COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN PEACE-BUILDING: A CASE OF MOUNT ELGON RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION IN BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA

Ronald Elly Wanda, Mount Kenya University, Kenya
Kefa Nyandoro, Mount Kenya University, Kenya
Joyce Muchemi, Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Abstract

This article analyses community participation in peace-building in the Mt Elgon area between 2007 and 2017. The article assesses the use of indigenous methods of conflict resolution embedded in restorative practices, as well as seeking to establish the role that Mount Elgon's Residents Association (MERA) played in peace-building. The study adopts the theoretical work of Johan Galtung's conflict analysis model and John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation work on peace-building. The study reveals a yawning need for younger community members to be more involved in peace-building activities in the Mt Elgon area. It further reveals that community members aged between 35 and 54 years strongly believe that their traditional culture and indigenous practices are central to their peace-building efforts in their locality. The study found a majority of community members felt that their involvement has played an important role in disarming local militia groups and in peace-building. Overall, the community strongly pointed at land and "dirty politics" as issues being at the forefront of community conflict in Mt. Elgon.

Keywords: *community conflict, indigenous practices, restorative justice, peace-building.*

Introduction

Community conflicts usually have long and complex histories of different (ethnic, religious, political) group relationships, attacks, and victimization, and are often accompanied by structural violence, and they often lack mutual confidence-building and reconciliation efforts (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 1999). That said, all over the world these types of conflicts emerge as a result of many reasons. At the local level, social changes occur very often as a result of these types of conflicts (Bowd and Chiwanha, 2010). The impact of such conflicts continues to leave communities distraught, economies destroyed, and nervous political and social relationships including what has been described as psychological suffering and an omnipresent fear (Haider, 2009).

However, at the same time, it is possible to argue that conflicts are not automatically a harmful phenomenon; what matters most is the approach that communities take during and after the conflict. In our view, understanding the role that communities play in peace-building, using restorative and indigenous approaches in the resolution of conflicts, is vital in the stability and long-term sustainable growth and development of not just communities in Mount Elgon in Western Kenya, where this article is cited, or East Africa as a region but also the continent at large.

Conflicts in Africa continue to pose significant challenges to the security and prosperity of the continent's 1.2 billion population, which according to the UN, accounts for about 16 % of the world's total population (United Nations, 2016). That said, violent conflict is by no means unique to Africa; other regions of the world have also experienced and as such known wars and upheavals as well. Furthermore, Africa's conflicts, while having some common attributes, nevertheless differ in important details, reflecting the size, diversity, and complexity of Africa (Themner and Wallesteen, 2014).

Recent conflicts in the Eastern and Central Africa region have led to serious societal problems such as internal displacement of communities creating at times refugees' crises in other countries. According to the 2015 report of the United Nations Humanitarian Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) titled *Global Trends Forced Displacement Report*, the crises in several countries in the East African region have led to an increase in large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons. The UNHCR also reported that Chad as a country was number ten in the world in terms of the number of refugees it hosted in 2015. The figure stood at 369,500 refugees by the end of 2015. Kenya, the report noted had the seventh-largest refugee population worldwide, protecting 553,900 refugees, respectively (UNHCR, 2016).

Previous studies of post-conflict situations have often assumed that the main actors of peace-building are states, the United Nations or international NGOs. By comparison, community members were seen as mere recipients of outside intervention. Nowadays, it is fair to observe that community members are increasingly gaining attention as significant actors in peace-building. Having said that, the traditional negative models of peace continue to restrict how we can explain their involvement in the peace-building process. As such, the purpose of this paper is to assess the contribution of local community members; their local organization and the traditional practices they use towards peace-building. In specific, the study argues that traditional approaches embedded in the local communities' use of restorative and traditional or indigenous practices to the resolution of local conflicts using cultural practices such as those found in the Mt Elgon crisis in Western Kenya play a crucial part in community transformation.

Looking at the modalities of the inter and intra-community violence in Western Kenya, 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. The human rights abuses

meted by 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 in Mt Elgon, various actors embarked on post-conflict peace-building processes in the 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), using restorative and indigenous practices played in restoring peace in the region.

Our study 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 the peace-building process. A majority of community members 43 % were uncertain or neutral, while a further 38 % confirmed that they felt the local community did not do enough to disarm the militia groups. On the other hand, only 15 % of respondents felt that the community did enough to disarm the militia.

Our study was also interested in finding out what the local communities of Mt Elgon thought about the government's authorization of KDF's Operation *Okoa Nchi* and the role, if any, it played in the restoration of peace in the region during and after the conflict. Our data seems to suggest that while 44% of community respondents agreed that KDF's operation *Okoa Nchi* had a positive impact in the region, a significantly high number (56 %) of community members were unsure or strongly disagreed.

As such, restorative and indigenous practices are very important but much-neglected resources for peace-building, especially when 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 have 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).

Schiff (2013) has argued elsewhere 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, compared to her regional neighbors' remains an important engine of economic activity in the region's financial system. 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, Kenyan scholar Gilbert Khadiagala went on to question the region's institutions such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in failing to

address the situation in Kenya. Khadiagala quoted Rwanda's president Paul Kagame expressing worries felt by other regional leaders 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.

Methodological Approach

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach in order to provide a comprehensive picture of understanding of the peace-building processes and the role that the community played to bring about peace (Creswell, 2009). As such, structured questionnaires were used that generated quantitative data and focus group discussions that generated qualitative data. This research approach was suitable as it allowed us to collect detailed information as well as in identifying how variables interacted in peace-building in the Mt Elgon area from 2007 to 2017. A sample of 90 community members was selected out of the total population of 300 local community members that belongs to MERA. This represented 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 the Mt Elgon. This is in agreement with Best and Khan (2003) who asserted that the best sample size is that which covers at least 30% of the total population. Out of the sample of 90 community members, 75 valid responses were received yielding a response rate of 83.3%.

The study obtained its quantitative data through the use of a focus group discussion with individuals knowledgeable of the conflict in the Mt Elgon and the subsequent peace-building process in the region from 2007 to 2017. Some of these individuals belonged to

opposing 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 researchers organized one session that had a total number of 9 participants. The session lasted approximately 4 hours. This was 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.

This study's focus group discussions were then 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.

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework engaged the work of Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung's conflict analysis model and the American sociologist John Paul Lederach's

conflict transformation theory on peace-building. Peace-building theories are largely credited to the work of these two scholars. Galtung's work calls for the creation of peace-building structures that are aimed at promoting long-lasting peace in society by tackling the original reasons that bring about conflicts and supporting indigenous approaches such as those found in the Mount Elgon region in resolving conflict and managing peace.

John Galtung's work is important in the study of peace-building in the Mt Elgon area in many respects. His theoretical works since 1963 when he first published in the *Journal of Peace Research* broadened the focus of our understanding of the nature of conflicts and how to prevent them. Of interest to our study of Mt Elgon's communities in the aftermath of the conflict of 2006 and 2008 is Galtung's introduction and subsequent use of the terms, structural violence, development and social justice (Galtung, 1963).

So in a way, Galtung's peace-building theory moves us away from focusing on the actors in conflict as rationalization of our understanding of peace and violence and he introduces us to the concept of using structure as tangible account of conflicts in communities such as Mt Elgon where the central idea is that the 2006 and 2008 violence existed because of the structure and the actors such as SLDF or for that matter the KDF were mere actors carrying out that duties.

By connecting conflict in society to structural problems in the community, Galtung's theoretical premise helps us to locate the concepts of peace, conflict and progress in the community. The concept of structural violence theory is important in the Mt Elgon context in that it helps us to understand the formation of local community organizations such as MERA and their quest for social justice through restorative and indigenous peace-building efforts (Galtung, 2013).

In Galtung's theory, he was convinced that research into conflicts in the communities and peace-building, in general, should not be limited to only issues of de-escalation of structural level violence but that researchers must seek to understand the conditions for the prevention of violence in the community in general. In order to achieve this properly, Galtung seems to suggest that researchers must look at both peace and violence in totality and all human organizations (Galtung, 1996). The value of positive peace in Galtung's theory is its visualization of generating harmony in the community instead of just focusing on putting off conflict fires as was the case in the Koffi Annan led political negotiation in Kenya following the 2007 general elections impasse (Wanda, 2008).

We sought to ascertain whether the local community felt that their involvement in peace-building in the 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).

John Paul Lederach, the other theorist whose work on conflict transformation and in particular his idea of grassroots community participation in peace-building resonates well with our study, has 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). Lederach's argument is that conflict resolution researchers need to critically explore the content and approach to conflict resolution in relation to a community's customs. He points out that cultural

dissimilarity in community conflicts have been misunderstood as externally driven (Lederach, 1997). Central to Lederach's theory is the call for reconciliation. For Lederach, repairing damaged relationships in the communities is not just a preserve for the elites sitting and talking in a comfortable hotel as was the case at Serena Hotel in Nairobi during the 2007 general election impasse. He instead calls for grassroots community participation in the peace-building process as is the case in the Mt Elgon area following the conflict that peaked between 2006 and 2008.

Lederach's notion of conflict resolution applied to the Mt Elgon conflict is important in illustrating not only that communities can live together in peace, but more importantly, it helps to demonstrate why MERA as an organisation and the community itself at large must live together in peace.

Conflict transformation theory is as such useful to communities that have experienced conflicts like those in Mt Elgon because this theory discourages the presumptuous culture of violence begets violence and instead encourages a more restorative approach. Cross-border communities around the mountain can engage in repairing community relations aimed at harmonising and advancing societal development by adopting a dialogue-led holistic, bottom-up, participatory approaches embedded in a transformative theoretical model (Wanda, 2013; emphasis added).

Indeed in cases where stakeholders mistrust each other such as in the Mt Elgon conflict, or when actors in the conflict have such major disagreements, it is important for these actors to engage in making attempts to engage in a dialogue aimed at resolving the issues at hand amicably and respectfully (Susskind et al, 2003).

From these facts, the study seems to confirm John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation theory particular when he stressed 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 that 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).

The recent empirical literature on conflict studies has shown how leading scholars from the western sphere have influenced the perception and, subsequently, shaped policies even in a country like Kenya that has, in turn, had effects in community conflicts such as that of Mt Elgon. Kaplan (1994), for instance, perceives Africa as being retarded and wild. Samuel Huntington in his book the Clash of Civilisation (1993) has blamed conflicts in Africa on cultures which he says has led to the current problems of fundamentalism and radicalisation. Others such as Chabal and Daloz in their book Africa Works (1999) also look at the continent simply as the way it is. These stereotypical generalizations of wars in the continent are simply aimed at portraying Africa as simple and absurd.

Pamela Aall (2015) points out that there are mainly three major assumptions that underlie the analysis of conflict in Africa. She lists the first assumption as the zero-sum power politics; the second assumption, she says is that conflicts are due to state weaknesses and the failure of governments failures to provide basic services; and the third reason she blames differing cultural and societal views (Aall, 2015: 1). In our view, while Aall's diagnosis of conflicts in Africa may be correct to a limited degree, it possible to argue that it does not capture the whole picture, as she acknowledges in her own 2015 article. Aall goes further and argues that in any event, it is important for us to look at the enabling condition that lies beneath a particular conflict as this will help in resolving that particular conflict (Pamela Aall, 2015:1).

Indeed in most traditional African societies, although conflict generally existed like elsewhere, whenever an incompatible

situation arose which very often also led to what Ajayi and Buhari have called a "win-lose" characterization, a traditional resolution would be used to transform the "win-lose" situation into a "win-win" outcome for all (Ajayi and Buhari, 2014:139).

The "win-win" approach is of particular relevance to conflict resolution, as it allows actors and parties involved in the conflict to become partners in the resolution of that conflict. The key to resolving a conflict is to convince both parties that they will mutually benefit from a resolution. As Deutsch (1973) has noted, a destructive course in conflict is avoided when parties in a conflict work together instead of separately and competitively win-win approach is very important as all parties feel that they have won (Deutsch, 1973).

Indigenous and Restorative Practices in Peace-building in Mt Elgon Area

Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms comprise social, economic, cultural and religious-spiritual dimensions in accordance with the entirety of traditions, customs and world views of 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 aimed 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 % of respondents agreed that they 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. 9.3 % were uncertain, 5.3 % disagreed while only 3 % strongly disagreed.

There are three significant pillars that support the enterprise of restorative practices. These are aimed at repairing the harm done during a conflict; holding wrongdoers to accountable; and more importantly, they are aimed at restoring relationships of those involved in the conflict (Zehr, 2002).

Unlike other traditional western forms of justice, restorative justice does not deal with offences by myopically determining punishment. Instead, the restorative system views crimes committed in a community in a wider scope. When one commits a crime it is not just a matter of offending the law but the offender also violates the wider community (Zehr, 2002). Therefore, the focus and importance are given on repairing the harm done to the community not just redressing the violated law (Walterman-Spreha, 2013).

In a community like Mt Elgon, where the actual number of deaths as a result of the 2006-2008 conflict is yet to be established, but according to the Human Rights Watch (HRW), approximately 600 people were killed by SLDF; others maimed, had their ears chopped or tortured as a way of punishing them (Human Rights Watch, 2008); creating a situation of a surge in widows and orphans in the region; a map of restorative practices might entail a communal contract drawn up by the communities that outline the specific requirements for the perpetrators that demonstrates remorse, an acceptance of responsibility, and a demonstration of accountability. If all actions on the community contract are fulfilled within the stated amount of time, the offenders are then slowly and safely reintegrated back into the community. But as Calhorn (2013) has argued, this process is not an easy one. However, there is evidence to show that it often yields more positive outcomes for victims, the community, and the offender than does the conventional treatment of community crimes (Calhorn, 2013).

In our view, the ubiquitous retributive justice system largely employed by the government's state-centric approach to the Mt Elgon conflict of 2006-2008 was largely concerned with broken laws. It appears in its part that there were two questions that preoccupied the government's response to the conflict. These were: what laws were broken? And

who broke them? Perhaps even another one: What do the offenders deserve? Its success was as such measured by the extent of the punishment netted out to the communities in Mt Elgon. This state-centric KDF approach is arguably effective in some instances, for instance, the ongoing 'War on Terror', largely driven by the threat posed to Kenya by Somalia's Al-Shabbab terrorist group. However, in other situations such as the Mt Elgon conflict, it left community members feeling unnecessarily harmed and in some cases even isolated. Those affected by the conflict and the communities involved were not adequately addressed by the government's approach to the conflict. As a result, it deepened societal wounds while limiting its effects on the healing process (Zerh, 2002).

In comparison, given the same situation, under restorative and indigenous practices, questions such as 'who has been hurt?' would have been asked. Or, 'what are their needs?', or 'who else is involved in this?' or 'how can we make things right for all involved?' Restorative practices in this sense proposes that crime is not as simple as a broken law. People, relationships and communities at large are harmed. And that, that harm needs to be addressed. Being grounded in the principle of repairing harm, restorative practices are simply a viable alternative for resolving community conflicts. The practice promotes holding offenders accountable while at the same time restoring peace in the community (Allena, 2004).

MERA's Contributions to Community Peace-building in Mt Elgon

In our view, understanding the role that communities play in peace-building using restorative and indigenous approaches in the resolution of conflicts is vital in the stability and long term sustainable growth and development of not just Kenya or the region but also the continent at large.

MERA which was registered officially on the 13th of April 2005 by the Registrar of Societies has been operational since about 1995 continues to engage in peace-building activities in the region. MERA is located in Cheptais Sub-County in Bungoma County, a locality that has been most hit by resource-based conflicts which are said to have been politicized during the 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007 elections. MERA's organization's effort focuses on four working areas (1) Democratic Governance and Advocacy; (2) Peace and Security; (3) Education and; (4) Rural Development, climate change adaptation and environment protection.

The 'community' organised through organizations such as MERA in the Mt Elgon area is important in the context of conflict resolution and peace-building. They help community members to cope during difficult times by using traditional practices in the restoration of peace under difficult circumstances (Pouligny, 2005).

In Kenya today, communities are increasingly relying on indigenous methods and approaches aimed at supplementing the modern high court. A good example of this blend of indigenous mechanism in Kenya today can be found in how local elders under the Land Disputes Tribunals Act of 1990 are used in resolving certain cases presented to the court system. This is important because land and boundaries disputes have been a major contributory factor to the conflict in the Mt Elgon area. Under the 1990 Land Disputes Act, the law allows for certain disagreements within the community to be resolved by nominated local. This indigenous practice has served to ease the pressure from the modern Court of law system. It has also helped community members who have disputes to have their cases heard at a cheaper cost and their issue resolved quicker. That said, different communities in Kenya have different ways of resolving conflicts indigenously. These different indigenous practices have helped the government of Kenya (GoK) by complementing its efforts in dealing with certain conflicts in the community such as the Mt Elgon one (Malesi, 2008).

Elders' community forums or *Bara*za are a

common feature in the Mt Elgon locality often used for sharing information and for gathering community opinions on local issues. Very often *Baraza* forums are used to resolve many community problems including conflicts. Evidence from the field suggests that an overwhelming majority of community members (90 %) agreed that the use of Baraza forums has played a useful role in peace-building in the Mt Elgon locality.

Research Findings and Analysis

According to the study's findings, the total number of male respondents was 43 out of a total 75. This accounted for 57.3 %. Female participants were 32 or 42 % of the total sample. The study revealed that 86 % of the total respondents had some form of formal education. 21 % were educated at the primary level, while 40 % had reached secondary education level. 16 % had vocational qualifications, while a further 9.3 % had a higher education levels of qualification. When it came to gender in relation to formal educational level attainment of community members, there were 10 women as opposed to 6 men who were educated unto to primary school level. At vocational level education, both male and female respondents were equal in number; they were 6 men and 6 women. However, men doubled the number of women at 20 as opposed to 10 women that had secondary level education. At post-secondary school level, there were 7 men and no women at all.

In response to our 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 that opinion was divided into the local communities as to what extent they were involved in the peace-building process in the area.

Using one of the study's independent variable's indicator, when it came to the disarming of the local militia groups such as the Saboat Land Defense Force or the Janjaweed as part of their involvement in peace-building process, a 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.

In response to the study's second objective, from the data gathered it was found that 83 % of community members agreed that they often used indigenous practices in peace-building. The data collected suggests that those aged between 35 and 54 years largely thought that their traditional culture and indigenous practices were central to their peace-building efforts in their locality. Furthermore, evidence from the field suggests that the majority of community members 90 % laud the use of Baraza forums and consider them as having played a useful role in peace-building in the Mt Elgon locality.

When it came to the overall effectiveness of indigenous or traditional practices of conflict resolution, a significant number of community members thought that they were effective in peace-building in their locality, 81 % were in favour as opposed to 19 % who thought indigenous or traditional practices of peace-building played little or no role at all in their pursuit of peace in Mt Elgon.

In addressing the third objective of the study, the study sought to establish how the role that the community organised through an organization such as MERA in the Mt Elgon area was important in the context of conflict resolution and peace-building. 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. The data suggests that 74 % of respondents also thought that MERA played an important role in disarming the local militia.

The data also suggests that 28 % of respondents 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 programmes were beneficial to women and this enhanced peace-building activities. 18 % remained neutral while 3 % disagreed.

Conclusion

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.

Data suggests that the local communities in Mt. Elgon do not trust the GoK as a neutral arbitrator. From the evidence gathered, when it came to the KDF's '*Operation Okoa Nchi*' 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 marginalisation of certain communities within the county.

Community's involvement in Mt Elgon is commendable. However, there were some communities that felt that their participation in the peace-building process was largely ignored by the 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. 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.

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.

References

Aall, P. (2015). *Conflicts in Africa: Diagnosis and Response*, CIGI papers, No 71, CIGI: Canada.

Ajayi, T. and Buhari, O. (2014). Ethiopia, *Africa Research Review*, Vol 8, 2.

Allena, T. (2004). *Restorative Justice on the College Campus*, Springfield: Charles Thomas Publishers Ltd.

Babitt, E. and Hampton, F. (2011). The Negotiated Settlement, *International Studies Review*, 13, 15.

Best, J.W., and Khan, J.V., (2003). *Research in Education*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Boege, Volker, Anne Brown, Kevin Clements and Anna Nolan (2009). On Hybrid Political Orders and Emerging States: What is Failing States in the Global South or Research and Politics in the West? in: Martina Fischer and Beatrix Schmeltzer (eds.). *Building Peace in the Absence of States: Challenging The Discourse on State Failure*. (Berghof Handbook Dialogue No 8.) Berlin: Berghof Research Center.

Bowd, R. and Chikwanha, A. (2010). Understanding Africa's Contemporary Conflicts, Monograph 173, available at www.africareview.org (accessed 14th July 2017).

Calhorn, A. (2013). Introducing Restorative Justice: Revising Responses to Wrongdoing, Prevention Research, 20, 1. Cooper, T. L. (Ed) (2001). Handbook of Administrative Ethics. (2nd edition). New York: Marcel Dekker.

Creswell, J. (2009). *Research Design*, (3rd edition.), London: Sage.

Deutsch, M. (1973). *The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Galtung, J. (1996) *Peace by Peaceful Means*, London: Sage.

Krueger RA & Casey MA (2000). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Khadiagala, G. (2009). Regionalism and Conflict Resolution: Lessons from the Kenyan Crisis. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3,

Malesi, R. (2008). *Information and Knowledge Management in Fostering Ethnic Cohesiveness*, Nairobi: Longmann Publishers.

Nabudere, D. W. (2009). *The Developmental State, Democracy and the Glocal Society in Africa*, Pretoria: UNISA Press.

Schiff, M. (2013). *Dignity, Disparity & Desistance: Effective Restorative Justice Strategies to Plug the School-to-Prison Pipeline. Center for Civil Rights Remedies National Conference*. Closing the School to Research Gap: Research to Remedies Conference. Washington, DC.

Susskind, L., Boyd. F., David, F. and Michele, F. (2003). The Organization and Usefulness of Multi-stakeholder Dialogues at the Global Scale. International Negotiation: *A Journal of Theory and Practice* 8(2).

Themner, L. and Wallensteen, P. (2014). Armed Conflicts, 1946–2013. *Journal of Peace Research* 51: 541–54.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2016). Global Trends Forced Displacement, Geneva: United Nations.

Walterman-Spreha, (2013). Engaging Studies on the Topic of Restorative Justice, *Contemporary Justice Review*, 16, 1.

Wanda, R.E. (2008). Grounds for Hope. BBC Focus on Africa. Vol. 19., No. 2., PP 30-31.

Wanda, R.E. (2013). Afrikology and Community: restorative Cultural Practices in East Africa. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol.6., No. 6.

Wanda, R.E. (2016). Constituting Folklore: A Dialogue On The 2010 Constitution in Kenya. Africology, *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol 9, No. 1.

Zehr, H. (2002). *The Little Book of Restorative Justice, Intercourse*, PA: Good Books.