

Peacebuilding initiatives among pastoral communities in Garissa County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to assess the peacebuilding initiatives among pastoral communities in Garissa County, Kenya. The study was guided by Systems Theory, which emphasizes the interdependence of social institutions in promoting stability. Grounded in the pragmatist research philosophy, the study adopted a descriptive research design. A sample of 526 respondents was selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques from household heads, chiefs, Members of Parliament (MPs), Members of County Assembly (MCAs), National Police Service officers, non-governmental organization (NGO) and community-based organization (CBO) representatives, the County Commissioner, religious leaders, women leaders and youth leaders in Garissa County. Primary data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides and focus group discussion (FGD) guides, while secondary data were obtained from journals, books, unpublished works and research articles. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, whereas qualitative data were analyzed thematically with the aid of NVivo software. The findings revealed that peacebuilding initiatives are highly prevalent (88.6%) and generally effective (75.6%) in promoting peaceful coexistence among pastoral communities. Community-based peacebuilding mechanisms received strong support from respondents, with religious leaders recording the highest endorsement (97.7%), followed by dialogue forums (95.0%), clan elders (92.4%) and the customary xeer system (90.6%). Inferential analysis confirmed very strong positive correlations between the peacebuilding initiatives and their perceived effectiveness, with County Peace Committees returning the strongest association ($r = .983$, $p < .001$). The study concludes that locally driven and culturally embedded peacebuilding approaches, when coordinated with formal state structures, remain the most trusted and effective mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution in Garissa County. It recommends the enactment of a Hybrid Peace Infrastructure Policy that embeds customary and religious peace actors within formal state peace structures.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution; Community Participation; Garissa County, Peacebuilding Initiatives; Pastoral Communities

I. INTRODUCTION

Peacebuilding initiatives have become an integral strategy for addressing conflicts in pastoral communities, where competition over natural resources, historical grievances and weak governance structures frequently contribute to cycles of violence. Peacebuilding extends beyond ending violence to establishing mechanisms that promote reconciliation, social cohesion, trust and sustainable coexistence among conflicting groups (Williams & Gordon-Gibson, 2024). In pastoral settings, these initiatives commonly include dialogue forums, traditional conflict resolution institutions, religious mediation, community policing, peace committees and government-led reconciliation programs. Their effectiveness depends on the extent to which they are locally owned, culturally accepted, and supported by formal governance institutions.

Globally, peacebuilding initiatives have increasingly emphasized community participation and inclusive governance as essential components of sustainable peace. In Colombia, for example, territorial peace initiatives that integrated local communities into land governance strengthened reconciliation and reduced conflicts associated with land ownership (Vanelli & Ochoa Peralta, 2022). Similarly, Northern Ireland's peacebuilding process demonstrated that creating inclusive public institutions and promoting community dialogue enhanced social cohesion and reduced sectarian tensions (Rifai & Emekci, 2022). These experiences illustrate that sustainable peace is more likely when local institutions and communities actively participate in conflict management.

Across Africa, peacebuilding initiatives have increasingly combined customary institutions with formal state mechanisms. In South Sudan, local governance structures and traditional leaders have been instrumental in facilitating community reconciliation and supporting peace agreements, although their effectiveness has often been constrained by political instability (Maphasa, 2022). In Nigeria, peace education, inter-community dialogue and community participation have strengthened social cohesion by promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence among diverse ethnic

and religious groups (Adedokun & Bolarinwa, 2020). Similarly, Somalia has relied extensively on clan elders, customary law and religious leaders to mediate disputes and restore peace within pastoral communities, demonstrating the continued relevance of indigenous peacebuilding institutions (Mohamud, 2023).

In Kenya, peacebuilding among pastoral communities has evolved through collaborative efforts involving government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious institutions and traditional leadership. Community peace committees, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and elder-led mediation have been widely implemented in pastoral counties such as Wajir, Marsabit, Turkana and West Pokot to address inter-clan conflicts and disputes over grazing land and water resources (Chelang'a & Chesire, 2020). Studies by Abdi and Mwangi (2023) indicate that community participation in peace committees and local decision-making has strengthened conflict management by increasing community ownership of peace initiatives. Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions varies across counties due to differences in institutional capacity, resource availability, and local socio-cultural dynamics.

Garissa County has experienced numerous peacebuilding interventions implemented by government agencies, development partners, religious organizations, and local community institutions. These initiatives include the use of clan elders, the xeer customary justice system, inter-clan dialogue forums, religious mediation, peace committees, and community security structures aimed at preventing and resolving pastoral conflicts. While these interventions have contributed to reducing tensions in some areas, conflicts continue to recur, suggesting that the effectiveness and sustainability of existing peacebuilding initiatives remain uncertain. Therefore, there was need to assess the prevalence, effectiveness and community acceptance of these peacebuilding initiatives in order to establish the extent to which they contribute to sustainable peace among pastoral communities in Garissa County.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Pastoral conflicts continue to pose a significant challenge to peace and development in Garissa County, Kenya. These conflicts are largely associated with competition over water and grazing resources, inter-clan rivalries, communal land ownership and recurrent droughts, resulting in loss of lives, displacement, destruction of property, and disruption of livelihoods (Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies [CHRIPS], 2021; Mkutu & Wandera, 2013). To address these persistent conflicts, the Government of Kenya, development partners, civil society organizations, religious institutions, and local communities have implemented a range of peacebuilding initiatives, including peace committees, inter-clan dialogue forums, mediation by clan elders, the xeer customary justice system, religious peace forums, disarmament campaigns, and cross-border peacebuilding programmes (Kubasu, 2017).

Despite these interventions, pastoral conflicts continue to recur in Garissa County, indicating that sustainable peace has not yet been achieved. The persistence of violent conflicts raises concerns about the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and sustainability of the existing peacebuilding initiatives. While some interventions have contributed to reducing tensions and promoting dialogue, others have experienced challenges related to weak institutional coordination, inadequate community participation, limited financial resources, and insufficient integration of customary and formal peacebuilding mechanisms. Consequently, the extent to which these initiatives have contributed to lasting peace among pastoral communities remains inadequately understood.

Previous studies in northern Kenya have predominantly focused on the causes of pastoral conflicts, resource competition, insecurity, and counter-terrorism interventions (Mkutu & Wandera, 2013; CHRIPS, 2021). Although these studies acknowledge the existence of peacebuilding interventions, few have systematically assessed their prevalence, effectiveness, community acceptance, and contribution to sustainable peace in Garissa County. As a result, there is limited empirical evidence on which peacebuilding initiatives are most trusted by pastoral communities, how effectively they address recurring conflicts, and the factors that influence their performance. This knowledge gap limits the ability of policymakers, development partners, and community leaders to strengthen existing peacebuilding mechanisms and design interventions that respond to the realities of pastoral communities. Therefore, this study sought to assess the peacebuilding initiatives among pastoral communities in Garissa County by examining the existing initiatives, evaluating their perceived effectiveness, and generating evidence to inform more effective and sustainable peacebuilding strategies.

1.2 Research Objective

To assess the peacebuilding initiatives among pastoral communities in Garissa County.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Systems Theory

Systems Theory, originally developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1951) and later applied to peacebuilding by scholars such as Johan Galtung (1996) and Ricigliano (2012), provides the theoretical foundation for assessing

peacebuilding initiatives among pastoral communities in Garissa County. The theory views society as an interconnected system comprising multiple actors and institutions whose interactions determine whether peace or conflict prevails. Rather than treating peacebuilding as the responsibility of a single institution, Systems Theory emphasizes that sustainable peace is achieved through coordinated action among government agencies, customary institutions, religious leaders, civil society organizations, and local communities. This perspective is particularly relevant to Garissa County, where numerous peacebuilding initiatives operate simultaneously to address recurrent pastoral conflicts.

The first tenet of Systems Theory is interconnectedness, which posits that all components of a social system are interdependent and that the performance of one institution affects the effectiveness of others (Von Bertalanffy, 1951). In Garissa County, peacebuilding initiatives involve county and national government agencies, peace committees, clan elders, religious leaders, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations. The success of these initiatives depends on effective coordination, collaboration, and information sharing among these actors. Weak coordination or duplication of roles may reduce the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions, while strong partnerships enhance community trust and collective conflict resolution.

The second tenet is feedback mechanisms, which explains that systems continuously adapt through responses generated by their own actions (Coleman et al., 2007). Within peacebuilding, successful interventions generate positive feedback by increasing community confidence, encouraging participation in dialogue, and strengthening peaceful coexistence. Conversely, ineffective interventions may erode public trust, reduce community participation, and increase the likelihood of recurring conflicts. Assessing community perceptions of existing peacebuilding initiatives therefore provides important feedback on their effectiveness and sustainability.

The third tenet is interdependence, which maintains that no institution can independently achieve sustainable peace because peacebuilding requires complementary roles from multiple stakeholders (Galtung, 1996). In Garissa County, customary mechanisms such as mediation by clan elders and the *xeer* system often operate alongside formal government structures, religious institutions, and civil society organizations. Systems Theory suggests that peacebuilding initiatives are likely to be more effective when these formal and informal institutions work collaboratively rather than in isolation. This tenet therefore provides a useful framework for examining how different peacebuilding initiatives complement one another in managing pastoral conflicts.

The fourth tenet is that systems are open and adaptive, meaning they continuously interact with their external environment and adjust to changing circumstances (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). Peacebuilding initiatives in Garissa County operate within an environment characterized by drought, cross-border migration, insecurity, and changing community needs. Consequently, peacebuilding mechanisms must remain flexible and responsive to emerging challenges. Initiatives that continuously adapt their strategies through stakeholder engagement and learning are more likely to remain relevant and effective in promoting sustainable peace.

The fifth tenet is holism, which argues that the effectiveness of a system should be evaluated based on the performance of the whole rather than individual components (Ricigliano, 2012). Applying this principle to the present study implies that peacebuilding initiatives should not be assessed in isolation but as complementary interventions contributing collectively to conflict prevention, reconciliation, and social cohesion. Evaluating peace committees, dialogue forums, religious mediation, customary justice systems, and government peace programmes together provides a comprehensive understanding of their contribution to sustainable peace among pastoral communities in Garissa County. Systems Theory is therefore appropriate for this study because it provides a comprehensive framework for assessing peacebuilding initiatives as an integrated system of interconnected actors, institutions and processes. It enables the study to evaluate how coordination, collaboration, adaptability and community participation influence the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions among pastoral communities in Garissa County.

2.2 Empirical Review

Empirical studies on peacebuilding among pastoral communities consistently emphasize the centrality of community participation, customary institutions and multi-sectoral collaboration. In Wajir County, Abdi and Mwangi (2023) established that community participation in peace initiatives is critical to managing inter-clan conflicts, demonstrating that when communities engage directly in decision-making, they are more likely to develop sustainable conflict management mechanisms. This underscores the importance of local agency in peacebuilding among pastoral communities.

Studies focusing on inter-clan conflict in northern Kenya further highlight the role of resource competition and indigenous mediation. Alio (2012), in a study of inter-clan conflict between the Garre and Murulle clans in Mandera, found that migration onto contested territories, compounded by drought and dwindling pasture and water resources, set in motion the competition that fuelled conflict. Building on the same context, Mohamud (2014) established that peace efforts by the Government of Kenya together with local elders from both warring clans culminated in a signed memorandum of understanding that was accepted by the communities and enabled the resettlement of displaced persons, illustrating the effectiveness of hybrid state–customary mediation.

The value of negotiated and mediated settlement is echoed in the broader literature. Muigua (2015) explains that negotiation is a process through which parties identify and discuss problems in order to reach agreement without external assistance, employing strategies such as concession, compulsion and confrontation. Comparative Kenyan evidence similarly indicates that peace initiatives in which NGOs and local leaders mediate inter-ethnic disputes and promote economic alternatives to violence are most effective when they rest on active community engagement that compensates for the limited reach of formal government intervention.

Empirical evidence also links environmental stress to conflict recurrence. Huho (2012), reviewing conflict resolution among pastoralist communities in the Pokot region, found that access to natural resources, particularly water and pasture, was the major source of conflict, and that resolution efforts were frequently hindered by climate-induced scarcity. The study concluded that climate change mitigation must be a central component of conflict management in pastoralist areas. Collectively, these studies reveal that sustainable peacebuilding among pastoral communities depends on inclusive, grassroots-driven and multi-sectoral approaches that combine customary legitimacy with formal institutional support — the very interaction this study set out to assess in Garissa County.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a pragmatist research philosophy and employed a descriptive research design to assess the peacebuilding initiatives among pastoral communities in Garissa County, Kenya. The descriptive design was considered appropriate because it enabled the study to systematically examine the existing peacebuilding initiatives, their implementation, community participation, and perceived effectiveness in promoting peaceful coexistence, using both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Garissa County, focusing on the five rural constituencies of Ijara, Fafi, Dadaab, Lagdera and Balambala, where pastoral conflicts are prevalent. These areas are characterized by pastoral livelihoods, recurrent drought, competition over water and grazing resources, and inter-clan dynamics that shape both conflict and peacebuilding processes.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised household heads, chiefs, Members of Parliament (MPs), Members of County Assembly (MCAs), National Police Service officers, the County Commissioner, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), as well as religious, women and youth leaders who are actively involved in peacebuilding processes in Garissa County.

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

A sample of 526 respondents was selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to identify key informants with specialized knowledge of peacebuilding, including chiefs, security officers, the County Commissioner, MPs, MCAs, NGO and CBO representatives, and religious, women and youth leaders. Simple random sampling was used to select household heads, ensuring that the general community perspective was adequately represented.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to household heads, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and focus group discussions (FGDs) involving religious leaders, women leaders and youth leaders. Secondary data were obtained from books, peer-reviewed journals, government reports and other relevant publications on peacebuilding. The instruments were pretested to ensure clarity, validity and reliability before actual data collection, and trained research assistants supported administration in the local context.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, as well as inferential statistics comprising Pearson product-moment correlation and multiple regression analysis to establish the relationship between peacebuilding initiatives and their perceived effectiveness. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically with the aid of NVivo software to identify emerging themes relating to peacebuilding initiatives. The findings were presented using tables, frequencies, percentages, charts and narrative descriptions to provide a comprehensive assessment of the peacebuilding initiatives among pastoral communities in Garissa County.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study observed established research ethics throughout. Research authorization was obtained from the relevant university authorities and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), and permission was sought from county administrative authorities before fieldwork. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents after explaining the purpose of the study. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and the data collected were used solely for academic purposes. Given the sensitivity of conflict-related information, the study exercised particular care to avoid exposing respondents to any risk arising from their participation.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Presence of Peacebuilding Initiatives in Garissa County

The study sought to assess the presence of peacebuilding initiatives among pastoral communities in Garissa County. The results are presented in Figure 1.

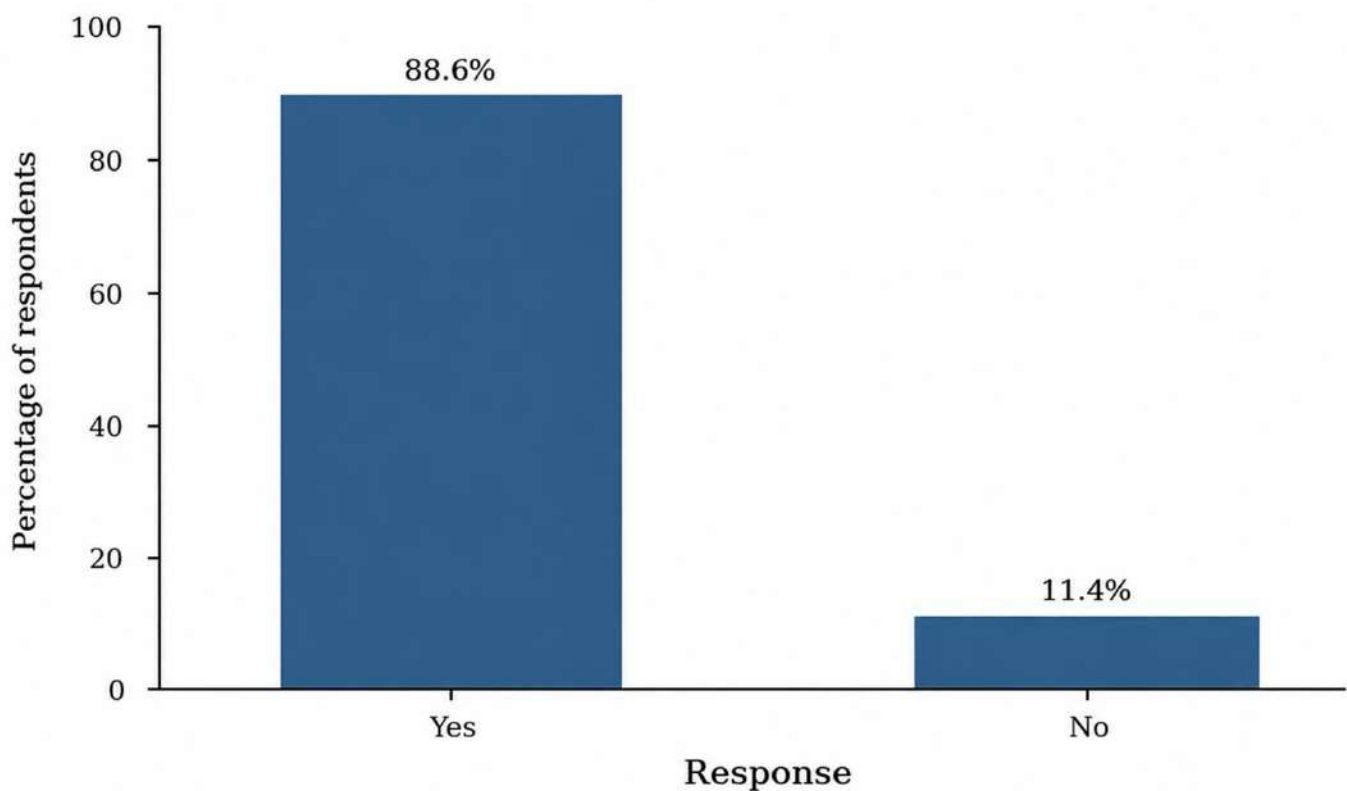


Figure 1

Presence of peacebuilding initiatives in Garissa County

Findings revealed that 88.6% of respondents acknowledged the existence of active peacebuilding initiatives in their communities, while 11.4% reported that such initiatives were absent. This finding demonstrates that peacebuilding interventions have become embedded within the conflict management landscape of Garissa County through the involvement of state institutions, non-governmental organizations, religious actors, and customary authorities.

The finding is consistent with Bond and Mkutu (2018), who observed that northern Kenya has developed a complex network of peace actors involving state agencies, civil society organizations, and indigenous institutions. They describe this arrangement as an institutional “bricolage” where multiple actors contribute to peacebuilding through overlapping but sometimes fragmented approaches. The high recognition of peacebuilding initiatives among respondents may therefore reflect the visibility of these multiple interventions within pastoral communities. However, qualitative findings revealed that the presence of peacebuilding initiatives does not necessarily translate into sustainable peace outcomes. During a focus group discussion with women in Garissa Town Market, participants acknowledged the existence of peace committees, dialogue forums, and NGO-supported conflict resolution programmes but raised concerns about their limited reach. One participant noted:

“Local women-led peace committees and community dialogue forums exist. Participation in religious and elders’ councils advocating for reconciliation occurs. These initiatives have some positive impact, especially in mediating local disputes, but their reach is limited due to lack of funding and male dominance in decision-making.” (FGD with women, Garissa Town Market, 4th March 2025).

This finding supports Okeyo (2025), who argues that peacebuilding initiatives in northern Kenya are often constrained by inconsistent funding, historical grievances, ethnic divisions, and exclusion of marginalized groups. Similarly, the findings indicate that the visibility of peace initiatives should not be interpreted as evidence of institutional effectiveness, as issues of inclusivity, sustainability and community ownership continue to influence outcomes. An interview with a local government administrator further highlighted institutional challenges affecting peacebuilding sustainability. The administrator observed that:

“Many local peace committees lack operational funds or have become inactive due to disinterest or lack of government support. Chiefs and local administrators are often overstretched, covering large, sparsely populated areas. Poor coordination between county and national government arms also affects timely response to conflicts.” (Interview with local administrator, Garissa Town, 4th March 2025).

This finding reinforces concerns raised by Bond and Mkutu (2018) that multiple peace actors may create fragmented rather than coordinated peace infrastructures. Therefore, while peacebuilding initiatives are widely present in Garissa County, strengthening coordination, financing and institutional support remains critical for achieving sustainable peace. Effectiveness of Peacebuilding Initiatives in Garissa County: The study further examined the perceived effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives among pastoral communities. The results are presented in Figure 2.

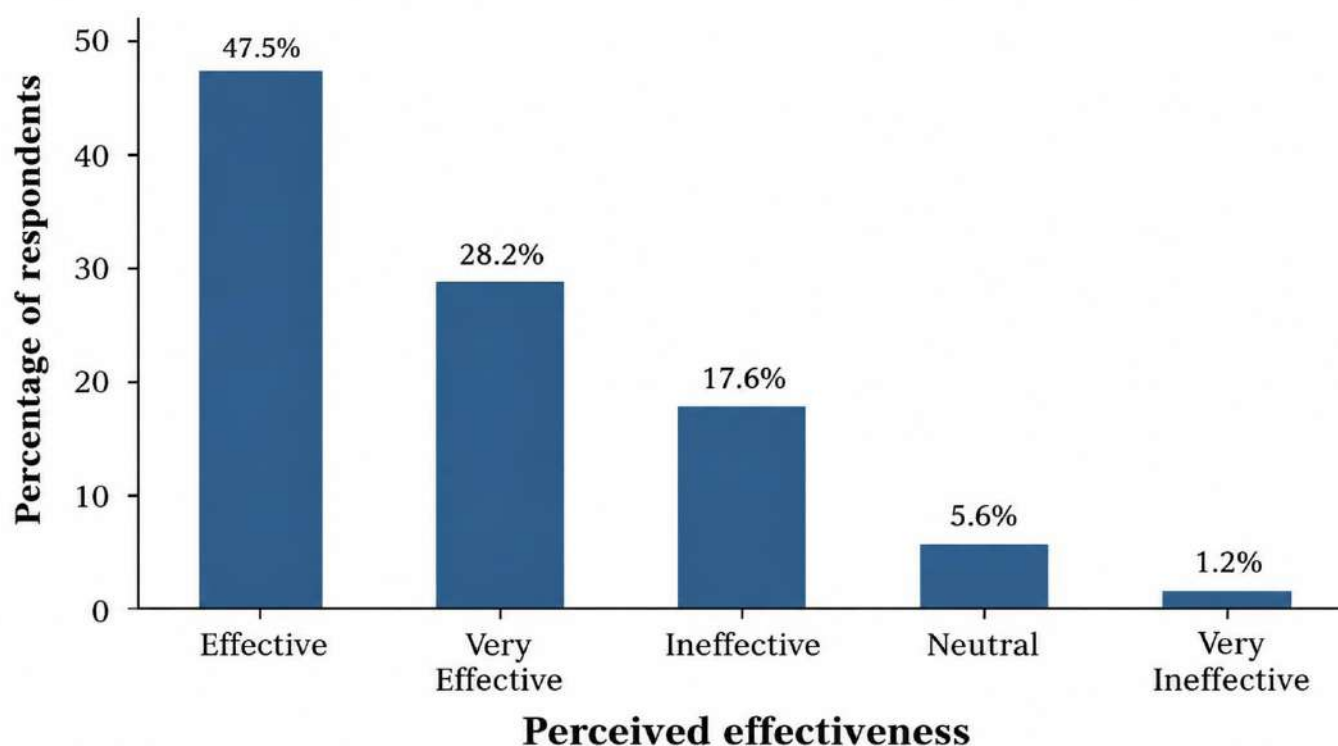


Figure 2

Effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives in Garissa County

Findings indicated that 75.6% of respondents perceived peacebuilding initiatives as effective, with 47.5% rating them as effective and 28.2% as very effective. A further 17.6% considered them ineffective, while a smaller proportion remained neutral or rated them very ineffective. These findings suggest that existing peacebuilding initiatives have contributed positively to conflict prevention, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence, although their impact remains uneven.

The positive perception of effectiveness can be attributed to the integration of culturally legitimate peace mechanisms, particularly clan elders, customary law (xeer), religious leaders and dialogue forums. Wanyoike et al. (2018) argue that traditional conflict resolution mechanisms remain effective among pastoral communities because they are rooted in local values, social relationships and collective responsibility. Similarly, Kipkorir and Omboto (2025)

found that joint peace committees incorporating traditional approaches and structured dialogue significantly improve conflict management outcomes. Qualitative findings supported the importance of community ownership in enhancing peacebuilding effectiveness. Women participants emphasized their role in sustaining peace through mediation, early warning and community education:

“Women act as mediators and peace educators in their homes and communities, mobilizers of youth against violence, and early warning agents identifying tensions before they escalate.” (FGD with women, Garissa Town, 5th March 2025).

This finding corresponds with Nyonje and Muiya (2024), who established that women’s participation strengthens resilience and enhances community capacity to prevent violence. The recognition of women as early warning actors demonstrates that peacebuilding effectiveness extends beyond formal institutions to include informal community networks. Youth participants also emphasized the importance of youth inclusion in peace processes. One participant stated:

“Young people should be at the center of promoting peace because they are energetic, creative, and often open-minded. They can act as bridge builders between communities through dialogue, social media, and community projects.” (FGD with youth leaders, Garissa Town, 5th March 2025).

This supports Okumu (2013), who found that youth-led peace initiatives among pastoral communities contribute to reconciliation by creating platforms for cross-community engagement. However, the findings also revealed that effectiveness remains constrained by weak coordination between actors. A government administrator noted that peace actors often operate separately, with NGOs focusing on development activities while security agencies concentrate on enforcement. This separation limits information sharing and reduces the possibility of developing integrated peace responses. Community-Based Peacebuilding Mechanisms in Garissa County: The study established that community-based mechanisms remain the most trusted peacebuilding approaches among pastoral communities. Respondents’ levels of agreement are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Community-Based Peace and Traditional Mechanisms

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Clan elders are instrumental in conflict mediation and reconciliation	5 (1.5%)	6 (1.8%)	15 (4.4%)	202 (59.2%)	113 (33.1%)
Use of Somali customary law (xeer) has helped in peacebuilding	4 (1.2%)	11 (3.2%)	17 (5.0%)	206 (60.4%)	103 (30.2%)
Dialogue forums are effective	4 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	11 (3.2%)	204 (59.8%)	120 (35.2%)
Religious leaders (imams and sheikhs) promote peace messaging	4 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (1.2%)	195 (57.2%)	138 (40.5%)

Findings showed that 97.7% of respondents endorsed religious leaders as important peace actors, followed by dialogue forums (95.0%), clan elders (92.4%) and Somali customary law (xeer) (90.6%). The high endorsement of clan elders reflects their continued legitimacy in pastoral conflict management. Respondents indicated that elders possess historical knowledge, social authority and the ability to negotiate agreements acceptable to conflicting groups. A woman participant explained:

“Clan elders are the backbone of our peace efforts. When there is a dispute over grazing land or water, we do not go to the police first. We go to elders because they understand our history and have authority respected by both sides.” (FGD with women, Garissa Town Market, 6th March 2025).

This finding aligns with Menkhaus (2008), who demonstrated that elder-led institutions in northern Kenya play a central role in preventing conflict escalation and facilitating reconciliation. The findings also support the concept of a “mediated state,” where customary institutions operate alongside formal government structures in areas where state presence is limited. Similarly, respondents strongly supported the role of xeer in peacebuilding. Participants emphasized that customary law focuses on restoring relationships rather than punishment. A religious leader explained:

“Xeer is not just about punishment; it is about restoring relationships. The goal is not revenge but healing because both families agree on the solution.” (FGD with religious leaders, Garissa Town, 6th March 2025).

This finding agrees with Mohameddeq (2024), who notes that xeer remains influential because it provides culturally accepted mechanisms for reconciliation and compensation. However, respondents also acknowledged limitations, particularly regarding its ability to address contemporary challenges and ensure participation of women and youth. Community-Based Peacebuilding Initiatives: The study sought to examine community-based peacebuilding initiatives adopted among pastoral communities in Garissa County. The findings demonstrate that community-driven mechanisms remain central to conflict management, reflecting the importance of locally legitimate institutions in

addressing ethnic tensions. The results indicate strong support for the role of religious leaders, dialogue forums, clan elders and customary mechanisms such as *xeer* in promoting peace.

The findings suggest that peacebuilding in Garissa County operates through a hybrid institutional framework where formal and informal institutions interact. This supports Bond and Mkutu's (2018) institutional bricolage framework, which argues that peace in northern Kenya emerges through the interaction of state institutions, customary authorities, religious actors and civil society organizations rather than through a single dominant mechanism. State-Based Peace Initiatives: The study sought to examine state-based peace initiatives implemented in Garissa County. Respondents' levels of agreement are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

State-Based Peace Initiatives in Garissa County

State-Based Peace Initiative	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Deployment of security forces	4 (1.2%)	4 (1.2%)	4 (1.2%)	211 (61.9%)	118 (34.6%)
Disarmament programmes	6 (1.8%)	3 (0.9%)	10 (2.9%)	203 (59.5%)	119 (34.9%)
Establishment of County Peace Committees	3 (0.9%)	1 (0.3%)	2 (0.6%)	200 (58.7%)	135 (39.6%)
Integration of peacebuilding into CIDPs	4 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (1.2%)	202 (59.2%)	131 (38.4%)
Early warning and early response systems	5 (1.5%)	3 (0.9%)	8 (2.3%)	195 (57.2%)	130 (38.1%)

The findings reveal strong community support for state interventions, including deployment of security forces, disarmament programmes, County Peace Committees, integration of peacebuilding into County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs), and early warning systems. The high levels of approval indicate that communities recognize the importance of state involvement in addressing insecurity. However, qualitative evidence demonstrates that respondents do not view state interventions as sufficient independently. Rather, they perceive sustainable peace as requiring collaboration between government institutions, customary authorities, religious leaders and communities. This finding supports Bond and Mkutu's (2018) description of peacebuilding in Kenya's northern drylands as a "patchwork" involving multiple actors whose legitimacy varies across communities.

Deployment of Security Forces: The study found that 96.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that deployment of security forces contributes to conflict management. This demonstrates recognition that government security institutions remain necessary in controlling armed violence, cattle rustling and extremist threats. The qualitative findings from government administrators revealed that security agencies depend heavily on community actors for intelligence, mediation support and access to local networks. This demonstrates that security effectiveness depends on cooperation with community structures rather than purely military approaches.

This finding aligns with Musau et al. (2023), who argue that contemporary pastoral conflicts have evolved beyond traditional cattle rustling into complex forms of organized violence involving sophisticated weapons and criminal networks. Therefore, security deployment remains necessary. However, the findings also reveal limitations of security-centered approaches. The observation that security forces often lack mediation and conflict resolution skills supports Musau et al.'s (2023) argument for human-centered security approaches rather than state-centric models. The high approval of security deployment should therefore not be interpreted as support for militarization alone. Instead, it reflects community recognition that security forces are necessary but insufficient without addressing poverty, unemployment, resource competition and governance challenges.

Disarmament Programmes: The study established that 94.4% of respondents supported disarmament programmes. This indicates broad recognition that small arms contribute to the escalation of pastoral conflicts. Musau et al. (2023) identify the proliferation of small arms as a major factor transforming traditional cattle rustling into highly destructive violence. However, qualitative findings demonstrate that communities remain concerned about surrendering weapons without adequate protection. The government administrator's testimony that poverty transforms livestock raiding into organized criminal activity supports Jackson's (2022) argument that disarmament must be integrated with economic empowerment and multi-sectoral peacebuilding. The findings further show that youth unemployment remains a significant factor influencing participation in armed groups. Therefore, disarmament programmes require complementary interventions addressing livelihoods, education and employment.

Establishment of County Peace Committees: County Peace Committees received exceptionally high support, with 98.3% of respondents affirming their importance. These findings indicate that communities value institutional mechanisms that combine government coordination with local participation. The qualitative findings from government administrators emphasized the importance of representation of clans, women and youth within peace committees. Women participants further highlighted that women's involvement strengthens early warning, reconciliation and community dialogue. These findings support Kipkorir and Omboto (2025), who found that joint peace committees

significantly improve management of cattle rustling conflicts. They also reinforce the institutional bricolage framework because peace committees represent hybrid structures combining customary legitimacy with formal state support.

4.1.2 Integration of Peacebuilding into County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs)

The study found that 97.6% of respondents supported integrating peacebuilding into CIDPs. This demonstrates community recognition that conflict cannot be addressed through security measures alone but requires development interventions. The qualitative evidence emphasized livelihood diversification, youth employment, civic education and peace education within religious institutions as important components of development-based peacebuilding. This supports Muthama (2019), who argues that CIDPs provide important mechanisms for translating national development objectives into county-level action. However, the findings also reveal implementation challenges, particularly the need for adequate funding and institutional commitment.

Early Warning and Early Response Systems: The study found that 95.3% of respondents considered early warning systems effective. Qualitative findings from meteorological officers, county administrators and women participants confirmed that early warning mechanisms provide important opportunities for preventing conflict escalation. However, the findings reveal three major challenges, namely limited capacity to respond after warnings are issued, fear of retaliation among community informants, and exclusion of women from formal monitoring structures. These findings support Adano et al. (2012), who argue that early warning systems are effective only when connected to timely response mechanisms. They also support IGAD (2025), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, which emphasizes women's contribution to peace information networks. **Inclusivity of Peace Initiatives:** The study sought to establish whether peace initiatives in Garissa County are inclusive. The results are presented in Figure 3.

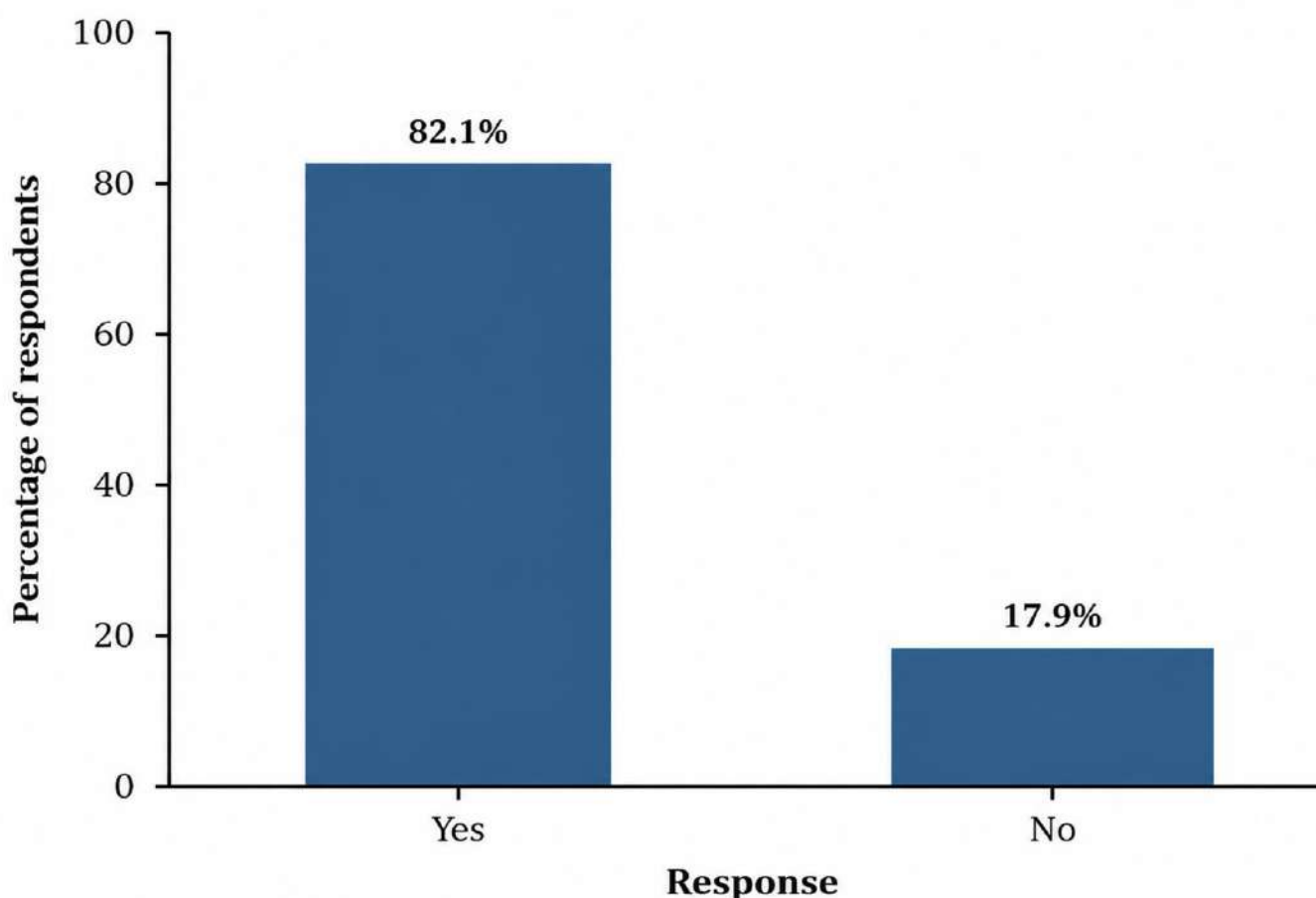


Figure 3
Inclusivity of peace initiatives

The findings revealed that 82.1% of respondents considered peace initiatives inclusive, while 17.9% disagreed. Although the majority perception is positive, qualitative findings reveal important differences between numerical inclusion and meaningful participation. Women and youth participants indicated that they are often invited to participate but remain excluded from decision-making processes.

This finding supports Ogega (2022), who identified structural barriers affecting women's participation in peacebuilding. Similarly, Elfversson and Nilsson (2022) distinguish between symbolic inclusion, implementation participation and meaningful involvement in negotiation processes. The youth testimony that they are expected to implement decisions rather than participate in making them demonstrates that inclusion remains incomplete. Therefore, while Garissa demonstrates significant progress in inclusive peacebuilding, deeper participation of women, youth and marginalized groups remains necessary. Most Effective Approaches in Addressing Conflicts in Garissa County: The study sought to establish the most effective approaches for addressing ethnic conflicts in Garissa County according to household heads. The rankings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Ranking of Effective Ways of Addressing Ethnic Conflicts in Garissa County

Effective Way of Addressing Ethnic Conflicts	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rank
Strengthening community dialogue and mediation	240	70.4	1
Enhancing resource-sharing agreements	35	10.3	2
Investing in livelihood diversification	29	8.5	3
Disarmament and arms control	20	5.9	4
Integrating traditional and formal systems of conflict management	17	4.9	5
Total	341	100.0	

The findings revealed that strengthening community dialogue and mediation was ranked as the most effective approach by 240 respondents (70.4%), followed by enhancing resource-sharing agreements (10.3%), investing in livelihood diversification (8.5%), disarmament and arms control (5.9%), and integrating traditional and formal systems of conflict management (4.9%). These findings demonstrate that communities in Garissa County place greater confidence in relational and participatory peacebuilding mechanisms compared to predominantly coercive or externally driven interventions.

The strong preference for dialogue-based approaches reflects the central role of social relationships, trust-building and negotiated settlement within pastoral conflict contexts. This finding supports the institutional bricolage perspective advanced by Bond and Mkutu (2018), which argues that sustainable peace in northern Kenya emerges through interaction between customary institutions, state structures and non-state actors rather than through reliance on a single conflict management mechanism. Strengthening Community Dialogue and Mediation: The study found that strengthening community dialogue and mediation was ranked as the most effective conflict management approach, with 240 respondents (70.4%) identifying it as the preferred strategy. This finding indicates that household heads in Garissa County perceive dialogue as a practical mechanism capable of addressing ethnic tensions through reconciliation, trust restoration and negotiated problem-solving.

The quantitative finding is supported by qualitative evidence from women and youth focus group discussions. Women participants emphasized that peacebuilding is embedded within everyday community interactions, where women act as mediators, peace educators and early warning actors. One participant explained that women identify emerging tensions within families and communities before they escalate into violence, demonstrating that mediation extends beyond formal peace forums into informal social networks. This finding supports Mkutu and Lokwang's (2017) argument that pastoral communities have historically relied on indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms to manage disputes and maintain social cohesion where formal state institutions have limited reach. Their analysis demonstrates that customary mediation systems remain important because they are locally legitimate and culturally understood by conflicting groups.

Similarly, Yegon et al. (2025) found that inclusive dialogue facilitated by experienced mediators enhances consensus-building by allowing conflicting groups to express grievances and negotiate mutually acceptable solutions. This supports the Garissa finding that dialogue is preferred because it creates spaces where communities participate directly in resolving disputes rather than becoming passive recipients of externally designed interventions. However, although dialogue and mediation received overwhelming support, scholarly literature highlights important limitations. Mkutu and Lokwang (2017) caution that indigenous mechanisms face increasing pressure from contemporary challenges such as commercialization of resources, infrastructure development, political competition and changing governance structures. Therefore, while community dialogue remains highly valued, it requires institutional support, mediator training and coordination with formal peace institutions.

The interview with a religious leader further revealed that dialogue mechanisms often suffer from weak coordination among peace actors. Religious leaders, despite possessing significant moral authority, are sometimes incorporated into peace processes only after decisions have already been made. This suggests that effective dialogue requires not only participation but also meaningful inclusion of actors who possess community legitimacy. Enhancing Resource-Sharing Agreements: Enhancing resource-sharing agreements was ranked second, with 35 respondents (10.3%) identifying it as the most effective approach. This finding reflects recognition among Garissa communities that

competition over pasture, water resources, grazing corridors and livestock contributes significantly to ethnic tensions. The qualitative findings from women participants confirmed that resource scarcity, intensified by drought and climate variability, remains a major driver of conflict. Participants identified competition over water and pasture, cattle rustling, clan rivalry and boundary disputes as interconnected causes of violence. These findings correspond with Cheruiyot and Ngari (2025), who observed that prolonged drought conditions increase competition over limited resources among pastoral communities, creating conditions for conflict escalation. Their research emphasizes that resource-sharing agreements can reduce tensions when they are inclusive, adaptive and supported by effective local governance mechanisms.

The interview with a government administrator further demonstrated that resource-sharing agreements can generate peace dividends when communities perceive benefits as equitable. Shared markets, schools, health facilities and livestock infrastructure can strengthen cooperation between competing groups. However, the administrator also cautioned that poorly managed development projects may intensify conflict when communities perceive resource allocation as favouring particular clans. This finding supports Harper and Nagai's (2024) argument that environmental stress and livelihood insecurity contribute to youth vulnerability to conflict involvement. Therefore, resource-sharing agreements must address not only access to physical resources but also broader issues of economic opportunity, youth employment and political inclusion.

Investing in Livelihood Diversification: Livelihood diversification was ranked third, with 29 respondents (8.5%) identifying it as the most effective approach. The finding suggests that while communities recognize the importance of economic opportunities, they do not view diversification alone as sufficient for addressing ethnic conflicts. The relatively lower ranking may reflect community awareness that pastoral livelihoods are complex and that poorly planned diversification initiatives may undermine existing coping strategies. Stites (2024) argues that pastoral mobility remains central to resilience, and that interventions encouraging sedentarization without considering local livelihood systems may negatively affect food security and social stability.

The qualitative findings from women participants demonstrated that economic vulnerability affects peacebuilding participation. Women reported that poverty limits their ability to participate in community initiatives because survival needs take priority. They also highlighted youth vulnerability to recruitment into violent groups due to unemployment and lack of opportunities. These findings support the argument by Stites (2024) that livelihood interventions must address structural inequalities rather than simply introduce alternative economic activities. Similarly, the government administrator emphasized that poverty transforms livestock raiding from a cultural practice into organized criminal activity when young people lack economic alternatives. Therefore, livelihood diversification should complement, rather than replace, dialogue, governance reforms and security interventions.

Disarmament and Arms Control: Disarmament and arms control ranked fourth, with only 20 respondents (5.9%) identifying it as the most effective approach. The finding suggests that although communities recognize the dangers associated with firearms, they remain cautious about disarmament programmes implemented without adequate security guarantees. This finding corresponds with Nambair (2019), who found that disarmament initiatives in pastoral regions often face resistance because communities perceive weapons as essential for self-protection in insecure environments. Similarly, Nyamohangah (2023) argues that small arms proliferation is closely linked to insecurity, cattle dependency and weak state protection.

The qualitative evidence confirmed this concern. Government administrators explained that communities may resist disarmament because surrendering weapons without confidence in state protection exposes them to attacks from rival groups. This demonstrates that disarmament is not simply a technical process of removing weapons but a political and social process requiring trust between communities and the state. The youth focus group discussion further revealed that unemployment and idleness increase vulnerability to militia recruitment. Therefore, disarmament initiatives require parallel investment in youth empowerment, employment creation and community security mechanisms.

Integrating Traditional and Formal Systems of Conflict Management: The integration of traditional and formal conflict management systems received the lowest ranking, with 17 respondents (4.9%) identifying it as the most effective approach. However, this finding should not necessarily be interpreted as rejection of hybrid peacebuilding approaches. Instead, it may reflect challenges associated with implementation. Greiner (2017) argues that customary institutions face difficulties adapting to contemporary pressures, including changing land relations, political competition and state interventions. Similarly, Okwany and Owino (2024) demonstrate that externally imposed interventions may undermine traditional governance systems when communities are not meaningfully involved.

The interview with a religious leader highlighted coordination challenges between formal peace actors and community institutions. Religious leaders reported that they are sometimes involved symbolically rather than as equal partners despite possessing significant legitimacy within communities. This finding supports Kapinde's (2025) argument that peacebuilding frameworks in Kenya have often underestimated the role of religious and non-state actors. Effective integration therefore requires genuine partnership, institutional recognition and capacity strengthening.

4.2 Inferential Analysis: Relationship between Peacebuilding Initiatives and Effectiveness

The inferential analysis examined the relationship between peacebuilding initiatives and perceived effectiveness in addressing ethnic conflicts in Garissa County. Pearson correlation results revealed very strong positive relationships between all examined peacebuilding initiatives and effectiveness, with County Peace Committees demonstrating the strongest correlation ($r = .983$, $p < .001$), followed by religious leaders ($r = .977$, $p < .001$), dialogue forums ($r = .950$, $p < .001$), clan elders ($r = .924$, $p < .001$) and xeer customary law ($r = .906$, $p < .001$). These findings demonstrate that respondents perceive peace outcomes as strongly associated with the presence of legitimate and participatory peace institutions. The correlation results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis

Peacebuilding Initiative	Correlation with Effectiveness (r)	p-value	Interpretation
Religious leaders (imams/sheikhs)	.977	< .001	Very strong positive
Dialogue forums	.950	< .001	Very strong positive
County Peace Committees	.983	< .001	Very strong positive
Clan elders' mediation	.924	< .001	Very strong positive
Use of xeer (customary law)	.906	< .001	Very strong positive

The strong correlation between County Peace Committees and peace effectiveness supports Kipkorir and Omboto (2025), who found that joint peace committees significantly contributed to managing cattle rustling conflicts. The findings suggest that structured community–state collaboration provides an effective platform for conflict prevention and response. The strong correlation of religious leaders with peace effectiveness confirms their importance as trusted community actors. This supports Kapinde (2025), who argues that religious institutions represent underutilized resources for conflict transformation.

4.3 Regression Analysis of Peacebuilding Initiatives and Perceived Effectiveness

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive contribution of the peacebuilding initiatives to perceived effectiveness. The analysis of variance and regression coefficients are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Regression Analysis (ANOVA and Coefficients)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F / Sig.	
Regression	22.567	6	3.761	421.345	
Residual	0.378	334	0.008	—	
Total	22.945	340	—	$p < .001$	
Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.045	0.031	—	1.452	.147
County Peace Committees	0.356	0.035	.341	10.171	< .001
Cross-border peace committees	0.289	0.038	.277	7.605	< .001
Religious leaders	0.198	0.041	.190	4.829	< .001
Dialogue forums	0.112	0.036	.108	3.111	.002
Clan elders	0.045	0.033	.043	1.364	.173
Use of xeer	0.038	0.030	.037	1.267	.206

The regression model demonstrated that peacebuilding initiatives collectively explained 98.4% of the variation in perceived peace effectiveness ($R^2 = .984$, $p < .001$). County Peace Committees emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .341$, $p < .001$), followed by cross-border peace committees ($\beta = .277$, $p < .001$), religious leaders ($\beta = .190$, $p < .001$) and dialogue forums ($\beta = .108$, $p = .002$). The findings indicate that while traditional mechanisms such as clan elders and xeer remain highly valued, their independent influence decreases when institutional mechanisms such as peace committees and dialogue structures are considered simultaneously. This supports Bond and Mkutu's (2018) institutional bricolage framework, which argues that sustainable peace emerges from the interaction of multiple complementary institutions.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that peacebuilding initiatives are highly prevalent and generally effective in promoting peaceful coexistence among pastoral communities in Garissa County. The overwhelming majority of respondents acknowledged the presence of active peacebuilding initiatives (88.6%) and perceived them as effective (75.6%), confirming that a broad infrastructure of state, customary, religious and civil society actors is engaged in conflict management across the county. The findings further establish that community-based and culturally embedded mechanisms remain the most trusted peacebuilding approaches. Religious leaders (97.7%), dialogue forums (95.0%), clan elders (92.4%) and the customary xeer system (90.6%) received the strongest endorsement, while strengthening community dialogue and mediation was ranked the single most effective approach for addressing ethnic conflicts. Inferential analysis confirmed very strong positive correlations between all peacebuilding initiatives and their perceived effectiveness, and the regression model showed that County Peace Committees, cross-border peace committees, religious leaders and dialogue forums are the strongest predictors of effectiveness.

Taken together, the results confirm that sustainable peace in Garissa County does not emerge from any single mechanism but from the coordinated interaction of formal state structures and informal customary and religious institutions — an institutional bricolage consistent with the Systems Theory that guided the study. Nevertheless, the persistence of conflict points to enduring gaps in coordination, financing, inclusivity and the meaningful participation of women and youth, which continue to constrain the sustainability of otherwise valued initiatives.

5.2 Recommendations

The County Government of Garissa, in collaboration with the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management and non-state peace actors, should enact a Hybrid Peace Infrastructure Policy that embeds customary and religious peace actors within formal state peace structures through statutory co-governance arrangements. This would institutionalize the collaboration between clan elders, the xeer system, religious leaders and County Peace Committees that respondents identified as most effective. County and national governments should strengthen the financing and institutional support of local peace committees by allocating dedicated operational budgets, building the capacity of chiefs and local administrators, and improving coordination between county and national arms of government to ensure timely response to conflicts.

Peacebuilding actors should move beyond symbolic inclusion to guarantee the meaningful participation of women and youth in decision-making, not merely in implementation, by reserving representation within peace committees and mediation panels and by supporting women-led early warning and reconciliation networks. Security interventions such as the deployment of forces and disarmament should be integrated with development-based peacebuilding — livelihood diversification, youth employment, civic education and resource-sharing agreements — embedded within County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs), so that disarmament is accompanied by credible protection and economic alternatives. Early warning and early response systems should be strengthened by linking community-based information networks to rapid response mechanisms, protecting informants from retaliation, and formally incorporating women into monitoring structures.

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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