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## The Consequences of Inter-Communal Conflict across the Border in Moyale on Micro-Regionalism between Ethiopia and Kenya

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### Abstract

Although African border regions are promising areas with a great potential to develop practical integration, the recurrent inter-communal conflicts have negatively affected the economic interactions between the border communities. This paper aims at assessing the effect of inter-communal conflict across the border between Ethiopia and Kenya in Moyale on the micro-regionalization. A qualitative method was employed, based mainly on the information obtained from secondary sources, focusing on the effect of selected communal conflicts such as the Borana-Garri conflict in Moyale Ethiopia and the Borana-Gabra conflict in Kenya Moyale on micro-regionalization. It is revealed that albeit the common historical background, existing cultural and ethnic affinities, and geographical proximity among the border communities of Ethiopia and Kenya that continue to provide a strong impulse for cross-border socio-economic interaction, the protracted nature of intercommunal conflict significantly affects this vibrant cross-border socio-economic interaction in the form of obstructing cross-border trade, market operation, free movement of people, and vehicles between Ethiopia and Kenya at Moyale. It is found that though inter-communal conflicts are non-state and intrastate disputes, they have also proved to have a consequence on the neighbouring country by affecting its national economic prospects and security due to their spillover effect. Effective micro-regionalization, peace, and development in Moyale will only be feasible in the future if the ongoing and protracted intercommunal conflicts in and around the Moyale micro-region are brought under control. Hence, this study suggests that prevention and resolution of ICC should be put at the top of the political agenda with the aim of buttressing cross-border micro-regionalism.

**Keywords:** Inter-Communal Conflict, Micro-Regionalization, Cross-Border Socio-Economic Interaction, Ethiopia, Kenya, Moyale

### 1. Introduction

African border regions are promising areas with a great potential to develop practical integration, due to already developed trade and social networks across borders (AEBR, 2012). This is also true in the Ethiopia-Kenya border in Moyale. There are already developed trade and social networks between communities across the Ethiopia-Kenya border in Moyale (Molla, 2025). The Moyale micro-region provides a socio-economic activities interface that crosses state boundaries. Over the common border that the two countries share in Moyale, similar communal groups such as the Borana, Garri, Gabra, and Burji are living. This helps develop

social connections across borders, facilitating the movement of people, goods, and services that support micro-regionalization between communities of the two countries. As Little (2006:177) noted almost two decades ago, "the very existence of an international border creates economic opportunities that go well beyond cattle transactions, and distinguish cross-border trade from other types of livestock commerce." Indeed, besides livestock trade, several products, including cereals, pulses, vegetables, electronic products, utensils, and clothing, are traded across the Moyale border markets (Molla, 2025; USAID, 2018). The border trade in livestock, foodstuffs, clothes, electronic products, and other goods between the two countries across the border is widely



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perceived to provide mutual benefits (Pavenello, 2010; USAID, 2018).

However, the Ethiopia-Kenyan borderlands are hotbeds of cyclical conflicts (Wario, 2023). The protracted inter-communal conflicts that the Moyale region has experienced have negatively affected the micro-regionalization attempts. Protracted conflict is conceptualized as “usually conflict between ethnic groups which have been going on for some time, and which may appear to be unresolvable to the parties caught up in them” (Ryan, cited in Gati, 2009:28). For a long time, there has been conflict in Moyale. Particularly, since 1992, the conflict has become more serious and recurring as both the Oromia (Borana) and Somali (Garri) regions claim the town and its surrounding areas (Molla, 2025). The unresolved demarcation between the two state regions and the status of Moyale town is behind the cyclical conflict in the study area. Political competition between the Gabra and Borana groups in Moyale Kenya, accusations and counter-accusations of importation of voters from Ethiopia in every electioneering year has worsened existing tensions since the introduction of multi-party in the beginning of the 1990s in Kenya. The ongoing antagonisms between the Borana and Garri on the one hand and the Borana and Gabra on the other can be seen as a kind of protracted social conflict, specifically when assessing the nature of conflict for the last three decades. Hence, Moyale is chosen as it provides a chance to understand the effect of inter-communal conflict (ICC) on micro-regionalization among the communities along the Ethiopia-Kenya border.

Like inter-state and intra-state conflicts, inter-communal conflicts can also be a source of bilateral and regional political and economic destabilization (CEWARNb 2006; Glowacki and Gönc 2013) and, as such, it can be an obstacle to cross-border micro-regionalism between and among border communities living in different countries. However, there is a lack of systematic academic studies as to what extent inter-communal conflicts in one or both countries have consequences on the livelihood of the communities living on both sides of the border and the micro-regionalization across the border.

The purpose of this paper, thus, lies in its analysis consequences of inter-communal conflicts on micro-regionalization across the Ethiopia-Kenya border. Specifically, it focuses on how they affect the free movement of people, vehicles, goods, and services across the border, mainly considering the January 2012 conflict between Borana and the Gabra, July 2012 conflict between Borana and Garri in in the Ethiopia Moyale, and the August 2013 conflict between the Borana, Burji and Gabra in Kenya Moyale. To address this objective, a qualitative method was employed, based mainly on the information obtained from secondary sources, focusing on the effect of selected communal conflicts (the Borana-Garri conflict in Moyale Ethiopia and the Borana-Gabra conflict in Kenya Moyale) on micro-regionalization. Before analyzing the effect of inter-communal conflict on micro-regionalization, it is imperative to briefly conceptualize inter-communal conflict and micro-regionalization, and review how communal constraints affect the progress in regionalization conflicts.

## 2. Communal Conflicts as a Constraint to Progress in Regionalization

There have been three types of violent conflicts that have plagued the Horn: inter-state conflicts; intra-state conflicts (Conflicts between the state and part of the society governed by the state); and society versus society conflicts – that is, ethnic [communal], pastoralist, and pastoralist versus agriculturalist conflicts (CEWARN, 2006). In terms of socio-economic and political prospects, the three types of conflicts have harmful consequences in the occurring countries as well as neighboring states. However, unlike communal conflict, the effect of inter- and intra-state conflict on regionalism/economic integration is well established. For example, for a short period (1991-1998), Ethiopia and Eritrea had total economic integration, with open borders, free trade, and the use of a single currency (Alemo, 2010; Healy, 2011). This, however, moved in the direction of economic disintegration as a result of the 1998-2000 conflict (Healy, 2011).

Civil conflict, albeit an intrastate dispute, is also found to have an impact on the neighboring countries by affecting their economic prospects and by geographically spreading to those countries (Bah and Tapsoba, 2010). For example, the civil conflict in Somalia have not only affected the population of Somalia, they have also had a spillover effect to the Horn of Africa region and the international community in terms of problem of refugees, piracy, the smuggling of small arms and light weapons, the spreading of terrorism, and radicalization, mainly affecting the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) member states.

African countries seem particularly plagued by communal conflicts. In the IGAD region, communal violence is considered one of the security challenges (IGAD-CEWARN, 2023). Communal conflict could be violent or ‘latent’ (not yet given rise to violence). It takes place between non-state groups which are organized along a shared communal identity, but which have not announced a group name and do not have a formal military structure (Johansson, 2011:4). It can generally be understood as a conflict in which groups that define themselves using ethnic, national or religious criteria, claim other counterpart group, the state or other political actors. According to Brosché and Elfversson (2012:35), a communal conflict is a violent conflict between non-state groups that are organized along a shared communal identity that may seek material and political gains. Violent conflict, they postulate, denotes the fact that the parties use lethal violence to gain control over some disputed and perceived indivisible resource, such as a piece of land or local political power. As Wario (2023:10) aptly stated “The busy town of Moyale with bee-hive of economic activities have severally been rendered a ‘ghost town’ by violent armed conflicts.”

Communal conflict, in this paper, can be conceptualized as violent conflict between groups that share a common identification, basically along clan/ethnic or tribal lines, who are not groups that are permanently organized for combat, but who at times organize themselves along said lines to engage in fighting. It is a conflict



between non-state groups across borders that are organized along a shared communal identity. A communal conflict could be the one that takes place within a state's territory, in which its consequence has the potential to transcend the boundary of a state, or which involves communities of two or more states sharing a boundary. Communal conflict and cross-border conflict can be used interchangeably for this study.

According to the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (cited in Brosché and Elfversson, 2013:44), the six worst-hit countries in 1989–2010, in terms of the number of communal conflicts, were Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda. Communal conflict is endemic in the vast arid region on both sides of the Kenya-Ethiopia border (The Conversation, September 13, 2024). A major challenge to economic development, communal conflicts cause serious damage to national economic prospects. The most common feature that has been identified in the literature on the consequences of communal conflicts is the decline of economic capabilities that results from communal conflict.

Although intrastate events, it has been argued that communal conflicts have a strong negative impact on the neighboring countries (Collier et al, 2003). Murdoch and Sandler (cited in Bah and Tapsoba, 2010:5) find that civil wars reduce short-run growth across an entire region of neighboring countries. De Groot (cited in Bah and Tapsoba, 2010) moderates this finding by arguing that only contiguous ("primary") neighboring countries actually suffer from the negative effects of proximate conflict, and also experience a decline in their economic capabilities. Non-contiguous ("secondary") neighbors experience, on the contrary, a positive spillover effect.

There is also some evidence that cross-border communal conflict may also have an impact on neighbors through geographical spillovers. The 2011 World Development Report (WDR, 2011: 65–67) assessed the spillover effects of violence in general and cross-border violence in particular. It identified direct and indirect economic and non-economic consequences as a result of conflict. It indicates that the development consequences of violence spill across borders, with implications for neighbors, for the region, and globally. It asserts that violence in one country can create a "bad neighborhood" that affects economic prospects. It estimates that countries lose 0.7 percent of their annual GDP for each neighbor involved in civil war. It also reduces regional trade and economic activity. Similarly, in the attempt to interpret and analyze cross-border conflicts and their effect on integration in the Horn of Africa in general, Pavanello (2010) believes that ongoing conflicts and random border closures increase risks and uncertainties for merchants, and thereby retards trade activity. Thus, reflecting on how to manage or transform them is very essential to avert conflict situations for effective micro-regionalization.

Conflicts that endure over long periods can have tragic outcomes for the individuals and societies that must live in them (Beaudoin, 2013). Protracted conflict is "the type of ongoing and seemingly unresolvable conflict" (Azar, 1985). Protracted social conflict entails a vicious cycle of fear and hostile interactions among the

communal contestants, and meaningful communication between or among conflicting parties dries up; the ability to satisfy communal acceptance needs is severely diminished (Beaudoin, 2013).

This theoretical position is very useful when seen within the context of the inter-communal conflict (ICC) in the Moyale region. This is evident with the multi-dimensional and changing nature of the conflict. The ongoing antagonisms between the Borana and Garri on the one hand and the Borana and Gabra on the other can be seen as a kind of protracted social conflict, specifically when assessing the nature of conflict for the last three decades. Since relations between the communities have been severely deteriorated since the 1990s, and still simmering, is going on confirms the fact that it's a protracted conflict. The conflict between Borana and Garri on the Ethiopian side, for example, will continue as far as no solution is given to the status of Moyale town. This has led to the conflict having a protracted nature, which in turn has implications for micro-regionalization.

### 3. The Effect of Inter-Communal Conflict on Micro-Regionalization

There are myriad consequences of inter-communal conflict (ICC). Some of these are general, but indirectly related to cross-border socio-economic interactions or micro-regionalization efforts, whereas others are directly linked. Thus, the discussion on the consequences of ICC is categorized into two: those that are indirectly linked to micro-regionalization, which the researcher prefers to use the term 'general' consequences of ICC, and those that are directly related. Let us begin with the general effect of ICC.

#### 3.1 General Consequences of Inter-Communal Conflict on Micro-Regionalization

It is well documented that inter-state conflict and intra-state (between state and non-state) conflicts in the Horn of Africa have resulted in grave consequences. From anecdotal estimates, for example, the number of human lives deaths from different post-independence intra-state and inter-state conflicts in Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Uganda, and Kenya are said to be over 5.9 million and resulted in the displacement of over 7.5 million people (Mengisteab, 2011:17). According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, 2011), from 1990 to 2010 the Horn had suffered from 32 state based armed conflict dyads where a government is one of the warring parties resulted in approximately 231,510 battle related fatalities. The recent Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, 2025), data indicates that the number of deaths in armed conflicts from 2021 to 2024 in Ethiopia and Kenya is 300,843 and 516, respectively.

As can be seen from the forthcoming discussion, like inter-state and intra-state conflicts, inter-communal conflicts involving different clans/communal groups across the Ethiopia-Kenya border in Moyale are terrible, which have caused great loss of lives, widespread looting of economic resources, environmental degradation, and massive displacement of people. They also harm



the livelihoods of the community, as well as micro-regionalization and the national and regional economies.

### 3.1.1 Loss and Injury of Human and Livestock

Death and injury of humans and animals are one of the major consequences of violent ICC in Moyale. However, it is not easy to come up with exact number of people who lost their lives and the number of lost livestock. This is mainly because some are killed in the bush, which makes it impractical to do body count under prevailing circumstances of insecurity, or not all parties in conflicts may be willing to disclose the exact extent of the casualties they suffered. Hence, the number of fatalities may be underreported. Nevertheless, some attempts have been made by a few sources to do a body count. For example, the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Country Updates reported that inter-communal and cross-border pastoral conflicts in the Moyale Weredas (Ethiopia) and Moyale District (Kenya) often result in considerable loss of human and livestock lives. The CEWARN country update (2005-2009) recorded 130 human deaths and 2,756 livestock losses from 2005 to 2009 in the Ethiopia Moyale Wereda and Kenya Moyale District (CEWARN, 2009). The report, however, did not include all the fatalities that occurred in this period. For example, in some of the months of 2005 and 2006, the fatalities were not reported. This suggests that the number of those who lost their lives, as well as the loss of livestock in the period, might even be very large.

Most notably, the fatalities in the conflicts have even become graver. For example, in a single event clash between Garri and Borana, which began around 25 July 2012 in Ethiopia Moyale continued for the next three days, resulting in the loss of 20 people (BBC, 2012; IOM, WFP and UNHCR, 2012). On the Kenyan side, because of the Borana and Gabra conflict since October 2011, which finally escalated into a fully-fledged conflict in mid-January 2012, resulted in approximately 60 deaths and 57 injuries (DREF, 2012). The violence that broke out on August 30, 2013, between the Borana, Burji and Gabra till the next day in Kenya Moyale led to at least two dozen deaths (IRIN, 2013). The result of the Borana-Gabra conflict in Kenya Moyale as from 15th of July to 8th December resulted in 71 injuries and 20 deaths (CAR, 2014: 3). At least 21 people were killed and 61 wounded in two days of intense fighting between ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia in March 2018 (Aljazeera, 2018).

The loss of human and livestock as a result of protracted and ongoing conflict has created fear and insecurity among the communities (Molla, 2017), and the reduction of availability of livestock for trade. This in turn also reduces interactions among the communal group and may impede progress in the micro-regionalization attempts among the communities along the border between the two countries, as it may restrict movement of people and goods and, by extension market operation. Hence, loss of humans and animals has implications for micro-regionalization indirectly

### 3.1.2 Displacement of People

Another consequence of prolonged and ongoing ICC in the Moyale area is the displacement of people. Displacement is one of the major effects of ICC. Violence and displacement of communities living in the Moyale borderlands is rampant (Wario, 2023). Every ICC has produced a certain number of displacements in the area. The July 2012 incidents proved the shocking effect of conflict on displacement. The conflict between Borana and Garri that took place in July 2012 in the Ethiopia Moyale caused the displacement of over 20,000 people (BBC 2012; IOM, WFP, and UNHCR 2012). According to other sources, the number of people displaced because of this conflict is larger. For example, according to the USAID fact sheet (2012:3), the July 2012 conflict had displaced more than 46,000 people within Ethiopia, including nearly 34,000 people in Oromiya Region and more than 12,000 individuals in Somali Region, and approximately 8,000 displaced Ethiopians were residing in Somare town, Moyale District in northern Kenya. This has security implications to Kenya as it hosts the displaced. Overall, the ICC in the area displaced some 218,591 individuals in 2012 (OCHA 2012). While at least 48,000 people were forced to escape Kenya Moyale to seek refuge in Ethiopia in 2014 (Reliefweb, 5 Jan 2014), while more than 5,000 Ethiopians were forced to seek refuge in Kenya in 2018 (Al Jazeera, December 2019)

On the Kenyan side, the January 2012 conflict between Borana and the Gabra displaced about some 5,000 families (DREF, 2012). Similarly, thousands of families remain displaced from the northern Kenya district of Moyale, close to the Ethiopian border, following the wave of clan violence on August 30 and 31, 2013 between the Borana and Gabra in which more than 38,000 people from 6,381 households have been forced to leave their homes (IRIN, 2013). Another conflict was the conflict that started on 15th of July 2013, and has been going on since then up to December 2013. Though the fighting stopped owing to the deployment of the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF), the clashes have left a trail of consequences. The details of the consequences that these conflicts had on Moyale community is aptly captured in the assessment report compiled by a team from Marsabit County, Moyale Sub-County, the Ministry of Health, National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), Kenya Red Cross Society, Ministry of Health, World Vision Kenya, Concern Worldwide and Care Kenya which was conducted in December 2013 (CAR, 2014). To fully appreciate the impact of the ongoing conflict, it is important to note that out of an estimated 80,550 people living in Moyale constituency, 53,968 people, which is 67 % of the population, were displaced (CAR, 2014: 4-5)

Most of these facilities are overcrowded and resulting in a lack of sanitary facilities. As aptly noted by IACD (2009: 30), rights of the displaced people have been grossly violated as there is a strong correlation between displacements and increased rape cases, physical assaults, prostitution, and child labor. Besides, scores of children, women, and men were separated from their families, while others were missing. Displaced families were in urgent need of food assistance, shelter, drugs, water, cooking utensils, clothing,



and mosquito nets, among other things (IRIN, 2013). The provision of food aid among the displaced groups has resulted in unprecedented dependency syndrome among the community. The displacement, destruction of property, and loss of lives are the major effects of conflict. Most displaced people did not have any food for their families, and access to markets was a big challenge (CAR 2014:5-6).

### 3.1.3 Destruction and Theft of Property

In addition to displacement, the protracted inter-communal conflicts in Moyale have inflicted the destruction of private and public properties such as schools and businesses. Household equipment and livestock are looted during ICC. BBC (2012) and CAR (2014) recorded the devastating effect of inter-communal conflict in the area. For example, the July 2012 inter-communal conflict in the Ethiopia's Moyale resulted in the destruction of property and the burning of villages (BBC 2012; UNHCR 2012).

On the Kenyan side, the mid-January 2012 conflict between the Borana and the Gabra communities caused the burning down of houses and destruction of property perceived to belong to the rival community. About 1,000 houses, health facilities, water points and schools have been vandalized or burned (DREF, 2012). In the July 2013 and July 2013 in Moyale Kenya between Borana and Gabra, a total of 100 houses were found to be burnt in various areas: 62 in Butiye, 15 in watiti, 3 in Manyatta and 2 in Sessi and 19 in odda (CAR, 2014:5). Some of the houses were found to be looted or/and destroyed. One school (Vision academy) was also observed to be totally burnt and so was Sessi Guest House. Quite a number are traumatized having witnessed the destruction of their property or lost their loved ones both of which affect milk production (ibid). Besides milk production, the destruction and theft of property because of conflict may lead to the reduction of volume of all types of products and by extension market operation.

### 3.1.4 Disruption of the Socio-Economic Situation

The protracted conflicts among clans and politically instigated skirmishes within the two Moyales have inflicted enormous damage on people's livelihoods and destabilized local economies. The socio-economic situations of the people in the area have been negatively affected because of the ongoing conflict. ICCs are affecting the development process and provision of essential services, destroying the social amenities already in place.

The joint assessment of Marsabit County, Moyale Sub-County, the Ministry of Health, Kenya Red Cross Society and others (CAR, 2014; CAR, 2013) reported that the July 2013 to December 2013 conflict between Gabra and Borana virtually affected all areas of the central and Gobo division. The conflict led to most of households to live below the absolute poverty line, with moderate malnutrition rates, a shortage of water, poor sanitation, and low literacy levels. Income, money, and resources to survive have been hard hit by the conflict. Livelihoods have been worse off because there are no livelihood opportunities, livelihood assets have been lost (left behind, destroyed, and looted) and insecurity/fear is preventing people from engaging in livelihood activities; farmers

cannot farm, traders are fearful and pastoralists have migrated to consider safe zones far away from their areas of habitation (ibid).

According to CAR (2014:6), the conflict has exacerbated the hitherto dire water problem in Moyale. In the towns, for example, water (of questionable quality) is being sought from an average of 10 km by donkeys and being vended at Kenyan Shilling (KShs) 50 per 20-liter jerry can, a price beyond the reach of many displaced families with no source of income. Areas worst hit by the water crisis are: Kinisa, Godoma, Sessi, Manyatta, Lami, Tesso, Arosa and Heilu. The water problem is further exacerbated by insecurity that restricts access to water sources and lack of water collection and storage facilities. Women have been widowed by the conflicts, further increasing their vulnerabilities to poverty and human right abuses (IADC, 2009:30). In general, protracted conflict in Moyale disrupted the socio-economic situation and increased hatred between groups.

### 3.1.5 Cessation of Social Services

ICCs have also reduced education and medical services and sometime caused the closure of school and medical centers. ICCs in Moyale have resulted in either damage, loot or close down school, health centers, restaurants and other social services which makes for people difficult to access to services. People in the area used to cross the border to access health centers and school but this is possible only when the area enjoys relative peace (Adhanom and Murray, 2022).

It is worth noting to consider the joint assessment report (CAR 2014; CAR 2013) about the effect of the July to December 2013 conflict between Borana and Gabra. Due to this conflict, schools were closed, students and teachers from the affected communities displaced which enhanced low standard of performance. Five public schools and one private primary school were destroyed, burnt and looted. The following learning institutions were affected in Kenya Moyale: Butiye primary school (1 classroom was completely destroyed), Moyale Girls Secondary School (Libraries, Classrooms, Computer Lab were broken into and learning materials destroyed/looted), St.Mary's Primary School (Gate and Fence destroyed), Illadu and Mansille Primary School's (Building broken into, learning materials destroyed and School Meals Programme food stolen) and Sessi Academy, a private school was burnt (CAR, 2013:2).

With respect to Medicare, 5 health centers (Godoma, Odda, Kinisa, Mansile, Butiye) were closed down due to conflict (CAR 2014:7). In some cases medical staffs fear going to work while those that are open and have medical staffs do not have adequate supply of medicine and essential Medical apparatus. The general hospital could not be accessed due to the fear of ethnic violence and people take patients to areas where they feel that it is safe. Some staffs from the other tribes do not feel safe working at the District hospital. Because of insecurity, people are finding it hard to access medical care in the open facilities for fear of attack and have resorted to walking for long distances to seek for medical care where they feel safe even across the border in Ethiopia. There is no access to adequate health care mainly because of insecurity and



inadequate health services. Most of the health facilities have run short of essential medicine. Some of the health in Heillu, Mansille, Kinisa, Odda, Butiye, Arosa and Manyatta facilities are closed due to insecurity and destruction (CAR, 2013:4). This suggests that communal conflict not only affect social amenities but also reduces social relationship among the communal groups. This in turn may impede the socio-economic interactions across the border between the communities of the two countries.

### 3.1.6 Fear, Suspicions, Mistrust and Loss of Confidence among the Communal Groups

The combinations of the above effects have also produced fear, mistrust and the reduction of social cohesion. The affected population encountered ordeal experiences during the clashes. Some lost property, houses burnt, displaced, lost loved ones, and some are living in fear, distress, and panic (CAR, 2013; CAR, 2014). As Wario (2023) rightly proclaims, conflicts in Moyale "have led to mistrust, suspicion, and fear among the ethnic groups and make it difficult for them to work together towards common goals".

The persistence of inter-communal conflict has reduced cooperative and social relationships that had existed for a long period of time (Molla, 2017). Fear and suspicion among the community reign in the Moyale due to prolonged ICC. The conflict has also reduced the social relationships in the area among the communal groups (Wario, 2023). Let alone crossing the border, it is risky to go into the deep to the other side of the main road Moyale Ethiopia that belongs to another Woreda (Molla, 2017). The devastating effects of prolonged and unabated conflict in Moyale are the creation of fear, suspicion, mistrust, and loss of confidence among the communal groups. The persistent of ICC for a long time without being properly addressed has reduced social relationship (Shikuku, Okoth, and Kimokoti, 2020) that existed for long period of time and produced somewhat mistrust, suspicion, and uncertainty among the communal groups in the borderlands between Ethiopia and Kenya. There have been a number of peace initiatives undertaken by different actors such as government, intergovernmental organizations, and traditional institutions and NGO to reduce the levels of violence. However, the conflict continue unabated (Odhiambo, 2012; Wario, 2023). Consequently, people are still living in fear and movement in the areas where fighting occurred is almost nil.

It was evident that quite a number of the affected people by the July-December 2013 conflict had encountered bad experiences during the clashes, such as losing their breadwinners, their belongings (vehicles, houses and businesses) to the conflict, thereby subjecting them to stress and trauma (CAR 2014:7). The situation is similar in Ethiopia Moyale. Both Ethiopia Moyale and Kenya Moyale remained tense since the incident, and potential for future violent conflicts still exists since the underlying issues have not been adequately addressed.

### 3.2 The Direct Impact of ICC on Micro-Regionalization

Inter-communal conflicts are a major challenge to the economic development of the Moyale region. As discussed in the previous

section, the protracted and unabated ICCs in Moyale have had very negative and severe effects on the communities living along the Ethiopia-Kenyan border. However, it is worth noting that, other than general consequence such as the tragic massacres, loss of property, and displacements of large segments of the communities, increased fear, mutual suspicion, and mistrust, the conflict among the Gabra, Garri and Borana and Burji have direct effect on the micro-regionalization attempts. This consequence is manifested in terms of restriction of cross-border movement of people and vehicle, obstruction of cross border trade and market operation. Let us begin with the impact of ICC on free movement of people and vehicles.

#### 3.2.1 Disruption of Free Movement of People and Vehicles

As discussed earlier, over the common border that the two countries share in Moyale, similar communal groups such as the Borana, Garri, Gabra and Burji are living which facilitate the movement of people and goods and services that buttress micro-regionalization between the communities of the two countries. However, such free movement of people and vehicle occurs only when the area yields peace. In times of violent ICC, the thousands of people moving across the border turned to almost nil. Unlike in the past, once conflict is erupted it cannot easily be stopped (Molla, 2017). So the restriction on the movement of people and vehicle is serious, which may sometimes take more than a month. For example, following the December 2013 conflict between the Barana and Gabra, the border points was closed for about two months which was open only in February 2014 (CEWARN, 2014; CAR, 2014). In the times of communal conflict and tension, security at checking points have become tight, cross border points is closed, curfew is imposed, there is no or little means of transportation. This has serious implication for movement of people and vehicles such as automobile and motorcycles and taxis along the main cross border points.

It was reported that no person from another communal group was ready or keen to go the other community's stronghold underpinning the inherent sense of insecurity (CAR (2014:3). This inhibits any meaningful economic cooperation with other clans, leading to serious micro-regionalization implication.

#### 3.2.2 Obstruction of Cross-Border Trade

Cross-border trade has long been a feature of Moyale's economy and has been the lifeblood of the economy of the Moyale micro region for centuries. Trade provides incomes for herders, traders, intermediaries/middlemen, transporters and local authorities in both countries Molla<sup>b</sup>, 2025). However, the persistent conflicts continue to affect trade, income and trading relations between the two communities in Moyale. Trade and conflict are closely intertwined as cross-border trading activity is highly correlated with the pattern of conflict.

The protracted conflict in Moyale usually resulted in random border closures which in turn increase risks and uncertainties for merchants, producer. For example, the July 2012 Borana/Garri conflict in the Ethiopia Moyale led to the closure of border, destruction and theft of goods such as livestock and the closure of



businesses on both sides of the border (BBC 2012; IOM, WFP and UNHCR, 2012). On the Kenyan side, the July-December 2013 conflict had encountered bad experiences during the clashes among which are loss belongings of traders (CAR, 2014:7) which increased risks and uncertainty for traders. So, traders could not move their livestock to market for fear of attack. It is important to acknowledge that some variation in both the volume of trade and prices can occur within only a few days if a conflict erupts. The volume of their sale to the other side of the border decreased somehow due to ICC.

Overall, there has been a contraction/reduction of cross-border trade activities. The fear of losing their property and their lives may prevent traders from selling and buying goods across the border. (Molla, 2015) Traders incur high risks of livestock and non-livestock products losses from insecurity, which has hindered traders crossing the border to seek markets.

During a decade of conflict the costs of trade have risen relentlessly, because of the fees associated with armed escorts of trekking cattle from Moyale to Nairobi and for the reason that traders are usually forced to take longer and circuitous routes to avoid conflict hotspots, which also increases the cost (Molla, 2015). The impact of conflict on trade revealed rising cereal prices and deteriorating terms of trade between cereals and livestock in parts of the Moyale region.

In addition, because of the conflict between the Gabra, Burji and Borana on August 30 and 31 2013 in Kenya Moyale, the suspension of operations by transporters has led to a spike in food prices in the area. The prices of hiring and ferrying livestock by lorries doubled as a result of the clashes. Animals at the market are too few and very expensive and difficult for traders to make profit (IRIN, 2013). All of this has illustrated clearly the devastating consequences the ICC has had on cross-border trade.

### 3.2.3 Contraction of Market Operations

Moyale is a busy market for both informal and formal trade of a number of products such as livestock, cereal, pulses, vegetable, electronic products, utensils, and clothes. The Moyale Corridor holds great potential for improving regional trade and food security (USAID, 2018). Micro-regionalization or cross-border activities between communities across the Ethiopia-Kenya border in Moyale are marked primarily due to their proximity, social, cultural, and political linkages, and the fact that their populations visit the same markets (Molla<sup>b</sup>, 2025). The market operates every day including Sunday. However, such market operation prevails only when the area yields peace. In the advent of ICC, markets are either relocated or closed/inaccessible and interrupted. In most of the conflict that erupted people closed their businesses until the violence subsided (Ibid.). As a response to the violent conflict between the communities, both Ethiopian and Kenyan governments closed the border with the intention of reducing conflict across the border, all of which constrain marketing activities (Mahmoud 2010:13).

In response to the violent ICC, traders have taken various measures, which might in turn affect the cross-border market

operation. They reduced their cross-border marketing activities by concentrating their marketing activities within the local market in the advent of ICC, albeit the extent to which such measure is small (Molla<sup>b</sup>, 2025).

There are also cases where traders are forced to withdraw from conflict-stricken areas, relocate their trading activities in fear of being looted, and incur losses. For example, the July 2012 ICC in the Ethiopia Moyale led to the closure of businesses on both sides of the border (BBC, 2012; IOM, WFP and UNHCR 2012). On the Kenyan side, two days of inter-clan fighting (on August 30 and 31, 2013) among the Gabra, Burji and Borana communities in Kenya Moyale saw houses torched, gunfire exchanged and business come to a standstill in the areas of Somare and Teti (IRIN, 2013). Thus, certain markets that were major centers of trade before the conflict became shadows. All this suggests that there is clear evidence of barriers to micro-regionalization in terms of market operations due to ICC.

### 3.2.4 Bullets as Commodities

In Moyale-Kenya, operational inefficiency of state security apparatus continues to exacerbate small arms race across borders (Wario, 2023). Easy availability and circulation of firearms in the Moyale region have been exacerbating prolonged violent conflicts and social breakdown within the Gabra, Garri and Boran communities. The human costs of inter-communal conflict in the Moyale borderland region have risen, owing to expanded access to and use of more advanced weapon systems such as the AK4, which has reshaped the dynamics of conflict, and significantly increased the magnitude of fatalities (Molla, 2017). What is striking is that the engagement in arms trade is terrifically increasing while the arrangement of exchange of trade between the communal groups is declining due to the prevalence of tension among the communities (Molla<sup>b</sup>, 2025).

Even if people in the area have the culture of possessing firearms the trend of engaging in buying and selling firearms has tremendously changed since inter-ethnic rivalries between the communal groups for scarce resources, coupled with struggling for political and administrative control (Molla<sup>a</sup>, 2025). This implies that the competition for political control of the area in turn has pushed communities to arm themselves for security, which has negative implications for the social and economic ties among the communities.

Cyclical inter-ethnic conflicts among nomadic groups exacerbate this proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region, which has made it easier for communities to engage in violent conflict. (Wario, 2023). Insecurity arising from the conflicts has allowed the communal groups to smuggle in and trade in firearms. The fact that ICCs continue unabated and the root drivers of conflict have not yet been addressed, the communal groups in both countries strive to accumulate more firearms and thus are willing conduits for trade in firearms. The protracted and unresolved conflict between the Gabra and Borana in Kenya and the Borana and Garri in Ethiopia, which has produced tension, fear, and mistrust among the communities, has influenced them to demand



more firearms as these groups compete for scarce resources and control of more territory and administration. This has pushed communities to arm themselves for security rather than engage in trade in commodities. This suggests that the security of the micro region has been deteriorating.

Arms that are easily transported across borders by pastoralists find their way into criminal groups and agents for further transfer in the center. This situation is further aggravated by the presence of insurgent groups such as the OLF in the Borana Zone of the Oromia regional state adjoining Kenya (Tigist, 2010; Mahmoud, 2011). The peripheral status as well as the vast and porous borders arms smugglers frequently straddle across the border, and their unmonitored movements facilitates arms transfers in the area, which has security implication, by extension it has negative impact on micro-regionalization efforts.

### 3.2.5 Other Effects: Migration and Disheartening Investment

There are a number of people particularly Ethiopians who are employed and work in Gambo (Moyale Kenya) which buttresses economic ties and by extension micro-regionalization between the communities of the two countries in Moyale (Molla<sup>b</sup>, 2025). However, this economic ties has been affected by the outbreak of ICC either in Moyale Ethiopia or/and Kenya Moyale. The protracted ICC in the area usually leads to large out-migration and displacement of communities in general and laborers in particular.

In addition to its effect on laborers, ICC also acts as a disincentive to investment. ICC in the Moyale region discourages people to invest in area for security reasons. When some businesspersons get rich they prefer to invest in faraway places like Hawassa, Addis Ababa, or Nairobi, which are assumed to be stable and conducive for their own lives and the operation of business (Molla, 2015). Persistent ICC has implication on diverting resources to other places.

Even though the Moyale town has the potential for development as it serves as the connection point between the two countries and is considered to be the hub of economic and trading activities, the persistent ICC dishearten people to invest in the area (Ibid). It could be argued that the risk and uncertainty associated with ICC notably because of fear of losing gains and business that is emanated from the protracted and undiminished ICC in the area results in a lower investment in Moyale state. This undermines the micro-regionalization process across the border between the two countries.

To recap, what has been happening in both Ethiopia Moyale and Kenya Moyale over the last three decades illustrates clearly how ICC disrupts and can destroy free movement of people and vehicle, cross-border trade, market operation and investment. It has also encouraged arms trade that significantly undermines the local economies, livelihoods and the micro-regionalization attempts. From the discussions, what is explicable is that conflicts between the Borana and Gabra on the one hand and the Borana and Garri on the other have a negative consequence on micro-regionalization efforts such as free movement of people and goods across the

border not only when they occur, but also when there is a risk that they occur. The effect of ICC is, however, not only confined to local communities, which is the subject of the next section.

### 6.4 Implications for the Two Countries and the Horn Region

In general, the political relation between Ethiopia and Kenya at the state level is labeled as healthy (Molla<sup>a</sup>. 2025). In recent past, some attempts have been made to do the same in economic spheres. Consequently, their relationships are strengthened in the area of road construction and railway connection between the two countries through Moyale. Trade agreements between the two are also reached, among other things to encourage and facilitate the engagement of commercial contracts between business organizations, as well as facilitate freedom of movement of transit commercial goods originating from each country (Embassy of The Republic of Kenya, 2020).

However, the protracted and unabated ICC in Ethiopia Moyale, and Kenya Moyale may have implications for the two countries in the process of materializing these economic agreements. The communal conflicts, “though taking place at local levels, have involved complex legal, political and economic dynamics that extend from local to national, and even regional dimensions encompassing the communities and their allies elsewhere in Ethiopia and across the border in Kenya.” (Odhiambo, 2012). Although non-state events, besides their effect on the livelihood of the borderland people in their socio-economic ties across the border, ICCs could have a strong negative effect on the neighboring countries' economy through geographical spillovers. In particular, contiguous neighboring countries usually suffer from the negative effects of proximate ICC and experience a decline in their economic capabilities. Because of ongoing and persistent insecurity across the border, the potential sources of development for the national economy are discouraged in the form of losing government revenue, as discussed below, or loss of potential public and private sectors from investing in the communities.

ICC in the Horn affects the viability of regional economic integration both directly and indirectly. An insidious consequence of protracted and unabated ICC is that governments give priority to national security and defense interests at the expense of micro-regionalization and wider regional economic and human security. The legacy of conflict is a profound lack of trust between governments, affecting their willingness to enter into long-term economic agreements for mutual benefit (Healy, 2011). Similar argument can also be made. The legacy of the protracted ICC in the Moyale region is a profound lack of trust between communal groups as well as communal groups and governments that undermines economic ties between the communities along the Ethiopia and Kenya border. At the same time, because of protracted conflict and the prevalence of tension and insecurity coupled with the presence of insurgent groups like OLF and Al Shabaab along the Ethiopia-Kenya border, governments are more concerned about its security than micro-regionalization across the border.



Although ICCs are intrastate disputes, they are a source of regional political and economic destabilization and, as such, it might be an obstacle to the economic prospects of neighboring countries. This is somehow observed in the Moyale conflict. The ICC in Moyale Kenya, has severely affected Ethiopia's sources of revenue from customs duty, which has implications for other countries in the Horn of Africa. The case in point is the communal conflict between the Gabra, Burji and Borana, which started on 15th of July 2013, and has been going on since then up to December 2013. Compare to the June/July 2013 revenue (Birr 33,978,723.45) where the Moyale region was relatively peaceful to the revenue gained in July/August 2013 (Birr 7,330,862.12) when ICC started in Kenya Moyale, the revenue from Moyale custom was adversely affected, which was suddenly dropped by 446 %, which is substantial in quantitative terms. (Molla, 2015). The declining trend of government revenue during the conflict period, from mid-July to December 2013 demonstrates the negative association between the presence of ICC in the neighboring country and the reduction of government's revenue. That is, the conflict in Kenya has reduced income of Ethiopian government.

Besides, the trend of Ethiopia government revenue from Moyale Custom duty was also affected in quantitative terms by the July 25-28, 2012 inter-communal conflict that took place within Ethiopia Moyale. Compare to the June/July 2012 revenue (Birr 22,303,905.97) that the Ethiopian government gained before the conflict erupted to the revenue obtained in July/ August 2012 (Birr 7,404,120.16) during the three days Borana-Garri conflict in Ethiopia Moyale, the revenue was precipitously dropped by 301 %. In the aftermath of conflict, however, the revenue increased again from Birr 7,404,120.16 to Birr 23,444,955.50 in August/September 2012 by 317 %. This negative association at the time occurred due to the closure of border following conflict, which in turn resulted in culminating formal bilateral trade between the two countries through Moyale during conflict period. This has also implication for the region as a whole.

As mentioned earlier, this conflict virtually affected all areas of the central and Gobo division. Approximately 6,500 households were affected, of which 107 houses were burnt and 186 houses destroyed and looted and it also led to most of the households to live below the absolute poverty line (CAR, 2013:3). However, the effect was not only confined to Kenya Moyale, but also to Ethiopia Moyale and beyond.

One can find that ICC significantly affects regional economic process through its negative effect on sources of revenue of government by affecting bilateral trade relationship. The two cases, that is, the July 2012 conflict between the Borana and Garri in Ethiopia Moyale and the July to December 2013 conflict between the Borana and Gabra in Moyle Kenya and their negative effects on the Ethiopian revenue illustrated above also suggest that similar effect may occur on the Kenyan government. Both cases elucidate the negative association of the occurrence of ICC in the borderlands in one of the country may also affect the neighboring state's economic prospects and its implication for bilateral as well as regional trade relations in the Horn of Africa.

Moreover, as Glowacki and Gönc (2013) noted, a protracted and unabated ICC and the prevalence of tension among the communal groups threaten regional stability due to refuge and movements of displaced persons. Hosting refugees has security, political, and economic implications. Refugees could pose a security threat to the host country. Besides, the economic effect of hosting refugees on the neighboring states, the presence of the other state refugees of the Gbara, Garri and Borana communities in the other side of the border, is said to have increased tensions and created ethnic alliance militants. As stated earlier, the communities being in a state of apprehension over future outbreaks of violence they are engaged in collecting more arms. This also threaten regional stability.

Given the importance of livestock to livelihoods in the region (for example, it contributes about 45% of agricultural GDP of Ethiopia, 19% of the overall GDP, and over 30% of the agricultural labor force (PSI, 2023) as well as significant contribution to the livelihood base in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands, the prevalence of communal conflict in the Moyale micro-region greatly reduce and affect not only the income and employment opportunity and welfare of border communities which arises from cross-border trading and market activities but also leading to welfare losses and adversely affects food security for communities of the two countries and the Horn of Africa in general (Molla, 2015). This all suggests that ICC in the borderlands has the potential to affect the security and the economic prospects of neighboring countries in the Horn of Africa.

## 6.5 Conclusion

The Moyale micro-region is favorable areas for social and economic ties as similar communal groups such as the Borana, Garri, Gabra and Burji are living which facilitate the movement of people, goods, and services that buttress micro-regionalization between the two countries. However, these promising social and economic ties remain constrained by insecurity in the form of ICCs. There is clear evidence that the ongoing ICCs in Moyale obstruct effective micro-regionalization directly and indirectly, as well as the economic prospects of the neighboring countries. The recurrent ICCs and tensions in Ethiopia Moyale or/and Kenya Moyale, over the last three decades, illustrate clearly how ICC disrupts micro-regionalization. They have restricted the free movement of people and vehicles, cross-border trade activities and market operation and resulting in low level of investment.

No simple quick fix solution brings about sustainable resolution to the conflict that foster reconciliation among all sectors of the community, and in turn buttress socio-economic interaction among communities across the border. The experience of Rwanda can tell us that after grave violence, peace and integration among ethnic groups were restored. Why not in Moyale? Although complexities involved in Moyale conflict, it would be realistic to expect a lasting solution to the conflict that brings about effective micro-regionalization if coordinated efforts are made by key actors. Specifically, without commitment on the part of both Ethiopian and Kenyan governments, sustainable peace in Moyale as well as



effective micro-regionalization in the borderlands is a pipe dream. The governments should put conflict management and transformation at the top of priority. Conflict resolution efforts should seek to deal with the root causes, and not just the symptoms of the conflicts as a fire brigade does.

More importantly, policies that acknowledge and encourage cross-border micro regional socio-economic activities - rather than discourage it - would capitalize on comparative advantage for different local and national economies; strengthen local food security; increase collection of state revenues and investments in key market and transport infrastructure.

Finally, this study does not claim to have covered enough about the effect of inter-communal conflict on cross-border socio-economic interaction. Focusing on issues of what conflict mechanisms would yield better to ensure sustainable peace to further buttress cross-border interaction are imperative. Hence, there is a need to broaden this study by carrying out a more advanced survey in both Ethiopia and Kenya Moyale.

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