ABSTRACT
The focus of this research is the role of land as a factor in conflict in Taita Taveta since independence. The research begins with an examination and analysis of the people of Taita Taveta, their relationship with their neighbours the Akamba and Maasai, as well as their relationship with the sisal estates, Tsavo National Park and mining companies in different historical times. This provides a background to the understanding of the conflict and the role of land in it. The study was carried out among the Wadawida who live around Dawida area which comprises of the massif Taita Hills and Watuweta who live around Taveta area located near the Kenya Tanzania border of the Taita Taveta.

The study examined the conflicts from 1963 to 2010. It is argued that land was a major factor in conflict in Taita Taveta. However, the problem is that, studies carried out on the area did not draw attention to the symbolical identity of land to the Wadawida and Watuweta, and how it influenced their social political behaviour; neither did they reveal the historical linkages between land, symbolical identity, subsequent reallocation and the prevalence of land conflict in Taita Taveta. In order to understand the conflict, the study was guided by three objectives; to determine the nature and types of land conflict in the area, to examine the causes of such conflicts and to evaluate the impact of the conflicts.

The weapons that were used were mainly traditional weapons which included ndana na mawanu ga wusungu. These weapons were easily available and used by both men and women of all ages since pre-colonial era. As the conflict intensified, the colonial government disarmed the people of Taita Taveta. However, the post-colonial governments were faced by various challenges. The new discoveries of various precious stones in Taita Taveta in the 20th century attracted local and international companies. Meanwhile, politicians from the area are exploiting the issue of land conflict to whip up nationalist sentiment while threatening to secede from the rest of Kenya. It, therefore, became hard for the government security personnel to rid the region of the modern and more deadly weapon, such as guns and pistols.

The study further argues that the conflict impacted on the people of Taita Taveta and their neighbours in the entire region in both negative and positive ways. For example, the conflict inflicted suffering on a large section of the population, who lost their
family members and livelihood. It disrupted school learning, displaced people and destroyed property. However, there were gains associated with the conflict, ranging from accumulation of stolen gemstones to benefits gained by those who took part in trading in arms.

1Ndana na Mawanu ga Wusungu. It means bows and poisonous arrows in Taita Taveta.