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Patriarchy in Pre-Colonial Kapedo, Turkana County 1850 to 1900

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of Patriarchy culture on women's socio-economic development in Kapedo, Turkana County, Kenya from 1850 to 1900. The research emphasizes the lasting effects of patriarchy on women's lives, showing how it perpetuates inequality through imbalanced power dynamics and limited access to opportunities and decision-making roles. The findings reveal that a patriarchal framework significantly disadvantaged women by maintaining unequal power dynamics, which limited their access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making roles. The findings draw attention to the systemic barriers that hinder women's full participation in society, reinforcing their subordination across various cultural and historical contexts, including Kapedo, Turkana County. Despite gradual shifts in women's roles toward greater socio-economic engagement, patriarchal norms endure, shaping societal perceptions and practices that maintain women's subordinate status and foster discrimination. Addressing these entrenched dynamics is crucial for achieving genuine gender equality and empowering women to fully contribute to societal advancement.

Key words: Patriarchy culture, women, Socio-economic development

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy in precolonial Kapedo, Turkana County spanning from 1850 to 1900, unveils the influence of patriarchy on women's socioeconomic development. During this era a patriarchal framework significantly disadvantaged women by maintaining unequal power dynamics, which limited their access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making roles. This systemic inequality created barriers that hindered women's full participation in society, reinforcing their subordinate status.

This investigation delves into the historical context and cultural practices that shaped gender roles, shedding light on the roles of men and women in precolonial Kapedo. The study also sheds light on how these societal norms influenced perceptions of women's contributions and roles within the community. Although socioeconomic conditions started to evolve, the deeply ingrained belief systems continued to restrict women's progress. The findings emphasize the need for a cultural shift to enable women to attain equal opportunities and full participation in all facets of societal development. Ultimately, the study highlights that, while there were emerging opportunities for women, entrenched patriarchal values posed significant challenges to their socioeconomic advancement in Kapedo.

The 1850-1900 time-frame encapsulates a significant period in Kenya's history, marked by sociocultural changes, and the colonial influence. By delving into patriarchy in precolonial Kapedo, this study aims to uncover the dynamics that guided gender roles, exploring the roles of men and women in Kapedo. Furthermore, the examination of patriarchy in precolonial Kapedo contributes to a broader understanding of the historical underpinnings that have shaped Kenya's contemporary socioeconomic landscape.

The influence of patriarchy culture on women's socioeconomic development during the colonial era also requires a critical examination to understand the role the colonial government played in promoting women's



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socioeconomic development. The study is therefore centered on understanding the influence of patriarchy on women's socioeconomic development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds, have historically participated in a diverse array of economic activities, such as smallholder farming, agro-processing, craftwork, informal trade, and home-based enterprises. Despite their significant contributions to household and community economies, these efforts have often been undervalued and remain underrepresented in official data and policy discussions due to longstanding deficiencies in data collection and recognition (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). Within the Kenyan context, women have consistently played vital roles across various sectors of national development; however, their participation is frequently rendered invisible in formal development agendas and policy frameworks. This is particularly evident in marginalized regions such as Kapedo in Turkana County, where women's involvement in grassroots development initiatives is both under-examined and insufficiently acknowledged in mainstream discourse.

This persistent marginalization is sustained by deeply embedded patriarchal norms and institutional biases that restrict women's access to educational opportunities, financial capital, and positions of authority within both formal governance and informal community decision-making structures. These systemic inequalities perpetuate entrenched cycles of poverty, social exclusion, and gender-based disadvantage. Patriarchy, conceptualized as a socio-political system wherein authority and lineage are concentrated among male elders, reinforces hierarchical gender relations and legitimizes male dominance. As argued by Johnson and Leone (2005), patriarchal systems perpetuate male privilege by entrenching normative assumptions of male leadership and female subordination within both cultural and institutional spheres. This framework enables continued control over women's reproductive choices, occupational roles, and household responsibilities, reinforcing structural dependency and limiting socio-economic mobility.

At a global level, the exclusion of women from high-income employment and productive economic sectors has far-reaching implications for economic growth and societal development. Schanzenbach and Nunn (2017) demonstrate that increased female labor force participation can yield substantial economic and social benefits, particularly in industrialized contexts such as the United States. Although women in the U.S. achieved significant educational and occupational advancements during the second half of the 20th century, progress has slowed and even reversed in some respects since 2000. For instance, female labor force participation in the U.S. declined from 60.7% in 2000 to 57.2% in 2016, underscoring the vulnerability of gender equality gains to shifting economic and policy environments.

While the work of Schanzenbach and Nunn offers valuable empirical insights into the relationship between gender inclusion and macroeconomic outcomes, it presents important contextual limitations in relation to this study. Their analysis, rooted in the socio-economic context of the United States in the early 21st century, does not adequately reflect the historical, cultural, and structural dynamics shaping gendered development in Kapedo. Consequently, the present study aims to bridge this knowledge gap by offering a historically grounded and localized examination of patriarchal influence on women's socioeconomic conditions in Turkana County, with a specific temporal focus spanning from 1850 to 1900.

Similarly, research conducted by Webber and Williams (2008), Bianchi (2011), and Carnevale et al. (2018) has explored the complex interplay between social norms, educational attainment, and women's labor force participation in the U.S. context. These scholars collectively argue that gendered labor outcomes are influenced not only by market forces but also by personal preferences, caregiving obligations, and societal expectations. Their findings show that women, compared to men in similar demographic groups, are more likely to assume primary responsibility for unpaid care work, particularly child-rearing. This unequal distribution of domestic labor contributes to lower earnings, reduced labor market participation, greater exposure to financial precarity, and increased reliance on part-time or flexible employment arrangements, often without social protections.

Though these studies contribute important empirical perspectives on gendered labor dynamics, their geographical and temporal focus limits their applicability to the present research. Their emphasis on the United States and their reliance on data collected in 2008, 2011, and 2018—does not account for the specific socio-historical configurations present in rural northern Kenya. The current study, situated in the region of Kapedo during the



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period between 1850 and 1900 and analyzed through a contemporary lens (2022–2024), addresses both geographic and theoretical gaps by contextualizing women's economic roles and the influence of patriarchal systems within a localized, historically contingent framework.

Raynolds (1998), in his examination of gender roles within the Dominican Republic, emphasizes the compounded pressures experienced by women, who are simultaneously tasked with contributing to household income and fulfilling domestic and childcare responsibilities. He conceptualizes this phenomenon as a form of role conflict, wherein competing demands render women's dual roles unsustainable without significant concessions. Raynolds' findings underscore the disproportionate burden placed on women in socioeconomically constrained settings. However, it is important to note that his study employs a broad, cross-sectional survey approach across multiple ethnic groups, diverging from the current study's methodological emphasis on a localized case study. The present research aims to produce a deeper contextual understanding of patriarchal influence in a specific geographical and cultural setting—Kapedo, Turkana County.

In a South Asian context, Tanzeel et al. (2012) investigate women's roles in agricultural production in Pakistan, highlighting their substantial labor contributions despite the existence of pervasive wage disparities when compared to their male counterparts. This inequality, they argue, stems from entrenched gender biases and discriminatory labor practices. Complementing this perspective, Bhutto and Bazmi (2007) argue that Pakistan's sustainable development objectives are unattainable without harnessing the full potential of its human capital, including women. Despite their active involvement in the rural economy, women often lack economic autonomy, thereby undermining their capacity to contribute fully to national development. These insights parallel the concerns of the current study, particularly in terms of gendered access to resources and structural inequalities. Nonetheless, the applicability of their findings is constrained by geographical and temporal differences: both studies were conducted in Pakistan and are temporally removed from the present study's focus on Kapedo between 2022 and 2024.

Turning to the African continent, Fedders (1969) contends that the imposition of colonial rule, missionary activity, and Western educational paradigms significantly undermined the status of women in traditional African societies. These external forces introduced alien cultural norms that frequently failed to recognize pre-existing gender roles and relations. Ondicho (1993) adds that much of the colonial-era knowledge production about African women relied heavily on male informants, leading to skewed interpretations that underrepresented women's roles and obscured their agency. Such portrayals often positioned women as passive dependents, ignoring their roles as influential actors within indigenous sociopolitical systems.

In Ethiopia, Ayferam (2015) presents evidence of women's active involvement across economic, political, and cultural spheres, despite pervasive barriers to recognition and advancement. Legal and institutional constraints continue to impede women's access to opportunities, particularly in leadership and decision-making domains. Traditional gender norms further restrict autonomy, particularly regarding reproductive health and household authority. These conclusions are supported by Gossaye et al. (2001), who argue that entrenched patriarchal structures constitute formidable barriers to the socioeconomic progress of Ethiopian women.

Collectively, these studies reinforce the necessity of investigating patriarchy as a central determinant in women's development trajectories. Nevertheless, differences in methodology and geographical scope create significant distinctions between this body of literature and the current research. While most of the referenced studies adopt survey-based or macro-analytical approaches, the present study employs a case study design to engage in an in-depth, context-specific analysis of patriarchal dynamics in Kapedo. This methodological divergence, coupled with differences in conceptual frameworks, underscores the need for research grounded in localized and historically informed perspectives.

In the Kenyan context, early academic and ethnographic literature on women's roles—especially during the pre-independence era—was predominantly produced by European settlers, missionaries, and colonial administrators. As Whittings and Whittings (1977) argue, such writings were often shaped by Euro-centric assumptions and patriarchal ideologies, resulting in depictions of African women that were both ethnocentric and reductive. These representations typically portrayed women as overburdened and subjugated, often likening them to dependents or even slaves within their societies. For instance, Mercier (1962) notoriously referred to African women as “almost



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a slave,” a characterization that failed to acknowledge the complexity and resilience of women's roles within indigenous African cultures.

Despite these distortions, historical and contemporary evidence reveals that Kenyan women have long been instrumental in driving local and national development. Their roles have spanned agriculture, informal and formal trade, artisanal industries, domestic management, and increasingly, professional sectors. Recent scholarship by Kenyan academics has sought to correct earlier misrepresentations by highlighting women's agency and collective action. Ndeda (2015), for example, documents the evolution of grassroots women's organizations since 1945, illustrating how these platforms have facilitated both economic empowerment and political participation. Similarly, Kanogo (2005), in her seminal work *African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya*, provides a historical analysis of changing gender relations during the colonial period (1900–1950), underscoring how women navigated and contested the constraints imposed by colonial and patriarchal institutions.

The present study builds on this critical scholarship by adopting a historically grounded case study approach to investigate the interplay of patriarchy and women's socioeconomic development in Kapedo, Turkana County. In doing so, it not only addresses geographic and theoretical gaps in the literature but also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of localized gender dynamics in postcolonial Africa.

The reviewed literature offers a crucial foundation for the present study, which interrogates the influence of patriarchal systems on the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo, Turkana County. These prior contributions provide essential historical, thematic, and conceptual insights that enrich the current analysis. However, identifiable theoretical and methodological gaps remain. While earlier research has predominantly relied on broad historical overviews and survey-based methodologies, the current study adopts a localized case study design. This approach enables a deeper, context-specific exploration of patriarchal structures and their gendered impacts within a defined spatial and temporal framework.

The synthesis of these perspectives affirms that patriarchal sociocultural systems remain pervasive barriers to women's development in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Patriarchy not only dictates normative gender roles but also shapes the pace and inclusivity of developmental outcomes. Although women's roles have undergone significant transformation—expanding from traditionally domestic responsibilities to active engagement in economic, political, and social domains—patriarchal ideologies continue to dominate, particularly in traditional African contexts. In many communities, including those in Kenya, women are still regarded as subordinate to men, and their societal value is frequently linked to domestic labor and reproductive functions. Such entrenched norms sustain gender inequality by limiting women's access to education, leadership opportunities, and economic resources.

Nonetheless, emerging global and national trends signal a shift. In developing countries such as Kenya, women are increasingly demonstrating their capacity for meaningful contributions to development. Rising levels of female educational attainment, expanding participation in the formal labor market, and greater involvement in civic and political processes challenge long-standing gender hierarchies. The conventional belief that a woman's primary role ends within the domestic sphere has been increasingly contested, as women navigate both familial obligations and professional aspirations. These dynamics reflect broader societal transformations in which women are asserting agency and seeking recognition in public life.

Despite such progress, localized patriarchal norms persist in many rural and marginalized regions—such as Kapedo—continuing to confine women's roles primarily to the private domain. These cultural perceptions limit the visibility and valuation of women's broader socioeconomic contributions. As Onwubiko (2012) observes, the enduring tendency to confine women to household spheres serves to diminish the extent of their impact on national development. While global development discourse has increasingly acknowledged the importance of gender inclusion, localized settings like Kapedo still reflect a significant lag in both recognizing and institutionalizing women's contributions to development.



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Furthermore, the historical evolution of women's socioeconomic roles in Kapedo has received limited scholarly attention. Existing literature tends to generalize the experiences of women across Kenya or Africa without accounting for the unique sociocultural, environmental, and historical dynamics specific to the region. As such, a significant gap persists in the academic understanding of how patriarchal structures have historically shaped, and continue to shape, women's development in Kapedo. The present study seeks to fill this lacuna by offering a focused, gender-sensitive historical analysis spanning the period from 1850 to 2010, thereby contributing a nuanced understanding of local gendered development trajectories within the broader framework of Kenyan socioeconomic history.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative methodological approach to examining the impact of patriarchal structures on the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo, Turkana County. By employing qualitative research techniques, the study was able to capture the complex and nuanced lived experiences of women in a remote, historically marginalized, and conflict-affected setting. The research design integrated both a case study and a phenomenological framework. The case study design facilitated an intensive, context-specific analysis of Kapedo as a site of intersecting sociopolitical exclusion and economic deprivation, enabling the investigation of multiple data sources to understand localized experiences. The phenomenological component complemented this by prioritizing participants' subjective interpretations of their realities within patriarchal and conflict-laden environments.

The rationale for utilizing a case study design lay in its capacity to provide a richly contextualized understanding of the ways in which patriarchal norms interact with broader structural inequalities and localized insecurity to constrain women's economic agency. By focusing on a single, clearly defined locality, the research afforded a deep engagement with community-level dynamics, including informal governance mechanisms, customary practices, and social hierarchies. This approach allowed the researcher to access both overt and tacit knowledge, thereby constructing a more holistic portrait of the obstacles faced by women in achieving economic empowerment.

The study was conducted in Kapedo, a settlement situated at the border between Turkana and Baringo counties, characterized by chronic underdevelopment and recurrent violent clashes between the Pokot and Turkana communities. This persistent insecurity has not only disrupted social and economic life but has also compounded the structural marginalization of women by restricting their access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and income-generating opportunities. These contextual attributes rendered Kapedo an appropriate and compelling case for interrogating the effects of patriarchal oppression and armed conflict on gendered development outcomes.

Participant recruitment employed a dual non-probability sampling strategy comprising purposive and snowball techniques. Purposive sampling was utilized to identify individuals with firsthand knowledge of the specific challenges faced by women in Kapedo. Participants included women of varying age and socioeconomic status, community elders, religious leaders, local administrators, and other stakeholders with historical and sociocultural insight into the region. Snowball sampling was subsequently employed to access additional respondents, particularly those from vulnerable sub-populations such as widows of conflict victims, survivors of gender-based violence, and internally displaced women. This approach enabled the inclusion of voices frequently marginalized in conventional research and policy discourse.

A total of approximately 45 individuals participated in the study. Data collection included 20 in-depth interviews, four focus group discussions (FGDs) comprising five to seven women each, and several key respondents interviews with administration and the elderly men and women residing within the region. This diverse and



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strategically selected sample facilitated the triangulation of perspectives and ensured the credibility of emergent themes.

Four primary data collection instruments were employed: semi-structured interviews, FGD guides, structured observation protocols, and a document analysis framework. The semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit open-ended responses pertaining to gender roles, livelihood strategies, experiences of conflict, and engagement with development interventions. The flexibility of this tool allowed for the emergence of detailed narratives and personal reflections, enhancing the richness of the data. Interviews were conducted in Kiswahili and the Turkana language, with translation assistance provided where necessary, and all sessions were recorded with the informed consent of participants.

FGDs were conducted to examine shared understandings of development and collective responses to insecurity and economic hardship. These discussions illuminated group-level dynamics, including solidarity mechanisms, informal networks of support, and local discourses around gender and development. FGDs also surfaced divergent perspectives within the community, allowing the researcher to explore the intersections of gender, age, and social status in shaping individual and collective experiences.

Observational methods served as a supplementary data source, capturing non-verbal cues, behaviors, and everyday practices that might elude verbal articulation. The researcher attended community events, visited local markets, and observed routine domestic activities to gather real-time insights into women's social roles, mobility, and access to public spaces. Observational data were recorded systematically using a protocol that emphasized indicators such as participation in governance, visibility in public forums, and patterns of resource access.

Documentary analysis complemented primary data collection by providing a broader historical and policy context. Key documents reviewed included NGO reports, archival materials, governmental policy papers, and academic literature relevant to women's development in Turkana County. This analysis provided insight into the macro-structural forces shaping localized gender disparities and enabled the researcher to link micro-level narratives with national and historical trajectories.

All qualitative data comprising interview transcripts, FGD recordings, field notes, and photographs were organized and subjected to a dual-process coding strategy. Initially, deductive coding was conducted using pre-defined thematic categories aligned with the study's objectives (e.g., gender-based exclusion, economic marginalization, conflict). Subsequently, inductive coding facilitated the identification of emergent themes grounded in the empirical data, allowing for the development of nuanced insights into the interplay of structural and experiential variables.

Thematic analysis served as the primary analytical technique, enabling the categorization of recurring patterns and the synthesis of individual experiences into broader thematic frameworks. Comparative analysis was conducted across participant groups to explore intersections between gender, age, marital status, and exposure to conflict. In selected cases, digital photographs were incorporated to visually corroborate findings, particularly regarding women's participation in economic activities.

Additionally, a phenomenological interpretive approach was employed to delve into the subjective meanings and emotional responses elicited by women's lived experiences. This involved an iterative process of reflection on how structural and symbolic violence is internalized and manifested in individual behavior, identity formation, and aspirations. Such analysis enriched the study's explanatory depth by connecting external barriers to internalized consequences.

To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the study employed methodological triangulation, comparing data across interviews, FGDs, observations, and documentary evidence. Peer debriefing sessions were conducted with local experts to validate interpretations and contextual appropriateness. Discrepancies in data were addressed through follow-up consultations, and the use of photographic evidence further enhanced the credibility of the findings.

Ethical protocols were rigorously observed throughout the research process. Approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Participants were briefed on the study's objectives, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Special care was taken when addressing sensitive issues such as gender-based violence, with interviews conducted in secure and private settings. Anonymity was preserved through the use of pseudonyms, and all digital files were encrypted and stored securely.



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Despite its methodological strengths, the study encountered several limitations. Insecurity in Kapedo restricted access to some regions, potentially limiting the geographical scope of the findings. Language barriers, although mitigated through translation, may have influenced the depth and nuance of participant responses. Moreover, cultural sensitivities around discussing patriarchal oppression may have led to partial disclosures or socially desirable responses. Nevertheless, these constraints were minimized through prolonged field engagement, culturally appropriate facilitation, and triangulation across multiple data sources.

The integrated use of case study and phenomenological designs complemented by purposive and snowball sampling, diverse data collection instruments, and rigorous analytical methods provided a robust framework for capturing the multifaceted experiences of women in Kapedo. This methodological approach foregrounded the agency and resilience of women while illuminating the structural impediments to their development. It thereby lays the foundation for empirically grounded recommendations aimed at informing policy reform and gender-sensitive development interventions in marginalized regions.

RESULTS

The socio-political organization of pre-colonial Kapedo, a region within present-day Turkana County, was anchored in a patriarchal framework that centralized authority and decision-making in the hands of men. Between 1850 and 1900, this system systematically excluded women from the public domain and economic control, reinforcing gender-based hierarchies that shaped social norms, property rights, and governance. Within this context, male dominance permeated all spheres of life, from familial roles to resource management and leadership, with profound implications for women's status and agency.

Men occupied dominant positions in both the household and the broader community. They not only managed property and livestock the principal sources of wealth in this pastoral society but also wielded exclusive control over decisions concerning marriage, inheritance, and dispute resolution. The public domain was largely inaccessible to women, as male elders presided over community affairs through traditional councils. These councils, which functioned as central institutions of governance and justice, adjudicated conflicts, allocated communal resources, and upheld customary laws. Women were excluded from participation in these forums, thereby denied the opportunity to influence communal decisions or advocate for their interests.

This gendered imbalance in governance structures had lasting consequences for women's ability to assert their rights or contribute meaningfully to the development of their communities. Their absence from decision-making forums marginalized their perspectives on issues such as social welfare, resource allocation, and communal security. Consequently, policies and practices often overlooked women's needs, reinforcing their subordination and institutionalizing their exclusion from political life.

The economic order mirrored these gendered inequalities. Men retained control over critical aspects of the pastoral economy, including livestock ownership, water access, and land use. Responsibilities such as branding animals and managing seasonal migrations were markers of authority and prestige, closely linked to masculine identity and leadership. In contrast, women's economic roles were confined to the domestic sphere and low-value economic activities. They were primarily responsible for milking animals, food preparation, childcare, and the production of craft goods such as mats and baskets. Although essential to household survival, these contributions were not recognized as forms of wealth generation or labor deserving of remuneration.

Moreover, women lacked legal and customary rights to property ownership. While they had access to livestock products like milk and hides, they could not own or inherit the animals themselves. Land, where used for small-scale agriculture in riverine areas such as near the Turkwel River, was similarly governed by male ownership. Women could cultivate plots of land but only under temporary or conditional rights, contingent upon continued use. These user rights could be withdrawn or reassigned by male relatives or elders, leaving women with no long-term security or means to accumulate wealth.

In Turkana's semi-agricultural communities, women's participation in horticulture and trade was an important supplementary source of household subsistence. Nonetheless, the absence of formal land tenure and the undervaluation of women's labor kept them in precarious economic positions. Trade interactions with neighboring



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ethnic groups, such as the Pokot, involved the barter of goods primarily produced by women, but men managed the higher-value exchanges and controlled profits derived from such transactions. Thus, women's economic activities were largely exploited within systems that denied them control over outputs or financial independence. The patrilineal inheritance system further reinforced gender-based disparities. Property was passed from father to son, excluding daughters and widows from any substantive claims to family assets. Oral testimonies from the region consistently reflect the perception that women "own nothing," a sentiment that illustrates the extent of their economic marginalization. This inheritance structure not only denied women the right to own property but also reinforced their dependency on male relatives throughout their lives—from fathers and brothers to husbands and sons.

These economic constraints were compounded by social norms that defined women's identities almost exclusively in relation to men. Gender roles were deeply internalized and socially enforced. Women were expected to fulfill roles as caregivers, homemakers, and supporters of their husbands' work. Labor performed within the household such as gathering firewood, processing milk, and raising children—was classified as natural female responsibility and thus excluded from formal recognition as economic labor. This perception diminished the social value of women's contributions and perpetuated the belief that men were the primary providers and decision-makers.

Women's exclusion extended to decisions on vital issues, including reproductive health, family budgeting, and children's education. Control over such matters rested with male household heads, rendering women passive recipients of decisions that affected their wellbeing. Their exclusion from family and community decision-making processes deprived them of strategic influence and limited their ability to challenge or change their conditions.

Culturally, patriarchal ideologies cast women as emotionally volatile, irrational, and therefore ill-suited for leadership. This construction legitimized the marginalization of women from roles in diplomacy, conflict resolution, and inter-community negotiation—areas in which male leaders were expected to operate. These gendered perceptions of capability shaped local political structures and leadership ideals, perpetuating male authority and diminishing opportunities for female participation in governance. The absence of women in such spaces served to naturalize the belief that public authority belonged to men and reinforced structures that kept women politically invisible.

The practice of early and forced marriage, often motivated by customary dowry systems, further restricted women's autonomy. Girls were married off at a young age, often before they could complete basic education or acquire vocational skills. Once married, women assumed full domestic responsibilities and were expected to raise children, manage household affairs, and support their husbands' pastoral duties. In polygamous arrangements, the workload was even greater, as multiple wives shared domestic responsibilities without corresponding increases in support or authority. This institutionalization of early marriage curtailed women's personal development and entrenched cycles of poverty and dependency.

Despite the integral role women played in sustaining their households and contributing to community welfare through pastoralism, agriculture, and trade, they were structurally excluded from the systems that governed access to resources and decision-making. This exclusion created a self-reinforcing cycle: the less women were involved in governance and economic planning, the less their interests were considered, and the more entrenched their marginalization became. This structural marginality had long-term consequences for women's education, economic empowerment, and representation in leadership.

The enduring effects of these patriarchal institutions continue to be evident in the modern period. Although socio-economic conditions have evolved, the legacies of historical gender roles remain deeply embedded in community norms and practices. Women in Kapado continue to face significant barriers in accessing education, land ownership, and financial services. Their under-representation in formal employment and local governance structures reflects a persistent gender gap rooted in historical exclusions. The belief that men are more suited to leadership and resource management continues to influence attitudes toward female empowerment and limit the community's capacity to pursue inclusive development.

The pre-colonial period in Kapado was marked by the consolidation of male authority across all facets of life—political, economic, and social. Patriarchy was not merely a cultural belief but a deeply embedded institutional system that governed access to power and resources. Women's exclusion from land rights, inheritance, decision-



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making, and public leadership was systematic and reinforced by social norms that devalued their labor and capacities. The consequences of these structures continue to shape gender relations in the region, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to dismantle residual inequalities and promote inclusive governance. Unless addressed through deliberate policy and cultural change, these historical patterns are likely to perpetuate gender-based disparities for future generations.

DISCUSSIONS

Patriarchy in pre-colonial Kapedo from 1850 to 1900

Patriarchy is a historically entrenched social system where men predominantly hold authority and power. This structure has its roots in early pastoral societies, such as those in the Old Testament, where paternal dominance was the norm (Chowdhury, 2009). Walby (1990) conceptualizes patriarchy as a multifaceted system that allows men to dominate, exploit, and oppress women. LeGates (2001) describes it succinctly as "the rule of the father," while Lerner (1986) traces its institutionalization through Greek and Roman legal systems, where male heads of households had unchallenged legal and economic control. Ferguson (1999) similarly interprets patriarchy as a paternalistic order of rule. Collectively, these scholars frame patriarchy as an intricate structure of male supremacy embedded in social, economic, and cultural frameworks.

In patriarchal societies, familial decision-making and the allocation of key resources, such as land and livestock, are primarily controlled by men. Patriarchy is thus broadly understood as a rigid gendered system where male dominance is perpetuated through multiple domains—production modes, paid labor, state mechanisms, cultural institutions, violence, and sexuality.

Njoroge (2009) emphasizes that the hierarchical construction of gender roles historically positioned men in superior roles, enabling them to exert power over women. This hierarchical framework was imparted socially, where individuals internalized norms of subordination and discrimination within familial contexts. Haj-Yahia (2005) reinforces this, highlighting that men in patriarchal societies enjoy disproportionate access to economic and symbolic resources, including prestige and discretionary authority. These disparities reinforce gender-based inequalities, reducing women's self-esteem and limiting their participation in social, economic, and political spheres (Makama, 2013).

Empirical studies from South Asia, such as those by Saira et al. (2005), Sultana (2010), and Schuler et al. (1996), reveal persistent gender disparities in household decision-making. In patriarchal societies like Bangladesh and Pakistan, men continue to assert authority simply by virtue of being designated as the family 'head.'

In Kenya, similar gender hierarchies prevail. Historical and oral sources indicate that in precolonial Kapedo, male authority dominated familial and communal decision-making, encompassing areas such as marriage arrangements and resource distribution. Traditional councils, composed of elder males, resolved disputes and upheld customary laws, with minimal or no female participation (Mercy Ekanan, O.I., November 25, 2022). Consequently, women had limited influence over resource allocation and community development, thus impeding their socioeconomic advancement (Gossaye et al., 2001).

Makama (2013) argues that patriarchal structures confine women to domestic spheres while enabling men to take leadership roles. This dynamic shapes leadership norms that devalue women's capacities, often framing women as emotional, indecisive, and thus unsuitable for leadership (Strachan, 1999). Cultural expectations and gendered leadership ideals create significant barriers for women in patriarchal societies (Hallinger, 2005). As a respondent observed, leadership roles within the community including dispute resolution and external representation are predominantly held by men (Patricia Ekeno, O.I., December 10, 2022).

Among the Turkana, men held supervisory roles over pastoral and domestic activities. They managed water rights, animal branding, and other resource-based responsibilities, reinforcing their societal prestige and control (Nyanchoga, 2000). Connell and Connell (2005) affirm that men in patriarchal settings benefit from higher income, control over assets, and exclusive access to institutional power. Women, by contrast, are relegated to the private sphere, often described solely in relation to their domestic roles (Wamalwa, 2007; Kenyatta, 1939).



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Despite women's critical role in pastoralism, gathering, and small scale trade, they lacked ownership rights and control over resources. In Kapedo, women had user rights to livestock products like milk and skins but did not own livestock, reflecting broader economic disenfranchisement (Gulliver, 1951; Dupire, 1963). Gathering, crafting, and gardening were central to women's livelihoods, yet undervalued in societal and economic hierarchies (Nyanchoga, 2000).

Some Turkana communities engaged in agriculture, particularly along the Turkwel River. Women participated actively in cultivation and trade, producing baskets, mats, and other goods for barter with neighboring groups, including the Pokot (Lamphear, 1992; Salome Emase, O.I., November 25, 2022). Nevertheless, women's land rights were conditional—linked to active cultivation—and not recognized as permanent (Zwanenberg & King, 1975).

A 2016 United Nations report highlights that although women make up the majority of Kenya's population and contribute significantly to development, entrenched patriarchal systems continue to subordinate them. In Kapedo, traditional gender roles restrict women to household responsibilities, reinforcing socio-cultural expectations that inhibit their autonomy (Nakilau et al., 2023).

These norms have had enduring implications for women's socioeconomic development. Classified primarily as caretakers, women are economically dependent on men, participating mostly in informal, unpaid labor such as food processing and childcare (Oyemoni, 2008; Everlyne et al., 2023). Gendered expectations limited their access to financial tools, property, and education, perpetuating economic marginalization (Donald, 2019; Basse & Kwizera, 2017). Even though women performed demanding tasks, livestock and land—key economic resources—remained under male control (Dupire, 1963; Stevenson & St-Onge, 2005). The patrilineal inheritance system further entrenched this disparity, depriving women of property ownership and economic autonomy. Interviews affirmed that women "own nothing," with all assets belonging to men (Alice Erukudi, O.I., November 25, 2022). This exclusion limited women's ability to participate meaningfully in the economic development of their communities.

Women also had minimal decision-making power regarding vital issues, including childbirth and financial resource management (Gossaye et al., 2001). Traditional norms excluded them from public forums where critical community decisions were made, silencing their voices in governance and economic planning (Kenyanman, O.I., December 10, 2022).

Comparative insights from South Asia reinforce these findings. Although women are essential to agriculture, their labor remains undervalued and undercompensated (Tanzeel et al., 2012; Bhutto & Bazmi, 2007). Gender discrimination in inheritance, legal access, and resource control mirrors that found in Turkana, highlighting the global pervasiveness of patriarchal oppression.

Forced and early marriages, often driven by the economic incentive of dowry, deprived women of education and vocational opportunities (Jallon, 2015). Among the Turkana, polygamy further entrenched gender hierarchies by overburdening women with childcare while men acquired more wives for economic gain (Joyce Ekanan, O.I., November 10, 2022).

Ultimately, the cultural tradition of early marriage and enforced domesticity severely curtailed women's agency, socioeconomic potential, and capacity to participate in decision-making processes (Mary Emanikor, O.I., January 13, 2023). These structural barriers impeded women's ability to access education, own property, or contribute to local economies.

The persistence of patriarchal norms continues to shape contemporary gender dynamics. Datta & Gailey (2012) argue that limited access to education, capital, and land ownership exacerbates poverty and reinforces gender inequalities. In Kapedo, gender-based economic restrictions have consistently excluded women from formal economic sectors, reinforcing their dependence on male relatives (Salome Emase, O.I., November 25, 2022).

This study underscores that patriarchy systematically disadvantages women by institutionalizing power imbalances that curtail access to resources, leadership, and decision-making. In Kapedo, despite the gradual evolution of gender roles, entrenched beliefs continue to portray women as subordinate. This perception inhibits women's full participation in socioeconomic development and sustains cycles of inequality and marginalization. The study, therefore elucidates how patriarchy systematically disadvantages women by reinforcing inequitable power dynamics that restrict their access to opportunities and decision-making roles. A comprehensive analysis



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of socioeconomic development in Kapedo, Turkana County, from 1850 to 1900 reveals that deeply entrenched beliefs continue to endure, despite a gradual transition from traditional roles predominantly centered on childbirth and domestic responsibilities to increased participation in socioeconomic activities. These prevailing beliefs assert that women occupy subordinate positions relative to men, thereby perpetuating discrimination and significantly hindering the realization of equitable opportunities for women within society.

CONCLUSIONS

This study is of critical importance as it provides a comprehensive analysis of the systemic challenges that continue to hinder the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo, Turkana County. The research offers a compelling examination of how patriarchal cultural norms remain deeply embedded in the community, perpetuating gender inequality and obstructing women's full participation in social and economic life. Despite gradual shifts in women's roles and increased involvement in development efforts, the study reveals that these changes are limited and often superficial, as enduring patriarchal values continue to shape societal expectations, institutional practices, and power relations.

One of the study's most significant contributions is its identification of patriarchy as a central and persistent barrier to women's progress in Kapedo. It clearly outlines how women are consistently denied access to opportunities, decision-making spaces, and essential resources due to long-standing gender biases and power imbalances. These constraints not only limit women's personal and professional growth but also inhibit broader community development by failing to leverage the full potential of half the population. The research draws attention to the fact that gender inequality in Kapedo is not simply a matter of individual discrimination, but a systemic issue rooted in cultural and historical contexts that must be addressed comprehensively.

This study is especially important because it does not merely diagnose the problem but also outlines the necessity of a multifaceted, long-term approach to change. It emphasizes the importance of inclusive and collaborative solutions involving government agencies, non-profit organizations, and the local community. The call for coordinated action reflects an understanding that sustainable development and genuine gender equality require the dismantling of entrenched systems of oppression through education, policy reform, economic empowerment, and cultural transformation.

Moreover, the study underscores the need for increased government investment in gender-focused research and better monitoring of ongoing projects to ensure they are effectively addressing the unique needs of women in Kapedo. Such data-driven and responsive approaches are essential for designing interventions that not only address immediate challenges but also promote lasting change. By highlighting the gaps in policy implementation and community engagement, the study advocates for more accountability and stronger institutional support to advance women's rights and well-being.

This study serves as a crucial resource for stakeholders working to promote gender equality and social justice in Kapedo and similar contexts. It sheds light on the deeply rooted cultural and structural challenges facing women and provides a roadmap for transformative action. Addressing the issues outlined in the research is not only vital for the empowerment of women in Kapedo but also for the overall development, peace, and resilience of the region. This makes the study both timely and essential for informing future initiatives and policymaking efforts aimed at achieving inclusive and equitable development.

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