

## **A Review of the Impact of Ethno Political Conflicts on Agricultural Food Production in Kenya**

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**Abstract:** Increasing agricultural productivity and expanding the agribusiness industry in sub-Saharan Africa is critical for poverty reduction, food security and economic growth. Kenya comprises of some populations that relies heavily on small-scale agriculture for its livelihood. Ethno political conflicts have been taking place in some parts of the country climaxing in 1993, 1997 and 2008. In spite of the periodic spates of ethno political conflicts, how they influences agricultural production is a subject that has not been wholly explored. While there have been in-depth studies on other factors that impact on agricultural production such as rainfall patterns, inputs and credit facilities among others, there has been little interest on the impact of the periodic ethno political conflicts on agricultural production. Though the government of Kenya (GoK) has attempted to address other factors that affect agricultural production in the country, the input of ethno political conflicts on agricultural production at the local level is yet to be fully unveiled. As such the various efforts that the GoK has put in place to address agricultural production might not be a success without afore knowledge of how ethno political conflicts affects agricultural production. The questions leading to this review are: does ethno political conflict have any link with agricultural food production? If yes, what causes ethno political conflict; what evidence there is in terms of literature; what link does the existing literature establish; what are the theoretical link and the possible solutions for ethno political conflict? This paper is a review paper focusing on the situation in Kenya, drawing from other cases in Africa and the theories of relative deprivation and realistic group conflict.

**Keywords:** Ethno political conflict, food production.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Ethno political conflict (EPC) is a disharmony between two or more distinct ethnic groups, taking the veil of differences in political interests that neither target nor directly involve the state. These conflicts tend to be episodic rather than sustained campaigns like armed conflicts [1]. In the past, ethno political conflicts received less attention historically because they do not fit neatly into the state centric security paradigm [2]. However, Raleigh [3] posits that ethno political conflicts pose one of the most persistent forms of antagonism in the contemporary world of politics. Further, ethno political conflicts are found to have direct consequences on local, national, regional and global security. Raleigh [4] emphasizes that ethno political conflict often take place against a backdrop of reduced agricultural productivity, chronic food insecurity and are exacerbated by poverty and political exclusion. This concurs with the analyses by USAID [5] Salehyan and colleague [6] and Raleigh [7] that ethno political conflicts happen under reduced agricultural productivity, are usually between ethnic communities, and are episodic in nature. Thus societies attack one another when least expected. When this becomes

recurrent members of the different communities may live under fear of imminent attacks, thereby may not invest heavily on agriculture, which may decrease crop output and productivity as well as efficient use of labour, inputs and farm capital. Moreover, the analysis by Salehyan and colleagues [9] has it that ethno political conflicts have not received much attention from other scholars, provides a knowledge gap, because without empirical evidence their impact on livelihoods may not be fully understood for policy purposes.

Ethnic conflicts and religious divisions are found in most countries and on all continents [10]. However the bulk of these conflicts have been witnessed in sub-Saharan Africa. To Azam, many Sub-Saharan African countries find themselves engulfed in ethnic conflicts, mostly within states between contending ethno-political entities manipulated by rivaling political elite groups. Inter-group violence in Sub Saharan Africa is often the outcome of a political process whereby some local groups take on other groups living in the same region, mostly as a proxy war for conflicts resulting from the uneven impact of state policies concerning resource exploitation [11]. The

Kenyan case has proved that ethno political conflicts occur between intergroup rivalries mainly in competition for resources. Despite decades of conflict, death and tragedy, the coverage of Africa has often been ignored, oversimplified, or excessively focused on limited aspects. Consequently this analysis affirms that deeper analysis, background and context need to be done.

### **Case of Kenya's ethno political conflicts**

Empirical evidence reveals that between 1991 and 2008, Kenya experienced ethno political conflicts especially in the Coast, Western and the Rift valley provinces [13]. Kenya is a multi-ethnic society and many communities have lived in harmony for many years. In addition, available literature tells us that ethnic diversity by its mere fact is not a negative attribute. It becomes problematic when such recognition is accompanied by exclusion of everybody else from that group and the view that anybody who does not belong to this group is evilly misplaced and a nuisance [14].

Historians have traced the seeds of ethnic conflict in Kenya from the European colonialism. The onset of colonization in 1885 saw the boundaries drawn with little or no consideration of distributions of actual indigenous people. To historians the problems of ethnic conflict were rooted under colonialism because Africans had no control over the central power and often were kept divided into administrative districts by Europeans. More profoundly, the problem of ethnicity in Kenya has progressively been accentuated by successful post-independence governments who have used it as a factor in national politics. Fifty years after independence, there has been a tendency by politicians to sensationalize and politicize existing differences along ethnic lines thereby pitting communities against each other. Kenya is a multi-ethnic society where societies for long lived in harmony for long before the seeds of ethnicity were laid by the political class who has advocated for politics of exclusion.

Politicization of ethnicity often takes place in a situation characterized by an inequitable structure of access which gives rise to the emergence of the "in group" and the "out group" with the latter trying to break the structure of inequality as the former responds by building barriers to access. This ensures the continuation of its privileged position. Ethnicity has always been a matter of concern since the colonial period and was propagated in the post-independence period during the implementation of the policy of Africanisation. With Africanisation, ethnic tensions developed around the structure of access to economic opportunities and redistribution of some of the land formerly owned by the white settlers [15]. It was against this background that the Gikuyu, Embu and Meru (GEMA) groups, especially the Kikuyu, using the economic and political advantage available to them

during the Kenyatta regime took advantage of the situation and formed many land-buying companies. In his opinion, the GEMA using these companies facilitated the settlement of hundreds of thousands of Kikuyu in the Rift Valley, especially in the districts with arable land, notably Uasin Gishu, Nandi, and Trans Nzoia, Narok and Nakuru throughout the 1960s and 70s. Yamano and Deininger [16], point that during the same time period other entrants into the Rift valley included the Kisii, Luo and Luhya, who moved in and bought land. The land in the said districts historically belonged to the Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana and kindred groups such as the Samburu (KAMATUSA).

During the latter years of Kenyatta's presidency and the early years of his reign, Moi worked closely with the Kikuyu. However, he slowly fell out with them through his policy of rectifying the structure of access to benefit the Kalenjin community at the expense of the Kikuyu; the former in-group. To him by the late 80s, the Kikuyu were a bitter group looking for any opportunity to regain the lost ground after Kenyatta's death. He goes ahead to note that by this time the Luo who had been the leading outsiders since the mid- 60s when they fell out with the Kikuyu, were also working to reposition themselves as an in-group. As such in the run up to the multiparty elections Yamano and Jayne [17] states that the two groups had formed an alliance of convenience out of necessity to dislodge the then in- group.

The communities that had benefited from land settlement in and around Rift Valley became the target of "revenge" by the KAMATUSA coalition that controlled political power at the time. The analysis further observed that during this time ethnic ideology was invoked and politicized in order to mobilize the KAMATUSA group throughout the Rift Valley to evict the "outsiders" from their ancestral land [18]. It was against this background that in 1992-3 ethnic clashes occurred in the rift valley leaving thousands of people displaced, hundreds dead and property worth of millions of shillings destroyed. Osamba [19] contends that displacement of people and the destruction of farms from rich agricultural areas resulted in food shortages in 1993. He continues to clarify that under these circumstances the Kenyan government had to appeal to the international community for relief food. Following a similar pattern as in 1993 the KHRC reported that in the 1997 multi-party elections ethnic clashes broke out in many parts of the rift valley where ethno-nationalist sentiments characterized relations between the indigenous ethnic groups and the immigrant groups.

More recently in 2007/8, Kenya reeled under the effects of ethnic violence, which was sparked off by the contested presidential elections [20]. When the electoral commission of Kenya announced on 30 December that president Mwai Kibaki had defeated his

challenger Raila Odinga for re-election the country exploded. Thereafter, millions of people were driven from their productive lands especially in the Rift Valley consequently, missing essential entitlements such as food, employment and income.

### **Ethno Political Conflicts and Agricultural Food Production**

Due to massive displacements, many farms were left desolate and prospects of employment and income from productive farms faded after the infamous 2007/2008 post election violence [21]. Conflict and post conflict societies often miss out on important entitlements like reproductive land and when ethnic antagonisms occur and reoccur without proper redress as has periodically happened in Kenya, they tend to have adverse consequences on livelihoods.

Writing about Ethiopia, Bishaw [22] noted that despite its importance, agricultural sector is dominated by subsistence and smallholder-oriented system. This notwithstanding, Diao and colleagues [23] observed that 85% of the population in the rural areas derives its livelihood from agriculture; the sector accounts for more than 40% of national GDP; and it is the source of 90% of the country's export earnings. This means that the rate at which agricultural sector attains its growth and sustainability highly determines the country's macroeconomic performances such as overall economic growth, employment, food security, poverty reduction and per capita income. For instance in 1994 in Rwanda, approximately 800,000 men, women and children were brutally massacred within 100 days. It is estimated that in four months, 1.75 million people, or a quarter of the country's pre-war population, had either died or fled the country. The massacre escalated into a Genocide that started on April 7, 1994 resulting in the death of up to one million people. This horrifying event affected mainly agriculture, the main occupation of the population, as civil strife heightened in the middle of the growing season. It was estimated that the overall loss of harvesting during the period of the Genocide was as high as 60% historically; Hutus have been mainly agricultural laborers while the Tutsis were landowners [24].

Combining all these aspects of the sector led Tony Addison to state, "overall development success or failure is often an outcome of what happens in agriculture" [25]. To these scholars most armed conflict is centered within regions of the world extremely dependent upon agriculture. In addition, FAO [26] reveals that Kenya has severely been affected by the crisis in the Horn of Africa.

Agriculture is a crucial economic activity, providing employment and livelihoods for many. The Food and Agriculture Organization [27] is of the view agriculture is the backbone of most low-income

countries, employing the most individuals of any sector and it plays a significant role in driving economic growth as well as contributing greatly to foreign-exchange earnings. It serves as the basis for many industries as a source of key inputs and is the driver of Kenya's economy [28]. In addition, agriculture remains the economic base for majority of the poor in Africa, as it constitutes a core economic sector in most countries. Of great emphasis is the fact that its importance in poverty reduction and sustainable development cannot be overstressed [29]. This clearly shows that agriculture is core in the alleviation of poverty as illustrated further by Ajibefunand Daramola [30] that in order to achieve poverty alleviation objectives among smallholder farmers, productivity and efficiency of resource use must be improved to increase income, attain better standard of living and reduce environmental degradation.

According to the DG Development [31], agricultural sector accounts for about a third of Africa's GDP, while in many developing countries the sector provides 60-90% of employment. In Africa in the year 2002 about 203 million people, or 56.6 percent of the total labor force, were engaged in agricultural labour [32]. The analysis also notes that in many African countries, agriculture supports the survival and well-being of up to 70 percent of the population. Ajibefun and Daramola [33] further argue that there is a need to increase growth in all sectors of the economy for such growth is the most efficient means of alleviating poverty and generating long-term sustainable development, where resources must be used much more efficiently to improve productivity and income. It is important to note that resource use efficiency in smallholder agriculture could be the basis for achieving universal food security and poverty reduction objectives of the country particularly among the rural households in the developing countries.

One of Kenya's food policy objectives is to have the country remain self-sufficient in the supply of food products [34]. Therefore, agriculture is a pillar in sustainable development as well as an improved wellbeing of many rural communities in Kenya and beyond. However, it goes a step further to conform to the findings of Bozzoli and Brück [35] that the amount of labour force employed by a producer significantly influences the amount of average output and profitability. Thus, reduced family labour to an optimal level of one man hour per day not only leads to improved output and profitability, but also reduces the problem of underemployment of labour.

### **Impacts of conflicts**

In 2001 conflicts were identified in fourteen countries (24.5% of the total survey); of these three occurred in countries considered free (21%) and eleven occurred in countries considered partly not free (7%).

During the 2003 Federal and States election in Nigeria, at least 100 people were killed and many more were injured. Approximately 600 people were reported killed in Kenya, following disputes over the presidential results of December 2007. During August 2007 run-off elections in Sierra Leone, violence erupted following a clash between the supporters of the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the opposition All People's Congress (ACP).

Conflicts impose costs on agricultural production through two broad channels. First, conflict-induced shocks cause devastation and limit market transactions. Various studies [36-38] have proved that armed combats, terrorist attacks, looting or overall devastation generate the destruction of public and private capital, and assets; thereby decreasing the productive capacity of firms and households. Aggressions against the civil population destroy or deteriorate human capital through abductions, killings and maiming [39]. Direct impacts of conflict also reduce market efficiency. Contraction in the supply of goods, and higher transactions costs cause prices increases and reductions in the size of networks [40]. All these effects produce a drop in household's income and consumption, and countries experience a fall in the aggregate production [41-43]. In line with these studies, it is significant to note that conflicts brings about devastation and poses fear thus discouraging farming populations from engaging in productive agricultural undertakings. Moreover, more reflection shows that all economic activities are successful due to human interaction and interdependence. Conflicts lead to breakage of relationships hence reduced use of farm machinery services while transport of agricultural inputs or outputs may be deterred due to fear.

Strikingly, Africa experienced unusual cases of ethnic conflicts from the 1960s through the 1990s. Some of these conflicts grew into wars and loss of lives. Various studies show that such conflicts are detrimental to both economy and civil society. Lorentzen and colleagues [44] show in the working paper, "Death and Development", that mortality is inversely related to investment, human capital, fertility and ultimately economic growth. The mortality-growth relationship is highly linked to poverty trap in Africa that is commonly known as Africa's Growth Tragedy.

On one level, the impact of conflict on agriculture is fairly straight-forward and intuitive, though there are problems in assigning causality in this relationship [45]. Collier demonstrates that production in the agricultural sector demonstrably drops on average by 12.3% per year during periods of violent conflict. He cites the example of the extreme case of Angola where agricultural production dropped by as much as 44.5% during the war years from 1975- 1993. Other authors indicate that the link between agriculture and conflict is

one that has not received enough thoughtful discussion and analysis. When addressing issues of conflict, agriculture is not a sector that is generally immediately identified, but in development as a whole, its importance is well recognized.

## **DISCUSSION OF THE REVIEW, THEORETICAL LINK AND CONCLUSION**

While this review is not by any means evidence of a causal link between reliance on agriculture and the risk of violent conflict, it underscores the importance of this sector upon the societies in which violent conflict is most prevalent. In addition, due to decades of political instability in the region and recurrent natural disasters, Kenyans have become increasingly vulnerable to poverty and hunger. From the foregoing, it is important to borrow FAO point that agriculture is the cornerstone of the rural population. This implicitly agrees with Balot and colleagues [46] that the direction a nation takes in terms of development is based on its outcome in agriculture. Therefore, in order to realize any development, the Kenya Small-scale farmers and pastoralists must be placed at the Centre of recovery efforts to increase and protect food availability at household level, and beyond by fostering peaceful coexistence. In times of conflicts, farmers have little or no access to production inputs, machinery or capital.

Continued insecurity and severe droughts in Eastern DRC have curtailed farming activities, leading to loss of produce and further population displacements. Easterly [47] contend that, conflicts generally reduce the desired stock of factors of production such as labour through killings and immigration which in turn hike price of labour. To Easterly, conflicts further lead to increase in prices of inputs. At the same time transportation, a crucial aspect of production, processing and marketing of agricultural production is adversely affected, consequently affecting the general outcome of production process. In turn, the increase in its price must have contributed to the lower income of the farmers in the conflict areas. Further, the research argues that livelihoods are directly affected through decreased access to land and inadequate access to natural resources, because of exclusion, displacement and the loss of biodiversity.

Easterly's opinion is highly relevant given that conflicts tend to affect agricultural productivity by creating shortages both in upstream input markets and downstream output markets, thus deterring increased food production, commercialization and stock management. Bearing these risks in mind, the farming populations tend to flee, decline or stop farming. In addition, farmers who manage to stay have no incentive to invest deeply in production, may reduce agriculture to subsistence and survival production. Messer and colleagues [48] contend that due to recruitment of

young men into militias and thousands of battle-related deaths not only will reduce family income but also take away labor from agriculture. Therefore, conflicts have proved to reduced agricultural production through displacement, death or strained social relationships. Conflicts lead to a reduction of farm resource efficiency and poverty resulting in population unable to invest in agricultural production.

### **Theoretical Link**

According to Wolff [49], it is absolutely beyond debate that violent conflict is destructive. It at best disrupts livelihood systems, damages essential infrastructure, and destroys people's coping mechanisms for dealing with shocks and can lead to a complete collapse of social and economic systems. Given the destructive nature of violent conflict, and its ability to undo years of positive development in the blink of an eye, development practice aimed at mitigating the risks of outbreaks of violent conflict promises to be one of the most effective means possible for the creation of long-term growth and improvement in people's lives. The question is; what are the theoretical explanations of the causes and impact of violence?

One theory can provides answers to this question is the relative deprivation theory that centers on the proposition that the negative effect associated with judgments of one's own status is not simply a function of one's objective status. Rather Relative deprivation happens when need achievement falls short of a reasonable standard [50].As proposed by Gurr [51], instead of an absolute standard of deprivation, a gap between expected and achieved welfare creates collective discontent. In other words, Walker and Smith [52] posit that through depriving people of their rights, a buildup of frustration and tension occurs which entices the onset of aggressive behavior. They also suggest that certain preconditions, such as the presence of a comparison other and entitlement, act conjunctively in affecting judgments of felt deprivation [53]. In addition, Cranmer [54] says that "feelings of deprivation arise when one has inconsistent rankings. According to Kendall [55], people who are satisfied with their present conditions are less likely to seek social change.

This theory explains different kinds of political violence that are experienced by communities when they feel that they are deprived of something they are entitled to. Gurr explains political violence as the result of collective discontent caused by a sense of relative deprivation. This theory is applicable in Kenyan situation because as many experts have noted the principal cause of ethno political conflict is the aspiration for economic or political equality on the part of the common people who lack it. Based on this argument it can be explained that ethno political

conflicts are reactions to discontent of people in an outer group who are unable to access resources in the hand of a group they are in competition with.

Another theory that provides an explanation is the realistic group conflict theory. The theory posits that competition between groups for finite resources leads to intergroup stereotypes, antagonism, and conflict. Such competition creates incompatible goals for members of different groups because one group's success in obtaining those resources prevents the other group from obtaining them. Such conflicts of interest lead to the development of in-group norms that foster negative reactions to the out-group, backed by punishment and rejection of those in-group members who deviate from those norms. It also argues that cooperation in pursuit of super ordinate goals, mutually desired outcomes that are unobtainable without such cooperation, and has the potential over time to reduce intergroup conflict and to create positive relations among members of cooperating groups.

According to realistic group conflict theory, intergroup conflict is motivated by a competition for a scarce external resource and group action is instrumental in winning this zero-sum contest. This theory obviously underscores a resource-denial strategy by one group against another, with the former group commandeering valued resources for its own group members. Such intergroup hostility will be non-existent if individuals in a society are not affected by such discriminating practices. The motivation to engage in realistic group conflict is undermined if people see that they have access to these resources despite their group membership. More often than not, the "in-group" perpetuates a resource-denial strategy because of the benefits involved; at the same time the "out-group" is confined in a helpless or ineffectual situation. The in-group further ensures its security by repressive and other security measures targeted against the out-group. The level of violence in conflict situations then becomes a function of intensity of motivation. Violence is directed toward the out-group because important economic, power, or security goals are involved.

The theory is appropriate for this study as it explains that destructively violent conflicts involve strong motives, which supply the energy necessary for action. In all instances, economic inequality suffered by one group is the dynamic element in the conflict. Political power can also be involved. The in-group or group in power usually institutionalizes violence, which is manifested in violence by police and army and labeled law and order. "Political power thus leads to a possibility of action through the legal machinery to establish a monopoly of violence in the hands of the ruling group. This strategy of power consolidation, which tends to erupt into ethno political violence, is

particularly applicable to many ethno political conflict situations in Africa.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it has been shown in the review that ethno political conflicts have direct impact on local, national, regional and global security. As Raleigh [56] argues ethno political conflict often take place at the cost of agricultural productivity, food security and are exacerbated by poverty and political exclusion. This makes members of different communities to live among each other but with persistent fear and insecurity that leads to their being unproductive because they fail to invest heavily on agriculture. This ultimately leads to decreased crop production due to lack of efficient use of labour inputs and farm capital. It has also been explained that inter-group violence in Sub Saharan Africa is often the outcome of a political process whereby some local groups take on other groups living in the same region, mostly as a proxy war for conflicts resulting from the uneven impact of state policies concerning resource exploitation. This is also shown by the relative deprivation and the realistic group conflict theories that explain the causes and fuels of the conflicts. The findings and review revelations through literature and theory is a contribution to the scanty information on challenges posed by such conflicts on livelihoods and more specifically on agricultural productivity in conflict and post-conflicts societies. There is also some light on how such violence are founded, developed and actualized through theories. This can be used by the government and other stakeholders to ensure ethno political conflicts are buried forever so as to have a sustainable food security in Kenya and beyond.

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