

Adoption of Community Security Initiatives against Protracted Insecurity in Laikipia North, Kenya

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Abstract

This article interrogates the underlying factors that cause communities residing in areas affected by communal conflicts in Laikipia North, Kenya, to embrace community security initiatives as a way of addressing protracted insecurity. In the context of peripheral territories such as Laikipia North, security as a right is contested due to factors such as protraction of insecurity, civilian militarization, and overall absence of the state as a security provider. Critical to the study is the understanding that the state as a political entity is impacted by a myriad of geo-political, security and socio-economic forces. These geo-political, security and socio-economic forces may compromise the functionality of the state as far as fulfilling its mandate to the citizens is concerned. In this regard, the adoption of community security initiatives raises fundamental questions as to whether the state has failed to deliver on its mandate of providing security, given that Kenya is a functioning state. This phenomenological study aimed at examining the underlying forces that inform internal security experiences among communities in communal conflict regions. Specifically, the study explored the post-2010 factors in relation to state of (in)security in Laikipia County. The study used qualitative approach in which data was collected using FGDs, interviews and observation checklist. Data was analyzed thematically in line with the objectives of the study.

Key Words: Community Protection Initiatives, Insecurity, Protracted, Violence

DOI: 10.7176/RHSS/11-18-07

Publication date: September 30th 2021

1. Introduction

Laikipia County experiences perennial and protracted insecurity attributed to different forces (Bond, 2014; Kanyinga, 2007; Mkutu, 2020, Okumu, 2014). The situation, which dates back to the colonial era, has derailed attainment of human security and has impaired the functioning of the society. Bond and Mkutu (2014) contend that endemic insecurity has caused loss of lives and biodiversity, destruction of livelihood, and a culture of violence. Besides, the situation has led to protraction of insecurity in Laikipia County. In addition, the security problem had caused death of security officers, and an estimated loss of close to \$2million in revenue. Evidently, the state of security is a palpable internal security problem for local communities, and both the county and national governments. For the national government, which is the custodian of security, the palpability is seen in the measures employed to counter protracted insecurity. These include deployment of the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF), dominance of paramilitary (GSU) in the area, shoot-to-kill orders, and arming of civilians (Musumbayi, 2006; Mkutu, 2018). In spite of this, state of insecurity persists.

Notable in the state of insecurity, is the failure of conflict management approaches such as peace caravans and peace committees. In addition, state security approaches such as security operations, and arming of civilians have significantly failed to end the recurrence of violence. Instead, the security situation appears to be teetering between an environment of negative peace on the one hand and violence on the other hand. Even with the 2010 constitutional dispensation, the expected peace and security dividends appear far off. While this remains the case, community security initiatives that aim at deterring, countering, protecting and resolving insecurity have been taking shape. This includes initiatives that are inherent to local communities, those that are a part of state-

community partnership, as well as those from non-state actors. The adoption of these initiatives raises pertinent questions on the underlying factors contributing to their use in addressing protracted insecurity in the area. Some of the factors discussed in this section includes; state perception of Laikipia North, attitude towards government security operations, gendering of security, stateness, as well as proliferation of small arms.

1.1. Perception of Laikipia North and Nature of Communal Violence

Perception is about how individuals and groups filter threats to their well-being in line with their beliefs, values, gender, information, and experiences (Adeniji, 2015). Perceptions include attitudes of state security agencies regarding communal violence in Laikipia North, the geography of the region, as well as attitudes of local communities towards state security agencies and insecurity. For instance, among the security officers, sentiments on perception have to do with the geography of Laikipia, local communities, and the nature of threats. Concerning the geography of Laikipia, a 42 year –old senior security officer in charge of operations in the areas affected by cattle rustling explained the causal-link during an interview. The officer explained that “Laikipia North is a partly stable but hostile place” (Participant, 7, Oral interview, Nanyuki, 29-5-2018). In echoing the remarks of the officer, a 44 year-old ASTU officer in charge of one of the camps in Laikipia North remarked:

I have been working here for some time and the situation is not good. First, the terrain is harsh. Second, the attackers [shaking his head] are very aggressive, violent, and not willing to give up. They can fight for the whole daylong. The forms of violence used by these communities and armed civilians have also become worse over the years. This place now looks like a combat area. That is why now we are using armored vehicles and anti-personnel detonators. (Participant, 22, Oral interview, Nanyuki, 30-5-2018)

In comparison, a 35 years old military officer who was part of the battalion deployed in the large Laikipia County pointed out that:

Laikipia north is very important to the security of this country. The difficult and hard terrains serve security and defense objectives. Military officers from Kenya and Britain conduct training in this area. The police also carry out training in the Mukogodo forest. We can therefore not allow senseless violence to tear Laikipia apart. (Participant 25, Oral interview, Nanyuki, 29-5-2018)

Although located 252 kilometres from Nairobi City County, the capital of Kenya, Laikipia North served the strategic interests of the Kenya state. These findings suggest that the deployment of the military in 2017 was not only a quest to fulfill constitutional obligations placed on the military but also a quest to secure Laikipia for its security and strategic objectives. From a theoretical construct, the remarks by the security officers are confirmation of securitization theory by Waeber (1995) and Buzan, De Wilde and Waeber (1998). In this, the geographical terrain, communities, and armed groups form part of the discursive process that legitimizes the use of extraordinary measures. Such measures include the deployment of the military, the use of armored vehicles, anti-personnel detonators to eliminate existential threats.

Another aspect of perceptions was illustrated during a drive along the border between Mugie Conservancy and Baringo County; the accompanying officers cocked their guns in readiness for retaliation. Seated between the officers, I sought to understand the change in the positioning of guns. One of the security officers, a 42-year-old male who was looking intently into the bushes remarked “this side mirror can go down anytime. There is always trouble in these bushes. The community here cannot withstand our presence” (Participant 7, Oral interview, 11-3-2018). The language used by the security officers illustrated not only the power of perception but also the extent to which perception discourse influence (in)security understanding. It is therefore not surprising that the language construct of Laikipia North and the inhabitants legitimize approaches used by the security officers. Moreover, perception rather than violation of law appears to be the primary determinant of how insecurity in Laikipia North is addressed.

Besides the readiness to retaliate, officers accompanying us during a drive to Lonyiek often greeted boys grazing in the vicinity ‘*pkayal*’, which translated means peace in Pokot language. An interrogation into the form of greetings revealed that the boys had security back up of heavily armed warriors watching from a distance. As a standby force, the warriors are expected to respond swiftly in case the boys raised an alarm. Therefore, the greetings were a form of communication that the security officers were driving into the area peacefully. The communication reflects a contentious relationship between the security officers and the local community. This clearly emphasizes the relevance of deconstructing the mental images and preconceived ideas of security officers, security in zones of communal conflicts, and of local communities. Perceptions and resulting mistrust

are in line with other literature on the challenges of community policing and police brutality (Amuya, 2017). It is important to note that allowing perceptions to influence responses to communal violence leads to disjointed and parallel protection strategies. Parallel protection reflects what the theory of state-society relation describes as competing establishments enforcing their authority in the context of inadequate stateness.

Other than the violent perceptions of communities and the region, security officers' perception of Laikipia North as a region with strategic interests informs how insecurity is addressed. One of the officers remarked that:

You see my friend, cattle rustling affects everyone in this area, whether poor or rich, so we cannot say we are here because of cattle rustlers who are armed. We are here because of the strategic interests of the state. The conservancies in Laikipia pay close to \$2 billion in tax per year. For any government in the world, this is serious. So you cannot sit and watch people destroy such resources in the name of their culture. (Participant 28, Oral interview, Nanyuki, 29-5-2018)

From a military standpoint, conservancies represent a strategic interest of the state. As such, violence from local communities necessitates the deployment of the military. What this means is that in the face of communal violence, deployment of the military to quell violence is largely influenced by the presence of strategic interests of the state. The idea that strategic interests fuel military deployment in communal conflicts tallies with Elfversson's (2015) views on determinants of government intervention in communal conflicts in Africa. In her analysis, Elfversson (2015) found out that states in Africa only intervene in a third of communal conflicts. Core to these interventions is the strategic interests of the state. Tying military intervention to strategic interests denotes the selective application of the security mandate especially where communal conflicts do not threaten the strategic interests of the state. In the aftermath, the management of communal conflicts embraces a narrow political undertone that exposes local communities to greater risks thus prompting self-protection strategies.

1.2. Nature of Police Response to Protracted Insecurity

Regardless of experiences of stateness, there is dominant use of customary institutions and customized practices to counter violent attacks by local communities. Preference for these local approaches is due to the nature of police response. Responses by security agencies are described as lackluster and inconsequential. A 42-year-old male and a farmer illustrated the nature of security responses to insecurity by observing that:

The security ears do not hear us, sometimes we can be attacked at 9pm and the police will come five hours after. But even when they come, they take the opposite direction from the route followed by the raiders, even when they can hear the direction from which the gunshots are coming from. (Participant 11, Oral interview, Ngenia, 16-3-2018)

Other experiences were shared by Morans in a discussion. One of the participants, a 30 year-old Moran summed the response by the security agencies by noting:

Hawa police sijui shida yao nini? [What problem do these police officers have?] Look, anytime they {referring to officers} come here they deal with us using guns, rungu, force, and violence. The government thinks we are criminals and we should be killed. That is why they never talk to us peacefully. Because of this, we have had to acquire guns and bullets because spears and arrows cannot deal with the government that, instead of talking to us, fights us all the times. (FGD3, Arjijo, 10-3-2018)

The nature of responses by security forces is in line with other studies showing police corruption, brutality, ineptitude, and the overall effect on security (Atta-Asamoah, 2015; Ombaka, 2015). The police officers were said to be slow, ineffective, non-cooperative, militaristic, and non-engaging. Widespread comments of police not showing up, claims of not having resources, and/or pursuit of attackers in the opposite direction were common. The nature of police response to communal violence is consistent with existing literature on policing in Kenya (Omeje&Gathigiro, 2012). The conduct of the security officers illustrates both institutional and individual failures.

In the context of security obligations, the response by security agencies indicates a failure in normative duties as well as protection gaps (Hills, 2011). It also reflects the inadequate facilitation of the officers to help achieve institutional obligations. Additionally, despite the state security agencies being victims of communal violence, there appears to be a lack of institutional introspection. The failure may be attributable to the equation of the

implication of communal conflicts to demographic losses rather than the holistic implication of communal violence that is the militarization of society. Furthermore, it is indicative from our interrogation of the protracted insecurity in Laikipia North that the escalation of conflicts is attributable to the conduct of security agencies, inadvertently resulting in civilian militarization and negative perception towards security officers. It can therefore be argued that the notion that security provision is solely a domain of community more so in the zone of communal violence, results from the ingrained approaches to policing of the periphery. Hence, multi-sectoral engagement on security requires security conversation on institutional obligation, individual roles, and security as a right and an obligation for community members.

Based on the above nature of police response, reliance on local protection to safeguard kin and property were reported, especially as exemplified by the Kenya Police Reservists. As one participant averred, the “KPR/NPRs are available and within our homesteads, so in case of anything they respond fast” reported a 60-year-old participant in FGD with NKI members (FGD4, Maunduni Meri, 27-4-2018). Another participant, 70 year-old Samburu elder noted that “NPR/KPR lives with the community and they are more responsible and helpful than the police” (Participant 4, Oral interview, Ewaso, 5-4-2018). Moreover, KPR and scouts were reported to understand the terrain and culture of the people. This was clearly illustrated by one of the participants from ASTU. When asked about the contribution of KPR, scouts, and Morans in dealing with communal violence, similar to the views of participant 4, the 42-year-old officer said:

Whenever the community members report to us cases of livestock theft, we respond but with the support of local scouts and KPR. These groups are composed of individuals from the community. They understand the terrain, hideouts, and raiding tracks. Although we have the vehicles, it is impossible to drive in these bushes and security hills. So, we rely on local knowledge. (Participant 7, Oral interview, Nanyuki, 29-5-2018)

In combination with other factors, local knowledge enabled NPR to work well with the community members. Besides, ASTU, a paramilitary unit relied on KPR knowledge in their response to attacks. The study findings tally with Bond’s (2014) work in Laikipia North where it was reported that “NPR was reported to be more reliable and preferable to formal police ... due to the perception that they have community interests in mind” (p.1002). The congruent response to violence based on availability, immediate response, and presence within the community, enabled NPR to fill the security void. Reliability and dependability also extended to *Nyumba Kumi Initiatives* (NKI), which was a group of community elders who worked with the NPR and the police to address security-related matters. With NKI, ethical credibility and knowledge of Laikipia North earned them community approval. Other than ethical credibility, fear of verbal punishment caused community members to adhere to the elder's call to desist from violent activities.

The residents’ attitude regarding the role of NKI are surprising considering that NKI was created to enhance community policing. In the light of the communities in Laikipia North, NKI is filling the gap created by the inadequacies occasioned by the actions of state security agencies. In consideration of this argument by the residents, it can be concluded that partnership between security agencies and NKI is somewhat insincere. To the residents, the reality of insecurity experiences is that the two act independently with NKI being the trusted and relevant authority of dealing with insecurity and inter-ethnic violence.

1.3. Use of Illegal Arms for Protection

Civilian possession of firearms in Laikipia is widely covered in several research undertakings. These illegal arms are used alongside other locally available weapons. When asked what forms of arms were prevalent, some participants could hardly expound on the types. This is because their interaction with arms is limited to the sounds of gunshots and physical injuries linked to gunshots. Nonetheless, participants reported AK47 as the most common form of small arms among the civilians. The second was G3 then M16, Rifle, and shotguns respectively. In most discussions and interviews, the protection of ethnic kin, territory, and property were cited as primary reasons for acquisition of illegal arms. However, regarding the nature and forms of violent risks that community members ought to be secured from, opinions varied. The variation affirms the social construction of threats, which Wyn-Jones (2001) and Williams (1998) in their theory of critical security studies (CSS) attribute to the existence of different referent objects of security. Beyond the social construction of security, the presence of firearms such as M16, a military weapon is evidence of state failure in enforcing its monopoly of violence. The failure creates a suitable ground for local communities to assume a primary role of security, hence the high level of military ware.

Even with the acknowledged prevalence of arms, there was recognition that the state is a primary actor with the right to use legitimate force for security purposes. Nonetheless, despite possessing the legal coercive force, the agencies had failed to exercise the legitimacy leading to a security void. With the malfunctioning of the monopoly of violence, community members embrace the use of firearms to secure themselves against violence. The question of failure to exploit the monopoly of violence overly contrasts the narrative of overall state absence in the periphery. From the field study findings, state agencies were reportedly present but dismally failing to live to their legitimate mandate. To this, community members responded by acquiring firearms for protection. The competing demeanor to use force to establish some form of control relates to the practice alluded to in the theory of state-society relations. In the end, the security situation is turned into a theatre where actors compete to use force at the slightest provocation.

Discussing security risks in some communities, protection from persistent violence and unresolved insecurity was cited as a reason for keeping firearms. Comparatively, a 56-year-old Pokot male participant from Maundu-ni-Meri observed that “in the last 10 years, the security situation has become very bad because of the many killings; we only survive because we have guns” (Participant 17, Oral interview, Maundu-ni-Meri, 27-4-2018). In the same breadth, a 37 years old female participant explained the extent to which violence had become ingrained into the society thus creating the need for arms. Narrating her experience of violent conflicts, the participant observed that “since [she] was born, people in this area have been fighting, and only stop for a while then start again. That is why you see young men with guns to protect the villages” (FGD6, Ilopolei, 29-3-2018). The link between firearm possession and insecurity is in line with a study conducted in South Sudan by Small Arms Survey (2017). The study found out that 71% of the people acquired arms for self-defense and protection of their families against persistent insecurity. The findings are interesting considering that possession of arms is illegal, yet the participants appeared impassive of legal implications. Hence, there is a need for security education as it relates to security as an obligation and as an individual right.

Contextually persistent insecurity, which is attributed to different agencies and actors, has created a demand for illegal firearms as a way of surviving violence. The situation has also promoted a culture of violence. This is a culture in which individuals presume that their survival is tied to possession of firearms, with firearms being depicted as a form of survival strategy. This explains the quest to acquire firearms by farming communities among whom the possession of firearms was initially largely limited. The implication of equating firearms possession to security is increased civilian militarization, the militarization of security, and a move towards normalization of violence.

Besides insecurity, the nature of atrocities committed by armed attackers (bandits, rustlers, and raiders) also fuels the demand for firearms for protection. For example, during an FGD held in Ngenia, participants recounted cases where heavily armed young men shot and killed anyone, at any time and sometimes even those without cows. A 30-year-old Agikuyu male and a KPR in Naibor also reported that “these days, armed young men carrying powerful guns openly kill people even those they should protect” (Participant 3, Oral interview, Naibor, 11-5-2018). There is a growing indiscriminate killing of the unarmed population. A 50-year-old female participant and a victim of cattle rustlers explained that “previously cattle raiders used to just steal livestock but now they kill women and children, rape women and kill men at day time” (Participant 1, Oral interview, Arjiijo, 10-3-2018). Similarly, in an FGD held in Ngenia village, women reported cases of sexual violation by young attackers. One of the participants, a 42 year-old Agikuyu female in the FGD said:

[Sobbing...] Myself and these women you see here, we cannot tell you how many times these cattle raiders have raped women in these villages. Many times, we have been forcefully taken to the Mukogodo forest [pointing in the direction of the forest] together with raided animals... [Bending down and sobbing] we have been repeatedly raped and left to die in the dark forest. Though ashamed, we are still here. We have had to plead with our men to acquire firearms and form groups to protect us. We live in fear that these raiders will keep coming back and forcing us to sleep with them and maybe one day, they will kill us all. We even fear to allow our young girls to stay here. (FGD7, Ngenia, 17-3-2018)

Possession of illegal firearms among attackers provides the ground for atrocities to be committed regardless of time, gender, and space. In response, community members and especially defense groups resort to counter-arming to protect their ethnic kin from the atrocities of the attackers. The repercussion of counter-arming is an arms race among the different ethnic communities, attackers, and defense groups. Additionally, communities using arms for their security have created room for atrocities that fit into war crimes to be committed. However, the internal security problems in Laikipia fall short of war situations hence such crimes are normalized. What

this means is that in addressing the problem of small arms in Laikipia North, there is a need to interrogate the different justifications for possession of firearms beyond cattle rustling, banditry, and violation of the law. This will allow for the pursuit of peace and security that goes beyond negative peace to addressing both structural, security, and cultural discourses that legitimize the acquisition of firearms for protection.

1.4. 'Stateness' and Communal Protection

Stateness entails the capacity of the state to exercise its fundamental functions (Ilyin et.al. 2012). With respect to stateness, the decision to embrace community protection initiatives was attributed to how the government exercises its monopoly of violence in the area. In one of the interviews, a 50 year-old male participant queried:

“Wewe nikuulize kati yetu na serikali nani anastahili awe na silaha (let me ask you [pointing at the researcher], between us and the government, who should possess arms?) [Pause]...We have always known that only the government has guns, but how come all these common people have all these guns for protection? Where is the government? (Participant 12, Oral interview, Chumvi, 6-3-2018)

Concerning the government exercising its authority, the possession of firearms for security is in itself a paradox for local communities. On the one hand, there is acknowledgment of state presence in the area. State presence reported in the study contradicts arguments by Kamenju, Singo and Wairagu (2003) and Mkutu (2007; 2008) that the acquisition of firearms for protection is solely because of the absence of government in peripheral frontiers. It is clear from the study that the existence of community initiatives such as possession of illegal firearms is not a question of the absence of government per se, but of failure by the government to exercise a monopoly of violence. The failure paves way for other actors to compete in the monopolization of the use of force.

Other than the failure of mandate and abuse of the monopoly of violence, in most FGD and key informant interviews, the government, as an institution that exercises authority over the land, was said to operate with limited authority or was perceived to be vaguely present. In another interview, a 48-year-old female participant argued:

We only see the government at certain periods, like when there are elections and when carrying out security operations. During elections, you will see many police and government agencies working here but after the elections, they are pulled out. It is as if the people of this area only exist during elections and then we cease to exist. All those other times we are left on our own to take care of our security. (Participant 13, Oral interview, Lekiji, 1-4-2018)

The feedback depicts an unenthusiastic approach to insecurity and limited government control over insecurity in Laikipia North. The unenthusiastic approach concurs with Nyanjom (2014) study on the re-marginalization of pastoralist communities by post-independence governments in Kenya. This approach by the government further reflects its perception of communal violence as an inconsequential threat to national security. Resultantly, the approach gives relevance to community security initiatives. Furthermore, the approach creates an environment of divergent social controls to which different social organizations (the state but not as a political institution defined by Weber) on the one hand and local agencies on the other hand struggle to establish control (Migdal, 2001). While the extent to which community initiatives have succeeded in countering communal violence may be insignificant, the absence of government as a political authority makes the initiatives viable. This is irrespective of the fact that some of the methods are a grave threat to human security.

Clearly, government presence is linked to critical periods; elections and security operations. These periods are essential for the security of any regime and hence the domineering presence of state security agencies. From this, the nature of state intervention affirms Weaver's (2008) view that the government worries about security problems and not peace problems. Communal violence in Laikipia North is not strictly a peace problem but rather a security problem. This is due to attacks on civilians, criminality, offenses, possession of illegal firearms, killing of security officers, attacks on sites of strategic interest, and overall disregard of the law. Ultimately, the security problems threaten the national security of the state as a political entity. This explains the emphasis on security problems and security of the regime, which in turn exposes communities to vagaries of localized security approaches.

Comparatively, in one of the FGDs, a 38-year-old female participant further noted:

The KPR and NKI are always here when we need them. In our CBC, we have a committee that always protects us, provides water, pasture, and give money to for our children's education. Serikaliniyawatuwengingenasiyosisi [Government is for other people, not us]. Our local elders, NKI, KPR, and committee in CBC take care of our needs and they make sure we are safe. (FGD6, Ilopolei, 29-3-2018)

What this means is that in the absence of the government, localized security infrastructure constitutes “performing state”. That is, a situation in which non-state actors plays the role of the state in the provision of security (Jeffrey, 2012). This explains the presence of cultural warriors (Morans), vigilantes, elders, CBC committees, and in some cases non-state actors (rangers and scouts from conservancies and ranches). All these agencies and groups act as primary sources of security. A form of stateness is constituted with actors, whose main aim is to fill the security gap, resulting in possession of firearms, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, vigilantes, non-state actors, and customary institutions in the domain of community security.

A good illustration of the rationale for “performing state” is a checkpoint in Ilopolei village where elders who are perceived as the guardians of communal resources, community endeavors, and survival needs had resorted to erecting a checkpoint. Sitting and monitoring the checkpoint, the elders collect taxes from lorries transporting sand from the area. In their assertion, the money would go to fund the education of children in their community-based conservancy. Such an instance of “performing state” by the elders is in part consistent with other studies in South Sudan and Northern Uganda where hybrid and alternative institutions were involved in “collecting taxes” (Leonardi & Santschi, 2016, p. 44; p. 94). In the process of meeting the needs of the community, the elders manning and collecting taxes act the state. Furthermore, the security flop by the government makes it difficult to enforce hybrid and bottom-up violence deterrence initiatives. It also results in loss of revenue and a lack of government involvement in managing environmental issues linked to sand harvesting.

1.5. Gendering security for Protection

In many communities, provision of security is primarily viewed as a reserved responsibility of men. Gendered construction of roles is such that men are the custodian of security, further explaining the predominance of men in self-defense groups, NKI, Security Committees, and KPR in Laikipia North. In key informant interviews, participants argued; “it is the work of men to protect the society (FGD 2, Lonyiek, 1-5-2018). In Ngenia, a 42-year-old Agikuyu female participant in FGD explained that:

Today we feel more secure because of the vigilante group. Before the men formed this group, cattle rustlers used to abduct women. Now whenever the cattle rustlers come, some men pursue the attackers and others remain behind to protect us. (FGD7, Ngenia, 17-3-2018)

Arguably, therefore, the quest to fulfill societal obligation of providing security to ethnic kin and property contributes to the formation of the vigilante group dominated by men, with women and children being the beneficiaries. Gendering protection as a form of community initiative against communal violence sustains the argument that security is manly or masculine. Gendering security contradicts UN Security Council Resolution 1325 that seeks to address the role of women, in war, nation building, and reconstruction. Consequently, to counter gender dimensions and respond to atrocities committed against women, there is need to deconstruct societal discourses of women as the victims, protected, vulnerable and mere beneficiaries of peace dividends.

On a different note, among pastoralist communities, failure by men to protect their community from attacks earns them a feminine label, and the perception of being as weak as women. A 40-year-old community elder and a member of the security committee in Lonyiek illustrated how the use of feminine labeling prompted them to acquire firearms to face their attackers:

Sometimes ago, the Turkanas would refer to Pokot men as women because they could not fight against them. At that time, the Turkanas had firearms but the Pokots did not have. When the Pokots acquired firearms in the early 1980s, they started attacking us, the Samburus in Laikipia, and they would call us women, and say we were not real men. Therefore, we had to acquire firearms so that we could defend ourselves from their attacks. Today we still protect ourselves even if the police are here because we do not want our attackers to think we are weak like women. (Participant 8, Oral Interview, Lonyiek, 2-5-2018)

From the above extract, lack of firearms or the presence of the police is not a sufficient reason for men not to defend their community from attacks. The elder's assertions were further supported by a 29-year-old Moran who asserted; "even if there are police here, us men have to protect our people and their property" (FGD3, Arjijo 10-3-2018). This view further demonstrates the social and stereotypical construction and use of masculinity and femininity in security discourse, essentially dovetailing with Butler (1990) who argues that in conflict, gender is an important aspect of masculinity, protection, and security. Notably, emphasizing on the protection role means that the duty is less circumstantial but a part of a social contract and a societal obligation. Consequently, despite the presence of modern forms of protection (the police) men still have to protect their communities as proof of their prowess and dependability to fulfill their societal obligation.

Other factors linked to the predilection of community initiatives against communal violence include the weakness of existing conventional security institutions; traditional, hybrid, and state institutions. Regarding traditional institutions, a 47-year-old local administrator suggested that there is a link between the rise of self-defense groups and the weakening of traditional authority. In his opinion, "elders are no longer influential and no one listens to them since they have lost their mandate in the society" (Participant 9, Oral interview, MNM, 26-4-2018). The loss of influence has created a gap in the community and consequently, according to a 29-year-old Maasai male moran, "we are the ones on guard providing security to our communities since elders have become very weak and others listen to politicians and not what the people want" (FGD 3, Arjijo, 10-3-2018). The declining authority of the elders and influence from politicians has seen the youth assume the role of guaranteeing security. The emphasis on the shifts in traditional security roles is consistent with what is in other literature regarding the nature of security in post-colonial societies (Mulu, 2009). Additionally the findings concur with Sagawa (2010) research on youth infiltration in the domain of elders in the rules of the battlefield. The involvement of the youth in managing insecurity is an indication that insecurity has pervaded traditional security structure.

With the hybrid system, the ineffectiveness of security institutions was widely reported. The KPR was said not to understand basic laws and often resorted to the use of force. The participants also noted that failure by the government to pay NPR has led the officers to lend out their arms to criminals. Besides, there is an imbalanced recruitment of NPR across different ethnic groups. With NKI, the dominance of male and elderly members is making the group ineffective to address communal conflict issues. For instance, it was reported that politicians appointed most elders and therefore they only address issues that did not pose a threat to the political interests of their political patrons.

The need for individual members to safeguard their lives, livelihoods, ethnic kin, and economic interests coupled with the failure of government institutions rationalizes community initiatives. For community members, limited stateness leads to local groups emerging to fill the security void. On the other hand, for the state security agencies, sustaining control in areas with limited government presence, unpredictable economic security, and maintaining order are core to the state's approach to communal violence.

1.6. Linking Livelihood and Protection

For both the government and community members, economic security is critical in the adoption of local measures of countering communal violence. For instance, for the conservancies and ranches, the protection of wildlife contributes to the militarization of wildlife. Accordingly, a 65-year-old elder and a member of a group ranch lamented that:

In the last 3years, [they] have faced serious security problems and they include invasion by herders, armed Morans, and cattle rustlers. Yes, the government indeed helps [them], but security from the state is limited. So [they] have had to hire local Morans and arm them heavily to protect wildlife. But arming is not enough sometimes [they] allow shot to kill otherwise [they] will have no wildlife here. (Participant 4, Oral Interview, Ewaso, 5-4-2018)

The violent threat against the vast conservancies and wildlife is increasing. While the state was applauded for providing security, the state's efforts are limited hence promoting local approaches such as arming scouts, use of electric fencing, hiring of local Morans as security guards, digging trenches around the land and approving shoot to kill orders against intruders. This argument is in line with Duffy's (2014) study on the militarization of wildlife in Africa. Increased poaching and human encroachment in protected areas inform this militarization since encroachment threatens the economic value of wildlife. While the measures may have threatened the

livelihoods of neighboring communities, economic security rather than community survival becomes the core driver of wildlife protection.

From our research, it emerged that both the government and the conservancies view wildlife conservation as key in economic security. Economic security here refers to the “ability of the state to timely and effectively preserve material resources that are needed for other dimensions of national security” (Rotaru, 2009). Conservancies are factors of national security because on the one hand, they contribute to national revenue through taxation and tourism and on the other hand, wildlife adds to the international prestige of Kenya. This is reinforced by the fact that Laikipia is recognized as one of East Africa’s most important sites of wildlife conservation and a world-renowned center for wildlife conservation. Collectively, these aspects constitute the economic security of the state.

The value of conservancies to the state was alluded to do during the field study. Participants observed, “whenever there is a problem in the conservancies, the government responds very first compared to when local communities are attacked” (Participant 17, Oral interview, MNM 27-4-2018). A 50-year-old male and a member of one of the security committees in Laikipia North noted that “whenever there is an attack, the police do not give security to the people, but they run to the ranches and conservancies and they leave us alone so we have to protect ourselves against being attacked”(Participant 12, Oral interview, Chumvi, 6-3-2018). The above description demonstrates inclination by the state to secure strategic resources that have greater economic value to national security. The economic value of conservancies creates biases in security management especially where communal conflicts are involved. The situation is even more intricate in Laikipia North where local communities are seen as a threat to estimated \$2 million revenue due to their perceived bad economic practices. Overall, the narrative of the good and the evil of wildlife conservancies fit in with Manichean terms.

The aspect of economic security also mattered in regards to how local ethnic communities respond to violence because communal violence fundamentally affects livelihood sources. A 38-year-old Agikuyu male participant from the farming community gave an example by noting that:

Anyone living here will tell you, there is no security here, so if you insist on staying, you will lose your life or become poor, so we acquire firearms to defend ourselves because this is our land. If we die, we will die on the streets with nothing. So we stay and fight for ourselves. (Participant 20, Oral interview, Ngenia, 17-3-2018)

The language of self-protection denotes that despite the reality of physical death, security against social death (physical death that results from deprivation) is paramount. A 65 year-old Maasai male elder interviewed in Ewaso Group Ranch further alluded to the fear of social death by pointing out that “people here don’t fear and care about death, all they care about is their cows” (Participant 4, Oral interview, Ewaso, 5-4-2018). The current findings dovetail with Macharia’s (2011) study on the influence of social death on the proliferation of firearms and the normalization of violence. The urgency to safeguard economic security denigrates the fear of physical death and instead reinforces the need for local safety systems.

Moreover, besides protecting economically valuable resources acquisition of firearms for protection was also linked to ease of convertibility of livelihood assets. Of particular interests is the ease of acquiring firearms by exchanging them with cattle, despite Laikipia North being far away from an international border. As such, the prevalence of firearms cannot be linked to the existence of a porous border but more to community initiatives aimed at protecting livelihoods and communal assets. For example, a 40-year-old male participant from Ilopolei pointed out that “with one cow I can get an Ak47 and with three cows I can get a G3” (Participant 6, Oral interview, Ilopolei, 28-3-2018). The argument suggests that livestock which translates into physical capital has become a means to get protection tools. A 56-year-old community member expounded on the culture of gun acquisition:

When our young men are initiated, we acquire firearms for them so that they can protect our livestock and us. We have people who bring guns here. When we do not have money, we exchange our cows for guns. But sometimes, we sell the cows and get guns. We also pay the people who bring guns with cows so that they can train the young men on how to use them. (Participant 17, Oral interview, Maundu-ni-Meri, 27-4-2018)

From the foregoing, the presence of intermediaries trading in firearms facilitates training and access to firearms. Furthermore, the ease of converting livelihood assets into liquid cash creates efficacy in the acquisition of

firearms for protection. The study findings in part agree with studies on the proliferation of arms among pastoralist communities in Ethiopia and Uganda. The studies, which were conducted, by Sagawa (2010) and Mkutu (2008) found out that one male calf in Ethiopia would be traded for 30 AK47 bullets, while in Uganda a bottle of beer can be exchanged for a bullet. In the case of Laikipia, cows are used to get the guns. This shows the versatility of the livestock economy as a means by which communities meet different security needs. Unfortunately, this versatility results in an arms race and constant raids due to the multifaceted security values of cattle. Livestock in this regard transcend the view that pastoralism is not merely an economic system but a resource that can be used by the communities to satisfy a myriad of socio-economic and geo-political needs.

2. Conclusion

This study concludes that institutional, geographical and group perceptions are primary determinants for the use of community protection initiatives. State securitization of Laikipia North and existent resources contributes significantly to state interventions in communal conflicts. Bureaucratic and institutional failures contribute to the use of local protection initiatives. Proliferation of arms has contributed to increased demand for security among pastoralist communities while among farming communities their perception of arms as a source of security creates a desire to acquire arms for protection. Among pastoralist communities, the ease of converting economic assets makes arms an attractive source of alternative security and subsequent civilian militarization and proliferation of arms for protection.

Equally, state absence and failure to exercise monopoly of violence are overriding factors in the use of local self-protection measures. Among farming communities, experiences of stateness (state authority and infrastructure) have impact on community reliance on state security agencies for protection. In the context of limited state authority, non-state actors and traditional authority assume the role of “performing state” in matters relating to security. Cultural beliefs, stereotyping and engendering the role of men and youth in provision of security entrench the existence of alternative self-protection measures.

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