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# Socioeconomic Development Projects and its Effects on Peace Building in Kerio-Valley Region, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

Kerio valley, for decades has been a hot bed of conflicts and violence. To curb the situation and reduce the effects of conflicts and violence, there has been efforts in place, by a range of stakeholders such as government, NGOs, CBOs, religious organizations among others. Despite all the efforts and resources put in place to build peace, the situation in the valley is still volatile, with milestones gained easily destroyed by political, cultural, social and economic troubles. The study was carried out in the three sub counties of West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet and Baringo, particularly in wards that experience recurrent conflicts. The objective of the study was to analyze the effect of socioeconomic developments projects and activities influence peace-building in Kerio Valley, Kenya. The study utilized the positive peace and structural violence theories. A descriptive research design was adopted. 200 respondents were targeted composed of 156 National Government Administrative officers, particularly, the chiefs, Assistant chiefs, Assistant County commissioners, and the Deputy County Commissioners, 9 community policing representatives, 125 National Police reservists, 6 religious representatives and 3 National Police reservists. A census was carried out and a response rate of 145(72.5%) was achieved. Data was collected using semi structured questionnaires, where both qualitative and quantitative data was gained and analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis, and results presented in themes. The outcome revealed that, efforts in place that address socioeconomic challenges aided in peace-building that brought relatively stable peaceful coexistence. However, practices such as cattle rustling, competition for resources and political interference as well as commercialization of cattle rustling watered down peace-building efforts. The study Recommends that more resources be provided to stakeholders, especially the local peace builders, the warriors (Morans) who are usually left out in the process of building

Keywords: Peace-building; conflicts; Kerio Valley; Violence

### 1 Background of the Study

Peace-building is a critical element that restores sanity in an otherwise hostile and life-threatening contexts. In Northern Ireland, peace has remained fragile for a while, but peace building effort evident in power sharing agreements that have been set using formal procedures, and provision of help to the affected populations by giving projects that generate economic gains, and improve livelihoods. Despite the efforts by the government and civil society organization, the reconciliation efforts are compromised by violent political crises, and contentions that arise along cultural lines, coupled with the uneven distribution of these programs (Yrre, Levasseur & Reimer, 2023).

In western part of Africa, particularly in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, Schoofs (2010), while investigating the effect of United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1325, targeted the role of women in the peace building process. In the post conflict study, the recognition and involvement of women in the entire peace building process have not only been recognized by the government but also integrated in the countries' national plan for peace-building. Despite this, the level of implementation is low, and is attributed to the presence of weak and sometimes non-existent implementation of policies in institutions, inadequate donor funding to drive the agenda and the inadequate resources

In Tunisia, Gray (2018) focused on examining the peace-building efforts of the country's post war era, beginning from 2011. The study uncovered that there existed several reforms that informed the peace-building process after the Arab springs. These included the involvement of victims in the transition to justice, particularly those who suffered economic, social and psychological harms. However, policies put in place to secure adequate and efficient transition ended up overlooking victims of the violence and conflicts, and thus continued to suffer due to constant and unattended psycho-social support, and outreaches that are gender sensitive, thus jeopardizing Tunisia's peace-building efforts.

In East Africa, civil organizations play critical roles in peace-building. For instance, Northern Uganda according to Omach (2016) during the post the Lord's Resistance army period, Civil societies such as faith-based organizations, NGOs, and traditional institutions were active stakeholders in the process of restoring peace and harmony in the community. The study by Omach revealed that the adoption of alternative dispute resolution strategies was critical in conciliatory process that brought communities together. However, the involvement of NGOs brought in conflicting interests that in certain circumstances countered the norms adhered by locals, and priorities by donors, thus compromising the peace-building efforts efficiency and sustainability.

In Kenya, a study by IPSTC & UN Women (2015), investigated the interrelationship between peace-building, natural resources and women in Turkana County. Key among the investigated variables was the institutional elements that utilized in the existing projects on peace-building. The outcome revealed that as much as women are critical players in peace-building, they are generally under-recognized in activities such as mediation, projects that support livelihood, and the mobilization of community members in peace-building processes linked to water and resources conflicts. This has been occasioned by weak co-ordination efforts that have eventually compromised sustainability of peace-building projects.

The situation in Kenya's Kerio valley region that covers the counties of Elgeyo Marakwet, Pokot, Baringo, Turkana and Samburu is no different. Elfversson (2016) investigated violence in Kerio valley that had been occasioned by the cyclic cattle rustling and resource-based clashes among the cross-county residents of Tugen, Marakwet and Pokot. The findings showed that the state interventions in the conflict in these communities are weak, and this has consequently paved way for non-state actors' participation in efforts to build resilience and bring peace in the Valley. These stakeholders include the involvement of local elders in the search of peaceful co-existence from the grassroots level. Despite the efforts, peace and security remains fragile and, in some places, with minimal to non-existent state support, and minimal resources. Based on this background, the study sought to investigate peace-building in Kerio-valleys most fragile counties of West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet and Baringo

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## 1.2 Statement of the problem

The communities living in Kerio valley, have over several decades endured conflicts that are recurrent. The violence and conflicts affect all the communities living in the valley. The communities, are composed of pure pastoralism and those practicing aggro-pastoralism. It is this reason, coupled with cultural norms and practices on livestock and way of life that led to disputes, that are resource based such as the seasonal fights over grazing land and water points during dry season, and cattle rustling for dowry payment, revenge attacks and prestige (Maina, 2023; Kipchumba, 2019).

The historical conflict, according to Kipchumba (2019) have had immense impact on the local communities. Hundreds of lives lost, loss of livestock to theft, a key lifeline of the population, exposing them to harsh basic living realities, degraded trust between communities due to long lasting and inter-generation attacks and counter attacks. Moreover, a norm of cattle rustling has transformed from a mere cultural practice to a dynamic commercial criminal activity, exacerbated by the proliferation of arms, and the use of technology, used by criminals to organize and execute crimes for personal gains.

Kiprono (2025), in a study that focused on colonial and post-colonial conflicts in the Kerio Valley, particularly in Elgeyo Marakwet unearthed that cattle rustling led to community militarization against each other, reduced investment in the basic socioeconomic activities, trauma in affected communities and individual victims, gender roles altered, family break ups, and generalized low investment in development initiatives. This has further allowed a fertile environment for unending conflicts.

To resolve the conflicts in the region, there has been multiple stakeholders actively involved in peace-building. They include local county government initiatives, the deployment of security agencies, who counter raids, disarm, carry out militarized operations and arrest criminals who cause mayhem, the national government through the implementation of policies in different ministries, utilization of local peace committees to mediate conflicts within and between communities, presence of civil society and non-governmental organizations who promote peace through advocacy, provision of support to maintain people's livelihoods, training on peace-building, and early warning systems. It is therefore worth noting the efforts were able to resolve conflicts, but short term, in some of the contexts. The efforts have been hindered from achieving lasting peace by stakeholder weak co-ordination mechanisms, leaving out the youthful population, key actors in the conflicts of violence of the region, limited resource bases, insufficient attention and action from government, the flow of arms and weapons into civilian arms, and lack of alternative sources to sustain livelihoods. This study therefore sought to analyze the effect of socioeconomic development projects on peace-building in the three affected counties of Kerio valley' the West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet and Baringo.

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## 1.3 Objective

To analyze the effects of socioeconomic development projects on peace-building in Kerio Valley

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## 1.4 Literature review

### 1.4.1 Peace building

Peace building, the foundation stone to sustainable communities. In Lebanon, Leonardsson (2024), carried out a study on the practices adopted to resolve conflicts in the country's post conflict period. The study was quidded by the relational approach to peace-building, in a qualitative case study that collected data using interviews and secondary data. The study found that, the local population got involved on peace building practices, to enable them shift from war, violence and conflicts to a peaceful co-existence. However, the efforts caused more friction and has caused inequalities that ended up jeopardizing the efforts.

In West Africa's Sierra Leone, Bangura (2018) investigated 25 years of civil war and implemented peace-building efforts. The study analyzed both sub-national and national level trajectories as well as the local civil society organizations, especially those led by women and the United Nations efforts through reconciliation. The multi-level peace-building approach was adopted, in a mixed method design that utilized both secondary data and qualitative

primary data. The results showed that peace building efforts were critical in attaining sustainable peace, but they highly depended on the common interests and goals of local, national and international actors.

In Eastern Africa, Datzberger (2017) investigated the use of non-formal programs used to build peace in Uganda during the post conflict era. The theoretical framework used was education for peace-building, in a qualitative analysis. The study targeted non-formal education centers, and data collected using questionnaires. The results indicate that the initiatives led to a positive contribution to peace-building, with feasible impacts felt among the youth through their inclusion, and gendered impacts addressed. However, inadequate funding and poor co-ordination disrupt the sustainability of milestones gained in the process.

In Kenya's Wajir county, Ogeda (2012), while examining peace-building focused on the role of local peace actors, government agencies, NGOs and local community clans in peace-building. The research was guided by the community capacity theory. It was a survey design that utilized data collected from the field and a review of existing research. The results showed that peace-building in the county have been done mainly by the local peace committees, and they enjoy local trust among the population, however, their efforts are hindered by inadequate resource base.

In Kerio Valley, Elfversson (2016) established a relationship between governance and peace building. The study had target both communities practicing pure pastoralism and those focusing on agro-pastoralism, who are always conflicting. The researchers utilized the peace from below approach, in a case study that was qualitative. The outcome revealed that the main cause of conflicts in Kerio valley is the fight over resources such as water, land and pasture. Grassroots effort to build peace, the government involvement as well as civil society actors have failed to secure sustainable peace.

#### **1.4.2 Socioeconomic development projects**

Socioeconomic development projects are key investments that aid in stability of communities. In the middle east, Beath, Christia and Enikolopov (2013) analyzed how Afghanistan's peace building was affected by assistance focusing on development projects such as schools and roads, and social assistance projects offered through cash for work. The context was the country's Taliban affected zones. Development as peace approach was adopted in randomized control trials. The outcome revealed that, the implemented projects cemented trust between communities and government but failed to build lasting peace.

Mac Ginty (2010), in a study that investigated the reconstruction of Sierra-Leone post war era, focused on developments at the grassroots that were social and economic oriented. These projects included the investment in infrastructure, education and basic livelihoods support, with the aim of establishing sustainable peace. The theoretical framework used was peace theory that combined both bottom-up and top-down peace building methodologies. It was a case study that collected data from primary and secondary sources. The outcome showed that when the community members were made part of the socioeconomic development projects, peace-building likely succeeded, and on the contrary, projects that did not involve communities failed.

In Rwanda, King (2014) focused on socioeconomic projects at village level. The study analyzed projects in housing, cooperatives and community-led works, whose goal was reconciliation post the genocide. Sociopolitical and contact theories were used in a mixed method design that targeted households. The outcome showed that inter-group cooperation in socioeconomic projects meant to bring reconciliation ended up rebuilding trust among communities, though in some instances, this benefited only a few communities who ended up rebuilding the relationships among themselves.

In Kenya, Mkutu (2008) while investigating how the social and economic projects affect peace building among pastoralism communities. The key projects that the study focused on were infrastructure, water projects and grazing fields. Conflict transformation theory was adopted in a study that collected data from interviews and review of existing policies. The outcome showed that the investment in the infrastructure reduced violence and conflicts, which subsequently reduced cattle raids, and armed clashes. This was made possible by ensuring that the localized projects were inclusive. However, sustainable peace was not achieved due to problems of elite capture, which led unequal access and subsequently, escalated tension in some contexts

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### **1.5 Theoretical framework**

The study was guided by the structural violence and positive peace theory. Proposed by a Norwegian sociologist called Johan Galtung (Galtung, 1969 & Galtung, 1996). The theory holds that peace is both the absence of violence and conflicts attained through the identification and resolution of root causes emanating from economic and social inequalities.

Moreover, areas with disadvantaged structures to support social and economic well being are prone to more conflicts and violence. Poverty is a catalyzed of violence. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure such as schools, hospitals roads among others further marginalize communities who will seek alternative means of survival, violence inclusive. Peace can therefore exist if there are adequate social and economic structures that are fully operational and accessible (Galtung, 1969).

The theory was applicable to this study because, Kerio valley counties included in the study have experienced conflicts between their ethnic communities, both intra and inter county. The root causes have been reported over time to include economic disputes over land, pasture and water, and the demographic characteristics indicate that the population is marginalized, live in poverty and there is a considerable number of unemployed youths.

The theory was therefore applicable because socioeconomic interventions implemented to build peace exist in the region and they include development and implementation of school programs, initiative to offer finances to small and medium enterprises, irrigation projects to foster agropastoralism and provide livelihoods, among others aimed to reduce existing inequalities that are structural in nature. Also, the theory advocates for the integration of

development in communities to equal benefits to all as well as the incorporation of local governance to address grievances and mitigate otherwise problems that can lead to large scale violence

## 1.6 Methodology

The researcher adopted a descriptive research design, and collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The target population included 6 religious leaders, 156 National government administrative officers, 9 Community Policing representatives, 26 National Police reservists and 3 NGO representatives from World Vision from the three sub counties.

A census was carried out, data collected using semi structured questionnaires, and analyzed using descriptive and presented results in themes. The researcher adhered to ethical considerations by seeking research authorization from Kenyatta university graduate school and research permit from NACOSTI. Additionally, authority to reach respondents was sought from the county education offices of the three counties. Data was presented in tables and narratives in themes.

## 1.7 Results and Discussions

### 1.7.1 Response Rate and demographic data

Out of the 200 questionnaires distributed, 145 were returned and duly filled. This translated to 72.5 percent response rate, which was considered adequate for data analysis. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 70 percent and above is considered adequate. The gender of the respondents was sought, to check the gender representation in the study. Overall, there was 68.3 percent female respondents and 31.7 percent male respondents. This showed that majority of the peace-builders were male while the female was the minority but represented the gender in the responses.

The responses were also computed per county and it was noted that the minority of the respondents were from Baringo, making a percentage of 29.9%, while 34.6 percent were from West Pokot and 35.5% came from Elgeyo Marakwet, thus, the results are representative of all the three counties targeted. The researcher also sought to know the level of education of the respondents. Majority (33.9%) were holders of bachelor's degree, 25.2% were postgraduates, 24.4% had secondary education while the minority 16.5% had primary level education. This outcome indicates that the respondents are educated and were able to interpret and respond with credible information sought in the research questionnaire.

The level of involvement in peace-building was also sought. Majority, 41.7% have been actively participating in peace-building for between 6-10 years, 29.9% for over 10 years while a minority, 28.4% for less than 10 years. This therefore denotes that the number of years that the respondents have been involved in the peace-building efforts in Kerio valley will consequently yield reliable data from experienced individuals. The respondents have also stayed in the area for some time. Majority, 43.2% reported that they have lived in the counties for over 10 years, 32.3% for between 6-10 years while a few, 24.4% have been in the area for less than 5 years. The majority are individuals who have lived and had the first-hand experience of conflicts and peace building processes in the region; therefore, their responses are considered credible.

### 1.7.2 Socio-Economic Activities

The study investigated how socioeconomic activities in Kerio Valley influence peace-building. Five Likert scaled questions to get the opinion of the respondents on their agree-ability of statements was asked, with 1=strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=neutral, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree.

#### *Income generating projects and diversification of livelihood*

When asked to indicate if the available activities that have been implemented to generate income among the youth have positively contributed to reduction of violence and building of peace, the response posted a mean of  $4.23 \pm 0.76$ . This clearly showed that the two variables had a positive rating, with the standard deviation showing diverse opinions, but all strongly building on their positive effect on the outcome variable.

The available activities include crop farming through irrigation, designed and implemented by the Kerio valley development authority (KVDA). They include the coming together of the Authority and local county governments to establish irrigation schemes and train locals to grow food crops such as vegetables, maize, sorghum, and millet. These irrigation initiatives were reported to influence peace-building positively. Locals who have adopted the farming systems have since ceased being highly dependent of livestock/pastoralism livelihood, this countering the cattle rustling, a key phenomenon highly associated with conflict and violence in the region. This outcome goes hand in hand with reports by KVDA (2022) in their annual progress report and the study results by Ochieng and Were (2019) while reporting on agricultural diversification and its effect on peace-building in the region.

The Kenya Livestock Commercialization Project (KelCoP), with its headquarters in Nakuru, is a project active in ten Kenyan counties, inclusive of Baringo and Elgeyo Marakwet. It aims to reduce the reliance on cattle as the sole means of livelihood and instead, introduces alternative farming activities such as poultry and livestock keeping, bee keeping and dairy goat farming. As the projects are geared towards diversification of livelihood from central reliance on cattle, it has been positively associated with peace because of the decreasing reliance on cattle, which has lowered cattle rustling and conflict over grazing lands Government of Kenya, 2020; Lemukol & Kiptum, 2022).

#### *Vocational and livelihood programs*

The respondents provided their opinions on whether vocational training programs offered in their localities by stakeholders such as government led institutions, religious institutions and NGOs have led to a more peaceful environment. The responses scored a mean and a standard deviation of  $4.205 \pm 0.74$ . This demonstrated a general agreement, though with slightly varied opinions from respondents. Further probing revealed that these programs are present in the grassroots level, though in some instances are unequally distributed.

In the context, the research unearthed that there are different stakeholders in the region that have implemented vocational and livelihood programs, with the sole goal being to reducing the existing conflicts between and within communities, eradicate poverty and provide an alternative source of income, upscale life skills of trainees and empower them economically. In Marakwet East, there are Technical and Vocational Trainings (TVETs) targeting the youth, to impart life skills in tailoring, mechanics, and hairdressing among others. According to World Vision (n.d), these programs have managed to bring individuals from a life of conflict and violence, and have gained skills that are currently utilizing to earn a living, thus reducing engagement in violent activities. This on the contrary does not reach the population in large scale.

#### ***Employment opportunities***

The respondents indicated their level of agreement on the statement that provision of employment opportunities have contributed to peace-building. A mean and standard deviation of  $4.165 \pm 0.784$  indicated a general agreement among all respondents. Further probing revealed that the implementation of livelihood programs has absorbed youth who are currently offering their labor for pay, an alternative to herding which subsequently reduce involvement in cattle rustling.

Previous studies have reported the same. KVDA (2024) reported that alternative means of earning livelihoods through projects such as bee farming, irrigation for food crops, etc. has offered an alternative self-employment that has diversified income sources, and reduced the pressure to engage in local conflicts and rustling. KelCoP (2020) on the other hand has introduced small holder farmers to commercialization of their livestock that adhere to respectable market prices and adhere to market value chains. The project, targeting livestock farmers, bee keepers and poultry farmers aims at offering alternative income, increasing income, reduction of vulnerability and creating job markets and income to the many unemployed in the region.

#### ***Resources Competition***

Asked to indicate whether competition for scarce resources contributes to local tensions, the response posted a mean and a standard deviation of  $4.252 \pm 0.786$ , denoting that the scarce resources was working against the peace building efforts in the region. The competition for water and pasture during the dry season has become a social norm that in most cases lead to casualties, within and outside communities.

According to NCIC (2019), the major sources of conflicts are the shared water points, the grazing lands. As the resources become scarce, communities compete to access, utilize and control them. In some instances, there is inferences from the political arm, which ends up fueling more conflicts and violence that not only fatal, but also destroy community trust and create lasting enmity, that its effects in some instances is felt through generations.

The result also tallies with a report by Kipchumba, (2019), in a study carried out targeting the border communities of West Pokot and Elgeyo Marakwet and how scarcity has fueled violence, bridged existing peace accords, destroyed peace building efforts and some instances occasioned revenge/retaliatory attacks. Additionally, Shalom-SCRR. (2024) reported the same in Baringo county, that conflicts and violence are strongly associated with competition over land, water and pasture

#### ***Cattle rustling***

The respondents indicated their level of agreement on whether Cattle rustling is a key cause of violence in the region. A mean and standard deviation of  $4.181 \pm 0.739$  denotes a general agreement. Cattle rustling, is a social norm among the communities, practiced historically as a cultural exercise, meant to restock after droughts, gain fame and prestige among the warriors, to pay dowry and occasionally to demonstrate dominance.

Over time, cattle rustling has metamorphosed and in some places, it has ceased to be a cultural norm practiced by warriors, but an illegal commercial activity, involving a range of stakeholders. There are weapons in civilian arms for actual cattle raiders, then the use of technology, within and across communities and counties, to plan and execute raids, transport livestock and link them to the market, hence, creation of an 'Unholy' alliance, consequently sabotaging peace efforts. Previous studies have supported the result. Murkomen (2011) in a study that focused on cattle rustling in Elgeyo Marakwet, and found that as much as efforts exist, political interference, illegal firearms and livestock trade are the key obstacles to sustainable peace-building.

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## **1.8 Conclusion**

Peace-building in Kerio valley is highly dependent on social and economic practices and projects. There are those that negatively affect the process such as social norms surrounding cattle rustling and competition for scarce water and pasture, and there exists those that influence peacebuilding positively such as vocational and training institutes, employment opportunities from stakeholders working to build peace in the region and provision of alternative sources of livelihoods aside from livestock keeping.

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## **1.9 Recommendations**

Based on the results of the study, it is therefore recommended that more resources be given to increase social amenities such as schools, and hospitals, build roads and to pump more energy on economic projects that will not only impart knowledge and skills, but reach all areas in providing alternative

sources of livelihood. More important, is recruiting warriors (morans) in the peace-building process because they are the major actors in conflicts and violence

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