

Assessing the effectiveness of security frameworks and policy interventions against transnational trafficking at the Kenya, Ethiopia, Marsabit border

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ABSTRACT

Transnational crime has increasingly become a pressing concern in the Horn of Africa, particularly along the Kenya–Ethiopia border where weak governance, porous boundaries, and socio-economic vulnerabilities converge. Despite state-led security operations, border-control measures and national and regional policy frameworks against trafficking, illicit networks continue to adapt and persist. This study seeks to assess the effectiveness of existing security frameworks and policy interventions in mitigating such crimes and enhancing human security. The study was anchored on Transnational Organized Crime Theory and Human Security Theory. A convergent mixed-methods design was used. The quantitative target population comprised households residing in border-adjacent and transit-related areas of Marsabit County, including Moyale, Sololo, North Horr, Laisamis and Saku. The qualitative target population included state and non-state stakeholders positioned along trafficking and response chains, including border and police officers, customs and immigration personnel, county officials, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, community leaders and transport/logistics actors. The study combined quantitative household surveys with qualitative key-informant interviews, structured observation, and document review. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 28, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software. The study targeted 423 households, out of which 320 valid questionnaires were returned, representing a 75.7% response rate. The study found that existing security frameworks and policy interventions have not been sufficiently effective due to weak implementation, limited operational visibility, legal and institutional gaps, and corruption, thereby allowing trafficking to persist and undermine livelihoods, health, safety, education, and community trust. The study concluded that transnational trafficking in Marsabit County is both a criminal justice and human security challenge that requires a broader response beyond routine enforcement. The study recommended strengthening integrated border security and Kenya–Ethiopia cross-border cooperation, enhancing legal implementation and anti-corruption measures, expanding livelihood and drought-resilience interventions for vulnerable communities, improving victim protection and rehabilitation services, and promoting community-based awareness and reporting mechanisms.

Key Words: Policy Interventions, Security Frameworks, Transnational Trafficking

I. INTRODUCTION

Transnational trafficking has become a major global concern for states whose borderlands combine legitimate cross-border movement with weak institutional reach, socio-economic vulnerability and organized criminal activity. Unlike domestic crime, transnational trafficking operates across territorial jurisdictions and often involves actors, routes, resources and effects that extend beyond one country. Drug trafficking and human trafficking are particularly serious because they do not only threaten border control and state sovereignty, but also undermine public health, community safety, institutional trust and human dignity. In fragile border spaces, traffickers exploit porous boundaries, weak surveillance, corruption, uneven enforcement, informal mobility systems and the economic desperation of communities to move people, narcotics and other illicit goods across borders (Shelley, 2014; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2021).

The Kenya–Ethiopia Marsabit border presents a significant case for examining the effectiveness of security frameworks and policy interventions against transnational trafficking. Marsabit County is part of Kenya's northern frontier and is linked to Ethiopia through formal and informal routes, pastoral mobility systems, cross-border trade, clan relationships and long-standing community interactions (International Organization for Migration [IOM] & Terre des Hommes, 2023; Terre des Hommes & SND, 2024). These forms of movement are not inherently criminal; in many cases, they are part of the social and economic life of borderland communities. However, the same mobility systems may be exploited by trafficking networks that rely on informal crossing points, transport actors, local knowledge, and weak patrol visibility and compromised officials to evade detection. This makes the Marsabit border not only a territorial

security concern, but also a governance challenge requiring coordinated, locally grounded and human-security-sensitive responses.

Security frameworks against trafficking exist at global, regional and national levels. Internationally, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols provide the normative foundation for criminalization, mutual legal assistance, victim protection and cross-border cooperation (UNODC, 2021). Regionally, the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) frameworks emphasize harmonized border management, migration governance, information sharing, referral mechanisms and integrated responses linking enforcement with prevention and protection (African Union [AU], 2018; Intergovernmental Authority on Development [IGAD], 2020). At the national level, Kenya's counter-trafficking and narcotics control frameworks provide a legal and institutional basis for investigation, prosecution, border control and victim assistance (Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2010; Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act, 1994). In principle, therefore, the anti-trafficking architecture is not absent. The more important question is whether these frameworks work effectively in remote and fragile borderlands such as Marsabit.

The effectiveness of security frameworks in Marsabit must be examined beyond the mere existence of laws, patrols, operations or agencies. A framework may exist formally but remain weak in practice if it is poorly implemented, inadequately resourced, weakly coordinated or undermined by corruption. Literature on transnational organized crime shows that trafficking networks are adaptive and often respond to enforcement pressure by shifting routes, replacing low-level actors, exploiting institutional gaps and using corruption as a form of protection (Shaw & Reitano, 2014; Shelley, 2014). Similarly, UNODC (2021) notes that interdiction at one route may displace illicit flows rather than eliminate them if enforcement is not coordinated across jurisdictions. This is especially relevant to the Kenya–Ethiopia Marsabit border, where traffickers can exploit large terrain, dispersed settlements, informal paths and limited operational visibility.

A human security perspective also requires anti-trafficking interventions to be judged by their effect on the safety and wellbeing of communities, not only by arrests or seizures. Human security emphasizes protection from threats to livelihoods, dignity, personal safety, health, community stability and political trust (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007; United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 1994). Therefore, a security framework that increases patrols but fails to protect victims, reduce community fear, address corruption, strengthen reporting channels or improve trust in state institutions remains incomplete. In Marsabit, trafficking affects communities through insecurity, drug availability, exploitation, weakened livelihoods, and fear of reporting and erosion of confidence in law enforcement. For this reason, evaluating the effectiveness of security frameworks requires attention to both enforcement outcomes and human-security outcomes. This article focuses on the effectiveness of security frameworks and policy interventions in addressing transnational trafficking and safeguarding human security at the Kenya–Ethiopia Marsabit border.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kenya's border regions are expected to operate as national security buffers that regulate lawful movement, facilitate trade, protect communities and prevent illicit flows. However, Marsabit County has increasingly emerged as a corridor through which drug and human trafficking networks exploit porous borders, informal routes, limited surveillance capacity and weak institutional reach. Despite state-led security operations, border-control measures and national and regional policy frameworks against trafficking, illicit networks continue to adapt and persist (IOM & Terre des Hommes, 2023; United States Department of State, 2025). This creates a contradiction between the existence of anti-trafficking frameworks and the continued vulnerability of the Kenya–Ethiopia Marsabit border to transnational trafficking.

The problem is therefore not merely that trafficking exists, but that existing security and policy responses have not sufficiently contained it. International and national instruments provide definitions, obligations, enforcement mechanisms and victim protection standards, while regional frameworks promote cooperation, information sharing and coordinated border governance (AU, 2018; IGAD, 2020; UNODC, 2021). Yet in remote borderlands, policy effectiveness depends on local implementation capacity. Where patrols are irregular, intelligence sharing is weak, resources are limited, agencies are poorly coordinated and corruption enables safe passage, traffickers may continue operating despite the presence of formal laws and institutions (Shaw & Reitano, 2014; Transparency International, 2019).

Marsabit's border environment deepens this problem. The county's vast terrain, sparse population, long distances between settlements, informal crossing points and cross-border socio-economic networks create enforcement challenges that are not easily addressed through routine patrols alone. Traffickers can exploit gaps in surveillance, move through less visible routes, rely on local facilitators and shift movement patterns in response to security pressure. Existing studies on trafficking in Kenya have tended to focus more on urban, coastal or general national-security contexts, leaving the localized effectiveness of anti-trafficking frameworks in the northern Kenya–Ethiopia frontier less

examined (Kiniti & Auya, 2023; Nzioka, 2021; Ogolla, 2021). This creates an empirical gap in understanding why existing security frameworks and policy interventions remain only partly effective in Marsabit.

The problem also has a direct human security dimension. Drug and human trafficking weaken livelihoods, increase insecurity, contribute to drug abuse and health risks, expose vulnerable persons to exploitation and reduce community trust in public institutions (IOM & Terre des Hommes, 2023; Terre des Hommes & SND, 2024). When communities perceive security systems as distant, inconsistent or compromised, their willingness to report suspicious activity declines. Similarly, when victim protection systems are weak, trafficked persons may remain hidden, unsupported or exposed to further harm. Therefore, the effectiveness of security frameworks at the Marsabit border cannot be measured only through enforcement presence; it must also be assessed through their ability to protect people, strengthen trust, reduce vulnerability and disrupt the governance gaps that traffickers exploit. This article addresses this problem by assessing the effectiveness of existing security frameworks and policy interventions against transnational trafficking at the Kenya–Ethiopia Marsabit border. It focuses on the gap between formal policy architecture and local operational realities, with particular attention to patrol visibility, institutional coordination, cross-border cooperation, corruption, implementation weaknesses, and community trust and victim protection.

1.2 Research Objective

The objective of the study was to assess the effectiveness of existing security frameworks and policy interventions in addressing transnational trafficking and safeguarding human security at the Kenya–Ethiopia Marsabit border.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This article is anchored in two complementary theoretical perspectives: Transnational Organized Crime Theory and Human Security Theory. The two theories are appropriate because the study assesses both the operational behavior of trafficking networks and the ability of security frameworks to protect borderland communities.

2.1.1 Transnational Organized Crime Theory

Transnational Organized Crime Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how drug and human trafficking networks survive in fragile border environments. The theory assumes that organized criminal enterprises do not operate randomly; rather, they take root where governance is weak, enforcement is inconsistent, institutions are under-resourced, borders are porous, and public officials can be compromised (Shelley, 2014; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2021). In such environments, trafficking networks are able to exploit institutional gaps and adapt to enforcement pressure. They do so by shifting routes, using informal crossings, recruiting local facilitators, bribing officials, changing transport methods and relying on decentralized networks of brokers, transporters, recruiters, informants and protection actors (Shaw & Reitano, 2014; UNODC, 2021).

This theory is relevant to the Kenya–Ethiopia Marsabit border because the area has characteristics that organized trafficking networks can exploit. The border terrain is vast, sparsely monitored and connected by formal and informal routes. In such a setting, traffickers can use ordinary mobility systems, including public transport, boda boda movement, cross-border trade and local knowledge of informal crossing routes to avoid detection. It therefore helps explain why formal security frameworks may exist but remain only partly effective. If enforcement is concentrated at official border points while trafficking networks move through informal paths, the result may not be elimination of trafficking but displacement of routes. Similarly, if low-level transporters are arrested while brokers, financiers and corrupt facilitators remain untouched, the network may continue operating with minimal disruption.

The theory also draws attention to corruption as a structural enabler of trafficking. Shelley (2014) argues that corruption is not merely an accidental feature of organized crime but one of the mechanisms through which criminal markets are protected. Where traffickers can purchase safe passage, acquire false documents, obtain prior warning of patrols or influence enforcement decisions, deterrence becomes weak. Transparency International (2019) similarly shows that corruption reduces institutional credibility and creates conditions in which citizens become less willing to report crime. In the Marsabit border context, this means that the effectiveness of security frameworks depends not only on the number of patrols or agencies present, but also on the integrity of the officials implementing those frameworks.

Transnational Organized Crime Theory further suggests that effective anti-trafficking responses should target the network rather than only visible offenders. This means that interventions should focus on brokers, route coordinators, corrupt gatekeepers, document facilitators, transport organizers, financiers and protection actors, not only couriers or low-level actors. UNODC (2021) argues that intelligence-led and problem-oriented policing is more effective when it identifies the connectors that allow trafficking networks to function. For Marsabit, this implies that effective security frameworks should move beyond periodic operations and establish sustained intelligence systems, joint investigations,

cross-border information sharing and anti-corruption mechanisms capable of increasing the operational costs and risks faced by trafficking networks.

2.1.2 Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory complements Transnational Organized Crime Theory by shifting the analysis from criminal networks alone to the effects of trafficking and anti-trafficking responses on people and communities. The theory emerged from the argument that security should not be understood only in terms of state sovereignty, military defense or territorial control. Instead, security should also focus on the protection of individuals and communities from threats to their lives, dignity, livelihoods, health, freedom and wellbeing (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 1994). Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2007) further argue that insecurity is experienced through everyday realities such as poverty, fear, exploitation, displacement, violence, disease and institutional neglect.

This theory is central to the present article because the evaluation of security frameworks at the Marsabit border cannot be limited to whether agencies exist, whether patrols are conducted, or whether traffickers are occasionally arrested. A security response may appear active from an enforcement perspective but remain weak from a human security perspective if trafficking continues to undermine livelihoods, increase drug availability, expose victims to exploitation, weaken community trust and discourage reporting. Human Security Theory therefore broadens the meaning of effectiveness. A policy intervention is effective not only when it disrupts traffickers, but also when communities feel safer, victims are protected, households are less vulnerable to recruitment, and citizens trust institutions enough to cooperate with security agencies.

In the context of drug and human trafficking, Human Security Theory highlights several dimensions of harm. Economically, trafficking can reduce household opportunities, distort local markets, pull young people into illicit survival strategies and deepen vulnerability. Personally and socially, trafficking can expose individuals to violence, coercion, stigma, fear and family disruption. In terms of health security, drug trafficking may increase addiction, mental health problems and other health-related risks, while human trafficking may expose victims to physical abuse, sexual exploitation and trauma (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2021; UNODC, 2021). Politically, trafficking weakens trust in institutions when citizens perceive that officials are ineffective, corrupt or unable to protect them. These dimensions are important because they show that trafficking is not only a legal or border-management problem; it is a threat to everyday community security.

Human Security Theory is also useful in evaluating the protective side of anti-trafficking frameworks. International and regional frameworks increasingly emphasize victim identification, referral, shelter, psychosocial support, legal assistance and non-punishment of victims for offences linked to their trafficking situation (IOM, 2021; UNODC, 2021). However, where these services are weak, victims may remain hidden, fail to cooperate with investigations or become exposed to further harm. In Marsabit, therefore, the effectiveness of security frameworks should be assessed by examining whether enforcement is accompanied by survivor-centered protection, confidential reporting channels, community trust, livelihood support and safe referral systems.

2.2 Empirical Review

Kiniti and Auya (2023) examined the influence of strategic cross-border practices in combating human trafficking along the Kenya–Ethiopia border. Using a mixed-methods approach involving border-security personnel and local communities, the study established that intelligence sharing, joint patrols and intergovernmental cooperation improved trafficking detection and interdiction. However, the researchers found that weak institutional coordination, inadequate resources and inconsistent implementation of bilateral agreements continued to hinder effective anti-trafficking efforts. The study concluded that cross-border cooperation remains an essential strategy in combating trafficking but requires stronger operational coordination and institutional support.

Similarly, the International Organization for Migration and Terre des Hommes (2023) investigated child trafficking and unsafe migration in Marsabit County. The study found that children and youth from vulnerable households were increasingly exposed to trafficking due to poverty, limited livelihood opportunities, weak border monitoring and misinformation regarding migration opportunities. The report further revealed that informal crossing routes between Kenya and Ethiopia facilitated trafficking activities because they remained largely outside official surveillance systems. The study recommended strengthening community awareness, child protection systems and cross-border collaboration.

Terre des Hommes and SND (2024) further demonstrated that trafficking along the Kenya–Ethiopia border is sustained by harmful social norms, economic vulnerability and weak community-based protection mechanisms. The study found that community engagement and local protection structures significantly contribute to preventing trafficking, particularly among children and vulnerable populations. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that although regional cooperation has improved anti-trafficking efforts, significant operational and community-level challenges persist, particularly in border regions such as Marsabit. Nzioka (2021) examined the national security

implications of human trafficking and migrant smuggling in Kenya between 2009 and 2019. The study found that trafficking networks increasingly exploited porous borders, corruption and weak institutional capacity to facilitate illegal movement across the country. The findings revealed that human trafficking contributes to insecurity by strengthening organized criminal networks, undermining state authority and creating opportunities for other transnational crimes. The study concluded that anti-trafficking interventions should integrate border security, intelligence gathering and community participation.

Likewise, Ogolla (2021) assessed the impact of human trafficking on state security in Mombasa County. Using qualitative methods, the study established that trafficking contributes to organized crime, corruption, illegal migration and exploitation of vulnerable populations. The findings showed that weak enforcement and inadequate victim support mechanisms reduced the effectiveness of anti-trafficking interventions. The study recommended strengthening institutional coordination and victim-centered approaches. Transparency International (2019) examined citizens' experiences and perceptions of corruption across Africa. The study established that corruption significantly undermines public trust in security institutions and weakens law-enforcement effectiveness. Citizens reported reluctance to cooperate with security agencies where they perceived officials as corrupt or compromised. This is relevant to the present study because community trust and willingness to report trafficking are important indicators of the practical effectiveness of security frameworks. Shelley (2014), through extensive analyses of organized crime networks, found that corruption functions as a critical enabler of trafficking operations by facilitating safe passage, document fraud, intelligence leaks and protection from prosecution. The study concluded that anti-trafficking interventions are unlikely to succeed without robust anti-corruption mechanisms. This supports the present study's focus on corruption as one of the factors undermining the effectiveness of security frameworks in border areas.

The World Migration Report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2022) found that inadequate victim protection systems discourage reporting of trafficking cases and reduce prosecution success rates. Victims often avoid cooperating with law-enforcement agencies due to fear of retaliation, stigmatization and lack of support services. Similarly, the United States Department of State (2025) Trafficking in Persons Report for Kenya identified persistent weaknesses in victim identification, referral systems, rehabilitation services and prosecution processes. Although Kenya has strengthened its legislative framework, implementation challenges continue to undermine victim protection outcomes. Shaw and Reitano (2014) examined trafficking and illicit trade networks across African border regions and found that criminal organizations adapt rapidly to enforcement pressure by changing routes, recruiting local facilitators and exploiting governance weaknesses. The study established that trafficking networks are resilient because they operate through decentralized structures that are difficult to dismantle through conventional enforcement alone. Similarly, UNODC (2021) reported that trafficking organizations frequently exploit weak border governance, inadequate surveillance and limited inter-agency cooperation. The report found that effective counter-trafficking efforts require intelligence-led policing, cross-border cooperation and integrated border management systems.

Existing empirical studies have extensively examined human trafficking, border security, corruption, victim protection and cross-border cooperation in Kenya and the Horn of Africa. However, most studies focus on national-level security implications (Nzioka, 2021), urban settings such as Mombasa (Ogolla, 2021), or broader regional trafficking dynamics (Shaw & Reitano, 2014; UNODC, 2021). Although Kiniti and Auya (2023) and IOM and Terre des Hommes (2023) examined the Kenya–Ethiopia border, limited empirical attention has been given to evaluating the effectiveness of existing security frameworks and policy interventions specifically within the Marsabit border context. Furthermore, previous studies have largely emphasized trafficking prevalence and security threats while paying limited attention to the relationship between security frameworks, implementation gaps, corruption, community trust, victim protection and human security outcomes. Therefore, this study fills an important empirical gap by assessing how existing security frameworks and policy interventions influence the control of transnational trafficking and the protection of human security at the Kenya–Ethiopia Marsabit border.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design supported by a convergent mixed-methods approach. The convergent mixed-methods approach was used because the effectiveness of security frameworks against trafficking cannot be adequately understood through quantitative data alone. Mixed-methods research is useful where a study requires both numerical patterns and contextual explanations to understand a complex problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantitative strand provided measurable evidence on community perceptions of patrol visibility, security operations, active security agencies, implementation gaps, corruption and confidence in existing interventions. The qualitative strand provided deeper explanations of why these frameworks were effective or ineffective, how traffickers adapted to enforcement, how corruption and informal routes affected implementation, and how community trust

influenced reporting and cooperation. This combination strengthened interpretation by allowing the study to compare survey trends with interview narratives, observation notes and documentary evidence.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Marsabit County, with particular attention to border-adjacent and transit-related areas along the Kenya–Ethiopia corridor. Marsabit was selected because of its strategic location in northern Kenya, its proximity to Ethiopia, the existence of formal and informal crossing points, its vast and sparsely monitored terrain, and its relevance to drug trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling and other forms of cross-border organized crime. The county also represents a fragile borderland where security concerns intersect with poverty, drought, pastoral mobility, cross-border kinship, informal trade and limited institutional reach. These characteristics made Marsabit an appropriate setting for assessing the gap between formal anti-trafficking frameworks and local operational realities (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2019; IOM & Terre des Hommes, 2023).

3.3 Target Population

The target population for the quantitative component of the study consisted of households residing in border-adjacent and transit-linked sub-counties of Marsabit County, namely Moyale, North Horr, Laisamis and Saku. These sub-counties were selected because Moyale and North Horr border Ethiopia, while Laisamis and Saku contain key transit corridors, market centers and feeder routes that may be used in the movement of people and goods from border areas toward interior Kenya. The qualitative target population included state and non-state actors directly or indirectly involved in, or affected by, trafficking and counter-trafficking operations in the Kenya–Ethiopia Marsabit corridor. These actors were selected because of their knowledge of enforcement patterns, border-control practices, community reporting behavior, victim protection, transport routes and trafficking risks. The summary of the Target Population and their relevance to the study is as shown in Table 1;

Table 1

Target Population and their relevance to the Study

Category	Specific Actors / Units Targeted	Relevance to Study
Border Security Officers	APS Border Patrol Unit (BPU), Kenya Police Service border posts, DCI Anti-Trafficking officers, NIS field officers	Enforcement patterns, trafficking detection, corruption risks, route shifted
Border Control Agencies	KRA Customs, Immigration officers at Moyale OSBP, NTSA compliance officers	Document fraud, cargo inspection, cross-border movement monitoring
County & National Administration	Chiefs, Assistant Chiefs, Village Elders, Sub-County Administrators, County peace officers, Nyumba Kumi	Community safety, reporting behaviours, early-warning networks
Civil Society & Service Providers	NGOs, shelters, legal-aid staff, psychosocial support workers, religious leaders	Victim support, referral pathways, rehabilitation challenges
Transport & Logistics Actors	Truck drivers, cross-border bus operators, boda boda riders, loaders	Movement patterns, transit routes, concealment methods
Households (Quantitative Population)	Residents of Moyale, North Horr, Laisamis, Saku border-proximate settlements	Community experiences, perceptions of trafficking impact
Survivors / Returnees	Trafficked migrants, women, youth, and children referred ethically via service providers*	First-hand accounts of exploitation, transit routes, recruitment methods

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

A multi-stage cluster sampling strategy was employed for the quantitative household survey. First, the border-proximate wards and locations within the four selected sub-counties were purposively selected because of the reported trafficking trends, in proximity to formal and informal crossing points, and security/accessibility considerations. Second, clusters (villages or urban blocks) in each ward were selected using probability proportional to size (PPS). Thirdly, systematic random sampling was used to select households within each cluster, the initial household was randomly selected and the interval was determined by the number of households in the cluster based on the number of interviews required.

The qualitative component employed a criterion-based purposive sampling method to identify key informants, among whom positions that are important in the understanding of trafficking and counter-trafficking processes are found. That comprised police, border officials, public officials, civil society/service providers, community leaders, and transport/logistics personnel as informants. Some snowball sampling was used to find other informants who emerged during the fieldwork who were important to the role. Structured observation sites (border posts, checkpoints, feeder-road nodes and markets) were purposively selected to reflect variations in enforcement presence and traffic flows. The

documents were reviewed using a criterion-based protocol agreed upon with institutional custodians and were relevant and conformed to ethical standards.

The sample size needed for conducting the survey was estimated by Cochran's formula for large population. Let (z) be the standard normal deviate corresponding to the desired confidence level (95% corresponds to (z) = 1.96) and (p) be the assumed population proportion (0.50 is used for conservative purposes to maximize the samples size) and (e) be the desired margin of error (e = 0.05). The base (infinite-population) sample size was:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2} = \frac{1.96^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5}{0.05^2} = 384.1$$

Applying a 10% allowance for non-response yields a target of $384 \times 1.10 = 422.4 \approx 423$ households.

A summary of sample size distribution is as shown in Table 2;

Table 2
Sample Size Distribution

Sub-County	Number of Households	Sampling Ratio	Allocated Sample Size
Moyale	22,500	0.0084	188
North Horr	13,200	0.0084	110
Laisamis	7,600	0.0084	64
Saku	7,300	0.0084	61
Total	50,600		423

Qualitative sampling continued until thematic saturation was reached. Key informant interviews were held with actors along the trafficking and response chain, including enforcement officers, administrators, civil society and service providers, community leaders, and transport and logistics actors. These sampling choices were appropriate for borderland research and consistent with sampling recommendations for social surveys and mixed-methods research designs involving large or difficult-to-enumerate populations (Cochran, 1977; Israel, 1992; Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collecting through questionnaires, key informant interviews and structure observation. The questionnaire generated quantitative data on community perceptions of security interventions and their effectiveness. The KIIs guide allowed participants to explain institutional practices, enforcement challenges, policy gaps, corruption dynamics, cross-border cooperation issues and human security concerns in greater depth. Structured observation was used at selected border posts, checkpoints, feeder-road nodes and market areas to capture enforcement presence, movement patterns and visible indicators of border control. On the other hand, document review was used to examine relevant official reports, policy documents, security records and institutional materials relating to trafficking and border governance.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 28). Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to summarize patterns in the data and show the extent to which respondents agreed with statements on security frameworks and policy interventions. For easier presentation and interpretation of the data a Likert Scale was used. Qualitative data from KIIs, structured observation and document review were analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis enabled the identification of recurring patterns relating to patrol visibility, weak implementation, corruption, inter-agency coordination, cross-border cooperation, community trust, victim protection and the broader human security effects of trafficking. The qualitative findings were used to explain the meanings behind the quantitative results and to strengthen interpretation of the study objective.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

The study involved sensitive issues such as drug trafficking, human trafficking and security along the Kenya – Ethiopia border, thus it was necessary to adhere to ethical standards for the protection of the participants, and the researcher. Ethical clearance was obtained from National Defense University – Kenya (NDU-Kenya) Institutional Review Board (IRB) before data was collected. Further authorizations were granted by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), Marsabit County Government and security agencies including the National Police Service as well as the local administrative offices.

All involvement was completely voluntary. The purpose, procedures, risks, benefits of the study and the right to decline or withdraw at any time without consequences were explained clearly to all respondents. Informed consent was obtained in writing or through signature, and in simple non-technical language to make it accessible to all

participants with different levels of literacy. The study engaged with vulnerable individuals, such as trafficking survivors, and those who are exposed to criminal networks, which did not lead any participant to provide incriminating or traumatic information.

The confidentiality of the participants was ensured. No personal data (names, phone numbers or exact residential locations) were gathered unless it was absolutely necessary for follow-up referrals. If identifying details could not be avoided, data was pseudonymised and held in encrypted, password-protected files which could only be accessed by the researcher. Interviews notes and audio recordings were kept safe and disposed of at the end of the project. Quotes or narratives were aggregated or paraphrased when reporting findings to protect the identity of individuals, villages or specific security personnel.

Throughout the research process, a strict “do-no-harm” principle was observed. The study did not delve into operational specifics that could jeopardize community security, security operations, or put respondents at risk of retaliation by trafficking networks. The interview was suspended and the participant was provided with referral options if they appeared to be distressed or they disclosed experiencing exploitation. In preparation, referral pathways were established with local partners including HAART Kenya, OPRIFT, and county social-services offices, as well as psychosocial support providers and legal-aid providers and organizations.

Contextualized safety of the researcher was also addressed. These included the use of safe hours for fieldwork, local authorities warning done before planning movements, the use of secure transport, the conducting of check-ins with supervisors, and the suspension of data collection when faced with declining security. The researcher at all times adhered to local customs, security warnings and the advice of community gatekeepers.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

Table 3 presents the response rate, which indicates that 320 questionnaires, representing 75.7% of the total number of questionnaires targeted, were returned with usable data. The response rate was adequate for analysis because it provided sufficient usable data to draw meaningful conclusions on the study objective. The high return rate also suggests that respondents were accessible and willing to participate in the study.

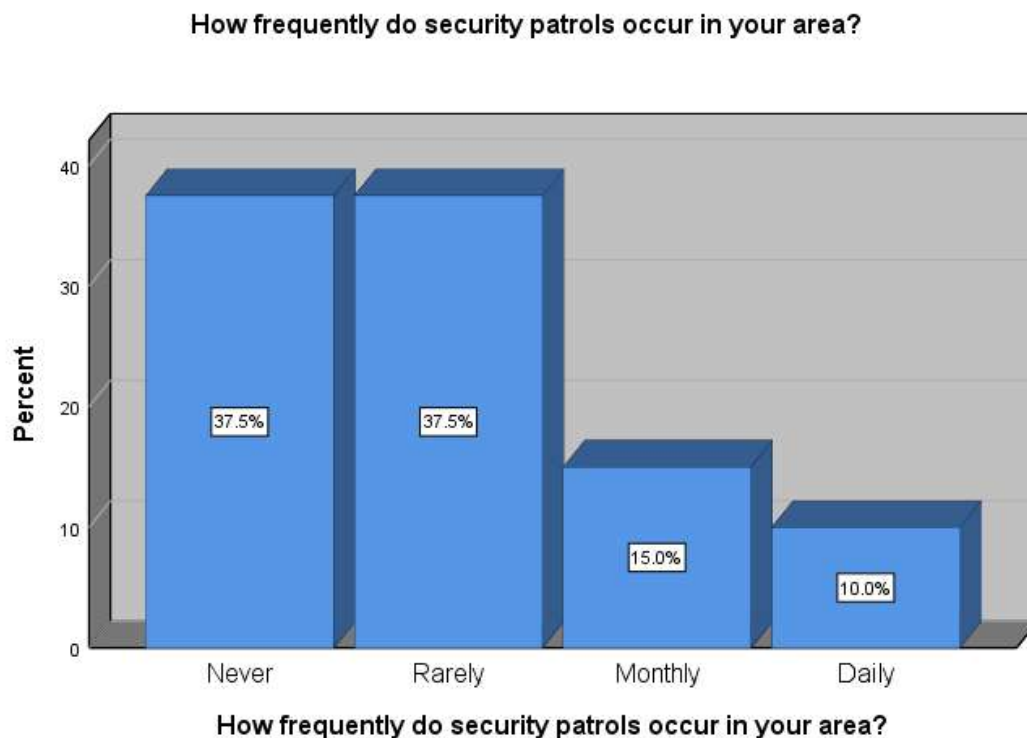
Table 3

Response Rate

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Targeted respondents	423	100.0
Successfully returned questionnaires	320	75.7
Unreturned/invalid questionnaires	103	24.3

4.1.1 Frequency of Security Patrolling

The study sought to determine the frequency of security patrolling in the study area for the respondents. This was deemed essential to ascertain the presence and regularity of security personnel in areas that are at risk of trafficking. The responses are shown below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

Frequency of Security Patrols in the Area

As seen in Figure 1, 37.5% of the respondents reported that security patrols never happen in their area, and another 37.5% reported rare security patrol occurrences in their area. Only 15.0% reported monthly patrols and 10.0% reported daily patrols. This indicates that in many areas of the county, security guards are not seen frequently, thus providing opportunities for traffickers to work with little disruption. The low rate of frequent patrolling also suggests deficiencies in preventive surveillance and in routine enforcement.

The research revealed that in many areas of Marsabit County, there was either a low frequency or low visibility of security patrols and anti-trafficking operations. This finding is consistent with African Union (2018), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (2020), and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024), which emphasize that effective border governance depends on sustained operational capacity, reliable communication, adequate resources and inter-agency coordination. Shaw and Reitano (2014) also note that state security in remote border regions is often episodic rather than continuous, creating enforcement gaps that traffickers can exploit. The findings of Marsabit support the idea that weak visibility in security decreases deterrence and allows trafficking routes to be in operation. The operation of security agencies is not the only challenge, but also ensuring their constant presence in a vast and challenging borderland. The study also aimed at determining the most active security agencies in the area of the respondents. This was relevant in the context of highlighting institutional actors involved in combating trafficking and security in the local area. The results are shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2
Security Agencies Most Active in the Locality

Figure 2 shows that the largest number of respondents (31.3%) identified the National Police Service as the most active security agency in the locality, followed by the Border Patrol Unit (25.0%). Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs (15.6%), community policing groups (9.4%) and NGOs working on counter-trafficking (9.4%) also accounted for their share of representatives, as did the Kenya Defense Forces (6.3%). These results suggest that anti-trafficking activities are primarily linked to traditional policing and border-control institutions, with some support from local administrative and community-based actors. The lack of an active agency by the small percentage with no such presence indicates there are still sections where security presence is low or not visible.

The study revealed that the two most visible institutions in anti-trafficking activities were the National Police Service and the Border Patrol Unit, with the community groups and the NGOs and other actors being less influential. This is in part in line with the literature. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2021) recognizes the importance of law-enforcement and border-control institutions in interdiction, investigation, arrest, route management and enforcement. However, International Organization for Migration (2022), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020), and United States Department of State (2025) emphasize the importance of community actors, civil society organizations and service providers in prevention, referral, rehabilitation and victim protection. From the findings of this study, it is clear that the enforcement dimension is more apparent than the protection and community dimension of intervention in Marsabit. This means there is disconnect between the broader security-centered response as called for in the literature and the more localized comprehensive model of response.

The study also analyzed the number of security operations (including raids, roadblocks, and patrols) the respondents had observed that were focused on trafficking in the last 12 months. This was because it was vital to measure the ground level visibility of anti-trafficking enforcement efforts. The answers are displayed in Figure 3.

How may security operations (raids, roadblocks, patrols) have you witnessed targeting trafficking in the past 12 months?

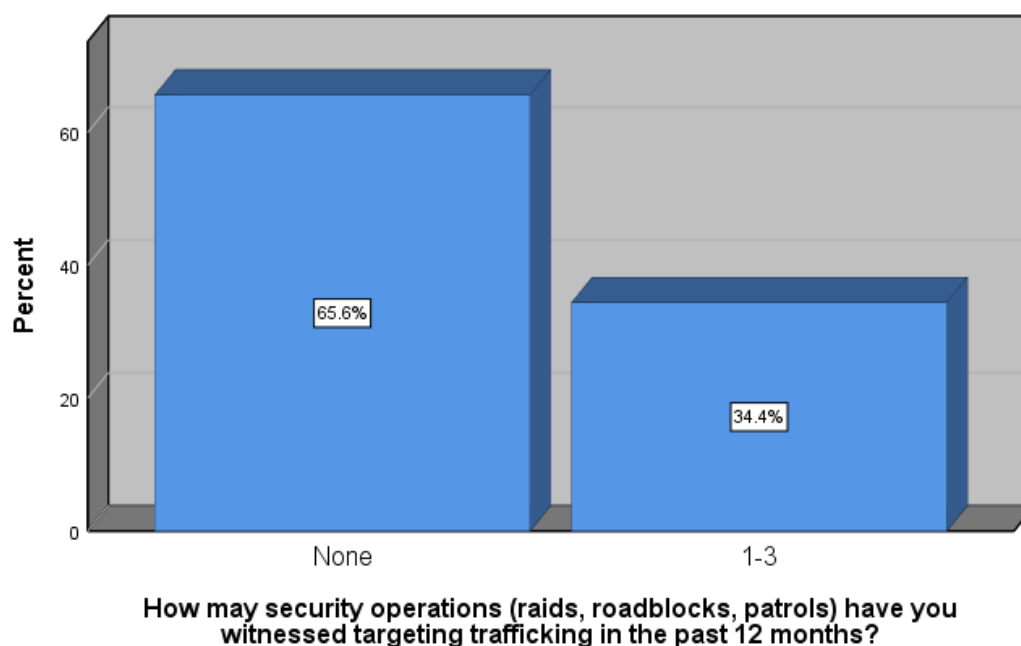


Figure 3

Security Operations Witnessed Targeting Trafficking in the Past 12 Months

As shown in Figure 3, 65.6% of the respondents reported they did not experience any security operations related to trafficking during the last 12 months, and 34.4% experienced between one and three security operations. This indicates that anti-trafficking operations are either infrequent or not sufficiently visible in many parts of the county. The results suggest a potential lack of enforcement, as trafficking could continue even in the presence of security institutions and policy measures.

The findings suggest that cross-border cooperation between Kenya and Ethiopia has produced some security benefits, but these benefits have not been matched by equally strong confidence in the implementation of anti-trafficking laws and local protection systems. This aligns with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (2020), which emphasizes cross-border policy harmonization, intelligence sharing and coordinated migration governance. The African Union (2018, 2019) similarly highlights the importance of regional cooperation, while noting that such cooperation is often constrained by limited resources, weak institutional capacity and uneven political commitment. The Marsabit findings then agree somewhat with the literature. There is potential for collaboration in theory, and some benefits are realized, but this has not been reflected in consistently good outcomes from prevention, identification, prosecution and community protection at local level.

Additionally, the study aimed to identify the largest obstacle to the success of anti-trafficking efforts in the county. These limits were important when evaluating why current security frameworks are not working to address security issues more effectively. The results are shown in Figure 4.

In your view, what is the biggest challenge limiting effective anti-trafficking action?

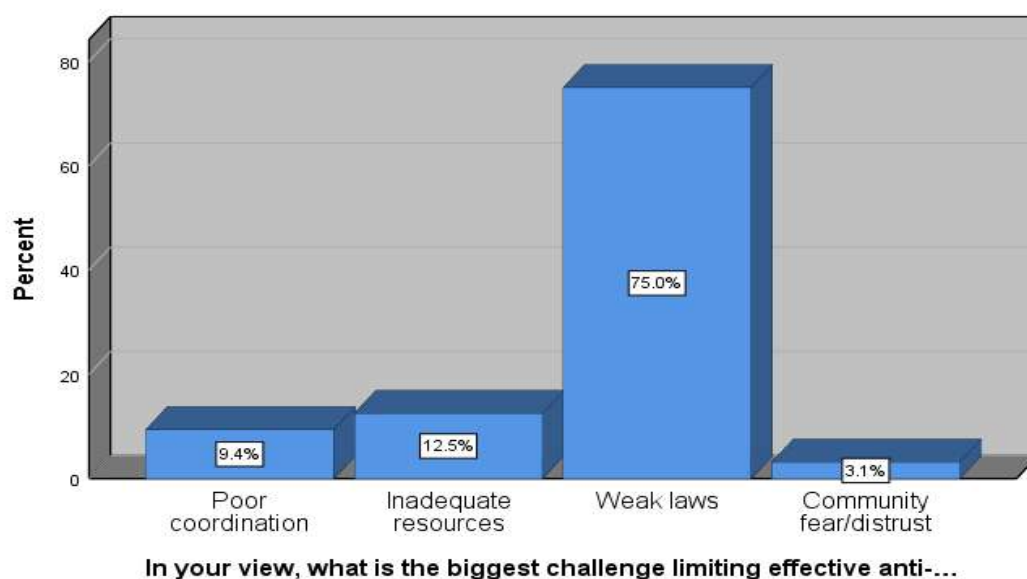


Figure 4
Biggest Challenge Limiting Effective Anti-Trafficking Action

Figure 4 shows that 75.0% of the respondents considered weak laws to be the biggest challenge limiting effective anti-trafficking action. Poor coordination was another challenge, with 9.4%, followed by inadequate resources with 12.5%, and community fear or distrust (3.1%). It is not just operational deployment that is a key area of weakness in counter-trafficking, as these findings indicate, but also the legal and policy framework. The findings thus suggest that strengthening the laws, improving the structure and execution of the laws and law enforcement mechanisms, and strengthening the supportive environment for law enforcement will be important to increase the effectiveness of anti-trafficking interventions in Marsabit County.

It was found that weak laws and weak implementation were key challenges to the effective anti-trafficking action. This discovery is consistent with the observation of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2021) that trafficking control is often not addressed during the policy development phase, but rather during investigation, prosecution, and victim assistance and local enforcement. The challenge in many border environments is to translate formal commitments into effective practice through well-funded, coordinated, trusted and technically capable institutions, as emphasized by the African Union (2018), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (2020), and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024). The results of Marsabit show that the establishment of security frameworks does not necessarily lead to effective trafficking control. Legal and policy tools need to be backed up by regular patrolling, sharing of information, corruption prevention and victim-friendly processes, and effective cooperation between border agencies.

The respondents were also asked how much they agreed with the statements on the effectiveness of the existing security frameworks and policy interventions in combating transnational trafficking and protecting human security in Marsabit County. Table 4 shows the outcome.

Table 4
Effectiveness of Existing Security Frameworks in Addressing Transnational Trafficking and Safeguarding Human Security on Marsabit County

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Existing government policies have reduced trafficking cases in Marsabit County.	3.888	0.882
Cross-border collaboration between Kenya and Ethiopia has enhanced security.	3.981	0.811
Anti-trafficking laws are well implemented by local authorities.	2.744	1.350
Security officers receive adequate training and resources to combat trafficking.	3.794	0.957
Community policing initiatives help to detect and report trafficking.	3.325	1.128
Non-governmental organizations contribute effectively to anti-trafficking programs.	2.331	1.305
Corruption undermines the effectiveness of security frameworks.	4.753	0.888
Victim protection and rehabilitation programs are well supported.	1.656	0.776

As per results, the respondents strongly agreed that corruption undermines the effectiveness of security frameworks as shown by a mean score of 4.753. Also, the respondents agreed that cross-border collaboration between Kenya and Ethiopia has enhanced security as shown by a mean score of 3.981, existing government policies have reduced trafficking cases in Marsabit County as shown by a mean score of 3.888, and security officers receive adequate training and resources to combat trafficking as shown by a mean score of 3.794. Further, the respondents were neutral on whether community policing initiatives help to detect and report trafficking as shown by a mean score of 3.325, and anti-trafficking laws are well implemented by local authorities as shown by a mean score of 2.744. The respondents disagreed that non-governmental organizations contribute effectively to anti-trafficking programs as shown by a mean score of 2.331 and victim protection and rehabilitation programs are well supported as shown by a mean score of 1.656.

The study further showed that corruption has a significant negative impact on the effectiveness of security frameworks and policy interventions. This is one of the best converging results between the results and the literature. Shelley (2014) asserts that corruption creates transactional spaces in the state, and Transparency International (2019) demonstrates that corruption undermines citizens' confidence in the state and enables criminals to bypass legal barriers. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2021) also notes that anti-trafficking efforts are weakened where officials can be bribed, politically influenced, warned in advance of operations or encouraged to apply enforcement selectively. These arguments are substantiated by the findings of the current study, which indicate that corruption was seen by the respondents as a serious weakness in the existing security frameworks and not as an administrative issue. In Marsabit, there is a perception that corruption lowers the likelihood of being caught by those engaged in trafficking and makes community members less likely to trust police and other officials who could be helpful in trafficking-related police operations.

The study revealed that the current security policies and structures have not been effective enough in combating trafficking in Marsabit County. While there are international and national legal instruments that define, require and provide prosecution mechanisms, UNODC (2021) states that effectiveness depends on the capacity of local actors to enforce them and the existing inter-agency coordination. AU (2018) and AU (2019) also emphasize that legal instruments are not sufficient to ensure effective control if the border institutions are under-resourced and weak. The Marsabit results support this difference between the formal existence of a policy and the effectiveness of it on the ground.

The qualitative findings reinforced the survey results by showing that the weakness of security frameworks lies more in implementation than in the absence of institutions. Qualitative results indicated that Marsabit County has various security and policy measures which address trafficking, including police patrols, multi-agency checkpoints, police intelligence gathering, immigration controls, community policing, National Government Administration structures and collaboration with civil society actors. Key informants, however, observed that the effectiveness of these measures is undermined by insufficient resources, the large geographical coverage of the county, limited patrol presence, weak intelligence sharing, corruption, community fear and limited operational cooperation across the Kenya–Ethiopia border. One respondent at the county level stated:

Policies and agencies exist, but the problem is applying them on ground. Marsabit is quite wide and officers cannot be all over the place, traffickers know this and they go where the officers are not. (KII-07, County Security Coordination Officer, 12 June 2025)

An immigration or border-control respondent added:

“Procedures are more transparent at the official border point; the challenge is to screen people and their documents at the unofficial movement outside the official border point.” (KII-02, Immigration/Customs Officer, 13 June 2025)

These findings indicate that the issue is not that the frameworks are not in place at all but that they are not effective. The legal and institutional structure offers a legal framework for action, but traffickers take advantage of the disparity between written policies and what can be done in a large borderland. Kenya's 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report confirms that while trafficking cases continue to go unidentified and trafficking investigations and victim identification remain policy concerns, gaps in enforcement and victim protection persist.

The KIIs also found that community cooperation is fragile. Residents might have information about suspicious movement, transporters, brokers and storage points, but might not report because of fear of retaliation, lack of trust, or suspected compromise by some officials. One of the community elders remarked:

“People can work with security officers, but they must trust that their name won't be revealed and they won't be made vulnerable as a result of reporting it. If they know what's happening, they will keep silent.” (KII-08, Community Elder, 11 June 2025)

This is one of the reasons that security should be a mix of enforcement and community building and witness protection. It also connects closely with the Human Security Theory that focuses on the protection of human beings rather than borders in terms of security interventions. In this context, the effectiveness of anti-trafficking policy in Marsabit should be judged on the basis of: arrests, seizures, community perception of safe reporting, protection provided to victims, and reduction of corruption. Trafficking in persons, drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized

crime are also listed as major threats that need to be addressed with a regional approach, as highlighted in the UNODC Regional Framework for Eastern Africa.

Overall, the findings show that there are existing security and policy frameworks in place to address trafficking in Marsabit County, but these are undermined by limited visibility of patrols, weak implementation, corruption, resource limitations and weak systems of victim protection. The results are consistent with the views of UNODC (2021), AU (2018), IGAD (2020) and IOM (2021) on the importance of local enforcement, inter-agency coordination, cross-border cooperation, and survivor-centered protection in effective anti-trafficking frameworks. The results thus imply a need for greater capacity for the enforcement of security frameworks in Marsabit, and greater integrity systems, community trust and victim support mechanisms.

The study revealed that the current security structures and policy measures have not been fully effective in combating trafficking in Marsabit County. While the international and national legal documents include definitions, requirements and prosecution mechanisms, they will only be effective if local law-enforcement capacity, inter-agency coordination, integrity and community cooperation exist (UNODC 2021). Similarly, AU (2018) and AU (2019) emphasize that laws are not enough to effectively control if the border institutions are poorly resourced, are weak and not acknowledged by local communities. The Marsabit findings reinforce this distinction between the actual practices at a local level and the existence of formal policies. There are patrols, checkpoints, security operations and laws, but they have been limited where traffickers can be able to take advantage of informal routes, local silence, corruption, lack of coordination, and gaps in operations across the border.

The study also revealed low confidence levels in the programs for victim protection and rehabilitation. This finding is consistent with IOM (2021), and UNODC (2021), which both emphasize the negative impact of protection gaps on reporting, prosecutions and secondary victimization of survivors. Only arrest-based solutions will not truly work to combat trafficking in persons. Anti-trafficking responses are incomplete when shelters, psychosocial care and legal assistance are limited and when safe reporting channels and reintegration assistance are not available. Based on the present findings, this is one of the key factors missing in the policy implementation in Marsabit and the protective aspect of the policy implementation has not kept pace with the enforcement aspect. Tools and systems that are effective in the county for security should not only aim to identify and arrest traffickers, but also to help protect victims, rebuild trust and minimize vulnerabilities.

Overall, the results demonstrate that Marsabit County has in place security and policy tools to combat drug and human trafficking but they are relatively ineffective due to limited visibility of patrols, weak implementation, problems of corruption, insufficient resources, and weak coordination across borders and lack of victim protection mechanisms. The findings are also in line with the findings from UNODC (2021), AU (2018), IGAD (2020), and IOM (2021) who state that effective AT frameworks are dependent on having strong local enforcement, inter-agency co-ordination, cross-border cooperation, community trust, and survivor-centered protection. The results, therefore, indicated that security systems in Marsabit need not only increased capacity of enforcement but greater capacity of integrity systems, local intelligence and capacity of community involvement as well as greater visibility of victim protection and security systems for vulnerable groups.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that Marsabit County does not suffer from a complete absence of security frameworks, agencies or policy measures. Rather, the main challenge lies in the gap between the existence of these frameworks and their practical effectiveness on the ground. Laws, patrols, multi-agency operations, border-control structures, community policing efforts and regional cooperation mechanisms exist, but their impact is weakened by limited operational visibility, inadequate resources, weak implementation, corruption, poor coordination and insufficient victim protection.

The findings suggest that current security responses remain too enforcement-centered and too episodic to fully address the adaptive nature of trafficking networks in Marsabit. Traffickers exploit informal crossing points, vast terrain, local transport systems, community fear, and weak surveillance and compromised institutional spaces. As a result, routine patrols and occasional security operations may interrupt trafficking temporarily but do not necessarily dismantle the networks and enabling conditions that sustain it.

Additionally, the effectiveness of anti-trafficking frameworks must be judged not only by arrests, patrols, seizures or official operations, but also by whether these interventions improve human security. In Marsabit, trafficking affects community safety, household livelihoods, drug use, health, and trust in institutions, social cohesion and willingness to report crime. Where communities fear retaliation or suspect that officials are compromised, reporting becomes weak and enforcement loses local intelligence. Where victim protection systems are inadequate, survivors may

remain hidden, unsupported or exposed to further exploitation. Therefore, an anti-trafficking framework that does not protect people, rebuild trust and reduce vulnerability remains incomplete.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that security agencies should strengthen routine patrols, surveillance of informal crossing points, checkpoint coordination and intelligence-led operations. Rather than concentrating only on visible couriers or low-level transporters, enforcement should target the wider network of brokers, route coordinators, corrupt facilitators, document handlers, financiers and protection actors who enable trafficking. This requires improved route mapping, better intelligence collection, and data sharing among agencies and sustained monitoring of both formal and informal crossing corridors. Also, community-based intelligence and reporting mechanisms should be improved. Communities in Marsabit are often the first to observe suspicious movement, recruitment patterns, drug availability, transport networks and informal route activity. However, fear of retaliation and weak trust in institutions can discourage reporting. Security agencies should therefore establish confidential and safe reporting channels, protect informants, strengthen community policing and work with chiefs, elders, religious leaders, youth groups and civil society actors. Reporting systems should guarantee anonymity where necessary and ensure that information provided by community members does not expose them to danger.

Further, livelihood and drought-resilience interventions should be treated as preventive security measures. Trafficking thrives where poverty, unemployment, drought, livestock loss and limited opportunities make individuals vulnerable to recruitment or complicity. National and county governments, together with development partners, should invest in youth employment, vocational training, pastoralist support, drought-response programs, safe migration awareness and livelihood diversification. Such interventions would reduce the pool of vulnerable individuals that trafficking networks exploit and strengthen the resilience of borderland communities.

Moreover, data collection, monitoring and evaluation should be improved. Effective policy intervention requires reliable information on trafficking trends, routes, actors, victim profiles, enforcement outcomes, corruption risks and service gaps. Marsabit County and national security institutions should develop integrated data systems that combine police records, immigration data, community reports, civil society referrals and court outcomes while protecting sensitive information. Regular monitoring would help identify whether anti-trafficking measures are reducing trafficking risks, improving victim protection, strengthening public trust and enhancing human security. Without reliable data, responses are likely to remain reactive, fragmented and difficult to evaluate.

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.

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