A PERSPECTIVE ON THE 2009 MAIKONA/DUKANA PEACE ACCORD

The Maikona-Dukana Peace Accord is an example of how local dynamics underpin peace-building initiatives between pastoralist communities. The progression leading to the pact was initiated by elders from the town of Dillo in Ethiopia and Dukana in Kenya in November 2008, resulting in an agreement to halt hostilities and to provide compensation for stolen animals. The Declaration, agreed upon in July of 2009, was a spontaneous breakthrough at the local level that galvanised the peace process leading to the formal accord.

After trust was restored between the communities, local leaders agreed to try to extend their mandate along the entire border area where both communities reside. This coincided with the revitalization and creation of CEWARN peace committees in the border woredas, the Ethiopian equivalent of Kenya’s sub-counties. This enabled the local communities to institutionalise their peace building efforts. These areas were

NURA DIDA (INTERVIEW)

Nura Dida is a Borana elder well recognised for his peace building efforts along the Ethiopia-Kenya border where there have been recurring inter-communal conflicts along the common border.
included in the November 2009 cross-border peace meeting that was convened by CEWARN in Moyale, Ethiopia.

The numerous peace processes led to the adoption of resource sharing agreements. In Kenya there is sufficient grazing ground but frequent water shortages, while in Ethiopia there is a shortage of grazing ground but sufficient water. Following the Maikona peace gathering and the revitalisation of CEWARN local peace committees, Borana livestock from Dillo and surrounding kebele (community associations) began travelling long distances, sometimes as far as the Hurri Hills inside Kenya, to access grazing areas. Following heavy rainfall and the flooding of ponds at Badhuhuri, Kenya in 2010, Borana communities took their livestock to Ethiopia. They returned during the 2010-2011 drought, migrating deep into the interior as far as Yabello in search of pasture.

The Maikona/Dukana peace process succeeded because of the cross-border linkages that were restored after a long period of conflict that had separated the communities. The agreement has brought the communities closer and provided an opportunity for them to interact and share resources peacefully. Before the agreement these communities frequently attacked each other.

This led to the loss of many lives, including the schoolchildren who died in the 2005 Turbi Massacre in Kenya. Since the conclusion of the agreement, even when incidents happen, they are contained and no longer assume massacre-level proportions. Instead, communities seek solutions by referring to the agreement.

Another success story is a peace agreement between the Konso and Borana communities. They have been enjoying peace and have done so with full commitment. The fact that the communities have used the agreement as an instrument to deal with conflicts and hold culprits responsible makes me happy. In all of these initiatives, our role is to bring the parties together and play a facilitative role. They do the rest. They make the decisions. Another thing that’s heartening is when they decide by themselves to initiate the process without anyone having to influence them or make the decision for them. They discuss their problems openly. They also discuss and acknowledge the different roles men and women play in conflicts, and decide what each of them can do to contribute to the peace process. This also makes me very happy.

In our facilitation we challenge them to reflect on the high cost of conflicts. So now they are more aware and more prepared to sort out their problems than before.
In the Bale area, for instance, Oromo and Somali communities have been sharing resources peacefully since a peace agreement was concluded between them at Medolabu three years ago. They even share relief supplies and they have not experienced conflict since the agreement. This is because they recognise the negative impacts of conflicts and its high cost. If they did not understand it before, the escalation of conflicts and new firearms raised the stakes and increased the suffering and horror that conflicts bring. They are now more receptive to reconciliation. This is the reason the peace processes are bearing more fruit now than before.

The fact that we acknowledge there has been progress does not mean there are no more problems. What is different now is that when one person was killed in the past, it led whole communities into conflict. But now when a killing occurs, it is the culprit who is held accountable rather than drawing in the communities. What is now required, in my view, is continuous follow up. With sustained efforts there will be even more significant improvements. There is always at least one bad person in a community; there is always someone ready to provoke a conflict. There are people who benefit from a conflict.

This is why follow-up is essential. Even though new conflicts will erupt, I don’t expect them to be as bad and as unmanageable as in the past. Collaboration has really made a difference. CEWARN contributed by bringing the two governments together—which proved to be an invaluable addition to the peace process. The inclusion of all members of the community and local government officials strengthened the accord, which received further reinforcement through the sports tournament and the complementary activities that were held later.

While it is also important to make use of elders and other influential people to educate the public against killings, these efforts should also target the youth and women. Women, children, and the youth suffer the most when conflict breaks out. At the same time, women play a central role in both fuelling and resolving conflicts. The provocative role they can play in conflicts should not be underestimated. For instance, when you look at cycles of revenge, if a woman’s relative is killed, she will incite her husband and relatives to revenge. Women do this through songs. This forces the men to rise and go to war. The man will not be respected if he does not act to protect home and community. He will be insulted through the woman’s songs.

In Teltelle, for example, a man was caught after a revenge killing. When he was asked why he did it, he said the women insulted him
and they would not leave him alone until he acted to preserve his honour. By the same measure, women are also powerful in influencing the men to stop fighting. They tell them, “the fighting is not good for us and our children and our youth—we are all suffering”. Some of them may even be pregnant or with young children, which motivates them to stop their husbands and their sons from fighting. Women occupy a central position that deserves acknowledgement. Their voices are influential because those who get killed in conflicts are their sons, husbands, fathers and brothers.

When the women speak on these things in the peace meetings, the men accept what they say. The Kenyan women came with messages of peace when we convened a peace meeting in Yabello as part of the Maikona/Dukana peace process. They composed songs, sang, and mourned the people lost in the conflict, including the cabinet ministers and other government officials who died in a plane crash on their way to a peace meeting in Marsabit. They composed songs about the lives lost, mentioning the officials by name.

These songs were later released on cassette for wider distribution. When the women sing these songs in peace meetings, men and women start crying and lamenting the cost of the conflict. This can change the minds of hardened warriors and elders with bad intentions who incite them.

We need sustained collaboration with CEWARN to protect the peace like one protects a valuable property. This is because a single person is capable of doing so much damage that many people working together may not be able to repair it. In particular, we hope that CEWARN continues to facilitate the operations of local peace committees and encouraging local administration officials to meet every three months in order to share information and situation reports. This facilitates their ability to take early action whenever problems arise. Having government officials present in these meetings also prepares them to respond to issues that are beyond the capacity of the committees.

When new frictions arise, a single event can divide communities, placing the peace at risk. Such incidents pose a threat to agreements like the Maikona-Dukana Accord, which is why such cross-border agreements should be revisited on a periodic basis. Meetings like the two-day summit held in Ethiopia in 2017 that revalidated the original declaration are important, but they also require the support of institutional arrangements on the ground.