Role of Community Involvement in Peace Building: A Case of Mount Elgon in Bungoma County, Kenya

Ronald E Wanda, Joyce Muchemi, Nyandoro K Obondi & Ogachi O Nyamora

Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Abstract: - **All over the world conflicts in communities materialize because of many reasons. At the community level, social changes often occur very often as a result of a conflict. The conflict that took place in Mt Elgon between 2006 and 2008 was devastating in many ways; it left many dead and destroyed many a property. This study was to assess community participation in peace-building in the Mt Elgon area between 2007 and 2017. The study also sought to assess the use of indigenous or traditional methods of conflict resolution embedded in restorative practices, as well as establish the role that Mount Elgon's Residents Association (MERA) played through its programmes in peace-building in the area. The study revealed a yawning need for younger community members to be more involved in peace-building activities in the Mt Elgon area. The study further revealed that those aged between 35 and 54 years largely thought that their traditional culture and indigenous practices was central to their peace-building efforts in their locality.**

Keywords: **Role of Community Involvement; Peace building; Mount Elgon; Bungoma County, Kenya**

I. INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons that cause conflicts in society. Indeed throughout the world, all societies have experienced a conflict; very often this is brought about because of certain tensions that arise because of many reasons some of which may include ethnic, religious or gender and so forth. Evidence has shown that community conflicts often emerge through many ways some of which may include riots, nonviolent demonstrations, or armed resistance against a political administration or amongst communities in a given society. As it has been pointed out by some scholars, many conflicts usually do not recognize geographic boundaries(Idean and Salehyan, 2012). According to the World Economic Forum's recent report titled 'Global Risk Report' (2016), it has been observed that the world is reproaching the protest levels that were witnessed in the 1980s, caused by different protests in different parts of the world such as the Anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the East and West Cold War apprehension and so forth. The report further notes that technological progress as well as changing demographic patterns and climate change politics have all played a role in the transformation (Global Risk Report, 2016). The report further noted that the escalating terrorist attacks in countries such as Kenya and Africa in general, continue to cause problems in terms of human and economic capital (Global Risk Report, 2016).

Some researchers have gone on to place blame on the increasing number of conflicts on an increasing problem of identity politics (Kottak and Kozaitis, 1999). They have pointed out that almost all societies in the world communities are divided along ethnic lines. Historically, as Richard Leone (1998) has pointed out, ethnicity has remained one of the major forms of identity that plays a significant role in exacerbating conflicts. While conflicts based on ethnicity remains an old problem globally, in Africa, according to Nigerian scholar Adebayo Adedeji (1999), it has been a serious problem making the region one of the worst in the world's continents. The African continent has had far too many conflicts in the recent past.

In East Africa, a number of scholars (Murunga 2014; Simiyu 2008; Nyongo 2010; and Kanyinga Karuri 2014) interested in understanding community conflicts and subsequent peace-building efforts, have deliberated on the question of ethnicity and politics. Despite the centrality of local community institutions such as the Mt Elgon Residents Association (MERA) in Mt Elgon in the western part of Kenya in resolving community disputes, few resources have been devoted by the international scholarly community or local scholars to supporting community peace-building capacities in sustainable ways that ensures the restoration of peace and prevention of future conflicts.

Indeed, many peace-building studies in the African continent continue to focus mainly on why armed groups wage wars against the state (Buhaug and Rod 2006; Collier and Hoeffler 2002; and Hendrix and Glaser 2007). The dominant focus on civil war and insurgency is understandable given the tremendous human suffering they cause through deaths, displacement, and the disruption of the economy. Yet armed conflict is not the only way people use contentious tactics to effect change.

Given this background, in the present researcher's view, theories of conflict and conflict resolution, although important in the public policy cycle, do not go as far as indulging the important factors of human understanding and relationships - in a word, how people or communities relate especially at times of times of serious divergence or an environment recovering from a conflict such as the Mt Elgon area in Bungoma County in Western Kenya. As such, in this study, it is argued that traditional approaches embedded in the communities' use of restorative and traditional or indigenous practices to the resolution of local conflictsusing cultural

practices such as those found in the Mt Elgon crisis of 2006-2008 in western Kenya play a crucial part in community transformation.

This study focuses on one such approach, the use of restorative practices by Mt Elgon's communities in restoring peace in the region during the crisis of 2006 – 2008, when the conflict was at its peak. The study is centered on the role that MERA, a cross-border community-based organization (CBO) headquartered in Cheptais, Bungoma County, played towards mobilizing its vast community members to engage in peace-building activities through some of its programmes from the period of 2007 to 2017 that has led to return of peace in the area.

Restorative practices are very important but much neglected resources for peace-building, cross-border community development, especially when the notions of peace and sustainable development are concerned. The most important proposition of traditional methods of conflict management is the respect and dignity that they place on human beings as naturally cooperative and positive agents of change, and that it therefore makes sense especially for those in positions of authority to engage them, rather than to decide things for them (Nabudere, 2012) . As pointed out by other researchers, the increasing processes of globalization has necessitated the incorporation of traditional approaches to conflict resolution into peace-building theories and practices, these have long been ignored by Western scholars on the basis that they lacked an empirical heritage (Boege, 2009).

Elsewhere, Schiff (2013) has argued that it is important for communities engaged in conflicts or recovering from a conflict to engage in restorative practices as these practices help to build good relationships by redressing some of the imbalances that existed before and during the conflict that might have caused the conflict in the first place. Restorative practices are aimed at addressing or redressing the wrongdoing (Schiff, 2013).

Kenya, where this study is located, compared to her regional neighbors 'remains an important engine of economic activity in the region's economy. However, this perception of Kenya changed drastically following a number of community conflicts in the country. Most notable amongst these conflicts was the almost a decade long conflict in the Mt Elgon area that became prominent in 2006 to 2008. The political meltdown that erupted following the disputed general elections of December 2007 (Wanda, 2008) also profoundly affected the Mt Elgon crisis. The crisis led to questions about Kenya's status as East Africa's most stable country being asked as well as its ability to manage local or its own internal community conflicts. At that time, a Kenyan scholar Gilbert Khadiagala questioned leading organizations within East Africa, particularly the EAC and IGAD in failing to address the situation in Kenya. Khadiagala quoted Rwanda's president Paul Kagame expressing collective regional worries by suggesting that the Kenyan army should have done more to prevent a similar situation that befell Rwanda in 1994 (Khadiagala, 2009: 432). The Kenyan situation aside, the nature of conflicts in the continent remains complex and varied, and their resolutions also remain mixed.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The conflict that took place in Mt Elgon area that peaked in 2006 and 2008 pitted the Soy and Ndorobo communities against each other. It was devastating in many ways; it led to the loss of many lives as well as the destruction of property. The human rights abuses meted by the Kenya's Defence Forces (KDF) soldiers and a community militia group known as the Sabaot's Land Defense Force (SLDF) left the local communities psychologically traumatized. But above all, the crisis tore the social fabric which bound the communities and clans together and resulted in feelings of hatred, mistrust, suspicion and each community fearing the other.

In an effort to develop peace-building, various actors embarked on post-conflict peace-building processes in the Mt Elgon area. However, researchers have not paid much attention to establish the part that community members through community organizations such as the Mt Elgon Residents Association (MERA) played in restoring peace in the region. As a result, this study, aims to analyse the role that the local communities played using indigenous practices in peace-building in the region between 2007 and 2017.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

i)   To identify the extent of local community involvement in peace-building in the Mt Elgon area from the period 2007 - 2017.
ii) To assess the use of indigenous peace-building methods in conflict transformation in the Mt Elgon area from the period 2007 - 2017.
iii) To establish the contributions of Mount Elgon Residents Association through its programmes in peace-building efforts in the Mt Elgon area from the period 2007 - 2017.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research method. The research was undertaken at MERA in Cheptais Sub-County on the slopes of Mt Elgon in Bungoma County, which borders Busia to the south and Trans-Zoia to the North West, it also borders Uganda's eastern border. The population of interest in this study was MERA members who lived in Cheptais village and the immediate surroundings. A sample of 90 community members was selected for this study out of total population of 300 local community member that belong to MERA. This represents 30 % or one quarter of the total population of members that belong to the Mount Elgon Residents Association (MERA) organization. These respondents provided their views on how they, as members of the local community, using restorative practices and indigenous

approaches, were involved in peace-building practices following the conflict in Mt Elgon. This is in agreement with Best and Khan (2003) who asserts that the best sample size is that which covers at least 30% of the total population. The sample units will be the ordinary members of MERA that reside in Cheptais Sub County. This was achieved through categorizing the MERA members' age-groups and their involvement in peace-building activities in the area. A pre-test of the instruments was carried out in 10 community members in Chaptais drawn from MERA membership pool to determine reliability. Elimination, alteration and improvements was done on the data collection instruments based on what the test study found.A concurrent triangulation approach was applied in order to collect information that was then catalogued separately. This research also used structured questionnaires in order to draw in quantitative statistics for the research.Focus group discussions were also employed in the research exercise. It was be made up of three sessions of 9 participants, both male and female from Cheptais that were selected because of their familiarity to the study.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

They have been discussed under the following sections.

Extent of Local Community Involvement from 2007-2017

The study sought to identify the extent of local community involvement in peace-building in the Mt Elgon area from the period 2007-2017. These included community dialogues and issues of community protection in the Mt Elgon area. It was felt important to find out how the community members felt about their contributions to peace building in the Mt. Elgon area. In order to capture this information, it was necessary to ask respondents about their ethnic origins captured in Table 1. This was crucial because Mt. Elgon area is made up of a number of communities that have coexisted for a very long time, although at times these communities have engaged in disagreements that have led to conflict such as is the case in the present discussion. Table 4.5 shows that in Cheptais Sub-County, Sabaots were the majority respondents at 58.7% followed by Teso at 20% while the rest of the other tribes that included Luhya, Kalenjin and Luo made up the remaining 21.4% as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Tribe of Community Respondents

Tribe	Frequency	Percent
Sabaot	44	58.7
Teso	15	20.0
Bukusu	6	8.0
Luhya	6	8.0
Luo	2	2.7
Kalenjin	2	2.7
Total	**75**	**100.0**

The level of community involvement was also determined and the results have been presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Tribe of Respondent and Level of Involvement in Community Peace-Building

Tribe of Respondent	Level of Involvement of Community in Peace Building				
	Very Low Extent %	Low Extent %	Fair %	High Extent %	Very High Extent %
Sabaot	4.5	9	36	34	15.9
Teso	26.6	33	26.6	13	0
Bukusu	0	33	0	33	33
Luhya	0	0	33	67	0
Luo	100	0	0	0	0
Kalenjin	0	100	0	0	0

Based on the data collected, the Bukusu community members felt that they were very highly involved in the peace-building process at 33%. While other Luhya sub-tribes in general felt they were to a high extent involved in peace-building at 66%. The Sabaots on the other hand who made up the majority of the community that responded to the research exercise, felt they were not adequately involved. Only 16% of Sabaot community members felt that they were very highly involved in the peace-building exercise. The other major tribal group in the Mt. Elgon area, the Itesos, who responded largely negative, at 26.6% they responded that they were involved to a very low extent. Luos and Kalenjins, although they made up a small percentage of the community respondents, felt that they were not involved at all in the peace-building process.

From these community responses based on tribes' representative of the Mt. Elgon communities, we can deduce that a significant part of the community did not feel involved in peace-building efforts in the Mt. Elgon area. In Johan Galtung's Conflict Analysis theory, he called for the creation of peace-building structures that were aimed at promoting long-lasting peace in the community by addressing the root-causes of violent conflict and supporting community-based approaches such as those attempted by communities in Mt. Elgon, albeit not fully. In Galtung's ABC Triangle Model of

Conflict Analysis, where A is for Attitude, B for Behaviors and C for Contradictions, it is evident that the attitudes or the perceptions of the tribes of the communities at Mt. Elgon appear to be both positive and negative, strongly positive in some instances (Bukusu community) and strongly negative in some instances (Luo and Kalenjin communities). These attitudes therefore affect their Behavior and this determines largely their involvement in peace-building. Furthermore, there were some Contradictions in that the Sabaot, for instance, who were the majority of the respondents at 59%, felt that they were not very highly involved in the peace-building process. This can perhaps be explained historically through their perceived differences with the Bukusu community especially in relation to land.

The conflict in Mt. Elgon has been characterized by the long struggle by the Sabaot against the historical injustices occasioned by the disinheritance of their ancestral land in the wider Trans-Nzoia region by the colonial government without any form of compensation by successive governments. Initially, the Sabaot were situated in the Bungoma District (that is at present Bungoma County) that formally part of Western Province. Although Sabaots share similar cultural ties with Kalenjin community that are spread across the counties that are situated in the former Rift valley Province (TransZoia, Nandi, Kerich, Bomet, Uasin Gishu) they were administratively grouped together with the groups with whom they did not share common ties (Simiyu, 2008). Bungoma County, for instance, where this study was located, is mainly dominated by the Bukusu who are the majority in numbers, while the Sabaot remain a minority.

The study also sought to find out whether the local community in Mt Elgon had been involved in disarming the militia groups such as the *Saboat Land Defense Force* or the *Janjaweed* as part of their involvement in peace-building process. .Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3 Community Disarmament of Militia Groups

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	4	5.3
Agree	11	14.7
Uncertain or Neutral	32	42.7
Disagree	20	26.7
Strongly disagree	8	10.7
Total	**75**	**100.0**

As shown in Table 3 the majority of community members 43 % were uncertain or neutral, while a further 27 % confirmed that they felt the local community did not do enough to disarm the militia groups. A further 11% felt very strongly that the local community did not do enough. On the other hand 15 % of respondents felt that the community did enough to disarm

the militia. They were further supported by 5.3 % of the respondents who strongly agreed that they were involved in the disarming of militia groups as part of the peace-building process

Use of Indigenous Peace-Building Approach

The study sought to ascertain whether the local community felt that their involvement in peace-building in Mt Elgon area was important in creating sustainable peace infrastructure in the region. The response in a way was aimed at understanding Johan Galtung's concept of structural violence in the community. Where personal and direct violence that a community can suffer from are often built into the social structures of a given community, it is much better to focus on the bigger picture revealed by structural violence as this would reveal the causes and effects of violence and conditions for peace (Galtung, 2013). The study found that 36 % of community members strongly agreed that their involvement was central to sustaining a sustainable security infrastructure in the region. A further 36% was also in agreement with the former. Those who disagreed were 16 % while 12 % were neutral or uncertain.

Community Participation and Sustainability

Table 4: Community Participation and Sustainability of Security Infrastructure

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	27	36.0
Agree	27	36.0
Uncertain or Neutral	9	12.0
Disagree	12	16.0
Total	**75**	**100.0**

Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms comprise social, economic, cultural and religious-spiritual dimensions in accordance with the entirety of traditions, customs and world views of a society within the different spheres of societal life. The methods involve negotiations, mediations and reconciliation based on the knowledge, customs and history of the community. Indigenous approaches to conflict resolution aim at restorative justice, restoration of order, harmony and the maintenance of relationships within the community through reintegrating feuding parties for true reconciliation (Boege et al, 2009).From the data gathered, 59 % respondents agreed that they often used indigenous practices in peace-building.

Role of Traditional Culture in Peace-Building in Mt Elgon

Table below presents the findings the community's views on the role of traditional culture in peace-building in Mt Elgon.

Table: Importance of Traditional Culture in Peace Building

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	18	24.0
Agree	44	58.7
Uncertain or neutral	7	9.3
Disagree	4	5.3
Strongly disagree	2	2.7
Total	**75**	**100.0**

Indigenous Practices in Decision Making

The study sought to assess the influence of indigenous practices on dispute resolution and reconciliation in relation to the conflict in the Mt Elgon area and the results have been presented in Table below.

Table: Influence of Indigenous Practices in Decision Making

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	17	22.7
Agree	39	52.0
Uncertain or neutral	13	17.3
Disagree	4	5.3
Strongly disagree	2	2.7
Total	**75**	**100.0**

From the data gathered, 52 % of the community members felt that indigenous or traditional cultural practices influenced their decision making when it came to their role in peace-building in their community. A further 22 % strongly agreed as well. 17 % were not sure, 5 % disagreed, and a further 3 % strongly disagreed.

The study also sought to find out whether the age of community members had any bearing on how they applied traditional or indigenous practices in their peace-building activities in the community in Mt Elgon. The results are reflected in the table below.

Table: Age of Respondents in Relation to Influence of Traditional Culture in Decision-Making

Age In years	Influence of traditional culture in decision-making					
	SA	A	U	D	SD	Tot
Under 25	0	0	0	0	2	2
25-34	4	6	6	2	0	18
35-44	5	18	4	2	0	29
45-54	1	15	1	0	0	17
55-64	4	0	2	0	0	6
65-74	1	0	0	0	0	1
75+	2	0	0	0	0	2
Total	**17**	**39**	**13**	**4**	**2**	**75**

The data collected suggests that those aged between 35 and 54 years largely agreed that their traditional culture and indigenous practices was central to their peace-building efforts in their locality.

Role of Baraza Community Forums

Elders' community forums or *Baraza* are a common feature in the Mt Elgon locality often used for sharing information and for gathering community opinions on local issues. This study sought to find out the role that these *Baraza* community forums chaired by elderly members of the community played in peace-building in Mt Elgon area. Very often *Baraza* forums are used to resolve many a community problems including conflicts and the results have been presented below.

Table: Elders *Baraza* Forum

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	22	29.3
Agree	45	60.0
Uncertain or Neutral	6	8.0
Disagree	2	2.7
Total	**75**	**100.0**

Evidence from the field suggests that the majority of community members 60 % the use of Baraza forums have played a useful role in peace-building in the Mt Elgon locality. This is supported by a further 29 % who thought these elderly forums played a very useful role indeed in peace-building. Only 8 % were unsure whilst 3 % thought *Baraza* forums had no effect in peace-building efforts following the conflict in Mt Elgon.

From these facts, the study seems to confirm John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation theory particular when he stressed for the inclusion of grassroots community participation in peace-building efforts. Especially when he observed that the reason why so many peace strategies have not been successful is because very often grassroots communities have distanced themselves from what they perceive as elitist institutions, and the governing structures that are extraneous to their immediate interaction (Lederach, 2005).

MERA's Role in Community Peace-Building in Mt Elgon Area

The study sought to establish the role that the community organized through an organization such as MERA in the Mt Elgon area is important in the context of conflict resolution and peace-building. MERA which was registered officially on the 13th of April 2005 by the Registrar of Societies has been operational since about 1995 has four working areas (1) Democratic Governance and Advocacy; (2) Peace and Security; (3) Education and; (4) Rural Development, climate change adaptation and environment protection.

MERA's Role in Disarmament

Table: MERA's Role in Disarmament

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	14	18.7
Agree	41	54.7
Uncertain or Neutral	16	21.3
Disagree	2	2.7
Strongly disagree	2	2.7
Total	**75**	**100.0**

The table above shows MERA's role in disarmament. The study revealed that 54.7 % of respondents thought that MERA played an important role in disarming local militia. This was supported by a further 18.7 % who strongly agreed, 21 % seemed unsure while 3 % strongly disagreed.

MERA's Role in Raising Women's Empowerment in Peace Building

Table: MERA's Role in Raising Women's Voices

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	21	28.0
Agree	36	48.0
Uncertain or Neutral	14	18.7
Disagree	2	2.7
Strongly disagree	2	2.7
Total	**75**	**100.0**

The study further revealed that 28 % of respondent strongly felt that MERA through its community programmes had empowered and raised the profile of women in the Mt Elgon area. A further 48 % of respondents also agreed that MERA community programmeswere beneficial to women and this enhanced peace-building activities.18 % remained neutral while 3 % disagreed.

MERA Membership and Community Security

Table: MERA Membership and Security

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	9	12.0
Agree	42	56.0
Uncertain or neutral	18	24.0
Disagree	2	2.7
Strongly Disagree	4	5.3
Total	**75**	**100.0**

The study revealed that whereas 12 % of community members strongly felt safe as a result of their membership of MERA, a

further 56 % also agreed. 24 % were not sure while a further 5 % strongly disagreed.

Tribal Affiliation, Security and MERA Membership

Table: Tribe of Community Member, MERA Membership and Security

Tribe of Respondent	Sense of security due to membership of Mera				
	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %
Sabaot	15.9	47.7	22.7	4.5	9
Teso	0	73.3	26.7	0	0
Bukusu	0	100	0	0	0
Luhya	33	33	33	0	0
Luo	0	0	100	0	0
Kalenjin	0	100	0	0	0

The study revealed that 100 % of Bukusu and 73 % of Iteso community members agreed that there were tangible benefits in terms of their security as a result of their MERA membership. This was followed closely with the Sabaots at 64 % and other Abaluhyas sub-tribes were also supportive at 33 %.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The second segment of this chapter was concerned with the collection of qualitative data for the study. The data was obtained through a focus group discussion with individuals knowledgeable of the conflict in Mt Elgon and the subsequent peace-building process in the region from 2007 to 2017. Some of these individuals belonged toopposing factions at the time when the conflict ensued. The FGD was conducted in Cheptais Sub-county, where MERA is headquartered and the majority of the respondents originate from. Most of the individuals that were selected for the discussion were themselves directly involved in the conflict, as well as the post-conflict peace-building activities in the area. The discussions attempted to establish factors that precipitated the conflict as well as the role of the community in peace-building between 2007 and 2017.

The focus group discussion comprised of a mixture of both female and male community participants. There were a total of 9 participants comprising of 5 females and 4 males that were MERA members. The aim of the FGD was to obtain in-depth knowledge of local community members and their perceptions of their involvement in peace-building in Mt Elgon area. Another aim was to assess their use of indigenous or traditional peace-building methods in conflict transformation in the Mt Elgon area. Furthermore, another objective of the FGD was to establish specifically MERA's contribution to the peace-building efforts in Mt Elgon area. Guided by 10 open-ended questions, the researcher organized one session that had a total number of 9 participants. The session lasted approximately 4 hours. This is in line with Krueger and Casey (2000) who observed that although the optimum number of participants for a focus group may vary, a

manageable number is between six and ten participants; the reason being that it is large enough to gain a variety of perspectives and small enough not to become disorderly or fragmented.

In concert with Krueger and Casey's (2000) who pointed out that in order to minimize the potential bias introduced in analysing and interpreting data drawn from focus group discussions, a research study analysis should be systematic, sequential, verifiable, and continuous. This study's focus group discussions were captured using field-notes, where major points of consensus and disagreements over the 10 key questions relating to the study's variables in peace-building in Mt Elgon were engaged.

The session begun with the question: *'to what extent were you affected by the conflict in Mount Elgon?'* This question was selected deliberately because it was aimed at introducing the rationale of the research exercise. It was explained to the participants that the overall purpose and objective of this study was to assess their participation in peace-building in their locality from the period 2007 – 2017. It was further explained to the participants that the discussion will be conducted with the study's other objectives in mind which were aimed at assessing the use of indigenous peace-building methods in conflict transformation in the Mt Elgon area; as well as establishing the contributions of Mount Elgon Residents Association (MERA) through its programmes in peace-building efforts in the Mt Elgon area.

This study can report that each of the participants confirmed that they were directly affected by the conflict in the Mt Elgon area. Some were displaced and lost property including animals. A majority reported that their family members were killed. One participant reported having lost 9 members of her family! Some female participants reported having suffered sexual violence especially repeated and violent rape. Others reported having been left homeless. Others reported that they still lived in fear and suffered trauma to the present day.

During the discussion, a significant majority agreed that the community itself in Mt Elgon has played a pivotal role in peace-building in spite of numerous difficult challenges. One of the recurrent challenges they mention was in respect to the land that many of them lost, the second issue was the problem of displacement. Some of the community members praised the idea of regular community dialogues and elders' forums or *Barazas* in addressing some of the challenges that they continue to face in the community. For instance the problem of widowhood and orphans was repeatedly mentioned. Youth unemployment is another factor that participants were concerned was a trigger to the Mt. Elgon conflict. They explained that because of idleness caused by lack of employment and lack of training opportunities, the idle and agitated youth were easily recruited into militia groups such as the SLDF.

The community felt that another fundamental problem that underlies the reoccurrence of conflict and violence in Mt

Elgon was primarily based on the problem surrounding land. They also blamed what they called 'dirty politics.' It later emerged that this was in reference to the perceived historical injustices that the Sabaots feel against the Bukusus in the wider Mt. Elgon area. When it came to the land issue, the GoK was significantly blamed for failing to redress land conflicts in the area as well as at times seeming to deliberately favour certain individuals within the wider community. The question of land had been aggravated by what the community saw as lack of political good-will to put in place relevant community driven policies and legal frameworks to redress colonial legacy of partition. In spite of GoK's effort by intervening in the Mt Elgon conflict in order to restore peace, there is a perception that the community reflected in the FGD that the government was not a neutral arbitrator.

Some of the participants suggested inter-marriage as a way of lessening ethnic tension and building stronger community cohesion with the long-term objective of diffusing violent conflict in the area. According to the participants, ethnicity has been a problem although they admitted that it was not a major one. There were certain stereotypes that some of them harbored against other ethnic groups in the Mt. Elgon area. They admitted that these derogatory perceptions of other communities were potential reasons that may have exacerbated community conflict in the area.

Some of the younger participants felt that their generation has largely been ignored by the elderly especially during community forums such as *Barazas* that are often chaired by the older members of the community. Participants who were younger wanted to be included in community gatherings or forums aimed at addressing issues of peace-building and conflict resolution. They also stressed that they were interested in empowering activities that were often aimed at women and women-led organizations. Other participants echoed politics of negative ethnicity. This mainly came from communities that had freshly immigrated to Mt. Elgon area. They explained that they felt equally marginalized and excluded from mainstream community activities including peace-building that are occupied by major tribes in the area.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study set about identifying the extent the local community was involved in peace-building in the Mt Elgon area between 2007 and 2017. It also set out to assess the use of indigenous or traditional methods of conflict resolution embedded in restorative practices; as well establish the role that Mount Elgon Residents' Association (MERA) played through its programmes in peace-building in the area. The study adopted the theoretical work of Johan Galtung's conflict analysis model and John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation work on peace-building in order to generate rich descriptions of community members' socialization and practical experience during and after the conflict. While observing MKU's ethical guidelines, the study used mixed methods research method -

questionnaires to generate quantitative data and a focus group discussion to generate qualitative data.

In response to the first objective, the study found that 64 % of community members strongly agreed that their involvement was central to sustaining a sustainable security infrastructure in the region. However, the study found that opinion was divided in the local communities as to what extent they were involved in the peace-building process in the area. For instance, younger members of the community felt that their generation has largely been ignored by the elderly especially during community forums such as *Barazas*. There is a yawning need for younger community members to be more involved in community gatherings or forums aimed at addressing issues of peace-building and conflict resolution in the Mt Elgon area than there is at present.

In the second objective, the study revealed that 59 % of community members often used indigenous practices in peace-building. A further 24 % strongly agreed that they used traditional or cultural practices in peace-building in their locality. The data suggested that those aged between 35 and 54 years largely thought that their traditional culture and indigenous practices was central to their peace-building efforts in their locality.

In the third objective, the study found that 93 % of MERA's community members felt that the organization had played a useful role through its programmes in the community towards peace-building. Furthermore, at 55 %, a majority of community members thought that MERA played an important role in disarming local militia. This was supported by a further 19 % who strongly agreed. The study also established that community programmes by organizations like MERA are an important part of community peace-building. A majority of MERA respondents agreed at 64 %, supported further by a 19% of the sampled population that strongly agreed.

From the FGD, many important issues were raised in relation to peace-building in Mt. Elgon, some of which the research exercise owing to its limited scope, time and resources was unable to address. The implications of which remain equally important in the quest for understanding and resolving deep-seated societal issues that continue to haunt communities in Mt. Elgon. One thing clear from these discussions is that the pain and anguish resultant from the prolonged conflict in Mt. Elgon is fresh in the minds of community members.

Overall, the community seems to be in agreement that the involvement of the community in efforts towards creating an everlasting peace in their locality was undoubtedly important. The community strongly pointed at land and "dirty politics" as issues being at the forefront of community conflict in Mt. Elgon.

Recommendations

From the study, the following recommendations are made to enhance community peace-building effort in the Mt Elgon area.

Authorities: From this study, it is clear that the local communities in Mt. Elgon would like the GoK to be a neutral arbitrator. From the evidence gathered, when it came to the KDF's '*Operation OkoaNchi'* intervention, the community felt that the GoK was heavy-handed. Therefore, GoK needs to involve more community-led initiatives in peace-building in the region. The County Government of Bungoma needs to be more inclusive in terms of its resource allocation to avoid accusations of nepotism, favoritism and the deliberate marginalization of certain communities within the county.

Communities in Mt Elgon: Community's involvement in Mt Elgon is commendable. However, there were some communities that felt that their participation in the peace-building process were largely ignored by larger communities. Furthermore, younger community members or the youth should be included more in activities concerning peace-building. Efforts should be made to encourage their participation to avoid the reoccurrence of conflicts in the region. Additionally, empowerment programmes with an economic inclination should be expanded to not only the female members of the community, but also to younger community members.

Other Actors/Stakeholders: Other actors that have been involved peace-building activities in the region such as NGOs and INGOs need to involve indigenous organizations and peace-building methods in their efforts towards assisting in the restoration of peace in the Mt Elgon area. Community-based organizations such as MERA should enhance its efforts towards expanding the use of indigenous peace-building methods and restorative practices and approaches as clearly they have served a useful role in peace-building in the region.

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