

**IMPLICATIONS OF STATE AND NON-STATE ACTOR'S POLICIES
AND PROGRAMS ON WOMEN'S SOCIOECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT IN KAPEDO, TURKANA COUNTY (1963–2010)**

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the impact of both state-driven and non-state policy interventions on the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo, Turkana County, over the period 1963 to 2010. Situated in a region historically marginalized in Kenya's national planning and development agenda, Kapedo's socio-political landscape has been shaped by inter-ethnic conflict, infrastructural underdevelopment, and minimal public sector investment. This study reveals that while state and non-state actors have made critical contributions in specific domains, structural inequalities, cultural norms, security challenges, and institutional neglect have continued to impede transformative progress on women's socioeconomic development. The paper concludes by advocating for comprehensive, community-driven, and gender-responsive policy reforms to ensure sustainable development for women in Kenya's arid and semi-arid regions.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Following Kenya's attainment of independence in 1963, successive administrations embarked on national development planning that largely prioritized regions deemed to have high economic potential. Arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), such as Turkana County, were consequently sidelined in resource allocation and service delivery. Kapedo, located in the conflict-prone eastern corridor of Turkana, exemplifies the compounded effects of geographic marginalization, gendered exclusion, and state neglect. The intersectionality of gender, poverty, and spatial inequality has resulted in women from Kapedo being among the most socioeconomically disenfranchised populations in the country.

Historically, the women of Kapedo have faced multifaceted challenges: deeply rooted patriarchal structures, recurrent intercommunal conflict with neighboring Pokot communities, high rates of illiteracy, and inadequate access to health and economic services. State policies from the post-independence period largely failed to address these unique vulnerabilities. Non-state actors attempted to mitigate these gaps through localized interventions targeting maternal health, girls' education, and women's livelihoods. However, these efforts were often fragmented, underfunded, and poorly integrated with national policy frameworks.

Since independence in 1963, Kenya has implemented numerous policies and programs aimed at fostering development across its diverse regions. However, the impact of these policies has not been uniformly felt, particularly in remote and marginalized areas such as Kapedo in Turkana County. Located in Kenya's arid northwestern frontier, Kapedo has historically been

overlooked in national development agendas. Women in this region, in particular, have borne the brunt of a complex interplay of state neglect, non-state program inefficiencies, inter-communal conflict, and rigid patriarchal norms.

This paper examines the implications of both state and non-state policies and programs on the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo between 1963 and 2010. It argues that despite intermittent interventions, systemic exclusion and fragmented development efforts have reinforced gender inequality and stifled the potential of women as agents of social and economic transformation.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Akinyemi and Adejumo (2018) define policy as a deliberately chosen course of action agreed upon by an organization, group, or political entity to guide a broad array of related activities. These activities can be embedded within institutional frameworks that regulate the daily operations of stakeholders (Mackay & Shaxton, 2011; Arshed et al., 2014). The policy-making process is traditionally understood as a linear sequence involving the identification of a problem, agenda-setting, formulation of alternatives, policy design, implementation, and evaluation. Governments often employ public policies to address complex and persistent social issues, referred to as "wicked problems" (Hudson et al., 2019). Moreover, public policies play a significant role in advancing entrepreneurship, social inclusion, ethical standards, gender equality, economic development, and innovation (Acs & Szerb, 2007; Hyytinen & Toivanen, 2005; Basant, 2018).

Policy programmes, in this context, refer to strategic objectives set by national governments to promote sector-specific development across domains such as education, health, entrepreneurship, employment, agriculture, gender equality, housing, infrastructure, and taxation. Beyond regulatory functions, public policies serve as mechanisms for socioeconomic intervention by addressing systemic barriers including limited access to finance, education, and employment, as well as various forms of cultural, religious, and gender-based discrimination (Ileana & Cornel, 2017; Damon et al., 2016; Profeta, 2020).

At the international level, particularly in the United States, Ahl and Nelson (2014) highlight that despite ongoing implementation of gender-sensitive public policies and programs, there is a paucity of research on the integration and diffusion of gender—especially women's issues—within public policy frameworks. Much of the extant literature on women's entrepreneurship and related policy analysis is predominantly situated in the Global North, signaling the need for more research that examines the embedded gendered mechanisms in diverse societal contexts (Henry et al., 2017).

Two primary gaps emerge from the current literature. The first is methodological: most studies utilize similar frameworks to explore the disconnect between policy and practice, whereas the current research adopts a case study approach. The second is geographical: while prior research has largely focused on contexts outside Kenya, this study is grounded within the Kenyan setting.

Furthermore, gender considerations within entrepreneurship policy continue to present challenges globally. Reports by the OECD/European Union (2017) and the International

Labour Organization (ILO, 2012) indicate that policy measures often fall short in addressing gender disparities effectively. Studies in the U.S., such as those by Acs and Szerb (2007), have examined the influence of policy on start-up performance, economic growth, and entrepreneurship. However, investigations into women-focused policies reveal significant structural barriers. For instance, Schofield and Goodwin (2005) argue that institutionalized policy processes in Australia have hindered progress toward gender equality. Given that less than 4% of empirical and theoretical entrepreneurship research has examined the role of public policy and government action (Link et al., 2016), this underlines the critical importance of further inquiry into gender and policy as a research priority.

The reviewed literature offers valuable insights that are highly pertinent to the current investigation into the influence of state and non-state policies on the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo, Turkana County. The foundational arguments presented in these studies have been instrumental in shaping the central objective of this study—namely, to evaluate the impact of policy frameworks, both governmental and non-governmental, on women's socioeconomic advancement in this specific context. However, notable theoretical and methodological gaps exist between the prior research and the current study. While earlier studies predominantly employed survey methodologies, this research adopts a case study approach, allowing for a more nuanced, in-depth exploration of the subject matter.

There is a growing consensus among scholars and policy analysts regarding the far-reaching implications of gender-based discrimination embedded within public policy programs and initiatives (UNDP, 2013). Ahl and Nelson (2014) have critiqued the limited consideration of gender in policy formulation, highlighting the persistence of structural obstacles to achieving gender equality, a concern echoed by Schofield and Goodwin (2005). These contributions provide empirical grounding for the present study's objective by illustrating the gendered dimensions of policy outcomes. Nevertheless, these earlier studies are primarily situated in Western contexts—specifically the United States and Australia—and were conducted in earlier decades (2005 and 2014, respectively), whereas the current study was conducted between 2022 and 2024. This temporal and geographical divergence presents a significant research gap, as policy dynamics and gender discourse have evolved substantially in recent years, particularly within African contexts.

In addition, feminist and gender-inclusive frameworks have been increasingly advocated for in policy design and implementation. Scholars such as Orloff and Palier (2009), and institutions like the United Nations (1995, 2018), argue that embedding feminist perspectives into public policy processes enhances equitable outcomes. Vossenberg (2014) further emphasizes that gender-neutral policy interventions benefit all genders, and that adopting feminist theoretical underpinnings in entrepreneurship promotion can yield more inclusive and effective policy development. While these arguments reinforce the rationale of the present study, they also expose theoretical incongruities, especially in how these frameworks are applied across different temporal and sociopolitical settings. Again, the studies cited were conducted over a decade ago, whereas the present research reflects contemporary realities between 2022 and 2024.

In the African context, particularly in Nigeria, state-led interventions such as YouWin, Sure-P, and Trader Money have been designed to address socioeconomic challenges among women

and marginalized groups by promoting entrepreneurship and financial inclusion. However, evaluations of these programs suggest that they have fallen short in delivering sustained socioeconomic benefits (Bolaji, 2014; Bolaji et al., 2015; Edoho, 2015; Drine & Grach, 2012). These findings parallel the challenges faced in Kapedo and offer comparative insights into the effectiveness of policy interventions targeting women's development across the continent.

Collectively, these prior studies have contributed empirical evidence that complements the current research. However, theoretical gaps persist, particularly concerning context-specific dynamics, temporal relevancy, and the adaptation of global frameworks to local realities. The present study addresses these gaps by providing a focused, Kenya-based case analysis informed by contemporary data and grounded in a localized understanding of gender and development.

Existing evidence suggests that public policy programmes have yet to yield significant improvements in women's enterprise development in Nigeria. Okeke-Uzodike et al. (2018) argue that such initiatives have not adequately translated into tangible economic outcomes for women entrepreneurs. This situation is reflective of broader trends across Sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya, where policy implementation concerning women's socioeconomic development remains insufficiently impactful. If appropriately designed and executed, such policies could transform not only women's lives but also those of their families. Vossenbergh (2013) emphasizes that gender-neutral—or gender-blind—policy frameworks often fail to address the specific challenges faced by women business owners in Sub-Saharan Africa, thereby reinforcing existing gender disparities in entrepreneurial engagement across developing economies.

In the Kenyan context, research by Logiel and Muna (2019) in Turkana County underscores the critical role of women's participation in policy-making processes. Their findings highlight that enhanced female involvement in decision-making correlates with increased representation of women in leadership positions, economic empowerment, and higher enrolment rates for girls in education. These insights are directly relevant to the current study, which seeks to investigate how state and non-state policy frameworks affect the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo, Turkana County.

Nonetheless, theoretical and temporal gaps remain. The study by Logiel and Muna was conducted in 2019, whereas the present research spans the period between 2022 and 2024. This chronological divergence introduces new dimensions, as policy landscapes and gender dynamics continue to evolve. Consequently, this research contributes fresh empirical data and interpretive frameworks to the growing body of literature on gender and public policy in the Global South.

Importantly, this study does not interrogate the broad functionality of public policy for women in general; rather, it specifically focuses on how such policies have shaped the socioeconomic trajectories of women in Kapedo Ward, Turkana County. Much of the prior literature on women's entrepreneurship policy—such as the work of Ahl and Nelson (2014) and Henry et al. (2017)—has centered on contexts in the Global North, including the United States, Canada, and parts of Western and Northern Europe. These findings often reflect economic structures and institutional frameworks not readily applicable to Sub-Saharan African countries, which face distinct development challenges. By contrast, the current study addresses this geographical

and contextual gap and offers policy-relevant insights for practitioners and decision-makers in Kenya and similar settings.

Moreover, this research engages with the practical challenges facing women in Kapedo, including poverty, unemployment, conflict, and health vulnerabilities—issues that are endemic across much of Kenya. Addressing these complex and interrelated challenges necessitates empowering women with the skills and capacities to be effective agents of socioeconomic transformation. As Ocho (2005) argues, the development of a nation requires deliberate investment in human capital formation, particularly through educational interventions that prepare individuals to engage productively with societal demands. Accordingly, this study considers how policy programmes can enhance women's access to education, promote gender-responsive development planning, and recognize women's roles in economic life through inclusive and equitable public policy design.

Although scholarly interest in women's socioeconomic development has grown substantially, a comprehensive historical examination focused specifically on the Kapedo region of Kenya remains notably absent from both national and international academic discourse. Much of the existing literature has centered on other counties within Kenya or has been conducted in international contexts, thereby failing to address the distinctive sociopolitical and economic conditions shaping women's development in Kapedo. Importantly, few studies have interrogated the specific role of state and non-state policy interventions in shaping women's socioeconomic trajectories in this region. The present study thus seeks to address this evident geographical gap.

Beyond spatial limitations, a temporal deficiency is also evident in the extant literature. Limited attention has been paid to the historical evolution of women's socioeconomic status in Kapedo, particularly during significant political and developmental transitions. Of particular note is the lack of research covering the post-independence period, beginning in 1963—a transformative era for governance and public policy in Kenya. This study addresses that oversight by exploring developments spanning from 1963 to 2010, thereby providing a longitudinal analysis that captures both historical and contemporary dimensions of policy impact.

In the Kenyan context, while previous research has acknowledged the importance of women's roles in development, few studies have rigorously examined the influence of state and non-state actors on women's social and economic agency over time. As such, this study fills a critical knowledge gap by offering a detailed and context-specific evaluation of policy-driven interventions and their implications for women's empowerment in Kapedo.

Moreover, the efficacy of current strategies and policy instruments intended to support women's empowerment has not been sufficiently analyzed. Although several initiatives have been launched to advance women's economic participation, the persistence of poverty and unemployment among women in Kapedo indicates a disconnect between policy intent and outcomes. This suggests a need to reassess the implementation and contextual relevance of these interventions. Accordingly, this study investigates both the historical and contemporary impact of conflict, alongside the influence of state and non-state policy mechanisms, on the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo, Turkana County, from 1963 to 2010.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate the influence of state and non-state policies and programs on the socioeconomic development of women in Kapedo, Turkana County. A qualitative paradigm was deemed appropriate due to its capacity to offer rich, in-depth insights into the lived experiences of women residing in this conflict-affected and marginalized setting. The research design integrated both case study and phenomenological frameworks. The case study methodology facilitated an intensive, context-specific exploration of Kapedo, illuminating the multifaceted dimensions of sociopolitical and economic marginalization. This design was particularly well-suited for examining how intersecting policies shape women's livelihoods at the micro-level.

Kapedo was purposively selected as the research site due to its strategic location at the border of Turkana and Baringo counties—an area marked by chronic insecurity, underdevelopment, and recurrent inter-ethnic conflict between the Pokot and Turkana communities. These conditions significantly constrain women's access to critical services and opportunities, thereby making the region an ideal case for exploring the tangible impacts of state and non-state interventions on marginalized populations.

Participant selection was guided by purposive and snowball sampling techniques, both of which facilitated the identification of individuals with direct experience and contextual knowledge of the issues under investigation. The sample included local women, administrative leaders, religious figures, and elders with historical memory of the community. Snowball sampling expanded the participant base by incorporating hard-to-reach groups, such as widows, internally displaced persons, and survivors of gender-based violence, who are often excluded from formal research processes.

Approximately 30 individuals participated in the study, comprising 20 in-depth interviewees, four focus group discussions (each with 5–7 participants), and several key respondents from local non-governmental organizations. This diverse sampling strategy ensured the inclusion of varied perspectives and enhanced the depth and validity of the data collected.

Four primary instruments guided data collection: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion (FGD) guides, an observation protocol, and a document analysis framework. The semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit narratives concerning gender roles, conflict experiences, resource access, and engagement with development initiatives. Conducted in Kiswahili and the local Turkana language—with translation support where necessary—interviews allowed participants to express themselves openly, facilitating the emergence of rich, detailed accounts.

FGDs enabled the researcher to capture collective insights and explore shared understandings of socioeconomic development, particularly regarding coping strategies, participation in community decision-making, and perceptions of external interventions. These discussions helped uncover both consensus and divergence among women's experiences and priorities.

Participant observation served as a supplementary method, allowing the researcher to witness social practices and interactions within natural settings. Activities such as market engagement, public gatherings, and daily chores were observed using a structured protocol focusing on indicators like mobility, leadership involvement, and service utilization.

Documentary evidence was also analysed to contextualize primary data. This involved reviewing government and NGO reports, academic literature, and archival materials pertaining to the region's historical, institutional, and policy landscape. A document analysis guide was used to structure the review, enabling connections between macro-level policy frameworks and micro-level lived realities.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic and phenomenological techniques. Thematic analysis entailed systematic coding of transcripts, field notes, and visual data, combining both deductive themes aligned with research objectives and inductive sub-themes that emerged from the data. This facilitated the identification of cross-cutting patterns, while also allowing for comparative analysis across variables such as age, marital status, and conflict exposure. Photographs were selectively used to visually illustrate key themes, particularly women's economic activities.

The interpretive phenomenological approach complemented thematic analysis by attending to participants' subjective meanings and emotional responses. This enabled a deeper understanding of how women internalize and react to exclusionary policies and programs, and how such experiences shape their perceptions, behaviors, and agency.

To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, the study employed methodological triangulation, integrating data from interviews, FGDs, observations, and document analysis. Peer debriefing sessions with local stakeholders further validated findings and ensured cultural sensitivity. Discrepancies were addressed through iterative follow-up engagements, and visual data were used to corroborate verbal accounts.

Ethical protocols were rigorously observed throughout the study. Institutional ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Participants were briefed on the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Special care was taken when handling sensitive issues, such as gender-based violence, by conducting interviews in private, secure locations. Anonymity and data confidentiality were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and secure storage of audio and digital records.

Despite its comprehensive design, the study encountered certain limitations. Security constraints restricted movement within Kapedo, limiting geographical coverage. Language translation may have affected the nuance of some responses, and cultural sensitivities may have led to underreporting or socially desirable answers. Nonetheless, these challenges were mitigated through prolonged field engagement, cultural mediation, and robust data triangulation.

In conclusion, the adopted methodology was instrumental in capturing the layered and complex realities of women's socioeconomic experiences in Kapedo. The integration of case study and phenomenological approaches, supported by a multi-method data collection and analysis strategy, produced a nuanced understanding of how institutional structures and lived experiences intersect to shape the trajectory of women's development in marginalized contexts.

4.0 RESULTS

Implication of State and Non-State Policies and Programs on Women's Socioeconomic Development in Kapedo, Turkana County (1963–2010)

The policy trajectory of postcolonial Kenya played a significant role in shaping the socioeconomic conditions of women as from 1963 to 2010, though its influence varied considerably by region. In peripheral and ecologically fragile locales such as Kapedo in Turkana County, national policy frameworks often failed to translate into tangible developmental outcomes for women. The Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on African Socialism and Its Application to Planning in Kenya, which laid the foundation for post-independence development planning, privileged rapid industrialization and economic growth, largely to the neglect of gender considerations. Although couched in the language of equitable development, this policy favored resource allocation to “high potential” areas—typically urban centers and agriculturally rich zones—while systematically excluding arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) like Turkana from meaningful investment. Consequently, women in Kapedo, who predominantly engaged in pastoralism, petty trade, and subsistence agriculture, remained marginal to national development priorities.

Subsequent development blueprints, such as the Third (1974–1978) and Fifth (1984–1988) National Development Plans, perpetuated this exclusion. These policy documents failed to recognize or support the economic roles of rural women, instead reinforcing prevailing patriarchal institutions by maintaining legal and customary barriers that restricted women's access to productive resources. In the context of Turkana, land tenure and resource governance continued to be controlled by male-dominated clan systems, limiting women's agency in both domestic and public spheres. Statutory reforms remained nominal, with little effort to dismantle these deeply rooted structures of gender inequality.

The Sixth (1989–1993) and Seventh (1994–1996) Development Plans marked the state's initial, albeit modest, efforts to integrate gender into national development discourse—prompted in part by international advocacy following the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women. Despite these rhetorical shifts, the practical outcomes of gender mainstreaming in rural and underserved areas such as Kapedo were minimal. Implementation gaps persisted due to weak institutional capacity, limited state presence, and insufficient budgetary support for gender-specific initiatives. In many instances, gender-sensitive policies were either selectively implemented or remained symbolic, lacking the structural mechanisms necessary to produce systemic change at the grassroots level.

A more explicit commitment to gender equity emerged with the Eighth National Development Plan (1997–2001) and the adoption of Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2006 on Gender Equality and Development. These policy instruments recognized women as integral to Kenya's development agenda, promoting gender-responsive planning, legal reform, and women's empowerment. However, despite the comprehensive nature of these frameworks, their practical reach in marginal regions was severely constrained. Structural limitations—including logistical barriers, chronic underfunding, and sociocultural resistance—hindered the translation of policy intent into local action. In conflict-prone and geographically isolated areas like Kapedo, women's socioeconomic mobility remained curtailed, and their representation in decision-making continued to be marginal.

Thus, Kenya's evolving policy landscape between 1963 and 2010 demonstrated a gradual shift toward greater gender awareness at the national level. However, this shift failed to adequately impact women in structurally disadvantaged regions. The confluence of institutional neglect, spatial exclusion, and patriarchal entrenchment significantly stymied the potential for inclusive development. The enduring disjuncture between policy formulation and localized implementation illustrates the need for regionally adapted, participatory, and well-resourced policy interventions tailored to the specific needs of women in historically marginalized contexts.

In parallel with state-led initiatives, non-state actors—particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—played a pivotal role in addressing the developmental deficits faced by peripheral regions, including Kapedo. From the post-independence era onwards, numerous NGOs collaborated with multilateral organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to deliver critical services in neglected regions.

International NGOs—including Oxfam, World Vision, GTZ (now GIZ), Médecins Sans Frontières, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Red Crescent, and ActionAid—were among the first to operate in Kenya's ASAL regions. Initially, their interventions were humanitarian in nature, focused on addressing the needs of refugee populations displaced by conflicts in Somalia and Ethiopia. Assistance included emergency health services, food relief, clothing, shelter provision, and water access via boreholes and shallow wells. However, it soon became evident that local host communities were also subject to chronic poverty and developmental neglect. This realization led NGOs to expand their scope of work to encompass underserved Kenyan populations, such as those in Kapedo, thereby compensating for the state's insufficient presence and investment.

The retreat of the state from public service provision, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s under the aegis of structural adjustment programs (SAPs), further accentuated the role of NGOs in delivering essential services. Development agencies from countries such as Finland responded by prioritizing gender equity, human rights, education, and poverty alleviation. These thematic priorities closely aligned with the goal of women's empowerment and helped to address the void left by declining state interventions.

In the context of Turkana and Kapedo specifically, NGOs introduced targeted programs that advanced women's education, health, and economic resilience. These included adult literacy classes, reproductive and maternal health outreach, peacebuilding efforts, and the provision of clean water. Furthermore, certain organizations worked directly with women's groups to foster leadership, offer vocational training, and support small-scale enterprises. Such interventions provided women with alternative livelihoods and enhanced their capacities to participate in local governance and conflict mediation.

Nevertheless, despite these laudable efforts, the impact of NGOs was often limited by structural and operational challenges. Insecurity and recurring inter-communal conflict disrupted program continuity, while dependence on donor funding resulted in short project cycles and limited sustainability. The fragmented nature of NGO operations—often lacking coordination

with governmental frameworks—meant that many initiatives remained isolated and failed to produce long-lasting systemic change. Moreover, the temporary nature of many interventions precluded the development of institutional capacity within communities to sustain progress once external support ceased.

The combined influence of state and non-state interventions on women's socioeconomic development in Kapedo from 1963 to 2010 reveals a pattern of partial, uneven progress constrained by structural, cultural, and institutional barriers. While national policies increasingly recognized the importance of gender equity, their implementation in marginalized and conflict-prone areas such as Kapedo was sporadic and largely ineffective. Conversely, NGOs emerged as critical actors in filling service delivery gaps and fostering women's empowerment. However, their contributions were limited by insecurity, resource scarcity, and lack of policy integration.

Women in Kapedo continued to face substantial impediments to their socioeconomic advancement, including poor access to health, education, and economic resources, all compounded by patriarchal norms and regional neglect. Bridging this developmental gap necessitates a paradigmatic shift toward community-based, culturally nuanced, and sustainably financed interventions. Addressing gender inequities in peripheral regions such as Turkana County requires not only progressive policy design at the national level but also robust local implementation strategies that reflect the lived realities of marginalized women.

5.0 DISCUSSIONS

State and non-state Policies and programs on Women's Socioeconomic Development in Kenya (1963–2010) — The Case of Kapedo, Turkana County

According to Nzomo (1989), Kenya has undergone significant transformations since the 1960s, a period during which women's roles were largely absent from development policy discourse. She asserts that throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the postcolonial Kenyan government largely ignored the relevance of gender in policy considerations. It was not until the mid-1980s that women began to receive increased attention and support from governmental bodies, international donors, and non-governmental organizations (Mayoux, 1995).

At the onset of the post-colonial era, the government endeavored to establish essential socioeconomic infrastructure—including roads, airstrips, service centers, schools, health centers, and communication systems. The primary focus was on resource development, population settlement through irrigation projects, and the provision of basic services. Concurrently, the growth of urban sectors was promoted to facilitate necessary administrative and service functions. Regrettably, minimal attention was directed toward other regions, particularly pastoral areas such as Turkana District. As a result, the impact of these developmental efforts remained negligible when compared to other districts, rendering Turkana one of the least developed regions in the country. This disparity in development translated into significant inequalities in the advancement of productive forces across various regions and affected the living standards of their inhabitants. Investment in infrastructure and social services was disproportionately concentrated in regions benefiting from modern technology (Chemelil, 2009).

Despite these initiatives, over four decades post-independence, it is estimated that more than 65% of the population in ASAL districts in Kenya continues to live in extreme poverty (Gimode, 2004, p. 295), with the Turkana community falling within this demographic. For years, the state has pursued strategies that have failed to achieve the intended socioeconomic transformation in Turkana District. The district has markedly lacked attention to crucial development priorities, such as infrastructure and social amenities (Ibid: 302).

Since independence, the Kenyan government has implemented a range of policies and interventions aimed at mitigating gender disparities and promoting women's empowerment. These initiatives included reforms in education and healthcare, microfinance programs, and affirmative action measures. Moreover, sector-specific reforms were introduced to enhance women's participation in diverse areas, including education and economic activities. However, the effectiveness of these interventions in Kapedo has frequently been undermined by logistical challenges, inadequate funding, and insufficient local participation. (Mary Emanikor, O.I., January 13, 2023).

Despite these advancements, challenges persisted. Cultural barriers, including early marriage and gender-based violence, continued to hinder women's full socioeconomic potential. Economic disparities persisted, with women in Kapedo often facing limited access to land, credit, and infrastructure necessary for sustainable development. Harsh environmental conditions compounded these challenges, affecting access to education, healthcare, and market opportunities.

The Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on African Socialism and Its Application to Planning in Kenya was the blueprint for national development planning post-independence. While it promoted equity and poverty reduction in theory, its focus on investing in "areas of high potential" — largely the fertile central and western highlands — systematically marginalized arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), including Turkana County (Government of Kenya [GoK], 1965). Women in Kapedo, whose livelihoods largely depend on pastoralism and subsistence trade, were doubly disadvantaged — first, by the geographic neglect, and second, by the omission of gender in the socioeconomic agenda.

The exclusion of ASALs was not merely a regional oversight but one that had significant gendered implications. Women in these areas, already constrained by patriarchal traditions, found themselves outside the purview of national development programs. The state's preference for urban industrialization and commercial agriculture diverted resources away from sectors where women predominated, further entrenching gender disparities (Wanyande, 2000).

Subsequent National Development Plans — particularly the Third (1974–1978) and Fifth (1984–1988) Plans — did little to correct this imbalance. These documents continued to prioritize macroeconomic growth and infrastructure while largely ignoring the informal and reproductive labor contributions of women, especially in marginalized areas (GoK, 1974; 1984). Legal and customary barriers, such as male-dominated clan systems in Turkana, restricted women's access to land, education, and credit. Although the Constitution and certain statutory laws guaranteed equal rights, implementation was hindered by entrenched patriarchal norms and inadequate enforcement (Mercy Ekan, O.I., November 25, 2022).

For example, in Kapedo and broader Turkana, women's lack of legal land tenure meant exclusion from state-backed agricultural extension programs, which required land documentation for participation. Similarly, women's lack of collateral — due to asset ownership being controlled by male kin — limited access to financial services (World Bank, 2004). These systemic constraints illustrate how formal legal guarantees can be rendered ineffective by customary practices.

Kenya's policy stance began to shift following international pressure, particularly after the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women. The Sixth (1989–1993) and Seventh (1994–1996) Development Plans began to integrate gender as a developmental concern, reflecting the growing global emphasis on women's rights and inclusion (GoK, 1989; 1994). Despite this shift, gender mainstreaming in practice was often tokenistic and urban-focused. There was minimal effort to address the specific constraints of women in ASALs like Kapedo, where lack of infrastructure, insecurity, and distance from administrative centers hindered policy execution (Kabira & Masinjila, 1997).

Meaningful policy commitments began to emerge with the Eighth National Development Plan (1997–2001), which explicitly acknowledged gender disparities and called for women's integration in all sectors of development (GoK, 1997). This was further cemented by the Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2006 on Gender Equality and Development, which introduced frameworks for gender-responsive budgeting, legal reform, and institutional capacity-building. These policies aligned with the Millennium Development Goals and aimed to mainstream gender into national development strategies.

However, despite progressive rhetoric, implementation remained weak in marginalized regions like Kapedo due to resource constraints, low institutional presence, and sociocultural resistance. Many government departments lacked gender focal points at sub-county levels, and those that existed were underfunded and lacked decision-making authority (FIDA-Kenya, 2008). Cultural resistance to women's leadership and autonomy further impeded uptake of these reforms. As a result, policy ideals did not translate into tangible benefits for women in Turkana, whose economic roles remained under-recognized and unsupported.

The state of Kenya has been a pivotal factor in shaping socioeconomic development. The country's development performance has predominantly depended on the state's contributions through public service, in conjunction with other organizations. However, the efficacy of the state as an agent of socioeconomic development came under scrutiny, particularly when development goals appeared elusive (Khubotlo, 2001, pp. 1-17). Notwithstanding its shortcomings, the state maintained an interventionist role in socioeconomic development (Wallis, 1989; Moos, 2004).

Odinga (1967) bolstered this argument, noting that the state persisted as an instrument of socioeconomic development despite its deficiencies, primarily due to the absence of viable alternatives in the local private sector and market, both of which were underdeveloped. He called for the liberalization of development and critiqued colonialism for systematically undermining African entrepreneurship through restrictive regulations and fraudulent practices (Odinga, 1967, p. 89).

The inadequacy of state mechanisms has facilitated the emergence of non-state actors, particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as alternative agents of socioeconomic transformation and development in Africa. This phenomenon primarily targets the impoverished and marginalized segments of society. Consequently, it has engendered a pronounced aspiration for sustainable socioeconomic advancement and the fulfillment of basic needs for ordinary citizens—needs that state-led bilateral and multilateral development cooperation have frequently addressed inadequately or ineffectively (Khobotlo, 2001).

Since 1974, famine relief initiatives undertaken by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations agencies in Africa have prompted a notable shift in the willingness of many African governments to rely on the international development community for the welfare of their populations. This tendency arises from the observation that, akin to the colonial state, the post-colonial state often operates as a repressive apparatus. Its focus on an export-oriented economy frequently serves the interests of those in positions of power, to the detriment of ordinary citizens, particularly those in rural areas and other marginalized groups (Nzongola, 1987, p. 70).

According to Dibie and Dibie (2007), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have initiated development programs aimed at politically, socially, and economically empowering women. However, despite these efforts, many empowerment initiatives have not led to women's full social and economic autonomy, as highlighted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2011). Women are increasingly recognized as a vital force for development that policymakers and INGOs cannot afford to overlook. In Turkana County, despite the influx of INGOs focused on empowering women, high poverty levels and persistent gender inequalities remain. These issues are reflected in increased poverty, low participation in decision-making, limited access to and control over resources, a high prevalence of domestic violence, lack of income-generating activities, low literacy rates, low self-esteem, and poor health outcomes.

The interplay between government policies and the programs implemented by these NGOs and international agencies has played a crucial role in shaping the lives of women in Turkana, a remote and marginalized region. Local consultations revealed that many non-state actors were hesitant to operate in Kapedo due to ongoing conflicts. Nonetheless, residents received humanitarian assistance from various non-state actors. The only organizations willing to venture into the area were missionaries, who built Kapedo Mixed Primary School, Kapedo Hospital, a gospel church, a garage, and a guest house. Unfortunately, these missionaries eventually left due to escalating conflict in the region (John Ekada, O.I., December 10, 2022).

The economic liberalization of the 1980s and 1990s under Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) further weakened the state's capacity to deliver social services, creating a vacuum filled by international NGOs and development partners. Finnish development cooperation played a crucial role in this context, particularly through initiatives aligned with Finland's foreign policy objectives on gender equality and human rights (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2003).

In Kapedo and greater Turkana, NGOs — including Finnish-supported agencies — implemented small-scale interventions that made tangible, though limited, contributions to women's empowerment: Women's education programs improved literacy and awareness, albeit on a modest scale, Maternal health services reduced preventable deaths, especially

through mobile clinics, Income-generating projects, such as beadwork cooperatives and small-scale retail, provided alternative livelihoods and Peacebuilding initiatives sought to reduce conflict between Pokot and Turkana communities, indirectly benefiting women who often suffer the brunt of intercommunal violence. (Salome Emase, O.I., November 25, 2022).

Some of these NGOs, such as those funded through Finnish development grants, worked directly with women's groups, fostering leadership and enhancing capacity for collective bargaining. This bottom-up approach allowed for some cultural navigation, making interventions more acceptable within local traditions. However, NGO operations often suffered from short project lifespans, inconsistent funding, and challenges accessing insecure areas — factors that limited long-term sustainability and scalability (Hearn, 2007).

The failure to fully operationalize gender-sensitive policies in Kapedo can be attributed to three intersecting barriers: Kapedo's remote location and poor road infrastructure limit access to government services, including education, healthcare, and development finance, Patriarchal structures remain dominant in Turkana communities, with customary laws superseding statutory provisions in matters like land inheritance and marital rights, and the fact that Government presence in remote areas is often minimal or absent, with poor coordination between central policy frameworks and local implementation agencies. (Kenyaman, O.I., December 10, 2022).

These factors contribute to persistent gender inequality, low literacy rates, high maternal mortality, and limited economic opportunities for women in Kapedo (KNBS & SID, 2013). Without localized and culturally responsive interventions, national gender policies risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

To bridge this gap, future policies must be localized, adequately resourced, and culturally sensitive. Stronger linkages between national gender frameworks and grassroots implementation are essential. Moreover, development partners, including Finnish agencies, must align with local priorities and invest in long-term, community-driven programs that empower women not just as beneficiaries but as leaders in their development.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The study is important because it sheds light on the persistent disconnect between Kenya's national gender policies and the actual socioeconomic conditions of women in marginalized regions like Kapedo, Turkana County. While national development frameworks evolved from exclusionary to more inclusive approaches between 1963 and 2010, this progress was largely uneven and often failed to translate into meaningful change on the ground. Women in Kapedo continued to face structural barriers such as geographic isolation, entrenched patriarchal systems, and weak institutional support, which severely limited their access to resources, services, and opportunities.

By focusing on the case of Kapedo, the study highlights how national policies—however progressive in theory—can remain ineffective without localization, cultural sensitivity, and adequate implementation. This localized lens offers valuable insight into how policy ideals falter in practice and underscores the need for a shift toward community-driven, context-specific strategies.

Furthermore, the study provides guidance for future development efforts, calling for stronger integration between national frameworks and grassroots realities. It emphasizes the importance of sustainable investments from development partners, such as Finnish agencies, that prioritize women not merely as recipients of aid but as active agents of change. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive and equitable development, offering a model for how policy can become a transformative force for marginalized women across Kenya and similar contexts.

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