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FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES,

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

POLITICS OF CLANNISM AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN MBEERE NORTH SUB-COUNTY, EMBU COUNTY- KENYA

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work that has never been presented to any other institution or university for an academic award of degree, diploma, or certificate. All sources of information used in this thesis have been duly cited and referenced.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis work to my dear mother Mrs. Julieta Thaara Njagi (JT) who has never been to a class, yet is the greatest champion of education that I know, Mama this is for you!

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the politics of clannism affects socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County and how the phenomenon has impacted on the lives of the residents. The study qualitatively focuses on the two politics of clannism of the major clans of Mururi (Thagana) and Ndamata (Irumbi) and how they have impacted the socio-economic development of the region. The researcher employed purposive sampling to pick 25 participants with 15 focused group members (M- 26 F- 14) participated in this study. The objective of this study was to understand the nexus between clannism and socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County by answering questions about how clannism influences resource allocation decisions, the distribution of socio-economic resources and impact on the region's socio-economic development. This qualitative study used interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs) for data collection. Descriptive and exploratory research designs were used respectively. The study employed three theories, social capital theory, neo-patrimonialism and development theory, and political economy theory. The researcher found out that clannism in Mbeere North Sub-County had significant influence on resource allocation decisions, affected the distribution of socio-economic resources, and impacted economic development in the region. The limitations included the vast geographical area to be covered, financial constraints and the sensitivity of clannism and politics in the region. The researcher presented recommendations to various stakeholders that can be used to solve the problem under study. The implications of the findings of this study will impact significantly on future researchers, policy makers, community leader and groups, law enforcers and the people of Mbeere North Sub-County. The researcher suggests need for more research to establish the prevalence of the problem under study in other regions in Kenya.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the objectives of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the limitations and delimitations, the theoretical framework, and the conceptual frameworks. The area of focus of this study is Mbeere North Sub-County and the issue to be addressed is clannism and its impacts on the socio-economic development aspects of the region.

1.1 Background to the Study

Clannism in postcolonial society has been used to achieve different ends. However, the study is interested in establishing the implications of clannism on the socio-economic development. To do this, the study focuses on sociological factors that explain development or underdevelopment, such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, among other factors. In addition, this proposed research pays particular attention to the politics of clannism and how it may have had implications on socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County.

The research is conceived with the wider development discourse characterized by competing perspectives. Economic development, a more complex process, encompassing quantitative (growth) and qualitative aspects, including the changes in the structures and factors of production and how public resources are managed (Biermann et al., 2022, p. 2). A third perspective that we can highlight is social development, focusing on qualitative transformation in social structure, which includes social integrity and social trust as well as changes in opportunities of individuals whose goal is to achieve a higher social status (Biermann et al., 2022; Mettler & Brown, 2022; Gandy, 2022).

The fourth perspective that this study focuses on is the socio-economic development, which encompasses quantitative, qualitative, and structural changes. The socio-economic perspective on development can justifiably frame analysis of development processes, initiatives, and challenges

in Africa. Protracted sociopolitical conflicts in the region are linked to underdevelopment in the region.

In Kenya, particularly, ethnicity has been pointed out as key factor in the distribution of resources, development and patrimonialism, which ultimately affects the well-being of the people (Magero, 2024). The assumption, therefore, is that, in the absence of ethnicity, equality would be realized and the well-being of the people would improve (Magero, 2024).

However, at the micro-level, there is still an imbalanced distribution of resources. There are various sociopolitical factors, such as clans, that contribute to the skewed distribution of resources (Mukanda et al., 2024). Clans may determine who gets what, and where what project is implemented (Mukanda et al., 2024); hence, bringing doubts whether clan-based politics at lower levels could have implications for development. The researcher raises this question because collective awareness of societal needs is requisite in prioritising and designing development needs, as well as fairness in the sharing of developmental dividends.

According to Harris (2022), clan politics occur within clan networks and activities. Such networks impact how politics are conducted such as clan -based political appointments, allocation of resources and how development opportunities are distributed across the region. Clan politics is manifested if it undermines the normal ways established institutions are supposed to function leading to clannism being a major factor. Clan-based politics has not been widely debated; however, existing literature has indicated that clans have a greater resilience and power (Harris, 2022; Seife, 2022).

The present study focuses on Mbeere North Sub-County in Embu County. This region is about 744.80 square kilometres, has a population of 200,000 (KNBS, 2019). A majority of the population is Ambeere people. However, we have other communities such as Ameru, Aembu, Kamba, and Agikuyu. The inhabitants of Mbeere North Sub-County subsist on peasantry, with small-scale crop production and livestock keeping. The social formation of this community is characterized by clan relationships, with about 50 clans and people who have migrated from other communities in Kenya.

Political patronage that has capitalized on deep-rooted clan cleavage has contribute greatly to the politics of clannism in the region (Wandia, 2024). Omondi and Mutua (2021) observed that members of the Mbeere North Sub-County community have experienced conflicts due to differences among the various clans that inhabit the area. The question of inter-clan divisions is significant in analyzing development at the grassroots in Mbeere North Sub-County. Since the 1970s, politics in Mbeere North Sub-County have revolved around the community's two clans, pitting the Mururi clan against the rival Ndamata clan.

Mururi is the largest clan in Mbeere North Sub-County with 30 sub clans, and Ndamata is the minority clan with 20 sub clans. Since Kenya's first general elections in 1969, election results in the Mbeere North and South sub-counties have been almost predictable. This is because clan configuration has had implications for elective politics in Mbeere North Sub-County- the candidate from the bigger clan that has always won (Wandia, 2024) elections. This has, for a long time, caused subtle clan divisions and conflicts in Mbeere North Sub-County and the community.

Wandia (2024) noted that Mbeere North Sub-County consists of numerous small clans based on family lineages. But there are two major clans, namely the Mururi (Thagana) and Ndamata (Irumbi). Based on these divisions, politicians have taken advantage of the existing clan cleavages since independence, and in the process, perpetuated the already existing divisions. He further argued that, since the Mbeere community regularly suffers from famine due to inadequate rains in the region, they depend on food aid from the government or non-governmental organizations. During a famine, food aid to the community is distributed based on the clan people come from. In this regard, leaders at the grassroots tend to distribute the food aid in favor of people from their own clans. They will deny or give fewer rations to members of the other clans while they give more to members of their own clan. A similar partisan mode is evident during fundraising for education, distribution of development projects, employment opportunities, and political leadership, and even church leadership positions.

Consequently, the social and political development and opportunities that individuals get in this region depends on the clan that the person comes from (Wanjiru & Gichuki, 2021). The question is, could these divisions have implications for development in the region? This question is significant because rural development requires collective consciousness as well as action (Wanjiru

& Gichuki, 2021). It is against this background that this work examines the nexus between the politics of clannism and socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study examines the politics of clannism and the socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County. Sociological factors, including race, ethnicity, age, and gender have long influenced power and resource distribution, often leading to socio-economic disparities in most developed and developing communities (Makhanya, 2024; Begum et al., 2024). Moreover, these authors argue that despite the efforts to enhance development across various parts of Kenya, Mbeere North Sub-County remains underdeveloped (Makhanya, 2024; Begum et al., 2024). This is marked by inadequate healthcare and education services that lead to high morbidity and mortality rates, negatively impacting productivity and economic development. Inadequate infrastructure, lack of teaching materials, and qualified teachers further restrict human capital development, perpetuating low socio-economic status. These deficiencies that have continued for years and seem to have a strong root in the society perpetuate a cycle of vulnerability and lack of skills among the affected individuals; hence, subjecting them and their subsequent generations to poverty (Akram & Hassan, 2023).

At the same time, clan divisions run deep, with significant allegations that political and economic decisions are made along clan lines. For instance, claims have been made that politicians prioritize clan loyalty when allocating bursaries, food aid, and development projects (Wandia, 2024). These patterns suggest that clan-based politics determine the political and socio-economic decisions in some communities and this may hinder equitable development, limiting access to resources and opportunities for those outside the dominant clan (Ali & Kiruthu, 2026).

Existing studies conducted in various parts of Kenya shows that tribalism and ethnicity are the major causes of unfair resource allocation and distribution across the country and this has led to unequal development (Elmi et al., 2024). Other studies conducted by Abraha (2025), Amutabi and Mwaura (2025) reveal that ethnicity enables leaders from larger ethnic communities to direct resources and favor their communities while the smaller ones suffer and experience slow developments.

These studies reveal that although democracy allows the will of the majority to prevail, political leaders from majority ethnic groups take advantage of their numbers and influence to make political decisions that favor their kinsmen. This means that ethnicity and tribalism have significant impacts on the politics of decision-making, resource allocation and distribution and socio-economic development.

Therefore, while the existing studies examine issues such as ethnicity and tribalism in Kenya, they have not narrowed down to study and understand how the politics of clannism affects socio-economic development across the country. Mbeere North Sub-County just like many other regions in Kenya are still underdeveloped partly due to the nature of politics in these regions. The omission of the impacts of politics of clannism on socio-economic development in the various studies across Kenya matters a lot because it would offer a proper understanding of how politics at the grassroots levels impact economic development. There is the need for people to understand that politics have far reaching impacts not only on the national level but also at the grassroots levels where clans are involved in making important political, social and economic decisions.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study's main objective was to understand the nexus between the politics of clannism and development issues in Mbeere North Sub-County, Embu County.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

i. To establish the influence of clannism in resource allocation decisions in Mbeere North Sub-County.
ii. To explore the influence of clannism on the distribution of socio-economic resources and opportunities in Mbeere North Sub-county
iii. To examine the impact of clan-based politics on socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County

1.3.2 Research Questions

i. How does clannism influence decisions on the allocation of socio-economic resources in Mbeere North Sub-County?

ii. How are the socio- economic resources and opportunities distributed in Mbeere North Sub-County?
iii. How does clan-based politics impact the socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County?

1.4 Justification of the Study

The role of clannism in socio-economic development is a relatively under-explored area in the context of Kenya, where much of the discourse has centered around ethnicity as the primary sociological factor affecting development. While ethnic politics has been extensively studied (Abraha, 2025; Amutabi & Mwaura (2025), the localized dynamics of clannism within ethnic groups, particularly in rural settings like Mbeere North Sub-County, remain poorly understood. This study seeks to fill this knowledge gap by focusing on how clan affiliations influence political processes and socio-economic outcomes.

Mbeere North Sub-County is a region characterized by severe developmental challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited access to water, and persistent poverty. Despite these challenges, the area remains highly polarized along clan lines, with accusations that political decisions and resource distribution are often skewed in favor of certain clans. By exploring the link between clan-based politics and development, this study addresses an urgent issue that directly impacts the lives of residents in this and other similar regions in Kenya.

It is necessary for policymakers, development practitioners, and community leaders who seek to create equitable and inclusive development strategies to understand the relationship between the politics of clannism and development (Ahmad & Islam, 2024). This study will offer valuable insights into the socio-political dynamics that hinder development, helping to inform interventions that can mitigate clan-based divisions and promote more balanced resource distribution.

Moreover, the findings of this research have broader implications beyond Mbeere North Sub-County. Clan-based politics play has a direct impact on the socio-economic outcomes in most regions. Thus, this study may contribute to a broader information that will expand how people understand the interactions of clannism and local governance structures, potentially informing more effective development policies in similar situations.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study has benefits at multiple levels, offering insights and practical recommendations for a range of stakeholders concerned with development, governance, and socio-political dynamics in rural communities. This study is significant to each of the following groups of stakeholders- policy makers, government agencies, community leadership, academics and scholars, and the people of Mbeere North Sub-County as discussed below:

First, for policymakers such as all the 67 Senators at the Senate, the 349 Members of Parliament at the National Assembly, and the Embu County leadership (the Governor, Senator, Women Representative, Member of Parliament and all the 30 Members of Embu County Assembly), will benefit from this study since it may point out how politics of clannism affects decision-making, allocation of resources, and socio-economic development. This study will guide these decision-makers in making the right decisions at their respective levels and ensure that resource allocations is done fairly and equitably to promote development across their respective jurisdictions regardless of the sizes of each specific social group.

Secondly, this study has significant impacts on the structured government stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Services, and Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs from the national to the ward levels. These ministries have budgets and are actively involved in resource allocation, community development, and poverty alleviation. Therefore, this study will offer valuable insights into how sociopolitical factors like clannism impact the effectiveness of devolving development initiatives to the ward levels to promote equal and fair distribution of resources and socio-economic development. Understanding these forces at work will enable these agencies to come up with strategies that account for local context, ensuring that government and public services, aid and resources reach all community members fairly, irrespective of clan affiliation.

Thirdly, this study is of significant value to community leaders such as church leaders, chiefs and sub-chiefs and clan elders in Mbeere North Sub-County. These individuals act as links between the government and locals and are an important channel of dissemination information between these two stakeholders.

The study's findings focus on the possible negative consequences of clan-based politics on community cohesion and socio-economic development. By fostering awareness of these issues to these community leaders, the study can contribute to the emergence of more inclusive leadership that prioritize collective welfare over narrow clan interests and this will help in ensuring that all citizens in Mbeere North Sub-county are treated fairly and equally.

Fourthly, academics and scholars in the fields of development studies, political science, and sociology find the findings are beneficial since they seal a critical literature gap on the intersection of clannism and development. Moreover, the study's findings will help develop the theoretical frameworks on rural development, governance, and sociopolitical conflict, offering new avenues for research on how micro-level sociological units like clans influence broader development outcomes. Also, this research project will offer useful information regarding the study of political and social factors that influence decision-making, resource allocation, and socio-economic development across the country.

Finally, this study will impact positively to all the clans in Mbeere North Sub-County from the large medium and smaller clans. By addressing the underlying sociopolitical factors contributing to uneven development, this research may lead to a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, enhancing the overall socio-economic status of the community.

This research is vital for informing policy, enhancing the effectiveness of development interventions, enhancing local governance, and contributing to scholarly discourse on the intricate relationship between clannism and socio-economic development

1.6 Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The institutional scope of this study focused on community structures that were identified as individuals from clans (large and small clans) residing within Mbeere North Sub-county. This study focused on understanding how clannism, a subset of ethnicity, influences socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County. Clannism is examined separately from broader ethnic affiliations, such as tribes, and other sociopolitical factors like religion or political party alliances. By concentrating solely on clan-based divisions, the study assessed how these internal cleavages affect political dynamics, resource distribution, and development outcomes within the community.

Geographically, the research was confined to Mbeere North Sub-County. The study did not extend to other regions or counties, even though similar dynamics may exist elsewhere. However, the study drew examples and reviewed literature of studies conducted in other regions within and outside Kenya to better understand the politics of clannism in Mbeere North Sub-County. This geographical delimitation is driven by the particular relevance of clan-based politics in this area, making it a suitable case study for understanding these dynamics in a rural Kenyan setting.

Methodologically, this study adopted the qualitative approach where the researcher used focus group discussions and interviews to gather detailed insights from political leaders, community members, youth representatives and local stakeholders. The study does not incorporate quantitative data or statistical analysis since its focus was to capture the lived experiences, understanding and insights of those directly affected by clannism. Additionally, the research focuses on contemporary and recent historical contexts, without delving into the distant origins of clannism.

Individual respondents from Mbeere North Sub-County were treated as units of analysis. These individuals involved clan elders, church leaders, and ordinary citizens from Mbeere North Sub-County whose perceptions and lived experiences of clannism were studied and analyzed to understand how it influences decision making, resource allocation and socio-economic development. By limiting the scope to the specific socio-political environment of Mbeere North Sub-County, this study provides a localized insight; however, there might be differences on the outcome of this study compared to similar studies conducted in other regions.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study experienced several limitations. One key limitation is the inability to cover all variables associated with the complex relationship between clannism and socio-economic development. Given the multifaceted nature of this issue, it was challenging to account for every factor that may influence the dynamics of clan politics, such as external economic forces or broader political trends, within the scope of this research. Financial limitations forced the researcher to concentrate on a small sample- generalizations were cautiously made from the data collected. Time constraints further limited the scope, as the researcher had only a brief period to conduct field data collection activity. This significantly hindered a deeper exploration of all emerging themes. Another significant limitation that came about was the sensitivity of clan politics.

Clan matters are often treated with secrecy, especially among insiders, which made it difficult to obtain comprehensive and candid information. As a female researcher, accessing certain clan-related information could prove challenging due to cultural norms and gender biases that limit interactions with key informants, particularly in patriarchal settings. These social dynamics may have affected the depth and breadth of the data collected.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

The researcher showed the relationships between independent variables (various aspects of the politics of clannism) and the dependent variable (socio-economic development), using a conceptual framework that specifically focused on investments, job creation, and trade in Mbeere North Sub-County. Each independent variable has specific measures that denote its impact on the dependent variables, as guided by the literature.

The framework assumes that the politics of clannism, for example, clan influence in political decision-making, resource allocation, and leadership appointments, affects socio-economic development in the region

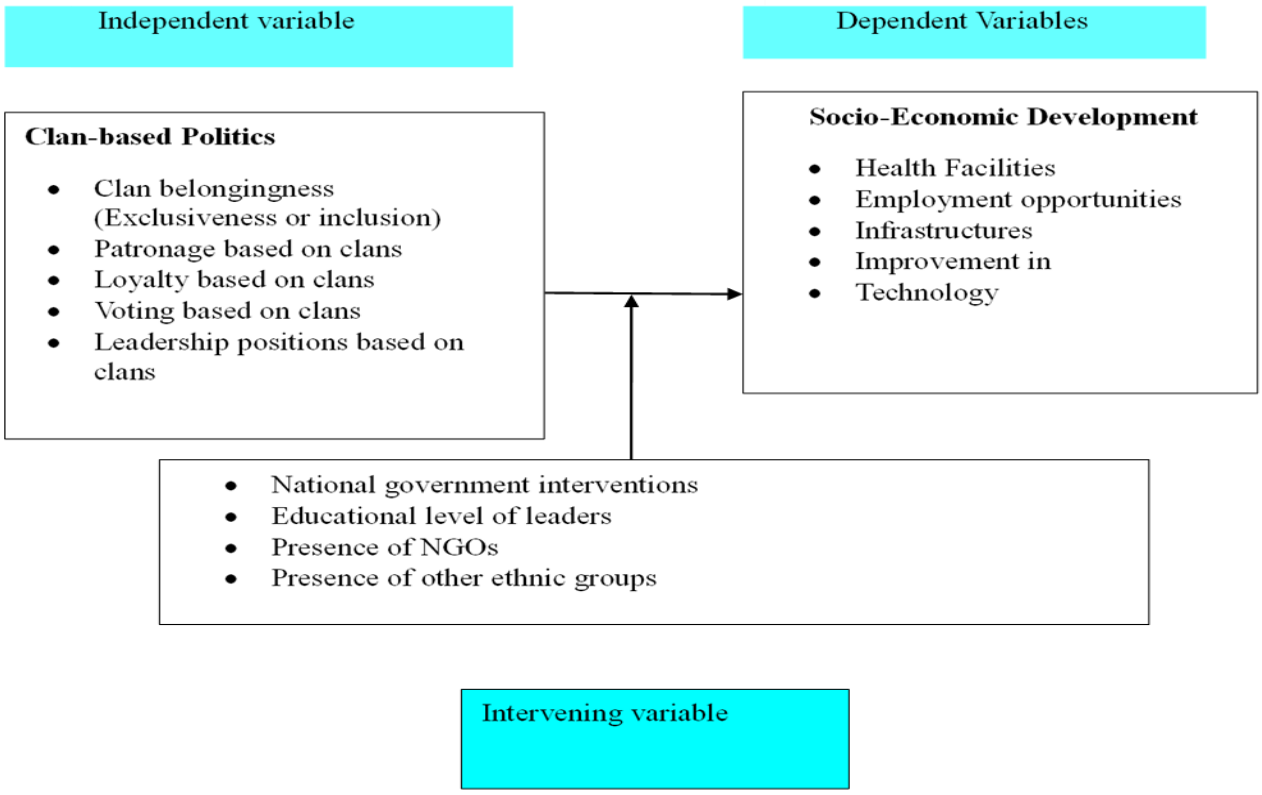


Fig. 1: Politics of Clannism and Socio-Economic Development.

Source: Researcher (2025)

1.9 Theoretical Framework

To examine clannism, this study is anchored in three key theories: social capital theory, political economy theory, and neo-patrimonialism theory, which offer useful information about clannism and socio-economic development. Political economy theory is the anchor theory used in this study because it directly focuses on the impacts of politics on the socio-economic development of a society- the theory directly links the politics of clannism and socio-economic development aspects in Mbeere North Sub-County. The social capital theory and neo-patrimonialism theory are supportive theories that are used to show how some micro aspects of clannism impact socio-economic development in this region.

The researcher did not use other theories such as the institutional theory, elite theory, modernization theory, or dependency theory because these theories are very broad yet the phenomena and subject under study were unique and required theories that would explicitly and succinctly provide a framework for studying them; hence, the researcher opted to use the social capital theory, political economy theory, and neo-patrimonialism theory.

1.9.1 Social Capital Theory

This study employs Social Capital Theory to anchor the argument in the study. The Social capital theory was coined by Lyda Judson Hanifan, an American educator in the 1916 and later developed to the modern theory by Robert Putnam, Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman (Wong, 2023). This theory focuses on how social networks build trust, shape norms and enhance a group's actions for the benefit of all or most stakeholders (Wong, 2023). In highly clan-based societies, social capital is often confined to clan lines, leading to the exclusion of non-members from key socio-economic opportunities. The theory suggests that while strong intra-clan networks can foster trust and cooperation within a specific clan, they may simultaneously weaken social cohesion at the broader community level (Wong, 2023). This study employs this theory to explore how clan-based affiliations affect collective efforts towards development in Mbeere North Sub-County and how elsewhere clan divisions may limit cooperation across the broader society, thus impeding socio-economic progress.

The social capital theory best fits the second research objective that focuses on the distribution of socio-economic resources and opportunities because this theory explains how trust among people and their social networks plays an important role in determining which clan and individuals get access to opportunities and resources, and not just who decides in Mbeere North Sub-County.

1.9.2 Neo-patrimonialism and Development Theory

Another relevant theory is neo-patrimonialism and development theory that was first coined by Shmuel Eisenstadt, an Israeli sociologist in 1973 before being developed to the modern theory by Richard Sandbrook, Tim Kelsall and Daavid Booth (Hout, 2024). This theory holds that unequal distribution of development resources and opportunities is guided by 2 neo-patrimonial relations.

'Neo-patrimonialism' was Max Weber's idea of patrimonialism, which is a type of old-style practice where personal loyalty among leaders and their subjects determined how they were ruled and decisions made (Hout, 2024). The person in authority has massive power and control of how resources are used and distributed (Hout, 2024). Neo-patrimonialism flourishes even in situation where legal systems exist but where individuals in power act conveniently to benefit some people more than others (De Sousa & Cuadrado, 2023; Ringson, 2025; Yulianti, 2026). Logically, politics has a way of altering the natural course of development and benefiting those close to power and authority while those in the periphery are marginalized (Twala & Baldwin, 2026).

The neo-patrimonialism and development theory best matches with the first objective about resource allocation and decisions because this theory focuses on specifically the issues of personal loyalty and patronage determines who decides to allocate what resources and to which clans and individuals in Mbeere North Sub-County.

1.9.3 Political Economy Theory

The political economy theory dates back to the mercantilism era during the mid-18th century and was developed by many scholars including, Adam Smith, David Hume, David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill who tried to front various perspective son how nations generate and distribute wealth to promote socio-economic development (Manioudis & Meramveliotakis, 2022). This political economy theory has a useful framework for analyzing the impacts of political structures on economic systems, especially in resource allocation and opportunities.

According to Manioudis and Meramveliotakis (2022), economic outcomes are often shaped by political decisions, which in turn are influenced by existing power structures. In the context of clannism, political patronage based on clan affiliations becomes a key determinant of how socio-economic resources such as employment opportunities, quality education, healthcare, and development projects are distributed. This theory will help in analyzing how political and economic elites in Mbeere North Sub-County leverage clan loyalties to consolidate power, potentially leading to unequal development outcomes. Recent studies (Patel & Lucey, 2024; Omar, 2024) emphasize the persistence of patronage systems in undermining equitable resource distribution, thus reinforcing disparities in development.

By integrating political economy, social capital, and neo-patrimonialism theories, this study focuses on expanding the understanding of the influence of clan politics on socio-economic development landscape in Mbeere North Sub-County. The interplay between political patronage and social trust within and between clans will be explored to understand its impact on equitable resource distribution and overall development. Recent scholarship on these theories (Mukanda et al., 2024; Ndiema, 2024; Nalugala & Muhati, 2026) reinforces the argument that both political structures and social networks are critical in determining developmental outcomes, especially in societies with deep-rooted kinship-based divisions.

The political economy theory best fits the third objective because it focuses on the overall impact of clan-based politics on the economic and social development in Mbeere North Sub-County. Another advantage of this theory is that it is broad and directly addresses the development outcomes of the region, and that is why it is used as the anchor theory in this study.

1.10 Operational Definition of Terms

Clannism is used in this work to refer to differential treatment and allegiance based on actual or perceived kinship and descent.

Development is used in this paper to refer to the gradual social, economic, and political changes aimed at achieving a quality of life for members of a given society.

Economic development is a complex process, encompassing quantitative (growth) and qualitative changes, including production structures and resource management practices.

An ethnic group, as used in this work, is a group of people whose members identify with one another through a common cultural heritage.

Politics, as used in this research, refers to power relations that determine decisions on who gets what, how, when, and how much?

Politics of clannism, as used in this work, refers to the process in which clan belongingness determines political processes, decisions, as well as who gets what and how much.

Socio-economic development is used in this work to refer to a change in both the standard and cost of living, including improvements in the conditions of health, nutrition, education, transport and communication, good governance, participation in decision making, and social cohesion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a literature review that corresponds with the problem under study and the research objectives that guided the researcher in conducting this study. A review of existing published literature from Kenya, Africa, and across the globe is used to gain a proper understanding of how clannism in Mbeere North Sub-County influences resource allocation decisions, the distribution of socio-economic resources, and socio-economic development outcomes. These publications help the researcher understand that this problem is not confined to Mbeere North Sub-County, but is also evident in other regions of Kenya and across the world.

2.1 Influence of Clannism in Resource Allocation Decisions in Mbeere North Sub-County

Recent studies conducted by Yazew and Kassa (2024) and Negi (2026) revealed that equal distribution of resources is pivotal to realizing robust economic development. For a long time, postcolonial societies have grappled with unequal distribution of national resources along divides such as ethnicity and clannism, divides that have consistently found their way into political discourse and governance (Yazew & Kassa, 2024; Negi, 2026). Despite this, scholars have historically underestimated the role of the clan in politics, partly because the concept of clan politics is not emphasized in global scholarly discourse and is largely foreign to European societal linkages. However, some regions of the globe, Africa in particular, operate clan-based political systems with a demonstrable impact on socio-economic development (Yazew & Kassa, 2024; Negi, 2026).

Studies from Central Asia and Somalia (Harris, 2022; Hashi & Hock, 2025; Ulziisukh & Wei, 2022) converge in showing that clan identity functions as an informal political resource that formal state structures have been unable to displace, Harris, Kha Hashi and Hock, and Ulziisukh and Wei all tie this more directly to electoral competition. Other similar studies include Abate (2022) Ayhan et al. (2023) and Harris (2022) that revealed that economic development was largely shaped by political stability and political freedom, implying that political certainty functions as a precondition

for socio-economic growth, while instability produces unfair distribution of resources and underdevelopment.

In addition, these studies demonstrate that political stability enables private relationship mechanisms among elites to develop into formal regulatory structures, and that clan-based systems reinforce the power of elites, warlords, and politicians not through independent political agendas but through loyalty networks.

Qualitative studies from other African countries (Young, 2023; Neblett Jr, 2023; Hashi & Hock, 2025; Ulziisukh & Wei, 2022) collectively identify clan affiliation as a central currency of political mobilization: presidential candidates must first secure clan-based votes before appealing to a wider electorate, and clan loyalty has repeatedly deepened Somalia's political and security crises. These studies broadly agree that clan identity substitutes for policy-based competition, though they diverge in their explanations Ulziisukh and Wei (2022) attribute this persistence to the failure of the educated class to offer alternative political leadership, while Lewis et al. (2023) and Ulziisukh and Wei (2022) emphasize the structural role of electoral incentives in entrenching clan-based mobilization.

In Kenya, ethnic identity has historically been mobilized in conflicts over resources and political power, though clannism specifically has received far less scholarly attention than ethnicity more broadly. Kenyan studies (Mukanda, 2025; Elmi et al., 2024) support the broader argument that marginalization of minority clan and ethnic groups is widespread and shapes socio-economic outcomes: elected leaders' control over resources such as the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) incentivizes voters to select leaders based on clan affiliation rather than policy platforms, a dynamic Elmi et al. (2024) link directly to inter-clan rivalries in Kuria East District.

Across this body of literature, there is broad agreement that clan- and ethnicity-based identity functions as an informal but powerful currency in political competition, particularly where formal institutions are weak (Harris, 2022; Hashi & Hock, 2025; Elmi et al., 2024). However, the literature diverges on causal emphasis: some studies foreground institutional and historical collapse (Harris, 2022), others foreground electoral incentive structures (Hashi & Hock, 2025; Ulziisukh & Wei, 2022; Elmi et al., 2024), and others foreground elite failure (Neblett Jr, 2023). Methodologically, the Somalia- and Central Asia-based studies rely heavily on historical and documentary analysis

of national-level political crises, which captures large-scale clan conflict but offers limited insight into the everyday, localized resource-allocation decisions this study is concerned with.

Similarly, the Kenyan studies reviewed (Mukanda, 2025; Elmi et al., 2024) are geographically and contextually distant from Mbeere North Sub-County and focus on inter-clan conflict rather than the routine politics of clan-based resource allocation decisions in a comparatively stable, non-conflict setting; a distinction that remains unexamined in the literature.

2.2 Influence of Clannism on the Distribution of Socio-Economic Resources and Opportunities in Mbeere North Sub-County

Global studies (Mukanda, 2025; Halkos & Aslanidis, 2023; Acharya, 2022) agree that there is unequal and unfair distribution of public resources, and that this inequality becomes inequitable when it excludes groups from processes that were supposed to ensure they access public resources equally and fairly. Internalized social structures, norms, and values sustain these arrangements, producing what these scholars term "inequality traps." Building on this, Kozhyna (2022) and Acharya (2022) argue that markets themselves are shaped by sociocultural values and information asymmetries distributed unevenly across pre-existing social networks, creating an uneven playing field even without deliberate intent to exclude. Moreover, Kozhyna (2022) and Acharya (2022) extend this discussion into the realm of distributive justice, questioning whether the principle of territorial sovereignty which grants states unrestricted rights over internal resources is normatively justified when it permits states to remain indifferent to the needs of populations both within and beyond their borders.

Development scholarship captures well the interactions between political processes and economic development (Raihan et al., 2022; Spyromitros & Panagiotidis, 2022), which broadly agrees that politically stable countries tend to be economically stable, and vice versa. This pattern extends to how economic shocks are distributed along group lines: Zewde and Crystal (2022), Modi and Sewell (2022) and Alam & Bose (2022) found that during the 2007–2009 US recession, median household wealth fell by 16% for White Americans compared to 53% for African Americans, illustrating how existing structural inequalities are amplified during periods of economic stress. A parallel pattern is evident in Africa, where colonial-era settlement patterns are argued to be the root

of contemporary inequality, more so than the identity of the colonizing power itself (Manioudis & Meramveliotakis, 2022; Frankema et al., 2023).

In Kenya, devolution under the 2010 Constitution was intended to reduce ethnic and regional inequality, yet studies (Nyandemo, 2022; Elmi et al., 2024; Muthama & Gal, 2025) suggest that county leadership frequently remains aligned along tribal or clan lines. Elmi et al. (2024), for example, were interested in understanding how clannism affects decentralization benefits and national security in Kenya's North Eastern counties, finding that clannism foreclosed devolution's benefits for most residents, produced incompetent leadership, undermined service delivery, and deepened divisions that fed local and national insecurity.

These studies agree broadly that group-based identity mediates access to resources and that this mediation intensifies during periods of political or economic stress (Zewde & Crystal, 2022; Elmi et al., 2024). However, a notable contradiction emerges in how this inequality is explained: the market/network-based literature (Acharya, 2022; Kivoi et al.,2022) treats unequal access as an emergent, largely unintentional outcome of information asymmetry, while the Kenyan devolution literature (Nyandemo, 2022; Elmi et al., 2024) treats it as a more deliberate outcome of elite political strategy. Methodologically, much of this section relies on macro-level, cross-national, or historical-structural analysis (colonial settlement patterns, national recession data) that is not well suited to explaining micro-level, sub-county resource allocation dynamics. The philosophical material on distributive justice (Kong,2022; Stivers et al., 2023) is theoretically valuable but empirically distant from the clan-specific, localized focus of this study. Most critically, none of these studies isolates clannism as distinct from ethnicity or race as an explanatory variable for resource distribution, leaving open exactly the question this study investigates.

2.3 Impacts of Clan-Based Politics on Socio-Economic Development in Mbeere North Sub-County

Global development debates are fundamentally tied to questions of resource scarcity and distribution, reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals' emphasis on mobilizing financial resources, capacity, and institutions (Agunyai & Amusan, 2023; Prabhakar, 2025; Raman et al., 2025). These scholars of global distributive justice (Agunyai & Amusan, 2023; Prabhakar, 2025;

Raman et al., 2025) argue that widening gaps between the affluent and the poor, and unequal state control over natural resources, make equitable global access to resources difficult to achieve.

Still at the national level, demonstrate that more equal distribution of resource ownership promotes structural economic change by easing entrepreneurial investment and shifting political power from resource-owning elites toward productivity-oriented actors; conversely, concentrated resource ownership (Agunyai & Amusan, 2023; Prabhakar, 2025; Raman et al., 2025) as observed historically in Latin America impedes structural transformation and entrenches elite governance.

In Africa, scholars (Jacob et al., 2024; Makhanya, 2024) this dynamic is compounded by colonial legacies and weak institutional histories governing natural resource rights. Governments frequently face, and do not always resolve equitably, contentious budgetary questions of resource distribution, with several studies noting a persistent tendency for those in power to further enrich existing elites at the expense of marginalized groups. In Kenya specifically, Makhanya (2024) argue that clannism significantly shapes socio-economic resource distribution, with individuals and groups tied to powerful clans disproportionately benefiting from allocation and development projects; further attributes these patterns to a deliberate policy legacy of regional marginalization dating to the colonial period, which has undermined national unity and cohesion.

These inequalities according to recent studies (Muinde & Prince, 2023; Sele & Wanjiku, 2024; Gatumu et al., 2023) are evident across sectors. In education, despite substantial government investment, Kenya continues to show regional, socio-economic, and gender disparities in enrolment, alongside imbalances in financial allocation, facilities, and teacher qualifications. These studies noted that devolution has not resolved these inequalities, since many public goods cannot be efficiently managed or funded below the county level.

There is strong convergence across this literature that unequal resource distribution regardless of whether framed through colonial legacy, elite capture, or clan/ethnic favoritism — constrains socio-economic development and entrenches group-based disparities (Qin et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023; Epo et al., 2023). A key contradiction, however, lies in the mechanism proposed: the global distributive-justice and market-structure literature (Qin et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023; Epo et al., 2023) treats unequal development as a function of resource ownership structures and institutional quality, while the Kenya-specific literature (Wang et al., 2023; Epo et al., 2023) treats

it as a function of group identity and political favoritism- the two strands are rarely brought into explicit conversation with one another.

Methodologically, the Kenyan studies cited are overwhelmingly either macro-level policy analyses or focused on overt conflict settings (Epo et al., 2023), leaving a gap in understanding how clan-based favoritism operates in the absence of open conflict; precisely the setting of Mbeere North Sub-County. None of the studies reviewed disaggregates clannism from the broader category of ethnicity, nor examines its effects using qualitative, lived-experience data at the sub-county level.

2.4 Summary and Research Gap

Taken together, the literature reviewed across sections 2.1 to 2.3 establishes clear and consistent evidence that group-based identity; whether framed as ethnicity, race, or clan shapes political competition, resource allocation, and development outcomes across contexts ranging from Central Asia and Somalia to the United States, Ghana, and Kenya. There is broad agreement that where formal institutions are weak or contested, informal identity-based networks fill the resulting vacuum to determine who accesses power and resources (Harris, 2022; Hashi & Hock, 2025; Elmi et al., 2024). The literature also agrees that these dynamics intensify under conditions of economic stress or institutional transition, such as post-Soviet collapse, economic recession, or devolution (Zewde & Crystal,2022; Volkert & Klagge, 2022).

However, three important contradictions and limitations emerge. First, the literature is divided on causal mechanism: some studies emphasize structural and institutional explanations (Qin et al., 2024; Frankema et al., 2023), while others emphasize deliberate elite political strategy (Wang et al., 2023; Elmi et al., 2024), with little effort to reconcile the two. Second, methodologically, the literature is dominated by macro-level, cross-national, historical, or conflict-focused studies; very few employ qualitative, community-level methods capable of capturing how clan-based favoritism operates in ordinary, non-conflict governance and resource-allocation processes. Third, and most significantly, none of the studies reviewed treats clannism as analytically distinct from the broader constructs of ethnicity or tribalism clannism is consistently subsumed within, rather than isolated from, these wider categories, and no study has examined its influence in Mbeere North Sub-County specifically.

To address the gaps above, this study qualitatively examines clannism as a phenomenon analytically distinct from ethnicity, tribe, religion, and political party affiliation, and by investigating its influence on resource allocation decisions, distribution of socio-economic opportunities, and development outcomes in the specific, non-conflict context of Mbeere North Sub-County. A setting and analytical focus that existing literature has not yet addressed.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a literature review corresponding to the problem under study and the research objectives guiding this study. These theories (social capital theory, political economy theory, and neo-patrimonialism theory) were examined for their relevance in explaining how clannism impacts socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County. Social capital theory explains how clan-based human connections facilitate large clans' access to social and economic resources, while other groups remain underdeveloped. Neo-patrimonialism theory examines how leaders, such as the Mbeere North Sub-County Member of Parliament and Members of the County Assembly, favor those close to them and those instrumental in their rise to power. Political economy theory reveals how law, politics, and economy intersect to make clannism a powerful political tool in shaping the region's development path, despite formal laws and policies intended to ensure fair and ethical resource distribution. The empirical review of global, African, and Kenyan literature confirmed that the problem of identity-based resource distribution is not unique to Mbeere North Sub-County, while also identifying a clear and specific gap. The absence of qualitative research isolating clannism, as distinct from ethnicity, in this specific sub-county context- a gap that the researcher endeavors to fill.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology that the researcher used. It describes the research paradigm and design, the study location, the target population, the sample and sampling techniques, the data collection instruments and procedures, data analysis procedures, the steps to achieve trustworthiness of the study, and the ethical guidelines that were observed. Together, these methodological decisions constitute a coherent qualitative research framework through which the politics of clannism and socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County, Embu County were investigated.

3.1 Research Paradigm and Design

This study is anchored in the interpretive (constructivist) research paradigm paradigm that insists that reality is personally created through the survived experiences, perceptions, and meanings that people assign to social phenomena (Fuhse, 2022). In the context of this study, the politics of clannism and its impact on socio-economic development cannot be adequately understood through numerical measurement alone; rather, it requires a deep, contextual exploration of how the inhabitants of Mbeere North Sub-County experience, perceive, and make sense of the role of clan identity in shaping their daily social and economic realities. The interpretive paradigm is therefore the most appropriate epistemological foundation for this inquiry.

Consistent with the interpretive paradigm, the researcher adopted a qualitative research methodology. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to study and understand intricate social aspects in their normal settings and to comprehend the connotations that participants attach to their experiences (Fuhse, 2022). The sensitive and nuanced nature of clan politics in Mbeere North Sub-County. Where clan affiliations shape resource allocation, leadership, and social relations demand the kind of rich, contextually grounded data that only qualitative inquiry can generate.

Within the qualitative approach, the researcher employed two distinct but complementary research designs: descriptive and exploratory. These designs serve different analytical purposes and were applied to different, non-overlapping aspects of the inquiry, following Stanley's (2023) and Fuhse, (2022) distinction between description (documenting what exists) and exploration (investigating how and why a poorly understood relationship operates).

The descriptive design was applied strictly to establishing the factual, structural context of the study site prior to any analysis of clannism's effects. It was used to document verifiable, observable features of Mbeere North Sub-County. The morphology of the two root clans and their sub-clans, the demographic profile of the three wards, and the existing distribution of physical infrastructure and public resources. The descriptive component therefore answers factual "what is" questions; for example, how the clan structure is organized, and what the current state of infrastructure and resource distribution looks like without attempting to explain why these patterns exist or how they relate to political decision-making. This descriptive baseline was established primarily through document review, secondary data (for example; KNBS, and KEFRI records), and background information gathered during initial fieldwork scoping.

The exploratory design, by contrast, was applied specifically to the interview and FGD data and was used to investigate the relational and interpretive question of how and why clan identity influences resource allocation decisions, distribution of opportunities, and development outcomes. This relationship was established in Chapter 2, remains empirically underexamined in the Mbeere North context. Exploratory research is appropriate precisely where relationships between phenomena are not yet clearly established in the literature and where the researcher seeks to generate rather than test theory (Olawale et al., 2023). Whereas the descriptive design produced a static profile of the study context, the exploratory design produced the interpretive, meaning-focused findings, participants' explanations, perceptions, and accounts of mechanism, that directly address the study's three research objectives. This division of labor between the two designs ensured that background/contextual description and objective-driven analytical inquiry remained methodologically distinct, while together providing both the "map" and the "explanation" needed to address the research problem.

3.2 Study Site Description

The study was conducted in Mbeere North Sub-County, in Embu County, Kenya. This county lies to the south of Mount Kenya and is bordered by Kirinyaga, Kitui, Machakos, Nyeri, and Tharaka Nithi counties. Kenya's new 2010 Constitution, led to the establishment of Embu County and its five sub-counties that include Embu East, Embu North, Mbeere North, Embu West, and Mbeere South. This study focuses on Mbeere North Sub-County.

This sub-county is approximately 744.80 square kilometers wide, with a population of 200,000 people as recorded in the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics census of 2019 (KNBS, 2019). The sub-county lies between latitudes 0°20' and 0°50' South and longitudes 37°16' and 37°56' East and comprises three administrative wards: Evurore, Nthawa, and Muminji (KEFRI, 2026).

The Ambeere people constitute the majority ethnic community in the sub-county; other communities present include the Ameru, Aembu, Kamba, and Agikuyu. The principal economic activities are small-scale agriculture and livestock keeping. Mbeere North Sub-County is a dry land although some sections receive some rainfall. According to the Kenya Forestry Research Institute, the sub-county receives between 640mm and 1,495mm of rainfall annually depending on altitude, which gives rise to diverse ecological zones and varying economic activities across the wards (KEFRI, 2026).

The social formation of the community is defined by clan relationships, with approximately 50 sub-clans classified under two root clans: the Mururi (Thagana) clan, which is the majority clan with 30 sub-clans, and the Ndamata (Irumbi) clan, which is the minority clan with 20 sub-clans (see Appendix III). Since Kenya's first general elections in 1969, the politics of Mbeere North Sub-County have been organized largely along these two clan lines. The researcher selected this site because it presents a clearly defined case of clan-based political dynamics that have had demonstrable consequences for socio-economic development, thereby making it a rich and relevant site for qualitative inquiry.

3.3 Target Population

Willie (2024) refers to a study's target population as the whole group of people from which a smaller number will be picked and used to collect information from. For this study, the target population comprised the residents and key informants of Mbeere North Sub-County who possessed first-hand knowledge and lived experience of the politics of clannism and its effects on the development in the region. The target population included: (a) community elders who are knowledgeable about the social history, clan structures, and development challenges of the sub-county; (b) local politicians and elected leaders, including current and former Members of the County Assembly; (c) church leaders who serve the community in Mbeere North Sub-County; (d) development practitioners working with private organizations (NGOs) in the sub-county; (e) youth representatives from the three wards; and (f) ordinary community members from both the majority Mururi clan and the minority Ndamata clan. The diversity of these groups was important to ensure that the study collected different views on the research problem, as recommended for qualitative inquiries of this nature (Fuhse, 2022).

3.4 Sample and Sampling Techniques

Douglas (2022) defines a sampling design as a framework for selecting participants from the target population. In qualitative research, sampling is not just a statistical representation, but the identification of cases with valid and rich information that will enable the researcher answer research questions and collect useful data (Fuhse, 2022). Accordingly, this study employed two purposive sampling strategies: purposive and snowball.

Purposive sampling was the primary technique used to select participants with higher chances of offering relevant, detailed, and credible information. According to Gena and Jarra (2023), 15 to 35 individuals are usually selected because they have knowledge, experience or expertise in a specific field. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to target relevant participants because they know, play a role or are closer to the phenomena under investigation, rather than on random selection. Using this technique, the researcher purposively selected a planned sample of 30 key informants, comprising:

1. Ten (10) community elders with knowledge of the sub-county's clan structures, history, and development challenges;
2. Five (5) church leaders serving the community across clan affiliations;
3. Five (5) local politicians, including current and former elected leaders;
4. Five (5) development practitioners from non-governmental organizations operating in the sub-county; and
5. Five (5) youth representatives from across the three wards.

The planned sample of 30 key informants, supplemented by 15 FGD participants from the 30 key informants; therefore, the study focused on the available participants (total N = 45 planned; 40 achieved), and this number is justified and consistent with established methodological guidance for qualitative studies of this design. The researcher noted that beyond the USAID 1996 benchmark of 15–35 key informants cited above, this figure aligns with Gena and Jarra (2023) empirical finding that 12- 20 participants are adequate to enable a researcher arrive at a thematic saturation; hence, the current sample provides a substantial margin beyond which no new themes may emerge.

It is further supported by Sharma et al. (2024) concept of "information power," which holds that the sample size needed for a qualitative study depends not on a fixed numerical rule but on the specificity of the study aim, the strength of the theoretical framework, the quality of the researcher-participant dialogue, and the analytic strategy employed- all of which support a leaner, purposively selected sample where, as in this study, the aim is narrowly defined (clannism specifically, rather than ethnicity broadly), the theoretical framework is well specified (social capital, neo-patrimonialism, and political economy theories), and the analytic approach (thematic analysis) is well suited to smaller, information-rich samples.

Additionally, Fuhse (2022) recommend that qualitative case-oriented studies draw on multiple participant categories- as this study does across six respondent groups- to make the findings credible through within-sample triangulation, rather than relying on sample size alone.

The combination of 25 completed key informant interviews and 3 FGDs (15 participants) therefore reflects both established numerical benchmarks and the qualitative principle that adequacy is determined by depth, diversity of perspective, and saturation rather than by statistical power.

Snowball sampling was used as a complementary technique to recruit participants for the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Snowball sampling is particularly appropriate in qualitative studies involving sensitive topics where participants may be difficult to reach through conventional recruitment methods (Ting et al., 2025). Through this technique, initial participants identified by the researcher recommended other suitable community members to participate in the FGDs. A total of fifteen (15) community members- comprising both male and female participants from Evurore, Nthawa, and Muminji wards- were recruited through snowball sampling to participate in three FGDs of five participants each.

During the actual data collection phase, it was not possible to interview all 30 planned key informants. Specifically, three (3) local politicians and two (2) NGO staff members were unavailable on their scheduled dates and were unable to reschedule within the data collection window. As a result, 25 key informant interviews were ultimately conducted. The researcher acknowledges this as a limitation of the study and notes that the data collected from the 25 available participants, combined with three FGDs, nonetheless provided sufficient depth and breadth of information to address the research questions, consistent with the saturation-based justification outlined above. The participants who completed individual interviews comprised 16 males and nine (9) females, while ten (10) males and five (5) females participated in the FGDs.

3.5 Research Instruments

In keeping with the qualitative research design the researcher used semi-structured interview guides and focus group discussion (FGD) guides. These instruments were developed by the researcher on the basis of the research objectives- the supervisor reviewed and approved them before the data collection process started.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide to interact with and gather information from the participants. Fuhse (2022) defines an interview as a physical or virtual face-to-face

conversation between a researcher and a participant in which information is transferred from the participant to the interviewer.

Semi-structured interviews were the best approach in this study since it allowed the use of pre-determined questions as a guide while retaining the flexibility to probe, follow up on emerging themes, and explore unanticipated insights that participants raise (Fuhse, 2022). This flexibility is particularly important in a study on the sensitive topic of clan politics, where rigid question structures may inhibit open and candid responses.

The interview guide was organized around the study's objectives: the influence of clannism on resource allocation decisions; the influence of clannism on the distribution of socio-economic resources and opportunities; and the impact of clan-based politics on socio-economic development. The researcher used open-ended questions that enabled the collection of and reflective and descriptive feedback. The interview guide is reproduced in Appendix I.

3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion Guide

Shabina et al. (2024) describe the focus group discussion as a research technique in which individuals are assembled for a discussion and to present their lived experiences- the researcher may or may not moderate these discussions. FGDs were used in this study to complement the key informant interviews by capturing community-level perspectives, shared experiences, and group dynamics that individual interviews may not fully elicit.

The FGD guide was similarly structured around the three research objectives and contained open-ended prompts designed to facilitate group discussion (Shabina et al., 2024). Each FGD was moderated by the researcher with the assistance of a research assistant who took notes and observed non-verbal cues. The FGD guide is reproduced in Appendix II. Also, the researcher used audio recording devices, field notes journals, and research cards to record and organize data during fieldwork.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out following the approval of the research proposal by the relevant institutional and regulatory authorities. Specifically, the researcher obtained a research clearance

letter from the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Graduate Training at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, as well as a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) authorizing the conduct of this study in Mbeere North Sub-County. The researcher also sought and obtained permission from the Mbeere North Sub-County administrator before proceeding to the field.

Upon arriving in the field, the researcher contacted the selected participants through prior arrangements made by telephone and through research assistants already familiar with the community. Each participant was introduced to the purpose of the study and was informed of their voluntary participation and the confidentiality measures in place. All participants were required to submit a verbal informed consent before proceeding with the interview or FGD.

For individual key informant interviews, each participant was interviewed separately in a private and comfortable setting of their choosing. The researcher used the semi-structured interview guide to direct the conversation while allowing participants the freedom to elaborate on their experiences. Interviews were conducted in the English language and in the local Kimbeere language. Audio recordings were made with the participant's consent, supplemented by field notes taken by the researcher during and immediately after each interview.

For the FGDs, the researcher convened three separate group discussions one each in Evurore, Nthawa, and Muminji wards to ensure geographical representation across the sub-county. Each FGD comprised five participants in a maximum of 90 minutes. The researcher, assisted and a trained moderator used the FG guide to conduct the discussion, ensuring that all participants had an equal opportunity to contribute. Ground rules for respectful discussion, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were communicated to participants at the outset of each FGD. All three FGDs were audio-recorded and documented in field notes.

A total of 25 individual interviews and three FGDs (15 FGD participants) were successfully completed during the data collection period. Detailed demographic information about participants is maintained in the researcher's records but is not disclosed in this thesis in order to make participants anonymous, particularly given the sensitive nature of the topic.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in this study followed a thematic analysis approach, which is recognized as one of the most appropriate and widely used methods for analyzing qualitative data (Rosairo, 2023). In thematic analysis, the researcher systematically identifies, organizes, and interprets themes from the collected qualitative data, guided by the chosen research objectives and questions. Data analysis process was conducted in the following sequential stages, following the six-phase framework discussed by Rosairo (2023).

1. Transcription and Familiarization: All audio recordings were transcribed exactly how they were written or recorded. The researcher made sure to understand the data collected and its importance to the study.

2. Initial Coding: The researcher systematically coded the data by assigning short descriptive labels (codes) to meaningful units of text. Unique identifier codes were assigned to each participant's interview transcript to maintain confidentiality while enabling cross-referencing. Codes were organized on research cards for ease of sorting and comparison.

3. Generating Themes: Codes were collated and grouped according to their similarities and differences. The researcher identified broader patterns across the coded data and organized these into preliminary themes and sub-themes, guided by the three research objectives.

4. Reviewing Themes: The major themes were reviewed in comparison with the coded data and the full data set. This was done to ensure that they were an accurate representation of the data and were internally coherent and distinct from one another.

5. Defining and Naming Themes: The researcher defined and named the final themes and sub-themes to understand the core of the patterns they represented. These themes corresponded to the research objectives: the influence of clannism on resource allocation decisions; the influence of

clannism on the distribution of socio-economic resources; and the impact of clan-based politics on socio-economic development.

6. Reporting: The themes were written up in narrative form in Chapter 4, with supporting evidence drawn from participant quotations and integrated with the theoretical frameworks and literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

To demonstrate how raw data was systematically transformed into themes (illustration of the coding process), Table 3.1 presents a worked example of the coding process applied to data relevant to Objective One (the influence of clannism on resource allocation decisions).

Table 3.1: Illustrative Example of the Coding Process

Raw data excerpt	Initial code	Category	Theme
A participant described that development projects tend to be sited in areas associated with the leader's own sub-clan	Project siting favors leader's clan	Clan-influenced project allocation	Clan-based bias in resource allocation decisions
A participant explained that securing a place on a bursary or CDF committee often depended on being known to, or related to, the sitting leadership	Committee access tied to clan ties	Clan-influenced appointment to allocation committees	Clan-based bias in resource allocation decisions
A participant noted that members of the minority clan felt they had to "wait longer" for their turn on development priorities	Perceived delay for minority clan	Perceived exclusion of minority clan	Perceived inequity in allocation processes
A participant observed that some leaders consulted broadly across both clans before allocating funds	Cross-clan consultation by some leaders	Inclusive allocation practice	Variation in leadership practice

As shown in Table 3.1, individual excerpts were first assigned specific, data-close initial codes. All the related codes were then clustered into larger sorts (codes describing biased project siting and biased committee access were grouped under "clan-influenced project allocation" and "clan-influenced appointment to allocation committees" respectively), and categories sharing a common underlying pattern were finally consolidated into predominant themes (for example "clan-based bias in resource allocation decisions").

This same coding-to-theme process was systematically applied across all transcripts and FGD data for each of the three research objectives, ensuring that the final themes reported in Chapter 4 were traceable back to specific, coded excerpts of raw data- thereby strengthening the dependability and confirmability of the analysis (see Section 3.8).

Data were presented under thematic headings corresponding to each research objective, enabling a coherent alignment between the fieldwork findings and the study's systematic outline. The qualitative nature of the analysis is consistent with the explanatory pattern underpinning the study. Also, the CUEA postgraduate guidelines for qualitative research were followed and applied.

3.8 Trustworthiness of the Study

In qualitative research, the concept of trustworthiness replaces the quantitative criteria of reliability and validity as the standard for evaluating the rigor and quality of the study (Ahmed, 2024). This study employed five criteria of trustworthiness as proposed by Ahmed (2024) credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the sureness represented in the certainty of the results from the perspective of the study participants (Ahmed, 2024). The researcher enhanced credibility through several strategies. First, prolonged interactions with participants in their environments, including multiple visits to the field across the three wards; hence, ensured that the researcher developed a sufficient familiarization of the community, strengthen trust and boning between the researcher and participants. Second, triangulation was achieved by using two different data collection methods (interviews and FGDs) and by drawing data from multiple participant categories (elders, politicians, church leaders, development practitioners, and youth). Third, member checking was done to verify the participants' responses. Fourth, peer debriefing with the research supervisors at regular intervals helped to challenge emerging interpretations and reduce researcher bias (Yanti et al., 2025; Abidin et al., 2024).

3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of a study may be applicable to other settings (Ahmed, 2024). The researcher enhanced transferability by using a more solid, detailed description of the study situation, including the geographical, demographic, political, and social characteristics of Mbeere North Sub-County for the audience to evaluate how a similar approach can be used in other studies (Enworo, 2023). The use of purposive sampling, which ensured the picking of reliable and useful participants with the best knowledge of the research topic, further strengthened the potential transferability of the findings.

3.8.3 Dependability

In qualitative research, dependability is the same as reliability in quantitative research and refers to the consistency and repeatability of the research process (Ahmed, 2024). The researcher ensured dependability through the upkeep of an assessment path, a detailed account of all research verdicts, methodological choices, and data collection activities, which would allow another researcher to trace the logical pathway from raw data to final conclusions. Overlapping data collection methods (interviews and FGDs) and a dense methodological description in this chapter, including the illustrated coding process in Section 3.7, further support the dependability of the study (Abidin et al., 2024).

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the objectivity of the findings and ensures that the study's conclusions reflect the data and participants' voices rather than the researcher's personal biases (Ahmed, 2024). The researcher achieved confirmability by maintaining reflexive awareness of personal assumptions during the study, by recording how each conclusion was derived using the audit trail, and by seeking external checks through supervisory reviews at each stage of the study. Direct participant quotations in the findings chapter, together with the traceable coding-to-theme process illustrated in Table 3.1, provides direct evidence that the conclusions are derived from the data collected (Yanti et al., 2025).

3.8.5 Authenticity

Authenticity is how the research fairly and honestly represents the varying perspectives and realities among the study participants (Ahmed, 2024). The researcher promoted authenticity by ensuring that all participant groups, including members from both the majority Mururi clan and the minority Ndamata clan, as well as male and female participants, were free and comfortable to participate in the study. Prompting questions were used during interviews and FGDs to draw out full responses and to ensure that the voices of less dominant groups, particularly women and members of the minority clan, were adequately represented (Enworo, 2023).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The conduct of this study was guided by established ethical principles for social science research, consistent with the requirements of CUEA and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). The following ethical measures were observed throughout the study.

Research Authorization: The researcher obtained a research clearance letter from the CUEA Directorate of Research, Innovation and Graduate Training, and a NACOSTI research permit prior to commencing fieldwork. The Mbeere North Sub-County administration gave permission before the researcher conducted any field activities. All required authorizations were in place before the researcher engaged with any participants.

Informed Consent: Participants were briefed about the research purpose, scope, their roles and expectations- they were also notified of their freedom to leave the study if they wanted without fearing for any consequences. All participants offered verbal informed consent before the study interviews commenced. The choice of verbal rather than written consent was made to accommodate participants who may not be comfortable with written documentation, and in recognition of the sensitivity of the topic, where written records could cause concern among participants.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: The researcher assured all participants that the data collected from them would be confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Also, no personal identifying data such as names, specific locations of residence, or employment details was recorded in the data.

Participant responses were assigned unique identifier codes (for example; KI 125 for key informants; FGD-E, FGD-N, FGD-M for focus groups) to maintain anonymity throughout data recording, analysis, and reporting. This was particularly important given the sensitive and politically charged nature of clannism in the study area, where disclosure could expose participants to community-level victimization.

Privacy and Non-Maleficence: The researcher ensured that interviews and FGDs were conducted in private or semi-private settings where participants felt comfortable and free from observation by community members who were not part of the study. The researcher was alert to any signs of discomfort or distress among participants and would have terminated an interview had it become necessary to do so. No participant was coerced to answer questions they were uncomfortable with.

Data Storage and Use: The researcher ensured privacy and safety for all raw data (notes and recordings) and were not accessible to unauthorized individuals. All this data will be used, retained and stored in strict accordance with CUEA guidelines. The data will be discarded responsibly after the required period following the award of the degree.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter covered the research methodology used by the researcher. The study is anchored in the explanatory (constructivist) model and adopted a qualitative research approach using two methodologically distinct designs, descriptive, for establishing the factual and structural context of the study site, and exploratory, for investigating the underexamined relational and interpretive question of how clannism influences socio-economic development. The study was conducted in Mbeere North Sub-County, a deliberately selected site given its well-documented history of clan-based political dynamics. The target population comprised diverse community stakeholders with first-hand knowledge of clannism and socio-economic development, and data were collected from 25 key informants and three focus group discussions involving 15 participants, selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques and justified against established qualitative sample-size and saturation guidance.

The researcher used semi-structured interview guides and focus group discussion guides (FGD), supported by audio recordings and field notes. Thematic analysis, following Rosairo's (2023) six-phase framework and illustrated through a worked coding example (Table 3.1), was used to analyze the data systematically, guided by the three research objectives of the study. The dependability of the study was addressed through the five criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity as proposed by Ahmed (2024). The study was conducted in adherence to all applicable ethical requirements, including NACOSTI research authorization and the maintenance of participant confidentiality throughout. Chapter 4 presents the findings generated through the methodology described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

The data gathered in the field in Mbeere North Sub-County, Embu County is presented, analyzed and discussed in this chapter. The findings are presented thematically under the three objectives of the study, which are: (i) the effect of clannism on resource allocation decision, (ii) the effect of clannism on distribution of socio-economic resources and opportunities, and (iii) the impact of clan based politics on socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County. For every objective emergent themes were identified from qualitative data, then presented with the data from the participant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), and then interpreted with the theoretical framework and literature studied in Chapter 2. In addition to summarising the content of what participants said, the chapter also questions their contribution to the development cycles that participants would have identified and the extent to which they have been found elsewhere in the literature.

Data were gathered from 25 key informant interviews and three focus group discussions which had a total of 15 people, making 40 participants who were in totality. The interviews were held with the community elders, Church leaders, local politicians, development practitioners (NGO staff), and youth representatives. The FGDs were conducted in Mbeere North Sub-County, in the three wards of Evurore, Nthawa and Muminji to ensure geographical and representation of the three clans. Quotations from the participants are reported in block-quote, which is used to "quote" them without paraphrasing as this might distill the meaning. In order to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the subjects, each person is only referred to by his or her assigned code, as indicated in the key below.

4.1 Participant Profile

The researcher wanted to find out their location, gender and clan of the participants. Demographic data of the subjects are presented in table 4.1. All names have been anonymized as a result of the ethical commitments that were made to the participants during data collection.

Table 4.1 Demographic Information of Participants

Code	Category	Ward / Location	Sex	Clan Affiliation	Method
KI 1	Community Elder	Nthawa	M	Mururi	Interview
KI 2	Community Elder	Nthawa	M	Mururi	Interview
KI 3	Community Elder	Muminji	M	Ndamata	Interview
KI 4	Community Elder	Evurore	M	Mururi	Interview
KI 5	Former MCA	Evurore	M	Mururi	Interview
KI 6	Community Elder	Muminji	F	Ndamata	Interview
KI 7	Community Elder	Nthawa	M	Mururi	Interview
KI 8	Community Elder	Muminji	M	Ndamata	Interview
KI 9	Community Elder	Evurore	M	Mururi	Interview
KI 10	Community Elder	Nthawa	M	Mururi	Interview
KI 11	Church Leader	Nthawa	M	Mururi	Interview
KI 12	Church Leader	Muminji	F	Ndamata	Interview
KI 13	Church Leader	Evurore	M	Mururi	Interview
KI 14	Parish Priest	Nthawa	M	Non-Mbeere	Interview
KI 15	Church Leader	Muminji	F	Ndamata	Interview
KI 16	Former MCA	Muminji	F	Mururi (married Ndamata)	Interview
KI 17	Youth Representative	Evurore	M	Mururi	Interview
KI 18	Youth Representative	Nthawa	M	Mururi	Interview
KI 19	Youth Representative	Muminji	M	Ndamata	Interview
KI 20	Youth Representative	Evurore	F	Mururi	Interview
KI 21	Youth Representative	Nthawa	F	Mururi	Interview

Code	Category	Ward / Location	Sex	Clan Affiliation	Method
KI 22	NGO Practitioner	Mbeere North	M	Non-Mbeere	Interview
KI 23	Community Elder	Muminji	F	Ndamata	Interview
KI 24	NGO Practitioner	Evurore	F	Mururi	Interview
KI 25	NGO Practitioner:	Evurore	F	Mururi	Interview
FGD-E	Focus Group	Evurore Ward	M- 3 F- 2	Mixed	FGD
FGD-N	Focus Group	Nthawa Ward	M-3 F-1	Mixed	FGD
FGD-M	Focus Group	Muminji Ward	M- 4 f- 2	Mixed	FGD

Source*: Researcher's Field Data (2025).*

The results presented in the following chapters should be interpreted with some degree of certainty because of the reasons outlined in the following analysis of Table 4.1. There was also a fairly even representation of the three wards and importantly the data was not skewed by the majority Mururi clan alone; with nine of the 25 key informants identifying as Ndamata, the minority clan had a genuine voice in this data. The deliberate inclusion of two participants not affiliated to the two clans (the parish priest and the NGO practitioner) was meant to be outside the two-clan structure altogether and thus allow them to describe what they saw without being tempted by their own clan interest to highlight it; as the findings below show, their descriptions do not greatly differ from those of the two clans and so the picture they paint is also creditable. The gender split (14 male, 11 female across individual interviews) also played a direct role in Objective Two because it allowed for the study to be structurally positioned to capture women's perspectives on their own marginalization, rather than simply have men report on women's marginalization second-hand. The patterns discussed below are seen as shared experiences of the community as a whole, and not as the voice of a single vocal group, because they are, at once, distributed across a wide variety of roles and genders, and through a variety of wards and clans.

4.2 Influence of Clannism on Resource Allocation Decisions in Mbeere North Sub-County

The study aimed at gaining an understanding of the influence of clannism on resource allocation decision in Mbeere North Sub County. The four predominant themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview and FGD data are: (i) unequal allocation of public funds based on clan; (ii) the exclusion of minority clans from decision-making; (iii) reward systems based on clan; and (iv) clan dominance in the leadership of institutional bodies. The themes will be introduced and discussed in the following.

Theme 1: Unfair Distribution of Public Resources Along Clan Lines

The interviewees shared those were the public resources which are not equally shared in Mbeere North Sub-County, where majority clans dominated wards acquire more than the other wards. This imbalance was recognized by the participants from all three wards including some of the majority clan Mururi. One youth contributor from Muminji Ward painted a picture of this imbalance that was more than just vivid:

> In the ward's planning, it is obvious that Nthawa and Evurore wards are more developed than Muminji Ward. The reason is that Muminji Ward is primarily inhabited by minority group, the Ndamata clan. The members of parliament had always been elected from these two wards and you can see that there is a tarmac road from Embu to Kanyuambora, straight to Ishiara to cover the Evurore Ward. There is also a tarmac road extending from Embu to Siakago which was constructed when the member of parliament was from Nthawa Ward. I come from Muminji Ward, members of parliament don't come from Muminji ward since the beginning of the world. This is a clear indication that resources are not allocated on the basis of a community need and there is no fairness in it. (Located in KI 19, Youth, Muminji Ward).

Moreover, in an FGD conducted in ward Evurore, the participants referred to ‘historical imbalance of allocation of public resources'. That, apart from the clan, the County government has been unfair as well in distributing the resources. They said that they felt other constituencies in Embu County had more resources than Mbeere North. Raising the question of always being left out in terms of

resource allocation, other parts of Embu County are more privileged than us, devolution has given them an opportunity to perpetuate their historical dominance over us (Member of FGD).

This story is an example of the real-world, infrastructure impacts of clan-based resource allocation. Association of the tarmac roads and the constituencies of sitting MPs reveals an inequitable pattern, rather than a coincidence. One FGD participant commented that the allocation of bursaries is also done in a clan-based manner: “Bursaries are allocated secretly, usually to relatives of the politicians and clan-mates, who do not necessarily merit it; it's sufficient if you're from the clan; you get the bursary.” (FGD-M, Woman, Muminji Ward)

Why is this trend so universal, rather than being found in only one sector, for these types of resources roads, and bursaries and water points? The conclusion that seems most likely to emerge from the data is that affiliation to clans is not a policy bias per se but a general operating strategy that political leaders use as a default when they have choices about how to allocate public invest. The same group of clan-ally predatory political actor’s controls each of these sub-sectors (road construction, allocation of bursaries, and water infrastructure); it is the same incentive, reward the base that voted you in to power, that gets multiplied throughout sub-sectors which, otherwise, have nothing administrative in common. This is what makes the Mbeere North case different from explanations of resource scarcity that are prevalent in the broader development literature; in this instance, the issue isn't just that resources are scarce, but that the use of the resources is in the hands of people who are accountable to the clan and have to please a clan constituency.

These results are consistent with the social capital theory which holds that social capital, defined as the resources that accrue from social networks, is more likely to accrue to members of dominant networks in a fragmented network than to other people. Case study in Mbeere North Sub-County shows that the social capital in Mururi clan in the form of relationship with elected political leaders is the key factor in accessing resources and not objective assessment of needs.

In Mbeere North, however, no parallel attempt is being made to break up clan-based allocation, the formal devolved system, exists side by side with clan logic, and is not challenged by it, and this is not clearly differentiated from a policy of institutional collapse in the existing literature.

Theme 2: Marginalization of Minority Clans from Decision-Making

Out of the 25 interviewees, and all three FGDs, all minorities, especially the Ndamata, were reported to be systematically excluded from meaningful participation in decision making processes related to resource allocation in the area. This exclusion is at various levels: formal political structures, community governance, institutional committees and even conflict resolution processes.

Participants highlighted that those with community authority such as assistant chiefs, Nyumba kumi leaders, school board members, women's group leaders and church committee members are usually from the dominant clan. In an FGD with an elder from Nthawa Ward, an example of this exclusion was cited, in which he said that no one from their side sat on the bursary committee. (FGD-N, Elder, Nthawa)

One particularly revealing testimony was from an old man from Muminji Ward saying that even the civil service recruitment system is rigged against the minority clan:

> If one of the chiefs or assistant chiefs becomes vacant an advert is secretly placed with a candidate from the major clan so that the minority clan will not have a candidate that may outshine the selected candidate in areas where the community is not directly involved with the selection of the chiefs or assistant chiefs. (KI 2, Elder, Nthawa).

In the very personal terms of a looked down upon life, a community elder from Muminji Ward described his experience of exclusion:

> It's like living in an enemy's house if you're from the minority clan. Important news is something that gets to us after the events. A bias towards obscuring information from the minority clans exists. This is given to us, as if we are not part of them, as we are few. Muminji ward is composed of 23 villages: (KI 23, Elder, Muminji Ward).

The second theme is important because it adds to the first: It was Theme 1 which demonstrated unequal outcomes, but Theme 2 elucidates how that unequal outcome was achieved. Being excluded from a committee is not an automatic consequence of inequalities in resources. It is the procedures of allocating bursaries that enable a group to have an unequal share, as they have no

chance to challenge the allocation of bursaries if they have no seat at the bursary committee. Beyond its emotional resonance, KI 23 betokens exclusion of the Ndamata in Mbeere North as a process of change of information and quiet gatekeeping, without any formal rule that stops the Ndamata from participating. This distinction is important because it would be not much more visible to an audit of the formal membership rules of committees or the policy of the government to exclude the exclusion documented here. It is a reality that exists outside of the written word and is the area where an interview-based, qualitative design can be used to uncover it and a quantitative or purely document-based design would probably not.

The results are in line with the neo-patrimonialism theory, which is presented in the work of Hout (2024). Neo-patrimonialism provides an explanation of the functioning of power in post-colonial African countries, which depends on the establishment of personal loyalty networks instead of rational legal ones, and which allocates resources to those who are politically loyal as private patronage. The situation in Mbeere North Sub-County is not ethnic, but rather operates within the community along clan lines and is an intra-community form of the neo-patrimonial dynamic that is described in the wider literature. This is an important shift from most of the neo-patrimonialism scholarship, which generally operates at the national state/elite level (Yulianti, 2026); the data from Mbeere North seem to demonstrate the same argument at a lower level of socio-political analysis (sub-county electorate).

Theme 3: Political Patronage and Clan-Based Reward Systems

The study participants across all categories, elders, youth, politicians, and development practitioners described a well-understood transactional relationship between elected leaders and clan elders. Clan elders mobilize votes during election campaigns; in return, elected officials reward them with employment opportunities, bursaries, development projects, and access to government programs. This cycle of political patronage is openly acknowledged by participants as the operating pattern in resource distribution in the sub-county. This was well put by a former Member of the County Assembly: "It is a game; you campaign through clan elders; once elected you return favours. (KI 5, Former MCA, Evurore)

This is a transactional relationship that has an impact on development equity. Political debt political leaders owe allegiance to clan elders and clansmen, and political decisions, such as the location of development projects are made accordingly. They all mentioned the same trend the same alignments occur each electoral cycle and the communities who are not a part of the dominant clan's network are structurally disadvantaged no matter who is in office.

The new line is not an opinion expressed by an outside observer on how politics in Washington goes, it's a former official talking from the inside about patronage as a fact of life game, rather than a dirty secret or one that is not played out. This distinction is important for interpretation: it implies that clan award is not an aberration from politics as it should be in Mbeere North, but rather is a way of politics as it is there, thus accounting for the absence of any of the participants referring to the patronage as scandalous but only as unfair in its outcomes.

This is supported by the theoretical background offered by political economy theory, according to which the economic impact in developing environments is influenced by political decisions, which reflect the current power system (Manioudis and Meramveliotakis 2022). In Mbeere North Sub-County, the political power system is organised based on clan size and electoral calculations, such that political economy of resource distribution is not based on development priorities, but on the need to fulfil clan-based political obligations. The same would apply to the case of Muminji Ward, where financial underdevelopment is also driven by structural conditions of political instability and patronage systems; however, Ayhan et al. (2023) original argument focused on financial underdevelopment at the national level where the scope of analysis in relation to financial systems is much larger than at the sub-county level as in Muminji Ward, so the extent to which political instability and patronage systems can drive financial backwardness at this smaller scale remains an open question.

Theme 4: Clan Dominance in Institutional Leadership Appointments

Participants noted that the rationale of the clan affiliation is not confined to elected political roles but also applies to all roles of institutional power at the sub-county level, such as being a member of the school board, CDF committee and leadership of the community based organization.

One thing that was found was that merit and qualification are not the criteria when it comes to the number of people who get these positions, rather it is all based on clan identity. The researcher observed that community members themselves acknowledged this: "The leaders elected for these positions are not qualified for the position, but members of the community in Mbeere North chose clan loyalty over leadership potential." (KI 2, Elder, Nthawa)

The discovery will have significant development implications. Where leadership and governance is based on clan membership and not on merit, its quality, service delivery and development programming is inevitably undermined. What's interesting about this is that KI 2's comment places some of the blame on the “ordinary voters” who chose clan loyalty over competence, rather than elites. This makes it difficult to read a purely "top down" version of clannism a political phenomenon imposed on a community by self-serving leaders – and suggests instead a more "circular" model where voters are more inclined to vote for a clan representative who best fits their preference for clan representation than to appoint one who is best suited for actual competence; in fact, the former is more likely to be successful by virtue of the latter. The study by Elmi et al (2024) of the North Eastern region of Kenya confirmed the same – clannism resultantly in poor leadership and failure to deliver services – and so it is not a unique pattern of North Eastern Kenya but of all of Kenya, specifically in the context of a clan-based political system where clan arithmetic takes the place of competitive, policy-based appointments.

The four themes emerging out of Objective One illustrate the systemic, structural nature of clannism in Mbeere North Sub-County, and how this influences all aspects of public resource allocation, from construction of infrastructure through to allocation of bursaries to public institutions. The four themes are also presented sequentially, and as a group, show a logical progression beyond four unrelated problems – unequal outcomes (Theme 1) are created by exclusion from decision-making (Theme 2), which is upheld by a patronage relationship between leaders and clan elders (Theme 3), which then permeates all appointed institutional roles, not just elected ones (Theme 4). The findings provide the validation and extension of existing literature which documents the dynamics that play out at the ethnic level in Kenya's wider development discourse (Magero, 2024; Nyandemo, 2022) at the intra-community level with the mechanism of

the clan identity as a finer level of identity-based exclusion than what has been discussed in most of the Kenyan literature.

4.3 Influence of Clannism on the Distribution of Socio-Economic Resources and Opportunities in Mbeere North Sub-County

The second aim of the study was to find out the effect of the clannism on socio-economic resources distribution and opportunities in Mbeere North Sub-County. The data was analyzed and four main themes emerged; (i) issues of clan-based land ownership and historical injustices; (ii) inequitable access to infrastructure and public services; (iii) lack of women's participation in socio-economic processes; and (iv) social divisions and community fragmentation due to resource inequality.

Theme 1: Clan-Based Land Ownership and Historical Injustices

Clan-based control of land, as a fundamental resource, was mentioned by all the interviewees and referred to as a legacy of history and unequal socio-economic relations today. The bulk of the Mururi people had more land to claim, and more fertile land, than the minority Ndamata people, due to their larger numbers in the population. Attendees noted that although the national land tenure system has been established, the underlying inequalities of land tenure were not redressed and this legacy of dispossession is ongoing and is a source of interclan grievance.

Participants also commented that even the use of dispute resolution mechanisms with regard to land are biased towards clan. Disagreements among clan members are likely to be more successful if there are more clan members on the mediation committee. “An elder in the Ward of Evurore explained that:

> When there is a land dispute between two members from different clans, members of the Mururi and Ndamata clans, the one having more clan members as mediators will be awarded the judgment positively. One party is deprived of an opportunity to obtain a fair judgment when it has a less representative person at the mediation table. (KI 4, Elder, Evurore)

But it is important for the theme because it shows how clan-based inequalities can persist, as they have in this instance, despite political changes such as awarding bursaries and building roads which are only temporary and renewable on an annual basis. This is a significant consideration when interpreting the nature of clannism in Mbeere North as it indicates that this is not entirely a product of the current political choices of policy makers, but also a product of the community's assets, which cannot be engaged by the ordinary skills of service providers.

Despite an ideal future leadership allocating roads, water points and bursaries fairly, what is outlined here is the underlying land inequality, which implies that land justice mechanisms, which are essential for the past are not solved by a fairer allocation, but by the treatment of the economic consequences of clannism.

The observations correspond with the framework of neo-patrimonialism of De Sousa and Cuadrado (2023) and Yulianti (2026), which shows that personal and group relationships with those in positions of power are key factors in determining access to justice and resources in neo-patrimonial systems. Land, as the most important productive asset in a largely agrarian economy, is therefore a key place where inequality is perpetuated and reproduced across generations, via the clan.

Theme 2: Inequitable Distribution of Infrastructure and Public Services

In all the three wards and all the participant categories participants provided detailed reports of significant developmental differences between the three wards of Mbeere North Sub-County. Historically, the wards of Evurore and Nthawa have been electing Members of Parliament, with these wards being described as well-served in terms of roads, healthcare facilities, water supply, electricity and schools, whereas the Muminji ward, dominated by the minority Ndamata clan, has been described as consistently underserved. These differences were not seen as random or as a result of the actions of chance, but instead were viewed as being directly caused by the process of clan-based political decision making. One of the youth participants from Nthawa Ward described the situation of lack of healthcare access due to infrastructure inequality with great picturesque detail:

> The distribution of the development projects in this sub-county is very uneven. There are areas so remote that a stranger to the area could not imagine that there are parts of those areas which are part and parcel of the same sub-county, Mbeere North, under the same leadership. The sub-county has only two district hospitals; Ishiara and Siakago that are both in the most developed wards. Both of these wards are equipped with tarmac roads and forms of transport. Muminji Ward has no means of transport thanks to the poor rough roads. The only means of transport here is motorbikes. Explain to me, like a small child, how a pregnant woman due for delivery gets to these hospitals? This is a blind spot for the leaders they are totally oblivious to it due to their clan blindness. (KI 19, Youth, Nthawa)

The same was demonstrated at the micro-level in the case of the earth dam project in the village of Karambari. Participants reported that an earth dam was constructed by the sitting MCA for his sub-location, Muminji, where access to water is relatively good and there no farmers keeping animals while water-scarce sub-locations with pastoralists, Kerie and Nguthi, were not served in a similar manner. In the ward, a second earth dam was being constructed in Evurore ward, for the purpose of irrigating crops of miraa and mainly for the benefit of the members of that clan in the area's MCA.

The Karambari example of the earth dam is worth a special mention as it shows that misallocation is still going on even within one ward by people who are of the same minority-clan. This is analytically significant as it demonstrates that clannism in Mbeere North is not merely a majority versus minority-clan struggle, but is reproduced at various levels down to sub-location where an individual leader has discretion over a resource. Whereas, "arguably the greatest objective need" for water infrastructure is being overruled by being the most politically close to the decision maker, and that is the case for sub-locations with farmers keeping animals that are not the majority within a clan.

These results are consistent with Mukanda's (2025) conclusion that resource distribution becomes not only unequal, but inequitable, when it systematically excludes groups from accessing political and economic avenues where they could ameliorate their situation. As shown in the data from Mbeere North Sub-County, this threshold has been breached as the access to socio-economic resources is not a result of random neglect but deliberate prioritization of socio-economic resources

by clans. This is similar to what was observed in Kajiado County by Muthama and Gal (2025) who found that clannism was stronger in the rural areas where one clan's political dominance equates with access to public goods being concentrated in a single area, the Mbeere North data corroborate this rural trend and escalate it, to the sub-location level even within an ostensibly "disadvantaged" ward.

Theme 3: Exclusion of Women from Socio-Economic Processes

The generalized marginalization of women in both the decision-making processes at the center of resource allocation in Mbeere North Sub-County and in the everyday functioning of the community reported with frequent uniformity by all the participants in the interviews, and across all three FGDs was the finding.

This exclusion is compounded by the compound nature of the clan identities and genders as women from politically less dominant clans are doubly marginalized as both women and members of the minority clan.

The participants described the traditional decision-making system as male-dominated, hierarchical and with respect to clan hierarchy, exercised by male clan elders. Women are excluded from decision-making mechanisms that determines priorities for development, project sites and allocation of resources on a regular basis. Women lack agency in socio-economic decision-making and this has serious implications for their participation in development issues that directly impact their lives, including access to maternal health services, water, sanitation and girls' education, as they are not present at forums where these decisions are made.One community member from the Evurore Ward described the following experience with trying to break this silence:

> I once placed my hand up in a water project meeting and stated that women should be included in the meetings because it is women who are affected by having to go miles to fetch water from the far end of our house. I was told to sit down and my husband later told me that, if I continued to open my mouth in such meetings, the elders would administer an oath of loyalty to me for fear that with my character, I may tell the secrets of the Ndamata clan to my Mururi clan. My husband warned me never to talk again in a meeting where

there were clan elders. I was never at those development meetings again. (KI 24, Woman, Evurore)

This account reveals two reinforcing mechanisms of exclusion: the exclusion of women's voices in the patriarchal suppression of their participation, and the use of clan norms of secrecy that silence cross-clan voices. Married across clan lines, as this participant was, are women who must deal with a second wall of suspicion and exclusion. But, as in many other instances in the study, gender exclusion and exclusion on the basis of clan, are not simply additive in KI 24; they are mutually reinforcing: KI 24 was not silenced because of her gender alone, nor because of her cross-clan marriage alone, but because of her cross-clan position making her a particular kind of threat, a potential leak of "clan secrets" which one would argue a clan insider raising the same point would not have threatened in the same way. This is something that neither the literature on gender exclusion nor the literature on clan politics would foresee, if these two strands were analyzed separately.

The socio-economic effects of women's marginalisation is profound. In a sub-county where most of the males have left for urban centers in order to seek jobs, most of the rural people are now women. This means their exclusion from participation in decisions on resource allocation is not just a matter of gender parity, but it is also a failure of rational development; the community is systematically leaving out the group to benefit from many of the resources it is allocating and to make the best use of those resources. This study's data supports the findings of Muthama and Gal (2025) and Elmi et al. (2024) that clanism and gender exclusion have kept the most vulnerable women and girls perpetually poor.

Theme 4: Social Divisions, Mistrust, and Community Fragmentation

Participants stated that socio-economic inequalities were cited as one of the major factors contributing to social division, inter-clan animosity and mistrust in Mbeere North Sub-County. Participants spoke of a community where even non-political interactions are mediated by clan allegiance and information, opportunity and goodwill are distributed through clan lines. A resident of Muminji Ward said with lightness and simplicity that he could sense the social fabric of this division:

> At times, when you go on a meeting, you are so uncomfortable that you will never get a chance to give an opinion. The most annoying part is when those that were supposed to speak start off with "watoria tugire" as we agreed, so that if they start, you know there was something they agreed on, and you are not part of that earlier discussion. This makes it very difficult to mobilize as a village or community or as a ward. (Community Member, Muminji).

The chairperson of a women group in Evurore Ward explained the overall social context that these dynamics bring:

> There is a degree of hesitation to join a community group that is dominated by another community in this region. The outsider is also carefully scrutinized to determine which clan he or she appears to be backing, and is regarded with suspicion or is backed and welcomed as part of a community project as the community views him/her. In general, it means that you can't go without a clan alignment without facing problems. It's not about our personal preference, it’s our lifestyle. (KI 25 Evurori Ward)

A member of the community from Muminji Ward gave a very personal account to make a point about the clan divisions that creep into even the most human of acts:

> I requested a very close family friend from Siakago to house my son during his studies and would provide foodstuffs from my farm and pay the school fees. After 2 months, I went to see him and when I arrived I got the shock of my life, without informing me, my son was taken from that family. I later found out the family had discovered that my son was from Mururi clan and that the family was Ndamata, keeping him was viewed as being on their rivals' side. I still haven't been able to heal from the pain. (KI 16, Woman, Muminji Ward)

It is worth considering KI 16 because it is a different scale from the other data in this theme: the “watoria tugire” example is of exclusion at a public meeting, and KI 25 is about caution in joining community groups, but KI 16 is about clan calculus at a private meeting between family friends, and about a child, without any political stakes whatsoever. The evolution from formal meetings to community associations to private domestic interactions, which this thesis documents, is what allows the study to make a leap from the political to what can be called a social operating system

that regulates the interaction between citizens, without any consideration of resource allocation or political competition whatsoever.

The accounts together show that clannism is not just a political elite phenomenon, but also is structurally embedded in everyday social life in Mbeere North Sub-County, resulting in structurally embedded inequality traps as described by Egede et al. (2024) where in-equitable arrangements are reproduced through internalized social norms. In Central and Eastern Europe, Abate (2022) also found that political instability and social disintegration are causally linked to economic underdevelopment, a suggestion that is in line with the social disintegration of community members in Mbeere North Sub-County, where they are unable to bring about collective action across clan lines for development (Wanjiru & Gichuki, 2021). Mbeere North's situation is also interesting in that the social fragmentation is not a result of a collapse of the national political system; it is possible to have a functioning devolved government and for this kind of social fragmentation to develop and remain stable.

4.4 Impact of Clan-Based Politics on Socio-Economic Development in Mbeere North Sub-County

The study aimed to look at the effects of clan politics on socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County was the third objective. The data was analyzed thematically, revealing four themes: (i) positive aspects of clan solidarity; (ii) clan voting and political hegemony; (iii) incompetence of leaders and failure of governance due to clan elections; and (iv) social disintegration and low productivity in development due to clan elections.

Theme 1: Positive Dimensions of Clan Solidarity

One key discovery and one which sets this study from more conflict-centred perspectives on clannism apart is that clannism was not seen as a negative force by everyone. Many participants stressed that clan membership offers a social safety net and a means of collective self-help and that in the past clans have fulfilled important welfare functions in the community through their sense of identity and belonging. An older member of the Nthawa Ward commented on the hand-on-hand tangible economic advantages that clan solidarity has brought to the common people of the community:

> I can't condemn clannism; it is not a bad thing. If it didn't exist, there wouldn't be any families, we wouldn't be living as one. I remember with gratitude that it is through their harambees that my kids were educated, and it is my clan. The clan came up with a plan for my son to work. I only paid Ksh 5000 for my son to be trained and he found work at a textile mill. It was our former Member of the Parliament who arranged to get him and other youths of the clan to work. (KI 1, Elder, Nthawa)

Participants also discussed the importance of clan networks in the support of members when they fall sick, are impoverished, or are widowed, as well as in arranging a dowry, in helping to resolve conflicts before they are escalated to formal court systems, and in fundraising for education through the use of harambees. These functions are in accordance with the ones stated by Yazew and Kassa (2024). Define social capital as a dense network of trust, reciprocity and cooperation among people in the same social group that allows them to cooperate for mutual benefit.

This theme's importance is that it provides an understanding of the processes by which clannism can be a mechanism of harm or a resource-mobilization structure on different scales and for different purposes. KI 1's account is of the same mechanism, when a Member of Parliament (MP) works through networks of clans to get young people into jobs, jobs which are stated in Theme 3 of Objective One (Political patronage) as a driver of inequity. It is not the mechanism per se that distinguishes the two but the frame of comparison: solidarity and mutual aid from the point of view of a member of the clan; patronage and exclusion from the point of view of a youth member of the Ndamata clan who was not placed. This implies that the moral valence of clannism is not inherent, but is reflected by the identity of the people within and outside the boundary at a particular time, which the Kenyan literature on clannism (Elmi et al., 2024; Muthama & Gal, 2025) seldom mentions.

One thing that the participants were consistently aware of, however, was that the positive values of clan solidarity are there, but the negative attributes of clan identity being used for political ends prevail in the current political climate. Real solidarity is something that can be used for good inside the Clan, but for ill against those outside. Neo-patrimonial systems are not always beneficial for the members of the favored group, as Hout (2024) noted, but the political elite receives the material

benefits; the rest of the clan members is mobilized in an instrumental way, and they may get little back but only symbolic recognition.

Theme 2: Clan-Based Voting and Political Hegemony

Participants referred to an electoral context where the exercise of voting in the Mbeere North Sub-County is more of a census of the numerical strength of a clan, rather than as a choice of policy. The Mururi clan who dominate the majority of the wards of Evurore and Nthawa consistently emerges with a winning candidate for parliamentary and ward representative positions, while the Ndamata clan in Muminji Ward is structurally incapable of reproducing a winning candidate for the constituency-level position. A parish priest, who was not part of the clan, described vividly the ethno-political organization of the clans even in the area of church governance:

> During the election of the church pastoral council, the church was too small to accommodate people during the election day, and we had to celebrate mass outside, the church. I was surprised of the outcome of the election. Strangers unknown to me were elected. I didn't know some of the people because they live and work in Nairobi and not really my parishioners. Later I learned that it was clannism that was at work: even the big crowds of the faithful were not on hand after the elections. Catholics were not alone in making electoral choices either but the non-Catholic was not the only one making electoral decisions. A parish priest, (KI 4, Parish Priest, Nthawa)

The reasons behind clan voting were described by the participants as a combination of factors other than material interests. Participants spoke of a "feel good" factor and that when someone within one's clan, or tribe, is in control, it can symbolically benefit the clan, even if the material benefits are not realized. Several participants also cited fear as a motivation, that is, voters vote for their own clan candidate not because they believe that they will gain themselves, but because they see that a rival clan might be gaining power.

The absence of clan involvement in the analytic sphere is significant precisely because it is not politic but religious, as clan mobilization was present even in attendance at church, attracting non-Catholics specially to vote, and also because the spread of clan organization is not limited to formal political institutions, but extends to any structure that can mobilize bodies on election day. The

motivations mentioned by participants, whether it was ‘feel good’ or fear based, also helps in understanding a pattern which a purely material or transactional theory of patronage cannot explain: If it was only about the expected personal gain, then those who had not personally received a job or a bursary from clan connections would not have had much reason to continue voting along clan lines. The fact that they do indicates that symbolic representations and defensive fears of the other clans' dominance are having real motivational effects in addition to material reward.

It mirrors the results of Zidaru (2024) in the Gusii area of south-west Kenya, where the same “tyranny of numbers” is evident, to the extent that its clans with higher numbers dominate political space during successive election cycles, irrespective of any clan's political representation. In Mbeere North Sub-County, clan mathematics not political competition has a greater influence on the predictability of elections, thereby negating the accountability incentive that the exercise of democratic elections is meant to provide.

As Harris found in Central Asia, the system of free elections in these clan-dominated political systems is extremely difficult to liberate, because the system of free elections becomes a means of clan reproduction, not a means of democratic representation.

Theme 3: Leadership Incompetence and Governance Failure

Consistent among the results that participants identified as a result of clan-based voting was the selection of leaders that may not be qualified for office. The requirement for activists to mobilize a clan to secure victory means that the expectations of the networks can be against the best interests of their leaders in governing responsibly, creating a perverse incentive for leaders to seek the approval of their clan networks. Participants reported leaders who were not able to work effectively in office as the norms of their clan in relation to employment, distribution of projects and other specific benefits were always in collision with the norms of the office. So what happens is that five years go by and there are no noticeable gains in development and the community underdevelopment cycle continues, the participants noted.

The theme here explains why, despite the existence of clan-based voting (Theme 2), it does not simply result in unequal but good governance, but rather in a problem which participants describe: the problem of the leadership that is captured by a duty to clan members to the detriment of their

duty to effectively govern their constituencies. That is, the leadership deficits argued here are not necessarily the fault of any one individual, or even any one individual's character or ability, but rather a foreseeable consequence of the electoral logic that pays attention to clan loyalty rather than policy competence when it comes to the choosing.

This is the exact scenario that Muthama and Gal (2025) observed in Kajiado where institutional leaders such as government officials and school principals are appointed by clan, resulting in poor service delivery which has a greater impact on women and minority clans. This phenomenon can be explained within a theoretical framework provided by Manioudis and Meramveliotakis (2022): the absence of effective governance in the presence of a closed patronage network leads to the lack of production of public goods that are essential for sustainable, inclusive economic growth.

Theme 4: Social Fragmentation and Loss of Development Productivity

There was a general sense of distrust and social division across the clans, which has hindered collective action and community co-operation for development. Subsequent, a failure to coordinate the response in times of development challenge, such as water scarcity, poorly designed roads, and limited access to health services, and ignoring to organize across clans line qualifies as a deep development loss of productivity in a semi-arid area.

A very interesting case in point was when the participants spoke of the reaction of the community to a national government free technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programme for the youth of Mbeere North Sub-County in 2023. Although the programme was offered to everyone, the clan elders of the minority community discouraged the younger members to register for the programme saying that it was a ploy to exploit cheap labour from that area. Therefore, many young people from Muminji Ward could not utilize the opportunity:

A few of the clan elders advised the young people of the minority clans against registration, saying they thought that the information was supposed to be used to recruit the young people for financial exploitation and cheap labour by the local leaders. (FGD-M, Muminji Ward). This account is particularly important because it indicates that the harm done by the clannish people is not confined to the inequitable actions of the dominant clan, but is also carried out by defensive responses of the minority clan in a political context where they have been excluded and are perpetually

suspicious of information and opportunity that comes from beyond their clan network. This is in effect a vicious cycle: years of objective one's documentation of real exclusion in Theme 2 have led to a rational defensive mistrust among the Ndamata clan of a government that is now rejecting opportunities that were not originally discriminatory against them. Clannism has now determined the majority clan's own "interventions" that are not acting against it, yet neutral and well-intentioned ones are either being filtered out or even rejected, creating a type of self-destructive effect that is not caused solely by the majority clan's activity but is also the result of the majority clan's inactivity.

Wanjiru & Gichuki (2021) alludes that rural development is about collective consciousness and collective action, which means the ability of people in a community to recognise shared needs, draw up shared priorities and take action together to address them. This capacity is directly threatened by the fragmentation in Mbeere North Sub County caused by clans.

That is why, it seems, Ulziisukh and Wei (2022) analysis of the politicization of clan identity in Somalia, which reached from a conflict over resources to a civil war, is a cautionary tale for what can happen if the dynamics they outlined in this research are not tackled. As a manifestation, it is now at the structural inequity and social mistrust stage as opposed to overt conflict, however the underlying conditions for conflict are there perceived exclusion, resources deprivation and systematic disempowerment of minority groups. The analogy with Ulziisukh and Wei (2022) Somalia case should not be drawn too strongly, however, as Mbeere North does not exhibit signs of armed mobilization or organized political violence. In addition, the TVET example above makes the point that the current expression of clan mistrust is largely defensive and self-limiting, rather than escalatory, and that successful intervention now could address root causes before they became entrenched in the context of further conflict-mitigation measures.

Based on the findings from all the three themes of objective three with the theoretical frame work, this study concludes that the politics of clannism in Mbeere North Sub-County are manifested in three inter complementary mechanisms as outlined by the three theoretical perspectives used. In the light of social capital theory (Yazew & Kassa, 2024), clan solidarity builds bonding capital among groups but erodes bridging capital needed for group cooperation and collective development. In the light of political economy theory (Manioudis and Meramveliotakis 2022), the

political impact of clan loyalties has an impact on the allocation of resources which causes systematic underdevelopment for the politically subservient communities. In terms of the neo-patrimonialism theory (Hout, 2024; Yulianti, 2026), the distribution of public resources to members of the clans is a failure of governance because it has historically led to inequality and underdevelopment.

The conceptual structure outlined in Chapter 1 is broadly confirmed by the data, which suggests that fragmentation is a mechanism in Theme 4 of Objective Two and Theme 4 of Objective Three that transmits and amplifies the effect of clannism on the investment, employment and infrastructural outcomes in the nexus of expectations that are experienced as a dependent variable. Read together across both objectives, the data validates the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 1, with the addition of an explicit reference to social trust and collective mistrust as an intervening variable: these two themes show that the effect of clannism on investment, employment and infrastructural outcomes in the nexus of expectations is transmitted and amplified by fragmentation, as well as being a direct effect of it.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced, analyzed and discussed the qualitative data gathered from the 25 key informant interviews and the three focus group discussions in Mbeere North Sub-County. The results of the study were presented and reorganized by themes, each one under the three study objectives, which resulted in the following themes: three per area of inquiry.

The study concluded that the public resources are allocated disproportionately by clan, that the minority clans are consistently ignored in decision making processes, that the main mechanism of resource allocation is through political appointments and that institutional leadership is mostly held among the majority clan throughout the sub-county. In terms of the impact of clannism on the distribution of socio-economic resources and opportunities, the study revealed that historical inequities in land ownership had become institutionalized over the years and that infrastructure and public services were being focused on majority-clan wards, that compounded exclusion at the intersection of gender and clan identity, and that the resulting resource inequities were creating pervasive social fragmentation and mistrust.

Regarding the role of clan politics in socio-economic development, the study revealed that while clan solidarity has welfare functions for the average citizen these are genuine and valued, the negative aspects of clan politics such as clan-based politics as a tool for selecting leaders that leads to failure in governance and mistrust and fragmentation at the community level leading to reduced development productivity outweighed the positive.

The results of the study were analysed according to the three theoretical frameworks used in this study: social capital theory (Yazew & Kassa, 2024), political economy theory (Manioudis and Meramveliotakis, 2022) and neo-patrimonialism theory (Hout, 2024) and were found to be consistent with and in some respects extend the existing empirical literature on clannism and socio-economic development in Kenya and similar contexts elsewhere in the world.

The data indicate that clan-based mechanisms (Elsewhere) documented at the national or regional level in other parts of the world are similarly operating in the sub-location arena within one sub-county, that the positive and negative aspects of clannism are two sides of the same coin, and that social fragmentation is an effect of clan-based exclusion but also a factor that is responsible for reproducing that exclusion. Chapter 5 summarizes the main findings, provides a general discussion of the findings, recommends policy and practice implications, and concludes the study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The study aimed at gaining knowledge on the politics of clannism and how it affects Mbeere North Sub-County socio-economic development. The prime aim of this study was to link the politics of clannism with socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County, Embu County. This study set itself the following three specific objectives: To establish the influence of clannism on resource allocation decisions, to explore the influence of clannism on the distribution of socio-economic resources and opportunities and to examine the impact of clan based politics on socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County.

The researcher wanted to find out the impact of clannism on decision making on socio-economic resources allocation, how socio-economic resources and opportunities are distributed in the sub-county of Mbeere North and how socio-economic development is affected by clan-based politics in the sub-county of Mbeere North. In order to account for the phenomena studied, the social capital theory, the political economy theory and the neo-patrimonialism theory of development were utilized. The summary of key findings, discussion, limitations, implications, conclusions, recommendations and further research are provided in this chapter.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

It was revealed that one of the major reasons for the disparities in development that the sub-County experienced is the politics of clannism. Electoral outcomes are a function of the size of the clan, and the control of resources is a function of the outcomes of the elections. Mururi are the most populous and have invariably elected Members of Parliament and Ward Representatives for Evurore and Nthawa wards in the Mbeere North Sub-County constituencies, with no Mururi ever being elected as a Member of Parliament in the Ndamata dominated Muminji ward. The electoral structure has a direct implication on resource allocation, with Kenyan Members of Parliament getting to control NG-CDF resources, while Ward Representatives control allocation of resources at the county level; this results in a resource-allocation pattern where wards that produce leaders get development priority while wards that do not are left behind.

This is the same trend that is captured in the study's results for socio-economic resources and opportunities. Nthawa and Evurore wards which are inhabited by the larger clan have better access to tarmacked roads, a reliable water supply, and also have access to funds from the constituency and county development funds, compared to Muminji ward which does not have these facilities. It's not a scarcity of resources, it's a concentration of resources: resources exist, but in a skewed distribution toward wards with the numbers to claim them.

Last, on the effect on other aspects of socio-economic development, the study revealed that the cycle is not a secondary effect of clan-based politics but rather part of the dynamic. The simple majority system in Kenya is built on numerical supremacy; thus, the same clan has been elected to office every election and every elected leader serves his or her region and people to the exclusion of the sub-county as a whole. Over the course of the electoral cycle, and over years and years of electoral cycles, the effect is not just that one term of development is not equal, but that it is a vicious circle, with underdeveloped wards never having a realistic chance of righting the imbalance. To sum up, these three goals are not three separate effects, but one continuous process: clan numbers determine who wins the elections, who wins the elections determines who controls resources, and who controls resources determines which wards develop and which ones do not.

5.3 Discussion

Clannism is a serious issue as encountered by the people of Mbeere North Sub-County, just like ethnicity. The discussion on the findings of the study is presented in relation to the study's three research objectives and the theoretical frame for the study.

5.3.1 Influence of Clannism on the Allocation of Socio-Economic Resources

The study found out that clan affiliation rather than the need assessment is the most important factor in allocation of public resources in Mbeere North Sub-County. Politicization of leaders often prioritizes projects that benefit their kin, creating political patronage, where backing for a leader is rewarded by resources being allocated to the leader's kin. That women are not involved in decision making further exacerbates this issue, as their exclusion from decision making, and denial of access to land and credit more broadly, further removes a group that plays a pivotal role in socio-economic development from the processes designed to advance it.

The phenomenon is similar to what Hout (2024) denounced as the neo-patrimonialism whereby leaders are choosing to reward loyal networks instead of providing services to the people they have been elected to serve. In Mbeere North Sub-County, this has resulted in marginalization of the wards, for instance, Muminji, where people do not have a strong voice in decision making on how public resources are shared.

5.3.2 Distribution of Socio-Economic Resources and Opportunities

The distribution of resources and opportunities in Mbeere North Sub-County is a historical trend of favoritisms that has favoured certain clans more than others to access various education, employment, health and infrastructure services. Economic participation and social mobility for the Ndamata clan and the Ward of Muminji have remained at the disadvantage, having been the targets of development initiatives in the Mururi dominated wards.

The social capital theory helps to explain why: The same social networks and social connections that it claims are important for collective action have been used in this instance for exclusionary, not collective, purposes. Leaders in Mbeere North Sub-County are involved in networks that they use to benefit their own clans instead of to benefit the sub-county as a whole, thus undermining the developmental potential of social capital as described by Putnam.

5.3.3 Impact of Clan-Based Politics on Socio-Economic Development

Mistrust and competition among communities and the division by politics between them are a result of clan-based politics which undermines inclusive development in Mbeere North Sub-County. Political agendas split up in different clan areas with some being duplicated and others neglected, resulting in no common development agenda, and reducing the incentive to engage in co-operative problem solving for sustained development.

This is not a unique pattern in Mbeere North Sub-County. Harris (2022) did an analysis of how ethnic politics have influenced Kenya's elections and social-economic development since the country's independence and found that majority Kenyans still vote in an ethnic-clan manner. The same was observed in Somalia, where the election or appointment to political positions was based on clan affiliation (Young 2023). Elmi et al. (2024) report in Kenya that the same applies to the

country; the distribution of resources here too is decided by the major political decisions which are won by larger and more influential clans taking the elective positions and appointments.

These studies collectively indicate that the correlation under study in Mbeere North Sub-County between clan size and political power, and political power and control of resources is not peculiar to this area, but has been found in other parts of the world where clan identity is still a vital organizing principle in electoral politics, ranging from Central Asia to Somalia to rural Kenya.

It is important to note that the wider argument of Yazew and Kassa (2024) about political decision affecting the socio-economic wellbeing of a community is instructive here. Although at principle elected leaders are supposed to serve their ward members regardless of their clan, the results of this research indicate that the political decision making that has been effected as a result of political patronage based on clannish affiliation has left wards like Muminji under developed for a long time.

5.4 Limitations

There were some limitations in the study that were faced while conducting the study. The first is that the scope of the phenomenon of clannism as a subject was too broad to attempt to treat all the variables related to clannism in a single study; clan dynamics cross gender lines, external economic factors and national politics. The researcher did this by promising participants confidentiality, thus getting more candid and open responses in the aspects covered.

Secondly, due to financial constraints the study could not be able to incorporate a very large population and the results of the study might not reflect the diversity of the population in the sub-county. To overcome this, the researcher made every effort to get as much depth (information) from each participant as possible given the number of participants.

Thirdly, clan and ethnic politics in Kenya is dealt with very quietly, particularly near election time, and the researcher as a female was hampered to some extent in accessing some participants and information by the patriarchal social structure of Mbeere North Sub-County. Participants were assured of confidentiality and protection from victimization, which contributed to the openness of respondents with respect to the sensitive information they shared, however there may have been a level of caution.

Lastly, constraints of time restricted the geographic areas where data could be collected, especially in remote and hard-to-reach areas in Muminji Ward. The researcher addressed this by starting early in the day and travelling by motorbike as well as scheduling the interviews in advance with the subjects, so that all the targeted subjects were still covered, given the terrain.

5.5 Implications

This study, theoretically, confirms the importance of using the concepts of social capital theory, political economy theory, and neo-patrimonialism theory in studying the influence of clan-based politics on resource allocation, access and development outcomes at the sub-county level. The results indicate value in adapting the theories, which were developed for national level politics, for smaller scale, intra-community analyses.

From a practical perspective, it is recommended that the Member of Parliament and Members of the County Assembly for Mbeere North Sub-County should focus on historically disadvantaged wards and clans in decision making on development. A more equitable socio-economic resource sharing approach would directly benefit wards that are marginalized and smaller clans in general.

The findings have implications for Embu County Government, the Mbeere North Sub-County administration, the ward level offices and Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) who all have a role to play in ensuring development is even in the case of the sub-county. Stronger application of current public policy and public conduct laws will contribute to greater transparency and accountability of local leadership in the allocation of resources.

5.6 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to establish the relationship between the politics of clannism and socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County and the result of the study confirms that, the relationship between the politics of clannism and the socio-economic development exists and is constant, reinforcing and found in all the three research variables.

With regard to Objective One, the study findings are that clannism positively affects allocation of the resources, not just incidental, in Mbeere North Sub-County. Larger clans have significantly more influence over the allocation of resources of NG-CDF and county, as they are also able to

control the numbers that elect their leaders, compared to smaller clans which have little influence in decisions that directly impact their wellbeing.

On the issue of Objective Two and the impact of clannism on the distribution of socio-economic resources/opportunities, the study finds that this impact on decision making results in measurable and visible disparities on the ground. The need of Nthawa and Evurore wards is not that much different from the need of Muminji Ward, but the political advantage of Mururi is evident in the better road, water and access to development funds because the latter wards are better off than Muminji Ward.

On its effect of clan-based politics on socio-economic development, the study finds that unless they are addressed, they generate a vicious cycle of inequitable development. The outcome of elections is largely determined by the clan in Mbeere North Sub-County and the traditional practice of concentrating resources on the clan continues to occur across successive political terms, leaving smaller clans like the Ndamata with a disadvantage that is not temporary.

These three conclusions therefore, serve as centers of this study's argument that the politics of clannism is an active factor in the decision making, allocation of resources, and socio-economic development in the Mbeere North Sub-County and that this cycle of clannism, if left unchecked, will continue irrespective of the individual leaders. The results add to the existing literature on the link between ethnicity and clan identity, politics and development, and provide further empirical evidence for the theories of social capital, political economy and neo-patrimonialism as frameworks for understanding the relationship between ethnic group and clan identity, politics and development at sub-national level.

5.7 Recommendations

The study results have led to the following recommendations in the order of the stakeholders empowered to implement them.

5.7.1 Recommendations for National and County Government

The national government should investigate past and current cases of resource allocation and development projects to Mbeere North Sub-County based on clan system, through the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) and the Directorate of Criminal Investigations.

The Embu County Assembly should seek to have the Embu North Sub-County leaders held to account openly and transparently by the receipts from both national and county government, but not just through the surface gesture of a mere process.

5.7.2 Recommendations for Local Leadership and Policy

The decision making process in the Mbeere North Sub-County should be transparent, inclusive and ensure full public participation, including all clan members (large and small) in ward level meetings and consultation on future development plans. It is important that current public policy and leadership-conduct legislation are implemented, not referred to, as a means to ensure leaders are held accountable for the equitable distribution of resources across the three wards.

5.7.3 Recommendations for the Community

Politicians, religious leaders and civil society groups in Mbeere North Sub-County should co-organize periodic peace and reconciliation programs that assist the residents to appreciate each other regardless of clan size. There must be no superiority or inferiority to any clan as a result of their size. In teaching young people to live in harmony without promoting clan-based division, learning institutions in the sub-county are also playing their part.

5.7.4 Recommendations for Researchers

Future research should explore the interaction between gender and clan-based politics in resource allocation and decision making processes, which this study showed to be an important area, but was not able to explore in detail. Future studies are recommended to use mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to determine whether there are consistent patterns emerging from the findings here, if these patterns grow worse or improve over subsequent election cycles, and to measure the extent of disparity quantitatively, which is not possible through a purely qualitative study design.

5.8 Areas for Further Research

The results of this study have identified the link between clannism and socio-economic development in Mbeere North Sub-County, however, some are specific areas that need to be explored in future:

i. If the resource allocation patterns described here are found in other sub-counties (clan) in Kenya, e.g., Kuria East or parts of North Eastern Kenya, it would be possible to determine whether this is a general pattern or only a specific one for a specific configuration of clans in Mbeere North.
ii. Studies on the relationship of gender and clannism, particularly on the issue of how the marginalization of women in clan and political decision making structures exacerbates the marginalization of women in access to resources are directly linked to the findings of this study on women's marginalisation and have merely been touched upon here.
iii. A longitudinal study over a period of two or more electoral cycles that monitors the self-reinforcing cycle in resource allocation across Mbeere North Sub-County would help determine whether the cycle found in the study's conclusions exists over time, or if particular interventions (e.g., changes in the oversight of the NG-CDF) can disrupt the cycle.
iv. This study's qualitative findings would be complemented by measurable and verifiable data with a mixed methods study quantifying the scale of infrastructural disparity between the three wards of Mbeere North Sub-County, such as by the number of kilometers of tarmacked road, water-point density, or CDF disbursement records by ward.

Further research is also recommended to explore the effectiveness of specific policy interventions to mitigate clan-based favoritism in resource allocation, such as public participation reform and/or EACC oversight mechanisms, to shift the debate from documenting the problem to assessing what works to address.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEW GUIDES

I am Feliciana Njagi a student at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. I am carrying out a study on **Politics of Clannism and Socio-Economic Development in Mbeere North Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya**. You have been selected to take part in this study because you are believed to have the right information regarding the issue of clannism in Mbeere North Sub-Country. The information you share is strictly for academic purposes and will not be used for a different purpose other than the intended purpose. Your sincere and correct disclosure of information is important towards attaining this goal. You are requested to respond candidly and collectively to the discussions. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to stop the interview at any time. All the information that you share here will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Influence of clannism in Resources Allocation Decisions in Mbeere Sub-county

1. Kindly comment generally on how resource allocation decisions are made in Mbeere North Sub County.
2. To what extent do clans influence resource Allocation decisions in Mbeere North Sub-County?
3. Can you describe situations where clan affiliation appeared to influence distribution of resources?
4. According to your experience whom can you say is the dominant political actors and decision makers in the region?
5. What is your opinion about the distribution of facilities such as school, hospitals, roads towns?

Influence of clannism on Distribution of Socio-Economic Resources and Opportunities in Mbeere North Sub-County

1. What would you say about the provision of social services in your region?
2. Share about how clannism affects access to socio-economic opportunities in this area?
3. What would you say about the manner in which employment opportunities, access to education and health care are facilitated in Mbeere North Sub-County?

4. How does clan identity influence access to bursaries, government tenders, scholarships, and business opportunities?
5. Based on your own experience as a residence of Mbeere North Sub-County, have you observed cases of exclusion or favoritism based on clan affiliation? Please explain.
6. How do young people and women experience clan-related inequalities?

Impact of Clan-Based Politics on Socio-Economic Development in Mbeere North Sub-County

According to you are there any positive effects associated with clan networks or clan solidarity in Mbeere North Sub-Country? Kindly share about what you consider to be positive.

1. In what ways has clan-based politics influenced development in Mbeere North Sub-County?
2. How has clan-based politics affected infrastructure development, education, health services, and investment in your area?
3. How does clan politics affect implementation of development projects?
4. In what ways has clan politics affected community unity and cooperation?

APPENDIX II: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS GUIDE

I am Feliciana Njagi a student at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. I am carrying out research on **Politics of Clannism and Socio-Economic Development in Mbeere North Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya**. You have been selected to take part in this study because you are believed to have the right information regarding the issue of clannism in Mbeere North Sub-Country. The information you share is strictly for academic purposes and will not be used for a different purpose other than the intended purpose. Your sincere and correct disclosure of information is important towards attaining this goal. You are requested to respond candidly and collectively to the discussions. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to stop the interview at any time. All the information that you share here will be treated with utmost confidentiality. For this discussion we have some few ground rules to follow to create a good environment for each member to participate. Here are the ground rules to follow.

- Speak one at a time
- Respect each other's opinions
- Everyone should participate
- Maintain confidentiality

1. In this community, how important are clans in the social and political life of the residents?
2. How do clan relationships influence community interactions?

1. Influence of clannism in Resources Allocation Decisions in Mbeere Sub-county

1. How are development resources distributed Mbeere North Sub-County?
2. Do clans influence allocation of public resources in this area? How?
3. Which areas or groups benefit most from resource allocation?
4. Are some clans marginalized? Please explain.
5. How does clannism affect fairness and transparency in leadership?

2. Influence of clannism on Distribution of Socio-Economic Resources and Opportunities in Mbeere North Sub-County

1. How does clan affiliation affect access to opportunities?
2. In your opinion are jobs and tenders awarded fairly? Please explain

3. what would you say about how clannism affects youth and women in this area?
4. In your experience in the community what forms of discrimination or favoritism exist if any?
5. How does clannism affect livelihoods and economic wellbeing of the residents of this area?

3 Impact of Clan-Based Politics on Socio-Economic Development in Mbeere North Sub-County

1. In your opinion does clan-based politics influence development projects? Please explain
2. What would you say is positive or negative about clannism in Mbeere North Sub-County?
3. according to your experience living in Mbeere North Sub- County Does clan politics slow down or promote development? Please Explain
4. What would you think are the challenges associated with political competition among clans?
5. As a residence of this area have you experience some examples of successful cooperation among clans? Please share.

APPENDIX III: The fifty Sub-Clans of Damata and Mururi Root Clans of Mbeere North Sub-County

DAMATA CLAN	MURURI CLAN
1.Mbúya 2. Kamuvia 3. Kathi 4. Múkera 5. Nyonga 6. Kamumu 7. Íkúnyi 8. Múthíga 9. Ndíriri 10. Úguerí 11. Kamúturi 12. Gekara 13. Magui 14. Ngúgí 15. Múgue 16. Írúma 17. Írimba 18. Cína 19. Mbandi 20. Muringa	1. Múrúri 2. Ngai 3. Gekaara 4. Nditi 5. Kígúrú 6. Kíragua 7. Ígoki 8. Íkandi 9. Íkunda 10. Kere 11. Ígúna 12. Ngithi 13. Ruangondi 14. Gacúgú 15. Gakenda 16. Mwítia 17. Mbutha 18. Múruga 19. Mwendia 20. Kambi 21. Marígu 22.Thaara 23.Ngúi 24. Rwerú 25. Ríimi 26. Ngúma 27. Írúme 28. Ngonye 29. Ígúcia 30.Gakera

APPENDIX IV: CUEA Approval Letter

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Department *of Social Sciences* and Development Studies

26th June 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: FELICIANA IGUNA NJAGI - REG NO: 1035369

This letter is to confirm that the above-named individual is a Post-graduate student pursuing a **Master's of Arts Degree *in Development Studies*** at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa.

As part of the degree requirements, the student is required to undertake a research study with the title:

> ***"Politics of Clannism and Socio Economic Development in Mbeere North Sub-County Embu County, Kenya"***

The information gathered during this study will be used solely for academic purposes and will be handled with strict confidentiality.

Any assistance accorded to her will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA
25 JUN 2025
P.O. Box 62157 - 00200, NAIROBI

Dr. Mary Mutisya
HoD, Department of Social Sciences and Development Studies

APPENDIX V: NACOSTI RESEARCH PERMIT

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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Date of Issue: **16/July/2025**

RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Ms.. Feliciana Iguna Njagi of Catholic University of Eastern Africa, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Embu on the topic: POLITICS OF CLANNISM AND SOCIO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN MBEERE NORTH SUB-COUNTY EMBU COUNTY, KENYA for the period ending : 16/July/2026.

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APPENDIX VI: PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATE



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I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT **FELICIANA IGUNA NJAGI** REG NO: **1035369**, SUBMITTED A CHECK OF ANTIPLAGIARISM ON EVALUATION OF **POLITICS OF CLANNISM AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN MBEERE NORTH SUB-COUNTY, EMBU COUNTY- KENYA. A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AT THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA, KENYA.**

Verification by Systems Librarian:

Name: HARUN MAINA ..... Signature: ..... Date: 24/7/2026





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Founded in 1984 by AMECEA (Association of the Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa)