



NEWS BULLETIN 333
THURSDAY OCTOBER 10, 2019

Climate Change Enflames Cow Wars in Northwest Kenya

A series of deadly clashes between pastoralists in northwest Kenya has shown how climate and drought are contributing to conflict in Africa.

The violence erupted last week after cattle herders from the Rendile tribe were forced by drought to move into grazing land in the Suguta Valley, which lies in Turkana territory. They were attacked by Turkana warriors, who killed four intruders and stole 500 goats and guns.

The violence then spilled over into Baragoi Town, capital of the region, where a teacher was shot and killed. This prompted panic and a general lock-down.

Earlier this week it was reported that a Turkana businessman had been killed while visiting a Samburu market. Two more Samburu herders were killed by Turkana on Tuesday.

The violence is the worst in Baragoi since 2012, when 42 policemen were killed while tracking Turkana cattle raiders in the area.

The fighting last week occurred while a team from [Children Peace Initiative Kenya \(CPIK\)](#), an AP partner, was working in a nearby village.

CPIK played a leading role in building peace between the Pokot and Samburu tribes, [as described by AP on these pages](#). This year the group began working in five villages that straddle the boundary between the Turkana and Samburu, with funding from [Zivik](#) through the German Foreign Office. [Ben Johnson from the Fletcher School at Tufts University](#) worked at CPIK as an AP Peace Fellow this summer.



Climate change at work: Peace Fellow Talley Diggs confronted the impact of drought during a 2016 CPIK team visit to Baragoi sub-county.

The CPIK team was meeting with parents from the Samburu and Turkana in the Samburu village of Ngilai when word of the fighting came through. Activities were cut short and the 45 visiting Turkana parents slept overnight in the Ngilai School, instead of Samburu homes.

"There was a lot of tension and fear," said Monica Kinyua, the deputy director of CPIK.

The link between climate change and cow wars has become clearer as the drought in East Africa has intensified. Ms Kinyua said that the Rendile herders had been allowed to graze on Samburu land and expected the same privilege from the Turkana. Instead, they were attacked and driven away.

Other factors are contributing to tension between the tribes. Samburu youths are currently undergoing circumcision - a rite of passage that happens every 15 years and is required of all warriors. Ms Kinyua said this "heightens the urge to fight." Guns are also easily available, causing further instability.



Monica Kinyua, deputy director of CPI Kenya, with Turkana girls in Baragoi Sub County.

CPIK's model starts by bringing children from opposing sides to "peace camps" and building on the resulting friendships to draw in parents, elders and eventually warriors. CPIK then creates economic inter-dependency by offering a cow to two families from the opposing tribes on the condition that they rear the cow together.

In the wake of last week's violence CPIK may try and work separately with warriors before bringing

them face to face with the other side. But Hilary Bukuno, the director of CPIK, said there will be no major changes in CPIK's approach, which is popular in the villages. "There will be no quick fixes. We are in for the long haul."

Given the threat posed by cows to the environment, Mr Bukuno said that CPIK could even help herders to rethink their herding practices and share grazing land. But, he said, this must be accompanied by a "serious effort" from the government to remove the guns.

* [Learn more about the cows wars and CPIK's response](#)

* Read the blogs of past AP Fellows at CPIK: [Ben](#) (2019); [Colleen](#) (2018); [Talley](#) (2018); [Rachel](#) (2016)

* [Learn about CPIK's work through photos](#)

* Email CPIK: Monicakinyuah@gmail.com.

The Advocacy Project (AP) supports advocates who work for human rights and social justice at the community level. AP is based in Washington, DC. Phone +1 202 758 3328. For more information [visit our website](#) or email us.

STAY CONNECTED

