

Banditry in Kerio Valley, Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya: Blessings in Disguise, Masked Media Coverage, and State Securitization

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ABSTRACT

In the Kenyan environment, banditry is prevalent among the pastoral communities, impacting on peace and security sustainability. Conflict-displaced victims are associated with positive effects of the conflicts. The focus of this research was on un-intended effects of Kerio Valley conflicts in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya, an ecosystem where mainstream media failed to highlight social impacts of banditry in the facade of consistent securitization by government. The study was grounded on the role of realist theory of forced migration. The study identified two active frames in Kerio Valley conflict: the expansionist narrative and the traditional livestock balancing cultural activity. The study participants involved 43 respondents stratified selected from the locals, elders, women, and the youth and 17 conflict-displaced victims identified using snowball technique. Expert opinions from 11 Key informants purposively selected from religious organizations, CBOs, NGOs, media sector, and national provincial administration conversant with conflict management, took part in the study. Data collection used questionnaire, key informant interviews and field observations. A descriptive research design was used to determine what blessings in disguise were evident, how media was masked and how the conflict had been framed to create securitization effect. The study findings reveal that the expansionist narrative is linked with masked media theory and blessings in disguise outcome. Therefore, this article is designed to address blessings in disguise, masked media and the securitization processes in Kerio Valley. Respondents at 100% said that conflict-displaced victims settled and lived a rosy life, engaging in various civic activities as they integrated and fully assume new roles in society without media and government attention to their plight. The study concluded that banditry in Kerio Valley, despite causing reverse development, opened new fronts to refocus on peacebuilding programmes. The Study recommended that government should protect and preserve human rights principles of conflict-displaced victims through peacebuilding to identify and recognize resilient efforts to support.

Keywords: Banditry, Kerio Valley, Blessings in disguise, Masked Media, Securitization, Elgeyo-Marakwet County.

INTRODUCTION

Globally and regionally, the security situation should be seen to support the thoughts attached to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in its entirety for any meaningful stability in the society. The entire Kerio Valley in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya, went through numerous media exposure reports on reverse infrastructural, economic and social development courtesy of deadly banditry attacks enabled by the use of automatic weapons that hitherto was a government functionality (Nolasco, 2017). The article determined effects of conflicts, blessings in disguise, masked media and securitization in Kerio Valley. Each time there is an event of hostile conflicts in Kerio Valley, different frames come either from non-residents, government officials, or the natives themselves. The conflict is framed to suit different situations; being labelled as

banditry, cattle rustling, cattle raids, or Ngorokos invasion as traced to colonial era where it was merely accepted as a traditional practice, never-mind resulting in human deaths, loss of livelihoods, widespread property destruction and displacement of people (Madueke, 2023). Ngorokos were merely lethal armed civilians with unstructured command making it difficult to trace and identify them by their culture.

The cause of Kerio Valley conflict is attributed to uncontrolled proliferation of guns since the mid-1970s when the first gun-influenced attacks happened in Kaben Location, bordering West Pokot County thus becoming a paradigm shift in the conflict situation (Kipchumba, 2019). The researcher's goal was to identify opportunities that came as a result of the age-long Kerio Valley conflict. Given that conflicts are presented with negative effects, Kerio Valley conflict has a mix of fortunes and disaster, however, this study is interested in positive outcomes associated with the conflict-displaced victims and how media puts a veil in-between them and reality, thereby avoiding coverage of such fortunes coming from the hostile conflict aftermath as attributed to sections of banditry victims. The media in Kenya is largely private and Kerio Valley is covered by Community Radio and Television (TV) to a small extent. The country has a state radio and TV, both of which have no audience appeal, hence no impact on its usage (Kalyango Jr, & Eckler, 2010) and (Otieno, & Ndonye, 2020).

Majority of the Kerio Valley residents have the feeling that both the prevalent electronic media and government agencies have had a hand in securitizing the pastoral communities of Kerio Valley, hence creating artificial suspicions and fear to non-locals who would have ventured into the study area on peacebuilding programmes. According to Saleem, Hanan, and Mian, (2014), the media is a tool that society relies upon to influence stabilization, coexistence and cohesiveness of the people with different ideologies. However, the same media is thought to create fear through securitization of the study area (Sarikakis, 2012).

According to Wepundi, *et al.* (2012), government indifference has been the norm in Kerio Valley. Several deadly attacks have taken place with little concern from each passing government. In the spirit of breaking barriers, Kerio Valley communities were made solitary through resilient concepts, demystifying the worst impacts of conflicts and again identifying media-influenced peacebuilding contrary to masked media in conflict environments. The study further aimed at discouraging stakeholders' securitization of Kerio Valley to enhance peace and security. Therefore, the study aims to examine positive impacts of the conflicts that have condemned Kerio Valley to lawlessness and which the media have not captured and reported.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design is an approach used by the researcher to integrate different components of the study in a rational manner, and to address the research problem. According to Myers, Well, and Lorch Jr, (2013), a research design is a plan to respond to study questions developed for research findings based on the data collection, interpretation and data discussion. Further, Omair, (2015) underscored the importance of selecting appropriate study design in research. The study, banditry in Kerio valley, Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya: blessings in disguise, masked media coverage, and state securitization used descriptive research design to answer to the research questions which embraced the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The design was suitable because there was little known about the research problem. The researcher also used stratified, purposive, and snowball sampling techniques to select different study participants.

Suitability of Selected Site

Kerio Valley is part of the larger Elgeyo-Marakwet County which was subjected to multi-agency security operation from March 2022 and is yet to be called off as at the time of this research in June 2024. It is sandwiched between Cherangany escarpment and Tiaty hills in Baringo County which is to the East while West Pokot is to the West of the study area (Mariita, & Keller, 2007). Kerio Valley was purposively selected for the study because of its high frequency of, brazen attacks, deaths, and displacement of attack victims. The banditry activities have persisted without cessation despite the heavy presence of government agents. The study area stretches 80 km by 10 km wide and is known for all the wrong reasons; landslides, invasion by

elephants on farms and the deadly conflicts that has magnified insecurity (Chirchir, 2018). The map of Elgeyo-Marakwet shown by Figure 1, have the study area identified by the blue shaded area.

Map of Elgeyo-Marakwet Showing Administrative Units



Source: County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP II) 2018 - 2022

Figure 1: Map of Elgeyo-Marakwet County

Target Population

According to Ayala, & Elder, (2011), target population is the set of individuals considered for a study whereas its sample is just a small part of the identified target population that is put on study to represent the entire population. The target population was Kerio Valley pastoral communities living in the site marked in blue in *Figure 1*, comprising of three Wards; Endo Ward, Sambirir Ward, and Arror Ward and the banditry-displaced victims and including Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Non-governmental Organization (NGOs), and expert informants based in the study area.

Study Objectives

The study's purpose was to explore blessings in disguise arising from Kerio Valley pastoral communities' hostile conflicts.

Scope

The study is confined to Kerio Valley stretch in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kenya as identified in blue in *Figure 1*. The study area is a narrow stretch with hostile terrain between Tugen Hills and Cherangany Hills (Östberg, & Caretta, 2017), a vast-land that encompass three Electoral Wards; Endo, Sambirir, and Arror Wards. The study is limited to blessings in disguise of displaced and migrated population, with masked media, and securitization impacts on Kerio Valley pastoral community. The research data collection was limited to

descriptive design supported by research techniques that include stratified sampling, purposive sampling and snowball sampling to select research participants in exploring the perceived blessings in disguise in the face of masked media and state securitization of Kerio Valley pastoral communities' hostile conflicts. The study was also grounded on three social theories; masked media theory, realist theory of forced migration and securitization theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In explaining the relationship between blessings in disguise, masked media and securitization, the researcher focused on one theory; Realist Theory of Forced Migration.

Realist Theory of Forced Migration

In society, disagreements are inevitable but not to the magnitude other sections of population are forced to migrate to oblivion. In that instance, government has a social contract with its citizens to provide protection from criminals and famine from prolonged drought. In the contribution by Collinson, (2011) and Hammerstad, (2014) people who are displaced and migrated to other areas create new scramble for resources, cause climate change effects due to the unexpected increase in population. Demand for land for cultivated increases, which means land surface cover is removed for crop farming while at the same time compete for few employment opportunities. The theory is applicable to the study considering that Kerio Valley conflict-displaced victims migrated and were hosted in other Counties. In their new ecosystem, the victims acquired education, employment and property that now is a subject of blessings in disguise being explored in the study.

Empirical Review

In the opinion of Knopf, (2006), it is necessary to seek the understanding of other similar authors' knowledge on related topics which will enrich the research knowledge. The researcher delves into the information of other scholars on masked media, blessings in disguise and securitization in Kerio Valley pastoral community.

Blessings in Disguise

In cognizant of the concept 'Blessings in Disguise', Kerio Valley disturbance became a game changer to the affected residents. The observation by Verme, & Schuettler, (2021), pointed out that accumulated benefits through displacement of population go to the host communities enjoying increased employment opportunities, probably with increased wages and enhanced pricing of farm produce per households. Blessings in disguise therefore, is a situation in the Kerio Valley displaced victims hence remaining more resilient away from habitual environment to enjoy continuity with relative stability. The researcher, while interacting with the residents of Kerio Valley learnt that members who migrated out of the region realized positive unintended consequence of insecurity aftermath (Daase, & Friesendorf, 2010).

Victims of the insecurity in Kerio Valley realized that they could survive elsewhere in the space, much better while still retaining their ancestral farms and identity but they are anonymous in their new found habitation (Vincet, & Sorenson, (Eds.), 2001). Although it is painful losing lives and property, the conflict provided undisputedly gigantic blessings in disguise to the displaced people of Kerio Valley who became successful farmers, and academicians - to the extent they gave back surplus of their income to their affected residents in the Valley. In this article, the phrase pastoral community as referred to severally, translate to a part of the society that solely relies on mixed-farming of cereals and keeping domesticated animals as their source of 'production'. In the Kenyan conflict context, displaced population has its consequences and aftermath particularly in the hosting environment (Winsor, Manolis, Kaufmann, and Kashyap, 2012). According to Tafere, (2018) such displacement contributes to environmental degradation, either directly or indirectly because the incoming mammoth population compete with host community on the same unchanging landscape and production with host acceptance to integrate. However, this study looks at what positive effects the migrated people have on themselves and back on the former immediate community.

The majority of schools that were destroyed and vacated are being renovated by the people and victims who went out fearing for their safety but performed economically well to the extent they came back to help equip school libraries, create mentorship foundations, peacebuilding foundations and youth oriented programs of behaviour change. The behaviour and activities exhibited by the victims who were probably labelled cowards by those who remained holed up in the escarpment stalagmites of Kerio Valley victims as a result of the incessant banditry activity are what bring out the blessings in disguise theory. With strong attachment to Kerio Valley, migrated victims of violence would occasionally look back to assist those in running battles with cattle rustlers while championing peacebuilding initiatives, providing other defensive and sustainable resources for physical development of the ecosystem, they used to call home which as well is blessings in disguise to the locals. Kerio Valley residents acknowledge that those displaced by violence or who could not withstand any artificial fear that the next hour is not certain proceeded to acquire new life in nearby Counties. According to Siebert and Kenneth, (2009), majority of successful displaced victims after a while came back as agents of peacebuilding after obtaining requisite education.

Masked Media in a Fragile Kerio Valley

As used in this article, the situation of masked media, does not point to scenarios of specific media being covered or prevented to operate, but it is a figurative and literal situation that media is either ignorantly or rationally abdicates duty of coverage, educating, reporting, and exposing social issues in the environment (Marino, 2021) in a manner to influence change. Similarly and considering the media in Kerio Valley is largely privately-owned, and for fear of reprisals from the state the media technically shy away from exposing certain concerns with public interest thereby masking its covering and responsibility, literally. The argument is supported in the contribution by Biela-Woloncej, (2012) while opining on linguistic masking.

Despite few business people putting Lorries on the rocky and muddy roads, the cost of vehicle maintenance is enormous that drive them out of business, as was observed by Marigat, & Cheruiyotomo, (2022), in addition to bandits' attacks which displace Kerio Valley residents out of their homes, schools and farms, thus impoverishing them more. Generally, the private media rely on half-truths, lies and sensational social issues with resale value for higher profit (Asak, & Molale, 2020). The masked media theory as used in this study is purely strong academically and the possibility of remaining afloat and in business for longer period is sustainable because it avoids hitting hard as journalistic work demand. The weakness of the theory rests on associated media attribute of manufacturing fear, avoiding immersing itself into the new fronts to grow career in journalism. The masked media theory is, however, applicable to the study blessings in disguise. The masked media theory as presented here considers the electronic media of radio, TV, and the print media to have failed to awaken government and the international community on the plight of the displaced and migrated Kerio Valley residents, reconstruction of the economic infrastructure and building sustainable peace in the study area.

Cherop, Muchanga, and Mulinya, (2019), noted that the economic potential of Kerio Valley justifies investing on its feasible future, hence the need for government focusing on improving the infrastructure in the foreseeable future. The road network to the study area is unfinished works despite evident efforts by government to gravel them (Murkomen, 2011). In as much as regionally, the Kenyan electronic media is rated as being vibrant by the Open Society Foundations and best in the expanse (Nyabuga, *et al.*, 2013), however, it failed to cover, report and highlight both sides of the one-sided conflict to expose banditry effects on the affected environment and on displaced victims. Owing to media business-oriented mind-set and government indifference to guarantee media security, a space and scenario called masked media arises as the norm due to deliberate and rational choice by government to nose-dive media security that would have ventured deep into the Valley to expose and highlight impacts of the conflicts.

The media has consistently failed to see good and positive aspects brought out by calamities but it always emphasize and report with gusto on the negative impacts of conflict (Garz, 2014). According to Harris-Brandts, & Sichinava, (2024), United Nations humanitarian and development agencies recognizes internally

displaced persons as a distinct category that deserve more societal attention as in Resolution 2022 referenced as A/HRC/RES/50/6. The resolution obligated mainstreaming of displaced persons, human rights issues and dialogue with authorities to protect victims against violent conflicts. Further, the UN body relies on media to highlight problems and phenomena in society, however in the case of Kerio Valley, the media was muted and masked by several factors including fear of media safety in exposing government's indifference while reporting critical effects of the conflicts (Menkhaus, 2008; Entman, 2012 and Jimris-Rekve, 2016).

With the media conspicuously missing to document activities and events through photographs, investigative videos, and individual victim stories with reference to the displaced and migrated victims of violence, the media masked itself from positive occurrences. The media here is electronic of radio and television at the lowest rating because Kerio Valley is not accessible by print media due to level of illiteracy, neither is social media useful due to its limited usage. The UN Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) numbering eight achieved uneven development by 2015 globally, thereby necessitating the introduction of Sustainable Development Goals (Seventeen SDGs), that were adopted to accelerate development in all spheres post 2015, whereby global goals were linked to national goals with particular approach of gender mainstreaming for inclusivity and sustainable peace and prosperity (Liu, Yu, and Wang, 2015). However, where the goals were not met in the short-term, the mid-term goal was stretched to the year 2050 (Phillips, 2024)).

In Kerio Valley, the hostile conflicts impaired the functioning of SDG No. 16 on peaceful coexistence and in general SDG Nos. 1 - 9, on societal development within the area of study. In this article, the researcher argues that - the 'one-sided conflict' of Kerio Valley exhibit masked media situations, despite the consequential advantages to the displaced and affected families, precisely to those who took the dilemma with positive attitude. The expected reverse development phenomenon rests with the natives remaining in Kerio Valley as the exiled excelled in academia, economic endeavours and socially, thereby becoming resilient to the hard situations back in the former ecosystem.

Understandably, different scholars and organizations have varied definition of SDGs, however, the Brundtland Commission is a bit clearer and accommodative. The Commission defined sustainable development as such development that meet the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Borowy, 2013). It is, therefore, the objective of Kerio Valley displaced and migrated victims to achieve the second generation SDGs timeline meant to improve the lives of the locals in the study area and further partner with government to uplift the economic wellbeing of the Kerio Valley pastoral community who are unable to decide for themselves, but instead bask to wait for nature's fate.

The Kerio Valley conflict has already impact on the national security, rule of law and its democratic governance (Osamba, 2000) because the conflict resulted in part of the population being displaced away from their ecosystem to far areas as Cherangany escarpments, abandoning their farms as another group of victims sought refuge in neighbouring Counties for instance in Uasin-Gishu and Trans-zoia, where they are viewed as refugees within their home-country. This category of displaced population did not allow victimization to pull them back but instead went beyond their limits and imagination to become successful academically, economically and socially. The researcher notes that, initially, the migrated population sought casual jobs as maize plantations-harvesters before rethinking their future survival. Then acquired economic boost in form of land-resource for income generation (Madueke, 2023). The population living away from Kerio Valley (Displaced victims of conflicts) are currently in the period 2023-2024, the peacebuilding crusaders, whose opinions carries more weight than that for the government, one that strong force of peacebuilding by a conflict displaced resident is Pangana Foundation which champions for peace and security through education scholarships, art and music and provision of incentives to communal economic endeavours.

Securitization of Kerio Valley

The Kerio Valley pastoral communities' hostilities have several players at play, some visible while others are hushed. Starting point in the conflicts is a forceful robbery of livestock from the Marakwet community by

armed Pokot community with accompanying wanton killings of human beings, young and old, irrespective of demographics. The immediate insecurity results being displacement of victims, abandonment of farms, and grazing fields, artificial famine, and outbreak of waterborne disease including Kwashiorkor in children (Kifle, *et al.*, 2003). Since the conflict have a common and constant denominator, “livestock”, the study respondents point fingers at wealth politicians and senior security agents engaged in commercial cattle business.

Just like any other conflict around the globe, the hostilities in Kerio Valley come with direct human and economic impacts thus qualifies linking it to the relevant SDGs. The concept of securitization, according to Floyd, *et al.* (2022), explains a process that social issues are presented by an actor and constructed as security threats which audience may accept thereby enabling some measures that could either propagate the same or address it all together. The area has experienced attacks orchestrated by Pokot Community from both West and East Pokot Counties targeting primarily at stealing livestock from the Marakwet Community. The activities are enabled by the presence of automatic rifles in the hands of the Pokot community members, although acquired illegally. In the process of stealing the livestock the attackers or bandits cause deaths, mayhem, injuries, displacement, and reverse infrastructural development (Musau, Ichani, and Mulu, 2023). Then as a consequence of consistent securitization by actors victims migrate to other neighbouring counties seeking to enjoy fruits of peace and security stability of society.

Therefore, Kerio Valley communities courtesy of securitization suffered from damaged infrastructure, hindered economic prosperity and absence of effective provision of public goods and services that include clean water, electricity, education, and medical treatment (Maisori, 2019). The impact of Kerio Valley conflicts is attributed to the securitization on one hand by the electronic media on how it handles issues that come into their attention for example making sensational-seeking coverage; enlarging anecdotic stories on who to blame and by an indifferent government.

After a period of lull activity, the electronic and seldom print media relapse with securitization aspects without seeking solutions of stability and with little regard for the physical and mental health of the affected society (Vasterman, Yzermans, and Dirkzwager, 2005). However, the media with wide coverage in the study are the radio and political opinion leaders using public gathering called “Barazas” in Kenyan dialects, and marginally the Television, all of which are privately owned. The media in Kenya is largely privately-owned (Onguny, 2021), however controls are exerted by several legislations, the Kenyan Constitution, the ‘Preservation of Public Security Act and the Penal Code sections 52 and 57(1) and the Media Act (Moggi, & Tessier, 2001) and Wanyama, (2015).

In a serious and candid engagement with the inhabitants of Kerio Valley and the displaced victims who were traced via snowball approach, it emerged that there has not been time that successive governments responded to the plight of Kerio Valley pastoral communities, however devastating a banditry attack would have been, which then qualifies to provoke humanitarian assistance including physical development assistance that impact on key development targets. In the Kenyan social palaver the Pokot community have time and again attacked the national security agencies with impunity, receiving no response of the time. The Kerio Valley residents including the displaced and migrated victims in their participation in the study noted that the social behaviour harboured by the Pokot community attackers was taken by successive governments from the 1970s to the periods of 2020s, to mean an outdated culture by primitive community individuals thereby almost dismissing the atrocities as inconsequential. By government repudiating to criminalize banditry, such actions embolden raiders and their back banner promoters while destroying culture, livelihood, economic development, and general infrastructural development of other pastoral communities.

According to Ajabshir *et al.* (2022), majority of marginalized communities suffer from acute malnutrition which is the concern of SDG No.1, however, the second-generation sustainable development goals are designed to be achieved by 2050 linking all developed countries and the developing countries to one page where the underdeveloped are incentivized to climb the development ladder in all spheres of social change. Conversely, according to Gates *et al.*, (2016) the concerns of malnutrition have not been a problem with the

conflict-hit communities in Kerio Valley despite the regular displacements. The major impact affecting displaced people of Kerio Valley while relocating to other areas for a better living is being vulnerable to disease and epidemics which answers to the public health concern (SDG No. 3) as observed by Collier *et al.* (2003). However, in an article authored by Lacina, & Gleditsch, (2005) and Hoeffler, (2017), several deaths in the Kerio Valley belt occur as a result of attacks by bandits raiding with intent to commit felony of livestock theft and further expand their territorial boundary for pasture. The aftermath of the attacks cause more death than natural attrition or being in the frontline engagement combat.

In a spirited attempt by government to restore normalcy in the region, they cause more insecurity and continues to securitize the entire valley through systematic abductions of suspected youth involved in cross-border raids, whose bodies are later found lifeless by the road side, forests, or dumped in river-banks away from their location of abduction as corroborated in a similar encounter, in the year 2010, where a RAND survey done by the United States of America (US) military department of personnel in Iraq with respondents accusing the US government of instigating worse atrocities than the ISIS enemy (Willis, & LaTourrette, 2009). The security and safety of the environment is what the SDGs envisages to be developed. It was further noted by Lorey, (2015) that due to insensitive of government, they cause more insecurity in her people that ultimately is manipulated by criminals. On the contrary, bandits sustained attacks in the confusion thus killing, maiming people, and even a primary school teacher (Mr. Simon Cheserek) and an Agricultural Extension officer, whose lives were cut short by heartless bandits on May 21, 2021 as was reported in the “The Standard Newspaper”, June 19, of 2021 (Maina, Limo, and Keter, 2023)..

Securitization in this article refers to how different stakeholders including government use narratives and frames that portray Kerio Valley as a crime scene, full of lawlessness, and nothing positive out of it. Therefore, Kerio Valley day-in-day-out hostile conflicts are a product of consistent securitization with the use of phrases and words like “Valley of Death, Dangerous and Disturbed or hostile terrain” as was noted by Godlewski, Skalski, and Mruczyk, (2021). Kerio Valley has been associated with deadly attacks that never discriminate on school going children, babies on vaccinations exercise translates to empty farmlands and displacement. It is not lost on all that press freedom and the social freedom of expression allow the media to inform the public about government activities, while promoting accountability by state officials and further catalysing social development (Dworznik, 2016) and (Schreiber, & Kampf, 2021).

Government Indifference

In Kenya there are two levels of government; national and county governments. The county government is just a service provision government with no autonomy, however it is recognized as local government, able to make legislations that are applied only within the county borders. In this article, any mention of government directly refers to the national government that is sovereign with security apparatus that enforce peace and security country-wide.

In the contemporary world environment, tradition has it that government provides security and safety to all ecosystems found within its territory. This observation was acknowledged by Sharma (2015), who affirmed that it is the responsibility of every government to protect her citizens and their property and any other person within her territory, from any form of harm, psychological or otherwise. However, the governments of Kenya, with Kerio Valley in deep turmoil, conveniently resist all real and perceived complaints of violent attacks by Pokot bandits despite authentic reported killings, displacement and destruction of economic infrastructure. Conversely, such display in the perceptions of the masses is associated with conflict beneficiary of possible imbalances (Paula & Allan, 2010).

The communities in conflict, in Kerio Valley surprisingly share vernacular language which directly confirms the reason why government becomes reluctant, to the extent of assuming and neglecting the hostile conflict complaints and hence fail to tame the perpetration of violence. Likewise the government projected indifference, erred when it perceives the conflict as environmentally induced (Waikenda, 2017). Across the

Kerio Valley environment, the media has portrayed the entire valley stretch as an area that is dangerous to work in, live in or do business, thereby giving the national government authorities reason to securitize the Valley as ‘disturbed and dangerous’ to create unpleasant perception of security situation to keep at bay, infrastructural investors as argued by Lecheler, Schuck, and De Vreese, (2013). Despite the cycle of regime change every after five years of democratic elections process to replace a regime or effect continuity there has not been any sign of halting banditry attacks that had polarized the Kerio Valley.

Data Collection

The study data was gathered through questionnaires, interviews of key informants and observations of social interactions, economic ventures and peacebuilding initiatives in the study area. Both open-ended and closed questionnaires were administered directly by the researcher without the aid of research assistants. Interview schedules was used to obtain relevant data from key informants whose expert opinions enriched the research. Questionnaire reliability was ensured through careful structuring of questions and logical sequencing. The collected quantitative data was analysed using SPSS then presented in frequency tables.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Response Rate

The research intended to have a total of 71 participants but overall 62 individuals participated in the study translating to 87% respondents turn up. Among the respondents in the study (23, 37%) were of the female gender, whereas (39, 63%) were of the male gender. The study also had a unique category of respondents, (9, 14%) rated as children under 18 years.

Table 1: Response Rate

Respondents' Category	Submitted Questions	Respon Frequency	Percentage
Kerio Valley Residents	43	37	86%
<i>Missed Response</i>	-	(6)	13
Displaced Victims	17	16	94%
<i>Missed Response</i>	-	(1)	6
Professional Informants	11	9	82%
<i>Missed Interviews</i>	-	(2)	18%
Total	71	62	87%

Source: Research Findings, (2024)

The residents of Kerio Valley who participated were 37 respondents out 43, which represents an 86% participation. Then key informants with expert opinions 82% turn-up and were resourceful. Whereas the 16 displaced and migrated victims participated in the exercise out of the possible 17 issued with questionnaires, indicating a 94% response.

Respondents Demographic Data

Majority respondents were between the ages of 36 – 50 years with 12 respondents being female and 11 male respondents. Participants between 19 – 35 years had 14 male respondents and 5 female respondents. Whereas above 51 years had 9 male and 6 female respondents respectively.

Age of Respondents

Figure 4.2 is a representation of age distribution of the research participants. Most of the respondents were aged between 18 and 34 years (139, 43.7%) at 43.7%. This group was followed by that category aged between

35 and 51 years at 33% (105, 33%), whereas those over 51 years at 23% (74, 23.3%) were minority respondents.

Table 2: Respondents Age Distribution

Age	Gender	Frequency	Overall Percentage
Below 18 years	Rated a child	5	8
19 – 35 years	Male	14	31
	Female	5	
36 – 50 years	Male	11	37
	Female	12	
51 and above years	Male	9	24
	Female	6	
Total		62	100

Source: Research Data 2024.

The research observed that out of the 62 respondents, 23 respondents were female with the highest number being from the ages between 36 – 50 years. From the study findings male gender was more accessible than the female gender. Women argued that conflicts effects and impacts affect women the most and they were not ready to revisit what befell on them other than revealing that those migrated outside the conflict environment excelled in live and they do visit home to rebuild through peacebuilding.

More than 68% of the study respondents reported that they were married compared to 24% who said they were single and even not contemplating marrying soon due to the security situation affecting children and women. Among the respondents 19% reported being widowed, 7% divorced and there was no data for separation as the Marakwet culture do not recognize separation in marriage. Further, majority of the participants living in Kerio Valley reported having no gainful employment thus can easily participate in the hostilities being studied.

Level of Education

Table 3: Education Levels of Respondents

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
No formal education	8	13
Primary	9	15
Secondary	15	24
College Diploma	6	9
University	19	31
Postgraduate	5	8
Total	62	100

Source: Research Findings 2024

As indicated in Table 3, the research found out that displaced and migrated victims education ranged from diploma (4, 25%), degree (44%), and postgraduate (8%), whereas key informants had degree (9, 100%) compared to Kerio Valley residents whose education ranged from non-formal education (8, 22%), primary (9, 24%), secondary (15, 41%), diploma (5%) and degree (3, 8%). Overall, the higher academic levels is with the key informants and the displaced victims whose majority is university and postgraduate degrees. The data

collected supports the argument that displaced victims excelled away from home and with economic muscle to invest back home through peacebuilding translating blessings in disguise both to the inhabitants of the study area and migrate victims of conflict.

Table 4: Respondents Contributions

Activity Studied	Frequency	Percentage
State Securitization of Kerio Valley pastoral communities	33	53%
Conflict-Displaced victims contribute to education infrastructure and increased secondary and college transition	43	100%
Mainstream media of Radio and Television impact on government interventions	39	63%
Conflict narratives as viewed by the residents	35	81%
Education equalizer for both Marakwet and Pokot communities	41	95%

Source: Researcher, 2024

All respondents said that displaced and migrated victims from Kerio Valley have been a blessing unto the area of study because of their resilience as they had supported needy children to further their education and continues to champion for peacebuilding. Some respondents (39, 63%) said that the media gave the Kerio Valley a coverage black out despite the area being on range of three different community radios and one state radio. Further argued that, had the media highlighted the state of affairs of the pastoral community in its entirety, international organizations (NGOs) would have noticed a gap in administration of the area.

In another strong voice, (41, 95%) respondents opined that, primary and secondary education is what lacks and should be equally provided to both the Pokot community whose youth is the reason hostile conflicts exist, and it will change their mind-set to think positively. This argument is therefore valid because government have not penetrated that part of the world, Tiaty from where bandits come from in a bid to pacify with construction of schools to reform the entire place.

The local community argued that the government has been on an overdrive in securitizing the Valley. Some (33, 53%) respondents harboured that opinion claiming, such words as, “Kerio Valley is dangerous and disturbed” worked in favour of bandits who manipulate the situation as everyone else self-relocates from the environment since the sentiments created outright fear.

A sizeable number of respondents (35, 81%) said that conflict narratives escalate the conflicts further. This underscores the reason why the conflict at some point encounters revenge mission.

Interview Schedule and Observation

Table 1: Variable Relationships

Variable	Interview Data	Researcher Observations
Masked Media on displaced victims	The Officer Commanding police Station (OCS) for Endo Ward noted that “The Media, specifically, the Radio concentrate on negative impacts and causes of the conflicts”, in total disregard of associated benefits that can be traced to the victims who migrated.	Residents dislike media pretentious appearance of having photos of victims killed which causes discomfort in communities with no conflict solutions on the table.
	A female administrator of the county government, responded that media have not made any trace of	Result in media’s failure to highlight community protests to satisfaction,

	<p>the conflict displaced victims, however media incriminate them when they supply food and some irrigation equipment to Kerio Valley residents.</p>	<p>community sees media as supporting the conflicts.</p>
<p>Blessings in disguise to the displaced victims</p>	<p>Interviewed study participants from all professions, acknowledged that majority of displaced victims have transformed community lives back at home through funding of projects like hospitals, schools and offering scholarships, at least 13 so far to needy bright students transitioning to secondary, colleges and universities, hence becoming blessings in disguise, at home and for themselves.</p>	<p>Kerio Valley residents, while gathered under shade by Karena roadside Business Centre, individuals move in a huff to confront particular approaching cars, mistakenly for their conflict-displaced clan-mates who are successfully eking a living elsewhere. They become dejected when the car passes on, it was the wrong visitors.</p>
	<p>A key respondent from the electronic media observed that “although no one would wish hostile conflicts be prevail, its impact at home is negative while the displaced victims took it positively and transformed it to better education, new opportunities’ for business endeavours and socio-political development hence blessings in disguise”.</p>	<p>The researcher observed and learnt from the conversations by the gathering that their visiting colleagues have a scheduled program of showing up, and they have stopovers at each shopping Centre or where there are people gathered for varied briefs. Further, the researcher observed that the conflict-displaced victims arrive with new found partners who enjoy the enthusiasm in the Kerio Valley residents and the fact that they can stop at several places for chat with the natives, which allow them assess their mission. In general the researcher concludes that the visits are also a blessing in disguise.</p>
<p>Securitization narratives on Kerio Valley Conflict</p>	<p>A council of elders’ participants, authoritatively argued that Kerio Valley respondents are almost in unison that the hostile conflicts that has haunted the study area have boundary or territory expansionist agenda in the activity of bandits thus giving the conflict lease of life and continuity.</p>	<p>As observed by the researcher, study area residents delink friendship distance from stakeholders labelling Kerio Valley as ‘dangerous and disturbed environment. According to the residents, it is such tagging which continue securitizing the area and loose in investment of infrastructural projects.</p>
	<p>The respondents also see government as propagating conflict by terming it ancestral and traditional balancing activity whose end game is promoting culture.</p>	<p>The resident do not attach government with any aspect of safety as the researcher observed at several gatherings where they seemed not to recognize contributions of government.</p>

	<p>In the understanding of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society bodies view the hostile conflict as a traditional bridge to adulthood and a source of international funding thus prolonging the hostilities due to a measure of resistance.</p>	<p>The researcher noted that Kerio Valley residents think NGOs and civil society are there to mint wealth from their suffering and do not wish solved prevailing situations in its short term..</p>
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Source: The Researcher, 2024

Findings reveal that masked-media blindly present extremes and partisan viewpoints that only promotes their cause, and phrases that create panic and fear in society. However, since media is, by default, in business, it has onerous responsibility to appeal to its audience for peacebuilding sustainability. Objectively, the media should remove their veils (masks), switch on their cameras and improve on the coverage and reporting style, to expose all transgressions by authorities in a manner that displaced people, for any social reason, can be identified and assisted as per the UNHCR 1951 Convention and the 1967 protocol on Refugees and internally displaced persons. The article revealed a weakness and insensitiveness of the government and the mass media in framing the entire situation of Kerio Valley through designed securitization.

DISCUSSION

A discussion section is very critical in any research paper as it summarizes what was found in the field of study as per the objectives and condenses the study into interpretation, analysis and explanations of the overall paper (Peacock, 2002), (San Francisco Edit., 2020), and (Dunton, 2022). The study area is a remote but very fertile environment on ground minerals that the country is at this period of time putting all focus at the north rift where Kerio Valley falls. The conflicts whose effects and impacts are being researched is historical, however a paradigm shift was felt with the emergence and proliferation of automatic weapons, particularly ‘The AK 47 assault Rifle’. The weapon is the cause of deaths, displacement, and huge deployment of government machinery without achieving intended mission.

In the paper, the researcher looked at effect of the conflict especially on those displaced to other parts of the region. The blessings in disguise became evident where respondents acknowledged the unmatched contribution by their natives who were victims of the conflicts and were forced to migrate to what was then oblivion. These category of people became resilient outside study area, achieved education, employment, ventured into successful business and made corporate friendship to then return home as agents of peacebuilding, through targeted development projects that include scholarships to needy and bright students at all levels.

The paper discussed masked media in the context of information supply by the media. The electronic media of radio and television is what can be found in the study area though mostly the radio. Media is supposed to educate, entertain, expose and highlight to the public on all issues of social concern to the society. However, the media failed to highlight the conflict effects and impacts to the world, could not see what the migrated-victims of conflicts were able to put together so that other international agencies may fall in, hence the idea of masked media in Kerio Valley.

On one side the paper delved on securitization of the study area. This was an activity done by those with authority for instance the government and the media that sets agenda for public discourse. When government uses such phrases as “Dangerous and Disturbed” in reference to the study area, it becomes an escalation of the hostilities in the face of the victims and as a consequence any effort meant for peacebuilding becomes a nullity. This is one aspect that the media as well failed to correct such impressions and hence it falls back to “masked media” responsibility.

During the research that involved Kerio Valley residents, conflict-displaced victims, and experts in managing

social order, it was evident that the region had been left to the children of Kerio Valley displaced and living way from the study area. Similarly, the residents attach great importance to those displaced kin and no wedge can be placed in between at least for now. Further, the nature and reasons for the senseless raids is wildly overlooked by government but the residents believe that they are all geared towards removing them from their ancestral land on the plains considering that the raids are confined on the plains where livestock are grazed. Overall, the research is good for projecting partnerships for development and reveals the importance of resilience spirit as not every negative activity produces negative outcome. It also reminds governments that refugees are not synonymous to international crisis but internal as well which calls for equal international attention as per the refugee convention on human rights (Benhabib, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The study was set to explore blessings arising from hostile conflicts in Kerio Valley displaced with masked media and how the study area was securitized by government and even the electronic media, particularly the radio and TV, at the least. The paper brought to fore the strategies adopted by Kerio Valley residents to remain resilient in the facade of armed conflicts. The government response to the hostile conflicts were not adequate and could not yield to meaningful sustainable peace and security but instead it created more fear and room for further attacks, whereas media became muted on all the atrocities in Kerio Valley.

The pastoral communities of Kerio Valley argued that with lack of government intervention to reconstruct their lives, they gotten a listening ear from their blood brothers and sisters who were displaced by the conflicts who offered scholarships to bright students, given shelter to the sick and old and brought development partners to invest on irrigation schemes in the study area. Consequently, the conflict-displaced victims who refused to be held-back by the banditry situation went beyond social imagination to acquire education, economic property and excellence away from the conflict area to be coined 'blessings in disguise'.

Despite the conflict being orchestrated and blamed on unstructured Ngorokos or bandits, it ignites economic and political instability, is directly linked to increase in poverty levels, and infectious lawlessness to portray outright government indifference in handling the plight and safety of its citizens. The researcher found out that education is the ultimate answer to eliminating the unwarranted and primitive cattle rustling culture by the Pokot community members and the commodity (education) should also be extended to the raiders environment in order for the security stability become sustainable.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommended that:

- a) The government should consider improving education infrastructure in the remote land of Tiaty in Pokot community bordering Marakwet community and make it compulsory.
- b) The government should facilitate media to provide balanced coverage of pastoral areas and any other part of the country to promote peacebuilding.
- c) The state should respect, protect and preserve human rights principles on internally displaced and migrated victims without discrimination.

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