

Challenges and opportunities facing peace building among the pastoral communities in Garissa County, Kenya

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Recommended Reference: Salah, M., Iteyo, C., & Simiyu, R. (2026). Challenges and opportunities facing peacebuilding among the pastoral communities in Garissa County, Kenya. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 3(4), 618–631.

<https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.3.4.49>

ABSTRACT

Pastoral communities in Garissa County, Kenya, continue to experience recurrent conflicts driven by competition over water and pasture, clan rivalries, political interference, insecurity and climate change, despite sustained peacebuilding interventions by government and non-governmental actors. This study examined the challenges and opportunities facing peacebuilding among pastoral communities in Garissa County with the aim of generating evidence to inform more effective and sustainable peacebuilding strategies. The study adopted a descriptive research design and employed a mixed-methods approach. The study adopted conflict transformation theory. The researcher employed purposive sampling. The sample size for this study was 641 participants. These respondents included 384 household heads and while key informants included 8 chiefs, 9 members of parliament, 30 National Police Officers, 6 Non-Governmental Officer's representatives, 6 Community Based Organizations representatives. Focus Group Discussion participants included 22 religious leaders, 20 women leaders and 40 youth leaders. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that scarcity of water and pasture (82.7%), cultural norms and gender roles (60.7%), lack of education and awareness (22.0%), political interference (10.0%), clan rivalries (5.3%), insecurity from armed groups (1.8%) and limited government presence (0.3%) were the major challenges undermining peacebuilding efforts. The study further established that promoting inter-clan dialogue (28.2%), supporting youth and women empowerment initiatives (24.6%), strengthening education (23.5%), expanding economic opportunities (17.9%) and enhancing community security and policing (5.9%) present significant opportunities for promoting sustainable peace. The study concludes that effective peacebuilding among pastoral communities requires integrated interventions that address both the structural causes of conflict and the available local opportunities for peace. It recommends strengthening traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, investing in water and pasture management, promoting inclusive participation of women and youth in peace processes, expanding livelihood opportunities and enhancing collaboration between government institutions, local communities and development partners to achieve sustainable peace in Garissa County.

Keywords: Challenges; Opportunities; Peace building; Pastoral communities

I. INTRODUCTION

Peacebuilding has become a central strategy for preventing violent conflicts, promoting reconciliation and creating sustainable peace in communities affected by recurring violence. According to the United Nations, peacebuilding involves addressing the root causes of conflict while strengthening institutions and relationships that promote peaceful coexistence. Across the world, pastoral communities continue to experience conflicts arising from competition over natural resources, weak governance systems, climate change, political exclusion and socio-economic inequalities. These conflicts undermine human security, economic development and social cohesion, making peacebuilding an essential component of sustainable development.

Globally, experiences from countries such as Colombia, Northern Ireland and the Philippines demonstrate that effective peacebuilding extends beyond ending violence to addressing structural causes of conflict. In Colombia, participatory land governance and equitable resource distribution have contributed to reducing historical grievances associated with land disputes (Vanelli & Peralta, 2022). Similarly, Northern Ireland has promoted reconciliation through inclusive governance and community-based initiatives that encourage interaction among formerly divided communities (Rifai & Emekci, 2022). In the Philippines, recognition of local identities and inclusive political participation have strengthened peace agreements and improved cooperation among previously conflicting groups (Biwang, 2023). These

experiences demonstrate that successful peacebuilding depends on inclusive governance, equitable access to resources and meaningful community participation.

Across Africa, peacebuilding among pastoral communities faces numerous challenges, including climate variability, resource scarcity, weak state institutions, poverty and the proliferation of small arms. Competition over grazing land and water resources frequently triggers violent conflicts, particularly during prolonged droughts. At the same time, opportunities exist through indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, traditional leadership structures, community dialogue, peace education and livelihood diversification. In countries such as South Sudan and Somalia, strengthening local governance, promoting accountability and supporting community participation have been identified as important pathways for enhancing sustainable peace despite persistent insecurity (Parry et al., 2026).

In Kenya, pastoral communities occupy large arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) that contribute significantly to the country's livestock economy. However, these communities continue to experience frequent conflicts resulting from competition over natural resources, cattle rustling, clan rivalries, political competition, youth unemployment and the increasing impacts of climate change. Studies by Chelang'a and Chesire (2020) indicate that traditional governance systems and community elders play an important role in resolving conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence. In Wajir County, community participation and local peace committees have strengthened conflict management by facilitating dialogue among conflicting groups (Abdi & Mwangi, 2023). Furthermore, livelihood diversification through trade, entrepreneurship and small livestock enterprises has been shown to reduce dependence on scarce natural resources and promote economic cooperation among communities (Mosol, 2022; King'ong'o et al., 2022).

Garissa County is predominantly inhabited by pastoral communities whose livelihoods depend largely on livestock production and access to communal grazing land and water resources. Despite numerous government and non-governmental peace initiatives, the county continues to experience recurrent conflicts driven by resource competition, clan disputes, cross-border insecurity, violent extremism, proliferation of illicit firearms and the effects of recurrent droughts. These challenges disrupt livelihoods, displace communities, reduce access to education and healthcare and hinder socio-economic development. Nevertheless, Garissa County also presents significant opportunities for peacebuilding. Existing traditional institutions, community elders, religious leaders, women and youth groups, peace committees and county government initiatives provide important platforms for dialogue, mediation and reconciliation. Development programmes aimed at improving livelihoods, strengthening governance and enhancing community participation also offer opportunities for building lasting peace.

Although previous studies have examined pastoral conflicts and conflict resolution in Kenya, limited attention has been given to the combined challenges and opportunities influencing peacebuilding among pastoral communities in Garissa County. Understanding these factors is essential for designing effective peacebuilding interventions that strengthen community resilience, promote peaceful coexistence and support sustainable development. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the challenges and opportunities facing peacebuilding among pastoral communities in Garissa County, Kenya.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Garissa County has experienced recurrent conflicts among pastoral communities for many years, largely driven by competition over grazing land, water resources, clan rivalries, cross-border insecurity and the increasing effects of climate change. These conflicts have resulted in loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of communities and disruption of socio-economic activities. Although the Government of Kenya, county government, non-governmental organizations, religious institutions and community elders have implemented various peacebuilding initiatives, including peace committees, mediation forums, disarmament campaigns and cross-border peace agreements, conflicts continue to recur, particularly in areas such as Hulugho, Fafi and Ijara (Kong'ani, 2024).

The persistence of these conflicts suggests that existing peacebuilding interventions have not achieved sustainable peace among pastoral communities. Their effectiveness is constrained by numerous challenges, including resource scarcity, prolonged droughts, poverty, unemployment, weak institutional coordination, proliferation of illicit firearms, political interference and violent extremism associated with Al-Shabaab. These factors continue to undermine trust among communities, weaken local peace structures and limit community participation in peacebuilding initiatives. At the same time, opportunities such as indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, the influence of community elders and religious leaders, youth and women peace networks, county peace structures and livelihood diversification programmes remain underutilized despite their potential to strengthen sustainable peace.

Previous studies in northern Kenya have largely concentrated on the causes of pastoral conflicts, resource-based violence, cattle rustling and counter-terrorism interventions, with relatively limited attention given to the combined challenges and opportunities influencing peacebuilding among pastoral communities in Garissa County. Consequently, there is inadequate empirical evidence on how existing challenges impede peacebuilding efforts and how available opportunities can be leveraged to promote lasting peace. This knowledge gap limits the ability of policymakers,

development partners and local communities to design interventions that effectively respond to the realities of pastoral communities.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the challenges and opportunities facing peacebuilding among pastoral communities in Garissa County, Kenya, with the aim of generating evidence that can inform more effective and sustainable peacebuilding policies and programmes.

1.2 Objective of the Study

To examine the challenges and opportunities facing peace building among the pastoral communities in Garissa County, Kenya

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict Transformation Theory, established by John Lederach (1995), is a nuanced approach to understanding and tackling complex, protracted conflicts by viewing peace as a dynamic and ongoing process rather than only a final and fixed state. The theory holds that sustainable peace does not end violence and it must change relationships, behaviors, structures and social dynamics which cause conflict and keep it going. The theory emphasizes that peace is based on having mutual understanding and trust between opposing groups (Lederach, 1997). This principle is clearly reflected in the study and it was that inter-group dynamics and community-government relations can be reformed when it comes to the transformation of them from adversary to cooperative, to a peace-building project. In Garissa County, where resource-based conflicts are often ethnic or clan conflict between Somali pastoralists and Borana pastoralists, relationship change is a key factor.

From a socio-economic perspective this tenet is perfect to identify the underlying grievances and systemic challenges that are preventing peace and create pathways to dialogue and cooperation in the study as it is the goal of the study to understand the socio-economic factors that are a key factor in the development of peace in conflict-prone areas where socio-political marginalization and economic disadvantage are a major factor. Conflict Transformation Theory stressed the need to tackle the underlying causes of conflict, such as economic inequality and political exclusion (Galtung, 1996). This tenet is critical to the study because a lot of the fighting in Garissa is due to the injustice of resources being distributed as well as education and healthcare and political representation being scarce. It is the theory that calls on researchers to do what is right by not only reform government systems but also reform governance systems to be more inclusive and equitable as well and to make them more decentralized, to make them more social in nature and to develop socio-economic programs for people who are marginalized. When it comes to Garissa's rural areas of Ijara, Fafi, Dadaab, Lagdera and Balambala, structural change would have to do with the lack of government presence, poor infrastructure and economic disenfranchisement for which there are so many people, these are factors that are linked to conflict.

This structural focus gives a much better perspective on the dynamics of conflicts and a framework for finding long-term solutions that address systemic causes, and for sustainable peace. The theory acknowledges the role of local traditions and practices in peacebuilding (Lederach, 1999). This is particularly important in Garissa County where indigenous conflict resolution practices (such as the council of elders and Xeer customary law) are crucial in settling local disputes. By acknowledging and incorporating these traditional mechanisms researchers and practitioners can tap into existing cultural resources to achieve peace while ensuring that interventions are aligned with local values and norms. Our Pearson correlation results back up this tenet by showing that clan elders' mediation was highly correlated with peacebuilding at $r = .924$ and Xeer customary law at $r = .906$, both $p < .001$. This culturally sensitive approach enables a peacebuilding process which is not only relevant to the context, but also might get community support and is more likely to have a sense of ownership, and commitment to sustainable peace.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Challenges and Opportunities Facing Peacebuilding among the Pastoralist Communities

The study of peacebuilding in pastoral communities in the Horn of Africa and the world community has also attracted widespread attention, but the empirical literature is quite patchwork-wise across thematic areas. This review will compile the best evidence-based research on the challenges and the possibility of peacebuilding and will focus on the studies conducted in Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). It will provide a common basis for the structural, socio-cultural, political and security factors that are at once preventing and enabling peace.

Resource scarcity and climate-induced conflict: More recent research has developed this relationship. Navarro et al. (2025) show through climate conflict modelling in the Karamoja Cluster that environmental variability is closely related to conflict timing and frequency. Elfversson and Nilsson (2022) show that resource competition in Kenya's arid

land is not simply a matter of environmental pollution but of governance failure and privatization of common property that disrupt traditional sharing mechanisms. Rao et al. (2025) found that the commodification of water and pasture is creating further inequalities and has led to new conflicts among pastoralist communities in northern Kenya. Wanyonyi et al. (2025) linked recurrent droughts to increasing inter-ethnic conflict between Turkana and Pokot and said that policy responses have frequently neglected the conflict aspects of climate adaptation.

Political interference and governance deficit: Studies on devolution and pastoral conflict show how political manipulation feeds into communal hostilities. Moler (2022) found that devolution in Kenya as a way to bring governance closer to the people has enabled political elites to manipulate ethnic and clan divisions for electoral advantages in pastoral areas. Sahal (2016) found a high level of relationship between political and administrative staff and perennial sub-clan conflict particularly in Garissa County, as political party leaders take advantage of clan divisions to gain political support. Oyoo et al. (2019) found that conflicts are multifaceted embedded in ethno-political and cultural issues of the community. Eaton (2008) observed that raiding has been institutionalized from the Kenya-Uganda border as it is used for political negotiation and status acquisition. Bond and Mkutu (2018) found that the proliferation of peace actors and institutions in Kenya's northern drylands has not translated into accountability mechanisms for elites who help to incite violence. Thumi (2023) noted that in peripheral areas such as this, state power and accountability is lacking and conflicts spread without effective deterrence.

Traditional Authority, Clan Dynamics, and Customary Mechanisms: Customary institutions are both good and bad in practice. Chelang'a and Chesire (2020) found that traditional governance systems and community elders play an important role in solving conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence in Kenyan pastoralist communities. Mkutu (2007) also found that community involvement and local peace committees helped in conflict management in Wajir County by facilitating dialogue among competing groups. However, Maelo (2025) studied how traditional elder councils in Isiolo County have been undermined by the proliferation of small arms, modernization and politicization of customary positions. As Mac Ginty (2015) pointed out, "customary" systems may be exclusionary, dominated by older men, and can be hijacked by elite interests. Ndinawe (2025) examined the efficacy of traditional Somali justice-based structures in Garissa County and found that traditional systems, although culturally legitimate, remain inconsistent as they are not integrated into formal state structures.

The transition of pastoral conflict to firearms and extremist dynamics is well-known. Mkutu (2007) showed how the availability of small arms among pastoral groups in Kenya and Uganda increased the likelihood of resource and clan disputes. Nyonje and Muiya (2024) investigated Garissa County's context in particular and found that proximity to Somalia brings external extremist dynamics that make local conflict resolution more difficult and that livelihood insecurity creates the motivation for affiliation in armed groups outside the state. Harper and Nagai (2024) found that environmental stress and competition for resources drive youth to join armed groups and not ideology. Hadi (2022) identified economic marginalization and youth unemployment as the main factors for recruitment into armed groups and banditry in Kenya's northern frontier.

Gender, Culture, and Exclusion from Peace Processes: Feminist peacebuilding scholarship shows a structural discrimination between women and peace setting. Parry et al. (2026) found that peace mediation spaces in Africa are shaped by patriarchal structures that make peacebuilding gender-based, and that the place women are able to get to have resources, networks and legitimacy is men's. Kong'ani (2024) observed that while women in West Pokot are crucial actors in informal peacebuilding as bridge-builders in clans, they are systematically devalued by cultural scripts that require formal decisions to be made by men. Tripp et al. (2025) highlighted that in many African contexts' women are invisible because their work in peacebuilding is not part of "public" or "authoritative" structures. Elfversson and Nilsson (2022) differentiated between inclusion as direct participation and inclusion as symbolic representation; the former is more meaningful to a person and the latter is not to be represented. Women and youth in Kenya's borderlands are often portrayed as "soft" in dialogue but not as a part of the formal decision-making about security and resources in the country (Kong'ani, 2024).

Education, Awareness, and Structural Exclusion: Education deficits are not just a matter of lack of schooling but also of gendered socialization. Parry et al. (2026) pointed out that even for women with decades of experience in grassroots conflict resolution they often do not have "procedural literacy" or knowledge of formal mediation, which is a product of donors and peacebuilding processes that have been established in those areas. Kong'ani (2024) found that pastoral education systems have dominated male education, resulting in periods of under preparation for formal roles. Novelli and Smith (2011) highlighted the importance of education systems in conflict-affected regions as a resource that has the potential to perpetuate division or create peace cultures. Osamba (2002) argued that peacebuilding in the Horn of Africa cannot be achieved without faith-based institutions.

2.2.2 Opportunities

Economic Diversification and Livelihoods: The evidence is clear that diversification of livelihoods lowers conflict incentives. Obote (2024) noted that diversification of livelihoods reduces the opportunity cost of conflict in

Kenya's northern rangelands, where whole community wealth linked to livestock creates high incentives for violent resource raiding. Mosol (2022) found that diversification of livelihood in trade, entrepreneurship and small livestock production, in particular, reduced reliance on limited natural resources and encouraged economic cooperation in West Pokot. Osamba (2002) also found that economic diversification drives inter-ethnic cooperation. But Rao et al. (2025) warns that economic interventions can lead to new conflicts over access to irrigable land or markets and conflict-sensitive planning is essential.

Youth and Women's Agency: Nowadays there is a growing body of literature recognizing women and youth as agents and not only victims. Kong'ani (2024) showed that women-led peacebuilding efforts in Kenya's borderlands are especially effective in early warning and community healing due to informal networks and cross-clan family structures. Tripp et al (2025) argued that youth engagement in peace-building is a bridge that connects generations and that peace cannot be frozen in past grievances. But Kong'ani (2026) made the point that genuine political space, not just symbolic participation, is the key to empowerment. The evidence is clear that peacebuilding challenges in pastoral contexts are interlinked rather than discrete. Resource scarcity is the basic material cause of these problems and leaders exploit them with political interference and clan mobilization. Insecurity from armed groups serves as a threat multiplier. Cultural norms legitimize women's exclusion from leadership and underinvestment in their education. However, studies have been done that only consider individual problems or opportunities and not as systems as a whole. There are few studies to systematically rank these factors by what the people affected by them believe and how they might be reformed to make them more inclusive but still culturally acceptable. These gaps support the present study's comprehensive exploration of challenges and opportunities in Garissa County.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the challenges and opportunities facing peacebuilding among pastoral communities in Garissa County, Kenya. The descriptive design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to systematically collect, describe and analyze information on the existing peacebuilding initiatives, challenges, opportunities and stakeholder perspectives without manipulating the study variables. The design facilitated the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from pastoral households and key stakeholders, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing peacebuilding in the study area. According to Kothari (2004), a descriptive research design provides an effective framework for describing the characteristics of a population and addressing research questions based on current conditions.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in the five rural constituencies of Garissa County Ijara, Fafi, Dadaab, Lagdera and Balambala where pastoralism is the dominant livelihood and conflicts over grazing land, water resources, clan rivalry and insecurity remain prevalent.

3.3 Target Population

The target population included household heads; community elders, religious leaders, youth and women leaders, security personnel, county government officials and representatives of non-governmental and community-based organizations

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

The study focused in five constituencies of Ijara, Fafi, Dadaab, Lagdera and Balambala. According to Kothari (2004), when the population is too small, the whole population is picked for representation. In this case, the five sub-counties were sampled by census method to participate in this study. The total number households in Garissa County were 841,353. When the population exceeds 10,000 respondents, Yamane's formula was applied to determine the sample size of household heads. In this case, Yamane's formula was used to sample 384 household heads and simple random technique was used in sampling these household heads in selected five sub-counties in Garissa County. Yamane's formula for calculating sample size:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where; N is the population size and e is the level of precision.

$$n = \frac{(z)^2 pq}{(e)^2} = \frac{1.96^2 (0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384$$

=384 household heads

The researcher employed purposive sampling to ensure knowledgeable stakeholders are included; snowball sampling to access hard-to-reach individuals with sensitive or closed networks; and simple random sampling to provide a balanced, representative view of the general population. This combination of sampling techniques will enable the study to gather comprehensive, high-quality data on socio-economic conflict and peacebuilding across multiple, relevant population segments in Garissa. The sample size for this study was 641 participants. These respondents included 384 household heads and while key informants included 8 chiefs, 9 members of parliament, 30 NPS Officers, 6 NGO's representatives, 6 CBO representatives. FGD participants included 22 religious leaders, 20 women leaders and 40 youth leaders.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and procedures

A total of 384 questionnaires were distributed to household heads respondents. The structured nature of questionnaires had open ended and closed ended questions that allows for the consistent gathering of information on key variables, including the effectiveness of peace-building strategies, resource allocation and socio-economic factors. Using closed-ended questions, the study measured specific indicators, such as the number of peace initiatives implemented, types of multicultural interactions and levels of community engagement. Sixty (60) Interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data and gain deeper insights into the socio-economic dynamics influencing peace-building efforts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on chiefs, political leaders, NPS Officers, NGO'S representatives, CBO representative and county commissioner. A total of ten focus group discussions (10FGDs) were conducted. Each FGD had 8 participants in each category within each of 5 sub-counties who took part in this study. These groups included youth leaders, women leaders and religious leaders ensuring diverse perspectives on socio-economic dynamics influencing peacebuilding.

3.6 Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for peacebuilding among pastoral communities in Garissa County.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study prioritized ethical considerations to ensure the research process upholds the dignity, privacy and rights of all participants. Before data collection, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, followed by a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). This authorization validated the study's purpose and allowed the researcher to notify and seek consent from local authorities and community leaders in Garissa County, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are informed about the study's academic nature and objectives. By securing this official approval, the researcher established transparency with both participants and local authorities, fostering an environment of trust and cooperation. Confidentiality and anonymity were paramount throughout the study to protect the privacy of respondents. Participants were assured that their responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and all data was anonymized to prevent any association of individuals with specific information.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Challenges hindering peacebuilding

The study sought to establish challenges hindering peacebuilding in Garissa County. The findings of the study revealed that out of the total respondents, 282 (82.7%) identified scarcity of water and pasture as the most important challenge, 34 (10.0%) cited political interference, 18 (5.3%) mentioned clan rivalries, 6 (1.8%) pointed to insecurity from armed groups, and 1 (0.3%) felt that lack of government presence was the main challenge. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1*Ranking Challenges hindering Peacebuilding*

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Scarcity of water and pasture	282.0	82.7
Cultural norms and gender roles	207.0	60.7
Lack of education and awareness	75.0	21.99
Political interference	34.0	9.97
Clan rivalries	18.0	5.28
Insecurity from armed groups	6.0	1.77
Lack of government presence	1.0	0.29

4.1.1 Scarcity of Water and Pasture

The finding that 82.7% of respondents identified scarcity of water and pasture as the most important challenge is strongly supported by focus group discussions. The qualitative data from a focus group discussion with pastoralists in Garissa Township provided powerful testimony regarding the lived reality of water and pasture scarcity. One pastoralist participant stated:

“We are dying slowly because of lack of water. When I was a young man, my father would tell me where the rains would fall by looking at the stars. That knowledge is useless now because the rains come when they want or they do not come at all. Last year, we walked for three weeks with our cattle looking for pasture. We lost forty goats along the way. Their carcasses lined the path. When we finally found water, it was at a borehole controlled by another clan. They said we could not drink because their own animals were dying. My young men wanted to fight. I stopped them, but I do not know how long I can continue stopping them. The government comes once a year with a water truck, but that is like giving a cup of water to a man dying of thirst. What we need is permanent water sources and grazing reserves that all clans can use, but no one is building them. The NGOs come, take photos of our dead animals, write reports, and leave. We are forgotten here” (FGD with pastoralists, Dadaab Garissa November 14, 2025).

The findings that 82.7% of respondents identified scarcity of water and pasture as the most important challenge have been confirmed by the literature reviewed. Through climate conflict modelling in the Karamoja Cluster (Navarro et al. 2025), environmental variability is linked to conflict frequency and timing, also supporting pastoralist claims that unpredictable rainfall has made traditional ecological knowledge obsolete and intensified resource competition. Tripp et al. (2025) found that resource competition in Kenya's arid territory is not just caused by environmental stress, but also by poor governance and privatization of common-property resources which has undermined the old sharing processes that had alleviated droughts. A borehole owned by another clan is reported by this participant to be unable to get water, illustrating how privatized resource points become flashpoints of conflict. Rao et al. (2025) observed that the commodification of water and pasture deepens inequalities and creates new conflict flashpoints among pastoralist communities in Northern Kenya as shown by the fact that communities in Garissa are excluded from water sources controlled by rival clans.

Wanyonyi et al. (2025) observed that recurrent droughts cause intensified inter-ethnic conflict among Turkana and Pokot and that the lack of policy attention to the conflict-sensitive nature of climate adaptation is comparable to the pastoralist's view that government action (e.g., annual water trucks) is intermittent and does not address structural determinants of scarcity. Taken together, these works show that there is a widespread and endemic problem of resource scarcity in Garissa County, and it is a governance and equity problem that is the most foundational problem with pastoral conflict that is recognised by the literature reviewed in this review.

4.1.2 Political Interference

The 10.0% of respondents citing political interference understates its pervasive role, as the qualitative data suggest. Moler (2022) documents how devolution in Kenya, intended to bring governance closer to communities, has instead enabled political elites to manipulate ethnic and clan divisions for electoral gain, particularly in pastoral counties. Further, interview with religious leader in Garissa town opined:

One of the key challenges we face is a lack of mutual understanding and coordination between religious institutions and formal peace actors. Often, NGOs and government agencies use secular frameworks that do not fully align with our faith-based approaches. At times, we are brought into peace processes too late or in token roles, rather than as key partners from the beginning. There can also be mistrust due to past failures or differing priorities. Capacity gaps, lack of funding, and limited training in formal peacebuilding methods further hinder our participation (Interview with religious leader of Imans at Garissa on 10.11.2025).

As shown in the empirical literature, political manipulation and governance deficits are mutually reinforcing drivers of pastoral conflict. Moler (2022) has shown that devolution in Kenya has not brought governance closer to communities, but rather has allowed political elites to manipulate ethnic and clan divisions to gain electoral advantage in pastoral counties. Sahal (2016) found a high relationship between political and administrative personnel and perennial sub-clan conflict in Garissa County, demonstrating that political leaders exploit clan divisions to gain electoral support. Eaton (2008) observed that raiding is institutionalised along the Kenya–Uganda border, and violence is a means of political negotiation and status acquisition in pastoral social structures. Bond and Mkutu (2018) found that peace actors and institutions in Kenya’s northern drylands have not been held accountable for violent elites, who use violence to gain political advantage. Thumi (2023) commented that weak state reach and accountability in peripheral areas allow conflicts to metastasise without effective deterrence.

These three studies together demonstrate that political interference is engineered through three interconnected mechanisms: the elite manipulation of clan identities for electoral gain (Moler, 2022; Sahal, 2016), the institutionalisation of violence as a political tool (Eaton, 2008), and the absence of accountability tools that would prevent such manipulation (Bond & Mkutu, 2018; Thumi, 2023). The convergence of these findings provides sound empirical evidence in interpreting the qualitative data in Garissa County, where respondents described a predictable cycle of electoral manipulation, unaccountable politicians and weak state presence in peripheral areas. However, existing studies do not focus on political interference at the top without systematically documenting how communities understand and experience political manipulation and how local peace structures might be reinforced to resist elite co-optation, which is a gap this study fills by looking at the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in Garissa County.

4.1.3 Clan Rivalries

While only 5.3% identified clan rivalries directly, the interviews reveal that perceptions of clan favoritism among chiefs and administrators critically undermine trust. Maelo (2025) examines how traditional elder councils, historically effective in mediating disputes, have been eroded by the proliferation of small arms, modernization, and the politicization of customary positions. When state-appointed local administrators are perceived as partisan, their neutrality collapses, and they risk becoming conflict actors rather than peacemakers. Rao et al. (2025) caution that clan-based social structures can foster both resilience and exclusion, and without impartial governance, they easily become fault lines for violence.

4.1.4 Insecurity from Armed Groups

The 1.8% citing insecurity from armed groups belies the outsized destabilizing effect of violent extremism and small arms. Thumi (2023) traces how traditional cattle raiding has been transformed by the widespread availability of firearms, escalating the lethality of resource and clan disputes.

Similarly, another interview with local government administrators revealed:

In Dadaab and parts of Fafi and Ijara, extremist threats make movement and engagement difficult, especially for government officials. Proximity to Somalia introduces external dynamics that complicate local conflict resolution. Many local peace committees lack operational funds or have become inactive due to disinterest or lack of government support (Interview with local government administrators in Garissa Town on 16.11.2025).

Nyonje and Muiya (2024) specifically analyze Garissa County’s context, showing that proximity to Somalia introduces external extremist dynamics that complicate local conflict resolution. Their research emphasizes that livelihood insecurity and marginalization can drive affiliation with non-state armed groups, making the security challenge both internal and transnational.

Chiefs and local administrators are often overstretched, covering large, sparsely populated, and insecure areas. Many officers lack conflict resolution, mediation, and peacebuilding skills. Poor transport and communication infrastructure make timely response to conflicts difficult. Poor coordination between county and national government arms (e.g., security agencies, county commissioners, local peace committees). Chiefs may be perceived as favoring their clan, undermining trust and neutrality. Local leaders or politicians may manipulate or escalate conflicts for political gain, especially during elections (Interview with local government administrators in Garissa Town on 16.11.2025).

This testimony aligns with the research of Nyonje and Muiya (2024), who specifically analyzed Garissa County's context and showed that proximity to Somalia introduces external extremist dynamics that complicate local conflict resolution. Their research emphasizes that livelihood insecurity and marginalization can drive affiliation with non-state armed groups, making the security challenge both internal and transnational. The administrators' observation about peace committees lacking operational funds or becoming inactive due to disinterest or lack of government support is consistent with the findings of Obote (2024), who documented that inconsistent external funding is a critical barrier to local peace committee effectiveness in Kenya's pastoral areas.

4.1.5 Lack of Government Presence

The finding that only 0.3% of respondents identified lack of government presence as a challenge is striking given that scholarly literature extensively documents state marginalization of pastoralist regions as a fundamental driver of conflict. Hadi (2022) found that pastoralist communities do not trust public administrators, hindering them from initiating programs that promote peace and stability. Bond and Mkutu (2018) documented that despite an active framework for peacebuilding processes from government, there exists a fundamental lack of strong conflict management and peacebuilding processes in place from government. The low percentage may reflect either normalization of state absence, where communities have ceased to expect government presence as a realistic possibility, or it may indicate that respondents perceive other challenges such as resource scarcity as more immediately pressing. The interview with local government administrators cited earlier, which detailed how chiefs are overstretched covering large, sparsely populated areas, implicitly acknowledges the limited government presence despite the low survey percentage.

4.1.6 Cultural Norms and Gender Roles

The finding that 60.7% of respondents identified cultural norms and gender roles as a barrier to women's participation in peacebuilding is consistent with a robust body of feminist peacebuilding scholars. A focus group discussion with women in Garissa Market provided detailed articulation of these barriers. The women stated:

Patriarchal norms and cultural restrictions are the biggest problem we face. In our community, a woman is not supposed to speak in a meeting where men are present. If we try to voice our opinions, we are told that we are being disrespectful or that we do not understand the issues because we are women. The elders say that peace is men's business because men fight the wars, so men must make the peace. But we are the ones who suffer the most when there is conflict. We lose our husbands, our sons, our homes. We are the ones who take care of the orphans and the wounded. We know what peace looks like because we are the ones who have to rebuild our families after violence. But our knowledge is not valued. Low levels of education and awareness among women also hold us back. Many of us were never sent to school because our parents believed that educating girls was a waste of money since we would only get married and go to another man's household. So, when peace meetings are held, we do not have the confidence or the language skills to participate. We are also excluded by local leadership. The clan elders are all men. The county peace committee has one woman if they remember to include one, but she is not allowed to speak freely because she is there as a token. We also lack financial resources to support women's initiatives. We have ideas for peacebuilding projects, but we have no money to implement them. The NGOs give funding to the men's committees, not to us (FGD with women in Garissa Market on 15.11.2025).

Parry et al. (2026) argue that peace mediation spaces in Africa are fundamentally shaped by patriarchal structures that assign women to subordinate, supportive roles. Their qualitative research with women mediators reveals that cultural norms do not simply exclude women but actively construct peacebuilding as a masculine profession, thereby limiting women's access to resources, networks, and legitimacy (Parry et al., 2026). This directly mirrors the FGD feedback from Garissa, where women explicitly cited "patriarchal norms and cultural restrictions" as a binding constraint.

Kong'ani (2024), in a study on pastoral communities in West Pokot, Kenya, provides further regional triangulation. She documents that while women are central to informal peacebuilding often acting as bridge-builders across clans their contributions are systematically devalued because "cultural scripts" reserve formal decision-making for men (Kong'ani, 2024, p. 9). This dynamic is not unique to Kenya; Tripp et al. (2025) demonstrate across multiple African contexts that women's peacebuilding work is frequently rendered invisible precisely because it operates outside the structures that culture defines as "public" or "authoritative." The overwhelming majority in your survey thus reflects a deeply institutionalized cultural logic that positions women's participation as transgressive unless confined to culturally sanctioned, informal roles.

The women's articulation of how low education levels compound their exclusion is critical. Their statement that they were never sent to school because their parents believed educating girls was a waste of money reflects what Parry et al. (2026) conceptualized as "procedural literacy" deficits, where even when women possess extensive grassroots conflict-resolution experience, they often lack awareness of how formal mediation frameworks, policy structures, and donor-driven peacebuilding operate because those spaces have historically excluded them. This structural exclusion is reinforced by education systems that, in many pastoral regions, have historically prioritized male education, perpetuating a cycle where women are systematically underprepared to claim formal roles (Kong'ani, 2024). The women's observation that the county peace committee has one woman if they remember to include one, but she is not allowed to speak freely because she is there as a token, illustrates what Elfversson and Nilsson (2022) described as the distinction between inclusion as direct participation in negotiations and inclusion as symbolic representation, with the latter failing to produce meaningful voice for marginalized groups.

4.1.7 Lack of Education and Awareness

The 22.0% of respondents who cited “lack of education and awareness” represents a critical intersecting barrier. In literature, this is rarely understood as merely a deficit of formal schooling; rather, it is conceptualized as a product of gendered socialization that restricts women’s access to the knowledge, skills, and networks required to navigate formal peace processes. Parry et al. (2026) emphasize that even when women possess extensive grassroots conflict-resolution experience, they often lack “procedural literacy” awareness of how formal mediation frameworks, policy structures, and donor-driven peacebuilding operate because those spaces have historically excluded them. This structural exclusion is reinforced by education systems that, in many pastoral regions, have historically prioritized male education, perpetuating a cycle where women are systematically underprepared to claim formal roles (Kong’ani, 2024). Tripp et al. (2025) add that a lack of awareness of rights and of the mechanisms of peace processes is not accidental but is a consequence of the same patriarchal structures that confine women to the private sphere. Consequently, the educational barrier reported in your study is both a symptom and a mechanism of the broader cultural norms identified by the majority.

The study findings reveal that the barriers are not discrete categories but deeply interlocking dimensions of a single structural problem: the gendered architecture of peacebuilding (Parry et al., 2026). Cultural norms and gender roles function as the foundational ideology that justifies both women’s exclusion from leadership and the underinvestment in their education and awareness. The quantitative predominance of the cultural norms category (60.7%) is therefore not merely a statistical majority but a reflection of the root driver.

Furthermore, the scholarly literature challenges any reading of these barriers as purely local or traditional. Kong’ani (2024) and Tripp et al. (2025) both note that international peacebuilding interventions often inadvertently reinforce these barriers by engaging only with formal male leadership, thereby bypassing and delegitimizing women’s informal peace structures. This external reinforcement suggests that the barriers identified by your respondents are sustained not only by endogenous cultural practices but also by the design of peacebuilding programs that fail to prioritize gender transformation.

Hence, the findings of the study where over 60% of respondents identified cultural norms as a barrier, supplemented by education deficits are robustly supported by peer-reviewed research. The literature confirms that these obstacles are structural, intersectional, and resilient, requiring not merely additive approaches (e.g., including a few women and youth in committees) but transformative strategies that address the patriarchal foundations of peacebuilding itself.

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals that the challenges hindering peacebuilding in Garissa County are not isolated but form an interconnected system. Resource scarcity (82.7%) operates as the foundational material driver of conflict, creating conditions of desperation that elites exploit through political interference (10.0%) and clan-based mobilization (5.3%). The insecurity from armed groups (1.8%), while proportionally small in respondent identification, functions as a threat multiplier that transforms traditional cattle rustling into lethal violence, as Thumi (2023) documented. The gendered barriers of cultural norms (60.7%) and lack of education and awareness (22.0%) operate at a different level, not as immediate triggers of violence but as structural constraints that prevent half the population from contributing their knowledge and skills to peacebuilding processes. The near absence of concern about lack of government presence (0.3%) may reflect what Bond and Mkutu (2018) described as the normalization of state absence in Kenya’s northern drylands, where communities have developed alternative governance structures because they have never experienced reliable state presence. For peacebuilding policy, the implication is that interventions must simultaneously address material resource scarcity, political accountability, and patriarchal structures, as no single intervention can succeed in isolation. The qualitative testimonies from pastoralists, religious leaders, women, and government administrators consistently point to the failure of episodic, externally driven interventions that do not address the structural drivers of conflict or build local capacity for sustained peacebuilding. As the NGO representative quoted earlier noted, interventions that do not include community buy-in from the start are doomed to fail, a finding that resonates across all the challenges identified in this study.

4.2 Opportunities for promoting Peace in Garissa County

The study sought to establish opportunity that could be tapped for promoting peace in the community. The findings of the study revealed that out of the total respondents, 96 (28.2%) considered promoting inter-clan dialogue as the greatest opportunity, 84 (24.6%) supported youth and women empowerment initiatives, 80 (23.5%) believed strengthening education was the greatest opportunity, 61 (17.9%) felt expanding economic opportunities was most important, and 20 (5.9%) considered enhancing security and policing as the greatest opportunity. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Opportunities for promoting peace in Garissa County*

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Promoting inter-clan dialogue	96.0	28.15
Supporting youth and women empowerment initiatives	84.0	24.63
Strengthening education	80.0	23.46
Expanding economic opportunities	61.0	17.9
Enhancing security and policing	20.0	5.87

The findings in Table 2 reveal a multifaceted landscape of opportunities for peacebuilding in Garissa County, with respondents identifying inter-clan dialogue, youth and women empowerment, education, economic expansion, and security sector reforms as key pathways. The prioritization of these opportunities reflects a community-level understanding that sustainable peace requires moving beyond reactive security measures to address the structural drivers of conflict.

4.2.1 Inter-Clan Dialogue Platforms

The finding on inter-clan dialogue was the single most significant opportunity (28.2%) underscores the centrality of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in pastoralist contexts. Some of the existing dialogue platforms include the platforms by the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) to foster equitable resource sharing. Areas such as Bula Ponda, Modika, Jairut have benefitted from dialogue forums organized by the SUPKEM (Supreme Council of Muslims of Kenya which works with government ministries and CSOs on outreach programs to discuss conflict issues, climate change and peace building. This preference aligns with the scholarly consensus that in settings where the state's reach is limited, customary institutions often serve as the primary arbiters of peace (Osamba, 2002). The data suggests a community-level endorsement of endogenous peacemaking practices over externally imposed models. This is corroborated by insights from local administrators. As one official stated,

The county government has more local reach. If well-managed, it can deliver inclusive services... and reduce perceptions of marginalization that fuel conflict (Interview with local government administrators in Garissa, 15 October 2025).

This finding highlights the critical synergy between formal governance structures and the informal, localized dialogues that form the bedrock of inter-clan relations. One female participant in a focus group setting elaborated on this synergy, noting,

When elders from rival clans sit under the same tree and share tea, the young men see it. That act alone stops revenge before it starts (FGD with Women in Garissa Market, 12 October 2025).

However, a critical perspective, as advanced by Mac Ginty (2015), warns against the romanticization of "customary" systems, noting they can be exclusionary (e.g., often dominated by elder men) and may be co-opted by elite interests. Therefore, the opportunity presented by inter-clan dialogue is contingent upon its ability to adapt, incorporating broader representation such as youth and women to ensure its legitimacy and effectiveness in the contemporary context.

4.2.2 Youth and Women Empowerment Programs

The robust support for youth and women empowerment initiatives (24.6%) reflects a growing recognition of their agency in peacebuilding, moving beyond a narrative that views them solely as victims or perpetrators of violence. Youth inclusivity both in peace building and economic activities have been fostered in the county by international organizations such as UNDP and European Union (EU); promoting early warning conflict prevention and youth alternative economic activities. This finding resonates with the work of Parry et al (2026), who demonstrate that women-led peacebuilding initiatives in Kenya's borderlands are particularly effective in early warning and community healing due to their access to informal networks and their role in cross-clan family structures. The interview with a local government administrator illustrates this:

Women-led peacebuilding initiatives are effective at grassroots level, especially in early warning, community healing, and dialogue." Similarly, the emphasis on youth is captured in the note: "Engaging youth in peace committees helps bring in fresh ideas and improve representation (Interview with local government administrators in Garissa, 15 October 2025).

A male youth participant in a community dialogue reinforced this point, stating,

We are tired of being called 'jobless militia.' Give us skills and a table at decision-making meetings, and we will choose business over bullets (FGD with Youth in Garissa Town, 13 October 2025).

These findings directly support the argument by Wanyonyi et al. (2025) that youth engagement provides a crucial intergenerational bridge, ensuring that peace processes are not frozen in past grievances but are forward-looking.

A critical triangulation, however, must acknowledge the tensions. As Parry et al. (2026) note, women and youth are often relegated to "soft" roles in peacebuilding (like dialogue) while being excluded from formal, decision-making forums related to security and resource allocation. Thus, the opportunity for empowerment is maximized only when these groups are given genuine political space, not merely symbolic participation.

4.2.3 Strengthening Education

With 23.5% of respondents identifying strengthening education as an opportunity not merely as a development goal but as a direct peacebuilding intervention. This aligns with the concept of "structural peacebuilding," which focuses on addressing root causes of conflict (Galtung, 1969). The qualitative data notes that *"Civic education on conflict resolution, rights, and responsibilities can reduce manipulation by extremist or political actors"* (Interview with local government administrators in Garissa, 15 November 2025). This is supported by the work of Novelli and Smith (2011), who argue that education systems in conflict-affected areas are a critical "site of struggle," capable of either reinforcing divisions or fostering a culture of peace. Furthermore, the data points to the specific opportunity within religious institutions: *"Madrasa reforms and integration of peace education into religious institutions can foster tolerance and counter radicalization"* (Interview with local government administrators in Garissa Town, 15 November 2025). This is a crucial insight, as pastoralist communities are deeply religious. A local teacher captured this sentiment during a school-based forum, observing,

When our children learn that a Somali from another clan is still a brother, not an enemy, the whole village changes in one generation (FGD with Teachers in Garissa, 14 November 2025).

Scholars like Ndinawe (2025) have highlighted that without engaging faith-based institutions, peacebuilding efforts in the Horn of Africa risk being perceived as foreign and illegitimate. A critical analysis suggests that the opportunity of education is potent but politically complex. Reforming madrasas, for instance, requires a delicate balance to avoid alienating religious leaders while ensuring curricula do not propagate extremist ideologies.

4.2.4 Expanding Economic Opportunities

The finding that 17.9% of respondents view expanding economic opportunities as opportunity which is intrinsically linked to the pastoralist context. The field data emphasizes a strategic pivot: *"Beyond livestock economy-promoting agribusiness (e.g., irrigation-based farming), small-scale trade, and value chains helps reduce economic dependence on increasingly scarce resources"* (Interview with local government administrators in Garissa on 15.11.2025). This is a direct response to the central driver of pastoral conflict: competition over dwindling natural resources (water and pasture) exacerbated by climate change (Mosol, 2022). A female small-scale trader articulated the urgency of this approach, explaining,

If my daughter can sell vegetables at the market instead of waiting for a dry riverbed to give water to our goats, she will have hope. A hopeful girl is not recruited by extremists (FGD with Women in Garissa Market, 12 November 2025).

Mosol's (2022) research in northern Kenya confirms that diversifying livelihoods reduces the opportunity cost of conflict. When a community's entire wealth is tied to livestock, the incentive to engage in violent resource raids is high. The opportunity for economic diversification, as noted, is coupled with "Youth employment programs (e.g., entrepreneurship, digital skills training) which reduce vulnerability to manipulation by violent groups." This point is critically supported by Mkutu (2007), who argues that economic marginalization and youth unemployment are primary "pull factors" for recruitment into armed groups and banditry in the region. However, a critical triangulation reveals that economic interventions, if poorly implemented, can create new conflicts over access to irrigable land or new markets, necessitating that such initiatives are paired with robust conflict-sensitive planning.

4.2.5 Enhancing Security and Policing

The fact that only 5.9% of respondents considered enhancing security and policing the greatest opportunity is a telling statistic. CIMIC (Civil Military Cooperation) is an initiative which has been carried out in Holugho ad Fafi areas as noted by this study. CIMIC has been promoted through campaigns, humanitarian programs and outreach programs to promote trust among the two agencies. In Bulagolo, Bura East sub county, for instance, respondents indicated that KDF under Operation Amani Boni (OAB) through medical camps address security concerns and strengthen Cooperation in maintain Peace and stability. It suggests a community-level perception that security sector reform, while necessary, is less foundational than socio-economic and governance-based approaches. This challenges purely militarized approaches to peacebuilding in pastoral areas. The interview data reveal that the county government's local reach is crucial for *"delivering inclusive services... and reducing perceptions of marginalization that fuel conflict"* (Interview with local government administrators in Garissa on October 25, 2025). This speaks to the core issue of state legitimacy. As Osamba (2002) explains, the historical marginalization of northeastern Kenya has led to deep-seated distrust of state security apparatuses, which are often perceived as a tool of oppression by the central government rather than a protector of local

communities. Therefore, the small percentage supporting security-focused approaches does not mean security is unimportant, but rather that it must be pursued in tandem with the other opportunities. The "opportunity" lies in community policing models and the integration of local peace committees with formal security structures, a process that scholars argue is essential to building trust and shared ownership of security (Mkutu, 2007).

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that effective peacebuilding among pastoral communities requires integrated interventions that address both the structural causes of conflict and the available local opportunities for peace.

5.2 Recommendation

The study recommends strengthening traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, investing in water and pasture management, promoting inclusive participation of women and youth in peace processes, expanding livelihood opportunities and enhancing collaboration between government institutions, local communities and development partners to achieve sustainable peace in Garissa County.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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