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Population-Centric Approach in Coin Operations:

A Review of its Efficacy among Kenya's Defense Forces in Lamu County

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Abstract

This research article evaluates the effectiveness of the Kenya Defence Forces' (KDF) population-centric approach using Rational Choice Theory and a mixed-methods design. Targeting 110,000 individuals in Lamu town, Mpeketoni, Witu, Hindi, and Kiunga, 384 respondents include KDF personnel, police officers, local community members, advocacy group managers, and county officials. Findings reveal strong support for the approach, with 96.1% noting improved community trust and 97.4% recognizing enhanced security. Despite challenges in addressing grievances, positive perceptions of military tactics (94.8%) and KDF-community cooperation (97.4%) are prevalent. Recommendations include enhancing community engagement, expanding socio-economic initiatives, integrating non-military strategies, and improving psychological operations. Future research should examine the long-term impacts, targeted socio-economic interventions, and detailed psychological strategy.

Key Words: Al-Shabaab, Counterinsurgency, Extremist Threats, Insurgency, Population-Centric, and Security Operations

1.0 Introduction

1.1 An Overview of the Population-Centric Approach in COIN Operations

The effectiveness of a population-centric approach in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations has emerged as a pivotal subject of study, particularly as traditional military-centric strategies have frequently failed to secure lasting peace. This method emphasizes gaining the support of the local population instead of solely focusing on defeating insurgents through military force (Musya, 2023). The core idea is that by addressing the underlying causes of insurgency such as political, social, and economic grievances, governments can reduce the insurgents' attractiveness and support base (Kilcullen, 2020). This approach involves a comprehensive effort, including protecting civilians, providing essential services, promoting good governance, and encouraging economic development (Jones & Smith, 2021). Recent studies have shown that COIN operations that integrate these elements tend to have higher success rates in achieving long-term stability (Gompert et al., 2022).

Insurgency in the United States has followed a historical pattern of ebbs and flows, marked by periods of significant challenges to established authority (Smith, 2021). Notable examples include the American Revolutionary War and the Civil War, which posed substantial threats to national power structures (Jones, 2020). More recent examples, such as the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, demonstrate the persistence of societal grievances and the ongoing pursuit of change (Brown, 2019). These events illustrate the complex interplay between power, dissent, and social transformation across different periods of American history. Understanding this complexity is crucial for developing effective counterinsurgency strategies (Kilcullen, 2020).

In Africa, population centric counterinsurgency has been applied with varying degrees of success. The continent has witnessed numerous insurgencies driven by ethnic tensions, political grievances, and economic disparities. For instance, in

Nigeria, the government's approach to countering Boko Haram has increasingly integrated population centric methods, focusing on community engagement, development initiatives, and addressing the socio-economic conditions that fuel insurgency (Forest, 2012). Similarly, in the Sahel region, multinational efforts led by the G5 Sahel Joint Force incorporate these principles to counter the threats posed by groups like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) (International Crisis Group, 2017). These strategies aim to cut off insurgents from their support bases by improving governance and fostering local cooperation.

In Kenya, the population centric approach has gained prominence in response to the threat posed by al-Shabaab, particularly in the north-eastern regions and along the coast (Musya, 2017). The Kenyan government, in collaboration with local and international partners, has implemented various initiatives to address the underlying causes of radicalization and insurgency. These efforts include community policing, enhancing local governance, and economic empowerment programs designed to build resilience against extremist ideologies (Botha, 2014). Additionally, Kenya's strategy emphasizes the importance of integrating local leaders and communities in security operations to ensure sustainable peace and stability (Anderson & McKnight, 2015). The shift towards a more population centric approach reflects a broader understanding that enduring counterinsurgency success hinges on securing the trust and cooperation of local populations.

Recent conflicts in Lamu County underscore the intricate challenges of implementing a population centric approach within a region characterized by a volatile security landscape and entrenched socio-economic disparities (Musya, 2023). The Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) have deployed a multifaceted strategy that integrates military operations with community engagement initiatives designed to foster trust and collaboration between the security forces and the local populace. These efforts have ranged from targeted military actions aimed at neutralizing insurgent threats to more nuanced, population centric programs intended to address the underlying socioeconomic grievances that fuel instability (Cunningham, 2022). Such programs have included infrastructure development, educational outreach, and support for local governance structures, all of which are geared toward not only enhancing security but also improving the livelihoods of the residents. Evaluating the effectiveness of these strategies necessitates a comprehensive analysis of their impact, considering both immediate security outcomes such as the reduction in insurgent activities and long-term effects, including the resilience and stability of the communities involved (Musya, 2023). This evaluation must also take into account the complexities of local dynamics, such as ethnic tensions, historical marginalization, and the role of external actors, all of which influence the success or failure of population-centric counterinsurgency efforts.

Despite the Kenyan government's significant operation in Lamu in 2015, known as Operation Linda Boni, issues such as kidnappings, terror attacks, false reports of explosives, and the indoctrination of youth continue to plague the region (Musya, 2017). The effectiveness of civil-military collaboration in stabilizing security is undermined by Al-Shabaab's deep rooted connections with the local population, who often refuse to share vital information with security forces (Wanjiku, 2020). Additionally, internal conflicts between the military and police, along with poor coordination and community mistrust, have been highlighted (Simiyu, 2023). These challenges raise serious concerns about the applicability and effectiveness of the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) strategy in achieving peace and security in Lamu County. This context highlights the need to investigate the effectiveness of a population-centric approach to counterinsurgency, particularly regarding the Kenya Defense Forces' operations in Lamu County between 2014 and 2024.

1.1 Research Question

How effective has the population centric approach been in the counterinsurgency operations conducted by the Kenya Defence Forces in Lamu County between 2014 and 2024? This article sought to evaluate the impact of this strategy on reducing insurgent activities, fostering trust between the military and local communities, and promoting long-term stability.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Rationale Choice Theory

Rational choice theory offers a framework for understanding decision-making processes by analysing individuals' choices based on a rational assessment of costs and benefits. Proponents like James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin argue that insurgents are motivated to engage in violence and rebellion when they perceive the potential rewards, such as political power, outweigh the risks, including capture or death (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). In the context of counterinsurgency operations, this theory suggests that insurgents weigh these factors when deciding whether to participate in insurgent activities. The application of this theory to the population centric approach in counterinsurgency operations by the Kenya

Defence Forces (KDF) in Lamu County between 2014 and 2024 aims to reveal how insurgents' perceptions of costs and benefits influence their participation.

In examining insurgency dynamics in Lamu County, rational choice theory helps uncover the strategic calculations of insurgent groups. Understanding these motivations is crucial for developing effective counterinsurgency strategies (Fouseki et al., 2022). If insurgents view the benefits of their actions as greater than the associated risks, they are likely to persist in their activities. Conversely, if counterinsurgency measures increase the perceived costs or reduce the potential benefits, insurgent activities may decline. By altering these calculations, counterinsurgency efforts could potentially shift the balance in favour of stability and security.

Fearon and Laitin (2003) emphasize that the incentives and opportunities available to insurgents are key factors shaping their behaviour. By analysing the incentives driving insurgents in Lamu County, this study can identify factors contributing to the persistence of insurgency in the region. Addressing the root causes of insurgent motivations and offering alternative incentives for compliance and cooperation may prove more effective than traditional strategies. The choice of rational choice theory for this article is grounded in its ability to explain insurgents' decision-making processes, which directly affect the efficacy of the KDF's population-centric approach. By applying this theory, the article seeks to explore how the KDF's strategies impact insurgents' cost-benefit analyses. This approach provides valuable insights into the dynamics of insurgency in Lamu County and offers guidance for developing strategies aimed at promoting long-term peace and stability in the region.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1 Population-Centric Approaches

Johnson et al. (2023), in their study titled "Evaluating Population-Centric Strategies in Counterinsurgency Campaigns," demonstrate that such approaches lead to more sustainable peace and stability. Their comprehensive review of counterinsurgency efforts over the past decade utilized a mixed-methods methodology, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative case studies. The findings suggest that while traditional military tactics may achieve short-term success, they often fail to address the underlying social and economic grievances that fuel insurgencies.

A study by Smith (2021) explored the impact of population-centric strategies on mitigating insurgency in sub-Saharan Africa. By analysing case studies from various African countries, Smith found that initiatives focusing on winning the hearts and minds of the local population through community engagement, development projects, and targeted communication campaigns were associated with greater success in countering insurgent movements. Johnson et al. (2023) investigated the role of population centric approaches in addressing the root causes of insurgency in East Africa. Through a comprehensive review of counterinsurgency strategies implemented in the region, Johnson et al. (2023) underscored the significance of integrating socio-economic development initiatives with security measures to effectively combat insurgent groups. The study emphasized the need for long-term investments in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and job creation to address underlying grievances and enhance community resilience against extremist ideologies.

Miller and Thompson (2024) explored the use of artificial intelligence and big data analytics in enhancing the effectiveness of population-centric COIN operations. Their research showed that leveraging these technologies can improve the accuracy of identifying insurgent networks and understanding local population dynamics, thereby increasing the efficacy of engagement strategies (Miller & Thompson, 2024). Similarly, Mutua (2023), on the use of social media and mobile technology for real-time communication and information dissemination has enhanced the ability of security forces to respond promptly to threats and engage with the community. This technological integration has not only improved operational efficiency but also strengthened the bond between security forces and civilians. This current article shall fill the knowledge gap by examining the efficacy of population-centric as a variable without concentrating on the technological part of it.

Several research studies have extensively explored population-centric issues, offering a comprehensive understanding of their demographic landscapes. For instance, Hassan and Said (2017) conducted an in-depth analysis of population dynamics in Lamu, highlighting critical factors such as fertility rates, migration patterns, and their broader socio-economic impacts. Their research demonstrated how rapid population growth interacts with resource availability, infrastructure development, and environmental sustainability, uncovering complex relationships that affect local livelihoods.

Ochieng and Mburu (2022) investigated the effectiveness of community-based development projects in enhancing security and stability in Kenya, revealing significant insights into the impact of grassroots initiatives. Their research emphasized that local governance structures, coupled with economic empowerment programs, played a crucial role in mitigating insurgent activities.

Karanja and Mutiso (2021) investigated the impact of local conflict resolution mechanisms and traditional justice

systems on mitigating insurgency in Kenya. Their study revealed that integrating traditional leadership structures and community-based mediation practices into formal security frameworks was highly effective in addressing localized grievances. By leveraging the authority and respect commanded by traditional leaders and employing culturally resonant conflict resolution methods, the study found that these practices significantly enhanced community resilience against extremist threats.

Wangari and Njeri (2023) conducted a comprehensive study on the impact of educational programs and vocational training in Kenya, revealing their crucial role in mitigating insurgent recruitment. Their research illustrated that implementing targeted educational initiatives and vocational training for at-risk youth significantly reduces their vulnerability to insurgent recruitment by providing viable socioeconomic alternatives. By focusing on equipping these individuals with relevant skills and knowledge, the programs not only address immediate economic needs but also foster long-term resilience against extremist influences.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research article utilized a descriptive survey research design to examine the efficacy of the population-centric approach in counterinsurgency operations, with a particular focus on the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) in Lamu County, Kenya. This design, as outlined by Orodho (2009), provided a systematic framework for collecting data on the characteristics, behaviours, attitudes, and perspectives of the target population. By employing structured questionnaires, interviews, and observations, the article aimed to capture a comprehensive overview of the population's attributes and the effectiveness of the KDF's strategies.

3.2 Population of the Study

For this article, the population was broadly defined to include individuals within the security sector and those directly or indirectly impacted by security issues in Lamu County, Kenya. This comprehensive group encompassed Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) personnel, police officers, and members of National Government Offices (NGAO), such as the County Commissioner, deputy county commissioners, and Chiefs. Additionally, the population included the local community, whose daily lives are affected by security dynamics, as well as advocacy group managers who play a role in addressing or mitigating security concerns.

3.3 Target Population

The target population in this research article was made up of 110,000 individuals which comprise of (KDF personnel, Police officers, Local community, Advocacy groups managers and last but not least County commissioner/ deputy county commissioners) from Lamu County, specifically; Lamu town, Mpeketoni, Witu, Hindi, and Kiunga.

3.4 Sample Size

The article's sample size was 384 respondents which included; KDF personnel, Police officers, Local community, Advocacy groups managers and last but not least County commissioner/ deputy county commissioners from Lamu County, specifically; Lamu town, Mpeketoni, Witu, Hindi, and last but not least Kiunga as shown on Figure 3 below:

The number of 384 respondents was arrived at using Fisher's formula for getting sample size of populations greater than 10,000.

$n = Z^2 pq / d^2$ (when target population is greater than 10,000) where:

n = required minimum size

z = standard normal deviate at the required confidence level = 1.96

p = the proportion of the target population estimated to have characteristics being measured ($p=0.5$: the value that yields maximum possible sample size)

$q = 1-p$

d = the set level of significance (0.5 in this research article). The area covered by the target population was large and therefore sample size in this article was estimated as;

$n = (1.96)^2 (0.50) = 384$

Table 3.2: Sample Size

Category	Population (n)	Percentage (%)
KDF personnel	78	20.3
Police officers	52	13.5
Local community	233	60.6

Advocacy groups managers	20	5.2
county commissioner/deputy county commissioners	1	0.4
Total	384	100

Source: Author (2024)

3.5 Sampling Techniques

This article used a stratified random sampling technique to select respondents. The population was first divided into distinct strata based on their roles: KDF personnel, police officers, local community members, advocacy group managers, and the county commissioner/deputy county commissioners. Each of these groups was further stratified by location Lamu Town, Mpeketoni, Witu, Hindi, and Kiunga. Within each stratum, a simple random sample was drawn to ensure that every subgroup and location was proportionally represented in the research article. This method ensured that the unique perspectives and experiences of each group and locality were adequately captured, providing a comprehensive understanding of the population centric approach's efficacy in counterinsurgency operations in Lamu County.

In addition, the researcher utilized purposive sampling to select key informants for interviews. These key informants included senior-ranked security officers such as KDF brigadier, lieutenant colonel, and major. For the national police, the key informants included chief inspectors, Senior Superintendent of Police, and Assistant Inspector Generals. Other key informants consisted of the county commissioner/deputy county commissioners, chiefs, and advocacy group managers. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their expertise, knowledge, and role relevant to the article's objective.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

The article data collection instrument consisted of two parts: Part I gathered personal information about respondents, including age, gender, and position within the security industry, while Part II included questions related to the research objective, presented on a 4-point Likert scale. This scale is known for its clarity and balance, which enabled accurate and meaningful responses. Additionally, the research employed an interview guide to collect qualitative data. Purposive sampling was used to select the key informants for the interviews, who mainly consisted of key policy actors. Interviews were scheduled as the preferred method of data gathering, as they provided the researcher with the opportunity to delve into respondents' viewpoints, ideas, and beliefs, and to seek further clarification.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

The researcher distributed the printed questionnaire to selected respondents in Lamu County. Individuals were engaged at CBD locations in Lamu and at the community level. The article's objective was explained, informed consent was secured, and the questionnaires were disseminated. Clear guidelines for filling out the questionnaire were provided, and the privacy of the responses was guaranteed. The completed questionnaires were then retrieved from the participants. The researcher supervised the data collection process and resolved any issues or concerns raised by the participants. Additionally, relevant information was retrieved from identified secondary sources, including key findings, data, trends, and policy implications. The extracted data were categorized into relevant themes that aligned with the study objective.

3.8 Pre-testing of the Research Instrument

Preliminary research was conducted in Lamu County, Mpeketoni town, Kenya, to assess the efficacy of the tools and methodologies for data gathering. This article also provided an opportunity to reflect on research techniques, data analysis, and findings interpretation. A sample size of 25 respondents (10 KDF personnel and 15 police officers) from Lamu town, Kenya, ranging from 10% to 30% of the sample size, was used in the pretesting of research instruments. The 25 respondents were not included in the final study. To assess the consistency and stability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha was employed. Reliability was higher when the Cronbach's alpha value was closer to 1. According to Sekaran (2006), only assertions that had a value greater than 0.4 were included in the Cronbach alpha reliability test and analysis.

3.9 Validity and Reliability

3.9.1 Validity

To establish the instrument's validity in this article, the researcher asked the supervisor for their opinions. This facilitated the revision and modification of the instrument as needed, thus improving its validity.

3.9.2 Reliability

To improve the quality of the research instrument and increase its reliability, the researcher was able to evaluate the clarity of the questionnaire items during the pilot study and was able to delete or modify those that are deemed to be insufficient or vague.

3.10 Data Analysis Plan

The data collected was edited for accuracy, uniformity, and completeness, then arranged for coding. Data analysis was conducted once all the data had been captured. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and presented in the form of tables, percentages, graphs, and charts. A thematic analysis was performed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and significances within the data. The identified themes were analysed in accordance with the stated objective and theoretical framework. The data was used to illustrate key elements and enhance the analysis through the inclusion of quotes and excerpts.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical research writing involved the responsible conduct of research, including the proper attribution of sources, accurate reporting of data, and avoidance of plagiarism. It also encompassed respecting intellectual property rights and the ethical treatment of human and animal subjects. The researcher ensured that all participants, including local residents and military personnel, provided informed consent, understanding the purpose, risks, and benefits of the study. This process included explaining the study's aims and securing voluntary participation without coercion (Appendix A).

Furthermore, approval was obtained from the Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee (ISERC), and a research permit was secured from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) to ensure compliance with national regulations. Maintaining confidentiality was crucial; sensitive information that could have compromised the safety of participants or revealed strategic military details was rigorously protected. Data provided were anonymized to prevent any potential retribution or harm, ensuring the privacy and safety of all involved. These ethical practices not only protected participants but also enhanced the credibility and integrity of the research.

4.0 Analysis and Presentation of Findings

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Response Rate

The article findings revealed that out of the 384 questionnaires distributed to various stakeholders in Lamu County, including KDF personnel, police officers, local community members, advocacy group managers, and county commissioners or deputy county commissioners, 231 were fully completed, resulting in a response rate of 60.2%. This suggests a majority engagement from the targeted respondents, though a significant portion 153 questionnaires, were not returned or were incomplete (39.8%). The response rate reflects a relatively high level of participation, which is crucial for ensuring the reliability and validity of the research findings, as it demonstrates substantial input from diverse groups within the community. In line with this, Babbie (2010), emphasizes that a high response rate is essential for ensuring credibility and generalizability of research outcomes.

4.1.2 Gender of the Respondents

The article findings reveal that out of the 231 respondents, 63.2% were female, while 36.8% were male. This gender distribution indicates a higher female participation in the research article. This finding can be related to the study by Smith et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of community engagement in the success of counterinsurgency (COIN) initiatives. The higher female participation in this article suggests that women may play a critical role in community-based interventions, potentially offering unique perspectives and contributions to fostering community engagement and reducing insurgent support.

4.1.3 Age Bracket of the Respondents

The results in Table 4.3 reveal a significant concentration of respondents within the 36–45-year age bracket, representing 59.3% of the sample, indicating that this age group is the most prevalent among the study participants. Conversely, the least represented groups are those aged 56 and above, at 1.7%, and 46-55 years, at 5.2%. This distribution highlights a skew towards mid-career individuals. For context, a study by Smith et al. (2020) on workforce demographics found that mid-career professionals (ages 35-50) are often more engaged in research due to their accumulated experience and established positions, which may explain the dominance of the 36–45-year age group in this research article.

4.1.4 Position of Respondents

The data indicates that the majority of respondents were local civilians (46.8%), followed by Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) personnel (24.7%) and police officers (21.2%). While the minority representation of local government officials (0.4%) indicated that they were not the main focus in the article. This distribution of respondents aligns with findings from Karanja and Mburu's (2021) study, which highlighted the significant role of local communities in shaping security perceptions and interventions in Kenya. Their research emphasized that local civilians often provide critical insights into security dynamics, which can be overshadowed by the perspectives of formal security actors and government officials (Karanja & Mburu, 2021).

4.1.5 Level of Education

The data reveals a diverse educational background among the respondents, with the majority holding a degree (59.3%), followed by those with a diploma (22.1%), a certificate (10.4%), and a smaller proportion having a master's degree or higher (8.2%). This distribution suggests that most respondents possess a higher level of formal education, which could influence their perspectives and understanding of complex issues.

4.1.6 Length of Stay/Residing in Lamu County

The data in Table 4.6 illustrates the length of residence of respondents in Lamu County, with a notable majority (80.9%) having lived there for over a decade. Specifically, 46.8% of respondents have resided in Lamu for 21-30 years, indicating a strong, established community. Those who have lived in the county for 11-20 years make up 34.2%, while the smallest groups include residents of 2-10 years (9.1%) and those with over 31 years (9.9%). The high percentage of long-term residents suggests a deep-rooted local population, which is crucial for the Kenya Defence Forces' population-centric approach in counterinsurgency operations.

4.2 Population Centric Approaches

4.2.1 Effectiveness of Military Tactics and Strategies

The data indicates that the majority of respondents (59.7%) agreed that military tactics and strategies employed were effective, while 35.1% strongly agreed, meaning that a combined 94.8% of respondents had a positive perception of the effectiveness of the strategies. A small minority, 5.2%, disagreed, while no respondents strongly disagreed or were undecided.

4.2.2 Cooperation Between KDF and Local Civilian Populations

The data in Table 4.8 reflects a strong perception of cooperation between the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) and the local civilian populations. Of the 231 respondents, a majority (58.4%) "Strongly Agree" that there is cooperation, while an additional 39% "Agree." Only 2.6% of the respondents are undecided, and none disagree with the statement. This indicates overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the relationship between the KDF and local communities, with 97.4% of respondents affirming cooperation in some form.

4.2.3 Socio-Economic Development Initiatives

A majority of the participants (80.6%) expressed agreement, with 48.1% agreeing and 32.5% strongly agreeing. This suggests strong support for the initiatives. A smaller portion, 18.2%, either disagreed (9.1%) or remained undecided (9.1%), indicating that only a minority had reservations or uncertainty regarding the initiatives. Very few, 1.2%, strongly disagreed.

4.2.4 Success of Population-Centric Approach

The data in Table 4.10 reveals that a significant majority of respondents view the population-centric approach in COIN operations as successful. Specifically, 62.3% of participants agreed with its success, and an additional 26% strongly agreed, totalling 88.3% who are positive about the approach. Conversely, only 5.2% disagreed and none strongly disagreed, indicating minimal opposition to the approach. A small portion, 6.5%, remained undecided.

4.3 Key Informants Interview Findings

The article reveals a largely favourable perception of the population centric approach in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations by the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) in Lamu County, with 94.8% of respondents expressing positive views on the effectiveness of military tactics and strategies. The cooperation between the KDF and local civilian populations was perceived positively by 97.4% of respondents, demonstrating strong civil-military relations, an essential element of this theory. Additionally, 80.6% of respondents supported the efficacy of socio-economic development initiatives, which are designed to address the

root causes of insurgency, such as poverty and marginalization. These initiatives echo the principles of Rational Choice Theory, which posits that individuals will choose to support insurgents or the state based on a cost-benefit analysis of who can better meet their socio-economic needs.

Most notably, 88.3% of respondents viewed the population centric approach as successful overall, further emphasizing the approach's impact. These findings support Johnston's (2018) conclusion that a holistic population centric approach, integrating military and socio-economic strategies, is crucial for sustainable security and long-term success in COIN operations. This perspective also reflects Rational Choice Theory, as local populations are more likely to align with the government when their grievances are addressed through development projects, making insurgent recruitment less appealing.

Key informant interviews provide additional insights into the local perceptions of these strategies. For example, one respondent stated,

The CVE programs were designed to create awareness, conduct counter-radicalization, and educate the public about terrorism, offering vocational training to reduce vulnerability to recruitment by extremist groups. Religious interfaith peace dialogues have also played a critical role in countering narratives that portray the conflict as religiously driven (KI-02, Lamu County, 2024).

This observation supports Khalil and Zeuthen's (2020) argument that population centric COIN efforts, which address local grievances and socio-economic factors, tend to achieve greater long-term success, consistent with Rational Choice Theory. However, challenges persist in fully realizing the potential of the population centric approach. As another key informant explained,

The population centric approach has been moderately effective in improving relations between the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) and the local community in Lamu County. However, challenges remain due to deep-seated mistrust and a lack of sustained community engagement. While the KDF has provided security and conducted development projects, these initiatives have not fully addressed the underlying socio-economic grievances of the local population. More inclusive strategies that involve local leaders in decision-making and long-term conflict resolution are still needed to achieve lasting peace (KI-11, Lamu County, 2024).

This insight reflects Rational Choice Theory, suggesting that without strong, sustained community engagement, mistrust may undermine the effectiveness of COIN strategies. Moreover, findings from Kivoi et al. (2023) highlight that while the KDF's infrastructure development efforts in Lamu County reduced insurgent activities by 20% between 2016 and 2022, the absence of governance reforms and the failure to address root causes of radicalization, such as poverty and political marginalization, limits the long-term success of COIN operations.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The article's objective, to evaluate the population-centric approach in coin operations: a review of its efficacy among Kenya's Defence Forces in Lamu County, revealed a largely positive perception among respondents. The effectiveness of military tactics and strategies was endorsed by 94.8% of participants, highlighting a strong consensus on their success. Similarly, cooperation between the KDF and local civilian populations received an overwhelmingly positive endorsement from 97.4% of respondents, indicating robust community engagement. Socio-economic development initiatives were also well-received, with 80.6% expressing support. The success of the population centric approach itself was affirmed by 88.3% of respondents, reflecting significant approval.

These findings align with recent studies that underscore the positive impact of community-focused strategies in COIN operations. For instance, Ochieng' and Mburu (2022) emphasized the role of local engagement in enhancing operational effectiveness in Kenya's counterinsurgency efforts. Similarly, Wangari and Njeri (2023) highlighted the importance of socio-economic development in supporting successful COIN operations in conflict-affected areas. These studies corroborate the favourable assessment of the population-centric approach in Lamu County, reinforcing the efficacy of integrating local community dynamics into military strategies.

The article provides strong support for military strategies, community collaboration, and socioeconomic projects while showcasing the efficacy of the population-centric strategy in counterinsurgency operations among Kenya's Defence Forces in Lamu County. These findings, which are consistent with prior research on the topic, highlight the importance of incorporating local dynamics into military plans. Strengthening this strategy calls for ongoing community involvement, ongoing assessment of socioeconomic initiatives, and flexible approaches to emerging problems. The population-centric strategy can further establish itself as a pillar of effective counterinsurgency operations in Kenya and beyond by strengthening cooperation between the KDF and civilians.

5.2 Recommendations

1. The KDF should intensify community engagement through creating dedicated platforms for ongoing dialogue with local communities to better understand their needs and concerns.
2. The KDF should prioritize socio-economic development initiatives through focusing on projects that tackle economic hardships and educational deficiencies, such as vocational training programs, scholarships, and infrastructure development.
3. The KDF should develop a comprehensive framework that integrates economic and educational programs with traditional military tactics.
4. The KDF should significantly enhance its psychological operations by investing in targeted information campaigns and countering-propaganda measures to undermine insurgent narratives and strengthen support for government initiatives.
5. The KDF should introduce joint training programs that involve both military personnel and local stakeholders. These programs should focus on building mutual understanding, improving communication, and resolving conflicts.
6. The KDF should establish a robust framework to assess the impact of their strategies on security, socio-economic development, and community relations by implementing regular assessments and incorporating feedback from local communities to adjust strategies as needed.

5.3 Areas for Further Research

First, a longitudinal study exploring the long-term impacts of the population-centric approach in COIN operations could provide deeper insights into its sustainability and effectiveness beyond the 2014-2024 timeframe. Research could focus on how the KDF's engagement with local communities influences long-term security dynamics, socio-economic development, and community relations, examining whether the positive outcomes observed in Lamu County are replicated or evolve differently in other regions affected by insurgency.

Second, investigating the specific mechanisms through which socio-economic and educational initiatives contribute to COIN success could yield valuable information. Future research could assess the effectiveness of various types of non-military interventions, such as targeted economic development programs and educational outreach, in reducing insurgency-related activities. This could involve comparative studies of different intervention models and their impact on both community resilience and insurgent activities.

Finally, exploring the role of psychological operations in greater detail could enhance understanding of their effectiveness in COIN operations. Research could focus on the development and implementation of information campaigns and counter-propaganda measures, evaluating their impact on insurgent narratives and local support. Additionally, studies could examine how different psychological strategies are perceived by various community segments and their influence on community cooperation and insurgent recruitment.

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Ethical Consideration Statement

Every ethical standard in research involving humans or animals was followed in this article. Both NACOSTI and Daystar University granted approval.