

EFFECT OF CONFLICTS ON FOOD AVAILABILITY IN POKOT CENTRAL SUB -COUNTY, KENYA

Peter Chemei Cheseto^{1*}, Caroline Kathure Gatobu²

¹Mount Kenya University

²Kaimosi Friends University

*Corresponding Author:

petercheseto85@gmail.com

Abstract

Food security is paramount in any political system as a unitary actor. The primary role of any government is to ensure the security of its population is secured against food insecurity, insurgency and traditional security threats. The contemporary identifies world food security as one of the components of non-traditional security threats and conflict is said to be affecting food security globally. The study herein sought to examine the effect of conflicts on food availability in Pokot Central Sub County. The study used themes derived from the objectives to review relevant literature and employed conflict theory propounded by Karl Marx. Also conceptual framework was used to identify dependent, independent and intervening variables. The study utilized a descriptive research design to bring in the nexus between conflict and food security. Area of study was West Pokot Central Sub County in West Pokot County with a population of 114, 093 residents and it covers 2,380 km square. The study sample size was 200 and was calculated using Yamane Taro's formula. The study used a multistage sampling which is a sampling technique that is used to select a representative sample of a large population. The sampling strategy involved dividing the population into smaller, more homogeneous groups or clusters, and then selecting a random sample of individuals or sub-groups within each cluster. Sample size was divided into residents, Ngo's employees, households, church leaders, political leaders and administrators and data was collected by use of questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were administered to residents while interviews were used to collect data from key informants who included Ngo's employees, administrators and political leaders. Reliability of research tools were tested by administering them to selected respondents prior to the real data collection process. The study observed research ethical considerations, and also sought consent from the respondents before proceeding to collect data from them; and kept their anonymity and confidentiality of obtained information. Data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics and the findings were presented in tables and percentages and summary, conclusions and recommendations were made guided by research themes. The study established that conflict significantly disrupts the availability in Pokot Central Sub County.

Keywords: Conflicts, food availability, food insecurity, traditional security threats

INTRODUCTION

Burchi, and De Muro, (2016) note that, in most conflict regions in Africa, food supply goes down and fails to adequately address the basic requirements of the people. In the case of Pokot Central Sub County and its environs, the conflictual situation is continuous and has affected food production in the area. When people don't have peace, they cannot plan their food production activities. According to (FAO, 1996) food security can be defined as the situation where people at any given time are able to enjoy consistent socio-economic and physical access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food with adequate preferences and nutrients requirements for a healthy and active livelihood. According to Onono, (2016), he explains that, conflicting groups sometimes uses starvation to subdue their enemies. In so doing, the community faces shortages that impact on their dietary needs. This explains why, in many conflict areas, the number of malnourished children and generally sick people are more compared to peaceful communities or countries.

Upreti, Sharma and Paudel, (2014) explain that, conflicts affect most elements and processes in the food system of a country or a community. Many famers, both in conflicting communities and those relying on the conflict areas as access routes are subjected to suffering of some kind. When roads are not passable, due to insecurity, farm inputs cannot be supplied and produce cannot reach the intended markets (Burchi and De Muro, 2016). According to Justino, (2017), in many conflict areas in sub-Saharan Africa, the governments face difficulties in meeting the needs of the people. The locals and even government security officers have lost lives, have been injured and property worth millions destroyed. Essential services like health and security are destabilized living the people at the mercies of the fighters who in most cases do not care (Onono, 2016). For example, cattle rustlers are keen on driving away large heads of cattle and will go to any extent to eliminate the male members of the society, whom they perceive as a threat.

Onono, P. A. (2016), further notes that, the nexus food and conflicts is a complainer connected web. In some cases, conflicts arise as a result of shortage in food supply, hence a competition because of the limited food sources. For example, in Kenya the animosity between the Turkana and Pokot communities is due to resources near Turkwel where both sides claimed to be ancestrally theirs (Upreti, Sharma and Paudel, 2014). In another case, food insecurity result from conflicts that interfere with the food production system (Justino, 2017). The food system, that comprise people and processes involved in food activities function well under peaceful and orderly environment. All the domestic political conditions determine the level of production and success of any food producing project. When there is sudden disruption in the system, the food cannot move from the producers, through the processors and distributors to the consumers.

On the other hand, food can be the source of conflict because one community perceive the other as taking advantage of them. There are many protracted conflicts among the pastoral communities caused by a perceived undue privilege to one community over the other. Some of the claims by the local community's point at the contribution of the government to conflict. For example, Huho, (2012) note that, in Kenya, the Pokot community in East Pokot feel deprived of essential government services, while they think their neighbors receive better services. In their study, some of the claims include supply of security personnel and the distribution of relief food in the region. Conflicts present shocks to the society's wellbeing that may take long to overcome. For instance, Onono, (2016) explain that, conflicts mainly affect communities by first, transforming the existing national institutions or causing an emergence of completely new institutions.

Gicheru, (2019), note that, due to conflict in some parts of the Africa, governments have been forced to create military camps in the regions where communities are conflicting. He also notes that, government are sometimes forced to create special units to try and deal with cattle rustling. The new units are created to deal with difficult issues and may not be friendly to the communities. When the government decides to take administrative actions, they may include measures which curtail the freedom of the local communities (Tschunkert, Delgador, (2022). For instance, introduction of curfew hours in the insecurity zones and road check units will cause delays in transportation and that is likely to impact negatively of those transporting perishable goods. Security forces are keen on controlling the proliferation of small arms which are the main weapons for cattle rustlers.

Secondly, when a community is exposed to conflict situations food security is affected but also other factors like the prices of food and climatic conditions which account for the level of shock the people will undergo. For example, Koren, and Bagozzi, (2016) note that in Yemen, the humanitarian groups distributing food are restricted by armed groups and as a result food security is threatened by different groups as a weapon for engagement. Conflicting groups want to capture the attention of the international bodies by making difficult for food aid to reach their destination. In some cases, aid workers are killed and the food destroyed (Brinkman and Hendrix, 2011). Combined, the transformation witnessed and the other factors (food prices and weather) both the unintentional and intentional, effects of conflict have direct and indirect association with food insecurity. Incidences of conflicts have been found to reduce daily energy supplies affecting normal livelihoods. For instance, Koomson, and Churchill, (2021) note that due to the problems of conflict among two ethnic communities in Ghana, studies reveal a change in their diet. Some adults eat just to sooth the body and are not focused on the right diet. Gicheru, (2019) note that, in many cases, conflicts involve competition over the available resources. For example, communities competing for the control of factors of food production mainly land and water. In many pastoral communities, land is not subdivided and therefore they keep moving from one place to another. These movements sometimes take them to areas occupied by other communities and in many cases are the sources of conflict (Nyiri, 2014).

The pastoral communities mainly keep large heads of cattle and the grazing land is becoming smaller as the population increases. When many people depend on a limited land space to feed, the place will face pressure and coupled with unfavorable climatic conditions, it may not be able to sustain community needs. Such pressures contribute to the risk of social unrest and may escalate into conflict when it involves different communities. The literature fails to recognize that, in fact, lack of sources of income can be the sources of food insecurity in the conflict regions. Human being by nature will struggle to preserve themselves. In the case where poverty levels are so high, people will look for alternative ways of income to ensure they continue to live. If for instance, the people of a region rely on livestock for income, then that source is interfered with by factors beyond their capacity, they will work to get a living. This might explain why the conflict communities are mainly found in developing countries. According to World Bank Report (2011), poverty rates in communities affected by conflicts are 20% higher than peaceful communities. This means conflicts are a recipe for poverty. According to Justino, (2017), many countries and communities that face pressure of resources are unable to respond appropriately. This means people plunge into poverty levels at a higher rate.

Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive research design. A descriptive research design assisted in bringing in the nexus between conflict and food security in Pokot Central Sub County by highlighting how the conflict in the study area affects food production, distribution, availability and utilization. Descriptive research design is a scientific method used to observe and describe the characteristics, behaviors, or conditions of a particular subject or group. It aims to provide a detailed and accurate account of a phenomenon, without seeking to establish causal relationships (Trochim, 2006). This type of research is particularly useful when the goal is to gain insights into the current state of affairs or to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon.

The study area of this study was Pokot Central Sub County in West Pokot County and it was chosen because it borders Turkana to the North, Elgeiyo Marakwet to the South and Baringo to the East areas which have been a center of the conflict. In terms of population, it is estimated to be having a population of 114, 093 residents and it covers 2,380 km square and practices pastoralism as its main economic activity. Target population is a critical concept in research, referring to the specific group of individuals or elements that a researcher intends to study and draw conclusions about. The target population defines the broader group to which the research findings are intended to apply. Researchers aim to draw conclusions about this population based on their study, and the extent to which findings can be generalized depends on how well the sample represents the target population. Identifying the target population guides the selection of a suitable sample for the study. A researcher must choose a sample that is representative of the target population to ensure that findings accurately reflect the characteristics, behaviors, or attitudes of the broader group (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). The target population of this study was all the residents of Pokot Central Sub County and the leadership of the area. According to the Census report of (2019) Pokot Central has a population of 114, 093.

The study used a multistage sampling technique. Multistage sampling is a sampling technique that is used to select a representative sample of a large population. It involves dividing the population into smaller, more homogeneous groups or clusters, and then selecting a random sample of individuals or sub-groups within each cluster. This method is commonly used when the population is large and geographically dispersed, or when certain subgroups within the population are of particular interest. The advantage of multistage sampling is that it can help to reduce the cost and time required for data collection while still providing a representative sample of the population (Johnson, J. K., & Christensen, L. B, 2020). The sample size was stratified into five clusters of households, political leaders, administrators, opinion and church leaders. Within each stratum, a random sample was selected using a simple random sampling technique. This ensured that each individual had an equal chance of being selected for the study. The study employed multistage sampling which is a useful sampling technique for selecting a representative sample of a large population. It involves dividing the population into smaller, more homogeneous groups or clusters and selecting a random sample from within each cluster. This method helps to reduce the cost and time required for data collection, increase the representativeness of the sample, and improve the accuracy of the sample.

The study sampled 158 residents, 11 area chiefs from the eleven locations, members of county assembly for (Seker, Masool, Lomut and Wie Wei wards), 4 ward administrators, the sub County administrator, the area Member of parliament, Assistant County Commissioner, 10 opinion leaders and 10 church leaders. The sample size for this study will be determined through a combined analysis of the target population based on knowledge from Yamane Taro's (1967) formula ($n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$) provides that at 7% precision level for population above 100,000 a sample size of 200 respondents is appropriate. Yamane Taro uses the following formula to arrive at his sample size.

The research used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through questionnaires and interview schedules administered to the respondents and secondary data was obtained from published books and articles. Both open and close-ended questionnaires were used. The questionnaires were used to collect data from the residents. Closed questionnaires allowed the collection of quantitative data while open-ended questionnaires facilitated the collection of qualitative data. Interview schedules were used to collect data from key informants who included provincial administrators, officials from non-governmental organizations and opinion leaders. Reliability is the ability of research tools to produce consistent results. When the research tools produce consistent results under the same conditions at different times, such tools are considered reliable. To test the reliability of research tools in this study, test and re-test of

the research tools was done by selecting group participants in the study area and the questionnaires administered to them twice within a period of one month. Validity is the level of accuracy a research tool measures the intended phenomena. The research with high validity results in corresponding properties and characteristics to the realistic features of the research phenomenon. When there is a high level of reliability then the measurement is deemed valid. A pilot study was carried out in Pokot Central Sub County to examine the suitability of research instruments. Samples of 10 respondents were interviewed. Questionnaires were distributed to 6 residents of the study area and interviews were done on twelve key informants.

The study used descriptive statistics in data analysis, where qualitative data was coded as per the guiding themes and semi themes and quantitative data collected from the field was coded and processed via a statistical computer program (SPSS). Descriptive statistics are a fundamental component of data analysis that involve summarizing and presenting the main features or characteristics of a dataset. They provide a concise and meaningful way to understand and interpret data without making inferences or drawing conclusions beyond what the data can support. In this study after the analysis, the analyzed data was interpreted and presented in percentages and tables. Ethical considerations were observed where the researcher ensured that the rights, dignity, and well-being of research participants are protected, and that the research process itself is conducted with integrity, honesty, and transparency. The researcher conducted the study with honesty and integrity by accurately reporting findings, avoiding fabrication of data and citing sources appropriately. The information obtained from the respondents was only used for academic purposes.

Results

To find out if conflict affects food availability, the researcher asked the respondents if they have ever witnessed conflict in the area. When asked this question, the majority of the respondents at 92.7% said yes while the minority at 7.3% denied having witnessed conflict. As held by one of the respondents that:

“...Cheptulel, Muino upper side, Seger, Masol and Lomut are the places that experience conflict mainly because they are along borderlines...” Opinion leader Seger(2023)

From the above findings it evidently sounds that the study area is prone to conflict. On the issue of whether conflicts have an effect on food availability in West Pokot Central, 82% of the respondents agreed that indeed conflict affect food availability while 18% were of the contrary opinion. The findings above resonate with Gicheru’s, (2019) opinion that conflicts involve competition over the available resources where communities competing for the control of factors of food production mainly land and water keep moving from one place to another and consequently clashing over the same resources, this is because it is noteworthy here that conflict in the study area is concentrated along the borderlines.

When asked if they have ever lacked food because of conflict, 53.3% of the respondents agreed to the fact that they have lacked food because of conflict and a minority of them at 44.7% said that they have never lacked food because of conflict. Although the minority were of the contrary opinion, the majority believed that the result from conflicts that interfere with the food production system can lead to lack of food agreeing with Justino, (2017) that all the domestic political conditions determine the level of production and success of any food producing process.

On the other hand, 88.7% of the respondents believed that conflict in the area is driven by food accessibility whereas 10% did not believe that conflict in the area has been influenced by food availability and 1.3% of the respondents were neutral on the same. The findings corroborate with that of Koren and Bagozzi, (2016), which holds the opinion that, conflicts affect many people providing labor in farms by displacing, maiming, injuring and death of skilled farmers. In many cases, producers are not able to access their fields, livestock, seed stock, stored food and pastures. According to Justino, (2017) communities that face pressure of resources and are unable to respond to it appropriately and may resort to raiding their neighbors casing conflict. From the findings of this study, there is enough evidence that conflict in the area oscillates around resources which ultimately stops at food availability.

On the perception of government interventions in conflict areas, particularly on ensuring regular and steady supply of food the respondents’ opinions were as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: How do you rate government intervention on ensuring steady supply of food

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very poor	47	31.3	32.4	32.4
	Poor	70	46.7	48.3	80.7
	Neither poor or good	18	12.0	12.4	93.1
	Good	6	4.0	4.1	97.2
	Very good	4	2.7	2.8	100.0
	Total	145	96.7	100.0	
Missing	System	5	3.3		
Total		150	100.0		

The respondents at 32.4% rated the government intervention as very poor, 48.3% believed that government intervention has been poor, another 12.4 % were neutral in their opinion while 4.1 % believed that government intervention has been good and 2.8 % rated government intervention as very good. From the findings, the majority believed that government intervention geared towards steady supply of food has not been sufficient. They cited poor infrastructure and the need to improve security in the area as the major challenges affecting steady supply of food. The findings are in line with the opinion of Dureab, (2019) who believes that when governments fail to contain insecurity, then the food web will be affected by low supply and high demand causing food insecurity.

Conclusions

It is evident from the findings that conflict significantly disrupts the availability, accessibility, supply and utilization in the area. This study has unveiled crucial insights into the effect of conflicts on food availability in Pokot Central Sub County. The prevalence of conflicts, their impact on food scarcity, and their relationship with food accessibility have been clearly demonstrated. Also the study's findings provide valuable nexus into the complex relationship between conflict and food accessibility in Pokot Central Sub County. While a significant portion of respondents acknowledged the impact of conflicts on food markets, infrastructure, and food aid delivery, there were variations in perceptions among individuals. Additionally, the study highlighted the need for enhanced government interventions to address the challenges of food supply in conflict-affected regions. A substantial majority of the respondents (18.9% agreed, and 18.2% strongly agreed) believed that people sometimes have food in stores but are unable to access their homes due to conflict-related displacement. This highlights the vulnerability of food stocks during times of conflict and the urgent need for strategies that safeguard food availability and accessibility for affected communities.

The government should prioritize efforts to resolve conflicts and promote peace in the area by engaging community leaders, and relevant stakeholders in peace dialogues and conflict mediation. Also community-based conflict resolution mechanisms should be established to address grievances and disputes at the grassroots level, thereby reducing the incidence of conflict between communities along the borderlines because conflicts were seen to be prevalent among bordering communities. This study also recommends that the national government should foster partnerships between local government authorities, non-governmental organizations, and humanitarian agencies to jointly implement programs aimed at addressing food security and conflict-related issues among communities living in conflict prone areas. Additionally, the County government of West Pokot should encourage diversification of livelihoods, including income-generating activities beyond agriculture, to reduce communities' vulnerability to food-related disruptions during conflicts. Also, interventions should be designed to support small scale farmers in protecting their crops during periods of conflict. Strategies may include the establishment of community-based early warning systems, secure storage facilities, and agricultural insurance programs to mitigate the impact of crop spoilage on livelihoods. These initiatives can contribute to greater food availability and resilience in the face of conflict-related challenges. Nevertheless, this study recommends that in order to address banditry and security concerns in the area, it is vital to unlock the potential of food processing in the region.

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