



GENDER ROLE IN ENHANCING INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN LAISAMIS SUB- COUNTY, MARSABIT COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Africa experiences significant levels of inter-ethnic conflict. These conflicts have caused loss of life and property, human displacement, cattle rustling and slow socio-economic growth. This study sought to investigate how cultural factors enhance inter-ethnic conflict resolution in Laisamis Sub-county, Marsabit County in Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to; to assess the role played by gender in enhancing inter-ethnic conflict resolution in Laisamis Sub-county, Marsabit County, Kenya. The study used mixed research design. The target population constituted 292 leaders of Laisamis Sub-county. A sample of 123 respondents was selected using both purposive and simple random sampling methods. The study used a questionnaire, key informant interview schedule and focus group discussions guide to collect data. Response from key informant interviews and focus group discussions were organized into themes and analyzed qualitatively. The findings were presented using frequencies and percentages. The results indicated that cultural factors do indeed enhance inter-ethnic conflict resolution in the study area. Majority of the respondents indicated that the rite of passage, traditional leadership, gender and nomadic lifestyle have an influence on inter-ethnic conflict resolution in Laisamis Sub-county of Marsabit County. The study concluded that gender and nomadic lifestyle also had an influence on the effectiveness of conflict resolution. There is therefore need to sensitize the communities on the most appropriate inter-ethnic conflict resolution strategies found in the local cultural attributes and activities. This study is expected to add value to the existing theories on conflict resolution and to existing knowledge in the field of inter-ethnic conflict resolution. Besides, it is expected to provide information to different organs of the government and stakeholders with interest on the inter-ethnic conflict resolution.

Key words: Conflict Resolution, Gender role, Inter-Ethnic

Introduction

In East Africa, the war in South Sudan, the collapse of the State in Somalia, and the conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi, the situation in Ethiopia as well as the wars in former Zaire (now called Democratic Republic of Congo), are significant examples of protracted conflicts. These conflicts were only addressed superficially their intensity notwithstanding (Al-Marura, 2021). In spite of the urgency concerning the conflict in Burundi, the focus was mainly on diplomatic interventions by several agencies and actors (Murithi, 2013). These interventions ended up with the

establishment of War Crimes Tribunals with none of the actors giving any consideration for the need to address the deep concerns of the parties in the conflict. The tribunals seem to have been intended to punishing individuals chosen for destruction by the powerful stakeholders rather than for unearthing the causes of conflict that remain deeply rooted in the respective societies. It is difficult to imagine how the War Crimes Tribunal in Rwanda helped to bring justice to the situation bred, for instance, by colonialism and the de-colonisation process in Burundi and Rwanda. The case was not different in Sierra Leone and Liberia (Devos, 2020).

In the case of the intractable fratricidal war in South Sudan, intervention was mainly intermittent from 1990 and undertaken by the Djibouti-based Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). In spite of the colonial basis of this conflict, it was difficult for many years to state any willingness on the part of the agencies to seek a lasting solution by addressing the profound causes of the conflict. Cuhada and Dayton (2011) summed it all when he affirmed that East Africa in general was a sub-region where neither the African Union (AU) nor the international community had been able to advance conflict management significantly beyond humanitarian intervention. Hence, there is need to study social economic factors influencing conflict resolution among pastoral communities in the Northern part of Kenya, and this study directs itself towards this end.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has since 1990, been involved in peacekeeping operations. The conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone were two situations in which ECOWAS sent in troops with financial and material support from the international community, notably the United States (Berman, 2004). In spite of the huge cost of the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone in terms of human lives and material, the peace-keeping interventions focused mainly on achieving what these actors termed 'peace and stability' (Bennett et al., 2012; Olonisakin et al., 2020).

In other parts of Africa, efforts undertaken in the 1990s included; negotiations between Angola's factions coordinated by the Portuguese in 1990 to 1992, the mediation efforts of the Italians in the civil war in Mozambique during 1991 to 1993, and the efforts of the United States with regard to Ethiopia in 1990 to 1991 and Somalia in 1992 to 1993. The United States, within the framework of the African Conflict Resolution Act of 1994, engaged with the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now known as African Union (AU), in an effort to get the Organisation's conflict management mechanism off the ground. French intervention in post-colonial African conflicts came mainly under the umbrella of the European Union.

France and Britain also sponsored a number of conferences in 1994 and 1995 in some African capitals to facilitate dialogue on the development of consensus on conflict management policy along specific lines, including *inter alia* the development of conflict management approaches tailored to African circumstances under African leadership (Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011). France also provided funding through the Paris-based multilateral Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation (ACCT) for launching a West African 'Observatory' or watchdog based in Dakar, Senegal, to focus on prevention and settlement of conflicts and democratic transition in West Africa. France has supported the development of an inventory of available military assets in West Africa for an eventual AU and or a sub-regional peacekeeping contingent (Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011).

Berman (2009) noted that France intervened militarily in some of her former colonies such as Côte d'Ivoire (2003 and 2010), Chad (2008), Mali (2013) and in the Central African Republic. The reason behind the intervention was to achieve 'peace and stability' by resolving the respective conflicts between the parties. This clearly indicates that many countries in Africa always resort to different ways of resolving conflict and especially using military and modern interventions.

Gender and Inter-Ethnic Conflict Resolution

According to Paulson and Calla (2000) the term gender is described as a social and cultural construct, which differentiates women from men and defines how they interact with each other. In traditional African set-up, the role of men and women was clearly defined. In most societies, the role of men was paramount in the formulation of values and norms. Women were not considered in matters of conflicts and peace processes, hence creating inequalities in post-conflict resolutions. While men are generally considered as the main initiators of inter-ethnic conflicts, women are left to face consequences of the conflicts.

According to Amusan et al. (2017) men who were usually in the forefront of causing conflicts side-lined the role of women in peace building and resolving conflicts. Women are the most affected by conflicts yet they are given little chance to participate in the peace processes that address conflicts. In Rwanda, for example, the success of the peace process was largely because of the full participation and contribution of women. The role of women in conflict resolution is confined to two areas; their participation and representation in the highest political levels and in decision-making and involvement in the local peace-making processes (Warren & Troy, 2015). According to Bilach (2018) women can participate well in the civil society as political representatives, in the negotiation teams as members of the mediation teams and as mediators. The capacity and the role of women in conflict resolutions has been tested and yielded positive results in African countries like Burundi, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Namibia, Somalia and Tanzania (UNESCO, 2015). Despite the call for women's active role in conflict resolution, there are still cultural related challenges that are encountered in respect to their participation in the leadership responsibility and in the decision-making processes.

Gender affects and indeed permeates, conflict dynamics at the societal and individual level. Understanding the role of gender in conflict resolution is best accomplished through an analysis of individual levels, interactional levels and the societal level. Gender may surface in conflicts in the ways that parties interpret and give meaning to the conflict. Prause and Mujtaba (2015) studied how gender affects the origins, processes and outcomes of disputes in the workplace. In this study it was found differences in the origins of disputes for men and women.

According to Elfversson (2019), gender also affects dispute-handling mechanisms. The processes used to resolve disputes for women were less effective than for men. For example, women were more often transferred laterally instead of resolving the dispute. While women felt more vulnerable, their vulnerability did not seem to interfere with their ability to actively handle their disputes. In this study it was observed that, women talked at length about feeling disempowered and disadvantaged in attempting to deal with their conflicts. There is however no documentation of any study that links the role of women to the interethnic conflicts and how the same can be used as source of conflict resolution, hence the need for this study.

Elfverson (2019) studied women as peacemakers in organizations. The women she studied acted as informal peacemakers within their organizations. These women got involved in people's conflicts because co-workers sought them out. They provided a sympathetic ear to their co-workers. They also became involved because they were loyal to the organization and also cared how the organization treated people. They provided support for people to tell their story, they reframed people's understandings of the situation, they translated people's perceptions of each other, they orchestrated occasions for private conflicts to be made public. The important role they fill in the organization is not yet understood and appreciated. This study picks this attribute of women to assess how they could be a source of a conflict resolution to the persistent ethnic conflicts in Laisamis Sub-county of Marsabit County in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Globally, conflicts among pastoral communities have continued to exist, thereby causing tension in their localities. Conflicts among the pastoral communities are largely caused by historical rivalry, land issues, political incitements, idleness amongst the youth and deep-seated cultural values (Huho, 2012). Over the years, perennial drought in northern Kenya has triggered inter-ethnic attacks, inter-clan attacks and counter-attacks and lives have been lost (Bradley, 2017). Although there are community interventions used to resolve conflict among the inflicted ethnic groups, many of these interventions have failed while others have not been sustainable. There is no attempt that has been made to determine if cultural attributes such as rite of passage, traditional leadership structures, the role-played by gender, and nomadic lifestyle can play a part in conflict resolution among the warring parties. Despite various measures put forward by the National Government, Marsabit County Government and Non-governmental Organizations to enhance sustainable inter-ethnic conflict resolution, peace has still proven elusive. The pastoral community at Laisamis has repeatedly been affected by conflicts that emanates from competition for pasture. It is against this background that this study seeks to establish the role that cultural factors can play in enhancing inter-ethnic conflict resolution among warring communities in Laisamis Sub-county of Marsabit County in Kenya.

Research methodology

The study used mixed research design.

Target population

The target population comprised of all the 5 Ward Administrators, 13 Chiefs, 33 Assistant Chiefs, 100 Village Elders, leaders from 50 Religious groups, 50 Youth groups and 41 active women groups in the Sub-county. These populations are also largely involved in the conflict resolution committees in the communities and have appropriate experiences and constant interaction with varied members of the community, public, religion, age and ethnic groups which puts them at an advantage of having and providing information. The target population constituted 292 leaders of Laisamis Sub-county.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study used mixed sampling design where both purposive and simple random sampling methods were used to select the sample. Purposive sampling was used to select all the Leadership of the area that is the 5 Ward Administrators, 13 Chiefs and the 33 Assistant Chiefs. Simple random sampling was used to select 30% of the 100

Village Elders, 30% of the 50 active Youth Groups, 30% of the 41 active Women Groups and 30% of the 50 Religious Leaders in Laisamis Sub-county. A sample of 123 respondents was selected using both purposive and simple random sampling methods.

Research instruments

The study used a questionnaire, key informant interview schedule and focus group discussions guide to collect data. Response from key informant interviews and focus group discussions were organized into themes and analyzed qualitatively.

Research findings

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques since both approaches complement each other. The findings were presented using frequencies and percentages as follows.

Results of the study

Gender of the Respondents

Table 1: Gender Distribution of the Respondents

	Ward Administrator	Chiefs	Assistant Chiefs	Religious Leaders	Village elders	Youth group leaders	Women group leaders	Average
Male	100%	100%	93%	100%	100%	67%	0	80%
Female	0	0	7%	0	0	33%	100%	20%

Source: Research, 2019

The results show that on the average majority (80%) of the respondents who participated in the study were male, while only 20% of the respondents were female. It is further noted that, apart from assistant chiefs and youth group leaders, all the ward administrators, religious leaders and village elders were male (100%). Among the assistant chiefs, 93% were male while among the youth leaders 67% were female. This shows high level of disparity among the leadership of the community. It is further noted that only 7% of the assistant chiefs' were female, 33% of the youth leaders were female and all the women group leaders were 100% female. This could be attributed to the fact that the community is patriarchal with male being dominant in the leadership positions in Laisamis Sub-county. In most pastoralist communities, women are given very little chance to participate in decision making hence they are very few in the leadership position just as seen in the study. In the case of the Rendille for instance women are not allowed to participate in sacrifice ceremonies in the families.

Respondents' Awareness of Conflicts and their Causes in the Area

It was important for the study to first establish whether the respondents were aware of the conflicts in their area and what the main causes of these conflicts were. All respondents who were actually leaders of the area were all fully

aware of existence of inter-ethnic conflict in the area both in the present and even in the recent past. It was found that at any one time, any two or all the ethnic groups could clash with each other, and there is no specific tribe that can thus be labelled as an aggressor. They gave nearly similar reasons for the conflicts, although in different proportions. The responses are presented in figure 1.

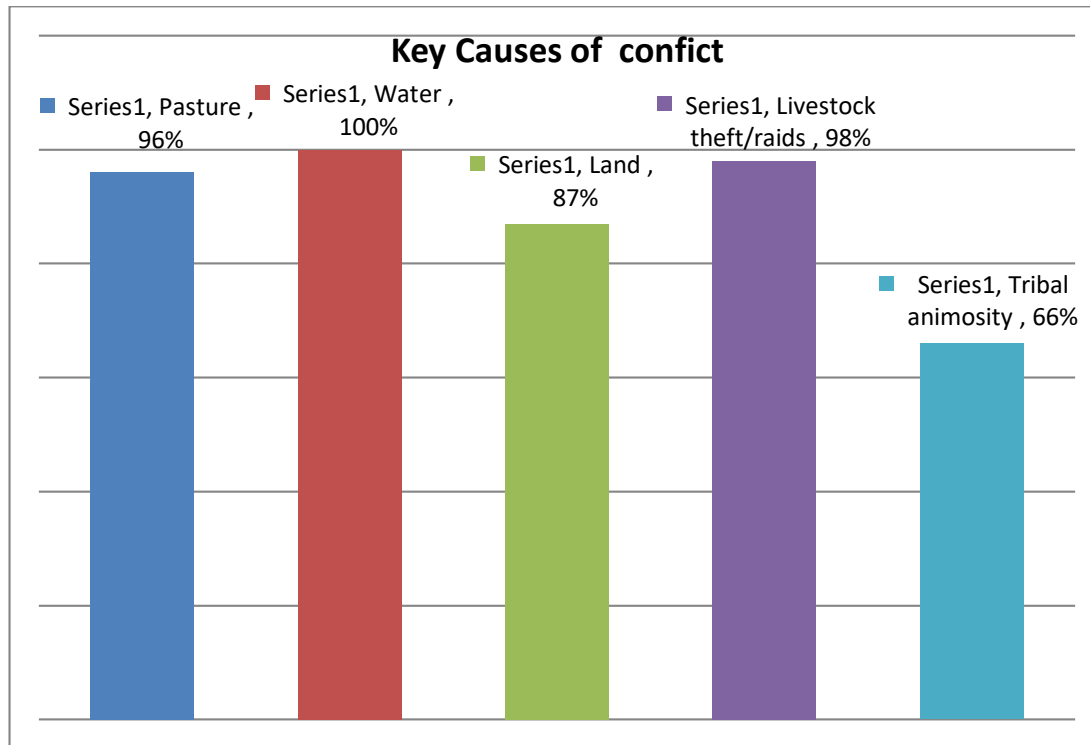


Figure 1: Causes of conflict

Source: Research, 2019

The results in figure 1 clearly show that majority of the respondents were aware of the conflicts and the causes of the conflicts in Laisamis Sub-county. All the respondents (100%) indicated that water was a major cause of the inter-ethnic conflicts given the climatically harsh condition of the area. The conflicts frequently occurred at the animal watering points where two groups will always start a fight when they find out that other communities are invading their watering points. The second major cause of the conflicts was livestock raids and theft as identified by 98% of the respondents. This was followed by 96% who indicated pasture as being a major cause of the conflicts. Clashing over the land and boundaries disputes accounted for 87% of the conflicts, while tribal animosity accounted for only 66% of the inter-ethnic conflicts. This implies that majority of the respondents were sure of the causes of the conflicts. Further probing through the interview with the village elders revealed a similar scenario. It was noted that most conflicts in the area among the ethnic communities arouse because of pasture and water points. These two were serious issues and they brought about the tribal enmity especially in cases where there were death occurring during the conflicts.

Role Played by Gender in Enhancing Conflict Resolution

The study also sought to establish the role of gender in enhancing inter-ethnic conflict resolution. It was important to note that the communities that participated in the study were patriarchal in nature. These communities are characterized by male dominance in most leadership areas. Among these communities, women's role in leadership

decisions is minimal. However, women have been noted to play a very significant role in peace making initiatives in the community. Women also have been known to suffer a lot in times of conflicts together with the children. Understanding the role played by women in conflict resolution as therefore important for this study.

In this section, the focus was directed to the focus group discussions because it was the only forum where women were highly represented. In Laisamis at Laisamis/Merille Ward, the discussion was very successful with very active participation from both the youth and the women representatives with a total of 5 members from the youth and 5 members from the women representatives the common issue was that yes women are actively involved in the conflicts and hence they should be involved in the resolution process.

One of the women indicated that;

“To me I believe we have a critical role as women to bring these conflicts to an end. This is because, we are the ones who praise our sons after the raids and we suffer most when we lose our sons and other property during the conflicts. We should through these groups organize to make peace with the other communities and encourage our children to take up alternative roles like attending higher education to bring about change of mind” (discussion held on August 2019)

In their narration some of the women felt that it is time they took up the issue on a serious note to end these conflicts. They all agreed that even if the government sent troops to the area, it will not resolve the issues these communities suffer from. This implies that the inter-ethnic conflicts are a cultural issue and this can be addressed if both men and women can sit and agree on what is to be done.

In another discussion held at Merillein, Laisamis/Merille Ward, with a total of 4 youth and 6 women group representatives, it also emerged that the young people who attended the discussion felt there was too much pressure from the culture for them to fulfill. Some of the aspects from the discussion as shown in box 4, show the frustration of the young men as they struggle to fulfill the requirements of their community.

Young men are in the front line in matters of conflict resolutions because they are the ones who go to war. In most of the communities, girls are not involved in many of the community issues instead they are nurtured by the women and taught matters of the family life. Some of the excerpts from the discussion were provided in box 5.

Excepts from Discussion with the Youth Leaders

One of the group members a young man said;

‘There is no other way to solving the social challenges facing our communities other than going to school. I say this because a few young people who have gone to school are much ahead of us in development and they do not have to join the raids to be praised. Families with educated young people are living much better life than those of us who have no proper education and still stick so much to our culture’

Another participant said ,

“....I agree with my colleague that if we the young people strive to get better education we will be able to defeat the challenges we are faced with and this culture that we are enslaved with will end and so will the inter-ethnic conflicts.”

Source: Research, 2019

The discussion in Loglogo in Loglogo Ward with a total of 5 youth and 5 members from the women groups indicated that gender plays an important role in inter-ethnic conflict. They stressed that women mock men who are defeated in any of the raids and this stereotype makes them feel worthless in the community. Out of this anger the young men become even more fierce and are ready to cause even more damage for that recognition and praise from their mothers and the girls in their community. They also indicated that, education will help resolve the inter-ethnic conflicts in the area. One of them indicated that; “when the young men and women go to school and get education, they will not remember to ever go out on raid because they will have alternative sources of livelihood and will assist their old parents to live better lives.”

In relation to the discussions, it is observed that gender is an important aspect of a community. Culture affects both male and female and any challenges relating to culture can only be solved if both men and women can sit together and agree on the most appropriate solutions to the challenges. The men need to approach the problems as the leaders of the community, while the women need to influence the decisions made as they have the power to do so.

Recommendations

This study recommends the following;

The role of women should be recognized in the leadership of the communities because it was established that women also play a role in fuelling inter-ethnic conflicts as they are the ones who cheer and praise the young men when they go and come back from these raids in Laisamis Sub-county.

The role played by community livelihood must be given a lot of attention as a factor that influences inter-ethnic conflict resolution as it is a cause of the inter-ethnic conflict in Laisamis Sub-county.

A mediation and reconciliation team should be formed to assist in considering improving the existing policy on how to solve inter-ethnic conflicts not only in Marsabit but also among other communities in Kenya. This policy must lay down common strategies among the members from different communities who must be part and parcel of the efforts in regard to raising of awareness, training of the members of the communities in collection and dissemination of early warning information and reverting to peace building process using indigenous or home-grown resolutions to inter-ethnic conflicts, in Laisamis Sub-county.

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