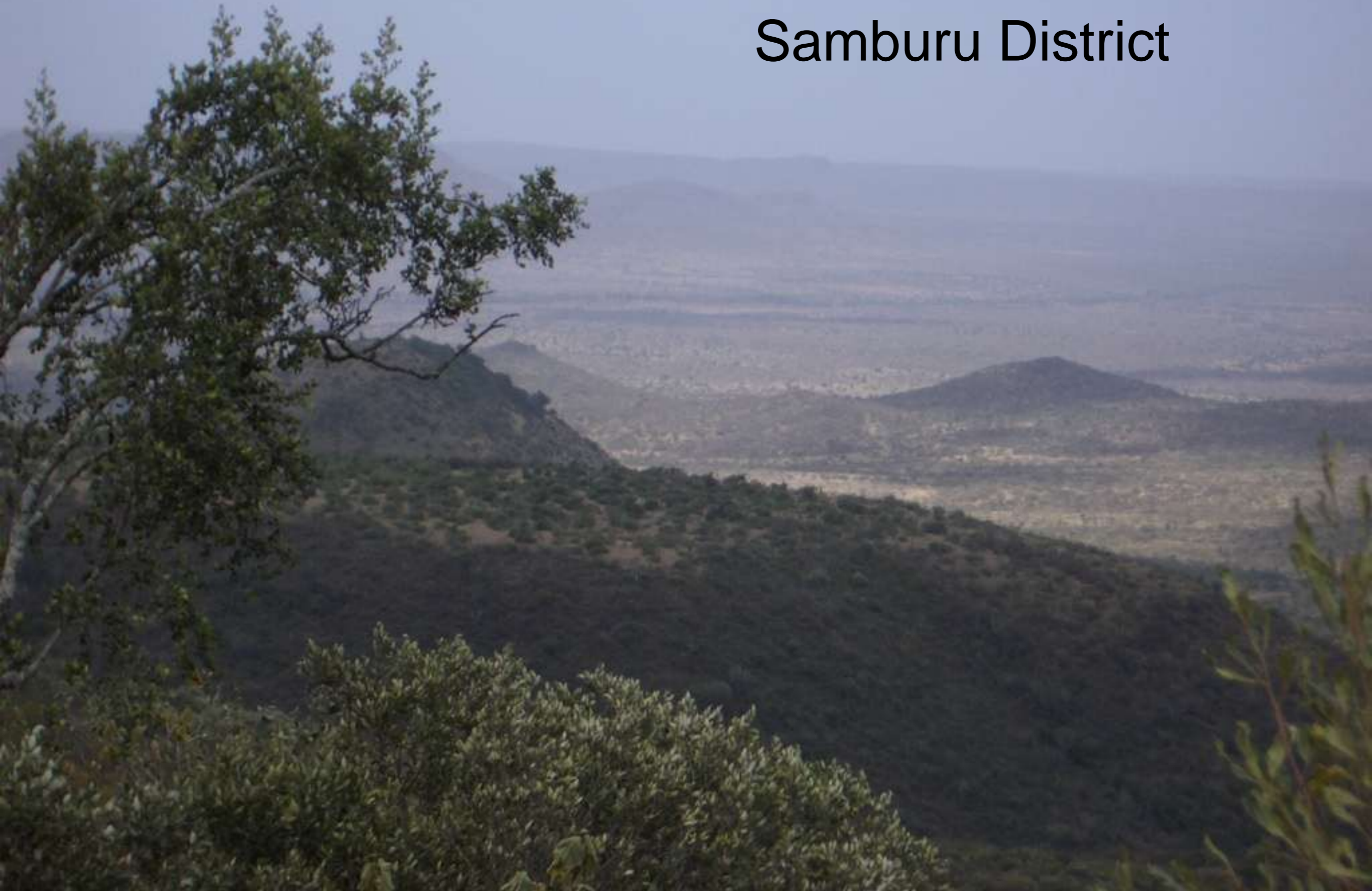# Conflict transformation in Maralal, Northern Kenya: Relational dynamics and empathy between Samburu, Pokot and Turkana communities

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Background

- Raiding escalated in recent years because of the availability of guns, initially for protection but increasingly used for revenge and attack, resulting in 40-50 deaths per year over the period 2005-10.

- Conflict transformation and peace building initiatives: as part of the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium and Diocese of Maralal Integrated Peace and Livelihood project (funded by CAFOD).

- March 2012: 2 deaths in 15 months

Empathy dynamics in conflict transformation

The work of empathy is precisely trying to imagine a view of the world that one does not share, and in fact may find it quite difficult to share.

Halpern & Weinstein, 2004: 581

Empathy as indicator of shift from dehumanisation of the Other to rehumanising

LwU model of empathy dynamics

- As complex dynamic systems

  o capacity, process, choice

- 1-1 but influenced by social factors

- In dialogue and interaction

  o automatic, emotion-led responses – *ouch!*

  o controlled responses of imagining Self into the world of the Other

- Initial conditions

- Empathic understanding emerging from dialogue and interaction

- Dyspathy

Conflict transformation through the lens of empathy

Project activities

- bringing children together through a peace school;

- sending young people to other communities as 'ambassadors';

- setting up peace committees to oversee projects;

- persuading elders to support changes in practice of customary law over cattle raiding;

- engaging young men from the warrior age sets (morans) in joint projects

Empathy dynamics in Maralal conflict transformation

Empathic understanding of the peace-building team towards conflicting parties

underpins conflict-sensitive activities that then support the growth of empathy between conflicting parties.

Without the team's empathic understanding, projects were less successful.

Leadership implications

Moral leadership in conflict transformation founded in empathic understanding.

Leadership recognises when empathy is strong enough to support social-institutional change – and how social-institutional change can support the growth of empathy and conflict transformation.

Socio-institutional change: from collective raiding to theft

- Before: cattle raiding as collective, supported by whole community. Response to raiding is revenge attack.

- Initial conditions: shared practice and shared problem (empathic understanding across tribes); discourse practices – elders, morans and leaders

Re-framing practice

- theft of cattle by individual(s) as criminal act;

- community responsibility for solving the crime – punishing thief and restoring cattle

- Affordances: tribal networks across the area; dysfunctional police and court systems

we'll put a road going down

The first road project

- During the conflict

- To build a road down from Samburu village to Pokot village

- Many benefits seen by the team

- Failed – destroyed by the Pokot villagers

- *"whose need was it? was it our needs? or the needs of the community?"*

- Missing empathic understanding of conflicting parties

The second road project

"the road was not a mistake, only it was done in the wrong way"

- conflict sensitivity training

- began with talking with elders, asking their feelings about a road

so it was a miserable life for them

and they started seeing,

by making peace with this Pokot

they will also be

make their own development

<Q because you will stay in your house,

you'll take care of your livestock,

you will sleep comfortably. Q>

grounded vision

this is a picture we were painting

that came to be the true one

slowly when we started

impressing the Pokot,

impressing these developments.

the Pokots now want the same developments.

they say,

<Q oh we will be able to do business also.

we can do this. Q>

securing agreement to the road project

empathic understanding includes:

- customary discourse practices: e.g. elders decide

- differences in lives and development of each community: e.g. lack of health care and school in the valley for Pokots

- how conflict had affected lives of each community: e.g. Samburus leaving land for the town

- people's desires to live differently: e.g. to sleep securely on their land; to earn money by selling.

building the road

when we were working,

we just didn't want anyone

to walk behind me

because I thought he would chop my head

with a panga

dyspathy as distance

on the first day

you will see

the Samburus,

if they want to lift a stone

he has to call a fellow Samburu

.. Samburus are working on that part

Pokots are working on this part.

micro-level interactions

- Pokot women invited to sell tea and snacks

- they extended credit to Samburu men knowing they would be paid at the end of the week

- 'the boy with the list' mediated trust

- trust becomes an affordance for empathy

- building in a cycle of feedback loops

Steps in empathic understanding through dialogue and interaction

- individuals started talking to each other;

- the Samburu young men started sleeping overnight in the Pokot village;

- the young men exchanged mobile phone numbers;

empathy scaffolds empathy

- Samburu women brought tea to sell and gave credit to the Pokot workers, and the Pokot slept overnight in the Samburu village;

- contact widened to families;

- discussion about the 'peace market' with the group, as a next, shared, project;

- Autonomous action: the young men started arranging their own meetings by phone.

shifts in perceived relations of Self and Other

I've changed my mind about you.

You're not the enemy you used to be.

I start trusting you,

as a friend,

not an enemy.

Conclusions

- Conventional theories and policies of peace building which do not adequately account for the micro-level human relations and intangibles that make peace work in Maralal.

- Empathic understanding and grounded vision work to provide and scaffold opportunities for empathy between people in conflict transformation.

- Empathy~dyspathy dynamics as indicator of conflict transformation processes.

- Dynamics of Empathy project - http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/ livingwithuncertainty/

- Empathy blog - http://empathyblog.wordpress.com/