

## **Mount Elgon Armed Conflict and Violation of Women's Rights, 2004-2008**

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## **Abstract**

This paper attempts an investigation into human rights abuses against women perpetrated during the Mount Elgon land conflict. Drawing upon concepts of feminist analyses of wartime human rights violations, the authors illustrate how Mount Elgon's armed conflict exacted a high toll on women and society between 2004 and 2008. It integrates critical political economy ideas on contemporary armed conflict and reveals that the Sabaot Land Defence Force-led war, which was later countered by the Moor Defence Forces and Kenya's military, subjected women to rape and brutalization, including destabilization, resulting in massive human misery, loss of life, internal displacement, and resource devastation, the majority of which disproportionately harmed women's livelihoods.

**Key Words:** Mount Elgon Land conflict, Sabaot Land Defence Force, Moor Land Defence Force, Women rights violations

## **Introduction**

A study of the history of armed conflicts around the world reveal that people, particularly women, are subjected to the most heinous violations of human rights. During armed conflict, women are used as sex slaves, they are kidnapped and forced to become bush wives for the soldiers. Some are kept as bush wives to fulfil the soldier's sexual needs. Women are therefore, sexually abused, killed, tormented, dislocated, abducted, starved or enslaved. Most of these breaches, however, are gender specific (Kutlu 2014, 1). To have a better understanding of the position of women in armed conflict, it is necessary to examine their experiences from feminist standpoint. This approach allows us to examine the distinctive experiences of women during armed conflict. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to provide a general perspective of violation of women's rights during conflict using Mount Elgon armed conflict as a case study.

### **Positioning Women Rights in Conflict**

We use the concept of feminist political economy to explain the violations of women's rights during the Mt Elgon conflict over land. The feminist political economy originated from the broad field of political economy of war paradigm, and assists in the understanding the effects of wartime human rights violations on women. The theory is indebted to prior feminist scholarship such as Shulamith Firestone's work on sexual politics and Kate Millet's work on feminist economics (Firestone 1971, 1-13). Proponents of feminist political economy of war claim that economic politics, political power struggles, and gender order indicate how sexual orders are linked to modes of economic production based on patriarchies, which are maintained and reproduced through violence and physical structures. They hold that there is a close relationship between structures of power in the social, political, and economic spheres and conflict. Drawing on insights from this feminist analyses of wartime human rights violations and integrating with critical political economy perspectives on the nature of contemporary armed conflict, this paper uncovers the atrocities committed against women, including how the conflict exacted a heavy toll on women and society especially in Chepyuk area that was the epicentre of the conflict. This approach will enable the discernment of who the perpetrators of these breaches were, the methods they used and their motivations for doing so.

A feminist political economy of violence approach highlights economic structures that condition and heighten women's vulnerability to violence (True 2010, 44-45). It points to the masculine nature of the integrated political-economic authority structure. This incorporates the gendered dimensions of war, in which scholars view violent conflict as caused by struggles for power and productive resources, normalizes violence, and spreads it throughout the society. That the state and militia groups that legitimize violence frequently celebrate masculine aggression and perpetuate impunity regarding men's violence against women, viewing women, as the 'spoils of war' (Susan 1989, 839).

### **Approach and Methodology**

This paper is drawn from a research on land conflict in Mount Elgon where we utilized a qualitative approach to obtain data. Two methods with varied techniques of data collection were deployed. First, desk top review was conducted in which books, articles in books and journals were analysed to gather information that spoke to the subject of war, conflict and women, and the interplay between these struggles.

Second, a field research was used to collect data that supplemented the library search. A questionnaire guide was used to collect data about the roots of the SLDF conflict, the causes that prompted it, the leaders of the insurgent group, and human rights violations. Respondents were asked about the nature of women's rights violations during Mount Elgon conflict. Each theme had follow-up question so that study participants might expound on their responses. Purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling, was used to identify study participants since it was judged the most acceptable strategy for tracing persons to interview. Based on their age and involvement in trying to resolve the conflict in Mt Elgon, informants were purposefully sampled and presumed to have expertise of the matter at hand. As a result, the researchers specifically targeted local elders, women, and human rights groups operating in Mount Elgon, as well as members of NGOs, peace committee members, church elders, and so on. Utilizing a primary contact known to one of the researchers, I was linked up to various informants. Once I was done with these initial interviewees, I requested for further contacts to assist in gathering my data.

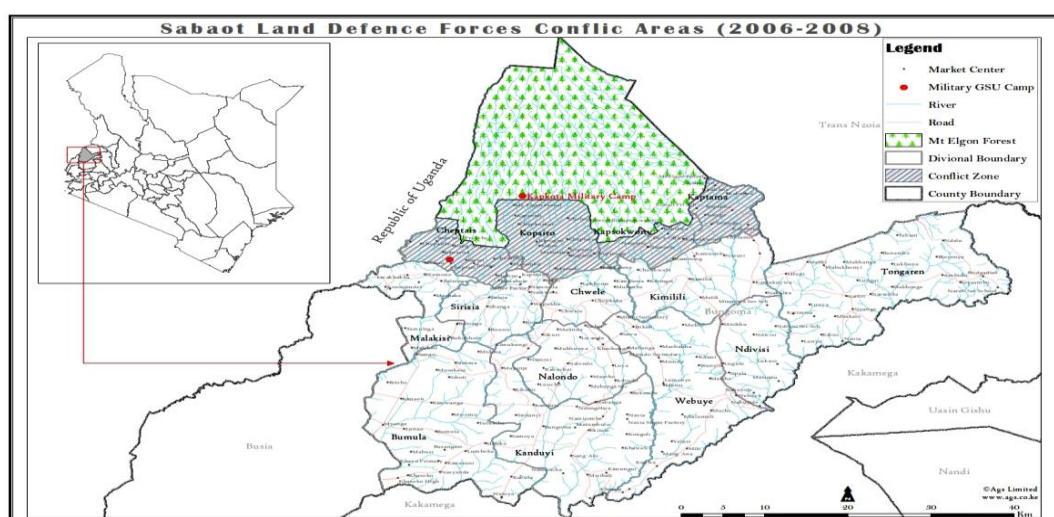
All interviews were transcribed after being recorded on a Dictaphone. Coding and meta-coding were used to examine transcribed material. The information coded and categorised thematically centred on women's rights violations during conflict. Further, concepts about what the informants were saying and how they related to the research's goals was taken into consideration. The meta-coding process entailed uncovering deeper themes that were mirrored in the initial coding. This was then supplemented with data obtained from library research in which books, book and journal articles on cultural influences on human rights violations, men's place on the violations, violence and peace, conflict and peace were read and analysed using content analysis (Bhattacharjee 2012, 113-129) method to uncover themes pertinent to the subject at hand. This paper was written using information gathered from library research and field investigation.

### **Research Area**

The study was conducted in Mount Elgon district located on the slopes of Mount Elgon in the western part of Kenya. Mount Elgon District is divided into four divisions, namely Cheptais, Kopsiro, Kapsokwony and Kaptama. The district shares geographical borders on Kenyan side with Bungoma County to the south, Trans Nzoia County to the east, and Teso sub-county to the southwest. On the Ugandan side, Mount Elgon share borders with Mbale to the west and Kapchorwa to the north. Mount Elgon district is inhabited by various ethnic groups namely; the Sabaot who are the majority while the Bukusu and Iteso form significant minority. The Sabaot community comprises of various clans which are clustered geographically into two blocks namely the Mosop and the Soy. The Mosop are the Sabaot clans that live in the high altitude regions of Mount Elgon, (Kakai, 2000, 63). The Mosop, also referred to as the Ndorobo, a term denoting a group of people who still embrace a traditional lifestyle and practice hunting and gathering as a mode of economic activity. By and large the groups referred to as Ndorobo retain their social marginality as people of the bush, (Kenny 1981, 477). The Mosop clans originated from Chepkitale which is in the high altitudes or upper part of Mount Elgon. The region was gazetted as trust land and therefore the affected clans were relocated to the settlement scheme of Chepyuk.

The term Soy refers to the Sabaot clans living in the lowlands of Mount Elgon. The Soy literally meant people from below or those settled on the lower slopes of the mountain in the rich agricultural area known as Chepyuk in Kopsiro Division which was the epicentre of Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF) led conflict (Simiyu, 2008, 13). The clans from the two groups of the Sabaot community are therefore identified by their regions of settlement that is the Mosop the upper side while Soy on the lower side of the Mountain. The government's move to gazette Chepkitale as a trust land and water catchment cum national park necessitated the evacuation and resettlement of the Mosop clans from the upper side to the Chepyuk I, II, III (Wapukha 2022, 1). Movement of the Mosop to Chepyuk became a point of contention and sparked the conflict between the two groups.

## Research Site



Source: Ags Limited- [www.ags.co.ke](http://www.ags.co.ke)

## Land Conflict in Mount Elgon

Mount Elgon has a long history of land disputes (Simiyu 2008, 51). This contestation became a source of conflict, as it does in other parts of the country where land is contested by different ethnic groups. According to Kanyinga (2009, 325-344), ethnicity and the way in which the land question was dealt with throughout the post-colonial period played a significant influence in the violence witnessed in Kenya (Kanyinga 2009, 328-329). On her part, Sorenson argues that politics over land in Kenya has roots in colonialism, in which Europeans alienated land and evicted indigenous communities (Sorenson 1968, 145).

Gona (2010) has documented the controversies surrounding land distribution and allocation, as well as the politics and conflicts surrounding them. He emphasizes that the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation process identified the land question as one that must be resolved as part of peace building (Gona 2010, 209). These researchers paint a vivid picture of land controversy in Kenya. According to Lambach (2004) and Medard (2010) there are serious issues about land in Kenya ranging from distribution skewed towards political gain, mobilization of communities around land issues and offering people land that might not be readily

available. As a result, land became a symbol of wealth and political influence, and thus considered as a source for power.

It should be emphasized that the Kenya government arbitrarily declared lands surrounding Mount Elgon as protected areas in 1968. This was done without consulting the Sabaot and Bukusu communities, who lived in the area and formed part of the local population. Local populations resisted this and became hostile to the government conservation effort because they displaced from their traditional lands without consultation. This frequently resulted in social unrest leading the government to convert part of the Mount Elgon Forest into Chepyuk Phase I settlement scheme.

### **The Conflict Triggers**

The situation deteriorated allowing either the Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF), Moor Land Defence Force (MLDF) or even Kenya government security agents looking for militia members. Politicians and aggrieved Soy/Bok men began recruiting young men, mostly school-dropouts, to join the ever-growing number of would-be militia fighters. There was little police action to preserve lives and property as intra-ethnic violence escalated. The absence of strong presence of state apparatus allowed for breakdown of law and order, resulting in violence that occasioned numerous human rights violations. As the fighting intensified, the Mosop/Ndorobo men took control of the situation and began subdividing the available plots (Simiyu 2008, 17-23). On their part, the Soy/Bok men and local politicians began overseeing issuance of land allotment letters without consulting the Mosop/Ndorobo elders (Ibid). On the side, Soy/Bok men surreptitiously organized and held meetings in which they planned to amass funds to buy weaponry to defend what they viewed as their rightful land.

The attacks began spontaneously in July 2004 when houses belonging to Soy/Bok community were set ablaze in broad day-light at Chepyuk centre. This was followed months later with several residences in Kipsukurok being set on fire. The government intervened by offering to restart the Chepyuk Phase III reallocation. This was met by resistance from the beneficiaries (Oteba 2018, 2-4). The Soy/Bok community (it is believed under Matakwei began conducting meetings retaliation. By the end of 2004, the relationship between the Soy/Bok on one side and the government and Mosop/Ndorobo on the other had further degenerated (Cheptora 2016, 201).

When the two communities failed to agree on the Chepyuk Phase III land allocation process, their claims and counter-claims escalated. They also made demand that the government provide amnesty to those who had taken refuge in the forest and caves in preparation to launch attacks against the settlement. This request was rejected. This refusal to halt the allocation process and grant amnesty to the Soy/Bok community members, the community chose to forcefully reclaim their land. This served as a basis for mobilising community members that formed a land defence force as a platform to coordinate the fight to reclaim their land.

The Mosop/Ndorobo elders, on the other hand, began demanding eviction of the Soy/Bok community from the entire Chepyuk Phase III Settlement Scheme, claiming that the Soy/Bok had enough land in Cheptais, Sasuri, Chepkube,

Chebwek and other areas in Mount Elgon and therefore should not be allocated land in Chepyuk. They considered the Soy/Bok as deceitful people who should be evicted (Medard 2010, 5-6). In response to government's poor administration of the Chepyuk Phase III Settlement Scheme, the Soy/Bok community formed the Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF). Soon, determined viewpoints and discussion on who gets what in Chepyuk Settlement Scheme phase III escalated into verbal attacks. Political leaders' statements revealed that the parties involved were unwilling to listen to each other, and the focus of the conversation shifted from facts to unreasonable allegations against "others". All these were indicators that the potential for conflict existed and all that was required was a triggering event to ignite the conflict (Kaye & Yahya 2012, 25). The polarizing land issues, combined with the revival of ethnic and clan-based hate speech appear to have sparked the open conflict. In their remarks, politicians on both sides denigrated each other, fostered hatred as well as encouraged violence against other groups (KNCHR 2006, p. 9). Political leader's instigation and demands for ethnic or clan nationalism, as well as outright hate of perceived outsider ethnic or clan groups, triggered local reactions, and communities began mobilizing to fight for what they thought to be their land. In 2005, government authorities reviewed the Chepyuk Phase III issue, but before much could be done to settle the land allocation dispute, Soy/Bok leaders dismissed any government efforts as fraudulent. They mobilized their youth to preserve their land by fighting evictions, which resulted in the founding of the SLDF and subsequently, the SLDF-led conflict (Oloo 2010, 147-181).

### **Impact of conflict on women's rights**

Like in most African societies, women among the Sabaot, were traditionally supposed to be protected and guided by men. Men were therefore, critical in this society for many reasons. During the Mount Elgon conflict, however, most of the Sabaot men were involved in a continuous fight that kept them away from home for long periods of time (Human Rights Watch 2008, 28). Several men were killed, leaving their wives with no one to turn to in times of need. Women were thus left with no one to handle marital conflicts, especially as extended relatives got dispersed during the fighting. These circumstances exposed women not only to violations of their rights, but also to harassment from "outdated" cultural practices, in which male members of the society exploited the situation, knowing very well that the women who had been left by their husbands had nobody to protect them (Fitzgerald, 2002, 85). Lack of father figure subjected young girls to early and forced marriages to older males which violated their right to education and, later, the choice of partners. Displaced households in safer escarpments organized early marriages to minimize unwanted pregnancies and to offer young women and girls with stability. These young girls were unprepared to perform domestic responsibilities normally assigned to senior women. The end consequence was sexual abuse, which physically and mentally harmed the young girls, creating major psychological impacts such as chronic sadness and deep trauma. The same impacts were felt by their mothers, who were very troubled by the situation their young daughters had found themselves (Ng'etich & Kwalia 2006, 27).

### **Sexual abuse**

There was widespread use of rape and other forms of sexual violence against women during the Mount Elgon armed conflict. Some women who were

interviewed during this study revealed that both members of militia groups fighting in Mount Elgon and government security agencies used gang rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence used as tactics of war. A respondent who is a survivor recounted how security men inserted powdered pepper into women vagina as a method of forcing the women to reveal the whereabouts of their husbands who were suspected members of SLDF (*Medecins Sans Frontieres* 2008,. 2-4).

Sexual abuse significantly increased the prevalence of STDs and HIV/AIDS, unplanned pregnancies, hazardous abortions and a higher mortality rate in the Mount Elgon region. HIV/AIDS has always been a major threat in the region, but with the fighting the scourge increasingly became a major concern. For example, the Kenya Government's District Development Plan of 2002-2008 for Mount Elgon District noted that "The HIV/AIDS pandemic in Mount Elgon district is a development issue, which should be addressed as a matter of priority. The HIV/AIDS prevalence is higher in the major centres of Kapsokwony, Kaptama and Cheptais. This is attributed to the influx of people on transit and security personnel" (Ryanga 2013, 71-72).

In terms of bride price and respect, the worth of a woman who had been eroded through sexual violation. Such a woman was never respected. Virginity was valued among the Kalenjin-speaking peoples, and any form of physical intercourse prior to marriage was regarded as act intended to bring dishonour and discontent to the family and entire community (Calves 1999, 297). Sex outside of marriages degraded a woman's social status, which was exacerbated if she became pregnant. This meant she would either, have to marry as a second wife or to an elderly man.

This oppressive environment deprived young females the right to choose the type of men they would marry. In such instances, teenage girls fled to urban areas and became prostitutes. When such young girls fled from Mount Elgon, some abandoned their children, denying them motherly love and protection that men who were fully engaged in the conflict could not provide. Such children survived adversity, and if they were able to mature, they remained bitter, psychologically scarred, and occasionally irresponsible, and therefore remained a burden to the community.

### **Child and forced marriages**

The conflict in Mount Elgon forced many school going children to drop out of school. Many had nowhere to go to as they had been pushed out of their homes and their parent's security. Such children were forced into marriage without knowledge on how to raise families. Forced marriages left most women exposed because they had not willingly expressed their full and free consent. To many girls below the age of eighteen, this was a violation of their rights and came along with several harmful effects on their lives. They were exposed to pregnancies before they matured leading to higher risks of maternal mortality and morbidity, limited decision-making in family matters and living in poverty (Mutua 2016, 56).

Similarly, women who chose to enter in forced marriages suffered problems and frustrations, causing them to lose the desire for sex, a condition that drove them into domestic violence. Refusing to have sex with their spouses was punishable by beating and, to a lesser extent, fine if the case was brought before the council of



elders. A woman was supposed to obey; disobeying her husband would result in automatic dissolution of marriage (Parpart 1986, 2). Furthermore, despite the fact that sexual abuse against women was common in Mount Elgon, Sabaot women were forbidden from discussing sex openly. They were hesitant to talk about their sexual experiences. Women were sometimes barred from speaking to strangers, and if they did, they were subjected to further abuse from their husbands or family, who frightened them into silence. Early marriages in Mount Elgon and, particularly among the Sabaot community, generally resulted in a lifetime of sexual and domestic subservience, lowering women's self-esteem (Fitzgerald 2002, 91).

### **Displacement**

Evidence exists to show that while patterns of discrimination emerge during the initial emergency response phase of any conflict, the longer that displacement lasts, the greater the risk of human rights violations. The Mount Elgon conflict witnessed mass displacement of human beings the bulk of whom were women and children. People in the worst-affected areas chose to relocate for several years out of concern for their life. From phase I to phase III of the Chepkuk Settlement Scheme, Kopsiro, Kaptama, and other parts of Cheptais were abandoned for several years as people moved north to other locations in Bungoma, Trans Nzoia and Marakwet (International Committee of the Red Cross 2007, 6). The International Committee of the Red Cross bulletin reported that:

An estimated 116,220 people were displaced by the simmering ethnic clashes on the Kenyan side of Mt Elgon, the Kenya Red Cross reported. From the report, 15,870 families were displaced persons (IDPs) in Mt. Elgon district itself, while 2,000 and 1,500 families were displaced to Bungoma and Trans Nzoia Districts (International Committee of the Red Cross 2007, 6).

Many residents fled their homes and went to market centers, where again, they were attacked by the combatants depending on who was taking refuge at the centre. The situation forced dislocated residents to move further into other districts where pregnant women faced a number of challenges (Somonsé 2004, 1). The most affected right was health as lack of maternal health hospital or prenatal care clearly compromised women's right to health. Pregnant women walk for miles to their prenatal clinic (Ong'anyi *et al* 2023, 1-4). Displaced women on the other hand, lacked adequate privacy to maintain their personal hygiene and dignity. Women and girls of menstrual age were deprived of sanitary supplies, putting them at risk of infections and suffering. Displaced young women aged ten to fifty years required a way to handle their menstruation. As a result, displaced Sabaot school girls were forced to remain home owing to lack of sanitary towels. Pregnancies and births became perilous for women in Mount Elgon as a result, and leading to increased maternal mortality. Women were more vulnerable because they could not get prenatal care or emergency obstetric care as noted by the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights report, "The Mountain of terror: A Report on the Investigation of Torture by the Military at Mount Elgon" (KNCHR 2008, 15-24). The Bungoma District Plan also stated that, "Women in Mount Elgon have limited access to information on reproductive health, and hence many of them could not assert their reproductive rights (Ong'anyi *et al* 2023, 1-4).

Many homes were destroyed as a result of attacks by the militia groups operating in the region. Parents and children alike fled for their safety losing contact while some never reunited as a family. Some children ended up living on streets of nearby towns, causing permanent displacement. Some of the children were abducted and employed as child soldiers or sex workers operating deep into the forest (Kimkung 2015, 22-29). Girls were kidnapped and forced into marriages with the men of the opposing side of the conflicting ethnic group. Consequently, the girls were disadvantaged because their education was interrupted and they had to begin raising families at a young age (Ogenga *et al.* 2011, 248-259). During the conflict, it was the fathers who went into combat, leaving mothers and children at home. Women were forced to care for their families particularly if their men not return from the battle. These were heavy responsibilities on the shoulders of women (Kikechi 2018, 30-34). As a result, some families were led by women, resulting to shift in gender roles.

Women have traditionally played an important role in crop- growing and food production in Mount Elgon. The volcanic mountain has very fertile soils and receives rain virtually all year, particularly between April and October. Women in this area play a dominant role in crop production; traditionally, in food production and now, in cash crop production. They also play a major role in rural and urban small-scale and informal sector activities. The conflict compelled women to become destitute Internally Displaced Persons, facing extremely uncertain socio- economic conditions. As a result of food insecurity, women suffered from hunger implying a total shift from a productive life to complete reliance on humanitarian relief (Kikechi 2018, 30-34).

### **Loss of life and property**

The Mount Elgon conflict resulted in significant casualties and property destruction (Kimkung & Espinosa 2013, 2-3). Members of SLDF and MLDF burnt down villages and shot people, before fleeing with stolen animals. Women lost close family members, such as spouses and sons, in the process, inflicting enormous emotional, social and economic hardship and exposing women to disadvantages and discrimination<sup>4</sup>. Sabaot community members had traditional laws which basically discriminated against the surviving female gender specifically widows and daughters left behind by deceased husbands and fathers. If a Sabaot man died without sons, his land was inherited by his closest male age-mates. The land was given to his surviving daughters in a few situations. Widows and female orphans, in general were left with no legal claim to their homes, land or other properties, with some losing everything. Such widows were left with almost no resources to raise their surviving children. Widowhood altered the social and economic roles of women in households, as well as the family structure of Mount Elgon communities. It had an impact on women's physical safety, and identity (Lindsay 2001, 303). Widowhood impacted their rights to land and property succession (Ibid). Cultural norms among the Sabaot required that widows be cared for by members of extended families, but due to poverty or diminished resources as a result of the conflict, such individuals were sometimes unable to meet their obligations. Women faced

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<sup>4</sup> Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission Public Hearing Transcripts-Western- Mt. Elgon, 2011. 4)

additional challenges as a result of the situation, particularly when they became heads of homes without a solid educational foundation and resources.

As men joined in combat, women and children left behind in Mount Elgon faced increased insecurity and danger. It also hastened the disintegration of the community's and, particularly, women's traditional protection and support mechanism (Lindsay 2001, 303). Women became households' heads and breadwinners, taking on responsibilities of earning a living caring for farms and animals, trading and being active outside the home, which were historically performed by men (Lindsay 2001, 303). The death of spouses, the primary breadwinners, resulted in a breakdown in the family division of labour, as women assumed duties usually performed by men.

In general, widowhood constituted a state of 'social death,' as it effectively caused the widowed to withdraw from social life. They were not always welcome in public and were excluded from some social and civic ceremonies. Due to the significant number of guns in the region, apart from attacks by raiders, women were subjected to gun violence during household quarrels in addition to raider attacks. When locals used guns to settle family disputes, this frequently ended in deaths. Some women, for instance, were shot by their own husbands following a fight. The high number of guns in Mount Elgon rendered the area insecure. There were frequent robberies too. SLDF fighters occasionally attacked women and children from the Mosop, in order to intimidate them, as did the MLDF for the Soy. Aside from direct engagement in the conflict, the local population in Mount Elgon was occasionally exposed to threats caused by unused bombs left behind by parties to the conflict and security forces alike. Such incidents occurred in high-risk locations, as reported in one of the dailies (Médard 2008, 349-370).

Property was also lost as a result of the Mount Elgon armed conflict. In raiding attacks, communities lost their crops, household items, and cattle herds. During the attacks, property, food crops and cash were looted. Homes and schools were demolished. This resulted in the loss of livelihoods and the rising destitution of families, leaving the people of Mount Elgon destitute in trading centres. Women, children, and the elderly resorted to begging as a means of survival, or relying on relief rations (Kikechi 2018, 30-34). Furthermore, because women were the ones who sheltered in those houses, the destruction of homes and the loss of livelihood placed a heavy burden on them. In a 2007 report, *Médecins sans frontières* reported that many houses had been burnt and livestock stolen, many and property stolen from their homes. It was also reported that in April of the same year (2007), more than 14,000 people visited Kopsiro dispensary an indication of the rise in casualties occasioned by the fighting. A woman describing to the *Médecins sans frontières team* the hardship that people went through, quipped "families are scattered all over the place because of the fighting between the various parties. People live in fear; they beat everyone including children. They take money from you and they kick you. Sometimes they do bad things to women. So, people hide in the bush or in the maize fields (*Médecins sans frontières*).). Children were the most affected because they were unable to attend school owing to insecurity, and the issue was made more problematic for female students due to forced pregnancy. The number of girls dropping out of school was so high that the government and other stakeholders were

concerned. Similarly, parents could not afford to feed their children or meet the basic cost of education. Prior to the conflict, income from farm products had fed their families, clothed, and educated them. Because of the violence, market activities including women dealing in farm products were paralyzed, resulting in disruptions of socio-economic activities.

### **Resource Destruction**

In general, the conflict destroyed resources and services. The damaged resources directly tied to traditional tasks and responsibilities of women such as supplying water and food. In certain cases, women discovered that they could no longer use their traditional skills and competencies, such as food production. They were subsequently coerced into criminal acts, including the prohibited brewing of alcohol, which led to government harassment, arrest, or incarceration. Women fleeing the combat zones, for example, often turned to clandestine beer manufacturing and trade. This frequently led to their imprisonment, causing additional suffering for their children. Traditional alcohol brewing is prohibited in Kenya, and individuals caught doing so are punished and even imprisoned.

In addition, after taking root, local brews were offered to school-going children, causing them to get addicted early in life. Early addiction damaged the future of most Mount Elgon school-age children. Alcohol addiction led to unlawful sexual behaviour at a young age. This exposed young children to venereal diseases, early pregnancies and other risks. Consequently, most of the children who had been affected by the war had emotional and behavioural issues which, had severe impact on their education. This situation alarmed neighbourhood lobbying groups, which vowed to sue the government for failing or neglecting its constitutional duty to protect lives and property. The fortunate students who could afford to go to school nevertheless faced a teacher shortage. The schools were understaffed because teachers were terrified of the endemic violence and requested for transfers, as soon as they arrived at their stations. Students were left without teachers, which hampered the learning process. As the result of the instability, many schools in the region were forced to close (Lucheli & Muganda 2007, 5).

Women of Mount Elgon enjoyed cultural rights before the conflict. They had a responsibility to organize the family and the society at large. Mount Elgon women possessed the power that bound the society together. They ensured survival of the family and the future of the society through marriage and child bearing. However, with the conflict, many women were displaced and some killed, this interfered with their cultural rights. It is also important to note that culturally, Mount Elgon women were the transmitters of the language, the history and the oral culture, the music, the dance, the habits and the artisanal knowledge. They were the teachers and were responsible for instilling traditional values and knowledge in children. But this could only happen in a peaceful environment. When the conflict erupted in the region, all these women cultural rights were threatened and some families destroyed. Mount Elgon women just like other African women were creators of life because women have the ability to give birth. As creation of life, they were charged with the sacred responsibility of caring for the needs of the next generation.

### **Impact on Health Services**

As in many other sectors in this society, the war severely harmed health-care services. Members of militia organizations targeted health institutions and employees in opposing areas. Health-care infrastructure was destroyed, and administrative capacities were destabilized, wreaking havoc on the health-care system. This had serious consequences for the health of women and general populations. In the event of an emergency requiring blood, no transfusion could take place since facilities had been destroyed or resources were unavailable. During the battle, a huge number of medical doctors left the Mount Elgon region, making even the most basic health care hard to deliver without massive aid from non-governmental organizations and the international community (*Médecins Sans Frontières* 2008, 12-13). As a result, pregnant women suffered complications and were unable to receive vital hospital care. They had limited access to gynaecological treatment, resulting in a high mortality rate from urogenital diseases and endocrine problems.

Unwanted pregnancies presented another serious problem for women in Mount Elgon. Some women opted to choose dangerous abortion. Such abortions were done by untrained people and with the use of crude equipment that in most cases resulted in deaths of young girls and women. Other women carried their pregnancies to term, but abandoned their babies at birth, while others kept the babies and in the process experienced family rejection and social isolation (Cawthorne 2008, 5).

### **Brain drain**

In terms of human resource, Mount Elgon region faced a high rate of brain drain because of the conflict that persisted from 2004-2008. The educated locals from the region opted to work in other parts of the country, where they were assured of their security plus that of their family members. This movement had a negative impact on all aspects of development including social, economic and political consequences. Mount Elgon development was highly affected with a lot of suffering by its inhabitants, due to the absence of professional services. Even before the conflict, Mount Elgon region faced a problem of fewer medical personnel to serve the population which not only faced health challenges posed by conflict, but also other natural health issues. Women were the most affected by increased work burden of caring for patients. Loss of nurses due to conflict exposed the regions fragile health system, with the consequences measured in lives lost. Brain drain from Mount Elgon violated the structural human rights of not only women but the entire population. The situation was replicated among all professionals (Ndiku and Kennedy 2013, 4-8).

### **Conclusion**

From a feminist political economy angle, there are numerous indications that demonstrate the suffering of women of Mount Elgon. According to the study's findings, the conflict imposed significant social and economic consequences in Mount Elgon. The conflict worsened existing disparities in Mount Elgon, particularly women's rights by reinforcing the patriarchal gender roles that victimize women. It has been demonstrated that the aftermath and trauma of death of family member's death extend far beyond the attack itself. Women

survivors experience mental pain, psychological harm, physical injuries, sickness, social ostracism, and a slew of other life-altering consequences.

Violence against women in Mount Elgon caused long-term physical and mental health problems. Violence and abuse witnessed in Mount Elgon affected not just the women involved but also their children, families, and communities. The conflict caused harm to woman's individual health, and long-term harm to children who missed out of school, witnessed violence mated on their parents and losing their homes. As stated in the text, Mount Elgon women experienced multiple and recurrent human rights violations due to the conflict which injured them, displaced them and caused scarcity of important commodities and services. Women experience persistent, inter-generational, and long-term mental and physical outcomes that manifest throughout their lives. They have felt threatened, were injured by the both militia groups and security agencies. They lost family members.

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