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# The nature and causes of conflict among communities bordering Borabu-Sotik Border Kenya

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## Abstract

This study sought to analyse the nature and causes of conflict among communities bordering Borabu-Sotik border Kenya. Cross-border conflicts have long existed worldwide, with recent ethnic and communal tensions affecting Africa, including Kenya. This study utilised descriptive statistics and a qualitative research design, focusing on churches at the Borabu-Sotik border, such as SDA, PAG, and Catholic, with a target population of 7,738 respondents. In the context of interfaith relations at Borabu and Sotik, churches play a significant role in conflict resolution through mediation and negotiations. Religious leaders actively mediate disputes and promote compromises between conflicting parties. Additionally, the church contributes to nation building by advocating for peace and supporting youth often involved in conflicts. The church collaborates with the government and other agencies to address social issues like land rights and ethnic discrimination, thus maintaining stability and security. The study used purposive and simple random sampling to select a sample size of 392 respondents, comprising 35 church leaders and 357 church members. Proportionate sampling methods were employed to categorize the sample according to churches. Stratified random sampling was used to select the respondents, who were then given questionnaires. Data collection tools included interview schedules for church leaders, questionnaires for church members, focus group discussions, and a checklist. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, means, and standard deviations were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

**Keywords:** Cross-border conflicts, conflict resolution, interfaith relations, peace initiatives, and religious mediation.



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## INTRODUCTION

Social cohesion issues are increasing, as communities feel increasingly disconnected from the local and national entities they belong to, thus affecting intercommunity relations. Wrong (2019) argues that contemporary discussions in philosophy and socialism emphasize social cohesion as a problem of social order. Social disorders contributing to the breakdown of social cohesion include displacement of people, lack of civic participation, unemployment, and economic inequalities (Harff, 2018). Today's headlines highlight that major multinational conflicts stem from ethnic and social identities. Consequently, the problem of social cohesion has permeated every aspect of diverse people's lives worldwide. International organizations, including the World Bank, have been involved in addressing social cohesion and its global importance.

Issues with social cohesion have repercussions on global well-being and the prosperity of countries worldwide (Cote & Healy, 2001). World Bank findings (2011) indicate that countries experiencing social cohesion problems have a higher propensity for violence and conflicts, resulting in slower development than those maintaining peace. Global (2018) reports that the erosion of social cohesion has led to unchecked violence, contributing to insecurity and hampering global productivity and economies.

Schmitt (2000) agrees that countries lacking social cohesion experience various negative outcomes, including violent crimes, social tension, human rights violations, and conflicts. Intolerance and disrespect for individuals and institutions are prevalent in such societies. Intercommunal conflicts worldwide have resulted in over 50,000 deaths across 54 sampled states. The deadliest conflicts include those in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, India, and the Philippines, with Syria experiencing a devastating loss of 1.6% of its population due to conflict. Additionally, Bosnia-Herzegovina lost 0.4% of its population in intercommunal conflict-related killings in the 1990s (Eck et al., 2018). Rodrik (2019) demonstrates how the absence of social cohesion exacerbates crises and political tensions, as seen in Indonesia. In Africa, ethnic tensions, demographic pressures, and religious conflicts hinder social cohesion (Ikelegbe, 2006). Fractured resource exploitation has fueled conflicts in countries like Nigeria, the DRC, and

Sierra Leone (Lujala, 2010). Ethnic conflicts have led to widespread suffering and loss of life, emphasizing the importance of social cohesion.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter analyzes the historical relations between the Kipsigis and Abagusii along the Sotik-Borabu border. This enables the researcher to trace the relations between the two communities before 1963. Through historical analysis, we ascertain whether conflicts between them originated in the pre-colonial, colonial, or post-independence period. Did the Kipsigis and Abagusii communities interact peacefully, or were they in constant conflict? When did conflicts between them begin? Most studies on conflicts between different communities point to politics as the main cause.

A study conducted by Partnership for Peace (2012) along the Sotik-Borabu border also indicated that politics played a significant role in fostering hostility between the Kipsigis and Abagusii of the region. The question arises: how did politics instigate conflicts between the two communities? Is it true that politics alone could lead to outbreaks of conflicts between the two communities under study? What are some of the political aspects that may have contributed to the conflicts? It is believed that politics, by itself, could not lead to conflicts without underlying factors that provided fertile ground for their occurrence. What are some of these underlying issues, and how did they contribute to conflicts between the Abagusii and Kipsigis? This chapter will address these questions, guided by Collins (Carrión & Kaufman, 2018). analytic conflict theory and Kaufman Stuart's symbolic/emotional choice theory.

## Causes of Conflicts and Conflicts Management

Inter-ethnic conflicts have persisted across various regions worldwide for an extended period. This reality holds for Sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya, where social and economic factors contribute to their recurrence despite efforts by the church, local communities, and governmental bodies to address them (Rugar, 2020). Specifically, the Borabu-Sotik border region has experienced inter-ethnic violence, prompting interventions from multiple stakeholders. These efforts, however, have often fallen short of providing lasting solutions due to underlying issues such as cattle rustling, border disputes, and electoral tensions. The dynamics of

interdenominational conflicts, particularly regarding the choice of marriage partners, remain insufficiently understood, highlighting potential shifts in the role of faith within societies (Cerchiaro, 2020).

The roots of contemporary conflicts trace back to the post-Cold War era, particularly evident in the surge of ethnic tensions across Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, grapples with ethnic conflicts driven by power struggles, resource competition, political manipulation, and ethnic divisions aimed at gaining political dominance (Ottoh, 2018). In Kenya, the advent of political pluralism in the 1990s intensified ethnic tensions, exacerbated by factors such as land disputes, electoral fraud, weak institutions, and biased security forces (Irungu, 2020). The ongoing land disputes between the Kipsigis and Abagusii communities exemplify inter-ethnic conflicts' complexities, underscoring the need for comprehensive approaches to conflict resolution.

### Historical conflict management

Past injustices and historical animosities can perpetuate conflicts. Colonial boundaries and policies often ignored ethnic distributions, creating resentments and rivalries. Historical analyses based on Said (2023) show how colonial histories and policies have left deep-seated divisions affecting contemporary societies. The legacy of arbitrary boundaries and divide-and-rule tactics remains evident in many African conflicts.

During colonial rule, arbitrary borders were often drawn without regard to ethnic, cultural, or linguistic boundaries, leading to fragmented societies (Horowitz, 2015). Post-colonial states inherited these divisions, frequently being sources of tension and conflict. In Africa, the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 is a poignant example where historical ethnic divisions between Hutus and Tutsis, exacerbated by colonial rule, erupted into violent conflict (Mamdani, 2011).

Colonial powers often employed a "divide and rule" strategy to control diverse populations. This involved fostering divisions among different ethnic groups to prevent unified resistance. For instance, the British in Nigeria amalgamated diverse ethnic groups with different languages, religions, and cultures into a single administrative unit, leading to enduring tensions (Falola

& Heaton, 2018). The colonial administrators often favored one group over another, creating imbalances that persisted after independence and led to conflicts such as the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) (Falola & Heaton, 2018).

The partition of India in 1947 is another significant example where colonial decisions led to lasting conflict. The British decision to partition India into India and Pakistan was based on religious lines, which ignored the complex ethnic and cultural landscape of the region. This resulted in massive migrations, violence, and animosity between India and Pakistan, which continue to this day (Talbot, 2010). The Kashmir conflict is a direct consequence of this partition and remains one of the most militarized and contentious regions in the world. Post-colonial states often struggled to build national unity within the artificial borders created by colonial powers. The lack of alignment between political boundaries and ethnic territories led to numerous conflicts. For example, in Sudan, the imposition of a centralized government in Khartoum over diverse regions with distinct ethnic and religious identities contributed to the protracted civil war and eventual secession of South Sudan in 2011 (Johnson, 2011).

The impact of colonial boundaries extends beyond Africa and South Asia. In the Middle East, the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which divided the Ottoman Empire's Arab provinces between Britain and France, created states with little regard for the ethnic and sectarian composition of the population. This has contributed to ongoing conflicts in countries like Iraq and Syria, where arbitrary borders have exacerbated Sunni-Shia tensions and Kurdish aspirations for autonomy (Gelvin, 2014). Analyzing historical contexts reveals that many contemporary conflicts have deep roots in colonial histories. The arbitrary borders, divide-and-rule policies, and favouritism practised by colonial powers have left legacies that continue to fuel conflicts in many parts of the world. Understanding these historical factors is crucial for addressing the underlying causes of conflicts and working towards lasting peace.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study sought demographic information about the church members, which was analyzed and presented in

tables. The gender of the church members involved in the study is shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Gender of the Respondents**

| Gender              |             | Value   | Count | Per cent |
|---------------------|-------------|---------|-------|----------|
| Standard Attributes | Position    | 1       |       |          |
|                     | Label       | Gender  |       |          |
|                     | Type        | Numeric |       |          |
|                     | Format      | F8      |       |          |
|                     | Measurement | Nominal |       |          |
|                     | Role        | Input   |       |          |
| Valid Values        | 1           | Male    | 111   | 41.9%    |
|                     | 2           | Female  | 154   | 58.1%    |

From Table 1 above, it can be noted that most respondents were female, 58.1 per cent. A shortage of males in churches affected the male response rate to 41.9 per cent, implying that the kind of response attributed to

conflict management was affected. The study sought to show the academic qualifications attained by the church members involved, as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Respondents' Level of Education**

|       |              | Frequency | Per cent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--------------|-----------|----------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Postgraduate | 17        | 6.4      | 6.4           | 6.4                |
|       | Degree       | 117       | 44.2     | 44.2          | 50.6               |
|       | Certificate  | 45        | 17.0     | 17.0          | 67.5               |
|       | Form four    | 49        | 18.5     | 18.5          | 86.0               |
|       | Others       | 12        | 4.5      | 4.5           | 90.6               |
|       | 6            | 25        | 9.4      | 9.4           | 100.0              |
|       | Total        | 265       | 100.0    | 100.0         |                    |

Table 2 shows the responses made. According to the findings, (44.2%) had attained a degree, (17%) had a certificate, (18.5%) had completed Form Four, and (6.4%) had postgraduate qualifications. This implied that all respondents were qualified enough to give relevant

information on the church's role in enhancing conflict management in the Borabu-Sotik border, Kenya. The study sought to determine how long the respondents have lived at the Borabu-Sotik border in Kenya. The findings are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: How Long the Respondents have Been Residents**

| How long you have been a resident |               |           |          |               |                    |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-----------|----------|---------------|--------------------|
|                                   |               | Frequency | Per cent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid                             | Below 1 Year  | 39        | 14.7     | 14.7          | 14.7               |
|                                   | 2-5 Years     | 86        | 32.5     | 32.5          | 47.2               |
|                                   | Above 6 Years | 140       | 52.8     | 52.8          | 100.0              |
|                                   | Total         | 265       | 100.0    | 100.0         |                    |

The study established that (14.7%) had been residents below one year, (32.5%) had been residents for 2-5

years, and (52.8 %) had been residents for more than six years. This implied that many were qualified to provide

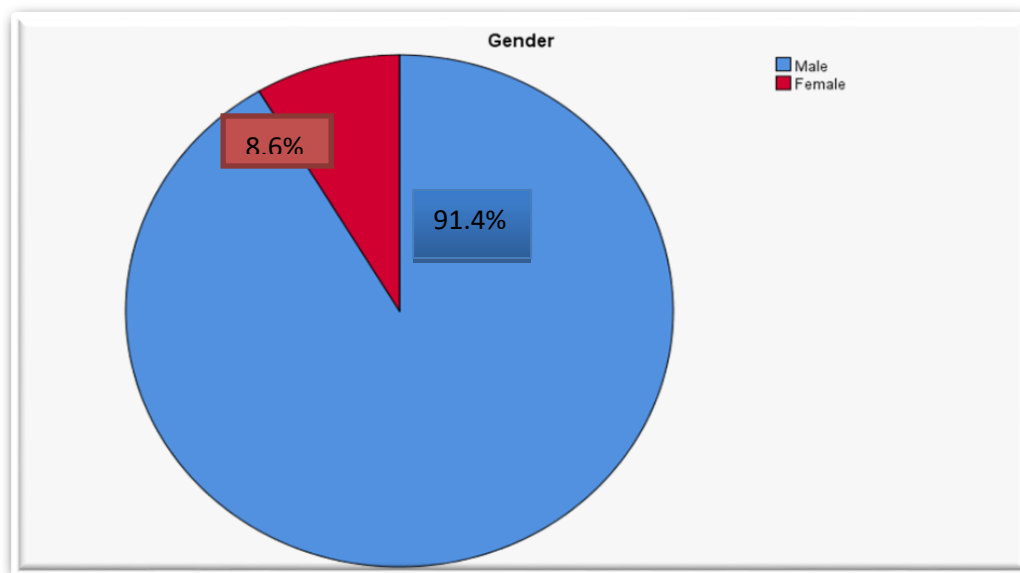
information on the church's role in establishing peaceful | conflict management around the study area.

**Table 4: How Long the Respondents have Been Residents**

|       |                 | Frequency  | Per cent     | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------------|------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | SDA             | 131        | 49.4         | 49.4          | 49.4               |
|       | PAG             | 57         | 21.5         | 21.5          | 70.9               |
|       | CATHOLIC        | 69         | 26.0         | 26.0          | 97.0               |
|       | OTHER INDICATOR | 8          | 3.0          | 3.0           | 100.0              |
|       | <b>Total</b>    | <b>265</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>  |                    |

The results in Table 4 show that out of 265 respondents, (49.5%) were from SDA; (21.5%) were from PAG; (26.0%) were from Catholic, and (3%) were from other

denominations. This is an indicator that all the sampled churches were well represented.



**Figure 1: Gender of the Interviewed Church Leaders**

Figure 1 above shows that church leaders interviewed (91.4 %) of male church leaders and (8.6%) female church leaders.

#### **Causes of Conflicts**

The respondents gave their views on questions to answer questions about the causes of conflicts in social

cohesion. Their responses were analyzed and presented in tables. Using a tick, respondents were asked to rank as strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree.

**Table 5: Idle Youths Initiate Cross Border Conflicts**

|       |                   | Frequency | Per cent |  | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------------------|-----------|----------|--|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly disagree | 24        | 9.1      |  | 9.1           | 9.1                |
|       | disagree          | 36        | 13.6     |  | 13.6          | 22.6               |
|       | undecided         | 46        | 17.4     |  | 17.4          | 40.0               |
|       | agree             | 103       | 38.9     |  | 38.9          | 78.9               |
|       | strongly agree    | 54        | 21       |  | 21            | 100                |
|       | Total             | 265       | 100.0    |  | 100.0         |                    |

Findings indicate that the 265 respondents reacted differently to the fact that idle youths initiate cross-border conflicts: strongly disagree (9.1%), disagree (13.6%), agree (38.9%), and strongly agree (21%), as

shown in Table 5 above. The higher percentage of agree and strongly agree implied that idle youths could be used to stage set cross-border conflicts.

**Table 6: The Cause of Border Conflict is Land**

|       |                   | Frequency | Per cent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------------------|-----------|----------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly disagree | 33        | 12.5     | 12.5          | 12.5               |
|       | Disagree          | 35        | 13.2     | 13.2          | 25.7               |
|       | Undecided         | 38        | 14.3     | 14.3          | 40.0               |
|       | Agree             | 78        | 29.4     | 29.4          | 69.4               |
|       | strongly agree    | 81        | 30.6     | 30.6          | 100.0              |
|       | Total             | 265       | 100.0    | 100.0         |                    |

The study established that (30.6%) and (29.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectfully. This implied that land issues cause border conflict to some extent as some 1(2.5%) of respondents strongly disagreed and (13.2%) disagreed. Therefore, (60%) of the respondents felt that the cause of the border dispute was the island. Kameri (2007) argues that ethnic

conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa are attributed to competition for resources such as land, political manipulation, and balkanization aimed at seizing power, shares the same views.

**Table 7: Cattle Rustling Causes Cross-Border Conflict**

|       |                   | Frequency | Per cent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------------------|-----------|----------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly disagree | 35        | 13.2     | 13.2          | 13.2               |
|       | disagree          | 31        | 11.7     | 11.7          | 24.9               |
|       | undecided         | 42        | 15.8     | 15.8          | 40.8               |
|       | agree             | 64        | 24.2     | 24.2          | 64.9               |
|       | strongly agree    | 93        | 35.1     | 35.1          | 100.0              |
|       | Total             | 265       | 100.0    | 100.0         |                    |

This study section shows that cattle rustling causes cross-border conflict, and Table 7 shows the findings. According to the findings, (35.1%) strongly agree, (24.2%) agree, and (11.2 %) disagree, whereas (13.2%) strongly disagree that cattle rustling causes cross-border conflict. This was interpreted to mean that some

incidences of cattle rustling triggered cross-border conflict.

**Table 8: Suspicion Between Communities is the Cause of Conflict**

|       |                   | Frequency | Per cent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------------------|-----------|----------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly disagree | 24        | 9.1      | 9.1           | 9.1                |
|       | disagree          | 32        | 12.1     | 12.1          | 21.1               |
|       | undecided         | 42        | 15.8     | 15.8          | 37.0               |
|       | agree             | 81        | 30.6     | 30.6          | 67.5               |
|       | strongly agree    | 86        | 32.5     | 32.5          | 100.0              |
|       | Total             | 265       | 100.0    | 100.0         |                    |

According to the findings, (9.1 %) of the respondents strongly disagree that suspicion between communities is the cause of conflict. (12.1%) disagree, (30.6%) agree, and (32.5%) strongly agree. This implied that suspicion

between communities is the cause of conflict, as (63.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed.

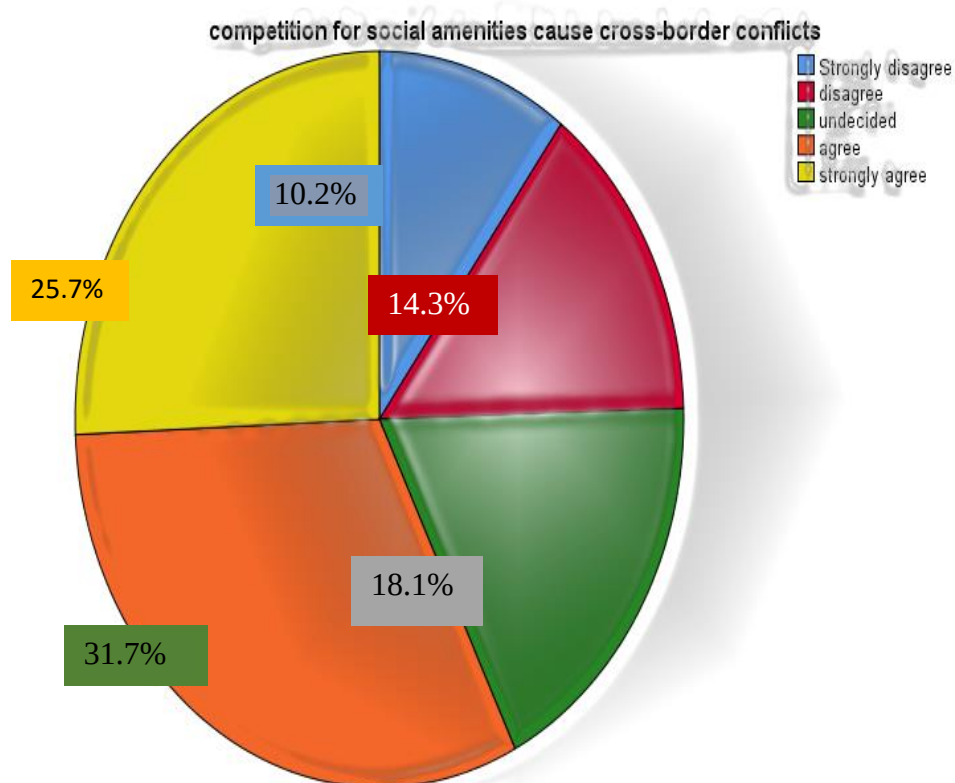

**Figure 2: Competitions for Social Amenities Cause Cross-Border Conflicts**

Figure 2 shows that (10.2%) of respondents strongly disagreed with the argument that competitions for social amenities cause cross-border conflicts, and (14.3 %) disagreed. The other (31.7%) respondents strongly agreed with that concept and (25.7 %) agreed. This implied that, to some extent, (57.4%) of respondents felt

those inadequate social amenities could be one of the issues influencing cross-border conflicts in the study area.

**Table 9: Unemployment has Contributed to Cross-Border Conflicts**

|       |                   | Frequency | Per cent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------------------|-----------|----------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly disagree | 30        | 11.3     | 11.3          | 11.3               |
|       | disagree          | 33        | 12.5     | 12.5          | 23.8               |
|       | undecided         | 36        | 13.6     | 13.6          | 37.4               |
|       | agree             | 66        | 24.9     | 24.9          | 62.3               |
|       | strongly agree    | 100       | 37.7     | 37.7          | 100.0              |
|       | Total             | 265       | 100.0    | 100.0         |                    |

From Table 9, it can be observed that (11.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed with the view that unemployment has contributed to cross-border conflicts, and (12.5%) of them disagreed. Also, (37.7%) of respondents strongly agreed, while (24.6%) agreed.

Hence, (62.6%) support that unemployment can contribute to cross-border conflicts, and a smaller number (23.8 %) don't accept that this view is correct.

**Table 10: Differences in Cultural Beliefs have Contributed to Cross-Border Conflicts**

|       |                   | Frequency | Per cent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------------------|-----------|----------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly disagree | 31        | 11.7     | 11.7          | 11.7               |
|       | Disagree          | 38        | 14.3     | 14.3          | 26.0               |
|       | Undecided         | 43        | 16.2     | 16.2          | 42.3               |
|       | Agree             | 65        | 24.5     | 24.5          | 66.8               |
|       | strongly agree    | 88        | 33.2     | 33.2          | 100.0              |
|       | Total             | 265       | 100.0    | 100.0         |                    |

From Table 10, it can be noticed that there were (11.7%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that differences in cultural beliefs have contributed to cross-border conflicts, while (14.3%) disagreed. The remaining (33.2%) strongly and (24.5%) agreed. This means (that

57.7%) believed that cultural differences not appreciated contributed to cross-border conflicts.

**Table 11: Religious Differences in Prayers Causes Cross- Border Conflicts**

|       |                   | Frequency | Per cent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------------------|-----------|----------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly disagree | 57        | 21.5     | 21.5          | 21.5               |
|       | disagree          | 35        | 13.2     | 13.2          | 34.7               |
|       | undecided         | 48        | 18.1     | 18.1          | 52.8               |
|       | agree             | 77        | 29.1     | 29.1          | 81.9               |
|       | strongly agree    | 48        | 18.1     | 18.1          | 100.0              |
|       | Total             | 265       | 100.0    | 100.0         |                    |

Table 11 shows that out of the 265 respondents, (21.5%) indicated that they strongly disagreed, while (13.2%) disagreed that religious differences in prayers cause cross-border conflicts. The other (29.1%) respondents

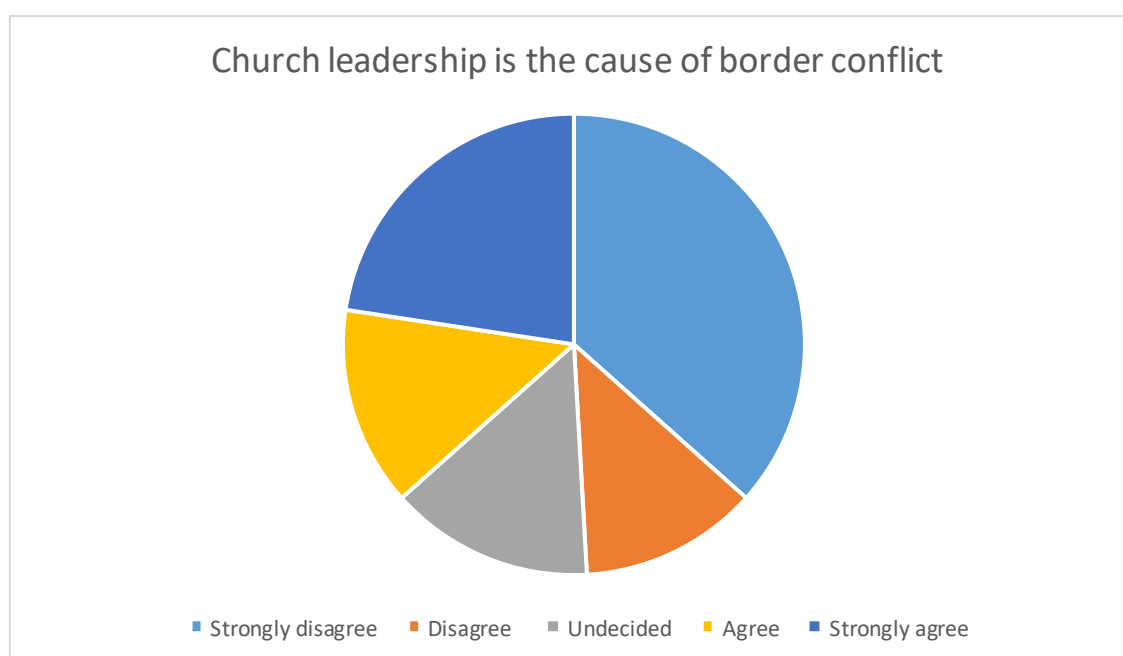
agreed with that view, while (18.1%) felt that religious differences cause conflicts. Most respondents (47.2%) were of that view, while another (34.7%) differed.

**Table 12: Lack of Conflict Mediation Causes Conflicts**

|       |                   | Frequency | Per cent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------------------|-----------|----------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly disagree | 44        | 16.6     | 16.6          | 16.6               |
|       | disagree          | 30        | 11.3     | 11.3          | 27.9               |
|       | undecided         | 45        | 17.0     | 17.0          | 44.9               |
|       | agree             | 67        | 25.3     | 25.3          | 70.2               |
|       | strongly agree    | 79        | 29.8     | 29.8          | 100.0              |
|       | Total             | 265       | 100.0    | 100.0         |                    |

The study also sought to know from the respondents whether a lack of conflict mediation caused conflicts. The researcher observed that (16.6%) strongly

disagreed; (11.3%) disagreed (29.8%) strongly agreed, the other (25.3%) agreed, as shown in Table 12.


**Figure 4: Church Leadership is the Cause of Border Conflicts**

The study sought to show responses on whether church leadership is a cause of border conflicts. Figure 4 shows the results of the findings. The study established that (36.6%) strongly disagreed that church leadership was the cause of border conflicts. Also, (12.5%) of respondents disagreed. The other (14.0 %) agreed, and the (22.6%) who strongly agreed sum up to (36.6%) against those (49.1%) not supporting the idea.

#### Causes of conflicts

Findings indicate that a higher percentage (59.9%) of respondents believed that idle youths could be used to initiate cross-border conflicts. In addition, the study

established that (60%) of respondents attribute cross-border conflict to land issues and border disputes. The study found that cattle rustling incidences triggered cross-border conflicts as a larger percentage of (59.3%) of respondents settled. Findings show that suspicion between communities and competition for social amenities were some factors that caused conflicts, as respondents supported the idea (63.1%) and (57.4%) respectively. Moreover, the study noted that unemployment and differences in cultural beliefs were also factors associated with cross-border conflicts, as (62.3%) and (57.7%) of respondents were of this opinion, respectively. On the other hand, (49.1%) of

respondents did not support the idea that church leadership is a course of conflicts at the border but on religious differences in prayers and lack of conflict mediations (47.2%) and (55.1%) of respondents, respectively, the majority felt that this caused conflicts at the border.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusions:** Based on the findings, the following conclusions emerged; Cross-border conflicts remain the most notorious challenges, causing poor security and porous borders. Interfaith and intra-faith conversations must be stepped up among the Borabu-Sotic border communities. However, religious movements and community leadership held some dialogues. Notwithstanding, the conversations were not enough to trigger dialogues on managing conflicts and enhancing social cohesion at the grassroots level. Cross-border conflicts have a long history in Kenya, starting from within and between pastoralist communities. Such conflicts continue to destroy relationships, and if not managed, the border areas risk losing security and peace. Cattle rustling has been advanced and expanded due to increased criminal networks, and responses by other communities to protect their livestock have resulted in ethnic profiling that the church is not able to revert. Interested parties to spark conflicts can misuse unemployed and idle youths. The issues of land disputes, suspicion between communities, and competition for social amenities, religious differences, and lack of

mediation were leading factors that triggered conflicts along the border.

**Recommendations:** Thus, to solve potential border conflicts in the Borabu and Sotik areas of contact, it is crucial to implement the following recommendations: Promote security by having more patrols and joint operations to counter other forms of illegality, including livestock theft. Encourage leadership of different religions to undertake inter-religious and intra-religious dialogues to solve some of these emerging issues. Improve the interaction by increasing leadership roles and responsibilities of leaders, elders, and youths in conflict interventions. Therefore, start with eradicating youth unemployment, educating them through vocational training, and engaging these youths in various projects in their societies. Settle land disputes using clear and understandable procedures and encourage people to learn about land rights. Upgrade the available social facilities to help eliminate the struggle that may lead to conflicts. Promote ethnic and cultural exchange through exchange programs and awareness creation. Ensure conflict resolution by forming committees in every area and training the mediators police-community relations to curb crime and eliminate criminal gangs. Finally yet importantly, it is important to oversee the conceptualization and implementation of peace efforts consistently and modify plans in terms of results to optimize efficacy.

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