

DISARMAMENT AND ITS EFFECTS ON INSECURITY IN BARINGO COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Globally, insecurity is a common occurrence, touching all domains of life. Political, social, economic, financial, and environmental. In 2023, the effects of insecurity were estimated to have costed countries worldwide an approximate of 19.1 trillion USD. African continent bears the brunt of this cost, with most of the security fragile countries, Kenya inclusive. In the Kerio valley region of Kenya, particularly Baringo county, Insecurity has existed over several decades, fueled by the proliferation of illicit firearms in the hands of civilians. The arms thus fuel insecurity through cattle rustling, banditry and revenge attacks. Despite the efforts by government to disarm the civilians, insecurity by the illegal firearms keep rising. The study therefore sought to determine the effects of disarmament, a government operation in reducing insecurity in Baringo County. Descriptive research design guided the study that targeted 120 key stakeholders in the security docket and the disarmament exercise. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules, qualitative data analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis and presented in tables and themes. Research authorization was sought from Kenyatta university and research permit from NACOSTI. The result revealed that disarmament reduced insecurity, were effective, reduced banditry and cattle rustling, and excellent cooperation existed between the members of the community and the police force. However, insecurity only reduced in areas that had regular and consistent disarmament effort, was hampered by lack or poor road infrastructure, difficult and treacherous terrains, and the lack of trust by the community and the police. The study thus recommends that, the road infrastructure be developed to improve access to remote areas, government presence be increased equally in the entire county, civic education be carried out to enhance collaboration and improve public trust, and incorporate the local leaders in the disarmament exercise and have it implemented uniformly and consistently to curb shifting insecurity to far and remote places and prevent negative attitude from the population who view the exercise as targeted and punitive.

Key words: Insecurity; Security; Disarmament; Illegal Arms; Kerio Valley

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Insecurity is a global problem affecting all sectors of life: economic, environmental, fiscal, social and political. It has been reported in recent decades that it has intensified, with the United Nations Development Programme (2022) reports noting that out of seven people, in the world, six do not feel safe due to livelihood pressures that cause anxiety, safety concerns and the uncertainty of the future.

Insecurity comes with immense costs. Globally, it is estimated that there is about 19.1 trillion USD spent to insecurity in 2023. This is a reflection of the globe's 13.5% GDP, thus demonstrating the global burden caused by insecurity. Rising trends have also been reported with over 295 million people facing secondary consequences of conflict such as hunger, triggered by conflicts economics shocks and climate change (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2024;). This further exacerbated by acute poverty that has seen over 1.1 billion people face conflicts, especially in fragile and conflict affected zones (Food Security Information Network, 2024).

In the years 2023-2024, there is a population of about 108 million people who have been forcibly displaced by insecurity worldwide, especially in states that are fragile with constant conflicts (World Bank 2024). weak governance, according to United Nations Development Programme (2024) has exposed populations to the vulnerable conflicting situations, due to the rise of unmonitored or uncontrolled drivers of conflicts and subsequent displacements.

In the United States of America, insecurity is reported to stem from unemployment, an existing economic gap among the population, causing inequality, and the presence of rampant violence in the urban areas, blames on the existence of populations living below the poverty line, disintegrated local communities that do not call for unified peaceful efforts and inequalities stemming from the differences in social structures (US Department of Justice, 2022; Sampson, 2021).

In middle East, Conflicts do exist and have been reported to be caused by competition over resources such as oil and water, existence of a weak governance structure that can handle insecurity before its consequences is felt, and the exclusions in the political arena in countries such as Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Iran, the major conflict zones in the regions, known for insecurity occurrences. The Israel-Palestinian conflict that saw casualties among civilians, hostage crisis, collapse of humanitarian aid and military operations across borders. Yemen insecurity included threats in the maritime that destabilized trading that depend on shipping and causing tension in Gaza (United Nations Security Council, 2023 and The International Crisis Group, 2024).

Africa has a bigger number of states with insecurity, especially due to the fragility of the states. In Nigeria, Ugwueze, Ngwu and Onuaha (2022), in a study that focused on re-integration of ex-Boko Haram fighters in the community, reported that the country has established programmes to rehabilitate individuals who have abandoned conflicts and violence, in North Eastern corridor. The programme sought to bring sustainable peace and security through programmes such as vocational trainings to impart skill, inculcation of religious reorientation that support peaceful co-existence and sustainable security, and the introduction of psychological rehabilitation. Despite the effort, the report indicated that there was resistance among community members and victims who felt that re-integration of ex-offenders meant no justice.

In South Sudan, a program is in place to ensure that peace and security is achieved. According to Jundi (2024), the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration program in 2018 in after the conflict era to ensure that ex combatants are brought back and get reintegrated into the community yielded positive results in curbing insecurity. It saw the reduction in arms in civilian hands, facilitated reintegration and reconciliation at the local grassroots community levels and allowed Ex combatants back home to begin a normal life. However, the report noted that the program was implemented in an inconsistent manner due to funding challenges. Moreover, the efforts were not sustainable, and thus insecurity kept rising due to the delays in unifying the army and rivalry in the political domain.

Kenya faces different kinds of insecurity, ranging from terror attacks, ethnic conflicts and violence, electoral related conflicts, among others. In Lamu county, insecurity has persisted due to the terror group Al-Shabaab, who carry out attacks. Experienced in the context is cross-border terrorism, and the effect of no to weak coordination mechanisms among different stakeholders and agencies. The gap exists among the disciplined forces such as the national police, the military forces, and the intelligence services. This minimizes the chances of establishing sustainable security in the county. Moreover, the existence of weak sharing of information structures/systems and the distrust of the security forces by the community members leaves the population vulnerable to different forms of insecurity (Kirwa, 2025).

In Kenya's Kerio valley region, insecurity, fueled by illegal arms in the hands of civilians has been a recurrent security dynamics that has not only called for local stakeholders to find solutions, but also called by the different stakeholders from both the county and national government, and NGO's who have come in to help bring sustainable intervention to secure the region, one being disarmament, either through surrender or by coercion. A report on state security by the Government of Kenya (2024), noted that in the Marakwet and Pokot communities living in the Kerio Valley have for several decades been at the receiving end on the effects of insecurity, catalyzed by the rampant illicit arms among civilians, which fuels cattle rustling, a practice that has a cultural identity. Additionally, the arid and semi-arid lands in the valley faces drought in certain times of the year, forcing the pastoralist communities to compete for scarce water and pasture for their livestock, their key livelihood. This is further intensified by the remote terrain, unreachable by security agencies in time during crisis, and unending revenge attacks. This leads to structured insecurity, cyclical and compounded by scares resources and marginalization.

In Baringo county, Mwaruvie, Keitany, & Osamba, J. (2024) while investigating banditry and illegal arms, reported that insecurity has become a complex affair in the county due to its metamorphosis from a cultural tradition of cattle rustling to an enterprise run by criminals who use available illicit arms to stage and carry out violent raids, motivated by livestock proceeds from the market, thus defying disarmament efforts and government, local community and NGOs interventions.

In a multicounty report by National Crime Research Centre (NCRC) (2024), illicit arms drive insecurity. Criminals use them to raid for commercial gains; an illegal trade linked to established structures of organized criminal networks both within and outside the county. Insecurity therefore rises due to presence of a weak policing authority, a situation that exacerbates the circulation of illicit arms. The availability of stolen livestock markets allows the violence to continue, hence insecurity. Disarmament efforts, thus become difficult due to its embeddedness in organized crimes related to cattle rusting and the economic gains from the available markets.

Based on this background, the researcher sought to establish the effect that government led disarmament has on insecurity in Baringo County, Kenya

Statement of the Problem

Insecurity in Baringo county has been a constant occurrence, happening through conflicts and violence between communities, rampant banditry, recurrent cattle rustling, and the competition over scares resources critical for sustaining the pastoral livelihood, particularly over water and pasture. The county, through the rampant and constant insecurity has seen the loses of human life, loss of community live line: livestock through rustling. Additionally, some people in the community have been forcibly displace from their homes, for fear of their lives, property have been destroyed, social and economic well being has been disrupted, family and communal ties changed. As a result, the affected communities have experienced minimal development owed to marginalization and instability from constant conflicts. Moreover, insecurity has trapped the population in unending poverty cycles (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2024).

The county has widespread illicit arms, used to raid for livestock, revenge attacks, and carry out violence among the local community. Despite the presence of disarmament, security is not guaranteed due to fragmented and parallel disarmament operations (Nambair, 2019). Additionally, the possession of illegal arms and its proliferation is attributed to the minimal presence of the security forces, the ease of flow of arms from the border countries. Moreover, the disarmament efforts have been resisted locally due to a widespread lack of trust on the government in ensuring security, and the vulnerability that the people are left in from attacks when they remain unarmed (Sitima, 2015).

According to Melil (2018), disarmament efforts have been halted by critical community practices. The utilization of indigenous governance system is deeply rooted in the county, and therefore, elders play critical roles in weakening disarmament efforts since they sanction decisions in the local jurisdictions, thus creating a cyclical self-sustaining violence.

There is also a research gap on disarmament in Baringo county. Odhiambo (2023) analyzed conflicts caused by resources competition, Mwaruvie, Keitany, and Osamba, (2024), investigated the Bandit economy, while Chemase and Muhindi(2024), concentrated on Bandity. The study therefore sought to fill this gap by determining the effect of disarmament on insecurity in Baringo County, Kenya

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design, which was selected because of its suitability in the evaluation of the respondents' behaviors, perceptions and experiences, from large populations. Additionally, the design allows for the collections of both qualitative and quantitative data. The area of study was Baringo county inhabited majorly by pastoralist communities, who have over several decades been experiencing insecurity partly fuelled by the infiltration of illegal firearms hence fueling cyclical insecurity.

The study targeted 120 respondents drawn from stakeholders directly involved on matters security and peacebuilding in the county. They included 1 Deputy County Commissioner, 2 Assistant County Commissioners, 10 Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs, 20 National Police service officers from the Kenya police and Administration police, 3 representatives from the Baringo County security representatives. 8 representatives of NGOs and civil society organizations, the world vision, Kenya, the Kenya red cross, mercy corps, and the rift valley peace and development project, all operational within Baringo county. Additionally, 15 community elders and 15 youth leaders, 15 Women group leaders, 4 religious leaders and 27 local residents were involved in the study. Since the target population was small, all the respondents were involved in the study.

To collect both qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher used structured questionnaires and key informant interviews on key informants, specifically, from the government officials such as the police and NGO representatives. A pilot study was carried out in West Pokot, a neighboring county that experiences similar challenges as Baringo, to ascertain the validity of the research instruments.

A research authorization was provided by Kenyatta University graduate school, and a research permit obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Informed consent, validity and confidentiality was adhered to in the course of data collection. Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data; quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Response Rate

The rate of response for both the instruments was 93.3% with 112 out of 120 questionnaires and interviews successfully done. This demonstrates that the response rate was strong and data collected was adequate for analysis, as noted by Creswell and Creswell (2018), that higher response rates are adequate for data analysis in social science research.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The research sought to determine the gender representation of the respondents. Out of 112, 68(60.7%) were male while 44(39.3%) were female. This showed a higher number of males which directly reflects the dominance of male in the subject of Security in Baringo County. It is also a direct representation of how matters insecurity is handled among the pastoralist communities of Baringo County.

The age of the respondents was sought, and categorized into 4 subgroups. The outcome showed that 22(19.6%) were aged between 20-29, 33.9%, belonged to 30-39 age group, 26.8% came from

age group 40-49 while 19.6% were age 50 and above. This outcome indicates that persons of all age groups were included in the study, thus reflecting the divergent views, and rich information on the information sought.

On their education level, 18(16.1%) had primary level education, 42(37.5 %) secondary, 34(30.4%) had attained diploma or college certificate, 18(16.1%) had attained a university degree. This outcome reveals that the respondents possessed adequate literacy level to understand the questions in the questionnaires and in the interview schedules, and respond to them adequately, thus adding to the reliability of the data collected.

The participants who successfully filled the questionnaires and those interviewed were from different categories: 40(35.7%) were the local residents who have been victims/experienced insecurity, 25(22.3%) were security officers from the disciplined forces, 20(17.9%) were the local national government Administration officers(NGAOs) who composed of Assistant county commissioners and the Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs, 10(8.9%) were representative of civil society organizations directly involved in the effort to curb insecurity in Baringo county, and included the NGO representatives, 17(15.2%) were the community leaders including the youth leaders, women leaders and local elders. Majority were local residents which ensured that the responses had the perspectives of the key stakeholders affected by illegal arms and insecurity. The respondents also reflect a balanced perspective of information from all other people directly involved in the disarmament effort whose goal is to curb the cyclical insecurity in the county.

Descriptive Results

Disarmament

The research sought the respondents' opinions using a five-point Likert scale questions, from 1-5 where 1= Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree. Table 1.1 presents the respondents results.

Table 1: Disarmament and its effects in Security

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean±Std. Dev
Statement						
Disarmament in our community have reduced the frequency of insecurity	1(1.0%)	4(3.5%)	7(6.3%)	59(52.7%)	41(36.5%)	4.21±0.78
The way government carries out the disarmament exercise/operations is effective	1(0.9%)	4(4.0%)	8(7.1%)	58(51.8%)	41(36.2%)	4.20±0.79
There is clear reduction of banditry incidences and cattle rustling due to disarmament	1(1.0%)	4(3.6%)	8(6.8%)	59(53.1%)	40(35.5%)	4.19±0.79
During Disarmament, there is excellent cooperation between the local community members and the security officers during disarmament	1(1.0%)	5(4.1%)	8(7.4%)	58(52.0%)	40(35.5%)	4.17±0.82

Source: Research Data (2026)

Disarmament Operations

When the respondents were asked to indicate their level agreement on whether the disarmament operations in their communities have reduced insecurity, Majority of the respondents 52.2% agreed, while 36.5% strongly agreed, making the total level of agreement 89.2%. only 1% strongly disagreed, 3.5% disagreed while 6.3% preferred to maintain a neutral position denoting that they were not sure if the operation had any effect in reducing insecurity. Additionally, the mean and standard deviation of 4.20 ± 0.78 , indicated that majority of the respondents had general agreement that disarmament operations, for all illicit, arms, small and light weapons had a positive effect in insecurity, and the standard deviation denoted that all the responses were almost similar, and grouped around the mean which means, the level of agreement was high while disagreement was very low with little response variations.

Responses from the qualitative data reflected the same trends. Majority reported that disarmament operations have successfully curbed the high frequency of insecurity in the county, and a number of illegal firearms have been recovered by the security forces through continuous disarmament operations that are both coercive and volunteer. This has further led to securing villages that were previously conflict and violent zones, weakened organized bandit groups, and reduced the number of livestock stolen over time.

This outcome has been reported by other previous studies. Sigu, Kiboro and Omboto(2025) while analyzing implications of disarmament in the North rift counties, found that there was reduced crime related to illicit firearms after disarmament operations, although the progress was not absolute but rather partial due to lack of total elimination. Wepundi et al. (2011) investigated the disarmament of civilian in the Kenya Uganda border. The outcome revealed that the disarmament operations led to the reduction of activities of militia groups and armed violence, led to the restoration of peace and stability in the mount Elgon region. However, they noted that the success and direct effects on reducing insecurity was highly dependent on the level of cooperation between the community and security forces.

Effectiveness of Disarmament Operations

The research sought to establish how effective were the disarmament exercise in Baringo County. Majority of the respondents 51.8% agreed, 36.2% strongly agreed, 7.1% maintained a neutral stance, 4%disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed. A large majority 88.0% generally were in agreement. A mean of 4.20 denoted that majority of the respondents had a general positive agreement that the disarmament operations were effective in reducing insecurity in their communities. A standard deviation of 0.79 denoted that the responses from all the respondents were clustered round the mean, showing a high agreement of the statement, with minimal divisions of opinions.

The qualitative data on the other hand revealed that as much as the disarmament exercise is effective, it is time and context bound. During the period of disarmament and immediately after the operations, insecurity drops drastically, banditry, stops and violence reduce. However, the situation surges again after sometime, returning back to the conflicting and violent situations, theft of cattle among other evils emanating from illegal firearms. Additionally, the respondents indicated that, there is limited reach to all the affected areas, occasioned by the tough geographical landscapes of Baringo county. The terrains are challenging delaying the disarmament effort in the risky remote context that prone to insecurity, and in some instances rarely reached by government, thus, despite the presence and effectiveness of the operations, some areas in the county are rarely reached, causing a continuous insecurity.

Previous reports support this outcome. According to the Small Arms Survey (2012), that covered the pastoral regions of Kenya, Kerio valley, that hosts Baringo county, has a highly rugged terrain and in some places, there are deep valleys and escarpments that leads to delayed response, when need be, both for the local communities and the security forces. This is occasioned by limited, no existent to poor road access, and dispersed settlements. This makes disarmament operations limited, and encourages insecurity, through

banditry, cattle rustling especially in the remote mountainous terrains and the risky treacherous valley, largely uninhabited.

The international Crisi Group (2021) further reported that Some parts of Kenya's Rift valley, particularly in the Kerio valley, there are places that are hard to reach due to terrain challenges. Occasioning limited state presence. In some territories, the escarpments are too steep, there are no all-weather roads for access, coupled with vast lands that are ungoverned, thus challenging disarmament efforts and security forces presence.

Reduction of Banditry and Cattle Rustling

The members were asked to indicate their level of agreement on the statement 'there is a clear reduction of Banditry incidences and cattle rustling due to disarmament'. Majority of the respondents, 53.1% agreed, 35.5% strongly agreed, 6.8% neither agreed nor disagreed, 3.6% disagreed while 1.0% strongly disagreed. This outcome showed that a larger majority, 88.6% had a general believe that the disarmament exercise carried out in Baringo county has a positive effect in reducing Banditry and Cattle rustling. This is supported by an aggregate mean of 4.19 and a stand deviation of 0.79, which meant that the respondents were in agreement that indeed banditry reduced, and low standard deviation denotes that the feedback of all the respondents were clustered around the mean thus a general agreement that there is a positive contribution of disarmament exercise in reducing banditry hence the reduction of insecurity.

The qualitative data further revealed that, banditry and cattle rustling in territories that have had consistent disarmament has reduced, and calm and stability has been restored, indicating that there is a positive relationship between disarmament and security because it is the illegal firearms that fuel banditry and cattle rustling. However, this was not uniform in all areas in Baringo. The regions along the borders still experience a rising and violent banditry and cattle raiding, territories reported to have illegal firearms in the arms of civilian.

The outcome is not new. Other previous studies detail almost similar outcome. Sigu, Kiboro and Omboto (2025) reported that disarmament in some regions of the North rift led to a shift of banditry and cattle rustling to regions that are remote and hardly reachable by security forces, especially in the rugged terrains that rarely attract police surveillance. Musau, Ichani and Mulu (2023) reported that the underpublicized areas in the remote regions with scarce security personnel still experience rampant banditry even with disarmament operations because the rugged mountains provide excellent hiding spaces for bandits. Additionally, Murkomen, Rotich and Majiwa (2025) confirmed that banditry and cattle raids only reduced in accessible areas that disarmament happened and did not change in the deep valley zones and the mountainous areas, especially those inhabited by bandits who have vast knowledge of the local terrain, thus facilitating their ambush and violence.

Cooperation During Disarmament

The respondents provided their views on whether there is excellent cooperation between the local communities and the security officers during the disarmament period. Majority of the respondents 52.0% agreed, 35.5% strongly agreed, 7.4% were undecided, and 1.0% strongly disagreed. Majority, 87.5% generally agreed that there exists an excellent cooperation among the stakeholders to ensure the disarmament exercise is successful. A mean of 4.17 further reveals that the responses were positive and generally agreeable to the statement. A standard deviation of 0.82 denoted that the responses from all the respondents were closer to the mean and thus their opinions were not scattered, and thus a high-level consensus that cooperation was excellent.

The qualitative data revealed that there is a strong trust y the community on the security forces, which ahs improved over time. This has encouraged positive collaborations that has yielded positive disarmament efforts, mostly done voluntarily, or via amnesty and when need be, community members provide information for coercive disarmament. On the contrary, it was also revealed that sometimes, the cooperation is halted by

rivalry in groups due to fear that groups may retaliate, thus halting voluntary surrender efforts. Thus, despite the excellent cooperation, there are critical factors that in some instances, jeopardize the efforts. These are: the historical facts that may lead to revenge attacks and mistrust fear for repercussions from the community and the fear for vulnerability in case the firearms are surrendered.

Previous studies report almost similar findings: The International Crisis Group. (2021) reported the existence of mistrust between security forces and the community during the disarmament exercise because the members of the community see it as a punitive practice that is implemented selectively and not supported by the community desire, thus hiding the weapons instead of surrender. Saferworld. (2015) in a study that covered Isiolo, West Pokot counties reported existence of low trust on the part of the police by the community, thus lowering levels of cooperation during disarmament.

CONCLUSION

Insecurity in Baringo county is rampant, fueled by the proliferation of illicit arms in the hands of civilian. The use of the firearms creates conflicts and violence in the form of Banditry, cattle rustling and revenge attacks. The government has intervened using different methodologies one being the disarmament implemented through amnesty for surrender, voluntary surrender, and coercive operations. The results show that , Disarmament has reduced insecurity with the response posting a mean and standard deviation of 4.21 ± 0.78 , the disarmament operations are effective in areas that are carried out constantly (4.20 ± 0.79), cattle rustling and banditry has significantly reduced in the areas that have consistent disarmament (4.19 ± 0.79) and that there exists excellent cooperation between the members of the community and other key stakeholders with the police force during disarmament exercise (4.17 ± 0.82)

However, despite the positive effects of disarmament exercise in reducing insecurity, the exercise is challenged by a number of issues: challenging and unreachable terrains, vast ungoverned areas with minimal government presence, historical factors that call for revenge attacks, fear of repercussions by community members, inadequate trust between local communities and the police, poor infrastructure that make certain terrains inaccessible and the fear to be vulnerable of future attacks if the illicit firearms are surrendered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study therefore makes the following recommendations:

- Improve Infrastructure development, particularly road networks to open up the county
- Increase government presence in all terrains
- Civic education to enhance cooperation between all stakeholders
- Include the local community in the planning and implementation of the disarmament exercise to make it a community driven project

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