

**BORDER CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN KENYA: A CASE OF THE  
MERU-THARAKA COMMUNITIES**

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**APRIL 2025**

## DECLARATION FORM

I, the undersigned,....**Eric....Githinji...Mahinge...**Student No: ...**152272.....** hereby declare that I am the sole author of this dissertation. To the best of my knowledge, this dissertation does not contain any material previously published by another person, except where proper acknowledgment has been given.



Student's Signature:

Date: 06<sup>th</sup> April 2025

## APPROVAL

I confirm that as the University Supervisor, I have approved this study project to be submitted for examination. This project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the university supervisor

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Date: 06<sup>th</sup> April 2025

## **ABSTRACT**

Border conflict management in Kenya remains a complex and evolving challenge, particularly in regions like the Meru-Tharaka border regions. The persistent tensions between these communities are deeply rooted in historical, socio-cultural, and environmental factors. Using document analysis and semi-structured interviews, it captured diverse perspectives from local communities, policymakers, and key stakeholders. The study further evaluated the policy and legal frameworks that inform conflict resolution efforts, with a focus on the effectiveness and limitations of local administrative interventions. Additionally, the study explored strategies for fostering dialogue, facilitating joint resource-sharing arrangements, and supporting community-led peacebuilding initiatives. The findings were that while economic competition, particularly over land and resources, remains a significant driver of conflict, deeply ingrained ethnic identity tensions and historical grievances play an equally important, if not more critical, role in sustaining hostilities. The study revealed that local administrative interventions have often been reactive and ineffective, with gaps in policy implementation and coordination. Moreover, the study emphasized the importance of incorporating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as Njuri Ncheke, alongside formal legal frameworks to foster long-term peace. It was concluded that managing communal border conflicts requires a holistic and inclusive approach that integrates both traditional and formal conflict resolution practices. Sustainable peacebuilding in the Meru-Tharaka region depends on addressing not only resource competition but also the underlying ethnic and identity-based tensions. The study highlighted the need for more proactive, community-driven strategies that empower marginalized groups, including women and youth, in peacebuilding efforts. It is therefore recommended that the national and county governments institutionalize a hybrid conflict resolution framework that formally integrates traditional mechanisms with statutory legal systems. Additionally, policies should focus on equitable resource allocation, community-based reconciliation programs, and inclusive governance structures. The study also recommends embedding conflict sensitivity and historical grievance redress into development and land adjudication processes, ensuring the active participation of marginalized communities.

**KEY WORDS:** *Meru-Tharaka conflict, border conflict management, community-based peacebuilding, traditional conflict resolution, ethnic tensions*

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## DEDICATION

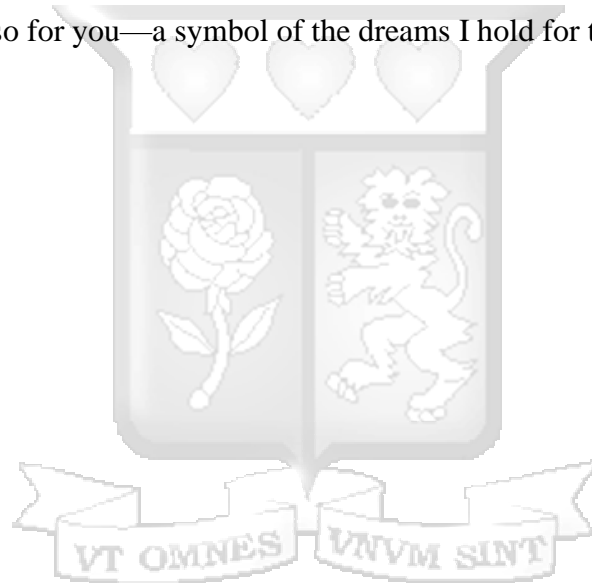
This work is lovingly dedicated to my family, whose support, patience, and love have been my greatest source of strength.

To my dear wife, Joyce Wanjiku Gitari, thank you for your unwavering encouragement, prayers, understanding, and belief in me even during the most challenging moments. Your love and sacrifice have been the foundation upon which this journey was built.

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With all my love.



## Table of Contents

DECLARATION FORM .....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT .....	iv
DEDICATION .....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	xi
DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS.....	xii
CHAPTER ONE .....	1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY .....	1
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Background Information .....	2
<b>1.2.1 Conflict Management.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.2.2 Policy Perspective .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.2.3 An overview of the Meru-Tharaka communities .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.3 Problem Statement.....	8
1.4 Study Objectives .....	10
<b>1.4.1 Study Questions.....</b>	<b>10</b>
1.5 Significance of The Study .....	10
1.6 Scope of the Study .....	11
CHAPTER TWO .....	13
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	13
2.1 Introduction .....	13
2.2 Theoretical Review.....	13
<b>2.2.1 Social Cognitive Theory .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2.2.2 Resource Scarcity Theory .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.2.3 Social Identity Theory .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.2.4 Conflict Resolution Theory .....</b>	<b>16</b>
2.3 Empirical review.....	17
<b>2.3.1 Underlying Causes and Factors Contributing to Conflict .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.3.2 Effectiveness of Current Policies and Laws.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.3.3 Impact conflict on Local Communities .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.3.4 Socio-Economic and Inter-Ethnic Impacts of Border Conflicts on Local Communities.....</b>	<b>23</b>

2.4 Summary of Study Gaps.....	26
2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	27
2.6 Chapter Summary .....	28
CHAPTER THREE .....	30
STUDY METHODOLOGY.....	30
3.1 Introduction .....	30
3.2 Study Philosophy.....	30
3.3 Study Design.....	31
3.4 Study Location.....	32
3.5 Population and sampling .....	33
3.6 Data Collection Methods .....	35
3.7 Data Collection Procedures.....	37
3.8 Study Quality.....	38
<b>3.8.1 Reliability</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>3.8.2 Validity</b> .....	<b>38</b>
3.9 Data Analysis.....	39
3.10 Study Ethics.....	40
CHAPTER FOUR .....	41
PRESENTATION OF STUDY FINDINGS.....	41
4.1 Introduction .....	41
4.2 Response rate .....	41
4.3 Identification and the analysis of the root causes of communal border conflicts .....	42
<b>4.3.1 Land Disputes</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>4.3.2 Political Incitement</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>4.3.3 Resource Competition</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>4.3.4 Ethnic Marginalization</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>4.3.5 Youth Radicalization</b> .....	<b>46</b>
<b>4.3.6 Summary of Findings</b> .....	<b>46</b>
4.4 Appraisal of the Existing Policy and Legislative Frameworks for Mitigating Communal Border Conflicts in Kenya (Meru-Tharaka Focus) .....	46
<b>4.4.1 Appraisal of Policies</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>4.4.2 Legal Gaps and Ambiguity</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>4.4.3 Inadequate Funding for Peace Infrastructure</b> .....	<b>51</b>

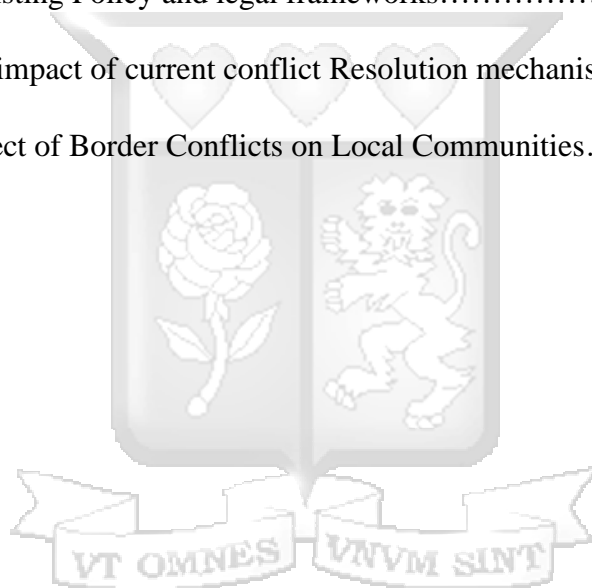
<b>4.4.4 Lack of Political Accountability</b> .....	51
<b>4.4.5 Summary of Findings</b> .....	52
4.5 Evaluation of the Impact of Current Conflict Resolution Mechanisms on the Persistence of Border Conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka Region .....	53
<b>4.5.1 Peace Committees and Community Dialogues</b> .....	53
<b>4.5.2 Use of traditional Mechanisms to address conflict</b> .....	54
<b>4.5.3 Limited Inclusion of Women and Youth</b> .....	55
<b>4.5.4 Summary of Findings</b> .....	56
4.6 Assessment of the Effect of Border Conflicts on Local Communities, Including Socio-Economic and Inter-Ethnic Relations .....	56
<b>4.6.1 Economic Disruption</b> .....	57
<b>4.6.2 Displacement and Insecurity</b> .....	58
<b>4.6.3 Inter-Ethnic Tensions</b> .....	59
<b>4.6.4 Summary of Findings</b> .....	60
4.7 Chapter Conclusion .....	60
CHAPTER FIVE .....	61
DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	61
5.1 Introduction .....	61
5.2 Summary of the Findings .....	61
5.3 Discussions of the Findings .....	62
<b>5.3.1 Root Causes of Communal Border Conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka Border Region</b> .....	62
<b>5.3.2 Appraisal of existing policy and legislative frameworks for mitigating communal border conflicts in Kenya, focusing on the Meru-Tharaka border region</b> .....	64
<b>5.3.4 Evaluation of the Impact of Current Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in the Meru-Tharaka Region</b> .....	67
<b>5.3.5 Impact of the Meru-Tharaka Border Conflict on Local Communities</b> .....	69
5.4 Conclusions of the Study.....	71
5.5 Implications of the study .....	72
5.6 Recommendations of the Study.....	74
5.7 Limitations of the study .....	74
5.8 Areas for further study.....	75
APPENDICES .....	83
APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER Study Title: Evaluating Policies, Factors, and Interventions in the Meru-Tharaka Border Conflict.....	83

APPENDIX 2: LETTER TO RESPONDENTS ..... 85  
APPENDIX 3: STRATHMORE RESEARCH FACILITATION LETTER..... 86  
APPENDIX 4: STUDY PERMIT NACOSTI..... 87  
APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW SHEET TEMPLATE..... 88  
APPENDIX 6: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS..... 89



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Summary of Research Gaps.....	26
Table 2.1 Conceptual Framework.....	28
Table 3.1 Respondent Distribution Table.....	32
Table 4.1- Percentage of responses from participants.....	42
Table 4.2 Analysis of Existing Policy and legal frameworks.....	50
Table 4.3 analysis of the impact of current conflict Resolution mechanisms.....	53
Table 4.4 analysis of Effect of Border Conflicts on Local Communities.....	57



## LIST OF ACRONYMS

**AU:** African Union

**CIPD:** Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

**FAO:** Food and Agriculture Organization

**HRW:** Human Rights Watch

**ICG:** International Crisis Group

**ICRC:** International Committee of the Red Cross

**KCCAP:** Kenya Climate Change Adaptation Programme

**KPS:** Kenya Police Service

**MPPM:** Master of Public Policy Management

**NCIC:** National Cohesion and Integration Commission

**NGO:** Non-Governmental Organization

**NPBCM:** National Policy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management

**UN:** United Nations

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Programme

**UNHCR:** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



## DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS

<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Border Conflict	Disputes or clashes that arise along defined or perceived boundaries between regions or communities, often related to land, resources, or identity.
Community Resilience	The ability of a community to withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversity, such as conflict, while maintaining core functions and structures.
Conflict Management	The process of handling disputes and disagreements in a constructive manner, often involving negotiation, mediation, and other non-violent strategies.
Conflict Resolution Mechanisms	Tools, methods, and processes used to resolve conflicts and disputes, including formal institutions, traditional systems, and community-based approaches.
Cross-Border Collaboration	Cooperative efforts between communities, governments, or organizations across borders to address shared issues and foster peaceful coexistence.
Environmental Drivers of Conflict	Natural factors such as land degradation, water scarcity, and climate change that contribute to tensions and disputes among communities.
Historical Grievances	Long-standing resentments and injustices, often rooted in past events such as colonization, displacement, or unequal resource distribution, that continue to fuel conflict.
Inter-Ethnic Relations	The interactions and relationships between different ethnic groups, which can range from peaceful coexistence to rivalry and conflict.
Local Governance	The structures, processes, and institutions through which local communities are managed and decisions are made, including traditional and formal systems.
Mediation	A conflict resolution process in which a neutral third party helps disputing groups reach a mutually acceptable agreement.
Meru-Tharaka Conflict	A specific ethnic and territorial conflict between the Meru and Tharaka communities in Kenya, often driven by historical, environmental, and socio-political factors.
Peacebuilding	Activities aimed at resolving the root causes of conflict and building sustainable peace through reconciliation, institution-building, and development.
Power Dynamics	The ways in which power is distributed and exercised within and between groups, influencing access to resources, decision-making, and social hierarchy.
Resource Competition	Rivalry among individuals or groups for limited natural or economic resources, which can escalate into conflict when access is perceived as unfair.
Socio-Cultural Dynamics	The social and cultural factors and patterns that influence behavior, relationships, and conflict within and between communities.
Stakeholder Engagement	The involvement of all relevant parties—such as community members, leaders, and institutions—in decision-making and conflict resolution processes.
Traditional Conflict Resolution	Indigenous and customary methods of resolving disputes, often involving elders, rituals, and consensus-building within the community.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The study is introduced by outlining the context, problem, objectives, and significance of the research on communal border conflicts in Kenya. It sets the foundation for understanding why the Meru-Tharaka border conflict persists despite various resolution efforts. The chapter also presents the research questions, scope, and structure of the study.

Communal border conflicts remain a persistent challenge in Kenya, especially among neighboring ethnic communities such as the Meru and Tharaka. The dispute between these two counties centers around contested areas including Kithino, Kianjai, Kathwana, Njoguni, and Gatithini, which have frequently experienced violent clashes (Kenya, 2023). These types of inter-group conflicts often arise from competition over scarce resources, unresolved historical grievances, and complex socio-political dynamics. Environmental stressors such as prolonged droughts and demographic pressures from rapid population growth have further intensified these tensions (Njenga, 2023).

Effective management of such conflicts requires a comprehensive approach that addresses underlying causes while promoting sustainable peace through inclusive community engagement, equitable resource allocation, and functional conflict resolution mechanisms (Ochieng & Kimenyi, 2019). The Meru-Tharaka conflict exemplifies the intricacies of Kenya's border disputes, where traditional institutions and modern governance structures often intersect—sometimes complementing, but frequently undermining each other.

This chapter sets the stage for the rest of the thesis by examining the background and rationale of the study, stating the research problem, and outlining the objectives and research questions. It also provides a brief justification for the study's relevance and its potential contribution to policy and practice. Through a focused analysis of the Meru-Tharaka conflict, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of communal border conflicts in Kenya and offer insights that may inform more effective conflict management strategies nationally and beyond.

## 1.2 Background Information

The 2010 Constitution of Kenya was designed to promote national unity and social harmony, anchored in principles of equality, non-discrimination, social justice, and peaceful coexistence (Githinji, 2021). These ideals are articulated in the preamble and reinforced through various constitutional provisions, all aimed at fostering a cohesive society where ethnic diversity is respected and celebrated (Kenya Law Reform Commission, 2024). The Kenyan national anthem, with its call for unity, peace, and justice, symbolically echoes these aspirations and reflects the shared hope for a harmonious and inclusive society.

Despite these ideals, Kenya has continued to grapple with communal border conflicts, especially those rooted in land and ethnic identity. Land has historically been at the center of Kenya's political and social tensions. As Di Matteo (2021) explains, land was a primary issue in Kenya's struggle for independence and heavily influenced the negotiations between British colonialists and emerging Kenyan elites during the drafting of the 1963 Constitution. The policy of land adjudication was introduced to transition land ownership from traditional communal tenure to individual titles, ostensibly to reduce conflicts and improve land administration (Gachanja, 2023). However, decades later, land disputes remain entrenched, particularly in areas with contested communal borders. Over 70% of land transactions and succession cases in rural areas still rely on customary norms rather than formal legal frameworks, undermining the effectiveness of adjudication processes (Wambua, 2023).

The failure of adjudication to fully resolve land disputes has deepened tensions in border regions, as seen in the Meru-Tharaka conflict. The 2002 Njonjo Commission, tasked with reviewing Kenya's land law system, concluded that the root causes of violent land-related clashes were tied to the politicization of land allocation, ethnic favoritism, and weak land governance (Kiliku and Akiwumi, 2008; Kameri-Mbote, 2023). Similarly, Mwai (2023) argues that the forced individualization of fertile land disrupted traditional tenure systems and enabled state appropriation of communal land, exacerbating local grievances. Political manipulation of historical injustices has also been used to entrench power and marginalize communities, making land disputes not just about territory but also about identity, justice, and representation.

The Zachary Ogongo Commission Report (2007) further emphasized that inter-community conflicts, such as those between Meru and Tharaka-Nithi, stem from ambiguities in

administrative boundaries, competition for resources, and a failure to acknowledge historical injustices. The Commission recommended the formation of a joint adjudication team to clarify boundaries and mediate disputes. However, implementation remains slow, and conflicts persist. Recent studies (e.g., Muiru, 2022) affirm that unresolved land adjudication issues continue to fuel inter-ethnic tensions, with border conflicts increasingly linked to environmental pressures and political mobilization.

Kenya has responded to these conflicts through a series of legislative and policy interventions. The County Boundaries Bill (2023) is one of the most recent efforts, proposing the establishment of a County Boundaries Commission to oversee boundary demarcation and resolve disputes through independent, participatory processes. By establishing formal dispute resolution mechanisms, the bill aims to de-escalate tensions and foster local ownership of conflict resolution outcomes.

Additionally, the National Policy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (2008) offers a holistic framework for addressing conflicts, emphasizing early warning systems, dialogue facilitation, and the strengthening of traditional and local peace structures. The policy recognizes the value of community-based peace initiatives and encourages collaboration between local governance institutions and civil society.

The National Land Policy (2009) explicitly acknowledges land as a central driver of conflict in Kenya and promotes equitable land distribution, protection of community land rights, and institutional reform in land governance. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) complements these efforts by encouraging the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms such as negotiation, mediation, and arbitration to address conflicts—particularly relevant in contexts where cultural practices play a significant role.

The County Governments Act (2012) empowers counties to play a central role in promoting peace and development, mandating the establishment of local conflict resolution mechanisms and inclusive public participation forums. Counties are thus positioned as key actors in preventing and managing conflict at the grassroots level.

Despite this comprehensive framework, implementation remains a critical challenge. Weak coordination among agencies, limited funding for conflict resolution programs, and political

interference have undermined the effectiveness of these policies. Furthermore, there is often a disconnect between national policies and the realities of local communities, where traditional leadership and informal systems still wield significant influence.

Communal border conflicts are not unique to Kenya; similar tensions are witnessed in other parts of Africa and globally, often shaped by overlapping drivers such as land disputes, ethnic rivalries, and weak governance.

In Nigeria, for instance, the farmer-herder conflict across the Middle Belt region—particularly between Fulani pastoralists and farming communities—has been fueled by land scarcity, climate change, and historical grievances. The Nigerian government has attempted to address the issue through grazing route policies and the creation of livestock reserves, but poor implementation and political resistance have limited their impact (Okoli and Atelhe, 2014).

In Ethiopia, the federal system based on ethnic lines has contributed to persistent boundary disputes, such as those between the Oromo and Somali regions. These disputes often escalate into violent clashes and are complicated by competition over administrative control and resource allocation. Although mechanisms such as inter-regional dialogue and federal arbitration panels exist, they have often lacked neutrality and enforcement capacity (Tewodros, 2020).

Beyond Africa, India's northeastern states, such as Assam and Mizoram, have also experienced border conflicts rooted in colonial-era boundaries and ethnic claims to land. Recent clashes have prompted calls for re-demarcation and inclusive dialogue, but progress remains uneven due to entrenched political interests and deep-rooted historical grievances (Chakma, 2021).

These cases highlight key lessons for Kenya: the importance of context-sensitive policies, inclusive governance, decentralized conflict management structures, and credible institutions capable of enforcing agreements impartially. Kenya's policy framework, while robust on paper, would benefit from integrating these comparative insights—particularly in fostering cross-county cooperation, building institutional trust, and ensuring meaningful participation of marginalized groups in conflict resolution.

### **1.2.1 Conflict Management**

Conflict management is a systematic approach to recognizing, addressing, and resolving disputes in a balanced, effective, and rational manner (CIPD, 2021). Conflicts are inevitable in any organization or social setting due to diverse interests, values, and perceptions among individuals. Effective conflict management is crucial as it helps maintain healthy relationships, enhances communication, and fosters a collaborative environment. According to (Thomas, 2020), conflict management involves designing effective strategies to minimize the dysfunctional aspects of conflict while maximizing its constructive outcomes.

Conflict management encompasses several sub-variables, each playing a pivotal role in the process. These sub-variables include conflict resolution styles, communication strategies, and emotional intelligence. Conflict resolution styles, as identified by (Kilmann and Thomas, 2020), include competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Each style represents a different approach to handling conflict, influencing the outcome and the relationship between the parties involved. Communication strategies are equally essential as they facilitate the exchange of information and perspectives, which is critical for understanding the root causes of conflict and developing mutually acceptable solutions (Jones and Hocker, 2020). Emotional intelligence, which involves recognizing and managing one's emotions as well as those of others, is another crucial sub-variable. It enables individuals to navigate conflict situations with empathy and self-awareness, thereby promoting constructive dialogue and resolution (Goleman and Boyatzis, 2020).

Understanding and effectively managing conflict is vital for the success of any organization. Poorly managed conflicts can lead to a decline in productivity, low morale, and a toxic work environment. Conversely, well-managed conflicts can lead to improved problem-solving, innovation, and stronger relationships. Study by (Van Dijk and Weingart, 2020) highlights that organizations with effective conflict management practices tend to have higher employee satisfaction and better performance outcomes. Thus, investing in conflict management training and fostering an organizational culture that promotes open communication, and emotional intelligence can significantly benefit both individuals and the organization.

The issue of communal border conflicts in Kenya, particularly the disputes between the Meru and Tharaka communities, is a pressing concern that significantly impacts regional stability and

development. These conflicts, rooted in historical grievances, resource competition, and territorial disputes, pose a challenge to national peace and social cohesion. Despite the implementation of various policies and frameworks intended to address these conflicts, tensions persist, revealing ongoing gaps in conflict management and resolution (Mwangi, 2020). Understanding the complexity of these conflicts requires a comprehensive review of the existing literature on communal border conflicts, focusing on policy effectiveness, underlying causes, and the socio-economic impacts on affected communities.

### **1.2.2 Policy Perspective**

Border conflicts are a significant challenge in Kenya, particularly among neighboring communities such as the Meru and Tharaka. Effective management of these conflicts demands well-defined policies that address their underlying causes and foster sustainable peace. The Kenyan government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and local leaders, has implemented various strategies to mitigate these conflicts. (Okoth, Njeri, and Ndungu, 2023) highlight that the national policy framework on conflict management focuses on community engagement, fair resource allocation, and strengthening local conflict resolution capacities to address these issues effectively (Okoth, Njeri, and Ndungu, 2023).

One of the key policy approaches in managing the Meru-Tharaka border conflict is the establishment of peace committees. These committees, composed of representatives from both communities, are tasked with mediating disputes, fostering dialogue, and promoting coexistence. As noted by (Ochieng and Omondi, 2020) peace committees have been instrumental in reducing violence and building trust between the Meru and Tharaka communities. Furthermore, policies aimed at improving infrastructure, such as roads and water projects, have also been pivotal. By addressing some of the root causes of conflict, such as competition over scarce resources, these development initiatives contribute to long-term peace and stability (Kamau, 2021).

Several policies and commissions have been established in Kenya to address border conflicts, including the National Policy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (NPBCM), the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), and the Commission of Inquiry into the Illegal/Irregular Allocation of Public Land, also known as the Ndung'u Commission. The NPBCM focuses on enhancing the capacity of local communities to resolve conflicts,

promoting equitable resource distribution, and fostering national cohesion (Kenya, 2020). The NCIC, established in 2008, aims to address ethnic tensions and promote peaceful coexistence among Kenya's diverse communities (NCIC, 2020). The Ndung'u Commission, set up in 2003, investigated land allocation issues that often underpin many local conflicts, including those between the Meru and Tharaka communities (Ndung'u, 2021).

These policies and commissions have had varying degrees of success. Peace committees have successfully reduced violence and fostered dialogue, but they often face challenges such as limited resources and political interference (Ochieng & Omondi, 2020). The NPBCM has provided a comprehensive framework for conflict management, but its implementation has been inconsistent due to inadequate funding and coordination (Kenya, 2020). The NCIC has made strides in promoting national cohesion through public education and advocacy, yet it struggles with enforcing its mandates and dealing with deeply entrenched ethnic divisions (NCIC, 2020). The Ndung'u Commission uncovered significant irregularities in land allocation and made recommendations for reforms, but the implementation of these recommendations has been slow and met with resistance from powerful vested interests (Ndung'u, 2021).

### **1.2.3 An overview of the Meru-Tharaka communities**

The Meru and Tharaka communities, located in the Eastern region of Kenya, are neighboring ethnic groups with rich cultural histories and significant socio-economic interactions. The Meru community, part of the larger Bantu ethnic group, is organized into nine sub-tribes and is traditionally hierarchical, with age sets playing a crucial role in social structure. Elders hold significant authority, responsible for making decisions and overseeing community matters, including conflict resolution and cultural rituals (Kamunde, 2021). Similarly, the Tharaka, also a Bantu group, have age-set systems, where members progress through various stages of social and political responsibilities together. Elders are central to governance, ritual practices, and conflict management, although the Tharaka have maintained more traditional practices compared to the Meru due to their location near the Central highlands (Muthoni, 2020).

Economically, both communities primarily engage in agriculture, though their specific activities and techniques vary. The Meru practice mixed farming, growing crops such as maize, beans, potatoes, and cash crops like coffee and tea. They also rear livestock, benefiting from the fertile lands of the Central highlands, which allow intensive farming practices (Njoroge, 2020). In

contrast, the Tharaka, inhabiting the semi-arid areas of Eastern Kenya, focus more on pastoralism and subsistence farming, growing drought-resistant crops like millet, sorghum, and green grams. Livestock rearing is crucial to their economy and social status, with agricultural practices heavily influenced by challenging climatic conditions necessitating strategies for water conservation and drought management (Mutunga and Mwiti, 2021).

Despite their similarities in Bantu heritage, languages, customs, and social structures, the Meru and Tharaka have notable differences. The Meru have adopted intensive farming and commercial agriculture, including cash crops like coffee and tea, leading to higher socio-economic development and integration with broader national markets (Njoroge, 2020). Conversely, the Tharaka rely more on pastoralism and subsistence farming due to the semi-arid climate, shaping their economic focus and social organization (Mutunga and Mwiti, 2021). Furthermore, the Meru have experienced more significant external influences due to their proximity to urban centers, resulting in faster modernization and cultural adaptation compared to the more traditional Tharaka (Mworia, 2020).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The Kenyan Constitution of 2010 envisioned a peaceful and cohesive nation, founded on the principles of equality, non-discrimination, social justice, and peaceful coexistence (Parliament of Kenya, 2024). These values are reflected not only in the Constitution's preamble and Bill of Rights but also in the array of policies and legislation enacted to prevent and resolve intercommunal conflicts. Among the key frameworks are the National Land Policy (2009), the National Policy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (2008), the County Governments Act (2012), and most recently, the County Boundaries Bill (2023). These efforts, alongside the promotion of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms and the empowerment of county governments in peacebuilding, represent a multipronged attempt to address the structural and historical causes of communal conflicts in Kenya.

Despite these initiatives, communal border conflicts continue to challenge national peace and development, underscoring persistent gaps in policy implementation, coordination among agencies, and community engagement (Kameri-Mbote, 2023; Mwai, 2023). These conflicts—rooted in territorial disputes, politicized land allocations, competition over scarce resources, and

unresolved historical grievances—regularly result in the loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of communities, and long-term inter-ethnic animosity (Elfverson, 2019; Mulu, 2021). Since 1989, thousands of deaths have been attributed to such conflicts, particularly in borderland regions.

The Meru-Tharaka border conflict exemplifies the persistence of these challenges. Historical records trace the conflict back to the colonial era when artificial administrative boundaries ignored ethnic and cultural settlement patterns. The post-independence adjudication of land further aggravated tensions by introducing individualized titling and disregarding traditional communal tenure systems (Gachanja, 2023; Muiru, 2022). Disputes over access to grazing land, water sources, and unclear administrative demarcations have since become recurrent flashpoints for violence. Notably, the Zachary Ogunjo Commission Report (2007) identified unclear boundaries, overlapping claims, and political manipulation as key drivers of tensions between the Meru and Tharaka communities. These findings were reinforced by more recent local studies that highlighted the failure of land adjudication and formal titling to account for customary land-use practices and the lived realities of border communities (Mwai, 2023; Wambua, 2023).

Efforts to resolve the Meru-Tharaka conflict have included peace dialogues facilitated by local leaders, sporadic government-led interventions, and community policing initiatives. However, these have often lacked continuity, adequate funding, or legal backing, making them unsustainable. In some cases, interventions have been politicized or met with community resistance due to perceived biases or exclusion (Kiliku and Akiwumi, 2008; Githinji, 2021).

This research seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of Kenya's land policy interventions in mitigating communal border conflicts, focusing on the Meru-Tharaka case. While multiple frameworks exist, a comprehensive understanding of how these policies interact with ground realities and historical grievances remains limited. Furthermore, there is insufficient empirical research analyzing why such policies have not yielded sustainable peace in contested border areas. Therefore, the central research question guiding this study is: What are the root causes of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict, and what interventions can be employed to address the issue?

## **1.4 Study Objectives**

- i. To identify and analyze the root causes of communal border conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka border region.
- ii. To appraise existing policy and legislative frameworks for mitigating communal border conflicts in Kenya, focusing on the Meru-Tharaka border region.
- iii. To evaluate the impact of current conflict resolution mechanisms on the persistence of border conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka region.
- iv. To assess the effect of these conflicts on local communities, including socio-economic and inter-ethnic relations.

### **1.4.1 Study Questions**

- i. What are the root causes of the communal border conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka border region?
- ii. To what extent do existing policies and legislative frameworks contextualize and address the root causes of the Meru-Tharaka border conflicts?
- iii. How effective are the current conflict resolution mechanisms in mitigating communal border conflicts in the region?
- iv. What impact does the Meru-Tharaka border conflict have on local communities, particularly in terms of socio-economic development and inter-ethnic relations?

By addressing these study questions and objectives, this study aimed to contribute to the existing literature on ethnic conflicts in Kenya by providing a comprehensive understanding of the causes of communal border disputes and their impact on the periodic occurrence of violent conflicts. The findings inform policymakers, community leaders, and organizations involved in conflict resolution efforts, guiding the development of evidence-based strategies to foster peaceful coexistence and stability in Kenya.

## **1.5 Significance of The Study**

This study was significant to various stakeholders and enhanced the broader understanding of communal border conflicts and their dynamics in Kenya. By investigating the causes of communal border conflicts and ethnic struggles, which are critical issues impacting peace,

stability, and development in Kenya, this study aimed to uncover the root causes and interactions of these conflicts (Mwangi, 2020). Understanding these factors can aid in developing effective strategies for conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding, contributing to more robust frameworks for managing communal disputes (Ochieng, 2020).

The findings of this study provided valuable insights for policymakers and government agencies regarding the underlying factors driving communal border conflicts. This knowledge can inform the development of targeted and evidence-based policies and interventions to address these conflicts and foster peaceful coexistence (Mwaura, 2022). Additionally, the study facilitated cross-regional learning by comparing the Meru-Tharaka border conflicts with other conflict-affected regions in Kenya, highlighting similarities and differences in conflict dynamics and offering insights into effective conflict management practices (Makotsi, 2021).

Overall, the significance of this study lies in its potential to influence policy making, contribute to conflict resolution efforts, and promote peaceful coexistence among Kenya's diverse communities. By addressing a complex and pressing issue, the study provides valuable insights for fostering harmony and stability in regions plagued by communal border conflicts and ethnic struggles (Fadiman, 2020).

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

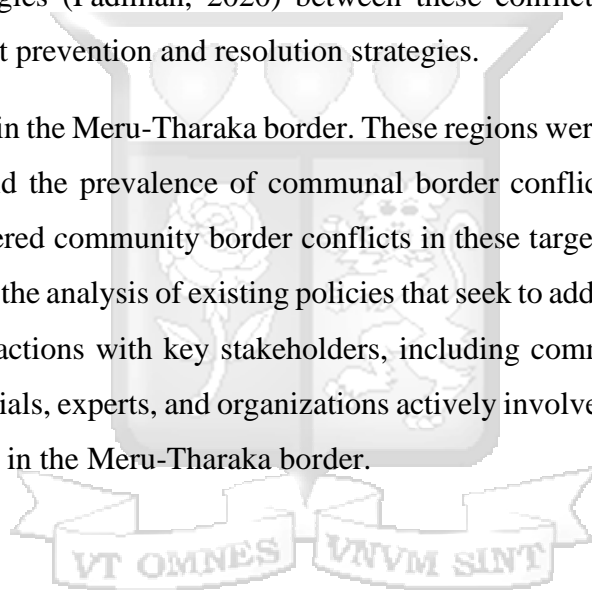
The Meru-Tharaka border has been identified as a critical case for understanding the complexities of communal border conflicts in Kenya. The region has experienced recurrent conflicts, and periodic ethnic struggles have been observed to influence the dynamics of these conflicts. The scope of this study encompasses the examination of communal border conflicts in Kenya, specifically focusing on the Meru-Tharaka border region. The study analyzed the effectiveness of current policies and laws designed to manage these conflicts, as well as the underlying causes contributing to their persistence. The study also utilized secondary data from government and NGO reports, academic case studies, and news articles, in addition to primary data collected through interviews with local experts, practitioners, and community members (Mwaura, 2022)

The geographical focus was limited to the Meru-Tharaka border area, known for recurrent ethnic tensions and disputes over territorial boundaries and resources. The temporal scope

included the period from the implementation of Kenya's 2010 Constitution to the present, providing a contemporary view of policy impacts and conflict dynamics (Kameri-Mbote, 2023). The study aimed to evaluate how effectively the implemented policies address the causes of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict and to propose recommendations for improving conflict management strategies.

The study did not cover other regions of Kenya in detail, although comparative insights were drawn from brief analyses of similar border conflicts in other areas for broader context. The focus is on identifying practical interventions and understanding the complexities specific to the Meru-Tharaka border, which can contribute to more targeted policy recommendations and conflict resolution strategies (Fadiman, 2020) between these conflicts which is crucial for devising effective conflict prevention and resolution strategies.

This study was done within the Meru-Tharaka border. These regions were chosen based on their historical significance and the prevalence of communal border conflicts and periodic ethnic struggles. The study covered community border conflicts in these targeted areas from 1990 to 2022. The study involved the analysis of existing policies that seek to address community border conflicts as well as interactions with key stakeholders, including community members, local leaders, government officials, experts, and organizations actively involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in the Meru-Tharaka border.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review aimed to address these gaps by analyzing and comparing the existing literature on communal border conflicts in Kenya. The criteria for evaluating the literature included the effectiveness of policy interventions, the relevance of theoretical frameworks, and the practical impact on local communities. The review was organized sequentially beginning with an overview of general trends in the literature, followed by a detailed examination of policy effectiveness, underlying causes of conflict, and socio-economic impacts. This structured approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the current state of study and highlighted areas for future investigation, ultimately contributing to the development of more effective conflict resolution strategies.

#### **2.2 Theoretical Review**

The theoretical review section critically examined the key theories and concepts that underpin the study, providing a framework for understanding the phenomena under study. It explored existing literature and theoretical perspectives relevant to communal border conflicts and ethnic struggles, offering insights into their causes, dynamics, and impacts on local communities.

##### **2.2.1 Social Cognitive Theory**

Social Cognitive Theory was developed by Albert Bandura, with significant contributions outlined in his work *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Bandura, 1986). This theory has been further refined and expanded in subsequent studies and publications. Social Cognitive Theory posits that individuals learn and develop behaviors through a process of observational learning, imitation, and modeling. (Bandura, 1986) argues that cognitive processes, such as attention, memory, and motivation, play a critical role in how individuals acquire and perform behaviors. The theory assumes that learning occurs in a social context and involves interactions between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. Central to the theory is the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to achieve specific goals. (Bandura, 1986) asserts that

self-efficacy influences how people approach challenges, their persistence in the face of difficulties, and their overall behavior.

Social Cognitive Theory has been critiqued for its broad applicability and potential lack of specificity in addressing complex social phenomena. Critics argue that while the theory provides a useful framework for understanding individual learning and behavior, it may not fully account for the impact of structural and systemic factors on behavior (Schunk, 2012). Additionally, some scholars contend that the theory's focus on observational learning and cognitive processes may overlook the influence of unconscious factors and deeper emotional responses (Miller and Dollard, 1941). Furthermore, the theory has been criticized for its limited consideration of how cultural and contextual factors shape the learning process and the development of self-efficacy (Cervone and Pervin, 2013).

Social Cognitive Theory is relevant to the study of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict as it offers insights into how individuals and groups learn and respond to conflict-related behaviors. The theory's focus on observational learning and self-efficacy is particularly pertinent in understanding how conflict behaviors and attitudes are modeled and reinforced within the communities (Bandura, 2021). For instance, the way community leaders and influential figures address and manage conflicts can significantly impact the broader community's responses and behavior (Miller and Dollard, 2020). By applying Social Cognitive Theory, the study can explore how individuals in the Meru and Tharaka communities learn from their experiences and observations of conflict resolution or escalation, and how these learning processes affect their behavior and attitudes toward conflict (Bussey and Bandura, 2021). The theory's emphasis on cognitive processes and self-efficacy can also inform interventions aimed at enhancing community members' confidence in their ability to participate in and contribute to conflict resolution efforts (Zimmerman and Cleary, 2022).

### **2.2.2 Resource Scarcity Theory**

Resource Scarcity Theory was prominently developed by Thomas Homer-Dixon in his seminal work *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence* (Homer, 1999). This theory has been extensively discussed and expanded in various scholarly works since its inception. Resource Scarcity Theory posits that competition over scarce resources, such as water, land, and energy, is a

primary driver of conflict. The theory assumes that as resources become increasingly limited due to environmental stressors or population growth, the competition for these resources intensifies, leading to heightened tensions and, potentially, violent conflicts. (Homer, 1999) argues that environmental degradation and resource scarcity create a "scarcity-induced" instability that exacerbates existing social and political tensions. The core assumption is that resource scarcity does not directly cause conflict but rather intensifies existing tensions by heightening competition and increasing the stakes for control over limited resources.

While Resource Scarcity Theory provides valuable insights into the relationship between environmental stress and conflict, it has faced several critiques. Critics argue that the theory can be overly deterministic, suggesting a direct causation between resource scarcity and conflict without considering the role of governance, social institutions, and economic systems (Schwerdtle, Kuhl, and Hegazi, 2020). Additionally, the theory has been critiqued for its limited focus on the socio-political context and its tendency to overlook how resource scarcity may lead to cooperation or conflict management rather than violence (Koubi, Schaffer, and Schilling, 2020). The theory has also been challenged for its generalization across different contexts, as not all instances of resource scarcity led to conflict, and some communities have developed effective mechanisms for managing scarcity (Mastrorillo, Markandya, and Simelton, 2020).

Resource Scarcity Theory is highly relevant to the study of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict, as it directly addresses the competition for resources such as land and water, which are central to the conflict between these communities. The theory helps to frame the resource-related aspects of the conflict, providing a basis for understanding how competition for these scarce resources contributes to ongoing tensions. By applying Resource Scarcity Theory, the study can analyze how environmental factors and resource limitations exacerbate disputes between the Meru and Tharaka communities. It also helps identify potential areas for intervention, such as improving resource management and developing policies to mitigate the effects of resource scarcity on conflict.

### **2.2.3 Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, with foundational works such as *The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior* (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). This theory has since been expanded and refined in various scholarly articles

and books. Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive their identity from the groups to which they belong, and that conflicts arise from perceived threats to these group identities. (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) argue that individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, which leads to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. The theory assumes that intergroup conflicts are driven by perceived injustices, competition, and status differences between groups. It emphasizes the role of social identity in shaping attitudes and behaviors towards other groups, and how these perceptions can lead to conflicts when groups feel their identity or status is threatened.

One critique of Social Identity Theory is that it can oversimplify the complex nature of group conflicts by focusing predominantly on identity and perception rather than on material and structural factors (Reynolds and Turner, 2020). The theory has also been criticized for its limited consideration of how identity conflicts intersect with other sources of conflict, such as economic or political issues (Jost and Banaji, 2020). Furthermore, while Social Identity Theory provides insights into the psychological aspects of intergroup relations, it may not fully account for how conflicts are managed or resolved through practical measures (Hogg and van Knippenberg, 2020).

Social Identity Theory is relevant to the study of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict as it provides a framework for understanding the ethnic and historical dimensions of the conflict. The theory helps explain how the Meru and Tharaka communities' perceptions of injustice, historical grievances, and ethnic identity contribute to the ongoing tensions. By applying Social Identity Theory, the study can explore how social identities and group dynamics influence the conflict and identify strategies for addressing these issues through dialogue and reconciliation. The theory's focus on perceived threats and group identity can also inform interventions aimed at reducing ethnic tensions and fostering social cohesion.

#### **2.2.4 Conflict Resolution Theory**

Conflict Resolution Theory has been extensively developed by various scholars, with notable contributions from (Fisher, 2011) in *Reconciliation: A New Paradigm for International Conflict Resolution*. This theory builds on previous works in conflict studies and negotiation. Conflict Resolution Theory posits that conflicts can be managed and resolved through a combination of negotiation, mediation, and reconciliation processes. The theory assumes that conflicts arise

from underlying issues that can be addressed through structured dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. (Fisher, 2011) emphasizes the importance of understanding the root causes of conflicts and employing a range of methods, including both traditional and modern approaches, to achieve resolution. The theory also assumes that effective conflict resolution requires the involvement of all relevant stakeholders and the creation of conditions that promote mutual understanding and cooperation.

A critique of Conflict Resolution Theory is that it may not always account for the power imbalances and entrenched interests that can complicate the resolution process (Lederach, 1997). The theory often assumes a willingness to negotiate and compromise from all parties, which may not be the case in deeply entrenched conflicts. Additionally, while the theory provides a range of strategies for managing conflicts, it may lack specific guidance on how to adapt these strategies to different cultural and political contexts (Zartman, 2007). Critics also argue that the theory's emphasis on dialogue and negotiation may overlook the role of structural and systemic changes needed to address the root causes of conflict.

Conflict Resolution Theory is highly relevant to the study of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict as it offers a framework for designing and implementing effective conflict management strategies. The theory provides practical approaches for addressing the conflict through dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation, which are essential for resolving the disputes between the Meru and Tharaka communities. By applying Conflict Resolution Theory, the study can evaluate existing interventions and propose new strategies that incorporate both traditional and modern methods of conflict resolution. The theory's emphasis on stakeholder involvement and understanding the root causes of conflict aligns with the need for comprehensive and context-sensitive approaches to managing the Meru-Tharaka border conflict.

### **2.3 Empirical review**

Recent publications reveal several trends and conflicts in the literature regarding communal border conflicts in Kenya. Studies have highlighted the successes of certain policy interventions, such as the establishment of peace committees and the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), while also pointing out limitations related to resource constraints and political interference (Mwaura, 2022). Conflicts in theory often center around

differing views on the effectiveness of traditional versus modern conflict resolution approaches. Methodological disagreements exist regarding the best methods for assessing the impact of these policies and the relative importance of historical grievances versus resource competition (Fadiman, 2020). Additionally, there are notable study gaps, particularly in understanding the integration of traditional conflict resolution methods with contemporary approaches and the local-level impact of policies (Ngunjiri, 2018).

### **2.3.1 Underlying Causes and Factors Contributing to Conflict**

Understanding the underlying causes of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict involves an in-depth exploration of both environmental and socio-cultural dimensions. Historical grievances, resource competition, and ethnic tensions are deeply intertwined, creating a complex and persistent conflict.

Historical Grievances and Resource Competition according to Mulu (2021) identifies historical grievances and resource competition as the primary drivers of the Meru-Tharaka conflict. The study underscores how disputes over land ownership and access to water resources are deeply rooted in historical injustices, particularly land dispossession and marginalization of certain ethnic groups. These issues have been exacerbated by environmental factors such as climate change, which intensifies competition for increasingly scarce resources like water and arable land. The conflict is thus not merely a result of current resource scarcity but is also deeply embedded in historical contexts that continue to influence community relations.

Environmental Stressors according to the Kenya Climate Change Action Plan (KCCAP, 2021) report highlights the significant impact of environmental stress on resource competition. According to the report, climate-induced challenges such as prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall patterns, and shifting agricultural zones have drastically reduced agricultural productivity in the region. These environmental changes have led to heightened competition over dwindling water supplies and fertile land, which are crucial for the predominantly agrarian communities. The (KCCAP, 2021) report suggests that these environmental pressures have not only exacerbated existing conflicts but also created new flashpoints, as communities struggle to secure basic resources.

Ethnic Identities and Historical Grievances in addition, (Mwangi, 2020) delve into the role of ethnic identities and historical grievances in sustaining the Meru-Tharaka conflict. The study reveals that long-standing ethnic rivalries between the Meru and Tharaka communities are fueled by perceptions of historical injustices, particularly related to land ownership and distribution. These grievances are often passed down through generations, making them deeply entrenched in the community psyche. Combined with current competition over resources, these historical and ethnic tensions create a persistent and multifaceted conflict that is resistant to simple solutions.

A study by Ouma (2022) explores the socio-cultural factors contributing to the conflict, emphasizing the role of traditional beliefs and practices in perpetuating hostilities. He argues that in some cases, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, which have historically been effective, are now being undermined by external influences such as political interference and modernization. This erosion of traditional systems has left a gap in conflict resolution efforts, further complicating the search for sustainable peace. The study suggests that revitalizing and integrating these traditional practices with formal legal frameworks could offer a more holistic approach to conflict resolution.

Kimani and Kinyua (2023), examine the role of political and institutional factors in the Meru-Tharaka conflict. Their study highlights how political interests and manipulation have often exacerbated tensions, with local leaders sometimes fueling divisions for electoral gain. Additionally, the study points to the weakness of state institutions in effectively managing and resolving conflicts. Inadequate enforcement of land policies, slow judicial processes, and corruption are cited as major impediments to achieving lasting peace. This analysis underscores the need for stronger governance structures and more effective policy implementation to address the underlying causes of the conflict.

These studies collectively demonstrate that the Meru-Tharaka border conflict is driven by a combination of environmental stressors, historical grievances, ethnic tensions, and political factors. Addressing this conflict requires a multi-faceted approach that considers both the material and socio-cultural dimensions, as well as the need for stronger institutional support and governance.

### **2.3.2 Effectiveness of Current Policies and Laws**

National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) has been instrumental in promoting dialogue and mediation between conflicting communities in Kenya. A report by the (NCIC, 2022) highlights the commission's success in mediating local conflicts. However, the report also notes significant challenges, including inadequate funding and political interference, which have often compromised its effectiveness. These limitations have hindered the sustainability of conflict resolution efforts, particularly in more complex or protracted disputes. The NCIC's impact is therefore constrained by a lack of sufficient resources and support from higher government levels (NCIC, 2022).

Peace committees, which operate at the grassroots level, have been established under various policies to mediate conflicts within communities. According to (Mwaura, 2022), these committees have seen localized successes in conflict mediation but struggle with scalability and sustainability. Their effectiveness is limited when addressing broader systemic issues or conflicts that extend across larger regions. This underscores the need for comprehensive approaches that integrate both local initiatives and broader policy frameworks (Mwaura, 2022).

The Integrated National Transport Policy aims to mitigate resource-based conflicts by improving infrastructure, particularly in transportation. (Ngunjiri, 2020) evaluates the policy's impact and finds that while transportation infrastructure improvements have facilitated economic growth, they have not sufficiently addressed the underlying causes of resource-based conflicts. This indicates that infrastructure development alone is insufficient in resolving the core issues driving these conflicts, necessitating more targeted interventions (Ngunjiri, 2020).

The National Land Policy and the Community Land Act are designed to address land disputes and promote equitable resource distribution. However, (Wanjala and Munene, 2023) identify significant challenges in the implementation of these policies, such as bureaucratic delays and limited community engagement. Despite their intentions, these policies have not fully resolved the historical grievances and competition for land that underlie many communal conflicts. The analysis suggests that the effectiveness of these policies is diminished by practical implementation challenges, calling for more inclusive and community-driven approaches (Wanjala and Munene, 2023).

The current policies addressing communal border conflicts in Kenya include the NCIC's mediation efforts, Peace Committees, the Integrated National Transport Policy, and the National Land Policy along with the Community Land Act. Each of these policies has been applied in various ways. For example, the NCIC focuses on dialogue and mediation, though its impact is limited by resource constraints and political interference (NCIC, 2022). Peace Committees have also localized success but face challenges in scalability and sustainability, especially in addressing broader conflicts (Mwaura, 2022). The Integrated National Transport Policy aims to reduce conflicts through infrastructure development, but its effectiveness is limited in addressing the root causes of resource-based conflicts (Ngunjiri, 2020). The National Land Policy and Community Land Act seek to resolve land disputes and distribute resources equitably, yet their implementation is hindered by bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of community engagement (Wanjala and Munene, 2023).

These policies demonstrate the need for stronger institutional support, better integration between local and national efforts, and more inclusive approaches that actively involve communities in both policymaking and implementation.

### **2.3.3 Impact conflict on Local Communities**

The impact of border conflicts on local communities has been profound, affecting both socio-economic conditions and social cohesion. A 2022 report by the Kenya Red Cross Society details the socio-economic effects of the Meru-Tharaka border conflicts, including widespread displacement, loss of livelihoods, and property destruction (Kenya Red Cross Society, 2022). The report highlights how conflicts disrupt agricultural activities and trade, leading to economic hardship and diminished community well-being. Displacement has further exacerbated vulnerabilities, leaving many affected families without stable sources of income or access to basic services.

World Bank reports have similarly emphasized the broader economic impacts of such conflicts, noting that prolonged instability often leads to a decline in local investment, reduced agricultural productivity, and a breakdown in essential infrastructure (World Bank, 2021). These economic disruptions can perpetuate cycles of poverty, making recovery even more challenging for affected communities. UNDP has underscored the critical link between conflict

and development, highlighting that conflict not only erodes socio-economic gains but also impedes future development prospects. In regions affected by border conflicts like the Meru-Tharaka area, UNDP has observed that the destruction of educational and health facilities severely limits human capital development, further entrenching poverty and underdevelopment (UNDP, 2022).

International Crisis Group (ICG) reports provide additional context, revealing how border conflicts exacerbate existing ethnic tensions and fuel new grievances, leading to a cycle of violence and retaliation (International Crisis Group, 2023). The fragmentation of communities along ethnic lines, as observed in the Meru-Tharaka conflict, results in the breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, leaving communities more vulnerable to ongoing and future conflicts.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has documented the human rights abuses that often accompany such conflicts, including forced displacements, gender-based violence, and the destruction of homes and other properties (Human Rights Watch, 2022). These abuses have long-term psychological impacts on affected populations, contributing to trauma and stress that persist even after the conflict has subsided.

ICRC reports have highlighted the humanitarian crisis that arises from such conflicts, particularly focusing on the loss of livelihoods and the challenges displaced persons face in accessing basic needs such as food, water, and shelter (ICRC, 2022). The displacement of populations disrupts local economies and social networks, further eroding community resilience. (Makotsi, 2022) elaborates on the social impact of the conflicts, noting that the breakdown of community structures and increased inter-ethnic tensions have led to a decline in social cohesion. The study points out that the conflicts have not only disrupted economic activities but have also strained relationships between different ethnic groups, creating long-term social challenges. This social fragmentation has made it difficult for communities to rebuild and recover from the impacts of the conflicts.

UNHCR reports emphasize the psychological impact on displaced and affected populations, noting that individuals in conflict zones experience high levels of trauma and stress, which affect their overall mental health and quality of life (UNHCR, 2023). The psychological toll of

the conflicts, combined with the socio-economic impacts, underscores the need for comprehensive support systems to address both the immediate and long-term needs of displaced and affected communities.

Additionally, (Odinga and Njoroge, 2023) discuss the psychological impact on affected populations, observing that individuals in conflict zones experience high levels of trauma and stress, which affect their overall mental health and quality of life. The psychological toll of the conflicts, combined with the socio-economic impacts, underscores the need for comprehensive support systems to address both the immediate and long-term needs of displaced and affected communities.

Finally, the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council has called for more robust interventions to address the root causes of such conflicts and to support the recovery and rebuilding of affected communities (African Union Peace and Security Council, 2023). The AU emphasizes the importance of regional cooperation and the implementation of sustainable peacebuilding initiatives to prevent the recurrence of such conflicts and to promote long-term stability.

In conclusion, the impact of the Meru-Tharaka border conflicts, as well as similar conflicts in other regions, extends far beyond the immediate violence. It disrupts economic activities, erodes social cohesion, and causes deep psychological harm to the affected populations. The need for comprehensive and sustained support for these communities is critical to ensuring their recovery and resilience in the face of ongoing challenges.

#### **2.3.4 Socio-Economic and Inter-Ethnic Impacts of Border Conflicts on Local Communities**

Empirical literature extensively highlights the detrimental effects of communal border conflicts on local livelihoods and social cohesion, particularly in the context of resource-based conflicts. Border disputes often create severe socio-economic challenges, including loss of livelihoods, forced displacement, and destruction of infrastructure. For instance, a study by Ndungu and Kendi (2021) on the socio-economic consequences of inter-ethnic conflicts in Kenya identifies significant disruptions in farming, livestock activities, and local markets. These disruptions often translate into economic instability, with farmers and pastoralists, the primary livelihoods

of many border communities, facing increased vulnerability to poverty. The destruction of essential infrastructure, such as roads and market centers, further isolates these communities, preventing them from accessing vital services, including healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. Moreover, the long-term effects of such disruptions create a cycle of poverty that becomes difficult to break, especially as displaced populations struggle to rebuild their livelihoods (Ochieng & Owino, 2021).

A study by Wambua and Mutua (2022) on the economic impacts of border conflicts in Kenya's pastoral regions reveals that livestock, being a primary source of income and food, suffers significant losses due to conflicts. Displaced pastoralist communities often face substantial economic setbacks as they lose their herds to raiders or through market disruptions. This leads to an erosion of community wealth and a reduction in overall productivity, further perpetuating the cycle of poverty. In addition, the lack of investment in these regions, due to ongoing insecurity, limits long-term economic recovery and growth.

On the issue of inter-ethnic relations, the impact of recurrent border conflicts on social cohesion is similarly significant. A study by Kimani and Kinyua (2020) explores how protracted conflicts can strain inter-community relations, fostering long-standing mistrust and animosity between different ethnic groups. The polarization caused by these conflicts inhibits cooperation between communities, leading to social fragmentation and diminished prospects for peace. For instance, the Meru-Tharaka conflict has seen a growing mistrust between the Meru and Tharaka communities, where historical grievances, particularly regarding land and resource distribution, are perpetuated by the conflict.

In the Meru-Tharaka context, Muiru (2022) observes that conflicts over land and administrative boundaries, often influenced by ethnic and political interests, have led to a breakdown in inter-ethnic cooperation and social integration. Long-standing disputes over land ownership and access to resources have compounded ethnic tensions, undermining traditional practices of communal living, mutual aid, and intermarriage. The conflict has fostered a hostile environment that limits opportunities for social interaction and cross-ethnic cooperation. These social rifts have not only disrupted social cohesion but have also hindered critical services such as

education and healthcare, as these services often become inaccessible to displaced populations or those living in conflict zones (Wanjiku, 2021).

In addition to these socio-economic and inter-ethnic impacts, border conflicts in Kenya also have broader regional implications. The cumulative effect of these conflicts stretches beyond the immediate communities, leading to regional instability. As observed by Munyao (2021), the trans-border nature of many of these conflicts, especially in regions where ethnic groups span national borders, results in cross-border tensions and insecurity. These tensions can spill over into neighboring countries, destabilizing entire regions and complicating diplomatic relations. Moreover, the humanitarian crisis resulting from displacement often requires regional interventions, with countries working together to manage refugee flows and provide emergency aid. In the context of the Meru-Tharaka conflict, the displacement of populations has, on occasion, spilled into neighboring regions, creating a need for cooperative cross-border peacebuilding efforts.

This socio-economic and inter-ethnic fragmentation highlights the urgency for comprehensive conflict resolution mechanisms. Sustainable peace in the Meru-Tharaka border region requires not only addressing the material causes of the conflict, such as land disputes and resource competition but also fostering inter-community dialogue and reconciliation. As noted by Kimani and Kinyua (2023), peacebuilding efforts must integrate both traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as elder-led mediation, and modern governance structures to create an inclusive approach that acknowledges the historical grievances and ethnic dynamics that underpin the conflict.

Thus, the socio-economic impacts of these conflicts are multifaceted, affecting not only livelihoods and regional economies but also the very social fabric that holds communities together. The long-term solution to these conflicts lies in reconciling communities, restoring trust, and creating opportunities for economic development that are inclusive and equitable for all parties involved.

## 2.4 Summary of Study Gaps

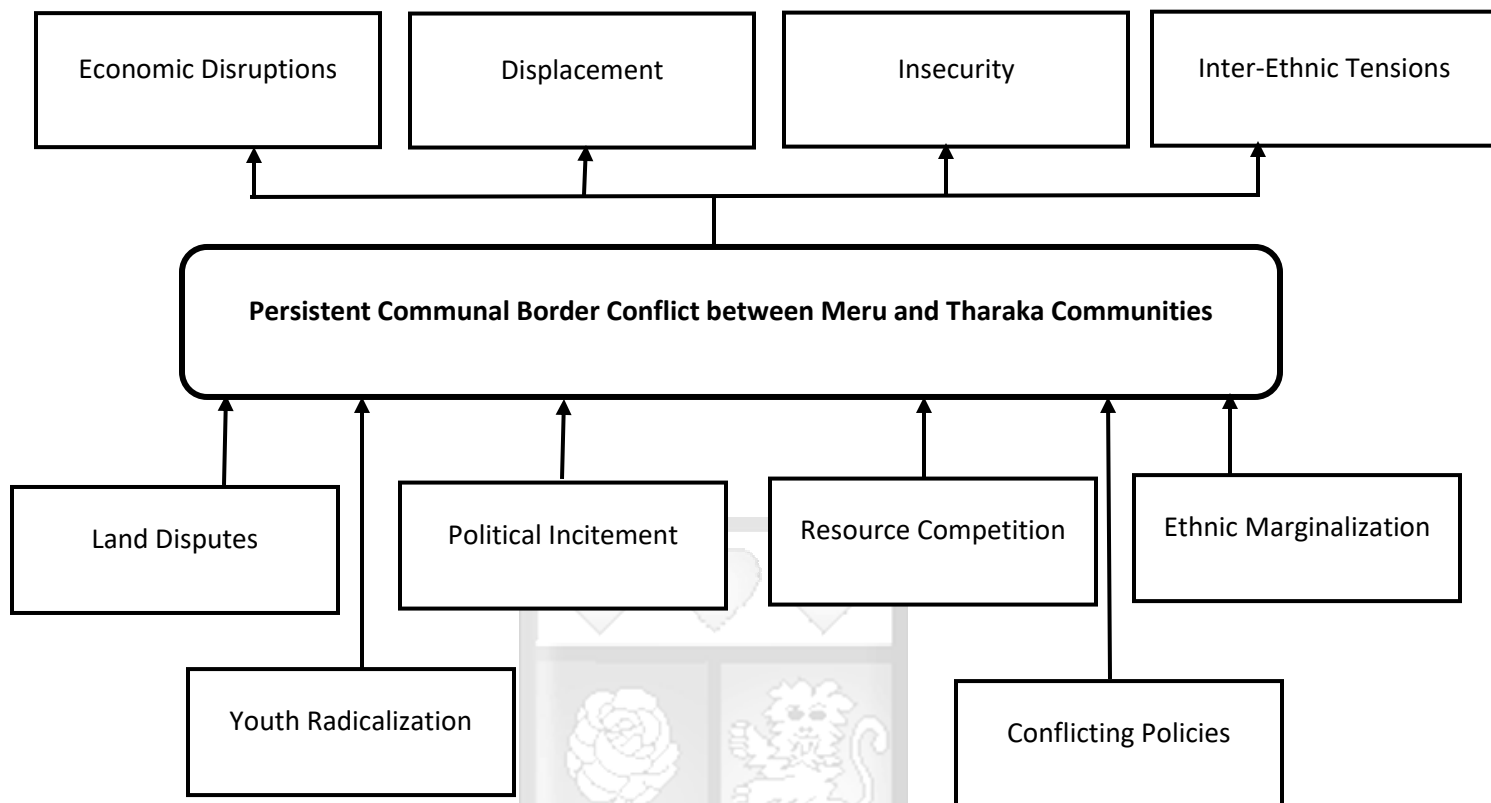
Study	Findings	Gaps Addressed by Your Study
Mulu (2021)	Historical grievances and resource competition over land and water are key drivers of conflict.	Lack of exploration of how climate change exacerbates these issues in Meru-Tharaka.
Mwangi (2020)	Ethnic rivalries between Meru and Tharaka communities, particularly over land disputes, intensify the conflict.	Limited focus on the socio-cultural implications of these rivalries beyond land ownership.
Ouma (2022)	Conflict between Meru and Tharaka is largely fueled by ethnic identity and land ownership struggles.	Insufficient focus on how shifting political and economic conditions influence the conflict.
Kenya Climate Change Adaptation Plan (KCCAP, 2021)	Environmental stressors like drought and erratic rainfall aggravate resource competition, fueling conflict.	Doesn't explore community resilience strategies in response to climate-induced conflict.
NCIC (2022)	National peace-building initiatives and local peace committees aim to mitigate the conflict, but face challenges like political interference.	Limited insight into the effectiveness and actual impact of these peace initiatives in the long term.
Mwaura (2022)	Land policies and governmental interventions face implementation challenges, leading to continued conflict.	Lack of in-depth analysis on the role of local actors and traditional conflict resolution methods.
World Bank (2021)	Conflict has disrupted livelihoods, displaced communities, and worsened poverty.	Gaps in understanding how these disruptions affect long-term socio-economic development in the area.
Human Rights Watch (2022)	Conflict has caused psychological trauma and social fragmentation, disrupting community relations.	Limited research on how inter-community dialogue and healing processes can mitigate these effects.
UNHCR (2023)	Displacement and loss of property due to conflict have led to significant human rights violations.	Insufficient focus on post-conflict recovery and reintegration strategies for displaced populations.
Wanjala & Munene (2023)	Existing policies lack funding and political will, contributing to the persistence of conflict.	Gaps in understanding how external actors and local governance can collaborate to improve policy implementation.

## 2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework is essential for understanding the dynamics of communal border conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka region of Kenya. It outlines the interplay of historical, socio-economic, political, and environmental factors that contribute to these conflicts. By identifying key variables and their relationships, the framework aims to evaluate existing policies and laws related to conflict management.

The persistent communal border conflicts between the Meru and Tharaka communities are the result of a complex interplay of historical, political, and socio-economic factors. At the root of this conflict lie land disputes, which stem from unresolved historical claims and unclear demarcation of administrative and community boundaries. These are further exacerbated by political incitement, where local leaders exploit ethnic loyalties for electoral gain, fueling animosity and mistrust. Competition over limited natural resources such as grazing land and water intensify hostilities, especially during periods of environmental stress. Additionally, youth radicalization—driven by unemployment, exclusion, and a sense of injustice—adds volatility to the situation. Ethnic marginalization and the presence of conflicting policies, particularly in land administration and governance structures, further alienate communities and hinder efforts toward equitable conflict resolution.

The effects of these root causes are far-reaching and deeply disruptive. Economic activities in the region are frequently halted during flare-ups, leading to loss of livelihoods and reduced development prospects. Displacement of families from conflict-prone areas not only causes humanitarian crises but also undermines social cohesion. Insecurity becomes a persistent reality, with fear and mistrust hindering cooperation and peaceful coexistence between communities. Inter-ethnic tensions rise with each episode of violence, creating a cyclical pattern of retaliation and resistance. Overall, these dynamics contribute to a fragile and unstable socio-political environment, emphasizing the urgent need for sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms and inclusive governance interventions tailored to the region's unique historical and cultural context



## 2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature pertinent to border conflict management, with a specific focus on the Meru-Tharaka communities in Kenya. The theoretical framework is anchored in four primary theories: Social Cognitive Theory, Resource Scarcity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Conflict Resolution Theory. Social Cognitive Theory as proposed by Albert Bandura emphasizes the role of observational learning, social influences, and cognitive processes in shaping behaviors and attitudes towards conflict. In the context of the Meru-Tharaka border conflicts, Social Cognitive Theory helps explain how individuals and communities learn from past experiences and interactions, which influences their approach to conflict resolution and management (Bandura, 2018). Resource Scarcity Theory, as proposed by (Homer, 1999), emphasizes the role of limited resources in driving conflict, a concept that is particularly relevant given the resource-driven disputes between the Meru and Tharaka communities (Homer-Dixon, 2020). Social Identity Theory, articulated by (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) sheds light on how ethnic identities and historical grievances contribute to intergroup conflict, highlighting the significance of perceived

injustices in perpetuating tensions (Tajfel and Turner, 2020). Conflict Resolution Theory, introduced by (Fisher 2020) offers insights into designing effective strategies for managing and resolving conflicts, integrating both traditional and modern methods to address communal disputes.

The conceptual framework, illustrated through a flow chart, delineates the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. The operationalization of variables is outlined to ensure precise measurement and analysis. This chapter sets the stage for a detailed investigation into the effectiveness of conflict management strategies and their impact on fostering harmony and stability in regions affected by communal border conflicts (Makotsi 2020)



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **STUDY METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the study methodology employed to explore the complexities of communal border conflicts, focusing on the Meru-Tharaka border region in Kenya. The study evaluated policies and laws, investigated contributing factors to conflict persistence, assessed the socio-economic impacts on communities, and explored potential interventions for sustainable peace. This chapter detailed the study philosophy, design, sampling strategies, data collection methods, analysis techniques, and ethical considerations applied in the study.

#### **3.2 Study Philosophy**

This study was grounded in social constructivism, which posits that knowledge and understanding are constructed through social interactions and influenced by cultural and historical contexts (Creswell and Poth, 2023). Social constructivism was particularly fitting for this study as it sought to explore how communities interpreted and understood conflict through their experiences, perceptions of policies, and historical grievances.

In the context of the Meru-Tharaka conflict, social constructivism allowed the study to delve deeply into how these communities not only interpret but also internalize and interact with current laws, cultural norms, and social structures. The philosophy focused on the ways in which communities constructed and maintained their understanding of the conflict, which is influenced by historical, social, and environmental factors. These subjective interpretations were key to understanding how the conflict had evolved and why it persists.

By emphasizing the constructed nature of realities, social constructivism provided a lens through which study could explore the diverse and often conflicting meanings attributed to land, resources, and identity by different ethnic groups. For example, the way land ownership or access to water was perceived by one community may drastically differ from the views held by their neighbors, based on their distinct historical experiences and socio-cultural narratives. This philosophy also helps in examining the roles of external actors-such as the government, NGOs,

or neighboring communities-in shaping the local understanding of justice, peace, and conflict resolution.

Social constructivism aligns well with the study's qualitative methodology, as it prioritizes interviews, observations, and discourse analysis to capture these varied interpretations. This approach allows the study to go beyond surface-level conflict drivers, such as land disputes, to uncover deeper, more entrenched factors like historical grievances, power dynamics, and socio-economic inequalities. Ultimately, it supports the identification of community-driven solutions that are grounded in the lived realities of the people involved, thereby fostering more sustainable conflict resolution strategies.

A similar approach was seen in (Wambui, 2023) study on communal conflicts in northern Kenya, where social constructivism was used to analyze how ethnic communities in conflict zones construct their own narratives around identity, land rights, and historical injustices, and how these narratives influence peacebuilding efforts.

### **3.3 Study Design**

This study adopts a phenomenological research design, a qualitative approach that seeks to explore and interpret the lived experiences of individuals directly affected by persistent communal border conflicts. Rooted in the philosophical tradition of Husserl and Heidegger, phenomenology emphasizes understanding phenomena from the first-person perspective. According to Flick (2022), phenomenology is particularly effective for examining complex social realities by focusing on how individuals perceive, experience, and interpret their world. In the context of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict, this approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how community members understand and are affected by issues such as historical grievances, land disputes, political incitement, and socio-cultural tensions.

As Creswell and Poth (2023) note, phenomenological studies are especially valuable in uncovering the “essence” of experiences by examining how social phenomena are constructed in lived reality. In line with this, the study employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to gather narratives from a wide range of stakeholders, including community elders, youth, women, local leaders, and representatives of civil society organizations. These tools helped surface deeply embedded perceptions and meanings attributed to the conflict. To ensure

a robust understanding of how communal tensions manifest and persist, the study also included document analysis of existing legal and policy frameworks. This allowed for the integration of lived experiences with institutional responses. The phenomenological lens applied across the study objectives facilitated the capturing of personal accounts related to displacement, insecurity, inter-ethnic tensions, and peacebuilding. This approach aligned with the social constructivist philosophy, emphasizing context, co-construction of meaning, and the subjective nature of conflict experiences.

### **3.4 Study Location**

The study was situated in the Meru-Tharaka border region of Kenya, in specific localities such as Kithino, Kianjai, Kathwana, Njoguni, and Gatithini. These areas, located along the administrative boundary between Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties, have been central to longstanding tensions marked by disputes over land, resource access, and ethnic identity. Their geographic and socio-political positioning makes them key sites for understanding the persistence and dynamics of the communal conflict in the region. The region features diverse physical landscapes, including arid and semi-arid zones that are critical for subsistence farming and livestock keeping—making land and water highly contested resources (Mwiti & Njoroge, 2023). The proximity of these communities and the dependence on overlapping ecological zones have made the area a hotspot for periodic conflict and negotiation over resource use.

This location was also selected for its socio-cultural and political relevance. Although the Meru and Tharaka communities share linguistic and historical ties, decades of colonial and post-colonial boundary demarcation, coupled with uneven development and representation, have intensified identity-based grievances (Kariuki & Njogu, 2022; Mwakimako, 2023). These tensions are frequently expressed through border disputes, especially during dry seasons or election periods. The region has thus emerged as a valuable site for investigating how ethnic identity, land tenure, and state policy interact to produce and perpetuate communal conflicts. By grounding the study in this location, it was possible to engage with lived experiences and observe firsthand the everyday realities of conflict and coexistence (Ochieng & Wambua, 2024).

### **3.5 Population and sampling**

The unit of observation for this study was the individual participants, specifically those with direct knowledge or involvement in the Meru-Tharaka border conflict. This focus allowed for capturing diverse perspectives from those most affected by the conflict, ensuring that the data collection methods were closely aligned with the specific objectives of the study. The unit of analysis was the socio-cultural, political, and economic dynamics of the conflict, which provided a framework for understanding how these factors influence the persistence of the conflict and the effectiveness of interventions.

The study aimed to gather comprehensive insights into the communal border conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka region, with particular emphasis on the root causes of the conflict, the impact of current policies, and the effectiveness of conflict resolution mechanisms. To address these objectives, the study employed a purposeful sampling strategy, selecting key respondents from the Meru and Tharaka communities who had direct experience or expertise in the conflict. The selection of participants was based on their role in the conflict, their understanding of the local socio-political landscape, and their involvement in either resolving or managing the conflict.

The study included a range of respondents, each contributing valuable insights to different aspects of the conflict:

Community Elders (4 total: 2 Meru, 2 Tharaka) provided historical perspectives on the conflict, offering insights into long-standing grievances, socio-cultural dynamics, and traditional conflict resolution practices. Their knowledge of community history was vital to understanding the historical context and drivers of the conflict.

Local Political Leaders (2 total: 1 Meru, 1 Tharaka) were selected for their roles in shaping current conflict dynamics through policy-making, political advocacy, and community mediation efforts. Their insights focused on contemporary issues such as inter-ethnic relationships, political power dynamics, and current efforts to mediate conflict.

NGO Representatives (2 total: 1 Meru, 1 Tharaka) were included to offer an external perspective on the conflict, focusing on grassroots peacebuilding efforts and the role of non-governmental organizations in addressing the conflict's underlying causes. Their contributions helped assess the effectiveness of external interventions.

Government Officials (4 total: 2 Meru, 2 Tharaka) provided practical insights into the implementation of national and local policies aimed at conflict mitigation. They played a key role in policy enforcement and offered a critical understanding of the challenges faced in applying these frameworks.

Legal/Policy Experts (4 total: 2 Meru, 2 Tharaka) assessed the effectiveness of existing laws and policies in mitigating the conflict. Their feedback highlighted gaps and inconsistencies, offering a critical view on the sustainability of current legal interventions.

Farmers (4 total: 2 Meru, 2 Tharaka) were included due to the centrality of land disputes in the conflict. Their insights into how the conflict has affected agricultural productivity, land use, and food security provided a socio-economic dimension to the study.

Business People (4 total: 2 Meru, 2 Tharaka) were selected to examine the broader economic impact of the conflict on trade, local markets, and business sustainability. Their experiences highlighted how the conflict disrupted local economies.

Women (4 total: 2 Meru, 2 Tharaka) provided a unique perspective on the conflict, particularly with regard to their roles in resource access, family life, and peacebuilding. Their voices were critical in understanding how the conflict affects daily life and women's roles in resolving it.

Youth (2 total: 1 Meru, 1 Tharaka) perspectives were crucial in understanding how the conflict influences the socio-economic opportunities available to young people and their roles in perpetuating or resolving conflicts.

In each area (Meru and Tharaka), 15 respondents were selected to ensure a balanced representation of the community members from different socio-political backgrounds and economic sectors. The decision to select 15 respondents in each area was based on the need to capture a wide range of perspectives without overextending the resources available for data collection. This sample size allowed for a detailed, in-depth understanding of the conflict from multiple angles, while also being manageable for analysis. The sample was not based on a specific population size but rather on the desire to include a diverse array of stakeholders, ensuring that the study could provide insights relevant to both local and national conflict resolution efforts.

By systematically organizing respondent groups according to the study's objectives, the research ensured comprehensive data collection that covered the historical, socio-cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict. This methodological approach provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the conflict, its root causes, and its impacts, helping to identify potential pathways for sustainable peace.

**Table 3.1 Respondent Distribution**

<b>Respondent Group</b>	<b>Number of Respondents (Meru)</b>	<b>Number of Respondents (Tharaka)</b>
Government Officials	2	2
Legal/Policy Experts	2	2
Community Elders	2	2
Local Political Leaders	1	1
NGO Representatives	1	1
Farmers	2	2
Business People	2	2
Women	2	2
Youth	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

### **3.6 Data Collection Methods**

The primary data collection methods for this study were carefully chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict. Each method was aligned with the specific objectives of the study and designed to gather rich qualitative data from various sources.

For Objectives 1 and 4, semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. This approach allowed for flexibility, providing respondents the opportunity to express their views and experiences in their own words while ensuring that the key study topics were addressed. Interviews for Objective 1 (To identify and analyze the root causes of communal border conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka border region) were conducted with community elders, local political leaders, and NGO representatives. These interviews explored the socio-cultural, historical, and resource-related drivers of conflict, offering insights into long-standing grievances, traditional customs, and contemporary political dynamics (Kumar, 2023).

The interviews for Objective 4 (To assess the effect of these conflicts on local communities, including socio-economic and inter-ethnic relations) focused on farmers, businesspeople, women, and youth. These groups provided perspectives on how the conflict affects daily life, livelihoods, and inter-ethnic relationships, shedding light on the socio-economic and cultural impacts of the conflict on different segments of society (Silverman, 2022).

The interviews were conducted in the local language, Kiswahili and English based on the preference of the respondents to ensure that respondents could freely express their views. The interviews typically lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the complexity of the responses. A checklist of open-ended questions was prepared in advance to guide the conversation and ensure consistency across interviews. However, the semi-structured format allowed for follow-up questions and the exploration of unanticipated themes that emerged during discussions.

For Objective 2, which focused on appraising the existing policies and laws related to conflict mitigation, document analysis was employed as a supplementary method. This involved the examination of various policy documents, legal frameworks, and related publications such as government reports, legal statutes, and policy briefs. The documents were gathered from government archives, legal repositories, and relevant NGOs working in the region. These materials were carefully analyzed to assess their relevance and effectiveness in addressing the Meru-Tharaka conflict. Specific attention was given to identifying gaps or inconsistencies in the legal framework and understanding how these documents had been implemented at both the national and local levels (Yegidis and Weinbach, 2021). The goal was to determine how well these policies had contributed to conflict mitigation efforts and whether they had been successful in fostering long-term peace.

The documents were collected through visits to relevant government offices, legal bodies, and NGOs involved in peacebuilding and policy advocacy. A review of secondary literature was also conducted, which included published academic papers, policy analyses, and reports from peacebuilding organizations. This process enabled the study to gather a comprehensive understanding of the existing legal and policy landscape and evaluate its effectiveness.

### **3.7 Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection for this study was conducted systematically to ensure consistency and credibility across all interviews and documents reviewed. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, targeting key informants who could provide in-depth insights related to the study's objectives. The purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that individuals with relevant experience or knowledge of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict were included in the study.

Once respondents were identified, interviews were scheduled based on mutual availability. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent, ensuring that they understood the nature of the study and agreed to participate voluntarily. The interviews were conducted in private settings to ensure confidentiality and encourage open dialogue.

Each interview followed a prepared checklist of open-ended questions tailored to the specific objective being addressed. The checklist provided a structured framework for the interview, but respondents were encouraged to speak freely and elaborate on their responses. Interviews were conducted by the researcher and six trained study assistants who were deployed across the study areas (Meru and Tharaka). These assistants were familiar with the local language and customs, which helped build rapport with the participants and ensured the collection of authentic and nuanced data.

The interviews typically lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. They were audio-recorded, with the respondents' consent, to ensure accurate data capture. Following each interview, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Transcriptions were cross-checked for accuracy and analyzed thematically.

For the document analysis, data was collected through a combination of field visits to government offices and NGOs in the Meru and Tharaka regions. The researcher reviewed key legal documents, policy reports, and other relevant publications. A detailed analysis was conducted to assess the content, applicability, and effectiveness of these documents in mitigating the conflict. The document collection process also involved consultations with local government officials and policy experts who were able to provide context and explain the practical implementation of these policies.

Data collected from interviews and documents was coded thematically, with recurring patterns and themes identified for each research objective. Thematic analysis was employed to uncover deeper insights and draw connections between the data collected from different sources. This approach ensured that the study addressed the research questions in a comprehensive and methodologically sound manner.

The entire data collection process was completed within one month, with study assistants playing a critical role in ensuring thorough and consistent data collection across all targeted areas. Their support helped maintain the integrity and reliability of the data, contributing to the study's overall credibility

### **3.8 Study Quality**

#### **3.8.1 Reliability**

Reliability in this qualitative study were achieved through the use of consistent interview guides across all respondents. By standardizing these tools, the study ensured that data collection was uniform and systematic, minimizing potential biases and enhancing the credibility of the findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2022). The study instruments underwent a review and pilot testing phase to confirm that they effectively capture relevant information for each study objective and function as intended (Yegidis and Weinbach, 2021).

#### **3.8.2 Validity**

Validity was addressed by ensuring that the data collection instruments were directly aligned with the study objectives and had been reviewed in advance before the study. This expert review helped confirm that the instruments accurately measured what they are intended to measure and were relevant to the study's aims (Merriam and Tisdell, 2022). Triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility of the findings by combining data from multiple sources—document analysis and semi-structured interviews. This approach helped to cross-verify information and provides a more comprehensive view of the study problem (Flick, 2022).

### 3.9 Data Analysis

The data collected for this study, both from interviews and documents, were analyzed through structured qualitative methods to address the research objectives and gain a comprehensive understanding of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict.

For the interview data, thematic analysis was employed to identify and interpret key patterns across the responses. Initially, the data were familiarized by reading the interview transcriptions multiple times. This process allowed for an initial understanding of the content and highlighted potential themes and patterns. Next, the data were coded, with significant pieces of information, such as quotes and insights, being labeled with codes reflecting the themes related to the study's objectives. These included topics like "historical grievances," "inter-ethnic relations," and "traditional dispute resolution mechanisms."

After coding, the data were grouped into broader themes. For example, themes like "socio-cultural drivers of conflict" and "policy gaps in conflict resolution" emerged. This stage involved refining and organizing the codes to form cohesive categories that directly linked to the research questions. Finally, the themes were further refined and interpreted to understand how they contributed to answering the study's objectives. This process allowed for a detailed examination of the factors driving the conflict and the effectiveness of current responses.

For the document analysis, a structured approach was used to examine policy documents, legal frameworks, government reports, and other related publications. These documents were reviewed to assess their relevance to the Meru-Tharaka conflict and the existing legal and policy frameworks. The content analysis focused on identifying key themes such as conflict mitigation strategies, the effectiveness of policies, and gaps or inconsistencies in the legal framework. Relevant sections of the documents were coded to highlight the key issues and themes.

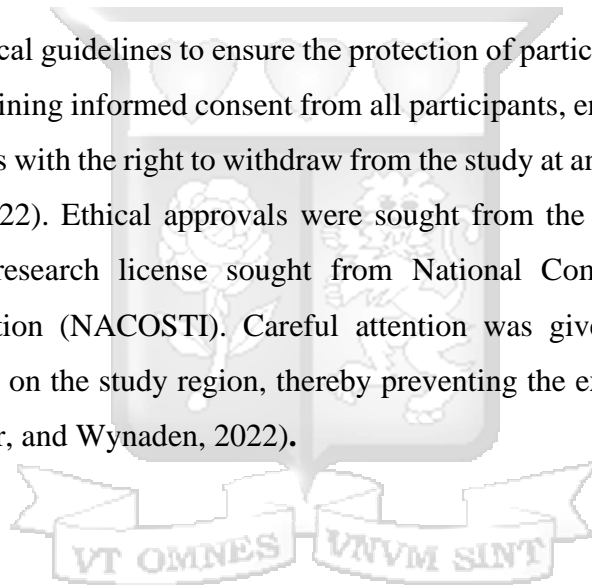
One important aspect of the document analysis was the identification of gaps or inconsistencies in the existing policies. This involved examining whether the policies were outdated or poorly implemented and whether they adequately addressed the root causes of the conflict. The findings from the document analysis were then compared with the interview data to identify areas of alignment or discrepancy, a process known as triangulation. By cross-checking the

document insights with the perspectives shared by key informants, a more robust and accurate understanding of the conflict and its resolution mechanisms was achieved.

Overall, the integration of thematic analysis for interview data and content analysis for documents allowed for a comprehensive and nuanced approach to data analysis. This combination enabled the study to explore both primary and secondary sources in depth, providing a rich understanding of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict, its causes, and the policy frameworks designed to address it. The results from both data sources were synthesized to offer a holistic view of the conflict and potential pathways for sustainable resolution.

### **3.10 Study Ethics**

The study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being. This included obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, and providing participants with the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (Denzin and Lincoln, 2022). Ethical approvals were sought from the Strathmore University Ethics Board and the research license sought from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Careful attention was given to minimizing any potential negative impact on the study region, thereby preventing the exacerbation of existing tensions (Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden, 2022).



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION OF STUDY FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the study findings derived from the thematic analysis of qualitative data collected from key stakeholders involved in communal border conflict management in the Meru-Tharaka region. Data was obtained from community elders, business people, government officials, local political leaders, policy experts, NGOs, women, and youth representatives. The study acknowledges that the themes emerging from the analysis represent a synthesis of collective stakeholder perspectives rather than isolated individual opinions. By coding and categorizing responses into thematic areas, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the structural and socio-political challenges fueling the persistence of conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka border region.

Prior to thematic coding, an initial review of responses was conducted to identify commonalities and discrepancies in stakeholder perspectives. The data was examined for recurring patterns, and preliminary classifications were made based on the nature of the issues raised. The study adopted a deductive approach, aligning the thematic analysis with the study objectives while ensuring that emerging insights were incorporated into the broader discussion.

#### **4.2 Response rate**

In this study, achieving a high response rate was a critical priority, as low participation often introduces bias and undermines the validity of qualitative research findings (Shiyab et al., 2023). To mitigate this risk, several strategic measures were employed to ensure full participation. First, purposive sampling was used to identify and recruit key informants who were highly relevant to the study objectives and willing to engage. Second, all interviews and focus group discussions were scheduled at times and locations that were convenient for the participants, ensuring minimal disruption to their routines. Third, trained research assistants from the local communities were engaged to support the data collection process, which helped build trust and encouraged open participation. Additionally, the use of semi-structured

interviews allowed for flexibility, enabling respondents to express themselves freely, which further motivated participation.

As a result of these deliberate efforts, the study achieved a 100% response rate. This outcome significantly enhanced the reliability, richness, and completeness of the data collected. The findings are presented in both tabular and narrative form in alignment with the study objectives, as detailed in the sections below.

### 4.3 Identification and the analysis of the root causes of communal border conflicts

The study sought to identify and analyze the root causes of communal border conflicts, appraise the effectiveness of existing policy and legislative frameworks, evaluate the impact of current conflict resolution mechanisms, and assess the socio-economic and inter-ethnic effects of these conflicts on local communities. The findings are expressed as percentages as shown in table 4.1.

**Table 4.1- Percentage of responses from participants**

Main Theme	Specific Causes Identified	Youth	Business people	Policy Experts	NGOs	Gov. off	Politicians	Comm Elders	Farmers	Women
Land Disputes	- CAP 283 (land consolidation) displacing rightful occupants	-	-	2	2	2	-	1	3	0
	Lack of land titles	2	-	2	-	2	1	2	3	1
	Conflicting adjudication systems	-	-	1	1	3	2	2	1	-
Political Incitement	Politicians provoke violence for votes	2	1	1	-	2	2	3	1	0
	Incite during campaigns	2	2	1	-	2	-	1	-	-
	Stir fear of outsiders	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	2	-
Resource Competition	Upstream communities blocking rivers	2	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-
	Fertile land in dispute	-	1	2	2	1	2	-	-	-
Ethnic Marginalization	Tharaka viewed as inferior	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	0
	- Feelings of exclusion in policy and service delivery	-	2	2	2	-	-	-	-	0
Youth Radicalization	Youth bribed into violence	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Used to defend territory	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
	Lack of peacebuilding alternatives	2	-	-	2	2	2	3	-	1

The findings are discussed in detail in the subsequent subsections.

#### **4.3.1 Land Disputes**

Competing land laws were cited by respondents as a significant challenge, with 30% pointing to contradictions within existing legal frameworks that have created confusion and manipulation. Several respondents specifically referenced CAP 283 of the Kenyan constitution (land consolidation), arguing that rather than providing tenure security, it has displaced rightful occupants and aggravated land disputes. Others highlighted conflicting adjudication systems, where customary and statutory laws operate simultaneously, leading to inconsistent rulings and selective enforcement. Many opined that these legal inconsistencies have been exploited by political elites, who manipulate land policies to advance personal or group interests.

Respondents widely cited unclear boundaries as a primary driver of land-related conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka border region. Many opined that the lack of officially demarcated borders has led to overlapping land claims, with communities asserting ownership based on historical and customary usage rather than legally recognized frameworks. This ambiguity has fostered longstanding tensions, as residents struggle to determine the rightful extent of their land. Additionally, respondents noted that the absence of clear boundary markers has facilitated opportunistic encroachments, leading to frequent disputes and retaliatory actions between neighboring communities. The lack of title deeds was identified by 50% of the respondents to further complicate the situation, as many residents are unable to prove legal ownership, making it difficult to resolve conflicts through formal channels and reinforcing the cycle of uncertainty and dispute.

The issue of unadjudicated land was another key concern raised by respondents, 33% highlighted that large portions of land in the region remain unregistered and legally undefined. Many expressed frustrations over the slow and inconsistent adjudication process, which has left entire communities without formal land titles. Respondents also emphasized that the lack of adjudication has fueled speculative behavior, where individuals claim large tracts of land in anticipation of eventual legal recognition. This has exacerbated tensions, as competing claims over unregistered land remain unresolved for extended periods, perpetuating uncertainty and conflict.

*Contradictory laws should not be applied, the locals prefer application of CAP 284 and not CAP 283 that was used at the time when there was vast agricultural land that had few occupants and did not lead to people displacement. **Government Official 3 Tharaka***

*Lack of goodwill by the politicians and long wait for land adjudication processes to begin - **NGO Rep 2 Meru***

*Non implementation or delays on issuance of land ownership titles complete land adjudication not done and the communities still live in fear - **Policy Expert 4 Tharaka***

#### **4.3.2 Political Incitement**

Political incitement was widely cited as a key driver of communal border conflicts, particularly during elections. 37% of the respondents noted that politicians exploit ethnic divisions and historical grievances through hate speech, which fuels animosity between communities. Campaign rhetoric often frames land disputes as existential threats, escalating tensions and triggering violence.

Vote-seeking propaganda was another concern, with respondents highlighting how politicians manipulate land issues to gain electoral advantage. Many pointed out that political aspirants make empty promises of land allocation to secure votes, further exacerbating existing disputes. This tactic polarizes communities, turning elections into high-stakes battles for land control.

Politically motivated evictions were also frequently referenced, with respondents describing how politicians facilitate the displacement of rival groups and outsiders. Some noted that leaders promise land to their supporters, leading to forced removals through intimidation or violence. This pattern of displacement deepens mistrust, fuels retaliatory attacks, and complicates reconciliation efforts.

*They incite communities against each other by issuing hate speeches to trigger tensions..." **Community Elder 1 – Tharaka***

*"As we move towards political campaigns, politicians will issue inciting statements... It's the cause of tension." **Government official 3 - Tharaka***

*Politicians have got much influence on the people; the main political factors are incitements and fake promises that cannot be fulfilled - **Political Leader 2 Tigania East (Meru)***

### 4.3.3 Resource Competition

Resource competition emerged as a significant driver of communal border conflicts, with 13% of respondents citing disputes over water access. Locals noted that upstream communities often block or divert rivers, cutting off water supply to downstream users. This deliberate restriction of access intensifies tensions, especially during dry seasons when water becomes a scarce and highly contested resource.

Agricultural scarcity was another pressing concern, as 23% of the respondents emphasized that dwindling arable land has heightened competition between communities. With limited fertile land available, disputes over farmland boundaries and grazing areas frequently escalate into violent confrontations. Many participants opined that these disputes are exacerbated by the absence of clear land-use policies, leaving communities to resolve conflicts through force rather than formal legal mechanisms.

*"Communities on higher grounds at times have blocked the flow of rivers downstream..." 1. Community Elder 2 – Tharaka.*

*"The youths have faced many challenges that include scramble for the resources and land grabbing in this area." Youth 1 – Tharaka*

### 4.3.4 Ethnic Marginalization

Ethnic marginalization was cited by 27% of respondents as a deep-rooted cause of tension in the Meru-Tharaka border conflicts. Many participants opined that the Tharaka community is often stereotyped as inferior, leading to their exclusion from key decision-making processes. This exclusion extends to governance structures, resource allocation, and land adjudication, reinforcing perceptions of systemic neglect. Respondents also highlighted widespread discrimination in access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, with many asserting that the Tharaka people receive disproportionately fewer public resources compared to their Meru counterparts. This institutionalized marginalization has fueled resentment, with respondents emphasizing that the lack of recognition and representation exacerbates inter-ethnic tensions and sustains long-standing grievances.

*"Tharaka people are considered inferior..." Community Elder 2 – Tharaka*

#### **4.3.5 Youth Radicalization**

Youth radicalization emerged as a significant concern among respondents, who cited the exploitation of unemployed and idle young men as key actors in escalating border conflicts. Respondents opined that political figures strategically manipulate the frustrations of jobless youth, offering financial incentives or promises of future rewards to incite violence against neighboring communities. 10% of the respondents observed that during election cycles, youth are often mobilized, armed, and deployed as enforcers to intimidate rival groups or to stake territorial claims on behalf of political patrons. Additionally, it was noted that the absence of viable economic opportunities leaves many young people vulnerable to such manipulation, as they see little alternative for financial stability. Despite being at the forefront of violent confrontations, youth respondents expressed a willingness to engage in peacebuilding initiatives if provided with structured platforms and economic prospects

#### **4.3.6 Summary of Findings**

The root causes of the Meru-Tharaka communal border conflict are multifaceted and deeply entrenched. Land disputes emerged as the most prominent issue, with respondents citing conflicting legal frameworks—especially the application of CAP 283 over the preferred CAP 284—as well as unclear boundaries, lack of adjudication, and absence of title deeds, all of which have led to overlapping claims and manipulation by political elites. Political incitement further fuels tensions, particularly during election seasons, when politicians exploit ethnic divisions, make unfulfilled land promises, and incite violence to secure votes. Resource competition, especially over water and arable land, exacerbates conflict due to scarcity and the absence of clear land-use policies. Ethnic marginalization also plays a critical role, with the Tharaka community reporting systemic exclusion from decision-making, public services, and resource allocation, deepening historical grievances. Lastly, youth radicalization contributes to the persistence of conflict, as unemployed youth are easily mobilized by political actors to engage in violence, though they remain open to peacebuilding if economic alternatives are provided.

#### **4.4 Appraisal of the Existing Policy and Legislative Frameworks for Mitigating Communal Border Conflicts in Kenya (Meru-Tharaka Focus)**

This section presents the key findings of the study, highlighting the results from the appraisal of existing policies and later on presenting the findings from the respondent interviews on this

objective. Combined, both approaches highlight the primary factors contributing to communal border conflicts and ethnic struggles in the Meru-Tharaka region.

#### **4.4.1 Appraisal of Policies**

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the existing policies and legal frameworks related to conflict mitigation in the Meru-Tharaka border region. The analysis aims to assess the extent to which these policies respond to the root causes and issues identified in Table 4.1, which highlights the socio-cultural, economic, and political drivers of the conflict.

The document analysis, as outlined in Chapter 3, involved a thorough examination of policy documents, legal statutes, and related publications, such as government reports, legal frameworks, and policy briefs. The goal was to assess the relevance, effectiveness, and implementation of these policies in addressing the underlying factors contributing to the conflict. In addition to evaluating the scope and objectives of each policy, the analysis sought to identify any gaps or inconsistencies in their application to the Meru-Tharaka border context.

The policy documents reviewed included national conflict mitigation strategies, local governance frameworks, land use policies, and peacebuilding initiatives from both governmental and non-governmental sources. These documents were evaluated for their alignment with the root causes of the Meru-Tharaka conflict, as identified in Table 4.1, including historical grievances, resource competition (especially over land and water), ethnic tensions, and political dynamics.

The first key policy examined was the National Policy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management, which aims to foster long-term peace and stability through grassroots-level engagement and community-driven conflict resolution. While the policy provides a framework for resolving conflict, the analysis revealed that it often lacks specific, actionable strategies for addressing localized tensions such as those between the Meru and Tharaka communities. There is a notable gap in the policy's ability to address land disputes, a primary source of conflict in the region. The policy's focus on broad national peace initiatives does not sufficiently address the unique socio-cultural dynamics of the Meru-Tharaka border area.

Next, the Land Act of 2012 was reviewed, as land disputes play a central role in the Meru-Tharaka conflict. The Land Act outlines mechanisms for land adjudication and conflict

resolution. However, the document analysis revealed that the Act is inadequately implemented in conflict zones like Meru and Tharaka, where traditional land rights and community land management systems are often in conflict with statutory laws. This disconnect between formal law and traditional practices exacerbates land-related conflicts and undermines the effectiveness of the policy. There is also a lack of adequate legal mechanisms to address inter-community grievances arising from land disputes, as highlighted in the findings from community elders and farmers.

The Peace and Security Council Resolution on Community Peacebuilding was also analyzed, which calls for community-based peace initiatives. While the resolution advocates for local peace committees and conflict mediation, it does not explicitly address the role of community elders in conflict resolution, despite their central role in the Meru and Tharaka communities. The analysis indicated that while the policy framework encourages local participation, it does not adequately recognize or empower traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, which are still highly effective in this region.

### **Evaluation of Policy Effectiveness**

The effectiveness of these policies was evaluated based on their ability to address the specific root causes of the Meru-Tharaka conflict. While national-level policies such as the National Policy on Peacebuilding provide general frameworks for conflict resolution, they are often disconnected from the realities of the local context. As indicated in Table 4.1, resource competition, historical grievances, and inter-ethnic tensions remain unresolved under the current policy framework. The national policies tend to focus on high-level strategies, but they fail to engage effectively with the micro-level dynamics that fuel the Meru-Tharaka conflict.

For example, the Land Act of 2012 has provisions for addressing land disputes, but its failure to incorporate customary land tenure systems means that many conflicts remain unresolved, as community members prefer to rely on traditional conflict resolution methods that are not legally recognized. This inconsistency between statutory law and local practices hinders the policy's success in addressing one of the core issues driving the conflict.

The Peace and Security Council Resolution on Community Peacebuilding has shown some success in fostering local-level peace initiatives, but its impact has been limited by insufficient

resources and support for local peace committees. Additionally, the policy does not address the deep-rooted socio-cultural tensions between the Meru and Tharaka communities, which continue to influence conflict dynamics despite the existence of peacebuilding programs.

### **Gaps and Inconsistencies**

Several gaps and inconsistencies were identified during the appraisal of these policies. One major gap is the lack of a comprehensive and integrated approach to land conflict resolution, which remains one of the most significant sources of tension between the Meru and Tharaka communities. The existing policies do not effectively bridge the gap between formal legal frameworks and traditional land tenure systems, leading to continued conflict over land ownership and use.

Another critical gap is the insufficient involvement of local community structures in policy implementation. Although community elders and local leaders play a crucial role in conflict resolution, existing policies do not fully recognize or integrate their role in formal peacebuilding efforts. Traditional mediation mechanisms, which have been effective in managing local conflicts for centuries, are often sidelined in favor of top-down approaches that do not resonate with the communities affected by the conflict.

Lastly, the policies reviewed often lack clear, actionable strategies for addressing the socio-cultural dimensions of the conflict, such as ethnic tensions and historical grievances. These elements remain under-addressed in the formal policy frameworks, limiting their effectiveness in fostering long-term peace in the Meru-Tharaka region.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the existing policies related to conflict mitigation in the Meru-Tharaka border region have some strengths, particularly in terms of promoting national peacebuilding and community participation. However, their effectiveness in addressing the root causes of the Meru-Tharaka conflict—land disputes, ethnic tensions, and historical grievances—remains limited. Key policy gaps include the lack of integration between formal legal systems and traditional practices, insufficient recognition of community elders' roles, and the failure to address the socio-cultural dimensions of the conflict. These findings highlight the need for a

more context-specific and inclusive policy framework that recognizes the unique characteristics of the Meru-Tharaka conflict and empowers local actors to play a more active role in conflict resolution.

A summary of the findings from the respondent interviews appraising the existing policies is presented in Table 4.2 shown below

**Table 4.2 Analysis of Existing Policy and legal frameworks**

Main Theme	Specific Causes Identified	Youth	Business people	Policy Experts	NGOs	Gov. off	Politicians	Comm' elders	Farmers	Women
Legal Gaps and Ambiguity	Confusion over CAP 283 vs CAP 284 and weak laws	-	-	3	-	1		1	-	-
	Border between Meru and Tharaka not officially mapped	-	-	-		2	4	1	1	-
Inadequate Funding for Peace Infrastructure	Peace committee members not paid	-	-	1	2	2	2	1	-	1
	Laws on incitement exist but are weak or not enforced	-	-	1		4	2	1	-	
Inadequate Policy Awareness	Politicians go unpunished for hate speech that fuels conflict	-	1	2		1	2	2	2	1

The findings are discussed in detail in the subsequent subsections.

#### 4.4.2 Legal Gaps and Ambiguity

Respondents within the conflict area highlighted that legal inconsistencies, particularly between CAP 283 and CAP 284, contribute significantly to ongoing border disputes. According to 20% of the respondents, the lack of clear boundary mapping between Meru and Tharaka leaves land ownership open to contestation, allowing different groups to exploit conflicting statutes. Weak policy enforcement further compounds the problem, as adjudication processes are often stalled by political interference and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Many stakeholders called for legal harmonization and formal boundary demarcation, emphasizing that without clear and effectively enforced land policies, conflicts will persist, deepening mistrust and instability in the region.

*“Contradictory laws should not be applied; the locals prefer application of CAP 284 and not CAP 283 that was used at the time when there was vast agricultural land that had few occupants and did not lead to people displacement” - Government Official 3 Tharaka*

*“The laws don’t address the root causes... only suitable for addressing the problems that emanate from the conflict.” Policy Expert 2 – Meru.*

#### **4.4.3 Inadequate Funding for Peace Infrastructure**

20% of the respondents emphasized that peacebuilding efforts in the Meru-Tharaka border region are significantly hindered by inadequate funding for local conflict resolution structures. Many peace committee members and community elders operate on a purely voluntary basis, with no financial incentives or stipends to sustain their work. Without adequate funding, these crucial actors struggle to consistently engage in mediation efforts, as they lack the necessary resources for transport and logistics, particularly when accessing conflict-prone areas. Some elders noted that while they are respected within the community, their influence is undermined by the absence of institutional support, making it difficult to implement long-term reconciliation strategies. The lack of structured funding also means that peacebuilding remains largely informal and reactive, rather than proactive and sustainable. While laws prohibiting incitement and hate speech exist, respondents expressed concern that these legal frameworks are either too weak or poorly enforced.

*“Members of these peace committees offer their services voluntarily... they are not paid even a single cent.” Government Official 1 Tharaka*

*“...There is no budget in place to appreciate the community elders...” Government Official 2 – Tigania East*

#### **4.4.4 Lack of Political Accountability**

30% of the respondents expressed deep frustration over the lack of political accountability in addressing incitement and hate speech, which they identified as a major driver of conflict in the Meru-Tharaka border region. Despite the existence of legal provisions against incitement, such as laws prohibiting hate speech, enforcement remains weak and inconsistent. Many stakeholders noted that politicians who incite violence or exploit ethnic tensions for electoral

gain often evade prosecution, either due to political protection or the unwillingness of authorities to act. Several community members highlighted instances where inflammatory rhetoric led to tensions and attacks, yet no legal consequences followed. This impunity not only emboldens politicians to continue using divisive language but also erodes trust in legal mechanisms meant to uphold peace and coexistence. Without firm legal action, respondents opined, political figures will remain unaccountable, perpetuating cycles of conflict and instability.

*“The laws we have against incitement are weak and have been incapable of taming hateful politicians. ... Now it's the politicians who add fuel to the fire. They incite people against each other in such a way.”* **Policy Expert 1 – Tharaka**

*“Local politicians make hateful comments... and no one makes them answerable.”* **Government Official 1 – Tharaka**

#### **4.4.5 Summary of Findings**

The study found that existing policies and legal frameworks addressing the Meru-Tharaka communal conflict are largely ineffective in resolving its root causes—land disputes, ethnic tensions, and historical grievances. While national policies like the National Policy on Peacebuilding and the Land Act (2012) offer general frameworks, they lack local specificity, fail to integrate traditional land tenure systems, and overlook the crucial role of community elders in conflict resolution. Document analysis and interviews revealed gaps such as legal ambiguities between conflicting land laws (CAP 283 vs. CAP 284), inadequate funding for peacebuilding structures, and weak enforcement of laws against political incitement. Respondents expressed concern over the lack of political accountability, with politicians often inciting violence without consequence. These shortcomings highlight the need for a more context-specific, inclusive policy approach that strengthens local institutions, harmonizes legal frameworks, and empowers traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.

#### 4.5 Evaluation of the Impact of Current Conflict Resolution Mechanisms on the Persistence of Border Conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka Region

This section presents the key findings of the study, focusing on the evaluation of the impact of current conflict resolution mechanisms on the persistence of border conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka region. A summary of the findings are presented in table 4.3 shown below.

**Table 4.3 analysis of the impact of current conflict Resolution mechanisms**

Main Theme	Specific Causes Identified	Youth	Business people	Policy Experts	NGOs	Gov. off	Politicians	Comm' Elders	Farmers	Women
Peace Committees and Community Dialogues	- Use of public barazas and peace committees for dialogue	2	-	-	2	4	-	-	-	-
	- Involvement of elders, chiefs, and local groups	2	1	2	2	3	2	4	-	-
Traditional Mechanisms	- Lack of formal integration of traditional institutions	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	-	-
	- Public trust in community-based justice mechanisms	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	2	-
Limited Inclusion of Women and Youth	- Women's groups (e.g. Chamas) not supported	-	1	-	2	-	-	2	-	1
	- Youth organize peace efforts but lack state recognition	2	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	-

The findings are discussed in detail in the subsequent subsections.

##### 4.5.1 Peace Committees and Community Dialogues

About 20 % of the respondents highlighted the significance of peace committees and community dialogues, particularly through public barazas and the Nyumba Kumi initiative, in

fostering conflict resolution at the grassroots level. These forums provide structured spaces where elders, chiefs, local administrators, and community representatives convene to deliberate on disputes and mediate tensions before they escalate into violence. Stakeholders noted that these dialogues have been instrumental in promoting understanding, rebuilding trust, and encouraging collaborative problem-solving among conflicting groups. The inclusion of diverse actors enhances the legitimacy of resolutions reached, ensuring broader community buy-in.

Despite their effectiveness, some respondents expressed concerns regarding the sustainability of these initiatives. Many peace committees operate without formal funding, relying on voluntary participation, which limits their reach and consistency. Additionally, political interference and competing interests often undermine the neutrality and credibility of these platforms. Stakeholders stressed the need for institutional support, resource allocation, and policy frameworks that formally integrate community-based peace efforts into national and regional conflict resolution mechanisms to enhance their long-term impact.

*“We make invites for all people to attend our public Barazas through the help of village elders and the Nyumba Kumi setups.” **Government Official 1 – Tharaka***

*We have in place the Nyumba Kumi, Area managers engaged in intelligence briefings, organized public joint barazas, established Peace Committees who have monthly meetings to address domestic matters and border conflicts. **Government Official 4 Tigania East Meru***

*“Through peace committees we have different representations... all interests addressed.” **Government Official 3 – Tharaka.***

#### **4.5.2 Use of traditional Mechanisms to address conflict**

Respondents emphasized the critical role of traditional mechanisms, particularly the Njuri Ncheke, in conflict resolution and community governance. The Njuri Ncheke and similar traditional councils arbitrate disputes related to land, resource access, and inter-community relations, often delivering resolutions that are widely accepted and respected. Their decisions are rooted in indigenous knowledge and historical precedents, making them effective in maintaining social harmony.

Despite their credibility, respondents noted that these groups lack formal recognition and integration into the broader legal framework. The absence of structured collaboration between

customary mechanisms and statutory legal institutions creates gaps in enforcement, limiting their ability to provide binding resolutions. Additionally, while communities largely trust these systems, younger generations and some external stakeholder's express concerns about their perceived exclusivity and potential bias. Stakeholders highlighted the need for harmonizing traditional and formal legal structures to enhance the legitimacy, enforcement, and sustainability of customary dispute resolution practices.

*“For a long time, we have used Njuri Ncheke-led peace initiatives to settle disputes and to provide leadership on key matters. Whenever a resolution is passed by Njuri Ncheke, the decision is usually final. It cannot be appealed. It's just final. It's a respected methodology of addressing pressing issues like land and boundary disputes.”* **Community Elder 4 Tigania East**

*“The problem in question here is a very old problem and the border in question has never been mapped and there's a lot of ambiguity surrounding it. That's why you'll often see disputes being resolved locally through traditional methods such as the Njuri Ncheke apparatus.”* **Policy Expert 2 Meru**

*“...In fact, people around prefer their disputes to be resolved by Njuri Ncheke but not the government. This happens because the Njuri Ncheke system of addressing disputes is home grown and it understands the problems of the Ameru more than anyone else...”* **Business Person 2 Tharaka**

#### **4.5.3 Limited Inclusion of Women and Youth**

Respondents highlighted that women and youth play a crucial role in grassroots peacebuilding, often organizing community-based initiatives such as Chamas and youth-led peace forums. These groups actively mediate disputes, promote dialogue, and foster reconciliation in conflict-prone areas. Women, in particular, are seen as key players in de-escalating tensions within communities, leveraging their social influence to encourage non-violence and cooperation. Similarly, youth-led initiatives provide alternative narratives to counteract radicalization and political exploitation, demonstrating their commitment to peace and stability.

Despite their contributions, 23% of the respondents expressed concern that these groups are largely excluded from formal peace structures. Women and youth are underrepresented in official decision-making forums, including government-led peace committees and conflict resolution mechanisms. This marginalization not only limits their influence but also weakens

the effectiveness of peace initiatives by failing to incorporate diverse perspectives. Additionally, the lack of institutional recognition and support, such as funding, training, and legal backing, further restricts the sustainability and impact of their efforts

*“...One of the reasons why people fight around here is because of poverty and therefore they fight for resources. If women are empowered materially and financially, they'll change the economic statuses of their communities and soon or later, no one will find sense in fighting...”* **Woman 1 Tharaka.**

*Youths hardly initiate conflicts. Instead, they get into it as catalysts. In most cases they participate under the guidance of other authorities. Therefore, youths in my view can make good agents of peace and they can also be used as merchants of hatred and violence.*  
**Youth 2 Tigania East.**

#### **4.5.4 Summary of Findings**

The study found that while current conflict resolution mechanisms in the Meru-Tharaka region—such as peace committees, community dialogues, and traditional institutions like Njuri Ncheke—play a valuable role in addressing border disputes, their overall impact is limited by structural, political, and institutional challenges. Peace committees, though instrumental in fostering grassroots dialogue and mediation, suffer from sustainability issues due to lack of formal funding and vulnerability to political interference. Traditional mechanisms are highly trusted by communities and offer culturally grounded solutions, but their lack of legal integration weakens enforcement and long-term impact. Additionally, despite their active engagement in peacebuilding, women and youth remain largely excluded from formal decision-making platforms, diminishing the inclusivity and effectiveness of these mechanisms. The findings underscore the need to formalize and support community-based structures, integrate traditional systems into national frameworks, and promote broader participation to enhance the legitimacy, sustainability, and reach of conflict resolution efforts in the region.

#### **4.6 Assessment of the Effect of Border Conflicts on Local Communities, Including Socio-Economic and Inter-Ethnic Relations**

This section presents the key findings of the study, focusing on the assessment of the effect of border conflicts on local communities, with particular attention to socio-economic conditions and

inter-ethnic relations in the Meru-Tharaka region. A summary of the findings are presented in table 4.4.

**Table 4.4 analysis of Effect of Border Conflicts on Local Communities**

Main Theme	Specific Causes Identified	Youth	Business people	Policy Experts	NGOs	Gov. off	Politicians	Comm elders	Farmers	Women
Economic Disruption	- Businesses shut down	2	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Decline in customer activity	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Displacement and Insecurity	- Families move frequently	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	1
	- Loss of crops and homes	2	1	-	-	-	-	2	1	1
Inter-Ethnic Tensions	- People viewed negatively based on origin	2	-	-	-	-	4	1	-	1
	- Ethnic-based rumors	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Hate speech from leaders	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	1

The findings are discussed in detail in the subsequent subsections.

#### **4.6.1 Economic Disruption**

33% of the respondents highlighted economic disruption as a significant consequence of conflict. During periods of heightened tension, commercial activities are severely affected as fear and insecurity drive customers away, leading to a sharp decline in economic transactions. Small businesses, which form the backbone of local economies, are particularly vulnerable, with traders reporting losses due to looting, restricted movement, and the destruction of goods and property. The ripple effect extends beyond businesses to households, as families lose their primary sources of income and face difficulties meeting their basic needs.

The instability disproportionately impacts women and youth, who are heavily engaged in small-scale trading and informal employment. Respondents noted that women, who rely on market

spaces to sell produce and goods, are often forced to suspend their activities, exacerbating financial insecurity in already vulnerable households. Similarly, youth who depend on daily wages from casual labor or small enterprises find themselves without work, increasing their susceptibility to exploitation and recruitment into conflict. The disruption in economic stability not only deepens poverty but also prolongs tensions, as communities struggle to rebuild financial resilience amid ongoing uncertainty.

*“Normal running of socio-economic activities like businesses stops or come to a halt and businesses lose money as a result of interrupted flow of customers.” Youth 1 – Tharaka*

*“Whenever we find ourselves in the middle of this conflict, our businesses often enter into survival mode, others close down completely. Some people just opt to relocate their businesses before the violence hots up. In unfortunate occurrences, some business enterprises are burnt down.” Business Person 1 Meru*

#### **4.6.2 Displacement and Insecurity**

About 17% of respondents cited displacement and insecurity as severe consequences of recurring conflict, with families frequently forced to abandon their homes and livelihoods. Many reported losing properties, including homes, livestock, and crops, as violence erupts, leaving them with no choice but to seek refuge elsewhere. The cycle of forced relocation disrupts community cohesion and exacerbates economic hardship, as displaced individuals struggle to rebuild their lives in unfamiliar or temporary settlements. Women, in particular, face heightened vulnerability, often losing land and possessions while shouldering the burden of securing shelter and food for their families.

A youth respondent opined; they are particularly exposed to physical danger as they are often drawn into defending their communities. Many young men are caught in the crossfire, sustaining injuries or in worst case scenarios, losing their lives in the process. The continuous exposure to violence fosters deep-seated trauma, with respondents describing long-term psychological distress, including fear, anxiety, and hopelessness. Children are also deeply affected, as displacement disrupts their education and social development, limiting future opportunities and perpetuating the cycle of instability.

Insecurity remains a constant reality for affected communities, with respondents expressing frustration over the lack of sustained interventions to address the root causes of displacement. They noted that the absence of reliable protection mechanisms forces families to move repeatedly, never fully settling or regaining lost assets. 20% reported significant loss of crops and destruction of homes during episodes of conflict, leading to heightened economic hardship and prolonged displacement for affected families.

*“Unexpected movements and relocation and loss of property in the process of relocating is part of what we have gone through during the times of the conflict. At worst we end up being hosted by people whom we are not even related to. Agricultural activities stop and at times those attackers go ahead to cause destruction of our crop”.* **Woman 3 – Tigania East**

*Exposed to loss of property and loss of life. Youths are always on the front line of defense in their communities thus leading to many losses.* **Youth 1 – Tharaka**

#### **4.6.3 Inter-Ethnic Tensions**

Inter-ethnic tensions have led to deep social divisions, fostering hostility and distrust among communities. 17% of respondents cited widespread stereotyping and identity-based discrimination as key drivers of exclusion, making peaceful coexistence difficult. 3% described how ethnic-based rumors fuel suspicion, often leading to targeted discrimination, economic marginalization, and even violence. 37% cited hate speech from leaders which exacerbates these tensions, reinforcing negative perceptions and further entrenching social divides.

The effects of these tensions are particularly severe for women, who respondents noted face heightened vulnerability. Many women experience social exclusion, displacement, and gender-based violence, especially in conflict-prone areas. Their safety is frequently compromised due to the manipulation of ethnic identities in disputes, making them primary victims of instability.

Respondents also emphasized that inter-ethnic mistrust disrupts everyday interactions, weakening community cohesion and economic stability. Markets shrink as communities avoid trading with those from rival groups, while access to shared resources becomes a source of competition and conflict. Without deliberate reconciliation efforts, respondents warned, these divisions will continue to undermine peacebuilding and social harmony.

*“They incite communities against each other by issuing hate speeches to trigger tensions on one another. When they don’t want a community who have settled in some place, they will incite their community to displace them saying that they don’t belong there. Also, the interest of the rich/wealthy in society contributes to these conflicts.” **Community Elder 1 – Tharaka***

*Other times we are stereotyped based on our areas of origin; for instance, you'll often hear people say that ‘women from Tharaka have violence in their blood’ and thus they don't make good wives. **Woman 1 – Tharaka.***

#### **4.6.4 Summary of Findings**

Border conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka region have significantly impacted local communities by disrupting economic activities, causing displacement, and heightening inter-ethnic tensions. Small businesses suffer losses due to insecurity, with women and youth—who rely on informal trade—being the most affected. Recurring violence forces families to abandon their homes, leading to loss of property, livelihoods, and community cohesion, while exposing youth and women to greater physical and emotional risks. Additionally, the conflict fuels deep mistrust among ethnic groups, with hate speech and negative stereotyping undermining peaceful coexistence and further marginalizing vulnerable populations.

#### **4.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a comprehensive analysis of the key findings from the study, shedding light on the complex dynamics of communal border conflicts and ethnic struggles in the Meru-Tharaka region. The study highlights that the existing institutional frameworks, while addressing some aspects of conflict, are insufficient in tackling the underlying causes of these disputes. In particular, the exclusion of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as Njuri Ncheke, from formal governance structures has left a significant gap in conflict management strategies. Additionally, the lack of empowerment for marginalized groups, especially women and youth, further exacerbates the challenges of peacebuilding.

However, the findings also reveal several opportunities for intervention. By formally recognizing and integrating traditional conflict resolution practices, promoting inclusive

participation, and ensuring the involvement of marginalized groups in peace processes, sustainable solutions can be developed. The study further emphasizes the importance of transitioning from reactive, security-focused measures to proactive, community-driven approaches that are grounded in local realities.

The next chapter will explore the implications of these findings in greater detail, examining how they can shape policy decisions, influence government actions, and contribute to broader efforts toward conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Kenya and beyond.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a discussion of the key findings from the study, linking them to existing literature and theoretical perspectives. Specifically, the chapter examines the root causes of communal border conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka border region, evaluates existing policy and legislative frameworks for mitigating such conflicts, assesses the socio-economic and inter-ethnic effects of border disputes on local communities, and analyzes the impact of current conflict resolution mechanisms on the persistence of these conflicts. The chapter also provides conclusions drawn from the findings and offers recommendations for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and future study.

#### **5.2 Summary of the Findings**

The findings reveal that land disputes, unclear boundaries, and conflicting laws fuel tensions, worsened by political incitement and elite manipulation. Resource competition, particularly for water and arable land, exacerbates conflicts, especially during droughts. Ethnic marginalization, with the Tharaka community facing stereotypes and unequal service access, heightens grievances. Youth radicalization is driven by unemployment, with many being manipulated for violence but lacking peacebuilding alternatives. Legal gaps and weak policy enforcement allow disputes to persist, while inadequate funding hampers peace efforts, leaving committees and elders unsupported. Politicians engage in hate speech without accountability, further inflaming tensions. Although peace committees and traditional mechanisms like Njuri Ncheke play vital roles, they lack formal recognition and

sustainable resources. Women and youth remain excluded from official peace processes despite leading grassroots efforts. Economic disruption, displacement, and insecurity destabilize livelihoods, while inter-ethnic tensions rooted in stereotypes and distrust perpetuate conflict. The findings highlight the deep-seated structural, political, and social factors driving instability in the region.

### **5.3 Discussions of the Findings**

#### **5.3.1 Root Causes of Communal Border Conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka Border Region**

The study identified five key root causes of the Meru-Tharaka communal border conflict: land disputes, political incitement, resource competition, ethnic marginalization, and youth radicalization. The findings reveal that land disputes are the primary driver of communal tensions in the Meru-Tharaka region. In line with Resource Scarcity Theory (RST), the conflict stems from historical boundary ambiguities, conflicting land tenure systems, and contested land ownership claims. The study confirms the observations of Ngunjiri (2018), who argues that colonial-era land policies disrupted indigenous governance structures, leading to long-standing disputes. Contrary to Mwangi (2020), who suggests that legal frameworks have effectively addressed historical land injustices, this study finds that unresolved adjudication processes continue to fuel tensions. Respondents emphasized that past attempts to demarcate boundaries have been met with resistance due to a lack of community involvement and the failure to align legal frameworks with customary land tenure systems.

The study finds that political actors frequently exploit historical grievances for electoral gains, intensifying intercommunal hostilities. In line with Social Identity Theory (SIT), political leaders mobilize communities along ethnic lines, framing land disputes as existential threats to group identity. These findings support Kimani and Kinyua (2023), who argue that political incitement transforms land conflicts into broader ethnic rivalries, making them harder to resolve. Contrary to the assumption that grassroots peacebuilding initiatives neutralize political interference (Mwaura, 2022), this study finds that such efforts are often undermined by elite-driven narratives that fuel mistrust between communities. Respondents noted that inflammatory rhetoric during election periods escalates tensions, making political incitement a persistent driver of conflict.

While resource scarcity has traditionally been cited as the main cause of communal conflicts, this study finds that it amplifies pre-existing tensions rather than initiating them. The study aligns with Wanjala and Munene (2023), who note that competition for pasture, water, and agricultural land exacerbates historical disputes. However, contrary to Ouma (2022), who asserts that resource competition is the primary cause of intercommunal conflict, the findings suggest that land ownership disputes and political incitement create the foundation for conflict, with resource scarcity acting as a trigger. Respondents emphasized that conflicts tend to intensify during droughts, as competition over scarce resources becomes a flashpoint for violence.

The study finds that ethnic marginalization fuels resentment and sustains hostilities in the Meru-Tharaka region. Respondents expressed that government-led development projects, resource allocation, and administrative decisions disproportionately favor one community over the other, reinforcing perceptions of exclusion. These findings align with Mulu (2021), who argues that ethnic-based marginalization exacerbates communal tensions by creating economic and political inequalities. In contrast to the claims of Mwangi, (2020) who suggests that devolution has reduced ethnic inequalities, this study finds that localized power struggles have, in some cases, deepened marginalization. Respondents emphasized that perceived injustices in government appointments and service delivery contribute to a sense of alienation, making ethnic grievances a critical factor in sustaining conflict.

The study reveals that youth radicalization has emerged as a new and growing driver of communal conflict in the Meru-Tharaka region. Economic deprivation, political manipulation, and ethnic identity narratives have contributed to the recruitment of young people into violent confrontations. This finding supports Kimani and Kinyua (2023), who identify youth radicalization as an overlooked but increasingly significant factor in local conflicts. Respondents noted that joblessness and lack of opportunities make young people vulnerable to political exploitation, leading them to participate in violence. Contrary to Mwaura (2022), who argues that economic empowerment programs have reduced youth involvement in conflict, this study finds that such initiatives remain insufficient and poorly implemented. Respondents highlighted that without long-term interventions addressing education, employment, and civic engagement, youth radicalization will continue to escalate tensions.

The findings underscore the need for a comprehensive approach that tackles both structural and historical drivers of conflict. While resource scarcity and ethnic tensions exacerbate disputes, unresolved land issues and political interference sustain them. Unlike previous studies that emphasize economic factors, this study highlights governance failures and historical injustices as key conflict drivers. Lasting peace requires legal reforms, political accountability, equitable resource distribution, and youth empowerment initiatives.

### **5.3.2 Appraisal of existing policy and legislative frameworks for mitigating communal border conflicts in Kenya, focusing on the Meru-Tharaka border region**

The findings from this study reveal several critical issues with the effectiveness of Kenya's existing policy and legislative frameworks for mitigating communal border conflicts, particularly in the Meru-Tharaka region. While Kenya has established a comprehensive legal and policy framework for conflict resolution, the study highlights that these frameworks are often inadequately enforced and poorly adapted to the specific dynamics of border conflicts, especially at the local level.

A central finding of this study is the legal inconsistencies that exacerbate land disputes in the Meru-Tharaka region. The conflicting policies, such as CAP 283 and CAP 284 of the Constitution, have created ambiguity in boundary demarcation, which has fueled tensions between the Meru and Tharaka communities. This aligns with Resource Scarcity Theory (RST), as the scarcity of land and water resources becomes a flashpoint for conflict. The findings emphasize that legal harmonization is needed to create clear and enforceable frameworks for land management, thus reducing conflicts driven by resource scarcity.

However, contrary to economic-centric views on border conflicts, the study found that historical grievances and identity-based rivalries have a more profound impact on the Meru-Tharaka conflict than purely economic factors. This supports Social Identity Theory (SIT), which asserts that perceived injustices and divisive rhetoric around ethnic identity are central to the persistence of the conflict. Historical grievances, including disputes over land ownership and the legacy of past injustices, have continued to fuel hostility between the two communities, suggesting that addressing these deeper socio-cultural issues is crucial for effective conflict resolution.

The appraisal of existing policies aimed at mitigating conflict in the Meru-Tharaka border region has provided valuable insights into their effectiveness, limitations, and the critical gaps that hinder their success in addressing the region's unique conflict dynamics. The findings indicate that while national and local policies have laid the groundwork for peacebuilding, their application in the Meru-Tharaka context remains insufficient and disconnected from the local realities.

A major finding from the policy analysis is that the National Policy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management, though well-intentioned, often falls short in addressing the specific, localized tensions that fuel the Meru-Tharaka conflict. The policy's broad national focus does not adequately cater to the unique socio-cultural and political dynamics of the region, leaving certain critical issues, such as land disputes, unaddressed. The lack of specificity in terms of actionable strategies for resolving conflicts in regions like Meru and Tharaka further undermines its effectiveness.

Similarly, the Land Act of 2012, a key legislative framework for resolving land-related conflicts, reveals significant inconsistencies between statutory law and traditional land tenure systems. The failure to integrate customary land rights into formal law creates a disconnect that perpetuates land-related conflicts, particularly in rural areas where traditional practices are deeply ingrained. This gap in policy implementation exacerbates tensions between the Meru and Tharaka communities, leading to protracted conflicts and undermining efforts toward peacebuilding.

The Peace and Security Council Resolution on Community Peacebuilding presents a more localized approach by advocating for community-based peace initiatives. However, its effectiveness has been limited by resource constraints and the insufficient recognition of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. The role of community elders, who remain key to resolving disputes, is often overlooked in policy frameworks that prioritize formal, top-down approaches to conflict resolution. This highlights the critical need for policies that more actively involve local structures in peacebuilding efforts.

The study also supports the observations of Mwaura (2022), who highlights that while Kenya's policy frameworks, such as those implemented by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), aim to foster peace through institutional mechanisms, these efforts are

often hindered by resource constraints and political interference. As seen in the Meru-Tharaka context, these peacebuilding mechanisms fail to reach grassroots communities effectively, further marginalizing the most affected populations. Additionally, the study corroborates the findings of Ngunjiri (2018), which emphasize the gaps in integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms with formal legal frameworks. Traditional practices, while trusted by local communities, lack legal reinforcement, and as such, they remain disconnected from the formal peacebuilding efforts. This creates a divide between the formal governance structures and the customary practices that remain highly effective in resolving disputes locally.

The findings diverge from the conclusions of Mwangi (2020), who suggested that formal conflict resolution mechanisms in Kenya are effective. This study reveals that communities often perceive these mechanisms as disconnected from their lived realities. While formal systems may provide theoretical solutions, they are often not practical or accessible in the context of the Meru-Tharaka conflict. In contrast, informal mediation efforts, such as those led by community elders, yield more immediate resolutions, though they lack legal backing. This highlights a significant gap between policy formulation and practical application, suggesting that a more integrated approach is required—one that blends formal legal systems with indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, as recommended by Kimani and Kinyua (2023).

The study further supports the findings of Wanjala and Munene (2023), who note that bureaucratic inefficiencies and limited community engagement undermine the successful implementation of policies like the National Land Policy and the Community Land Act. Although these policies are designed to promote equitable resource distribution, they have not sufficiently addressed the historical grievances and competition for land that are central to the Meru-Tharaka conflict. Similarly, the findings align with Mulu (2021), who argues that land disputes and historical injustices are the primary drivers of the conflict, and highlights the deep interconnection between resource competition and past grievances.

Another critical issue identified in the study is the role of political dynamics in sustaining the conflict. As noted by Kimani and Kinyua (2023), political manipulation and weak institutional coordination have contributed to the failure of conflict resolution efforts. In the Meru-Tharaka region, local leaders often exploit ethnic divisions for electoral gain, which exacerbates tensions

and complicates efforts to achieve lasting peace. This study underscores the need for more effective political leadership and institutional coordination to foster long-term stability.

In conclusion, the findings confirm that while Kenya's policy and legislative frameworks provide a foundation for conflict resolution, their effectiveness is significantly hindered by weak enforcement, lack of adaptation to local realities, and inadequate integration with traditional peacebuilding mechanisms. The policies reviewed reveal significant gaps in addressing the root causes of conflict, including land disputes, ethnic tensions, and historical grievances. The failure to integrate these factors into the policy frameworks has limited the long-term sustainability of peace in the Meru-Tharaka border region. Addressing these gaps requires stronger institutional support, better coordination between national and local efforts, and more inclusive approaches that actively involve communities in both policymaking and the implementation process. Only by bridging the divide between formal legal structures and indigenous conflict resolution methods can sustainable peace be achieved in the Meru-Tharaka region.

#### **5.3.4 Evaluation of the Impact of Current Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in the Meru-Tharaka Region**

The study evaluated the effectiveness of existing conflict resolution mechanisms in mitigating border conflicts in the Meru-Tharaka region. The findings reveal that while community-based initiatives such as peace committees, public barazas, and the Nyumba Kumi initiative have played a vital role in fostering grassroots conflict resolution, their sustainability and overall impact remain limited due to inadequate institutional support and political interference. Similarly, traditional mechanisms, particularly the Njuri Ncheke, have long been instrumental in resolving disputes, but their lack of legal recognition and integration into formal governance structures restricts their long-term effectiveness.

The findings highlight significant and unexpected results regarding the role of traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. In line with the study questions, the study confirms that the Njuri Ncheke remains a highly respected conflict resolution institution due to its deep-rooted cultural legitimacy and historical authority. However, contrary to the expectations that formal governance structures would have a dominant role in dispute resolution, respondents overwhelmingly preferred traditional mechanisms over government interventions. This aligns

with Social Capital Theory (SCT), which posits that trust-based, community-led approaches are more effective in resolving localized disputes than external interventions.

The study supports the observations of Mwaura (2022), who highlights that peace committees and community dialogues foster reconciliation by providing platforms for local actors to deliberate and mediate disputes. However, these initiatives often face sustainability challenges due to a lack of formal funding and structured institutional backing. Similarly, the findings align with Ngunjiri (2018), who underscores that political interference weakens the neutrality of peace committees, limiting their ability to implement long-term conflict resolution strategies. The study further confirms that while grassroots mediation is effective, the lack of policy frameworks integrating these mechanisms into national conflict resolution efforts hinders their broader impact, as also observed by Ouma (2022).

Contrary to the optimism expressed by Mwangi (2020) regarding the effectiveness of formal peacebuilding mechanisms, the study finds that many respondents view government-led initiatives as disconnected from their realities. Instead, informal mediation efforts—particularly those led by the Njuri Ncheke—are often perceived as more legitimate and effective. However, this reliance on informal systems creates a legal gap, as their decisions lack enforceability within statutory frameworks. This finding supports the argument by Kimani and Kinyua (2023), who advocate for a hybrid approach that formally recognizes traditional conflict resolution mechanisms while maintaining legal oversight.

Furthermore, the study corroborates the findings of Wanjala and Munene (2023), who note that bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of coordination among government agencies hinder the implementation of national peace policies. While the Community Land Act and National Land Policy aim to promote equitable conflict resolution, their practical impact remains limited due to weak enforcement at the local level. This study also aligns with Mulu (2021), who identifies political dynamics and the absence of formal boundary demarcation as major obstacles to sustainable peacebuilding.

Overall, the findings confirm that while peace committees, community dialogues, and traditional mechanisms contribute significantly to conflict resolution, their effectiveness is

hindered by weak institutional support, lack of legal recognition, and political interference. Addressing these challenges requires a more integrated approach that formalizes traditional mediation mechanisms, strengthens community-based peace initiatives, and enhances coordination between grassroots actors and national institutions. Without addressing these structural limitations, the long-term sustainability of current conflict resolution efforts will remain in question.

### **5.3.5 Impact of the Meru-Tharaka Border Conflict on Local Communities**

The study evaluated the effects of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict on local communities, focusing on socio-economic development and inter-ethnic relations. The findings reveal that persistent conflicts have significantly disrupted livelihoods, deepened inter-ethnic tensions, hampering regional development. The cyclical nature of violence has created an atmosphere of instability, discouraging investment and long-term planning among residents.

The findings highlight significant and unexpected results regarding the socio-economic consequences of the conflict. In line with the study questions, the study confirms that land-related disputes and political incitement have fueled displacements, leading to loss of agricultural productivity and reduced access to essential services. The destruction of farms and restricted mobility due to insecurity have exacerbated food shortages and economic hardships. This aligns with Resource Scarcity Theory (RST), which posits that competition over finite resources intensifies inter-group conflicts. Respondents emphasized that frequent disruptions to economic activities have led to reduced income levels and increased poverty, further perpetuating cycles of violence.

Contrary to previous studies that primarily associate border conflicts with economic competition, this study finds that the erosion of inter-ethnic trust plays an equally, if not more, significant role in sustaining hostilities. In support of Social Identity Theory (SIT), the findings demonstrate that deeply ingrained perceptions of 'us versus them' fuel resentment and reinforce group-based hostilities. Respondents reported that historical grievances, compounded by political rhetoric, have deepened mistrust between Meru and Tharaka communities, making reconciliation efforts difficult. This contradicts the assertions by Muiru (2020), who argued that

economic grievances are the predominant factor in border conflicts. Instead, this study suggests that identity-based tensions and political mobilization are key drivers of prolonged conflict.

The study supports the observations of (Njenga, 2023), who highlight that conflict-affected regions often experience significant setbacks in education and healthcare access. Schools and health centers in volatile areas face frequent closures due to security concerns, limiting learning opportunities and medical services. The findings also align with Kimani and Kinyua, (2023), who identify forced displacements as a major consequence of communal conflicts, leading to fractured social structures and long-term displacement trauma. The study further corroborates Ochieng (2020), who argues that economic deprivation resulting from conflict disproportionately affects women and children, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and marginalization.

Contrary to the policy effectiveness suggested by (Kariuki, and Njogu, 2022), who assert that government intervention has mitigated the worst socio-economic impacts of communal conflicts, this study finds that state-led responses have been largely reactionary rather than preventive. Respondents indicated that relief efforts and security deployments are short-lived, failing to address the root causes of the conflict. This highlights a critical gap between policy intentions and real-world outcomes, necessitating a more sustainable, community-driven approach to conflict resolution.

Furthermore, the findings align with (Mwangi, 2020), who argues that conflicts erode social cohesion by entrenching ethnic divisions. The study finds that communal tensions manifest in everyday interactions, limiting cross-community collaboration in trade, governance, and social initiatives. As a result, efforts to foster inter-ethnic unity often struggle to gain traction due to prevailing mistrust and fear of betrayal. Overall, the results reinforce the need for a holistic approach to conflict mitigation that goes beyond economic interventions. Addressing the socio-economic and inter-ethnic impacts of the Meru-Tharaka conflict requires policy reforms that prioritize equitable resource distribution, community-based reconciliation programs, and inclusive governance structures. Without targeted efforts to rebuild trust and promote sustainable economic development, the region will continue to experience cycles of instability that hinder long-term growth and peaceful coexistence.

## 5.4 Conclusions of the Study

The study investigated the underlying causes of the communal border conflicts between the Meru and Tharaka communities, revealing that the roots of these conflicts lie in unclear land boundaries, conflicting legal frameworks, competition for resources, and ethnic marginalization. These factors are deeply interconnected, creating a cycle of tension and violence that continues to fuel hostilities between the communities. The study concludes that addressing these root causes is vital to mitigating the conflict and preventing further escalation.

In evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies and frameworks in managing communal conflicts, the study found that while policies are in place, they often fall short in addressing the complex and dynamic nature of the conflict. Issues such as ambiguity in the legal system, policy inertia, and the exclusion of critical social groups from the implementation process have contributed to the ineffectiveness of these frameworks. Consequently, the study highlights the urgent need for reform at both the national and local levels in policy formulation and implementation to ensure more effective conflict management.

The study also explored the role of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly the Njuri Ncheke, which are deeply embedded in the local communities and trusted by the people to manage communal conflicts. Traditional leaders play a crucial role in maintaining peace and stability within these communities. The study concludes that integrating these traditional conflict resolution mechanisms into the formal conflict resolution framework could enhance peacebuilding efforts, bridging the gap between informal and formal systems of governance.

Furthermore, the study examined the participation of marginalized groups, especially women and youth, in peacebuilding initiatives. It found that these groups are often excluded from formal peacebuilding processes despite their significant potential to contribute. This exclusion exacerbates grievances and undermines the sustainability of peace efforts. Therefore, the study concludes that empowering women and youth to actively participate in peacebuilding roles is essential for fostering a more inclusive, effective, and enduring peace in the region.

In conclusion, the study asserts that border conflict management in Kenya, specifically in the Meru-Tharaka region, requires a multifaceted approach that integrates traditional conflict

resolution mechanisms with formal legal frameworks. By addressing the root causes of conflict, improving policy enforcement, and empowering marginalized groups, a sustainable peace can be achieved. The study advocates for the creation of a hybrid conflict resolution system that is inclusive, context-sensitive, and tailored to address the unique challenges of the Meru-Tharaka conflict. This approach could serve as a model for conflict management in other regions of Kenya and beyond.

### **5.5 Implications of the study**

The findings of the study underscore the need for a transformative shift in Kenya's approach to managing communal conflicts. It is evident that addressing such conflicts requires more than the mere formulation of new policies; it demands a deep, systemic transformation of existing institutions and frameworks. The study highlights the critical need to formally recognize and integrate traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as the Njuri Ncheke, into the national legal framework. By institutionalizing these mechanisms and establishing peace committees with clear legal mandates and dedicated budgets, Kenya can build a more robust and inclusive system for managing conflicts at the community level.

Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of designing conflict resolution strategies that are genuinely inclusive. Specifically, it advocates for empowering marginalized groups—particularly women and youth—to become active agents of peace. These groups should no longer be seen as passive victims or political tools, but as key players in fostering peace and stability. By focusing on inclusivity, the study provides actionable recommendations for creating more equitable and sustainable peacebuilding processes.

In practical terms, the study offers a roadmap for conflict-sensitive development, particularly for Meru-Tharaka and other similar regions. By integrating these insights into local county planning and budgeting processes, interventions can transition from reactive, security-driven approaches to proactive, participatory models that are grounded in local realities. Such an approach would not only enhance the effectiveness of conflict resolution efforts but also ensure that these efforts are sustainable and widely supported by the communities they seek to serve.

Furthermore, by highlighting existing systemic gaps and proposing locally resonant solutions, the study makes an important contribution to the broader academic discourse on conflict

resolution. It offers valuable lessons for policymakers in Kenya and other regions facing similar ethnic and communal struggles. These insights can guide the development of more effective, inclusive, and context-specific peacebuilding strategies. Ultimately, the study advocates for a shift towards a more holistic and people-centered approach to conflict resolution, one that recognizes the importance of local knowledge, traditional practices, and community-driven initiatives.

Moreover, the study can significantly shape the actions of government agencies tasked with conflict management and peacebuilding. It provides a clear framework for policy adaptation that can influence how government departments, including the Ministry of Interior and National Coordination, the National Land Commission, and local county governments, design and implement conflict resolution strategies. The findings urge these agencies to align their efforts with locally driven peace processes, leveraging traditional and community-based mechanisms to ensure that solutions are sustainable and culturally relevant.

In addition to shaping government actions, the study's insights could have a lasting impact on constitutional reforms. It calls for the integration of locally recognized conflict resolution practices into national governance structures, which could inform ongoing discussions around constitutional reforms aimed at enhancing community autonomy and self-governance in conflict-prone regions. By recommending constitutional amendments that provide legal backing to traditional conflict resolution systems, the study advocates for a legal framework that supports hybrid models of conflict management, blending modern governance structures with traditional community practices. This could lead to more inclusive, localized, and effective governance in conflict-affected regions.

The implications of this study extend beyond Kenya, offering valuable lessons for other countries and regions plagued by communal border conflicts and ethnic struggles. By fostering a deeper understanding of the root causes of conflict and promoting collaborative, inclusive solutions, the study can contribute to efforts aimed at promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion across diverse communities. In regions affected by similar challenges, the insights from the study can be used to develop tailored peacebuilding strategies that not only address the symptoms of conflict but also tackle its underlying causes, ultimately fostering long-term harmony and stability.

## **5.6 Recommendations of the Study**

In light of the research findings, the study calls for a rethinking of current conflict resolution practices, advocating for a more integrated approach that draws on both traditional and modern mechanisms. This approach has the potential to promote lasting peace, stability, and harmonious coexistence in Meru, Tharaka, and other regions facing similar challenges. The national and county governments should institutionalize a hybrid conflict resolution framework that formally integrates traditional mechanisms (such as Njuri Ncheke) with statutory legal systems. This framework should be grounded in constitutional legitimacy, supported by legislation, and implemented through a structured interface between customary elders, peace committees, and state institutions. Such a model would enhance local ownership of peace processes, close gaps between informal and formal systems, and ensure that indigenous dispute resolution practices are adequately resourced, recognized, and monitored.

The Ministry of Interior, County Governments, and relevant agencies should embed conflict sensitivity, historical grievance redress, and equity-based resource allocation into all development and land adjudication processes in conflict-prone areas. This includes mainstreaming inclusive participation of women, youth, and marginalized ethnic groups into policy formulation, budgeting, and implementation, not as beneficiaries, but as strategic stakeholders. Doing so would shift interventions from reactive crisis management to preventive peacebuilding and address the root structural inequalities that perpetuate communal tensions.

## **5.7 Limitations of the study**

Access to certain government records and policy implementation reports was constrained, limiting the study's ability to comprehensively assess the enforcement and operationalization of national and county-level conflict management policies. Additionally, sensitive political dynamics surrounding land ownership and ethnic tensions may have influenced the openness of some respondents, particularly those in public office, potentially leading to response bias.

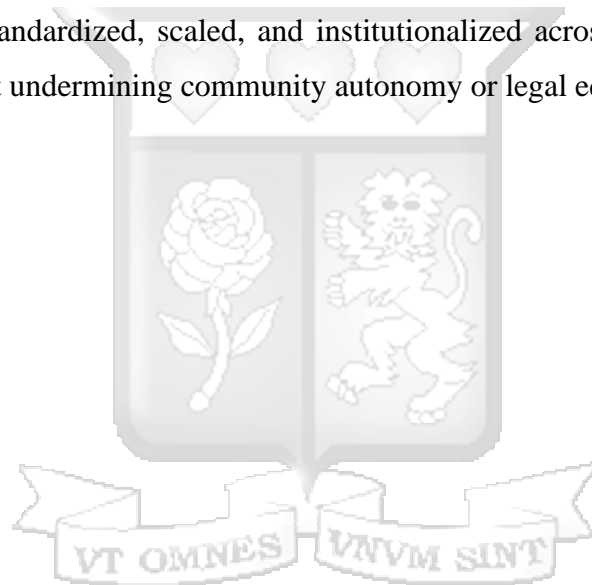
The study relied heavily on qualitative data drawn from interviews and focus group discussions, which, while rich in depth and context, may be limited in terms of generalizability. The perspectives captured reflect the lived experiences of participants within a specific geographical

and cultural setting and may not fully represent the complexity of similar conflicts in other regions of Kenya.

Despite these limitations, the study remains a critical step toward understanding and addressing the complex nature of communal border conflicts in Kenya and offers a strong foundation for continued study and policy development.

### **5.8 Areas for further study**

Future study should explore the long-term effectiveness and legitimacy of hybrid conflict resolution systems that integrate traditional institutions (such as Njuri Ncheke) with formal judicial and administrative mechanisms. Specifically, there is a need to investigate how such hybrid models can be standardized, scaled, and institutionalized across diverse cultural and political contexts without undermining community autonomy or legal equity.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

#### **Study Title: Evaluating Policies, Factors, and Interventions in the Meru-Tharaka Border Conflict**

Principal Investigator:  
Eric Githinji Mahinge  
Master of Public Policy, Strathmore University  
Email: [mahinge.githinji@strathmore.edu](mailto:mahinge.githinji@strathmore.edu)

Date: 10.03.2025

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student at Strathmore University-Business School, conducting a study titled "**Evaluating Policies, Factors, and Interventions in the Meru-Tharaka Border Conflict.**" The objective of this study is to explore the effectiveness of current policies in mitigating communal conflicts, investigate contributing factors, assess the socio-economic impacts, and identify potential interventions for sustainable peace in the Meru-Tharaka border region.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

You are being invited to participate in this study because your experience and knowledge can provide valuable insights into the conflict and potential solutions. The information gathered will contribute to a deeper understanding of how to address and resolve communal border conflicts in Kenya.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose to participate or withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. You are also free to skip any questions or decline to discuss any topic that makes you uncomfortable.

#### **Confidentiality**

The information you provide were treated with the utmost confidentiality. Your identity and responses will remain anonymous, and no personally identifiable information were disclosed in any reports or publications. The data collected were securely stored, and only the study team will have access to it.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you were asked to engage in an interview or focus group discussion lasting approximately [60-90] minutes. The session will be recorded for transcription purposes, but your name will not be included in any records. The results of the study may be published, but no information that could reveal your identity were included.

#### **Consent Form**

Please read the statements below and sign to indicate your consent to participate in this study:

- I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time.

- I understand that my responses were kept confidential.
- I agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at [mahinge.githinji@strathmore.edu](mailto:mahinge.githinji@strathmore.edu). Thank you for your valuable contribution.

Sincerely,  
Eric Githinji Mahinge



## APPENDIX 2: LETTER TO RESPONDENTS

Strathmore University  
Business School  
09.09.2024

Dear Respondent',

### **Subject: Invitation to Participate in Study on the Meru-Tharaka Border Conflict**

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study that I am conducting as part of my Master of Public Policy degree at Strathmore University- Business School. The study, titled "**Evaluating Policies, Factors, and Interventions in the Meru-Tharaka Border Conflict,**" aims to assess the current policies and strategies used to manage communal border conflicts in the region, understand the factors contributing to conflict persistence, and explore potential interventions for peacebuilding.

As someone with knowledge and experience related to the Meru-Tharaka border region, your input would provide valuable insights that will help inform the study's findings. Your participation would involve an interview or focus group discussion, where we will discuss your perspectives on the conflict, the impact it has had on the community, and potential solutions. The session will take approximately [30] minutes.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and all information provided were kept strictly confidential. If you choose to participate, your identity will be protected, and your responses were anonymized in any published findings.

If you are interested in contributing to this study, please let me know by [date], and we can arrange a time that is convenient for you. If you have any questions about the study or your potential involvement, feel free to contact me at [mahinge.githinji@strathmore.edu](mailto:mahinge.githinji@strathmore.edu) or by phone at 0704963405.

Thank you for considering this invitation. I appreciate your time and hope to work with you on this important study.

Sincerely,

Eric Githinji Mahinge  
Master of Public Policy  
Strathmore University- Business School



## APPENDIX 3: STRATHMORE RESEARCH FACILITATION LETTER



21<sup>st</sup> February 2025

Mr Mahinge Eric,  
mahinge.githinji@strathmore.edu

Dear Mr Mahinge,

**RE: Border Conflict Management in Kenya: A Case of the Meru-Tharaka Communities**

This is to inform you that SU-ISERC has reviewed and **approved** your above **SU-masters** proposal. Your application reference number is **SU-ISERC2632/25**. The approval period is from **21<sup>st</sup> February 2025 to 20<sup>th</sup> February 2026**.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements:

- i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used.
- ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by SU-ISERC.
- iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SU-ISERC within 72 hours of notification.
- iv. Any changes anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to SU-ISERC within 72 hours.
- v. Clearance for the export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to the expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days of completion of the study to SU-ISERC.






Before commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) <https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke/> and obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ambrose Rachier".

**Mr Ambrose Rachier,**  
**Chairperson; SU-ISERC**

# APPENDIX 4: STUDY PERMIT NACOSTI

 <b>REPUBLIC OF KENYA</b>	 <b>NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &amp; INNOVATION.</b>
Ref No: <b>339429</b>	Date of Issue: <b>14/February/2025</b>
<b>RESEARCH LICENSE</b>	
	
<b>This is to Certify that Mr., Eric Githinji Mahinge of Strathmore University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Meru, Tharaka-Nithi on the topic: Communal Border Conflicts and Ethnic Struggles in Kenya: A Case Study of the Meru-Tharaka Border Conflict for the period ending : 14/February/2026.</b>	
License No: <b>NACOSTI/P/25/415962</b>	
Applicant Identification Number <b>339429</b>	 <b>Director General NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &amp; INNOVATION</b>
Verification QR Code	
	
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<b>See overleaf for conditions</b>	

**APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW SHEET TEMPLATE**

**Interview Sheet:**

**Study Project Title:** *BORDER CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN KENYA: A CASE OF THE MERU-THARAKA COMMUNITIES*

**Objective:** To analyze the effectiveness of existing policies and laws in mitigating communal border conflicts in Kenya, focusing on the Meru-Tharaka border region.

**Interviewer Name:** .....

**Interviewee Information**

- **Position/Title:** .....
- **Organization/Affiliation:** .....
- **Interview Date and Time:** .....
- **Location:** .....

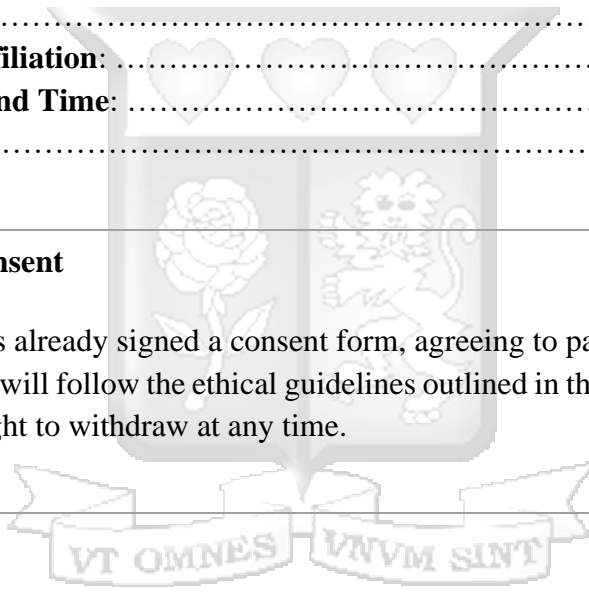
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**Acknowledgment of Consent**

*Note:* The interviewee has already signed a consent form, agreeing to participate voluntarily in this study. This interview will follow the ethical guidelines outlined in that document, including confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time.

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**Interview Questions**



## **APPENDIX 6: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **A. Community Elders (2 Meru, 2 Tharaka)**

1. Can you describe the historical context of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict?
2. What cultural or traditional factors do you believe have contributed to the persistence of the conflict?
3. How have historical grievances between the Meru and Tharaka communities shaped current tensions?
4. What traditional conflict resolution mechanisms have been used in the past, and how effective have they been?
5. What changes have you observed in community dynamics over the years due to the conflict?
6. What role do you believe elders can play in promoting sustainable peace?

### **B. Local Political Leaders (1 Meru, 1 Tharaka)**

1. What are the main political factors that have contributed to the continuation of the Meru-Tharaka border conflict?
2. How have local politics influenced inter-ethnic relations in the region?
3. What policy or legislative interventions have been initiated by local governments to address the conflict?
4. What challenges have been encountered in implementing these interventions?
5. How can political leadership contribute to sustainable conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the region?
6. What strategies could enhance cooperation between political leaders of the two communities?

### **C. NGO Representatives (1 Meru, 1 Tharaka)**

1. What key interventions have NGOs implemented to address the Meru-Tharaka border conflict?
2. How effective have these interventions been, and what challenges have been encountered?
3. What are the main gaps in current peacebuilding strategies?

4. How do NGOs engage with local communities and government bodies to promote conflict resolution?
5. In your view, what community-driven strategies could foster sustainable peace?
6. How can NGOs better support community efforts in conflict mitigation?

**D. Government Officials (2 Meru, 2 Tharaka)**

1. What policies or legislative frameworks exist to address communal border conflicts in Kenya, specifically in the Meru-Tharaka region?
2. How are these policies implemented at the local level, and what challenges have been faced?
3. How does the government collaborate with local communities and other stakeholders in conflict resolution efforts?
4. What are the main gaps or limitations in current policy frameworks?
5. How can policy interventions be improved to address the unique dynamics of the Meru-Tharaka conflict?
6. What mechanisms are in place to ensure the sustainability of peace initiatives?

**E. Legal/Policy Experts (2 Meru, 2 Tharaka)**

1. How effective are the existing legal frameworks in mitigating communal border conflicts in Kenya?
2. What legal gaps have contributed to the persistence of the Meru-Tharaka conflict?
3. How well do current laws address the specific needs and dynamics of the affected communities?
4. What recommendations would you propose for improving legal frameworks to support sustainable conflict resolution?
5. How can the law be better integrated with traditional and community-driven peace initiatives?
6. What role can policy advocacy play in shaping more effective conflict mitigation strategies?

**F. Farmers (2 Meru, 2 Tharaka)**

1. How has the Meru-Tharaka conflict affected agricultural activities and land use?

2. What are the main challenges you face in securing agricultural resources due to the conflict?
3. How do land disputes contribute to ongoing tensions in the region?
4. What interventions would support farmers in mitigating conflict over land resources?
5. How can community cooperation be enhanced to ensure sustainable land use and conflict mitigation?
6. What role can local and national policies play in securing agricultural livelihoods in conflict-affected areas?

**G. Business People (2 Meru, 2 Tharaka)**

1. How has the conflict impacted local trade and economic growth in your community?
2. What are the key economic challenges resulting from the conflict?
3. How have inter-community relations influenced business operations in the region?
4. What interventions would help promote economic stability and peace in the area?
5. How can local businesses contribute to peacebuilding efforts?
6. What role can government policies play in supporting business growth amid conflict?

**H. Women (2 Meru, 2 Tharaka)**

1. How has the conflict affected women's access to resources and opportunities?
2. What unique challenges do women face as a result of the conflict?
3. How are women participating in peacebuilding efforts within the community?
4. What interventions could support women in mitigating the impacts of conflict?
5. How can women's roles in traditional and modern conflict resolution mechanisms be strengthened?
6. What policies could better protect women and enhance their participation in conflict resolution processes?

**I. Youth (1 Meru, 1 Tharaka)**

1. How has the conflict influenced youth engagement in socio-economic activities?
2. What role do youth play in either perpetuating or resolving the conflict?
3. What challenges do young people face due to the conflict?
4. How can youth be empowered to contribute to peacebuilding efforts?

5. What interventions would support youth development and conflict mitigation?
6. How can government and community initiatives better engage youth in sustainable peace efforts?

