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LEARNING BRIEF

Real peace gains, changing realities

Gender, climate and conflict in the Kenya-Ethiopia borderlands

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Executive summary

Addressing the interconnected pressures of climate change, conflict and gender inequality across the Omo–Turkana borderlands has generated genuine, though still fragile, peace gains while reshaping livelihoods, resource governance and community resilience. This evidence and learning brief examines how the climate–conflict–gender nexus is evolving across the Kibish and Turkana North sub-counties in Kenya's Turkana County and Dassanech and Nyangatom woredas in Ethiopia's South Omo Zone. Drawing on a two-day Conflict Analysis Update and Outcome Reflection Workshop conducted in June 2026, the analysis brings together cross-border perspectives from Turkana, Dassanech and Nyangatom communities, including Peace Committees, Natural Resource Management Committees, women peace champions, youth representatives, government administrators, security actors and civil society organisations.

While existing research has documented environmental pressures, resource conflict and the gendered dimensions of vulnerability in the region, less attention has been given to how these dynamics are evolving together as the borderlands undergo environmental and livelihood transitions.

Firstly, the findings demonstrate that the relationship between climate pressures, conflict and gender dynamics is not static. In areas where sustained dialogue, stronger peace structures, improved administrative and security coordination, and cross-border engagement have taken root, large-scale livestock raids, retaliatory attacks and intercommunal killings have declined. However, conflict has not ended. Instead, the drivers, geography and forms of insecurity are changing, influenced by environmental change, shifting livelihoods, competition and cooperation around natural resources, population and settlement changes, and emerging governance, protection and criminality concerns.

Secondly, environmental change is playing an increasingly important role in reshaping this nexus. Changes in the Omo River and Lake Turkana, including flooding and rising lake levels, are altering grazing areas, settlement patterns, mobility and access to fisheries. While these changes have created new livelihood opportunities in some locations around Todonyang,[1] they have also shifted pressure towards fishing grounds and other shared resources. As fishing expands alongside livestock production and other forms of livelihood diversification, natural resource use is becoming increasingly connected to both opportunities for cooperation and new sources of tension. This demonstrates why climate adaptation and natural resource governance cannot be addressed separately from conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Thirdly, the analysis further highlights that the impacts of these changes are experienced differently by women, men and young people. Gender roles, unequal access to resources and decision-making power shape who benefits from emerging livelihood opportunities, who bears the costs of environmental change, and who can influence responses to conflict. Women in Nyangatom and Dassanech woredas are increasingly participating in peace dialogues, cross-border trade and community-level mediation, with some taking on more visible leadership roles. At the same time, male-dominated decision-making structures, unequal control over productive resources, domestic responsibilities, limited literacy and persistent protection risks continue to constrain women's influence and participation.

Finally, young people in the borderlands are becoming more involved in peacebuilding and community initiatives, yet unemployment, school dropout, early marriage and involvement in illicit

or high-risk activities remain important vulnerabilities. These realities underline the importance of understanding how climate and livelihood pressures interact with gender and generational inequalities to create different pathways into resilience, cooperation or insecurity.

Despite these challenges, important peacebuilding pathways are emerging. Local Peace Committees and Natural Resource Management structures are playing a stronger role in preventing escalation and mediating disputes around shared resources. Cross-border communication between administrators and community actors has improved the tracing and recovery of stolen livestock, reduced retaliatory responses and strengthened confidence in dialogue and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Growing economic interaction including women's cross-border trade and fisheries-related activities is also creating practical forms of interdependence that strengthen incentives for peaceful relations.

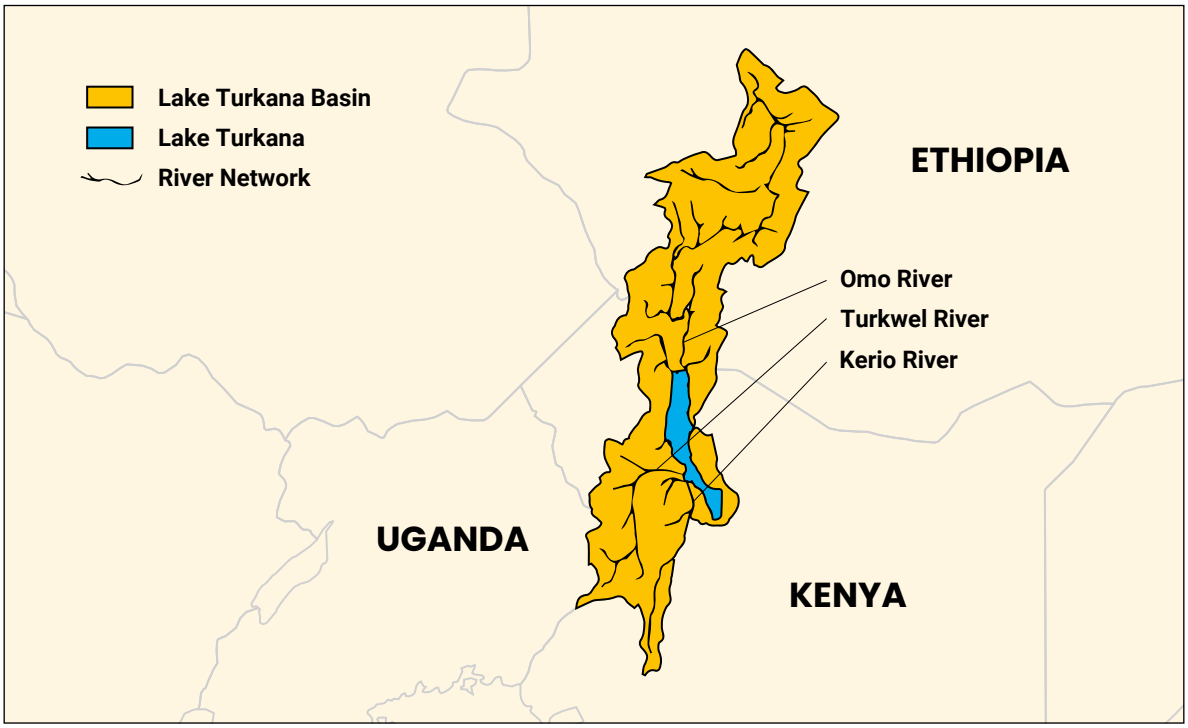
Overall, the findings suggest that peacebuilding in the Omo–Turkana borderlands is entering a new phase in which climate change, conflict dynamics and gender relations must be understood and addressed together. The priority is no longer only to prevent recurrent large-scale violence, but also to strengthen the institutions, relationships and livelihood and resource-governance systems that can manage the interconnected pressures emerging from environmental change, inequality and insecurity.

1. Introduction

The Omo–Turkana borderlands, spanning northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia, are home to pastoralist, agro-pastoralist and fishing communities whose livelihoods and social relations are closely connected to shared natural resources, including grazing land, water sources, the Omo River and Lake Turkana. These resources sustain livestock production, fishing, trade and other livelihood activities, but their availability and accessibility are influenced by climatic variability, flooding, drought, resource competition and insecurity.

It was against this backdrop that International Alert, in partnership with the Turkana Pastoralist Development Organization (TUPADO) in Kenya and the Ethiopia Institute of Peace (EIP) in Ethiopia, implemented the programme Addressing the Intersection of Climate, Conflict and Gender in the Omo–Turkana Borderlands from August 2024 to March 2027. The programme sought to strengthen women's and young people's participation in cross-border conflict management and climate adaptation; improve the capacity and coordination of communities and local institutions to address natural resource conflicts and gender-related concerns; strengthen gender-responsive governance of transboundary conflict and climate shocks; and promote the integration of learning on conflict, gender equality and climate action into national and regional policies and programmes.

Working across the Turkana–Dassanech, Turkana–Nyangatom and Dassanech–Nyangatom corridors, the project combined community engagement, dialogue, support to peace structures, early warning and response, natural resource governance and policy engagement. This learning brief examines the experience of implementing these interventions over three years, highlighting emerging lessons on how inclusive peacebuilding and gender-responsive approaches can strengthen community responses to climate-related pressures and cross-border conflict.



The geographical scale of the project is reflected in the population of its target areas. According to Kenya's 2019 Population and Housing Census, Turkana North Sub-County had a population of 65,218, while Kibish Sub-County had 36,769, giving a combined population of 101,987. South Omo Zone recorded 573,435 residents in Ethiopia's 2007 census. These figures provide an indication of the broader population context, although the South Omo figure covers a wider geographical area than the specific project locations and the census years differ.[2]

Climate-related shocks have had significant consequences for communities along the lower Omo River and Lake Turkana. In November 2023, flooding in Dassanech Woreda affected and displaced tens of thousands of people. The International Rescue Committee reported that approximately 79,828 people were displaced, while reports documented the inundation of 34 of the woreda's 40 kebeles[3] and the submergence of approximately 123,000 hectares of grazing land. In May 2024, further flooding along the Omo River affected approximately 12,247 people. Flooding continued to pose a major risk in 2025, when the overflow of Lake Turkana and the Omo River displaced approximately 8,000 people in Dassanech Woreda, with a further 85,000 reported at risk ahead of the rainy season.[4]

These events illustrate the scale of climate-related disruption in the borderlands. Floods can destroy homes, farmland and grazing areas, displace households and disrupt access to essential services. They also affect the natural resource systems on which pastoralist, agro-pastoralist and fishing communities depend. Where access to grazing land, water, fishing grounds and livelihood opportunities is contested, climate shocks can interact with existing tensions and increase pressure on community and cross-border conflict management mechanisms.

The region also experiences recurrent intercommunal violence and insecurity, including attacks, livestock raiding and disputes associated with access to natural resources and cross-border movement[5]. On 22 February 2025, an attack on Kenyan fishermen near Todonyang and the Omo River resulted in reported fatalities and missing persons. On 24 February, Kenya's Interior Cabinet Secretary stated that more than 20 fishermen were missing. The incident exposed the consequences of insecurity for fishing communities and the difficulties of coordinating cross-border responses where

communication networks and official coordination mechanisms are limited. Subsequent engagement between Kenyan and Ethiopian authorities helped facilitate search operations and de-escalation.[6]

The impacts of climate shocks and conflict are also shaped by gender and age. Women and young people contribute to household livelihoods, natural resource management, early warning and peacebuilding, yet their participation in formal decision-making and conflict management can be constrained by existing social and institutional barriers. Displacement, disruption of livelihoods and restricted access to natural resources can further affect their economic security, mobility and ability to influence decisions that shape their lives.

2. A changing context

This section examines these interconnected changes and their implications for peace, livelihoods and resilience, with particular attention to gender and inclusion, natural resource competition and cooperation, climate and environmental change, and evolving patterns of conflict and insecurity.

2.1 Gender, inclusion and changing roles in peacebuilding and livelihoods

Women are becoming more visible economic and peacebuilding actors. The conflict and gender analysis points to important, though uneven, changes in women's roles across the Omo–Turkana borderlands. Women who were historically excluded from formal peace negotiations and community decision-making are increasingly participating in peace dialogues, community consultations, Natural Resource Management Committees and local conflict resolution processes. Their growing involvement has broadened discussions beyond immediate security concerns to include household welfare, displacement, food security, children's wellbeing and access to essential services.

Changing livelihoods have also expanded women's economic roles. Around Lake Turkana, women are increasingly involved in fish processing, drying, transportation and marketing, while in Kibish and other cross-border areas they play an important role in trading fish, cereals, vegetables, livestock products and household goods. These activities have strengthened household incomes while creating regular opportunities for interaction across ethnic and national boundaries. Women's economic participation is therefore contributing not only to livelihood diversification but also to social cohesion by creating shared interests and strengthening everyday relationships between neighbouring communities.

Women are also increasingly recognised as important actors in conflict prevention and mediation. Through women's groups, savings associations, markets and community networks, they often identify emerging tensions, share information and encourage peaceful resolution of disputes at household and community level. In some communities, women have emerged as recognised leaders within local governance structures, reflecting a gradual shift from participation as beneficiaries or observers towards greater involvement in leadership and decision-making. Improvements in security have also expanded women's mobility, enabling greater participation in markets, public meetings and cross-border economic activities.

Despite these gains, meaningful participation remains constrained by deeply embedded gender norms. Traditional leadership and formal decision-making structures continue to be dominated by older men, while women's participation is often consultative rather than influential. Heavy domestic workloads, limited literacy, unequal control over productive assets and restricted decision-making power over household income continue to limit women's ability to take on leadership roles. The expansion of women's economic activities has not always translated into greater control over resources or financial decision-making.[7]

Protection concerns remain equally important. Gender-based violence, domestic violence, attempted rape and exploitation continue to affect women and girls, particularly in remote settlements where access to health, psychosocial and survivor support services is limited. Climate-related displacement and resource competition can further increase these vulnerabilities. Sustaining progress on gender inclusion will therefore require stronger women's leadership, meaningful representation in decision-making structures and improved protection and support systems.

Youth: Growing participation but persistent vulnerabilities

Young people are increasingly emerging not only as participants in peacebuilding but also as potential agents of conflict prevention. In the wider borderlands, youth are participating in dialogue, peace initiatives, and cross-border exchanges, while some are taking on roles in early warning, mediation and preventing retaliation. Evidence from South Omo similarly shows that youth have contributed to negotiations and the enforcement of agreements aimed at preventing cattle raiding.

At the same time, these opportunities exist alongside significant structural vulnerabilities. Youth unemployment, limited access to education and livelihood opportunities, poverty and insecurity continue to shape young people's choices in the borderlands. Young men may face particular exposure to livestock-related insecurity and other forms of criminality, while young women experience additional constraints linked to education, household responsibilities and early marriage.[8]

2.2 Competition and cooperation around natural resources

Competition over grazing land, water and fisheries remains one of the principal sources of tension across the Omo–Turkana borderlands. However, resource competition does not inevitably lead to violence. The way resources are accessed, negotiated and governed increasingly shapes whether tensions escalate or are managed peacefully. Local peace structures, Natural Resource Management Committees and cross-border dialogue have created mechanisms through which communities can negotiate access, address grievances and reduce the risk of resource-related disputes escalating into violence.

Fishing has become an increasingly important livelihood strategy, particularly in areas affected by changes in Lake Turkana. While the backflow of the lake has resulted in the loss of significant grazing areas, it has also created new fishing sites and opportunities for communities, including Dassanech and Turkana households, to diversify their livelihoods.[9] The expansion of fishing has, in some areas,

helped reduce pressure on previously contested fishing grounds and created new opportunities for cross-border economic interaction. Local Peace Committees and Natural Resource Management Committees on both sides of the border have played an important role in promoting dialogue, equitable resource sharing and non-violent approaches to managing competition over fisheries.

The nature of resource-related conflict nevertheless varies across the borderlands. In Todonyang, changing lake dynamics have contributed to a shift from predominantly pastoral conflict towards increasing competition around fisheries. Kokuro[10] continues to experience pressure linked to pastoral mobility, grazing and water resources, although these tensions increasingly coexist with stronger inter-community cooperation. In Kibish, growing pressure on water points, grazing areas and cultivable land has reinforced the importance of negotiated access and collaborative natural resource governance. Across all three corridors, the central challenge is therefore not simply resource scarcity, but how rapidly changing environmental conditions are altering access to and control over the resources on which communities depend.

2.3 Climate and environmental change: reshaping livelihoods, mobility and conflict

Climate and environmental change are fundamentally reshaping the way conflict manifests across Turkana North and the wider Omo–Turkana borderlands. Rather than creating entirely new conflicts, changing environmental conditions are interacting with existing vulnerabilities and transforming livelihoods, migration patterns and natural resource governance. The overflow of Lake Turkana, changing flow patterns of the Omo River, prolonged droughts and flooding have altered the ecological landscape upon which pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods depend.[11]

As traditional grazing areas become submerged and historic migration routes shift, communities are forced to adapt their livelihood strategies. Livelihood diversification into fisheries, cultivation, and alternative income streams has successfully reduced exclusive reliance on livestock while creating new economic avenues. However, these adaptive shifts also generate distinct forms of competition, particularly around highly productive fishing grounds, remaining viable pasture, and critical water points.

The local consequences of these environmental shifts vary across the corridors. In Todonyang, lake dynamics have accelerated the transition toward fisheries-based livelihoods and their associated tensions. In Kokuro, the loss of grazing land and changing mobility patterns intensify pressure on remaining pasture and water, elevating the necessity of negotiated resource-sharing agreements. In Kibish, climate variability exerts continuous pressure on key water points and grazing areas, emphasising the need for collaborative natural resource governance. Consequently, climate change functions as a threat multiplier that exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and redefines the conditions governing conflict and cooperation.

At the same time, local communities are actively developing adaptive responses to these environmental stresses. Heightened awareness regarding the links between climate change, natural resources and conflict has strengthened cross-border dialogue and encouraged collaborative resource planning. These emerging practices effectively cushion tensions linked to seasonal migration and shared resource access. Nevertheless, these hard-won peace gains remain fragile and vulnerable to severe climate shocks, which can rapidly heighten regional volatility.

2.4 Changing conflict patterns: livestock theft, cattle raiding and new forms of insecurity

Livestock remains both an important economic asset and a powerful cultural symbol of wealth and identity across the borderlands. Cattle theft and raiding involving Turkana, Dassanech, Nyangatom and neighbouring pastoral communities therefore continue to represent an important source of insecurity. However, the scale and nature of these incidents have changed significantly. Large-scale raids, retaliatory attacks and intercommunal killings have declined in many locations where sustained dialogue, community peace structures and cross-border coordination are active.[12] The gains reflect the collective effort of multiple actors, including Alert and its partners, government institutions and local administrations. Their complementary roles in facilitating dialogue, strengthening local peace mechanisms and improving cross-border communication have contributed to creating conditions for more peaceful coexistence, although other contextual factors may also have influenced these trends.

One of the most important changes has been the growing use of communication, mediation and recovery mechanisms to prevent livestock theft from triggering cycles of revenge. Administrators in the borderlands, peace actors and community leaders increasingly communicate across the border to trace and facilitate the return of stolen livestock. Local peace actors have played a particularly important role in tracking stolen animals and working with counterparts across communities to resolve incidents before they escalate. These mechanisms demonstrate the practical importance of community-led mediation in breaking the cycle of theft, retaliation and renewed violence.

Unresolved livestock losses remain a significant source of grievance. Restitution and recovery mechanisms are often dependent on local negotiations rather than consistent formal procedures, leaving room for disputes to re-emerge. Cultural practices and social norms associated with cattle raiding, including its links to marriage and dowry in some communities, also remain influential.[13] While violent behaviour has changed in many locations, some of the underlying norms that historically legitimised raiding have not disappeared.

The changing conflict environment has also produced new forms of insecurity. In some locations, livestock theft has been accompanied or partially replaced by fishing gear theft, petty criminality and other forms of localised insecurity.[14] This reflects a broader transition in which conflict is becoming less dominated by large-scale pastoral raids but increasingly shaped by changing livelihoods, resource competition and cross-border criminal activity.

3. Emerging themes from outcome harvesting

The emerging themes presented below are drawn from the Conflict Analysis Update and Outcome Reflection Workshop, including stakeholder reflections, outcome harvesting and analysis of changing conflict, climate, gender and livelihood dynamics across the Omo–Turkana borderlands.

The outcome harvesting exercise identified a set of interconnected changes that have emerged during project implementation. Rather than focusing on activities delivered, the exercise examined

changes in relationships, behaviours, institutional practice and community capacity, and explored the project's contribution to these changes. The findings suggest that the most significant outcomes are not isolated changes but mutually reinforcing shifts towards more inclusive, preventive and locally owned approaches to peacebuilding.

3.1 From participation to influence: women's and youth leadership

One of the clearest emerging changes is the growing visibility and influence of women and young people in peacebuilding and community decision-making. Women are increasingly participating in Peace Committees, community dialogues, natural resource governance, livelihood groups and cross-border trade, while young people are engaging in environmental conservation, awareness initiatives and local peace activities.

The change is particularly significant where participation is beginning to translate into influence. Women Peace Champions are increasingly recognised as trusted actors who can mediate within families and communities, discourage violence and promote peaceful livelihood options. In some Dassanech kebeles, women have also assumed formal leadership positions within local administration. Women's economic roles in fisheries and cross-border trade have further expanded their visibility and strengthened their contribution to household and community resilience.

The project contributed to these changes through awareness raising, leadership development, mentorship of Women Peace Champions and support for inclusive dialogue. Government institutions, including Women and Youth Offices, have provided complementary support by recognising and reinforcing women's participation in local governance.

Important barriers remain. Traditional leadership structures continue to be predominantly male, women often have limited influence over formal decision-making, and unequal control over resources, domestic responsibilities, limited literacy and protection risks continue to constrain their participation. Nevertheless, the emerging shift from presence to greater influence represents an important change in the inclusiveness of local peacebuilding.

3.2 From reactive conflict management to preventive cross-border cooperation

A significant change identified through the outcome harvesting process is the transformation of cross-border relationships between Turkana, Dassanech and Nyangatom communities. Relationships that were previously activated primarily in response to conflict are increasingly sustained through regular dialogue, cultural exchanges, trade, resource management and direct communication between administrators and community leaders.

Cross-border dialogue platforms have created opportunities to address emerging tensions before they escalate. Improved communication between Kenyan and Ethiopian administrators has also enabled quicker responses to security incidents, including the tracing and recovery of stolen livestock, reducing the likelihood of retaliatory attacks.

The change extends beyond formal dialogue. Participants identified growing inter-community marriages, increased social interaction and the replacement of messages that glorify violence with messages promoting peace and coexistence as signs of changing attitudes. During cross-border dialogues and cultural gatherings, local communities use songs and dance to communicate peace messages, discourage violence and promote peaceful coexistence. These community-led cultural expressions provide opportunities to reinforce positive social norms, challenge messages that legitimise violence and strengthen relationships between communities historically affected by conflict. These developments suggest that cross-border peacebuilding is increasingly influencing the social relationships that underpin conflict and cooperation.

3.3 From competition to negotiation: strengthening shared resource governance

Communities in the borderlands are increasingly using local governance mechanisms to negotiate access to shared natural resources rather than allowing resource pressures to translate automatically into violent competition. Natural Resource Management Committees have facilitated discussions around grazing areas, water points, seasonal livestock movement and fisheries, including during periods of drought and environmental stress.

This outcome is particularly important in a context where climate and environmental changes are altering access to land, water and fisheries. In several areas, locally negotiated arrangements have enabled neighbouring communities to share resources and reduce tensions. The expansion of fishing as a livelihood has also created new economic opportunities in some locations while reducing dependence on livestock.

The project's contribution has centred on linking climate adaptation with peacebuilding, strengthening local resource governance and creating spaces for communities to negotiate shared access. The emerging outcome is therefore not the reduction of climate pressure itself, but a greater capacity to manage its conflict implications collectively.

3.4 Stronger local peace architecture and community ownership

The outcome harvesting exercise also highlighted the strengthening of locally embedded peace structures. Peace Committees, Natural Resource Management Committees, elders, traditional leaders and women peace champions are increasingly working as part of a connected local peace architecture.

These structures are undertaking functions that extend beyond convening dialogue. They are identifying emerging tensions, mediating disputes, facilitating resource negotiations, sharing early warning information and linking communities with government and security actors.

The project's contribution has included capacity strengthening, support to dialogue platforms and strengthening the ability of local actors to undertake mediation and conflict prevention. The emerging change is therefore one of greater community ownership; peacebuilding is increasingly understood as a responsibility shared across communities and institutions rather than one resting exclusively with elders or government authorities.

3.5 Greater coordination between community, government and security actors

A further emerging outcome is stronger coordination between formal and informal institutions involved in conflict prevention and response. Peace Committees, chiefs, county and woreda administrations, security agencies, Women and Youth Offices, traditional leaders and community organisations are increasingly communicating and coordinating around emerging tensions.

The project support for cross-border dialogue and coordination has also helped strengthen direct communication between administrators in Kenya and Ethiopia. This has strengthened early warning and response, improved information sharing and enabled more coordinated action following incidents such as livestock theft. Direct communication between administrators across the Kenya–Ethiopia border has also contributed to quicker intervention and reduced opportunities for isolated incidents to escalate.

The significance of this change lies in the growing connection between customary and formal governance. Communities continue to rely on traditional mediation and local peace structures, while increasingly engaging government and security institutions where their intervention is required. This combination has the potential to provide a more responsive peace architecture for increasingly complex forms of insecurity.

3.6 Peace gains are creating conditions for social and economic interdependence

The outcome harvesting findings suggest that peace gains are beginning to generate wider social and economic benefits that can themselves reinforce peaceful relationships. Increased cross-border trade, women's participation in fisheries and markets, greater mobility, cultural interaction and inter-community marriages are creating more regular contact and practical interdependence between communities.

This is significant because the value of peace is increasingly experienced not only through the absence of violence but through the opportunities that peaceful relations make possible. Economic and social relationships create additional incentives for communities to manage disputes peacefully and preserve access to markets, livelihoods and social networks.

4. Lessons

The combined findings from the conflict analysis update and outcome harvesting process point to an important lesson for programming in the Omo–Turkana borderlands: progress in reducing violence should not be interpreted as evidence that the underlying conflict system has been resolved. Rather, the evidence suggests that peacebuilding efforts have helped communities and institutions manage conflict more effectively, even as climate, environmental and socio-economic changes continue to reshape the sources and geography of insecurity.

This distinction is particularly important for gender, conflict and climate nexus programming. Climate and environmental changes do not operate independently from conflict. Changes in the Omo River system and the expansion and backflow of Lake Turkana, for example, have altered grazing land, mobility routes and livelihoods. In some areas, this has contributed to a shift away from traditional pastoral conflict towards greater dependence on fisheries and new forms of competition over fishing grounds and resources. The central programming challenge is therefore not simply to reduce existing conflict, but to strengthen the capacity of communities and institutions to anticipate and adapt when environmental shocks transform the nature of conflict itself.

4.1 Peace gains require continuous adaptation

The reduction in large-scale violence across parts of the borderlands represents an important achievement. However, these gains have been sustained through continued engagement by community peace structures, government administrators, security actors, traditional leaders and development partners. Peace is therefore not a static condition but something that requires continuous maintenance.

The presence of functioning Peace Committees, Natural Resource Management Committees, women peace champions, local administrators and security institutions has created mechanisms through which emerging tensions can be identified and addressed. This suggests that the reduction in violence is linked not only to changes in community attitudes but also to the continued presence of institutions and relationships capable of responding to insecurity.

For nexus programming, this highlights the importance of investing in adaptive peace infrastructure. As climate and livelihood systems change, peace mechanisms must also evolve. Institutions established to address livestock raiding, for example, may increasingly need the capacity to manage fisheries-related disputes, changing migration routes, new settlement pressures and emerging forms of cross-border criminality.

4.2 Climate shocks are testing the ability of peace systems to adapt

The changing environmental landscape demonstrates why climate-conflict programming must move beyond treating climate change as a background risk. Climate shocks are actively reshaping livelihoods, resource access and the geography of interaction between communities.

The transformation of grazing areas and the growing importance of fisheries illustrate how environmental change can alter both livelihoods and conflict incentives. While fishing has created alternative economic opportunities, it has also generated new pressures around access to fishing grounds, equipment and declining fish stocks. Peacebuilding mechanisms must therefore be able to adapt to these changing realities.

The key question for future programming is whether communities have the institutions, information and relationships necessary to respond collectively when climate shocks occur. The evidence suggests that dialogue and natural resource governance structures have strengthened this capacity

in some areas. However, these mechanisms will require continued support if they are to respond effectively to increasingly unpredictable environmental pressures.

4.3 Cross-border infrastructure and service access are peacebuilding issues

One of the strongest lessons emerging from the borderlands is that peacebuilding cannot be separated from questions of infrastructure, mobility and access to basic services.

For communities living along the border, neighbouring towns and markets may be considerably easier to access than administrative centres within their own country. Communities in Todonyang, for example, may have stronger practical connections with markets and services across the border than with distant centres such as Lodwar. Similarly, communities along the Turkana–Nyangatom corridor may find Kangaten[15] more accessible for trade than travelling long distances to Lodwar.

These patterns demonstrate that cross-border communities organise their economic and social lives around geography and accessibility rather than national administrative boundaries. Poor roads, long distances and limited infrastructure can therefore reinforce isolation, constrain access to education and services, limit economic opportunities and increase vulnerability.

Cross-border cooperation should consequently extend beyond security and dialogue to include practical questions of mobility, markets and access to essential services. Greater cooperation around education, health, markets and infrastructure could strengthen both community wellbeing and the practical incentives for peaceful coexistence.

4.4 Inclusion must move beyond representation

The outcome harvesting findings demonstrate important progress in women's participation and leadership. However, the analysis also shows that representation alone is not sufficient to transform gender relations.

Women may participate in Peace Committees and dialogue forums while still having limited access to resources, restricted mobility or limited influence over household and community decisions. Similarly, technical government officers responsible for gender, youth and other sectors may face limited resources and capacity to engage consistently with communities.

This highlights a critical challenge for gender-responsive nexus programming: inclusion requires sustained institutional investment. Supporting women peace champions and increasing women's representation must be accompanied by stronger government capacity, access to livelihoods and services, protection mechanisms and opportunities for women to exercise genuine influence.

The gender dimension is also closely connected to changing livelihoods. As women become increasingly involved in fisheries, trade and cross-border economic activities, they can become important actors in building economic interdependence and strengthening peace. However, these opportunities must be accompanied by greater attention to safety, protection and women's control over economic resources.

4.5 Security gains must be balanced with longer-term transformation

Security operations have played an important role in reducing violence and creating conditions for dialogue and cross-border engagement. Increased security presence and improved responses to insecurity can create the space within which communities are able to trade, travel and interact more safely.

However, security operations alone cannot address the underlying structural conditions that continue to generate vulnerability and insecurity. Poverty, limited education, youth unemployment, weak infrastructure, competition over resources and the continued availability of firearms remain important challenges.

The continued presence of armed young people and reformed warriors illustrates this complexity. While some individuals may have disengaged from organised violence and adopted more peaceful roles, firearms remain embedded within the pastoral security environment, including for livestock protection. This highlights the gradual nature of transformation and the need to complement efforts to reduce organised violence with voluntary disarmament, alongside credible and community-responsive security arrangements.

This demonstrates that transformation is gradual and that reductions in organised violence do not necessarily mean that communities have become fully disarmed.

Future programming must therefore maintain a balance between immediate security measures and longer-term investments in livelihoods, education, infrastructure, social inclusion and locally owned peacebuilding.

5. Conclusion

Perhaps the most important lesson emerging from the analysis is that cross-border peacebuilding must be designed around the realities of how borderland communities live. Communities move, trade, access resources and maintain social relationships across national borders. A woman in Todonyang may find a market across the border more accessible than a distant county centre in Lodwar. A pastoralist's grazing decisions may be shaped by rainfall and resource availability rather than administrative boundaries. A young person may face limited access to education and livelihoods because of poor infrastructure, increasing vulnerability to involvement in livestock theft or other forms of insecurity.

These realities demonstrate that conflict, climate, gender and development cannot be addressed in isolation. The most effective interventions are those that recognise the interconnected nature of these challenges and strengthen the ability of communities and institutions to respond collectively. This also means recognising that peacebuilding is not only about preventing the next violent incident, but also about supporting those who have experienced violence to recover, rebuild their lives and participate meaningfully in peace processes.

The emerging peace gains across the Omo–Turkana borderlands provide an important foundation, but they remain fragile. Consolidating these gains will require peace infrastructure that can adapt to changing conflict and environmental conditions, more inclusive resource governance, stronger women's and youth leadership, sustained cross-border institutional cooperation, and improved access to services, livelihoods and psychosocial support for people affected by violence.

The sustainability of these gains will depend, in part, on whether the relationships, capacities and coordination mechanisms strengthened through the project can continue to function beyond the period of external support. Working with existing peace committees, natural resource committees and Climate change, peace building and gender departments provided a foundation for continuity. However, the continued effectiveness of these mechanisms cannot be assumed. Their ability to sustain regular engagement, respond to early warning, mediate disputes and support cross-border cooperation will depend on local ownership, institutional commitment, available personnel and resources, and the extent to which relevant government institutions can incorporate these functions into their ongoing responsibilities.

These challenges are shaped by wider governance and development conditions. In Omo-Turkana borderland areas, limited infrastructure and uneven access to education, health services, roads and livelihood opportunities can constrain both government presence and communities' ability to sustain peaceful relations. While peacebuilding initiatives can strengthen local capacities and relationships, they cannot substitute for sustained public investment in basic services, responsive security provision and inclusive economic opportunities. The extent to which Turkana County government and national governments in Kenya, and the relevant regional and national authorities in South Omo and Ethiopia, can prioritise these areas and allocate resources to them will therefore be an important determinant of longer-term sustainability. External development funding can help establish and strengthen peacebuilding mechanisms, but lasting progress requires these efforts to become embedded in locally owned systems and supported, where feasible, through domestic resources and institutional commitments.

Ultimately, the sustainability of peace will depend not only on whether violence declines, but also on whether communities and institutions have the relationships, resources and opportunities to manage change without returning to violence. The gains made so far should therefore be understood as a foundation on which longer-term transformation can be built, rather than evidence that the conditions sustaining conflict have been fully resolved.

Endnotes

1 Todonyang is a cross-border settlement in Turkana North Sub-County, Turkana County, Kenya, located near the Kenya–Ethiopia border at the northern end of Lake Turkana.

2 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, sub-county population tables; Turkana County Investment Portal, Turkana County demographics. South Omo Zone population: Ethiopia's 2007 Population and Housing Census, as summarised in the South Omo Zone demographic profile.

3 Kebeles are the lowest-level administrative units in Ethiopia and constitute the local administrative structures through which government services and community-level governance are organised.

4 International Rescue Committee reporting on the November 2023 floods, summarised by Africanews; the study Prevalence of acute diarrhoea and its risk factors among under five children in flood affected Dassanech District; and UNICEF's Ethiopia Humanitarian Situation Report No. 3, June 2025.

5 Conflict figures presented in this brief are based on publicly available reports and documented programme records. They should be interpreted as illustrative documented incidents rather than a comprehensive count of all conflict events in the programme area. Local peacebuilding structures collect additional information, but limitations in documentation, verification and public availability prevent the consolidation of a complete incident total.

6 Todonyang incident: Kenya National Assembly, Hansard Report, 27 February 2025, discussion of the security situation in Todonyang; see also the Parliament of Kenya report on the incident

7 Converging crises, fragmented responses: climate, conflict and governance gaps in the Kenya–Ethiopia borderlands, International Alert, 2026.

8 International Alert locations: Ethiopia.

9 Based on findings from the Conflict Analysis Update and Outcome Reflection Workshop, including community, Peace Committee and Natural Resource Management Committee perspectives on changing livelihood patterns and resource access in Todonyang and the wider Omo–Turkana borderlands

10 Kokuro is a settlement/locality in Turkana North Sub-County, Turkana County, Kenya, located within the Omo–Turkana borderlands.

11 Turbulent waters, troubled shores: the twin threats of climate change and conflict on vulnerable communities around Lake Turkana, International Alert, 2026.

12 This finding is based on stakeholder reflections and outcome harvesting during the Conflict Analysis Update and Outcome Reflection Workshop, including perspectives from community peace structures, local administrators and other peace actors across the Omo–Turkana borderlands.

13 Stakeholder discussions during the Conflict Analysis Update highlighted the continued influence of social norms surrounding livestock, marriage and bridewealth in sustaining some motivations for cattle raiding.

14 This reflects emerging patterns identified through stakeholder consultations and conflict analysis, particularly in locations where changing livelihood systems and resource-use patterns are reshaping the nature of local insecurity.

15 Kangaten is a locality in Nyangatom woreda, South Omo Zone, Ethiopia, within the Omo–Turkana borderlands.

Further reading

Converging crises, fragmented responses: climate, conflict and governance gaps in the Kenya–Ethiopia borderlands, International Alert, 2026, https://www.international-alert.org/publications/converging-crises-fragmented-responses/

Turbulent waters, troubled shores: the twin threats of climate change and conflict on vulnerable communities around Lake Turkana, International Alert, 2026, https://www.international-alert.org/publications/turbulent-waters-troubled-shores/

Appendix

Methodology for conflict analysis and outcome harvesting

This learning paper draws heavily from a two-day Conflict Analysis Update and Outcome Reflection Workshop conducted in June 2026. The workshop brought together people from Turkana, Dassanech and Nyangatom communities, including members of Peace Committees and Natural Resource Management Committees, women peace champions, youth representatives, government administrators, security actors and civil society organisations.

The workshop adopted a participatory reflection methodology combining Conflict Trend Analysis, Gender and Social Inclusion Analysis, and Outcome Harvesting. This approach enabled participants to analyse changing conflict dynamics while identifying observable behavioural, institutional and relational changes resulting from project implementation.

It used three complementary participatory exercises to capture changes in conflict dynamics, gender and social inclusion, and project outcomes since the baseline assessment. The exercises were designed to encourage reflection among diverse stakeholder groups while generating evidence on both observed changes and the project's contribution to those changes.

The first exercise focused on Conflict Trend Analysis, enabling participants to examine how the conflict context has evolved since the baseline assessment. The exercise was guided by the following questions:

- Since the baseline assessment, what are the most significant changes in conflict dynamics within and across the Turkana-Dassanech and Nyangatom-Turkana corridors?
- Which conflict drivers have increased, decreased, or remained unchanged, and why?
- What conflict hotspots or tensions currently require urgent attention?
- What new or emerging conflict issues have arisen over the last 12-18 months?
- How are climate-related factors (drought, floods, changing migration patterns, water scarcity, etc.) influencing conflict and cooperation today?
- What risks are likely to trigger conflict in the next 1-2 years if not addressed?

The second exercise examined Gender and Social Inclusion by assessing changes in the roles, participation and influence of women, youth and other marginalised groups in peacebuilding and natural resource governance. Key questions included:

- How have the roles and participation of women and youth in peacebuilding and natural resource management changed since the project began?
- What barriers continue to limit meaningful participation of women, youth, and other marginalised groups?
- What positive changes have been observed regarding gender relations, inclusion, and decision-making?

The third exercise applied the Outcome Harvesting methodology to identify significant behavioural, relational and institutional changes that had occurred during project implementation and to understand the project's contribution to those changes. Participants identified the most significant changes they had observed within their communities and institutions before analysing who had changed, when the change occurred, how the project contributed and which other actors had influenced the observed outcome. The harvested outcomes were subsequently organised into five thematic domains (peacebuilding, gender equality, youth engagement, climate adaptation and institutional strengthening) to facilitate comparative analysis across the intervention areas. Participants then prioritised the most significant outcomes based on their contribution to reducing tensions, strengthening cooperation, improving climate resilience, enhancing gender inclusion and promoting more effective natural resource governance.

International Alert works with people directly affected by conflict to build lasting peace. We focus on solving the root causes of conflict with people from across divides. From the grassroots to policy level, we bring people together to build sustainable peace.

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