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**BORDER INTELLIGENCE AND REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION IN
THE HORN OF AFRICA. A CASE STUDY OF KENYA–ETHIOPIA (2010–2024)**

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Border Intelligence and Regional Security Cooperation in The Horn of Africa. A Case Study of Kenya–Ethiopia (2010–2024)

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Abstract:

Purpose of the Study: This study examined the role of border intelligence in strengthening regional security cooperation between Kenya and Ethiopia within the Horn of Africa from 2010–2024.

Methodology: The study adopted a mixed-methods research design involving surveys of 138 respondents, 15 key informant interviews, and document analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression through SPSS, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Findings: The findings established that border intelligence significantly enhances

regional security cooperation between Kenya and Ethiopia. About 85% of respondents indicated that intelligence sharing improved threat detection, surveillance, and early warning systems, while 92.7% noted that intelligence gaps weakened counter-terrorism operations and coordinated border responses. Regional frameworks such as IGAD's CEWARN and the Eastern Africa Standby Force positively contributed to bilateral security collaboration and information exchange. However, persistent barriers including political interference, incompatible technological systems, inadequate institutional frameworks, and limited operational coordination continue to undermine the effectiveness of intelligence-sharing mechanisms and sustainable regional security management within the Horn of Africa.

Conclusion: The study concludes that effective border intelligence is essential for strengthening regional security cooperation and countering transnational threats in the Horn of Africa. Sustainable intelligence collaboration between Kenya and Ethiopia requires institutionalized intelligence-sharing frameworks, interoperable surveillance technologies, stronger political commitment, and enhanced coordination.

Keywords: *Border Intelligence, Regional Security Cooperation, Kenya–Ethiopia Relations, Horn of Africa, Intelligence Sharing, IGAD, Counter-Terrorism, Transnational Threats*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Cross borders intelligence and regional security partnership have now been made vital elements in peace and stability maintenance in the volatile parts of the world. As nations are becoming more aware of the value of intelligence sharing and joint security structures to improve border control, the scenario involving transnational threats, including terrorism, smuggling, and human trafficking, is increasing. Efforts to enhance cross-border cooperation to deal with sophisticated security issues can be seen through the example of initiatives such as the INTERPOL and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) in place on various locations around the world (United Nations, 2022; Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2023). Being one of the most strategically important areas that bridge Africa and the Middle East, the Horn of Africa is one of the centers of such cooperation due to its vulnerability to conflicts and extremist activities and geopolitical significance (International Crisis Group, 2021).

The USA has been instrumental in encouraging the region to work together in security in the Horn of Africa by offering military assistance, sharing of information and providing capacity building training. The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) encourages combined military training and intelligence activities to counterterrorism, especially against such organizations as Al-Shabaab and ISIS representatives who act in the area (Department of Defense, 2023). In addition, the U.S. promotes the exchange of information and enhances the ability to control borders between Kenya, Ethiopia, and other countries through the East Africa Regional Security Initiative (EARSII) (U.S. Institute of Peace, 2021). This activity highlights the strategic significance of border intelligence to the USA as an instrument to curb the issue of insecurity in the region indicating that the USA has a vested interest in this concern.

The rising role of China in Africa especially in infrastructure building and economic relations has been supplemented by increasing participation in Africa security relations. Beijing is promoting the concept of win-win security associations that involve the exchange of intelligence and the joint patrol as a means of securing the major economic routes like the Belt and Road Initiative routes, which bypass East Africa (Zhao, 2022). China has also supported Ethiopia and Kenya by providing surveillance equipment and border security personnel training, which denotes its concern about stable situations to have sure investments (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2023). Further, the strategy of China is more focused on multilateral cooperation and the principle of non-interference, which is a difference in the approach of the Western counterparts (Liang and Yu, 2021).

Being the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria has also had its fair share in border security such as the control of porous borders and the fight against insurgency in the North-East. The



regional intelligence cooperation has been central in improving the exchange of information and common operations to curb cross-national threats, with Nigeria investing significant resources in the ECOWAS and bilateral intelligence sharing and cooperation (Adeniran, 2023). The experience of managing internal security in Nigeria, especially with border intelligence to prevent cross-border insurgency and trafficking, can be used to bring a valuable insight to other African nations like Kenya and Ethiopia (Okeke, 2022). Nigeria equally promotes African solutions to African issues, the idea of homegrown approach towards regional security cooperation.

The 2011-protracted conflict in Libya has experienced destabilizing spillover impacts on the Horn of Africa and North Africa, and has shaped the dynamics of regional security. Weaknesses in central authority have contributed to unchecked borders where arms are being smuggled, people trafficked and extremists' groups moved (El-Ghali, 2023). The case of Libya highlights the importance of a powerful border intelligence to avert insecurity spill over to other neighboring nations such as Ethiopia and Sudan. International interventions to stabilize Libya have involved reinforcing the border controls and intelligence collection by regional players, and perceiving Libya as a hub and origins of illegal networks threatening the Horn of Africa (United Nations Support Mission in Libya, 2024).

Sudan borders two countries, Ethiopia and Libya, and it is still a vital player in the regional security cooperation in the Horn of Africa. There are several security threats to the country, such as in-country and border conflict, as well as the Blue Nile and Darfur contested areas with Ethiopia (Ahmed & Mohamed, 2023). The involvement of Sudan in regional intelligence sharing forums would be crucial in the countering and prevention of cross borders insurgencies and movement of arms. The last peace deals and intermodal mediation initiatives have strengthened the ability and the desire of Sudan to take part in cooperative security initiatives with the neighbors with a focus on the importance of border intelligence in conflict prevention (African Union, 2023).

Ethiopia is a strategic location within the Horn of Africa and its complicated border relations with Sudan and Kenya ensure that it remains a key participant in the process of regional security cooperation. Domestically, there are conflicts, including the Tigray and Oromia regions, which count heavily regarding border security and intelligence sharing with the neighbors (Tadesse, 2023). Ethiopia has optimally participated in bilateral and multilateral programs to drive sharing of the border intelligence, especially to battle terrorism, arms trafficking, and refugee migrations (Horn of Africa Security Network, 2024). The cooperation of Ethiopia with Kenya involves the shared security patrols and exchanging intelligence to secure the porous border and mitigating the frequent threats such as the Al-Shabaab infiltration.



The Kenya/Ethiopia border is a strategic security point in the Horn of Africa, whereby terrorism, human trafficking and organized crime continue to be a problem. Kenya has enhanced its border intelligence and established relations with Ethiopia, by collaborating in terms of joint task forces, sharing of information, and security operations (Kenya Ministry of Interior, 2023). These initiatives will be in line with the overall regional security approach of Kenya, which puts more focus on collaborative structures to promote stability and economic integration within the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) (Wambua, 2022). The situation in Kenya underscores the need to have a consistent regional collaboration through effective intelligence-focused systems to deal with the changing security conditions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Horn of Africa remains one of the most volatile regions globally, marred by persistent insecurity, weak state structures, and transnational threats such as terrorism, arms trafficking, human trafficking, and cross-border ethnic conflicts. In response, Kenya and Ethiopia two influential countries in the region have made strides toward enhancing bilateral and regional security through initiatives such as intelligence sharing, joint border patrols, and regional peacekeeping operations. Despite the establishment of security pacts and institutional frameworks under bodies like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and bilateral agreements such as the Kenya-Ethiopia Cross Border Programme (UNDP, 2020), the effectiveness and consistency of border intelligence cooperation between the two nations remains under scrutiny. Incidents such as the Al-Shabaab attacks in northeastern Kenya, persistent insecurity in the Mandera region, and illegal arms inflows from Ethiopian territories underscore the limitations of existing border intelligence systems (Rono, 2021; Adar, 2022).

While border intelligence plays a central role in facilitating preventive and proactive security interventions, there remains a paucity of empirical studies assessing how such intelligence is gathered, shared, and acted upon across the Kenya-Ethiopia border. Moreover, the effectiveness of intelligence cooperation mechanisms in reducing regional threats and enhancing long-term security stability remains insufficiently explored in academic literature, especially within the Horn of Africa context. Previous studies have often focused on broader diplomatic relations or peacekeeping interventions in the region without delving deeply into the operational dynamics of border intelligence cooperation between these two strategic nations (Mohammed, 2020).

The existing regional security structures are often hindered by mistrust, limited technological infrastructure, overlapping jurisdictions, and political sensitivities, which reduce the effectiveness of timely intelligence dissemination and coordinated responses. This creates a critical gap in policy and academic discourse, especially considering the evolving nature of transnational threats in the Horn of Africa (IGAD, 2021). Consequently, there is a need to assess the effectiveness, structures, and impact of cross-border intelligence and regional cooperation



practices specifically between Kenya and Ethiopia. This study aimed to address the knowledge gap by assessing the impact of cross-border intelligence cooperation on regional security management, examining border intelligence practices, and evaluating the overall efficacy of intelligence sharing in enhancing regional security collaboration between Kenya and Ethiopia.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study pursued three specific objectives:

- (i) to assess the influence of cross-border intelligence cooperation on the management of regional security threats between Kenya and Ethiopia;
- (ii) To analyze the effect of border intelligence practices on the level of regional security cooperation.
- (iii) To evaluate the effectiveness of border intelligence sharing in enhancing regional security cooperation within the Horn of Africa.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Anchors

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

Barry Buzan and Ole Waever (2003) express Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) as a way of understanding how the dynamics of security are inevitably interconnected between the states which are neighbors. According to RSCT, the security threat and response can never be possible in isolation since states in a geographical setting have security complexes clusters, where the security interests of one state will be inseparably linked with interests of its neighbors because of proximity in space, past relations, ethnic relations and common interests in political or security issues (Buzan and Waever, 2003). This interdependence implies that unrest or discord in a specific nation tends to spill over to other nations, and its solution would be found in a cooperative strategy. The Horn of Africa is a classic illustration of a regional security complex, with Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Eritrea being states that are connected to a set of security issues. Continuous hostilities, insurgencies, acts of terrorism and cross border criminal networks have rendered unilateral security responses ineffective. Specifically, the borders of Kenya and Ethiopia have turned into centres of those threats, such as the spillovers of Al-Shabaab insurgency or illegal trafficking networks, which necessitate harmonized intelligence exchange and combined military activities (Williams, 2020). RSCT makes it clear that security cooperation between Kenya and Ethiopia is not only bilateral collaboration but within the framework of a wider region based on the shared challenges and political issues.



The problems of effective regional security cooperation are also illuminated by RSCT. Although interdependence fosters cooperation, the differing national interests, the ability to govern, and the historical rivalries may make the collective responses complex (Lake and Morgan, 1997). As an example, Kenya and Ethiopia can focus on security issues differently or have different abilities to handle border intelligence activities, which influences the effectiveness of cooperation structures, including the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) (Lind et al., 2017). These dynamics are critical in the design of policies that balance conflicting interests and optimize collaborative intelligence activities. RSCT highlights that security is a multi-level variable that is localized to regional and requires inclusion of other actors such as those of the state agencies, local communities, and international organizations (Buzan and Waever, 2003). The Kenya-Ethiopia case of border intelligence has to work within this multifaceted environment in which regional security policies affect and are affected by local realities in Mandera. This paper critically analyzes the facilitation or hindrance of regional security cooperation by politics, social dynamics, and institutional elements within the Horn of Africa by applying RSCT, shedding some light on the way that border intelligence could advance stability and peacebuilding.

2.1 Empirical Review

Border Intelligence Systems and Cross-Border Security Threats

Border intelligence systems have increasingly become essential instruments in the management of cross-border security threats across the world. Contemporary security challenges such as terrorism, human trafficking, smuggling, illegal migration, arms trafficking, and transnational organized crime have compelled governments to adopt intelligence-driven border management approaches. According to Andreas (2013), border security has evolved from traditional physical surveillance to technologically enhanced intelligence systems that combine information gathering, analysis, monitoring, and inter-agency cooperation. These systems assist states in detecting security threats early and coordinating responses across multiple security agencies.

A study by Ackleson (2005) examined the transformation of border security management in the post-9/11 period in the United States. The study established that intelligence-led border control strategies, including biometric technologies, surveillance systems, and information-sharing platforms, significantly improved the capacity of security agencies to detect and deter transnational threats. Ackleson further argued that intelligence systems are most effective when integrated with coordinated institutional frameworks and inter-agency collaboration. Although the study focused on the United States, its findings are relevant to developing countries where border intelligence systems continue to play a critical role in enhancing national security.

Similarly, Bigo (2006) explored the securitization of borders and emphasized the importance of intelligence systems in managing modern security threats. The study argued that technological



surveillance alone cannot address border insecurity unless accompanied by coordinated intelligence analysis and institutional cooperation. Bigo observed that intelligence-sharing mechanisms between security agencies improve situational awareness and strengthen preventive security responses. However, the study mainly focused on European security systems and did not adequately address the operational challenges facing developing regions such as Africa.

In Africa, border insecurity has increasingly been associated with terrorism, cattle rustling, illicit arms trade, and irregular migration. According to Okumu (2011), weak border governance and limited intelligence coordination in the Horn of Africa have contributed to the growth of transnational criminal networks and extremist activities. The author noted that porous borders between Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Sudan create favorable conditions for illegal movements and cross-border insecurity. Okumu emphasized that intelligence-led border management systems are essential in enhancing early warning, surveillance, and coordinated response mechanisms. A study by Williams (2014) on transnational organized crime in Africa found that intelligence failures and weak border surveillance systems have undermined regional security efforts across the continent. The study established that criminal groups exploit weak intelligence coordination between neighboring states to facilitate trafficking activities and evade security detection. Williams argued that strengthening intelligence systems, improving information sharing, and investing in surveillance technologies are critical measures in reducing border-related crimes.

In Kenya, border insecurity has remained a major national security concern due to the country's proximity to unstable neighboring states. Anderson and McKnight (2015) examined Kenya's counterterrorism responses following increased attacks by Al-Shabaab. Their study revealed that weak intelligence coordination and inadequate surveillance systems along Kenya's borders contributed to security vulnerabilities. The authors emphasized the importance of integrating intelligence gathering, border monitoring technologies, and regional cooperation to improve national security management. Further, Menkhaus (2014) examined security challenges in the Horn of Africa and established that terrorism and organized crime thrive in regions characterized by weak border intelligence systems and poor inter-state cooperation. The study argued that effective border intelligence systems should not only focus on technological surveillance but also incorporate community intelligence, institutional coordination, and regional partnerships. Menkhaus observed that local communities living along border areas can provide critical intelligence information that enhances security operations.

The Kenya-Ethiopia border presents unique security challenges due to its vast geographical coverage, porous nature, and limited infrastructural development. According to the International Crisis Group (2019), insecurity along the Kenya-Ethiopia border is driven by cattle rustling, illicit arms trade, intercommunal conflicts, and extremist activities. The report noted that weak intelligence coordination between the two countries has occasionally limited the effectiveness of



joint security operations. The report recommended enhanced intelligence-sharing mechanisms, integrated border surveillance systems, and bilateral security cooperation as key measures for improving regional security.

A study by Mwangi (2021) on intelligence gathering and counterterrorism in Kenya established that intelligence sharing between domestic and international security agencies plays a critical role in combating transnational threats. The study identified surveillance technologies, informant networks, and inter-agency communication as important tools for enhancing border security operations. However, Mwangi also identified mistrust, bureaucratic delays, and inadequate resources as major obstacles affecting intelligence effectiveness. Additionally, Vhumbunu (2020) examined border governance and regional security in Africa and argued that intelligence systems are increasingly becoming central components of modern border management strategies. The study emphasized that effective border intelligence enhances early detection of threats, improves operational coordination, and strengthens regional peace and stability. However, the study observed that many African countries still face challenges related to inadequate technological infrastructure, corruption, and weak institutional cooperation.

The reviewed studies demonstrate that border intelligence systems significantly contribute to the management of cross-border security threats through surveillance, intelligence gathering, information sharing, and coordinated security operations. Nevertheless, most existing studies have focused on developed countries or broader African security issues without specifically examining how border intelligence systems influence cross-border security management and bilateral cooperation between Kenya and Ethiopia. The present study therefore seeks to fill this contextual and geographical gap.

Border Intelligence Practices and Regional Security Cooperation

Regional security cooperation has become increasingly important in addressing transnational security threats that extend beyond national borders. Intelligence practices such as joint surveillance, information exchange, coordinated patrols, and early warning systems are critical components of regional security frameworks. According to Deutsch et al. (1957), regional cooperation enhances collective security by enabling states to coordinate responses to shared threats. In the contemporary security environment, intelligence sharing has emerged as one of the most important pillars of effective regional security cooperation.

A study by Aning and Pokoo (2014) examined regional security cooperation in Africa and established that intelligence collaboration among states significantly contributes to peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The authors argued that regional organizations such as the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have increasingly promoted intelligence-sharing frameworks to combat terrorism, piracy, and transnational organized crime. The study further emphasized that intelligence cooperation strengthens trust among states and



enhances coordinated security operations. Similarly, Cilliers (2015) analyzed Africa's evolving security architecture and observed that regional security initiatives increasingly depend on collaborative intelligence systems. According to the study, intelligence practices such as joint operations, data-sharing mechanisms, and coordinated surveillance improve the ability of states to respond effectively to regional threats. However, Cilliers noted that political mistrust and institutional weaknesses often undermine intelligence cooperation in many African regions.

In the Horn of Africa, regional security cooperation has become particularly important due to the prevalence of terrorism, armed conflict, and illegal cross-border activities. According to Murithi (2009), regional peace and security initiatives in East Africa depend heavily on cooperation between neighboring states. The study emphasized that intelligence sharing enables governments to coordinate military operations, track criminal networks, and prevent cross-border attacks. Murithi further argued that sustainable security cooperation requires mutual trust, institutional capacity, and political commitment among participating states. A study by Whitaker (2008) on regional security cooperation in East Africa found that intelligence-sharing arrangements have improved counterterrorism efforts in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The study established that coordinated intelligence systems enabled security agencies to identify extremist networks and disrupt planned attacks. However, Whitaker noted that differences in political priorities, resource limitations, and concerns over sovereignty often constrain effective intelligence collaboration.

Similarly, Cliffe (2015) examined security governance in the Horn of Africa and observed that regional cooperation frameworks increasingly rely on intelligence coordination to address transnational threats. The study emphasized that cross-border intelligence sharing contributes to improved surveillance, rapid response capabilities, and conflict prevention. Nevertheless, the author highlighted that mistrust among states and competition over regional influence sometimes weaken intelligence-sharing initiatives. Kenya and Ethiopia have maintained long-standing security cooperation due to shared concerns over terrorism, cattle rustling, human trafficking, and illegal arms trade. According to the African Union (2020), the two countries have engaged in joint security operations and intelligence-sharing initiatives aimed at addressing instability along their shared border. The report established that bilateral intelligence cooperation has enhanced the monitoring of extremist movements and strengthened coordinated border patrols.

Further, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) reported that intelligence-led border management systems improve regional cooperation by facilitating timely information exchange and coordinated law enforcement responses. The report emphasized that integrated intelligence systems help neighboring countries identify trafficking routes, monitor suspicious activities, and prevent criminal networks from exploiting porous borders. In another study, Kasaija (2021) examined security cooperation in the Horn of Africa and found that intelligence practices play a significant role in promoting diplomatic relations and collective security. The study established that intelligence-sharing mechanisms improve trust among states



by creating platforms for continuous communication and coordinated action. However, Kasaija also observed that political tensions, institutional rivalries, and concerns over confidentiality often affect the effectiveness of intelligence collaboration.

Additionally, Le Sage (2010) analyzed regional counterterrorism efforts in East Africa and found that intelligence-sharing partnerships have contributed significantly to countering violent extremism. The study emphasized that joint intelligence operations improve surveillance efficiency and enable rapid responses to emerging threats. However, the study noted that disparities in technological capacity and resource availability between states may hinder effective cooperation. The reviewed studies demonstrate that border intelligence practices contribute significantly to regional security cooperation through joint surveillance, coordinated operations, intelligence exchange, and collective security responses. Nonetheless, most studies have focused broadly on regional cooperation frameworks without specifically examining the operational influence of border intelligence systems on security cooperation between Kenya and Ethiopia. Therefore, the current study seeks to bridge this gap by examining how border intelligence practices influence bilateral security cooperation within the Horn of Africa.

Effectiveness of Border Intelligence Sharing and Regional Security

Effective intelligence sharing is widely recognized as a critical component of successful border security management and regional stability. According to Ratcliffe (2016), intelligence sharing enhances situational awareness, facilitates proactive responses, and strengthens coordinated security operations. The study argued that intelligence-led policing and border management systems improve the capacity of states to detect and respond to security threats before they escalate. A study by Aldrich (2004) on international intelligence cooperation established that intelligence sharing enables states to combat transnational threats such as terrorism, organized crime, and illegal migration more effectively. The study observed that intelligence collaboration enhances information accuracy, operational efficiency, and strategic coordination among security agencies. However, Aldrich also identified mistrust, secrecy, and institutional competition as major barriers to intelligence sharing.

Similarly, Walsh (2006) examined intelligence-sharing practices in counterterrorism operations and found that effective information exchange strengthens joint security responses and improves threat assessment capabilities. The study emphasized that intelligence-sharing frameworks require strong institutional trust, compatible technological systems, and clear legal guidelines to function effectively. In Africa, intelligence-sharing challenges have continued to undermine regional security efforts. According to Aning and Edu-Afful (2016), intelligence cooperation in Africa is often constrained by political mistrust, inadequate resources, and weak institutional frameworks. The study found that many African states remain reluctant to share sensitive



intelligence information due to concerns over sovereignty, confidentiality, and political competition.

A report by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS, 2020) observed that intelligence-sharing initiatives in East Africa have improved regional responses to terrorism and organized crime. However, the report identified major challenges including limited technological infrastructure, corruption, poor communication systems, and inadequate policy harmonization among states. The report recommended stronger institutional coordination and investment in integrated intelligence platforms. Further, Botha (2013) examined counterterrorism cooperation in East Africa and established that intelligence sharing between regional states contributed to the disruption of extremist networks associated with Al-Shabaab. The study found that collaborative intelligence operations improved surveillance capabilities and enabled security agencies to prevent planned terrorist attacks. However, the study also highlighted the persistence of mistrust and bureaucratic inefficiencies within regional intelligence networks.

The Kenya-Ethiopia border region remains vulnerable to insecurity due to pastoral conflicts, arms trafficking, smuggling, and extremist infiltration. According to the Small Arms Survey (2017), inadequate intelligence sharing between border security agencies has occasionally limited the effectiveness of security operations in the region. The report emphasized the importance of harmonized intelligence systems and coordinated surveillance mechanisms in improving regional stability. Similarly, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD, 2021) emphasized that intelligence-sharing frameworks are essential for addressing cross-border threats in the Horn of Africa. The report established that coordinated intelligence systems enhance border monitoring, improve early warning capabilities, and strengthen regional peace and security initiatives.

The reviewed studies indicate that intelligence sharing plays a vital role in enhancing regional security through coordinated responses, surveillance, and information exchange. However, challenges such as mistrust, institutional weaknesses, technological disparities, and bureaucratic barriers continue to undermine intelligence-sharing effectiveness. Existing studies have generally focused on broader regional security frameworks without specifically examining the operational challenges affecting border intelligence sharing between Kenya and Ethiopia. The current study therefore seeks to address this gap by analyzing how border intelligence-sharing practices influence regional security cooperation between the two countries.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research design using a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative key informant interviews (KIIs) and documentary analysis.



This design was selected for its capacity to capture both the measurable patterns of intelligence cooperation and the nuanced operational and political dynamics that shape its effectiveness.

The study focused on the Kenya–Ethiopia border corridor, encompassing Mandera, Moyale, El Wak, Dolo Ado, and Sololo areas that represent both high strategic importance for trade and movement, and the most acute concentration of cross-border security threats in the sub-region. A stratified random sampling method was applied to a target population of approximately 250 individuals drawn from security organizations (KDF, National Intelligence Service, Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service), local government administrators, community leaders, and civil society representatives. Using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 5% margin of error, a sample of 150 participants was calculated. A total of 138 questionnaires were returned and validated for analysis (response rate: 92%). Additionally, 15 KIIs were conducted with senior intelligence officers, local administrators, and regional security experts. Documentary analysis encompassed institutional reports from IGAD, the African Union, UNODC, and bilateral government communications. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation and multiple regression). Qualitative data from interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, with themes coded around the study's three core objectives: intelligence cooperation, intelligence practices, and the effectiveness of intelligence sharing.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Respondent Profile

Of the 138 validated respondents, the majority were male (62.3%) and fell within the 31–40 age bracket (42%), reflecting the demographic profile of active-duty security personnel. Respondents were drawn from security organizations (47.1%), local administration (27.5%), civil society (18.1%), and border communities (7.3%). Educational levels ranged from secondary education (29.0%) to doctoral level (3.6%), with the plurality holding diploma-level qualifications (34.8%).

Table 4.1: Profile of Survey Respondents

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	86	62.3
	Female	52	37.7
Age Group	20–30 years	34	24.6
	31–40 years	58	42.0
	41–50 years	35	25.4
	51+ years	11	8.0
Occupational Category	Security Organizations (KDF, NIS, ENISS)	65	47.1



	Local Administration	38	27.5
	Civil Society Organizations	25	18.1
	Border Residents	10	7.3
Education Level	Secondary Education	40	29.0
	Diploma	48	34.8
	Bachelor's Degree	35	25.4
	Master's Degree	10	7.2
	Doctorate	5	3.6

Source: Primary Survey Data (Researcher, 2025)

4.2 Cross-Border Intelligence Cooperation and Regional Threat Management

The first objective examined whether and how cross-border intelligence cooperation between Kenya and Ethiopia influences the management of regional security threats. Findings are summarized in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Cross-Border Intelligence Cooperation and Management of Security Threats

Response Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Intelligence sharing has improved threat detection along the Kenya–Ethiopia border.	45	40	8	5	2
Cross-border coordination has reduced incidences of terrorism and smuggling.	38	44	9	7	2
Intelligence operations are hindered by political interference.	30	36	15	12	7
Inter-agency collaboration enhances rapid response to security threats.	48	35	10	5	2

Source: Primary Survey Data (Researcher, 2025)

The data in Table 4.2 reveal a pattern of qualified optimism. An overwhelming 85% of respondents (45% strongly agree, 40% agree) confirmed that intelligence sharing has improved threat detection along the Kenya–Ethiopia border, particularly in high-risk areas including Mandera, Moyale, Dolo Ado, and El Wak. This finding aligns with operational data showing that joint intelligence-led operations along the Mandera–Moyale corridor contributed to the disruption of multiple Al-Shabaab networks and arms trafficking channels. Eighty-two percent of respondents agreed that cross-border coordination has reduced terrorism and smuggling



incidences, pointing to the operational value of bilateral frameworks such as the IGAD CEWARN mechanism and joint taskforce arrangements.

Qualitative interviews enriched these quantitative patterns. A senior Kenyan intelligence officer posted in Mandera observed:

"Our cooperation with Ethiopian counterparts has greatly improved. We can quickly share news about planned attacks or trafficking routes. However, lack of interoperability in our communication systems sometimes acts as a barrier to real-time collaboration."

This candid assessment captures the study's central tension: the existence of genuine cooperative will on the ground, frustrated by systemic technological and institutional constraints. Meanwhile, 66% of respondents acknowledged that political interference periodically hampers intelligence operations — a finding consistent with the broader East African literature, where sovereignty concerns and inter-agency competition have been documented as recurring impediments to sustained cooperation (Hendrickson, 2021).

4.3 Border Intelligence Practices and Regional Security Cooperation

The second objective examined how specific border intelligence practices patrol frequency, surveillance technology use, inter-agency coordination, and policy framework adequacy affect the level of regional security cooperation. Table 4.3 presents the key findings.

Table 4.3: Effect of Border Intelligence Practices on Regional Security Cooperation

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Regular patrols and surveillance enhance border stability.	52	36	6	4	2
Information gaps between agencies reduce response effectiveness.	40	42	8	6	4
Technology-based intelligence (drones, sensors) improves coordination.	35	45	10	7	3
Border intelligence practices are adequately supported by policy frameworks.	25	30	20	15	10

Source: Primary Survey Data (Researcher, 2025)



Table 4.3 underscores both the promise and the precariousness of current intelligence practices. A strong 88% of respondents confirmed that regular patrols and surveillance have enhanced border stability, with officers in Mandera, Moyale, and Sololo specifically noting that coordinated patrols integrating foot, vehicle, and drone operations substantially improve situational awareness and deter cross-border criminal activity. The African Union Border Programme Report (2023) corroborates this, documenting a 20% reduction in cross-border instability in the Kenya–Ethiopia corridor between 2020 and 2023.

Eighty percent of respondents endorsed the contribution of technology-based intelligence particularly unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), satellite sensors, and digital surveillance systems to improving border coordination. Officers highlighted UAVs as especially effective in surveying remote and inaccessible terrain. However, these benefits are unevenly realized: high maintenance costs, limited technical expertise, and unreliable network connectivity were cited as persistent operational barriers. These findings resonate with Wanjiku and Mwangi (2021), who emphasized that cross-border technology alignment and training remain prerequisites for effective surveillance in East Africa.

The most striking finding in this section concerns policy frameworks: only 55% of respondents agreed that existing policies adequately support border intelligence practices, with 25% actively disagreeing. Despite formal cooperation frameworks including the Kenya–Ethiopia Cross-Border Programme (2018–2023) and the IGAD Regional Strategy on Transnational Security (2021–2025) officers reported that the absence of standardized operating procedures (SOPs) and enforceable legal instruments means that intelligence sharing remains more dependent on individual relationships than institutional systems. One Kenyan officer captured this precisely:

"Even when we have patrol data, autonomous chains of command sometimes prevent response teams from acting. Without a standardized system, a critical officer transfer can halt information flows entirely."

4.4 Effectiveness of Border Intelligence Sharing on Regional Security Cooperation

The third objective evaluated the overall effectiveness of intelligence-sharing mechanisms and their impact on the quality of regional security cooperation. Table 4.4 presents responses across four key dimensions.

Table 4.4: Effectiveness of Intelligence Sharing Mechanisms

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)



Joint intelligence operations have built mutual trust between agencies.	40	42	10	6	2
Border intelligence sharing reduces cross-border crime rates.	45	38	8	6	3
There are adequate institutional structures to facilitate intelligence sharing.	30	35	15	12	8
Intelligence sharing improves regional diplomatic relations.	42	40	10	5	3

Source: Primary Survey Data (Researcher, 2025)

Eighty-two percent of respondents confirmed that joint intelligence operations have built mutual trust between Kenyan and Ethiopian security agencies a foundational prerequisite for sustainable cooperation. This trust-building has occurred incrementally through joint field operations and collective threat assessments, particularly within the EASF and IGAD Security Sector Programme (ISSP) frameworks. Qualitative interviews revealed that repeated joint exercises and shared threat briefings create interpersonal bonds among officers that transcend formal institutional channels, a dynamic well-documented in the cooperation literature (Okumu, 2021; Mutie & Abdi, 2022).

Eighty-three percent of respondents affirmed that intelligence sharing reduces cross-border crime rates, with specific reference to successes in disrupting organized criminal networks along the Mandera–Moyale corridor. The African Union Peace and Security Council (2023) reported an 18% decline in terror-related incidents along the Kenya–Ethiopia border between 2020 and 2023, lending institutional credibility to these respondent perceptions. Similarly, intelligence-led operations reportedly disrupted several human trafficking and arms smuggling routes, outcomes corroborated by UNODC (2022). Eighty-two percent of respondents agreed that intelligence sharing positively affects regional diplomatic relations, a finding that extends the case for intelligence cooperation beyond its immediate security utility. This aligns with Nye's (2004) theory of complex interdependence, which argues that cooperation in one functional domain in this case, security generates positive externalities across others, including trade facilitation and diplomatic trust.

However, only 65% of respondents believed that adequate institutional structures exist to support sustained intelligence sharing the lowest agreement rate across all items. Interviewees consistently described intelligence exchange as resting on personal relationships rather than institutionalized processes, creating vulnerability to disruption whenever key personnel change. One senior security official observed:



"The circulation of information can stop as soon as an important officer transfers or retires. We need permanent systems that survive personnel changes, not arrangements that exist only because two officers trust each other."

This finding reinforces Alemayehu's (2020) argument that sustainable intelligence cooperation requires permanent accountability mechanisms, compatible technologies, and formal bilateral treaties that transcend individual relationships.

4.5 Border Intelligence Gaps and Counter-Terrorism Operations

A critical supplementary finding emerged regarding the direct operational impact of intelligence deficiencies. Table 4.5 presents responses on the impact of border intelligence gaps on counter-terrorism operations.

Table 4.5: Impact of Border Intelligence Gaps on Counter-Terrorism Operations

Perceived Impact of Intelligence Gaps	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Negative impact on counter-terrorism effectiveness	139	92.7%
No discernible impact	3	2.0%
Positive impact (gaps create adaptive pressure)	2	1.3%
Uncertain / Don't know	6	4.0%
Total	150	100%

Source: Primary Survey Data (Researcher, 2025)

The striking consensus 92.7% identifying intelligence gaps as having a negative impact — is among the study's most consequential findings. Respondents described how delayed or incomplete intelligence forces security agencies into reactive rather than preventive postures, enabling criminal and terrorist networks to exploit surveillance blind spots. A security officer's observation was particularly revealing:

"At times, it is only after an attack plan is carried out that we receive information about it, because the intelligence did not reach us in time. We respond to incidents instead of preventing them."

Secondary sources corroborate this pattern. UNODC (2022) documented that trafficking networks and extremist groups actively exploit intelligence gaps to sustain their operations, while the African Union Peace and Security Council (2023) linked intelligence vulnerabilities to heightened security incidents in porous border areas. The January 2022 Al-Shabaab attack in Mandera County which killed ten civilians despite prior warnings from French, American, and Dutch officials that attacks were likely stands as a tragic illustration of what happens when intelligence does not translate into timely action (Wikipedia, 2022).



5. DISCUSSION

5.1 The Promise of Structured Intelligence Cooperation

The study's findings paint a picture of partial but genuine progress in Kenya–Ethiopia intelligence cooperation, situated within a context of significant structural fragility. The signing of a bilateral MoU on intelligence sharing and coordinated security operations in August 2024 coinciding with Kenya's security operation against OLA camps near Moyale represents the most concrete institutionalization of bilateral intelligence cooperation to date (ISS Africa, 2025). The subsequent Defense Cooperation Agreement signed in September 2025 further demonstrates that both governments have recognized the urgency of moving from ad hoc coordination to structured, treaty-based intelligence frameworks.

These bilateral developments are reinforced by regional institutional progress. The joint AU–IGAD workshop on border governance in May 2024 in Entebbe, Uganda, signaled a renewed commitment at the continental level to aligning member-state border intelligence systems with standardized governance frameworks. IGAD's CEWARN mechanism continues to provide the most developed regional platform for conflict early warning, though its operational depth varies significantly across the Kenya–Ethiopia border compared to its stronger presence in the Somalia–Ethiopia corridor.

5.2 Structural Constraints: Technology, Trust, and Political Will

Despite these advances, the study identifies three systemic constraints that consistently limit the effectiveness of border intelligence cooperation: technological incompatibility, inter-agency trust deficits, and political interference.

The technology gap is both a symptom and a cause of cooperation failures. Kenya and Ethiopia employ different surveillance architectures, communication protocols, and data management systems, creating interoperability barriers that slow real-time information exchange. The 80% of respondents who supported drone and sensor-based surveillance simultaneously acknowledged that these tools are unevenly available and maintained across the two countries. Bridging this gap requires not merely equipment provision but sustained joint training and technical harmonization a process that has barely begun.

Trust deficits manifest at multiple levels: between agencies within each country, between the two countries' security establishments, and between security forces and the border communities whose cooperation is essential for human intelligence. The Oromo Liberation Army's (OLA) cross-border activities which prompted Kenya's 2025 security operation, reportedly coordinated with Ethiopian intelligence (NISS, 2025) illustrate both the value of when trust-based coordination works and the fragility of cooperation when political sensitivities arise. Ethiopia's



interest in pursuing OLA elements in Kenya risks being perceived through a sovereignty lens, potentially straining the very bilateral trust that recent agreements seek to consolidate.

Political interference acknowledged by 66% of respondents operates at multiple registers. At the bureaucratic level, inter-agency competition and overlapping jurisdictions delay intelligence dissemination. At the diplomatic level, bilateral tensions unrelated to security such as competing regional influence aspirations or disagreements over trade routes periodically cast shadows over security cooperation. These dynamics underscore RSCT's observation that states within a security complex do not operate as security-maximizing rational actors, but as political entities whose security cooperation is embedded in complex historical, ethnic, and diplomatic relationships.

5.3 Community Intelligence: The Underdeveloped Resource

One of the study's qualitative insights with the greatest policy relevance is the underutilization of community-based intelligence. Border communities in the Mandera–Moyale corridor possess unparalleled local knowledge of movement patterns, social networks, and emerging security threats. Yet 70% of respondents noted that insecurity arising from poor intelligence coordination had severely affected local livelihoods and cross-border trade, creating conditions of mistrust and grievance that undermine the community-security force relationships needed for effective HUMINT. This creates a vicious cycle: poor coordination generates insecurity, insecurity erodes community trust, and eroded trust diminishes the human intelligence essential for better coordination.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

This study set out to assess the role of border intelligence in enhancing regional security cooperation between Kenya and Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa. Three principal conclusions emerge from the analysis.

First, border intelligence cooperation between Kenya and Ethiopia has made measurable contributions to regional security outcomes particularly in threat detection, early warning, and the disruption of cross-border criminal networks. The 85% agreement rate on improved threat detection and the 83% agreement on reduced crime rates through intelligence sharing indicate that cooperation, where it functions, delivers real security gains. The signing of the 2024 MoU and the 2025 Defense Cooperation Agreement represents an inflection point in the formalization of this cooperation.



Second, the effectiveness of intelligence cooperation is fundamentally constrained by structural factors: technological incompatibility, the absence of standardized protocols, dependence on informal personal networks, and the corrosive effects of political interference and inter-agency competition. The 92.7% of respondents who identified intelligence gaps as negatively impacting counter-terrorism operations provide stark testimony to the human cost of these structural failures.

Third, the path to sustainable regional security in the Horn of Africa runs through institutionalized, technologically integrated, and community-engaged border intelligence systems. The bilateral and regional frameworks that currently exist IGAD CEWARN, EASF, the AU Border Program provide the institutional scaffolding for more effective cooperation, but their operational potential is constrained by implementation gaps, resource disparities, and the absence of formal bilateral intelligence treaties with clear legal and accountability frameworks.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Establish a Permanent Joint Intelligence Coordination Center

Kenya and Ethiopia should establish a Joint Border Intelligence Coordination Center a permanent, physically co-located institution staffed by officers from both countries' security services positioned at Moyale or another key border node. This center should serve as the operational hub for real-time intelligence sharing, joint threat assessment, and coordinated response activation. Its existence would anchor bilateral cooperation in institutional reality rather than personal relationships.

6.2.2 Develop a Formal Bilateral Intelligence-Sharing Treaty

The governments should negotiate and ratify a comprehensive bilateral intelligence-sharing treaty that specifies legal frameworks for data protection, information classification, operational protocols, and accountability mechanisms. This treaty should be aligned with existing regional frameworks including IGAD's Policy Framework on Cross-Border Security Governance (2018) and the AU Border Governance Strategy, ensuring that bilateral cooperation contributes to and benefits from regional-level coordination.

6.2.3 Invest in Interoperable Technology Infrastructure

Both governments, with support from international partners including USAID, the EU Trust Fund for Africa, and the UK's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, should invest in harmonizing border surveillance technologies. Priority areas include interoperable digital communication systems, shared data management platforms, and joint UAV maintenance and



operations training. Technology investment must be paired with sustained joint training programs to ensure human capacity keeps pace with technological capability.

6.2.4 Embed Community Intelligence into Formal Systems

Border intelligence frameworks should be redesigned to systematically incorporate community-based intelligence networks. Community liaison officers drawn from and accountable to border communities should be integrated into intelligence units, with clear protocols for how community information is processed, acted upon, and fed back. This approach should be accompanied by confidence-building measures including joint community-security force dialogues and transparent accountability for security force conduct.

6.2.5 Strengthen IGAD's Operational Role

The IGAD Secretariat, through its CEWARN mechanism and the IGAD Security Sector Programme, should be empowered through expanded funding, stronger mandates, and greater political commitment from member states to serve as the institutional anchor for multi-lateral intelligence coordination across the Horn of Africa. The AU–IGAD workshop model, piloted in May 2024, should be formalized into a regular structured review process that evaluates the implementation of border governance strategies and identifies operational gaps.

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