

POLITICS NOW

Managing development and security in north-eastern Kenya

A discussion with parliamentarians from the north east



Key points

- In north-eastern Kenya, MPs have taken a positive role in managing and resolving local conflicts.
- These conflicts have multiple causes, including a spill-over from other conflicts in Somalia and Ethiopia, competition over natural resources, and youth unemployment.
- Kenya's military intervention in Somalia has led to an increase in insecurity in the north east.
- Without developed communications and other infrastructure, there can be no long-term stability.
- Collaborative leadership in the north east is needed to deal with issues of development and security.

Panel

Ms. Gabriella Waaijman, Deputy Head of Office, UNOCHA East Africa (Chair)

Hon. Ambassador Mohamed Maalim Mohamud, MP for Mandera West

Hon. Fatuma Ibrahim, Women's Representative, Wajir County

Hon. Dahiye Duale, MP for Dadaab, Garissa County

Hon. Abdikadir Omar Aden, MP for Balambala, Garissa County

Introduction

This joint meeting of the Rift Valley Institute and Road International was opened by **Nuur Mohamud Sheekh**, Coordinator of the RVI Nairobi Forum, who introduced **Rage Mohamed** of Road International. The purpose was to discuss the role MPs are playing in conflict mediation and resolution in north-eastern Kenya—in the three recently-created counties of Garissa, Mandera and Wajir. Conflict in this region is not new, but events in Nairobi and clashes in the north east highlight the need to reexamine the drivers of conflict and insecurity.

A minute's silence was observed at the start of the meeting for the victims of the Westgate terrorist attack and attacks in Wajir, Mandera and Garissa.

MPs as facilitators

Mohamed Maalim Mohamud discussed the role of MPs in mediating and resolving conflict, touching on the agreement reached between the Garre and Degodia communities in July 2013.

While local communities remain the key actors in conflict mitigation, MPs have assumed an important facilitative role, bringing together elders, religious leaders, international and national organisations, and sponsoring cross-border

dialogue. It has not been easy for MPs to assume this role, since it is often government representative who are blamed for poor security. MPs need to hold the government accountable, pushing it to engage in cross-border and inter-clan dialogue.

In Ambassador Mohamed's view, travel and security advisories issued by foreign governments regarding risks in the north east are counterproductive. The limited UN and NGO access to the region prevents communities from receiving necessary humanitarian assistance and aid. The large numbers of people displaced in 2012 and in June this year as a result of conflicts between the Garre and Degodia communities require assistance. Violence is unlikely to subside as long as they remain unsettled.

By positioning themselves at the forefront of conflict mediation, he warned, MPs run the risk of neglecting other important issues, such the development of the capacity of county government to deal with the demands of devolution.

Hon. Fatuma Ibrahim discussed the ability of MPs to bring issues before parliament which might otherwise be ignored. In addition to representing their local constituencies at the county and national level, and assisting in formulating new laws and monitoring the implementation of existing ones, MPs have the ability to propose motions in parliament to address issues overlooked by the government.

A parliamentary motion currently under discussion concerns legislation regarding the resettlement of pastoralist and northern Kenya Internally Displaced People (IDP). There are currently 28,000 IDPs in Wajir displaced by conflicts in the north east, said Hon. Fatuma. MPs are lobbying the government to provide resettlement packages for this region as has been done for IDPs in the Rift Valley. But they face difficulties in presenting the motion because of the scant information available on the number and geographic concentration of displaced persons.

Very few international and national organisations currently operate in the north east, Hon. Fatuma said. She commended the efforts of Oxfam, Save the Children, and UNICEF and appealed to the international community to extend donor funding.

And she highlighted the role of women in conflict mitigation and resolution. Women are the most affected by conflict, she said. They are also a vital

force encouraging dialogue between the parties to the conflict and mobilising local resources before assistance from NGOs and government arrives.

She argued that communities should engage more with their MPs. While insecurity and the harsh environment make it difficult for national and international organisations to operate, their presence is needed to address inter-clan conflict.

The least secure road in Kenya

Abdikadir Omar Aden, MP for Balambala, Garissa, gave a personal account of managing security in Garissa and an overview of the opportunities and challenges of devolution. Garissa has been in the headlines as a security hotspot since Kenya's intervention in Somalia in October 2011. Yet, he asserted, prior to Kenya joining AMISOM, 'Garissa was rated as one of the safest places in East Africa'.

Kenya's intervention in Somalia has been the primary cause of the worsening security situation in the north east, he argued. As the most developed city in that region, with close proximity to the porous Kenya-Somali border and Kismayo, Garissa is an easy target for al-Shabaab. Trade in contraband goods—particularly sugar and small arms—has flourished in this environment of insecurity. The road from Dadaab to Dhobley is now the least secure route in Kenya. Border controls should be improved to limit the trafficking of contraband. At the same time, Kenya should also reconsider the costs of its mission in Somalia, and the international community should assume a greater role in stabilising Somalia.

In the long-term, the repatriation of refugees needs to be prioritised, Hon. Abdikadir argued. With roughly 650,000 refugees in Dadaab the native inhabitants of Garissa county now form a minority in their own land. This has created tensions between refugees and host communities.

High unemployment and poverty have further strained these relations. Drought has caused families to relocate to urban centres where there are few prospects for youth who thus become easy targets for recruitment by extremists.

MPs have worked with local leaders and with youth, Hon. Abdikadir said. But a general lack of trust between the government and local people hampers progress. There is an unwillingness, for example, to speak to the police or engage with

representatives of government. This reflects the historical marginalisation of the region. He noted the involvement of government forces in the 1980 Garissa Massacre and the 1984 Wagalla Massacre in Wajir. The communities involved, he said, are yet to be compensated for these injustices. MPs and the government need to focus on establishing trust.

He also discussed the opportunities and challenges posed by the current devolution of power to county level—a system, he said, which ‘is so difficult and complex that even those who formed it are unable to fully understand it’. The north east is facing critical problems of institutional and human resource capacity. While Kenya as a whole faces these issues, they are magnified in the north east. The unequal distribution of resources and political posts raises clan tensions. County assemblies are often monopolised by a single clan. As a result, the assemblies are unable to provide checks and balances.

But devolution provides an opportunity to empower and unite local communities and address long-standing grievances. Garissa County has received 4.2 billion shillings from the government—more than the north east has ever had in the past. Devolution also has the potential to allow counties to exploit their own natural resources, although this remains a highly controversial issue.

However, there is a substantial risk that the money and natural resources will be mismanaged unless certain precautions are taken to invest the money in sustainable industries like agriculture or in infrastructure, human resource development, education, and peace initiatives.

Hon. Abdikadir noted that the security situation has improved recently. National and international organisations should increase their partnership with the counties to improve security management and invest in sustainable livelihood and infrastructure projects. He illustrated this with the example of Balambala constituency which includes a 200 km stretch of fertile land along the Tana River. He noted that of 6000 acres of arable land, only 400 is currently being cultivated.

Conflict, security and development

In reference to the previous presentations, **Gabriella Waaijman** introduced the idea of a ‘conflict, security and development nexus’ to

describe how violent conflict in the north east is related to low levels of development. The absence of development allows informal shadow financial and security systems to thrive. Humanitarian organisations serve as place-holders in the absence of proper development, but their activities are also hampered by insecurity.

Dahiye Duale, MP for Dadaab (Garissa), focused on the security and development challenges in and around Dadaab and the impact of uneven development on relations between refugees and the host community. In Garissa, the lack of a local skilled workforce is a problem. In a teacher recruitment program in 2011, only 10 out of 260 were from Garissa. Non-Somali Kenyans used to dominate the public sector, but since extremists began specifically targeting non-Somali Kenyans in the region many have left. As a result, schools and hospitals have closed. And jobs with the UN or other humanitarian organisations are more appealing than working in schools or hospitals in the long-term the lack of a local work force will negatively affect development.

Hon. Dahiye expressed concern about the closing of the international border. Not only has the government lost revenue, but it has also created other forms of insecurity, such as the trafficking of illegal goods and widespread corruption among security personnel in the region. It has also impoverished border areas which had previously benefitted from the lucrative trade. Since the closure has not been effective, the MP appealed to the government to consider reopening the border.

He also addressed relations between refugees and host community and expressed particular concern about the environmental impact of the camps on deforestation and water depletion. Local actors had proposed mud bricks as a more sustainable alternative material for building shelters, but the government was concerned that this would make the settlements more permanent. In addition, the increased demand for firewood for cooking has put a strain on the environment. Refugees now move long distances from the camps, leading to conflict with the host communities. Depletion of the underground water supply, he said, is an additional concern. The refugee area lies on an aquifer, but the underground water level is receding. People now have to drill 200/250 meters instead of 100 meters. And no one is compensating the host community.

Hon. Dahiya mentioned that members of host communities had joined refugees in the camps in order to benefit from the services unavailable to the general population. Documentation is an additional problem. Some refugees have acquired ID cards hoping to be included in resettlement programs. If there is repatriation of refugees there is a concern within the host community that Kenyans in the camps may lose their citizenship.

Gabriella Waaijman noted that UNOCHA has an office in Dadaab for coordination with the host community, and for administration of programmes in and around the camps. She acknowledged that humanitarian operations, which try to adhere to the principle of 'do no harm', can have a negative impact when they attach certain benefits to different categories of people, like refugees, IDPs, and hosts.

Discussion

Mohamed Jama, Representative of the Government of Somaliland in Kenya, suggested that it is important to focus on locally-driven solutions. Several discussants argued that it was important to work with local media, but others cautioned that the media can also fuel conflict.

Two discussants recommended that MPs focus on uniting the inhabitants of the north east of Kenya and dealing with clan conflicts across the three counties instead of focusing on particular conflicts. It was suggested that this collective approach would also appeal to international donors. Another stressed the importance of MPs and governors coordinating at county level.

There was further discussion about the development of conflict early warning systems and the need to support livelihoods and expand education in order to counter radicalization.



Credits

© 2013 Rift Valley Institute (RVI). Published under Creative Commons License 3.0 by-nc-nd; available for free download at <http://www.riftvalley.net>. This report is an account of a meeting organised by the Rift Valley Institute on 27 September 2013, part of the programme of the RVI Nairobi Forum. The report was written by Claire Elder.