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## **Maritime Insecurity at Lake Victoria, Homa Bay County** Exploring the Socio-Economic Factors that Contributes to Instability

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### **Abstract**

This research article examines the significance of maritime security, as one of the most recent axioms of international relations and diplomacy. It focusses on the socioeconomic factors that contribute to maritime insecurity along Lake Victoria's Homa Bay shores. In order to determine the research outcome, a qualitative research approach and an exploratory research design were used in unveiling the problem under consideration. Individuals and organizations/institutions from the Homa Bay's Lake Region site were the target population. The research article has employed the purposive sampling technique and the saturation principle to obtain a sample size of 36 participants: 12 for in-depth interviews and 4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) of 6 members each. The study also used qualitative interviews, focus groups, and observation to collect data. According to the findings, the main Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported (IUU) fishing issues in Lake Victoria, Homa Bay County are unauthorized fishing, criminal gangs and pirates, encroachment by foreign fishers, employment of minors/children as fishers, use of prohibited gears and fishing methods, and fishing young, endangered, and protected fish species. Furthermore, IUU fishing is endangering fish stocks in Lake Victoria's Homa Bay County. In its results findings, the research article recommends that more patrol officers guard the waters in order to prevent illegal fishers and criminal gangs from roaming freely.

**Keywords:** Maritime security, Blue economy, Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported (IUU), Maritime piracy, Marine terrorism, drug trafficking, Illegal oil bunkering and socio-economic.

### **I. Introduction and Background**

Maritime security is a term that has attracted attention to new experiments and has gathered provisions to deal with them (Bueger, 2014). Bueger explains that top performers in maritime strategy, ocean supremacy, and global security have in the past begun to embrace maritime protection as a duty or reframed their efforts in such terms. For example, the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom (UK), and the African Union (AU) issued formidable maritime security policies in 2014. Furthermore, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) covered maritime security in its 2011 Alliance Maritime Strategy goals. The United States paved the way for progress in 2004 by establishing a national Maritime Security Policy.

Furthermore, the perception of an "Oceans Economy" or "Blue Economy" that resulted from the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) held in Rio de Janeiro was aligned with the idea of Maritime security for economic and trade activities (UNCSD, 2012). The UNCSD spawned the need to combine conservation and sustainability in the management of the maritime domain. Mbugua and Mwachinalo (2017) define "blue economy" as the well-adjusted use of resources at sea or lakes for job and wealth creation

in a way that protects ocean ecology, which includes ocean, green coastal, and marine economies. In fact, in the twenty-first century, marine environments have even become more vital to life than ever before.

Life, as we know it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is significantly sustained by the marine environment. Sea transport accounts for more than 90 percent of the world's trade goods, while submarine cables transmit 95 percent of telecommunications data per day. Many factors affect maritime security, including territorial disputes, conflict, environmental degradation, and severe crime. Despite years of national and international counter-proliferation efforts, up-to-date maritime piracy, terrorism, and illegal fishing remain significant issues affecting global maritime trade and the oil and gas industry and are present in most continents. Piracy, illegal fishing, and theft at sea play a key part in stimulating instability and violence on the water and land. The primary triggers for 21<sup>st</sup>-century maritime security worldwide include poverty, lawlessness, conflict, resources, and the complexity and fragmented territorial composition (Mbugua & Mwachinalo, 2017).

If maritime security is maintained, however, there can be economic growth and development (poverty elimination) as well as human security (food security, shelter, sustainable livelihoods, and safe employment opportunities). For instance, in Africa, just like the rest of the world, the maritime domain is the life force of the economy and controls food security and food sovereignty. Some tremendous imports and exports happen in the African ports to the rest of the world. Those historical primary raw materials include gold, diamonds, minerals, fish, cocoa, timber, and other agricultural goods; thus, access to safe, secure maritime transit routes becomes vital to integrating those products into the global marketplace. In Africa, fish is consumed as a significant source of food beyond the economic importance of the maritime domain for the physical survival of their population; thus, any interruption in access to fish is a significant threat to food security and economic stability in these countries (Mwangura, 2003).

In Kenya, Lake Victoria and the Indian Ocean provide thousands of people with significant economic opportunities. However, these prospects are hampered by maritime security issues such as illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing, piracy, marine pollution, and overexploitation of maritime resources. In the past, Kenya has dealt with environmental and marine safety issues, such as an oil tanker spilling five million litres of crude oil into Port Reitz Creek at Kilindini Harbour, causing damage to the marine ecosystem. Kenya had also experienced a maritime disaster in 1994, when the MV Likoni Ferry capsized off the coast of Mombasa, killing over 272 passengers (Mwangura, 2003). Because of the nature of these insecurities, maritime security has emerged as a top priority for Kenya's government. This was reflected in the 2014 Security Laws, which established the Border Control and Operations Coordination Committee (BCOCC), which develops a national maritime security strategy and implements the resolutions of the 2017 Blue Economy Conference.

As a result, Kenyan policymakers have recognized inland waters' as important sources of economic insecurity and opportunities due to the upsurge of illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing (IUU) and overexploitation of maritime resources. Lake Victoria is a critical element in Kenya's blue economy. Therefore, this study covered the nature of maritime security, focusing on Homa Bay County and the measures set up by the National and County governments and other actors to address the challenges (NCRC, 2018).

In Homa Bay County, adverse human activities, combined with global warming, continue to pose risks and exacerbate socioeconomic challenges. Because Homa Bay is the most accessible county in Kenya, unauthorized fishing techniques and unauthorized fishing equipment account for 63.56% of border-related crimes between Kenya and Uganda. Fishermen, unemployed youths, local community leaders, government officers, and civil servants are the most common victims of border-related crimes (NCRC, 2018).

Homa Bay is one of the 47 counties located in the southern part of the Nyanza region, along the southern shores of Lake Victoria, which is Africa's largest freshwater lake. It covers an area of 3,183.3 sq km and has a population of about 1.3 million people. The County borders five other Counties; - Migori to the South, Kisii and Nyamira to the East, and Kericho and Kisumu to the North East (Homa Bay, 2013). The County's economy is anchored on fisheries and agriculture. A projected activity in the county remains fishing, which has employed more than 18,300 people from around 3,600 families. Currently, the county has 151 landing beaches managed

by 133 Beach Management Units (BMUs) (Homa Bay, 2013). It is worth noting that Homa Bay County produces approximately 50 percent of the fish produced in Kenya's Lake Victoria (Homa Bay, 2013).

### Literature Review

How social dynamics influence and shape economic activities is the subject of socio-economics. Socioeconomic factors are created by the junction of economic activity and social process, and they have a direct impact on social privilege and levels of financial independence. When reviewing the empirical literature related to this study object, it is important to emphasize the new socio-economic approach that has developed in the maritime area. As a result, the blue economy offers vast untapped potential for the global social and economic growth of nations (Swanepoel, 2017).

The third stage of the so-called 'Scramble for Africa' is currently taking place on the African continent, and it is driven by geopolitical, geo-economics, and geostrategic considerations. As a result, the largest international powers are becoming more aware of the dynamics on this continent, with mineral and energy resources playing a key role in this new position (Abegunrin 2009). The rise of external players' interests in African regions is accelerated by these continental characteristics coupled with structural and socio-political weaknesses, making these regions desirable for the major international powers, specifically for those interested in the exploitation of their natural resources and for the main players in organized crime. We also point out the inadequate ability to uphold maritime borders and the limited resources, such as the major lakes, rivers, and inland waterways, which are available for the ongoing exercise of State power at sea. As a result, marine space and maritime borders are included in this system that is becoming more permeable and diffuse since the sub-Saharan region's long coastlines, which total around 30,725 km, further deteriorate the conditions of the States there. (Otto 2020).

This is the face of a continent that has been negatively impacted by maritime insecurity in terms of economic development, where countries with fragile structures worsen the continent's overall state even more. These flaws, coupled with the lack of regional integration and cooperation, have slowed the growth of their countries by creating barriers to the control of maritime borders, both in the territorial sea and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as well as in international waters where the maritime routes pass through. In light of this, Paul Biya, President of Cameroon, stated as much during the Yaoundé (24-25 June 2013) Summit of Heads of State and Government on Maritime Security (Surbun, 2021).

There are thirty eight coastal countries in Africa, and the oceans are one of the region's major economic resources and have incalculable economic value. However, in the majority of situations, this economic potential has not yet been fully realized. This is mostly because of the numerous internal vulnerabilities, such as weak political control, a lack of available resources, and insufficient marine space monitoring (Abegunrin 2009). This region has experienced a number of illegal activities, among them piracy, maritime terrorism, IUU fishing, drug trafficking, the smuggling of people, weapons, medicines, and diamonds, theft of oil and cargo, substance spills, and other manifestations of maritime crime. It is also characterized by war, socio-political instability, extreme poverty, and porous borders and a long coastline that are poorly monitored (Chatterjee, 2014).

A major issue for the world of organized icons of significant geostrategic importance, maritime piracy has been one of the principal 'viruses' for the African Maritime Domain (AMD). Modern piracy has an adverse impact on the strength of States, eroding their structures and their control over their regions, in contrast to historical piracy, which was mostly employed as a tool for states to increase their domination at sea (Cushman, (2013). The 20th century was characterized by the low frequency of pirate attacks in the area; however, the phenomenon has recently returned. Up until the conclusion of the first decade of the twenty-first century, East Africa served as the region most affected by the phenomena globally. Piracy had resulted in roughly USD 160 million in favour of pirates by the end of June 2012, costing the world economy USD 700 million, according to the annual report of the 'American One Earth Future Foundation' (Warren, 2007).

With a direct economic impact on regional stability and development, cargo theft and the rescue of people and goods have been the primary drivers of maritime instability (Onuoha 2012). According to the International Maritime Bureau's (IMB) annual reports from 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019, this phenomenon has recently assumed a concerning dimension, particularly on the western coast of the African continent, which is already known as the "New Pirate Hot Spot," as pirates have improved their methods of operation and the corresponding tools, enabling them to travel farther (IMB 2020).

Oil ships have been the chosen target, and Malaquias (2012) claims that oil tankers are their primary targets. They are searching for oil. After robbing the tankers, they move the oil to smaller ships, which move it once more to other ships, and so on until someone manages to track them down. Other than oil, they aren't really interested in cargo, ships, or anything else. It's called 'illegal oil bunkering' to do this. It has also been the catalyst for the phenomenon of piracy in the African region, particularly because the oil assault has been extremely profitable for criminal organizations, who use the black market to dispose of this cargo, favoured by a powerful transnational mafia, who finances and facilitates pirate operations; this frequently leads to piracy being confused with the phenomenon of smuggling (Baldauf, 2012).

Similarly, 'maritime terrorism,' which is difficult to distinguish from piracy due to its complexity and is also connected to all other forms of organized crime at sea, has alarmed African states. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Boko Haram, which are undermining regional socio-political stability and contaminating it, are two movements that have grown in size and expression recently. Additionally, there have been several acts of maritime terrorism, particularly in the oil industry, which have caused damage to oil infrastructure as well as economic and environmental harm (Ginga, 2020).

The international system has been put at risk by maritime terrorism, which poses a genuine threat with a variety of motivations. The main targets of terrorist organizations have been valuable cargo or maritime infrastructure, with or without the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) (Ridley 2014). The main examples of this type of maritime crime in the western part of Africa have been cargo theft and crude oil spills, which express the threat that terrorism poses to the marine environment and the economy. The 'SUA Convention 1988' and its 'Protocol of 2005' have specifically denounced this phenomenon as being harmful to the environment, the economy, and territorial sovereignty (Kim, 2019).

Similarly, the sub-Saharan region has seen a rise in drug trafficking over the past ten years, which has made the marine instability there much worse. In this context, West Africa's location between Latin America and Europe and the permeability of its maritime borders make these States attractive for this activity, in that over the past ten years, it has become well known around the world for its role as a major transit region for the trafficking of illegal drugs between Latin America and Europe (Marc, Verjee & Mogaka 2015). As a result, there has been an increase in the amount of drugs being transported across the waters of the African continent, where they are then moved to adjacent nations before being transmitted mostly to Europe and North Africa (UNODC 2018).

Thus, much as piracy, terrorism, and drug trafficking hurt trade and increased the risk and cost of investing in Africa, IUU fishing stunts economic growth and exacerbates the problems with food security on the continent. Currently, estimations show that one in four fish caught in Africa are illegally caught. According to Peter Thomson, the United Nations Special Envoy for the Ocean, the scourge is affecting the majority of African nations, primarily because 38 of the 54 African countries have coastal borders and many inland countries have vast lakes, which have also been affected by IUU fishing and poor fishing practices. IUU fishing has also caused ecosystem damage, threatened the sustainability of fish stocks, deprived governments of income, and deprived African peoples of their means of subsistence (Okafor-Yarwood, 2020).

Meanwhile, there are still other organized crime manifestations on the African continent, including illegal immigration, people and mineral smuggling, arms trafficking, the dumping of hazardous materials, and other activities that compromise maritime security, obstruct shipping and maritime trade, and spur an intensifying upheaval in the global political system. Meanwhile, with regard to 'arms trafficking,' it is noted that

the issue of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in West Africa has grown significantly in recent years and poses a serious threat to maritime security. This issue needs to be resolved immediately to avoid furthering the socio-political instability in the area (Shaw, 2017).

However, people can obtain a source of income through the blue economy by protecting the marine environment, stopping criminal activity in bodies of water, and promoting sustainable development in the area (Swanepoel, 2017). The underutilization and threat posed by widespread marine insecurity to Africa's maritime resources slows down the continent's contribution to sustainable development. Keen, Shwartz, and Wini-Simeon (2018) provided a paradigm for evaluating sustainable maritime management while describing the blue economy. This demonstrated the uneven attention given to important Blue Economy components and the missed potential for integration in the Africa area. Furthermore, it is impossible to avoid talking about IUU activities as a danger to the blue economy while researching socioeconomic factors and maritime security.

According to a study conducted in Lake Naivasha by Waithaka, Keyombe, and Lewo (2017), illegal fishing tactics are still being used there and are become more prevalent. The destruction of the fringe macrophytes, essential fish refuges, caused by these illicit fishing methods has a severe negative ecological impact on the Lake. In Lake Naivasha, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing is driven by a number of connected social and economic variables, according to the study. Furthermore, Waithaka et al. noted that resource usage conflicts arise because of the high level of resource rivalry caused by Lake Naivasha's geographic structure among fishermen. Additionally, the problem of IUU is exacerbated by the high rates of poverty among those who live close to Lake Naivasha.

The necessity to take advantage of more employment opportunities in the labour-intensive horticultural, floricultural, and geothermal industries has led to a rise in human population, which has also made a significant contribution to IUU fishing in Lake Naivasha (Waithaka et al., 2017). Fishers whose livelihoods depend on the lake have an increased need to look into business opportunities, which has resulted in declining economic conditions that endanger their way of life and call into doubt the viability of the fishery. Fishery managers and other interested parties in Lake Naivasha should give priority to limiting the rise in the proportion of juvenile, immature, and non-target fish that are being caught by fishermen. Why does this matter? It is impossible to talk about socio-economic elements outside of the heights of maritime insecurity. So, the study showed that marine insecurities-rather, crimes in the waterways domain-affect socioeconomic and economic activity, and consequently, the livelihoods of the population.

Moreover, the continent that had long avoided acts of terrorism and religious extremism has recently become the new hotspot for maritime radicalization as "a the competitive advantage generated by the region's weak state capacity and rule of law, the existence of well-developed smuggling networks, and its geographic location all heighten its appeal to drug trafficking cartels and criminal gangs" (Marc, Verjee & Mogaka 2015). In this environment, a variety of unlawful operations that jeopardize marine security and retard economic growth have targeted the continent's waterways, specifically the regions of the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) and the Gulf of Adem (GoA).

As a result, the battle against marine insecurity has taken centre stage in recent years in the primary development goals of African states, even though this understanding is barely embodied by the political dynamics formed there. Indeed, and recalling the negative aspects of globalization, the transatlantic connections that pass through the Western coast of the continent, coupled with facilities in terms of natural resources, turn the GoG region into "Highway 10" for maritime crime, attracting a variety of interests and including illicit and illegal activities like piracy, drug trafficking, arms and diamond smuggling, IUU fishing, illegal immigration, terrorism, the deposing of foreign nationals, and the detention of foreign nationals.

This research article aimed to evaluate the socioeconomic aspects that contribute to maritime insecurity along the Homa Bay beaches of Lake Victoria in comparison to this benchmark. According to the experts mentioned above, some socio-economic factors are employment, education, and money. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the absence of these characteristics had increased maritime insecurity. Has the

crime or insecurity along the Homa Bay coasts of Lake Victoria been influenced by illiteracy, poverty, or unemployment?

Maritime insecurity will, however, rise if the socioeconomic aspects that make up the independent variables deteriorate due to lax governmental policies and legal frameworks. How? It is obvious that factors such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy rates, etc. will result in bad livelihoods and may compel people to look for alternative sources of support. As a result, people may engage in IUU, piracy, and other crimes to meet their demands. Hence, there is maritime insecurity.

### **Research Methodology**

An exploratory research approach was used in this study to better understand how socioeconomic factors contribute to maritime insecurity in Homabay County. This qualitative study also adopted a purposive sampling technique in data collection, with twenty-four (24) Homabay locals (fishmongers) forming Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) of six (6) members each out of thirty-six (36) study participants. Whereas, twelve (12) administrative personnel were interviewed from various organizations/institutions (including the Kenya Coast Guard Service (KCGS), the County Government of Homa Bay, the Lake Basin Development Authority (LBDA), the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI), the Kenya Maritime Authority (KMA), and the National Government Administration Officers).

**Pretest:** The author conducted a pretest survey with four (4) participants, three (3) of whom were Homabay County locals (fish mongers) gathered to participate in FGDs and one (1) administrative personnel from the Kenya Coast Guard Service (KCGS) interviewed. The respondents mentioned above were not included in the study's findings.

The researchers used the triangulation method to establish the validity and reliability of study instruments (the use of more than one approach to researching a question to increase confidence in the findings by confirming a proposition using two or more independent measures) (Heale & Forbes, 2013). This method was useful in reducing measurement and procedural bias during data collection by relieving participants of the pressure to provide information.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The response rate was 75% whereby 7 administrative personnel were interviewed from the Homabay county fishery department officials, marine agencies, and marine coast guards; 3 FGDs of 6 members, 6 members, and 8 members respectively were also conducted. This gave a total of 27 participants. Further, the demographics of the study were 10 males and 17 females.

The participants listed a number of social-economic factors that contribute to an increase in maritime insecurity in the shores region, including poverty, unemployment, corruption, greed, poor fish prices, a lack of adequate fish storage facilities in the area, insufficient government support for fishermen and the fishing industry, and conflict in neighbouring nations. According to data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2019), the majority of the young people in Homabay County are unemployed and live in poverty. This helps to explain why there are more criminal organizations operating in Lake Victoria's waters, there are more robberies, and there is insecurity around the lake's shoreline.

The majority of Homabay County's households are impoverished, and the majority of the region's young people are unemployed. This helps to explain the increase in criminal groups operating within Lake Victoria's waters and along its shores, as well as increased robberies and insecurity along the lake's shores. Poverty had forced many young children (especially boys) of school age into fishing. These children are minors who cannot be issued fishing licenses by the authorities. Lake Victoria also attracts tourists from all over the country and from around the world, making it a popular destination for criminal organizations. Despite constant patrols by the coast guard and police, strong criminal gangs from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania continue to operate freely in the waterways.

## Discussions

According to participants, the persistence of IUU is due to economic incentives (fuelled by increasing demand for fish, continued overcapacity in many fishing fleets, readily available cheap labour, and weak governance) and a lack of resolve on the part of stakeholders to address its root causes. Therefore the researcher makes the following recommendations:

More personnel must be hired and trained by the national and county governments to assist in the fight against IUU in the region. Stakeholders should also ensure that coast guards and fisheries administrators are adequately compensated to do their jobs; more patrol officers should be added to patrol the waters to keep illegal fishers and criminal gangs at bay. To combat IUU, controls and sanctions must be coordinated and consistently enforced at the local, national, and international levels. Finally, fisheries working groups in the country should develop programs to assess the impacts of IUU fishing.

## Conclusion

From the above findings and discussions, we may conclude that the study revealed that the main IUU fishing issues in Lake Victoria, Homa Bay County are unauthorized fishing, criminal gangs and pirates, encroachment by foreign fishers, employment of minors/children as fishers, use of prohibited gears and fishing methods, and fishing young, endangered and protected fish species.

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**Author(s) contributions:**

The researchers concede that they are the sole authors of this research article that creatively contributes to the world of academia.

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