similarly, Karienyé and Warfa (2020) established that competition over resources in Wajir County, Kenya, has been militarized. Clan-based militias have emerged to protect grazing land and water points.

Land and boundary disputes

Land and boundary disputes were also a notable source of insecurity in the study area with respondents indicating that clan disputes over land boundaries are common to a large extent ($M=3.72$, Std. $=1.07$). Qualitative findings corroborated these results revealing that disagreements over clan territories, communal grazing areas, and ancestral

land are frequent and result to tensions between neighboring clans. The lack of clearly geographical boundaries, as well as the nature of the migratory lifestyle of pastoralists complicates resource ownership and access arrangements. Consequently, competing border claims result to recurring disputes and instability, undermining peaceful coexistence and security in the County. Findings strengthen the Kenya National Police Service Security Assessment Report (2023) that the main drivers for insecurity in Northern Kenya are land and boundary disputes. Ayal (2024) further established that territorial disputes are also common between the two communities. Akov and Asua (2021) found that conflicts over land ownership and territories are the main causes of conflict among pastoralists.

Clan-based political representation and resource allocation

Political competition and marginalization in resource allocation were identified as notable drivers of inter-clan insecurity. Political appointments often favor specific clans to a large extent ($M=3.68$, Std. $=1.09$). The key informants reported that competition for political representation, job opportunities, and government funding, tend to favour the dominant clans in political appointments which creates resentment in minority clans. Use of politics to create division between ethnic and clan groups creates a cycle of competition, undermining both traditional and formal government institutions ability to stabilize the area through maintaining order. Results support the International Crisis Group (2021) conclusion that clan-based political competition causes conflict, loss of social unity, and intergroup conflict in the region. The findings agree with Elmi *et al.*, (2024) who found that clan elites in Kenya's North Eastern Region use their influence to monopolize political power and distribution of resources.

Table 3: Effect of Inter-Clan Competition Over Resources Dynamics on Security

Statement	SD%	D %	N %	A %	SA %	Mean	Std.
Competition over grazing land has contributed to frequent attacks.	7.0	10.4	20.6	39.7	22.3	3.60	1.15
Water resource conflicts among clans often lead to violence and loss of lives.	5.9	9.9	18.3	40.0	25.9	3.70	1.13
Land disputes between clans pose a threat to security in this region.	5.1	9.0	21.1	38.6	26.2	3.72	1.10
Clan-based allocation of political positions disrupts peaceful coexistence among clans.	3.1	9.0	22.0	42.8	23.1	3.74	1.01
Clan militias formed to control resources have undermined state security systems.	5.1	7.6	22.5	38.9	25.9	3.73	1.08
Cross-border resource conflicts complicate local security efforts.	5.1	7.0	20.0	44.8	23.1	3.74	1.05
Average						3.71	1.09

Key: **SD**-Strongly disagree, **D**-Disagree, **N**-Neutral, **A**-Agree, **SA**-Strongly agree, **M**-Mean, **Std.**-Standard Deviation

Violent attacks

Results show that competition over natural resources significantly contribute to violent attacks with respondents indicating that competition over grazing land has contributed to frequent attacks to a large extent (M=3.60, Std. =1.15). This was reinforced by the key informants who reported that disputes over pasture, land, and water points usually intensify into violent conflicts among clans. The informants also noted that the conflicts escalate during drought periods when resources are scarce and competition for access increases.

The findings imply that resource scarcity intensifies violent attacks through increasing competition among clans for control and access to critical livelihood resources. Results concur with National Drought Management Authority (NDMA, 2023) that continued droughts and diminishing natural resources in Northern Kenya increase inter-clan conflicts and violent attacks. Ayal (2024) established that competition over resources between the Afar and Somali communities in Ethiopia is a major cause of violence.

Loss of lives and destruction of property

The results show that competition over water resources contributes notably to loss of lives and property destruction in Mandera County.

Respondents concurred that water resource conflicts among clans often lead to violence and loss of lives (M=3.70, Std. =1.13). This was corroborated by the key informants who reported that conflicts over grazing land and water points results in deaths, injuries, livestock theft, and property destruction.

The violent conflicts also disrupt economic activities, damage local infrastructure, and household displacements. These findings imply that the recurrent resource-based conflicts not only threaten human security but also negatively affect livelihoods, intensify poverty, and result to continued instability in Mandera County. Results are in support of UN OCHA Kenya (2022) that violent conflicts in pastoral regions results to destruction of business, infrastructure and community livelihoods. Akov and Asua (2021) who established frequent conflicts and amplified tensions are experienced among clans due to competition over diminishing natural resources.

Emergence of clan militias

The findings show that inter-clan competition over resources has resulted to emergence of clan militias as groups attempt to defend their interests. Clan militias are formed to control resources hence

undermining state security systems (M=3.73, Std.=1.08). The finding was supported by key informants who reported that competition over grazing land and water resources has prompted clans to arm and mobilize youths into militia groups to protect their interest especially when government security measures are considered inadequate.

Results support the Small Arms Survey Report (2021) that arms proliferation in Northern Kenya has enabled to emergence of clan militias and worsened violent conflicts. In addition, the findings concur with Karienyé and Warfa (2020) that that competition over resources led to emergence of clan militias to protect clan interests and access to resources.

Security Challenges Arising from Inter-Clan Competition

The study showed that clan rivalry over land creates serious security problems in Mandera County. The participants reported that land disputes between clans threaten security to a large extent M=3.72,

SD=1.10). Likewise, clan-based allocation of political positions disrupt peaceful coexistence among clans (M=3.74, SD=1.01) and cross-border resource conflicts complicate local security efforts (M=3.74, SD=1.05).

The results were supported by key informants who stated that land ownership and land use disputes are some causes of insecurity. Perceptions of unequal political representation among clans create tensions and undermine social cohesion. In addition, insecurity along the Somalia border such as insurgencies attack and cross-border conflicts intensifies mistrust among clans whereby some communities are alleged to be sympathizers of extremist groups. Therefore, resource competition, political marginalization, and cross-border dynamics intensify insecurity and undermine peace in Mandera County. The findings are in agreement with Elmi *et al.*, (2024) who established that capture by elites and monopolization of political power and resources by dominant clans led to marginalization, resentment and insecurity in North Eastern Kenya.

Table 4: Coefficient of Correlation

Variable		Security	Inter-clan governance dynamics
Security	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	342	
Resource competition	Pearson Correlation	.806**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	342	342

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

There is a strong positive relationship between resource competition and security in Mandera County, Kenya ($r = .806, p = .000$) implying that an increase in resource competition creates more tension between clans, lead to increased

mobilization of armed groups, and increase retaliatory violence and violent confrontations. Results are in agreement with Jahed (2023) that inter-clan governance systems helped maintain security in rural areas.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant/Y Intercept	5.285	.199		26.526	.000
Resource competition	.755	.032	.687	23.305	.000

Based on the results in Table 6, the equation

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \varepsilon$$

Becomes

$$\text{Security} = 5.285 + 0.755 (\text{Resource competition}).$$

The findings show that resource competition had a positive and statistically significant effect on security in Mandera County, Kenya ($\beta = .755$, sig = .000), indicating that increase in resource competition result to an increase in security issues in Mandera County, Kenya. Findings are in agreement with Baah (2025) that resource competition have a significant effect on conflict. Ayal (2024) established that competition over natural resources such as water, pasture and land was one of key drivers of violence.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study reveals that resources competition between clans has a negative impact on security in the Mandera County, Kenya. This competition is also exacerbated by clan-based political appointments and the clan mobilization to defend access to resources. This has perpetuated a pattern of tension and violence in the county. The findings also confirm that inter-clan resource competition directly increases insecurity through recurring violent attacks, loss of lives, destruction of property, theft of livestock and the rise of clan militias. Local security operations have also been hampered by cross-border

resource conflicts and inadequate state security forces. Inter-clan competition due to limited resources is one of the main causes of insecurity in Mandera County in general.

National and county governments should strengthen policies that promote equitable access to natural resources and inclusivity in political representation. Policies in the governance of resources and public appointment should be designed in a way that reduces clan-based exclusion. This will ensure that all communities perceive allocation processes as transparent and fair.

National Government in collaboration with local communities should strengthen mechanisms for managing cross-border inter-clan conflicts. Joint cross-border peace forums involving communities from Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia should be enhanced. Secondly, the National Government should strengthen and institutionalize inter-clan governance structures. Clan elders and councils should be formally involved in local peacebuilding and dispute resolution processes. The skills of clan elders should be enhanced through capacity-building programs.

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