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The Impact of Conflict on Women's Socio-Economic Development in Kapedo, Turkana County 1900 - 1963

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Abstract
This study delves into the impact of conflict on women's socioeconomic development in Kapedo, Turkana County from 1900 to 1963. The colonial era marked a period of profound change, as both external forces and internal factors reshaped the socio-political landscape of Kenya. Amid this transformation, the Turkana and Pokot communities grappled with territorial disputes, resource access, and cultural variations that fuelled tensions. The study investigates the interplay of colonialism and conflict in eroding women's traditional roles and social status within their communities. By shedding light on the impact of these historical tensions on women's socioeconomic development, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical analysis of women's socioeconomic development in Kenya. This study reveals that the colonial era and inter-ethnic conflicts, particularly between the Pokot and Turkana communities, significantly transformed women's roles and social status. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the importance of targeted interventions to support women in conflict-affected areas, aiming to address both immediate needs and foster long-term socioeconomic development.
Key words: Socio-economic development, Conflict, Colonialism, Women

INTRODUCTION

The period spanning 1900 to 1963 marks a pivotal era in Kenya's colonial trajectory, defined by extensive political restructuring, economic exploitation, and sociocultural upheavals. Among the communities most impacted by these transformations were the Turkana and Pokot, whose interactions during this time were deeply influenced not only by the imposition of British colonial rule but also by escalating inter-ethnic hostilities. These hostilities rooted in longstanding disputes over territorial demarcation and resource control intensified under colonial administration. While scholarly discourse has extensively addressed the ethnic dimensions of these conflicts, less scholarly attention has been given to their gendered consequences particularly how protracted conflict reconfigured the socioeconomic roles, rights, and resilience of women in frontier zones such as Kapedo.

This study, titled The impact of Conflict on Women's Socioeconomic Development in Kapedo, Turkana County (1900–1963), interrogates the inter-linkages between colonial governance, localized conflict, and gendered experiences. It explores how enduring hostilities between the Turkana and Pokot exacerbated by the colonial state's boundary re-configurations, administrative restructuring, and coercive governance disrupted traditional social orders and significantly altered the economic agency, mobility, and well-being of women. These systemic disruptions constrained women's participation in community life, limited their access to critical resources such as land and livestock, and hindered their educational and healthcare opportunities.

Utilizing a methodology that draws on archival records (National Archives of Kenya, 1930-1960), oral narratives, and a robust body of secondary literature (Van Zwanenber, 1975; Berman & Lonsdale, 1992 Warren, 1980), this research critically evaluates how conflict, alongside colonial policy, shaped the structural conditions of women's socio-economic marginalization.

By centering the historical experiences of women within the broader context of conflict and colonial disruption, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of the gendered legacies of violence and systemic inequality in Kenya's northern frontier.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing scholarly discourse has predominantly focused on economic determinants when examining the limited socioeconomic advancement of women, particularly in the Global South. While factors such as capital deficiency,

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infrastructural inadequacies, and insufficient entrepreneurial capacities have been widely acknowledged as barriers to development, these variables alone do not sufficiently explain the persistent underdevelopment of women in countries with economic structures comparable to Kenya. This discrepancy suggests the presence of significant non-economic influences that warrant closer academic scrutiny. Among these, ethnic conflict emerges as a critical yet underexplored dimension affecting women's development trajectories, especially in multi-ethnic societies where such tensions are endemic.

Despite the centrality of ethnic identity in shaping socio-political realities in countries like Kenya, ethnicity remains largely marginalized in mainstream development paradigms. Dominant economic and political development models, designed primarily for transforming so-called "third world" societies, have typically overlooked ethnicity as a variable of analytical importance. Instead, academic attention has predominantly focused on quantifiable deficiencies such as financial capital, managerial capacity, infrastructure, and governance mechanisms. Political science literature has emphasized obstacles such as exclusion from governance, weak democratic institutions, imbalanced power structures, and ineffective political mobilization as constraints to both political and economic progress. Social development analyses have similarly prioritized institutional underdevelopment, low educational attainment, poor maternal health services, and inadequate housing, often neglecting the structural influence of ethnic fragmentation.

Although a foundational body of literature acknowledges the relationship between ethnicity and political development—particularly the works of Singh (1988) and Premdas (1973, 1974, 1978)—there remains a paucity of research that rigorously interrogates the nexus between ethnic conflict and women's socioeconomic development. Early sociological inquiries (e.g., Bartels, 1978; Premdas, 1978) hinted at this linkage but lacked the sustained empirical engagement necessary for contemporary application. Furthermore, much of the extant literature on ethnicity in the Kenyan context has concentrated on themes of ethnic discrimination, racial hierarchies, social stratification, and the political dynamics of ethnicity (Hintzen, 1989). These studies, while valuable, seldom address how ethnic conflict directly impedes women's access to economic resources, education, healthcare, and social mobility.

Conversely, there is a considerable volume of research analyzing Kenya's post-independence economic policies and the broader economic patterns of Sub-Saharan Africa—regions characterized by shared colonial histories, state fragility, and resource-based economies (Erriah, 2011). However, these works have yet to establish a comprehensive framework connecting ethnic conflict with gender-specific developmental outcomes. This oversight highlights a significant theoretical and empirical gap that must be addressed to advance a more nuanced understanding of the barriers to women's empowerment in ethnically fragmented societies.

Despite its potentially significant implications, the study of ethnic conflict and its impact on socioeconomic development remains an under-explored area in mainstream academic literature. Traditional development paradigms have largely emphasized structural constraints—such as insufficient investment, inadequate education systems, limited access to resources, under-capitalization, technological deficits, and chronic political instability—as primary explanations for the developmental stagnation experienced by many countries. While these factors are indeed important, they alone do not capture the complexity of impediments to sustainable development. This study seeks to address this conceptual void by examining how ethnic conflict intersects with and influences socioeconomic development outcomes, particularly for women in marginalized regions.

On a broader scale, the ethnic competition model proposed by Olzak (1982) and Nagel (1984) offers a relevant theoretical framework. These scholars contend that ethnic mobilization should be understood as a rational, strategic response to the structural pressures of modernity—namely, the competition over scarce but highly valued resources such as employment, income growth, access to credit, housing, education, and market opportunities. Within this framework, ethnicity becomes both a mobilizing identity and a mechanism through which marginalized groups vie for state attention and material resources in an increasingly competitive sociopolitical environment. This model holds significant relevance to the current inquiry into how inter-ethnic conflict influences the socioeconomic status of women in Kapedo, Turkana County.

The insights drawn from Olzak and Nagel's framework inform the conceptual underpinning of this study. However, notable theoretical and methodological gaps exist between their research and the present inquiry. For instance, their studies were largely grounded in survey methodologies and quantitative data drawn from the United States, whereas the current investigation adopts a case study approach that allows for a more nuanced, context-specific analysis through qualitative and empirical exploration.

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Further scholarly contributions from Europe also underscore the developmental consequences of ethnic conflict. Young (1993), Stavenhagen (1991), and Smith (1981) collectively argue that the resurgence of ethnic identity and associated conflicts has disrupted social cohesion and undermined economic planning across several developing countries, including those in Eastern Europe previously aligned with socialist ideologies. Contrary to assumptions that socialism had eliminated ethnic divisions, the eruption of ethno-nationalist conflicts in these societies has demonstrated the enduring power of ethnic identity in shaping social and economic realities.

These European scholars highlight that ethnically driven conflict has not only stalled but in many cases reversed progress toward inclusive development and social transformation. The failure of development economists and policy architects to incorporate ethnicity as a core analytical variable has left a critical gap in the understanding of impediments to growth and stability. As such, the ethnic dimension must be re-centered in development discourse—both as a determinant of inequality and as a factor capable of redirecting national trajectories. Its exclusion from existing models limits the capacity of policymakers and scholars to formulate effective, equitable, and contextually grounded development strategies.

Despite offering critical insights, the existing studies by Young (1981), Stavenhagen (1991), and Smith (1993) exhibit both temporal and geographical limitations when juxtaposed with the present research. The current study, conducted between 2022 and 2024, captures emerging socioeconomic and political dynamics that were not prevalent or adequately addressed in the earlier European-based inquiries. This temporal disparity underscores a theoretical gap, as the contexts in which the earlier studies were developed differ markedly from the realities on the ground in contemporary Kenya. Furthermore, a geographical divergence exists, as the aforementioned studies focused primarily on post-socialist and Western European settings, whereas this study is firmly situated within the conflict-prone, marginalized locale of Kapedo in Turkana County, Kenya.

In the African continent, Ngomba-Roth (2008) documents a wide range of intra-state conflicts, including civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and along the Eritrea-Ethiopia border, as well as prolonged ethnic violence in Sierra Leone, Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan, and Nigeria. These conflicts have precipitated extensive humanitarian crises, including mass displacement, widespread disease outbreaks, systemic abuse of women and children, and large-scale loss of life. Crucially, such unrest has profoundly undermined the social, political, and economic development of affected states. Within this context, the current study builds upon Ngomba-Roth's findings by focusing specifically on how such patterns of conflict manifest in localized settings, particularly in terms of their gendered impacts. The study provides empirical evidence addressing how conflict disrupts women's socioeconomic progress in Kapedo, thereby fulfilling one of its central objectives.

Kenya's own ethnic tensions can be traced to the colonial era, but they gained greater prominence during the post-independence Africanization policies, particularly in the restructuring of access to land and economic opportunities formerly held by colonial settlers. As noted by Nyukuri and Basasa (1997), the persistence of ethnic divisions in Kenya has been exacerbated by competition over scarce resources, mutual suspicion among ethnic communities, and entrenched systems of dominance and marginalization. Inter-ethnic violence has occurred across nearly all provinces, often intensifying during electoral cycles or in periods of resource scarcity. The Norwegian Refugee Council (2004) similarly emphasizes that ethnicity has become a progressively dominant force in national politics since independence, framing both local governance structures and national development strategies.

Although these prior studies have helped lay the foundation for understanding ethnicity and conflict in Kenya, the present research distinguishes itself by its targeted focus on how such conflict dynamics affect the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo. This specificity offers an empirical contribution to the research objective and helps fill both a theoretical and temporal gap in the existing literature. By grounding the study in recent fieldwork and focusing on a historically underserved region, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between gender, ethnicity, and conflict in contemporary Kenya.

A number of ethnically driven conflicts in Kenya have had profound implications for inter-community relations and regional development. Notable among these are the long-standing disputes between the Sabaot and the Bukusu in Bungoma, primarily centered on land and livestock, which escalated significantly from the 1970s onward (Kakai, 2000). Similar tensions have been observed in Gucha and Migori Districts between the Luo and the Abagusii, while at the Coast, political instability during electoral periods has frequently triggered violent confrontations between the Mijikenda and migrant communities from other regions (Kiliku, 1992; Akiwumi, 1999).

These documented instances of ethnic conflict provide an essential contextual framework for the present study, which explores the intersection of ethnic conflict and the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo, Turkana County. While the insights from these studies align with the present research objective, notable theoretical and methodological differences exist. For instance, many of the previous studies relied on broad survey methodologies, whereas this research adopts a localized case study design to facilitate a more in-depth and context-specific analysis of women's lived experiences within conflict zones.

In Turkana County, Wairagu (2007) highlights the socioeconomic consequences of sustained cattle raids by the Pokot community, which have driven many Turkana households into sudden poverty. Such disruptions have disproportionately affected female-headed households, which often struggle to meet basic needs, including educational expenses. The resultant decline in school enrollment and retention, particularly among girls, signals a broader gendered impact of conflict that reinforces inter-generational cycles of disadvantage. This observation offers empirical validation for the present study's objective of examining how protracted conflict has historically shaped women's socioeconomic conditions in Kapedo from 1850 to 2010.

Ethnic conflict has also had transformative implications for gender roles and household dynamics. As conflict-induced displacements, deaths, and disappearances disrupt traditional family structures, women increasingly find themselves in roles of primary caregivers and providers. The emergence of female-headed households in post-conflict environments reflects the broader social realignment that occurs when men are conscripted, detained, killed, or otherwise absent due to violence. The resulting burden on women to care for children, the elderly, and broader community members significantly amplifies their vulnerability. Simultaneously, the collapse of traditional support mechanisms further exacerbates the challenges faced by women, often leaving them exposed to insecurity, economic deprivation, and limited access to institutional support (UNICEF, 2008).

A critical review of existing literature, both domestic and international, reveals a notable paucity of historical scholarship on the influence of conflict on women's socioeconomic development in Kapedo. Much of the extant research has either focused on other counties in Kenya or has been situated in entirely different geopolitical contexts. Furthermore, these studies often overlook the complex interplay between patriarchal norms, conflict dynamics, and state or non-state policy interventions. The present study addresses this geographical and thematic gap by examining the historical trajectory of women's socioeconomic development in Kapedo, with specific attention to the roles of cultural structures, interethnic conflict, and policy frameworks.

Additionally, prior research has largely neglected the precolonial period, thereby limiting our understanding of long-term historical patterns. This study responds to that omission by covering the period from 1850 to 2010, thereby capturing a broader and more nuanced historical continuum. Moreover, while previous works have explored women's roles in development, few have engaged with how conflict, and formal or informal policy responses have either facilitated or hindered their progress. In doing so, this study addresses a significant knowledge gap in gender and conflict literature.

Finally, although various conflict resolution mechanisms—both indigenous and externally imposed—have been deployed in response to ethnic tensions in Kapedo, few studies have critically assessed the efficacy of these interventions. Despite numerous efforts aimed at promoting peace and stability, conflict remains endemic in the region, with detrimental effects on women's socioeconomic advancement. This study, therefore, undertakes a comprehensive historical examination of the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo, with particular emphasis on the intersecting effects of conflict over the stated period.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore the impact of conflict on the women's socioeconomic development in Kapedo, Turkana County. Given the complexity and sensitivity of the subject matter, a qualitative research strategy was adopted, enabling a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of women in this remote and conflict-prone region. The research is anchored in both a case study and a phenomenological design. The case study design facilitated a focused exploration of Kapedo as a critical site of sociopolitical and economic marginalization, allowing the researcher to investigate various data sources in depth and in context.

Concurrently, the phenomenological design was employed to interpret and reflect on the lived experiences of women, particularly regarding how they navigate the multiple intersections of conflict.

The case study design was deemed appropriate because it provided an in-depth lens through which the researcher could analyze how conflict inhibit the socioeconomic empowerment of women in Kapedo. This design allowed for a deep, contextual understanding of how localized dynamics—including persistent insecurity interact with broader national development frameworks. By focusing on a single, well-defined community, the researcher could immerse themselves in the local context, engaging with both formal and informal knowledge systems and developing a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study.

Complementing the case study approach, the phenomenological design was selected to center the experiences and voices of the women themselves. This design allowed for the exploration of subjective realities, enabling the participants to articulate how they perceive, interpret, and respond to their social and economic environments. By prioritizing lived experiences, phenomenology served as a useful interpretative tool in reflecting on the emotional and psychological toll that conflict and marginalization have imposed on women's everyday lives.

The research was conducted in Kapedo, a settlement located at the border of Turkana and Baringo counties. The region is characterized by historical underdevelopment, pervasive insecurity due to inter-ethnic clashes— primarily between the Pokot and Turkana communities. These factors combine to make Kapedo an ideal case study for exploring how conflict hinder the socioeconomic progress of women. The geographical isolation, combined with frequent conflict-related disruptions, significantly constrains women's access to education, healthcare, and economic resources. This environment presents a unique opportunity to understand how conflict, affects marginalized populations in real and tangible ways.

Sampling for the study was conducted using two non-probability techniques: purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was used to identify and select participants who had firsthand experience or deep knowledge of the challenges faced by women in Kapedo. This included women, administration, religious leaders and elderly men and women with historical memory of the area. These individuals were selected based on their ability to provide nuanced and context-specific information aligned with the study's objectives.

In addition, snowball sampling was employed to expand the participant pool beyond the initial group. This technique involved asking selected respondents to recommend other individuals who met the research criteria or who had relevant stories to share. Snowball sampling was particularly valuable in accessing hidden or hard-to-reach populations such as widows of conflict victims, survivors of gender-based violence, or internally displaced women who had relocated multiple times due to insecurity. This method ensured that a diverse range of voices, including those often excluded from public discourse, were captured in the study.

The total number of participants in the study was approximately 45. This included 20 individuals who participated in in-depth interviews, four focus group discussions (each comprising five to seven women), and several key respondents drawn from the elderly men and women and administration operating in the area. The diversity of this sample enabled the researcher to gather a comprehensive range of perspectives and ensured the robustness and reliability of the findings.

Data collection was conducted using four main instruments: semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion guide, an observation protocol, and a document analysis guide. The semi-structured interview guide contained open-ended questions designed to explore issues related to gender roles, access to resources, personal experiences with conflict, and interactions with development programs. The flexibility of this format allowed participants to elaborate freely, providing rich and textured narratives that went beyond superficial descriptions. Interviews were conducted in Kiswahili and the local Turkana language, with translation assistance where necessary, and were audio-recorded with the consent of participants.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to capture communal dynamics and shared understandings of socioeconomic development among women in Kapedo. The FGDs explored themes such as collective strategies for coping with poverty and insecurity, women's participation in decision-making processes, and local perceptions of development interventions. These sessions were instrumental in illuminating the ways in which social norms and power structures shape women's experiences in a communal setting. They also served to identify points of divergence and consensus among different groups of women.

Observation was used as a supplementary data collection method to capture real-time behaviors, interactions, and social practices that might not be easily articulated in interviews or group discussions. The researcher spent time in the community, attending public meetings, visiting marketplaces, and observing daily activities such as water collection and childcare. The observations were systematically recorded using a structured observation protocol

that focused on indicators such as women's mobility, their involvement in public events, and their interaction with local authorities and service providers.

Secondary data were gathered through a thorough review of documents, NGO reports, academic literature, and archival materials sourced from local libraries and administrative offices. The document analysis guide helped structure this review by focusing on the historical, policy, and institutional contexts affecting women's development in Turkana County. This information was critical in linking micro-level experiences to macro-level structures and trends.

All qualitative data—including interview transcripts, focus group recordings, field notes, and photographs—were systematically organized and coded. The coding process was both deductive and inductive. Initially, broad themes were established based on the study objectives, such as "conflict." Subsequently, sub-themes were developed inductively from the data itself, allowing the emergence of new insights and relationships.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying patterns and recurrent ideas within the data and grouping them into coherent themes. This method allowed the researcher to compare and contrast narratives across different participants and to assess how individual experiences converged or diverged depending on age, marital status, economic background, or conflict exposure. Where applicable, digital photographs were used to support and visualize certain findings, such as the economic activities of women.

In addition to thematic analysis, a phenomenological interpretive process was employed to engage more deeply with participants' personal narratives. This involved reflecting on the meanings participants assigned to their experiences, as well as the emotional and psychological responses elicited by those experiences. This layer of analysis was essential for understanding the internalized impacts of structural violence and marginalization—how women feel about their exclusion and how that, in turn, shapes their behavior and choices.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, methodological triangulation was employed. This included comparing findings from interviews, FGDs, observations, and document reviews. Peer debriefing sessions with local experts and stakeholders were conducted to validate findings and ensure cultural relevance. Where necessary, discrepancies were revisited and clarified through follow-up discussions. The use of digital photography also enhanced data validation by providing visual confirmation of certain claims and observations.

Ethical considerations were a central concern throughout the research process. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Participants were informed about the aims of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the measures in place to ensure confidentiality. Special precautions were taken when dealing with sensitive topics such as sexual and gender-based violence, and interviews were conducted in private, safe spaces. Anonymity was preserved through the use of pseudonyms, and audio files were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access.

Despite its strengths, the methodology faced several limitations. Security concerns in Kapedo restricted access to certain locations, limiting the geographic reach of the study. Language differences and the use of translators may have affected the depth and nuance of some responses. Additionally, given the cultural sensitivity of the subject matter, some participants may have withheld information or provided socially desirable answers. Nonetheless, these limitations were mitigated through prolonged engagement, culturally sensitive facilitation, and the triangulation of data sources.

In conclusion, the methodology employed in this study was well-suited to capturing the multifaceted realities of women's socioeconomic development in Kapedo. The integration of case study and phenomenological designs, combined with purposive and snowball sampling, multiple data collection instruments, and rigorous analytical procedures, provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. This methodological approach not only foregrounded the voices and experiences of women but also situated them within broader structural and policy contexts, thus laying a robust foundation for actionable recommendations and policy reforms.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The colonial period in Kapedo, Turkana County, ushered in a profound transformation of the region's economic, social, and gender structures. The formal introduction of colonial administration with the establishment of a military post in 1919 marked the beginning of a disruptive phase for the traditional Turkana way of life. British colonial policies fundamentally altered the economic landscape by promoting integration into a capitalist economy, displacing indigenous subsistence practices with cash-crop agriculture and monetized trade. The shift

to non-indigenous crops like cotton destabilized established communal land-use systems and eroded the socio-economic balance of pastoralist livelihoods.

Women, who held key economic roles in precolonial Turkana society especially in the control of small livestock, milk production, and domestic trade were disproportionately affected by these changes. The commodification of livestock and the imposition of taxes stripped women of their economic independence and control over resources. As men were drawn into wage labor, state projects, and colonial military service, women were left to shoulder the burden of sustaining households under increasingly constrained conditions.

Colonial authorities further marginalized women by neglecting the provision of social services. Educational and healthcare infrastructure remained limited or nonexistent throughout the colonial period. By the time of independence in 1963, Kapedo had only two operational schools, severely limiting women's access to formal education and development opportunities. Nonetheless, women displayed remarkable adaptability, engaging in informal economic activities such as brewing, petty trade, weaving, and charcoal production to support their families and community survival.

The militarization of society and male labor migration contributed to a redefinition of gender roles. As men gained access to colonial privileges through enlistment in tribal police and military roles, male dominance was reinforced in both public and private spheres. Women, excluded from such roles, were further confined to domestic responsibilities, exacerbating gender disparities.

Despite these systemic barriers, some women used the limited educational opportunities available to them to carve out new forms of agency, including transmitting hybridized cultural knowledge to future generations. Education thus served as a subtle but significant tool of transformation, albeit within a system that continued to uphold gender inequality. Oral histories affirm that most women remained largely excluded from administrative power and formal decision-making processes. In the final years of colonial rule, women in Kapedo began to participate in the broader nationalist movement, although their roles were often overshadowed by male figures. Still, the adaptive strategies and resilience developed during the colonial era laid an important foundation for women's later involvement in community development and advocacy in post-independence Turkana.

Colonialism in Kapedo dramatically altered the socioeconomic and gendered fabric of Turkana society. Traditional systems of resource control, labor organization, and gender relations were upended by capitalist and administrative structures imposed by the British. While men were absorbed into the colonial order, women endured systematic marginalization. Yet, their adaptive responses—ranging from informal economic engagement to educational pursuit—demonstrated resilience and contributed to the gradual transformation of women's roles in the region. The legacy of these changes continues to shape gendered development outcomes in contemporary Turkana.

During this colonial period in Kapedo, Turkana, the conflict between the Pokot and Turkana communities was marked by deeply rooted cultural practices, intensified by environmental and structural changes introduced through colonial rule. One of the central cultural practices that defined inter-community relations was cattle raiding. Contrary to colonial and early anthropological narratives that dismissed raiding as mere lawlessness or criminal activity, it was in fact a culturally embedded institution. Among both the Pokot and Turkana, cattle raiding held symbolic and practical significance. It functioned as a rite of passage for young men, a system of wealth redistribution, and a means of maintaining economic equilibrium in times of crisis such as drought or livestock loss. These raids were governed by internal codes and cultural norms that gave structure and meaning to what outsiders viewed as violence, revealing the practice's integral role within pastoralist societies.

However, the onset of colonial rule disrupted this traditional order. Colonial land policies, which introduced individualized land ownership and prioritized settler and state interests, clashed with Turkana and Pokot communal land systems. These changes sparked disputes over vital pastoral resources such as pasture, land, and water—tensions that were particularly pronounced in areas like the contested eighteen acres of Kapedo's trading center. The colonial administrative and legal frameworks did not accommodate indigenous systems of land management, and in doing so, they exacerbated long-standing competition, leading to increased hostility and inter-ethnic violence.

This competition for resources was further worsened by environmental stress. Recurrent droughts and ecological degradation in the arid and semi-arid landscape of northwestern Kenya intensified the scarcity of grazing land and water. The colonial-era dispossession compounded these pressures, creating a fragile environment where traditional raiding practices escalated into more frequent and violent encounters. These cycles of conflict led to displacement, retaliatory attacks, and widespread insecurity, eroding the resilience of local communities.

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Women bore the heaviest burdens in the wake of these disruptions. As colonial policies and ongoing conflict eroded access to land and economic opportunities, women found themselves increasingly marginalized. Excluded from formal economic structures and vulnerable to displacement, they were often left to manage households alone as men were drawn into raids or died in conflict. The economic toll of livestock loss—central to pastoralist livelihoods directly affected women's ability to participate in milk production, trade, and food provision. Furthermore, the breakdown of traditional security and kinship systems exposed women and children to exploitation, abuse, and chronic poverty.

Despite these harsh realities, women in Kapedo demonstrated resilience and adaptability. In the absence of male providers, women took on expanded roles, including managing household economies, engaging in labor-intensive activities like small-scale farming and firewood collection, and maintaining social cohesion within fractured communities. In some cases, they even assumed informal leadership and decision-making roles, underscoring the dynamic nature of gender roles during times of crisis. These shifts highlight the unrecognized labor and emotional strength women contributed to community survival.

Nevertheless, the prolonged nature of the conflict led to widespread social disintegration. Increased numbers of widows and female-headed households, along with food insecurity and trauma, signaled the unraveling of traditional economic systems and the erosion of trust in public institutions. The compounded impact of colonial dispossession and inter-communal violence left communities vulnerable, destabilized, and struggling to recover.

The findings from this historical period underscore the urgent need for gender-sensitive peace-building strategies in the region. Lasting peace and development in conflict-affected areas like Kapedo will depend on addressing historical land grievances, enhancing women's access to economic resources, and recognizing the essential roles women play in rebuilding and leading communities. Without such inclusive and contextualized approaches, development efforts risk reinforcing the very inequalities that sustained cycles of violence.

In sum, the conflict between the Pokot and Turkana communities from 1900 to 1963 was not merely a product of cultural aggression, but rather a complex interplay of colonial disruption, environmental degradation, and structural marginalization. Women emerged as both the primary victims and unsung pillars of resilience in this context. Their experiences offer vital lessons for building inclusive, equitable, and sustainable peace in northern Kenya and beyond.

DISCUSSIONS

Colonialism and Women's Socioeconomic Transformation in Kapedo, Turkana (1900–1963).The onset of colonial rule in Turkana, particularly around the late 19th and early 20th centuries, marked a period of profound transformation, driven by British imperial expansion during the Scramble for Africa. The establishment of a military post in Kapedo in 1919 signaled the formal penetration of colonial administration, simultaneously serving military and commercial purposes.

The British colonial administration instituted profound shifts in Turkana's economic landscape. Traditional pastoralist systems were disrupted by policies favoring integration into the colonial capitalist economy. With the imposition of cash-crop agriculture and monetized trade systems, Turkana communities were compelled to shift from subsistence herding to the cultivation of non-indigenous crops like cotton and groundnuts, thus destabilizing communal land-use patterns and indigenous economic structures (Van Zwanenberg, 1975; Warren, 1980).

Colonial land legislation introduced individual land registration and tenure systems that clashed with Turkana's communal ownership traditions, resulting in the alienation of vast tracts of land for settler, missionary, and administrative use (Berman & Lonsdale, 1992). Consequently, dispossession and conflict over critical resources such as pasture and water became prevalent.

The introduction of wage labor further restructured socioeconomic relations. Colonial sauthorities imposed labor obligations that drew local men into state projects, wage employment, or military service, fundamentally altering the communal labor ethos and enhancing dependency on colonial economic structures. These developments entrenched capitalist modes of production and redefined class and gender dynamics (Zeleza, 1989; Maxon, 1989).

Colonial disruptions extended to the Turkana social order. The imposition of alien governance systems and attempts to co-opt traditional leaders into the Native Administration effectively reconfigured power hierarchies and gender relations. As observed by Nyanchoga (2000), colonial strategies sought to dismantle existing institutions and realign them within the colonial political economy.

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Among the most affected were women, whose traditional socioeconomic roles were undermined. While women had significant agency in precolonial pastoralist economies—including control over milk, small stock, and domestic trade—the commodification of livestock and taxation reduced their access to these resources (Soper, 1985). Economic pressures led to the erosion of women's rights to livestock, undermining their contribution to familial and cultural functions.

Colonial neglect of social services, particularly in education and healthcare, further disadvantaged women. By independence, educational opportunities in Kapedo remained minimal, with oral sources confirming only two operational schools (Salome Emase, O.I., 2022). Despite these constraints, women adapted by engaging in petty trade, craftwork, brewing, and wage labor to supplement household incomes (KNA Reports 1937–1942).

The colonial period also reshaped gender roles through militarization and labor migration. Men's enlistment in tribal police and military units increased their access to colonial privileges and power, reinforcing male dominance in both public and private spheres (Parsons, 1999; Hodgson, 2021). Women, often excluded from such formal structures, shouldered the burden of maintaining households and communities, sometimes turning to informal economic activities such as charcoal production, weaving, and beer brewing (Nancy et al., O.I., 2022).

Education, though limited, served as a vector of cultural transformation. While initially designed to reinforce colonial subservience, education allowed some women to negotiate new forms of agency, enabling them to transmit hybridized cultural knowledge to younger generations (Kanogo, 2005).

Nevertheless, systemic gender discrimination persisted, with oral histories confirming that most women remained confined to domestic roles and lacked access to formal education or administrative power (Mercy Ekaran, O.I., 2022). The Dimension of Conflict in Kapedo Between the Pokot and Turkana, 1900–1963 Prior to the onset of colonial rule, early ethnographic accounts often dismissed acts of violence such as cattle raiding as driven by material gain or conquest. Instead, these societies were broadly characterized as inherently socialist in nature (Eaton, 2008). Scholars such as Gluckman (1963), Dyson-Hudson (1966), Lamphear (1976), and Turton (1979) have interpreted cattle raiding as a cultural mechanism central to the internal identity of ethnic communities. In this view, violence was embedded in the cultural fabric rather than indicative of societal breakdown. Simonse and Kurimoto (1998) further posit that the enduring conflict between the Pokot and Turkana has its roots in each community's cultural worldview and value system.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, 2004) notes that raiding in precolonial pastoralist societies was largely ceremonial and functioned as a rite of passage for young men. Beyond asserting bravery, it was a critical means of wealth redistribution, particularly in the aftermath of crises such as drought or livestock disease. Among the Turkana and Pokot, traditional raiding persisted as a normalized and valorized practice. Anthropological analyses by Bollig (2003) and Muhereza (2005) reinforce the argument that such violence is deeply rooted in cultural norms, while Ng'ang'a (2012) contends that Pokot raids were often undertaken to fulfill cultural obligations.

Contrary to the narrative that sees warfare as deviant, Simonse and Kurimoto (1998) suggest that violence in some societies can be a constructive force, serving essential socio-economic and psychological functions. This perspective is shared by Lamphear (1999), who argues that cultural checks and norms often prevented conflicts from degenerating into uncontrolled warfare.

The primary driver of conflict between the Pokot and Turkana was access to and control over critical pastoral resources—namely livestock, pasture, land, and water. Livestock raids were not only economic in nature but also symbolized inter-communal hostility and contestation. Berger (2003) and Morton (2010) observe that environmental stress, especially prolonged droughts in northwestern Kenya, intensified these conflicts by reducing available grazing land and concentrating herders in ecologically fragile zones, thereby increasing tensions.

Oral testimonies corroborate that one of the principal triggers of conflict in Kapedo has been the competition for grazing land and water, particularly the contested eighteen acres upon which the trading center sits. These cycles of violence—cattle rustling, retaliatory attacks, and village raids—have led to significant casualties, widespread displacement, and property destruction (Lokorikeju et al., 2023).

During the colonial period (1890–1963), broader shifts in gender dynamics exacerbated the vulnerabilities of women. Colonial land policies and the prioritization of male-dominated cash crop economies eroded women's access to land and economic autonomy (Hollader, 1979). In Kapedo,

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however, the sustained state of conflict further marginalized women, who were largely excluded from formal agricultural roles due to insecurity. The protracted dispute over the trading center's land—rooted in competing claims dating back to the 18th century—has deeply fractured relations between the Pokot and Turkana.

The conflict over limited natural resources significantly affected women, given their central role in pastoralist households. Both communities depend on livestock for subsistence, trade, and social status. However, colonial and postcolonial disruptions to land tenure systems heightened inter-communal competition over pasture and water (Devine, 2016). These disputes frequently escalated into violent confrontations, driven by both historical grievances and present-day ecological pressures. Political manipulation, the spread of small arms, and climate variability have compounded these tensions (Devine, 2016).

As violence intensified, women bore the brunt of social dislocation. Raids necessitated constant mobility, disrupting livelihoods and social ties while generating persistent psychological and emotional stress. According to the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHCR, 2007), women and children constitute the majority of internally displaced persons, often facing exploitation and abuse in conflict zones. The psychological and physical toll of displacement has been particularly acute, compromising access to healthcare, safety, and essential services.

Oral narratives emphasize that recurrent attacks have led to family separations, further eroding the institution of the family (Joyce Erukudi, O.I., 2023). The economic impact has been equally severe. As men assumed defense responsibilities or engaged in raids, women were left to manage depleted household assets and livelihoods. Livestock losses directly curtailed women's participation in subsistence and market-based economic activities, such as milk production and trade.

To cope, women have undertaken labor-intensive responsibilities, including gathering firewood, fetching water across long distances, and engaging in small-scale farming to offset reduced pastoral productivity (Everlyne Namoru, O.I., 2022). This shift in responsibilities not only strained physical capacity but also disrupted traditional gender roles, placing greater economic pressure on women. The breakdown of traditional economic systems undermined household cohesion and community resilience.

Despite these challenges, women demonstrated agency by playing crucial roles in maintaining household stability and supporting community survival. During conflict, they managed scarce resources, provided logistical support, and occasionally assumed decision-making roles in the absence of men (Patricia Ekeno, O.I., 2022). These adaptive roles highlight the fluidity of gender roles in response to crisis and the importance of recognizing women's contributions in conflict settings.

According to Akiwumi (1999), Mkutu (2007, 2008), and Eriksen & Lind (2005), the cumulative impact of conflict includes widespread poverty, displacement, trauma, food insecurity, and the erosion of public trust. The death of male household heads has also led to a rise in female-headed households, placing additional burdens on women, who must now care for orphans, manage livestock, and navigate the complex socio-political landscape alone.

In addition to threatening national peace and governance, the persistent ethnic clashes in the Kapedo region have severely undermined the social fabric, especially by increasing the number of widows and female-headed households (Salome et al., 2022). These conditions have curtailed women's ability to contribute meaningfully to socioeconomic development in the region.

CONCLUSION

This study is critically important as it provides a nuanced and historically grounded understanding of how conflict and colonial legacies have deeply impacted the socioeconomic status and roles of women in Kapedo, Turkana County. By tracing the roots of current challenges back to colonial disruptions and persistent inter-communal violence, the study offers a comprehensive picture of the structural forces that continue to marginalize women in this region. It sheds light on the multifaceted struggles women face not just as individuals but as central figures within their families and communities.

One of the study's most significant contributions is its clear illustration of how conflict and colonial policies have transformed traditional gender roles and family structures. The colonial administration's imposition of new economic systems, such as cash crop farming and taxation, diverted men to wage labor and military service, leaving women to take on additional burdens in both agricultural and domestic spheres. These added responsibilities strained women's time and energy, reducing their ability to participate in traditional subsistence activities that previously supported household stability.

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Furthermore, the study reveals how ongoing conflict between the Pokot and Turkana communities manifesting in violent resource-based raids—has forced women to prioritize physical safety over economic and social engagement. The repeated loss of livestock, a cornerstone of rural livelihoods, has devastated household economies, pushing women into insecure and sometimes exploitative labor

environments. These conditions not only compromise women's economic autonomy but also erode their traditional status and influence within their communities.

The study also highlights the compounding effects of food insecurity, displacement, and community fragmentation—issues that stem from both historical and contemporary conflict dynamics. In doing so, it brings much-needed attention to the inter-sectionality of poverty, gender, and violence in rural Kenya.

These insights are crucial for designing interventions that address root causes, rather than merely responding to surface-level symptoms.

Importantly, the study does not stop at problem identification; it also offers actionable recommendations for improving the security and socioeconomic standing of women in Kapedo. It emphasiz

es that without addressing the ongoing insecurity in the region, efforts to empower women and foster sustainable development will remain ineffective. It calls on the government to take proactive steps, such as

strengthening law enforcement, enhancing security patrols, and equipping police forces to effectively respond to violence. Furthermore, the promotion of community-based initiatives like the Nyumba Kumi program is presented as a practical and culturally sensitive approach to conflict resolution and public safety.

This study is vital not only for its historical analysis but also for its relevance to current policy and development efforts. It provides a strong evidence base for understanding how entrenched conflict and colonial structures continue to shape gender dynamics, and why security and stability are prerequisites for meaningful socioeconomic change. By centering women's experiences and advocating for targeted, community-driven interventions, the study offers a road-map for addressing long-standing inequalities and promoting inclusive development in Kapedo and beyond.

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