



**MIDRIFT
HURINET**
Peace, Governance, Justice

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The Herders' Approach Model in Peace Building



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Abstract

This practice brief highlights the effectiveness of the "Herders Approach Model" to peace-building in Kenya's North Rift region. The "Herders Approach Model" is a community-driven, soft approach to conflict resolution that centers on youth-led (Morans) dialogue, joint resource management, and the involvement of community leaders to end long-standing conflicts, particularly over livestock and natural resources. This model leverages livestock herders empowered to transform violent conflicts over land, water, and other scarce resources into sustainable, peaceful coexistence and resource-sharing practices. It emphasizes local, participatory solutions rather than top-down, external impositions. In Kerio Valley and Amaya Triangle areas, including Baringo, West Pokot, Samburu, Turkana, and Laikipia counties, this model, practiced by Midrift Human Rights Network (MIDRIFT HURINET), shifts from relying solely on state-led security (hard approach) to a soft approach of empowering pastoralists themselves to negotiate peace and share, rather than fight over, the available scarce resources.

Introduction

The Herders' Approach Model in peace-building is often termed a community-led or participatory approach. This model is effective in conflict-prone pastoral communities because it leverages, restores, and adapts traditional local knowledge and mechanisms for conflict management, rather than relying solely on external, often ineffective, military or top-down legal interventions. This practice brief on the Herder's Approach Model emphasizes youth-led dialogue, resource sharing, and strengthening of social cohesion among communities, herders, farmers, and relevant local stakeholders, resulting in more sustainable peace, particularly in the arid and semi-arid lands.

Context

Natural Resource-Based Conflict among pastoralists in the arid and semi-arid zones, such as the Kerio Valley and Amaya Triangle, is exacerbated by a retrogressive culture of cattle rustling. This practice of cattle rustling is led by "morans" (herders) and often overlaps with extreme food insecurity and the effects of climate change. Pastoral conflict in Baringo County, Kenya, is a long-standing, complex, and violent phenomenon rooted in competition over scarce natural resources, exacerbated by cultural, political, and environmental factors. The conflicts primarily involve the Pokot, Tugen, Marakwets, and Ilchamus communities, with disputes often escalating into cattle rustling, displacement, and loss of lives. Several local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have programmes that seek to manage conflict, and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), intergovernmental organizations, and donors are increasingly focused on understanding conflict and trying out diverse approaches to conflict transformation in the region.



Core Components of the Herders' Approach Model

1. **Grassroots Dialogue (Amani Mashinani):** This model emphasizes local dialogues, such as the Amani Mashinani (Peace at Grassroots) initiative, which brings together conflicting communities, including Ilchamus, Tugen, and Pokot communities in Baringo, to negotiate, rebuild homes, and share the available scarce resources.
2. **Involvement of Traditional Structures:** The approach leverages elders, women, and "morans" (warriors) to foster a culture of peace. It recognizes the traditional role of youths (morans) in managing grazing and water access, which can be adapted to resolve modern disputes.
3. **Joint Resource Sharing:** Rather than competing for the scarce resources, communities are encouraged to jointly manage and use those that are locally available, e.g., water and pasture, especially during the drought seasons. Notably, the establishment of the Lolmoru Early Childhood Development Education Centre (ECDEC) allowed children from different communities to study together, acting as a symbol of unity. Evidently, establishing agreed-upon rules for resource use, such as defining grazing routes and timelines, has significantly contributed to peaceful inter-communal coexistence.
4. **Economic Interdependence:** The approach has a focus on promoting mutually beneficial relationships, such as establishing joint, sustainable, and climate-conscious livelihood opportunities. These include cattle-milk business, goat rearing, beekeeping and honey production, reseeded grasslands, and irrigation. Further, there is the formation of youth groups and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to access economic opportunities, including the National Government Affirmative Action Funds (NGAAF), Uwezo Fund, Nyota Fund, Youth and Women Enterprise Fund, among others.
5. **Capacity Building:** This model entails training of local herders who are youths (morans) in negotiation, conflict management, and non-violent communication to handle disputes before they escalate.
6. **Leveraging Women's Networks:** The approach increasingly recognizes the often-undervalued role of women in peace-building, encouraging them to actively participate in mediating conflicts and fostering cohesion within and among communities.



MIDRIFT HURINET's Interventions through the Herders' Approach Model

The Herders Approach Model is a soft strategy that is community-led and multi-sectoral with a focus on **herder-driven peace initiatives**. The model leverages the local leadership (like youth groups) to build trust, facilitate community dialogues, and create inclusive platforms for addressing resource conflicts (for example, cattle rustling and access to water). This is achieved through socio- economic empowerment, improved police-community relations, and tailored conflict management skills for sustainable security, as shown in successful interventions in Baringo, West Pokot, and Elgeyo Marakwet.

Particularly in Baringo County, MIDRIFT HURINET employs a Herder-led Initiative (often referred to as the Herders Approach model) as a core part of its community-driven peace-building model. This approach shifts the agency of peace from external actors to the herders themselves, who are often central to pastoralist conflicts.

Strategic Context

This approach is part of MIDRIFT HURINET's broader **Resilience, Peace & Stability (RPS)** program, which aims to:

- 1.Reduce Violent Extremism: By addressing natural resource-based and political conflicts.
- 2.Build Trust: Enhancing relations between communities and security agencies (like the National Police Service) based on human rights and good governance.
- 3.Empower At-Risk Groups: Providing youth and women with leadership skills, financial literacy, and social linkages to reduce their susceptibility to participating in violence.

Key Features of the Herders' Approach Model

- 1.**Direct Community Mediation:** Active herders from conflicting groups (such as the Tugen and Pokot) act as primary mediators. They initiate contact with displaced families to facilitate their safe return and help rebuild homes destroyed during the conflict.
- 2.**Inter-Ethnic Dialogue Forums:** Supported by local youth groups (e.g., Tanipolol youth group in Baringo County) and County Government Administrators, and herders participate in structured forums to discuss grievances, the benefits of peaceful coexistence, and reconciliation. Empowering local leaders and the youth gives room for community-initiated conflict transformation and peace-building efforts, fostering local ownership of the model.



3. **Multi-Sectoral Approach (MSA):** The MSA approach entails bringing together both state (national government, security agencies, county government) and non-state actors (CSOs), local security structures, community leaders (including village elders), women, and youth groups to create shared strategies and holistic approaches that contribute to creating closely knit relationships among communities to enhance social cohesion.
4. **Joint Community Projects:** A significant outcome of this aspect of the model is the establishment of a shared learning facility named Lolmoru Early Childhood Development Education Centre (ECDEC). This school serves children from different ethnic communities, acting as a symbol of unity and a foundation for long-term social cohesion. Besides learning, the facility is also utilized as a 'safe space' for holding both intra-community and inter-community dialogues.
5. **Economic Empowerment & Social Integration:** The model encourages the resumption of community-shared social and economic activities, including joint farming, trading at shared markets, and the use of common grazing committees.
Such activities offer a platform for different communities to interact, share available resources equitably, and, importantly, boost their economic power.
In addition, MIDRIFT, leveraging its existing networks, links groups of at-risk individuals to economic opportunities, including financial literacy training and government support grants. These grants serve as capital for small-scale income-generating activities as a sustainability mechanism for the beneficiaries. This approach deliberately seeks to empower individuals vulnerable to poverty, offering them alternative livelihoods, hence reducing pull and push factors towards violence, such as cattle raiding.
6. **Contextualized Interventions:** The successful implementation of this model is directly attributed to the evidence-based, context-specific, and community-initiated activities and dialogues. The activities and dialogues are tailored to address both emerging and long-standing community dynamics, including environmental stress caused by climate-related harms, such as floods and prolonged drought.

Case Studies and Impact of the Herders' Approach Model

1. **Reduced Violence:** Herder-led initiatives have led to the resolution of the long-standing, 15-year conflict at the border of Tiaty-East and Baringo South Sub-Counties, Baringo County.

A group of 40 youth from the Pokot community came together to form Tanipolol Youth Group, a Community-based Organization (CBO) to empower themselves economically and to unite the Tugen and Pokot communities. The group, through its chairperson, facilitated dialogues between the displaced Tugen and Pokot communities to find ways to restore trust and coexistence. Tugens carry their luggage and property, marking a significant milestone after the longstanding conflict of 15 years.



2. **Community Ownership:** By relying on local, rather than "external (state) solutions, the inter-communal agreements are culturally relevant and more sustainable.

The herders' commitment to co-exist peacefully, through various peace-building forums held in Baringo South Sub-County, led to an agreement by both Tugen and Pokot communities to establish the Lolmoru Early Childhood Development Education Centre (ECDEC). The school, a symbol of unity and commitment to a peaceful future, allows children from different communities (predominantly the Pokot and Tugens) to study together and lays a foundation for social cohesion at their tender age of development.

3. **Improved Security:** The approach has directly contributed to the reduction of the intensity of cattle rustling and fostered a more secure environment for economic activities like farming and trade.

Following MIDRIFT HURINET's interventions in Tiaty East, a noticeable behavioural shift occurred among the herders. They became more proactive in sharing information with security officers, which significantly helped reduce the number of banditry attacks reported.

The herders created a buffer zone that effectively prevented bandits from areas of Silale and Paka from passing through their areas to raid or launch attacks in Baringo South Sub-County.

4. **Alternative Dispute Resolution:** The model gives room for traditional methods like negotiation and reconciliation to be leveraged in dispute resolution, especially over natural resources.

Through community-led dialogues among herders, for the first time in 5 years, the Pokot and Marakwet communities came together in 2024 to ease tensions and agree on opening major transport corridors along the borders of Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet, and West Pokot counties to facilitate the free movement of goods and people, a significant step towards trans-border trade. Notably, the borders that were once blocked by fear of violence are gradually opening up, allowing for the resumption of cross-border trade and access to markets. A notable transport route is the Tot-Kolowa road and Arpollo-Chesengoch road.

As a commitment to sustained collaboration, herders from the two communities are also jointly undertaking farming through irrigation in the Kaben and Chesegon areas. Together, they cleared 10 acres of land and converted the space to an irrigation farm as a joint commitment to increasing both consumption and economic yields, and fostering shared prosperity and resilience.



5. **Increased diversification of livelihoods and climate change adaptive measures through the formation of Herders' CBOs and youth groups.** Through the Resilience, Peace and Stability (RPS) Program, MIDRIFT HURINET trained herders on financial literacy and group dynamics, which led to the formation of a Herders' Community-Based Organization (CBO). The CBO comprised herders who also engaged in beekeeping, livestock trade, and crop farming, leading to enhanced alternative livelihoods in Tiaty East.

In August 2023, 40 herders came together, formed, and registered Tanipolol Community-Based Organisation (CBO).

6. **A 30-member inter-communal peace committee was formed:** The peace committee was formed between the Pokot and Marakwet communities and tasked with leading continuous peace efforts, enforcing the ceasefire, preventing livestock theft, negotiating grazing pastures, and overseeing joint initiatives. This ensured the change was community-owned and not a one-off achievement.

Since the peace committee was formed in August 2024, there have been no reported incidents of fatalities in the affected area, a contrast to the weekly murders previously observed.

7. **Disarmament: More than 290 guns and 2,200 bullets were voluntarily surrendered across the Kerio Valley.**

The voluntary surrender of guns and bullets marks a shift from previous government-led forceful disarmament efforts to communities' being obliged to take responsibility over their peaceful co-existence through alternative means of dispute resolution.

Key Challenges and Considerations

1. **Integrating Local and National Level peace efforts:** Bridging the gap between grassroots peace efforts and national, legal, and security institutions
2. **Proliferation of Small Arms:** The easy availability of weapons makes it difficult to maintain peace.
3. **Political Interference:** Political zoning along ethnic lines often exacerbates tensions.
4. **Marginalization and Poverty:** Severe shortages of resources, intensified by climate change, continue to trigger conflicts.



Key Learnings and Best Practices

1. Facilitated safe spaces for open communication can bridge divides and foster mutual understanding. The initiative being driven and owned by local community members contributes to lasting peace as it ensures community acceptance and legitimacy.
2. Joint economic activities (farming and reopening trade routes and markets) provide immediate, visible, and collective benefits that strengthen the resolve of the communities to maintain peace.
3. The continued reopening of infrastructure, such as schools, roads, and markets, is critical to prevent a relapse into violence. This will help to restore opportunities for community members to rebuild and strengthen their resilience.

1. Recommendations to Government

- Institutionalize community-led peace initiatives: National and county governments should formally recognize and integrate community-driven models like the Herders' Approach Model into county peace-building and security strategies.
- Address structural drivers of conflict: Invest in water infrastructure, pasture management, irrigation schemes, and climate adaptation programs in pastoral regions to reduce competition over scarce resources.
- Enhance socio-economic opportunities for youth (Morans): Expand access to government funds and vocational programs that empower youth (Morans) economically and reduce their vulnerability to involvement in cattle rustling and banditry.

2. Recommendations to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- Build capacity of local peace actors: Provide training in conflict mediation, and resolution, leadership, and non-violent communication for herders, youth groups, and community peace committees.
- Enhance inclusive peacebuilding: Ensure women, youth, and marginalized groups are actively involved in peacebuilding initiatives and decision-making processes.
- Support livelihood diversification: Facilitate programs that promote alternative livelihoods such as beekeeping, livestock trade, irrigation farming, and small businesses.
- Document and scale best practices: CSOs should document lessons learned from successful models like the Herders' Approach Model and advocate for their replication in other conflict-prone pastoral regions.



3. Recommendations to Development Partners

- Provide long-term funding for community-led peace-building: Donors should prioritize sustainable funding for locally driven peace initiatives rather than short-term interventions.
- Support climate resilience programs: Invest in projects that address climate-related drivers of conflict, such as drought, water scarcity, and pasture degradation.
- Strengthen research and evidence-based programming: Support research that evaluates the effectiveness of community-based peace-building models and generates evidence for policy influence.

4. Recommendations to Community Leaders

- Promote peaceful cultural norms: Elders, youth leaders, and religious leaders should actively discourage cattle rustling and violence while promoting dialogue and reconciliation.
- Encourage joint resource management: Communities should continue developing agreements on shared grazing areas, water access, and farming activities to prevent competition from escalating into conflict.
- Promote social cohesion through shared initiatives: Community leaders should encourage joint projects such as schools, markets, and farming initiatives that bring different communities together and build trust.

Conclusion

The Herders' Approach Model demonstrates that sustainable peace in pastoral communities can be effectively achieved when local actors, particularly herders and youth (morans), are empowered to lead conflict transformation processes. By shifting the focus from purely state-led security responses to participatory peacebuilding approaches, the model promotes local ownership, cultural legitimacy, and long-term sustainability of peace initiatives. However, sustaining these gains requires continued collaboration among government institutions, civil society organizations, development partners, and community leadership structures. Addressing underlying drivers of conflict, such as poverty, climate stress, marginalization, and proliferation of small arms, is critical for long-term stability. Overall, the Herders' Approach Model offers a replicable and context-sensitive framework for peace-building in pastoral regions, demonstrating that locally led solutions are essential for transforming conflict and fostering durable peace.



ABOUT MIDRIFT HURINET

MIDRIFT HURINET is a Non-Profit organization operating in Kenya since 2008. We are dedicated to advancing Peace, Good Governance, and Human Rights in Kenya. Our work is anchored on three strategic priorities: Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation, where we engage stakeholders and empower communities to resolve conflicts and foster a culture of Peace and Security; Good Governance and Human Rights Advocacy, where we promote transparency, accountability, and civic participation; and Institutional Strengthening and Development, where we build the capacity of Government institutions, non-state actors, and our own team to collaboratively deliver on our mission for a more just and peaceful society.



Vision

A prosperous society that enjoys Human Rights, Good Governance, Peace and Security.



Mission

To empower Citizens, State and Non-State actors to foster a Culture of Human Rights, Good Governance, Peace and Security in Kenya.

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