

# The Role of Women in Conflict Management Following the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence in Kakamega County, Kenya

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## Abstract

*In most African societies women still occupy inferior positions both in the family and society as there is discrimination against them in terms of participation in decision making. The objective of this study was to examine the role of women in conflict management following the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kakamega County, with an aim of coming up with intervention strategies to improve women participation in conflict management. Lugari and Mumias West which were intensely affected by the PEV. The conceptual framework of the study was drawn from Liberal Feminism and Conflict theories as well as the United Nations Agenda for Peace. The study adopted descriptive survey and explorative research designs. Questionnaires, interviews, and observation methods were used to collect primary data while secondary data was obtained through analysis of documents and reports from relevant offices, library and internet. The main respondents were 384 household heads, while key informants were 38 head teachers of primary schools, 33 Community Based Organizations (CBO) heads and 9 Assistant Commissioners. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study revealed the major role of women in conflict management through peace talks, counselling, and civic education. Apart from contributing to existing knowledge on the role of women in conflict management, this research would be of benefit to policy makers, security managers, academicians, communities in Kakamega County, and Kenya at large. The study recommended enhancing capacities by dealing with root causes of conflicts, strengthening security personnel and promotion of national cohesion. It also recommended the implementation of Resolution 1325 on gender equity.*

**Keywords:** 2007/2008 post-election violence, conflict, impact, sustainable peace, woman

## Abbreviations:

PEV Post-Election Violence  
CBOs Community Based Organizations  
IDP Internally Displaced Persons

## I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world accounts of war tend to portray men as the conflict resolvers and women as passive innocent victims. In conflict situations, women are much more disadvantaged compared to men. Women tend to be the most vulnerable victims of various forms of violence, from domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, to sexual torture and other types of sexual violence. They also suffer disproportionately from displacement and deprivation (Boulding, 1988).

Focusing on women only as victims of conflicts ignores the fact that women play significant roles during and after the conflicts, and reinforces existing traditional gender values and practices that women are only “passive” and “subservient” in peace and politics. This has negative consequences in overlooking women’s potential as key actors in conflict management processes and activities and yet women themselves are active participants in conflict situations. Women are thus caught in a vicious paradox: while they are the main civilian victims of conflicts, they are often powerless to prevent the conflict, and are excluded from decision making positions, and negotiations. When it comes to women participation in conflict resolution, they are usually confined to a marginal role in the post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation and when they contribute their effort is usually ignored (Goldsten, 2001).

Women are viewed as peaceful because they are less likely than men to initiate or participate in violence because of the maternal instincts to have a peaceful environment for the children. However, they do often fill supporting roles that prolong or shorten intractable conflict. Goldstein (2001) argues that, “masculine war roles depend on feminine roles in the war system, including mothers, wives, and sweethearts. Women in Europe and North America organized in an effort to prevent the outbreak of the First World War. In July 1914, the International Women Suffrage Alliance presented a petition for peace to the British Foreign Ministry signed on behalf of 12 million women in 26 countries (Moser, 2001).

In Kenya women have mobilized resources, and facilitated reconciliation among warring communities in Wajir and the North Rift region (Odongo, 2004). According to UN (2012), Professor Wangari Maathai was awarded Nobel Peace Prize because of using environmental conservation as a prerequisite to a sustainable and peaceful world. Korir (2009) indicates that Teckla Lerupe a renowned athlete formed a peace foundation and on many occasions used sports in fostering peace especially in the Rift Valley region of Kenya. Nominated Senator Honorable Naisula Lesuuda championed peace campaigns in Laikipia in 2010 during ethnic conflict between the Samburu and the Pokots (UN 2012). In 2007/2008, Kenya experienced post-election violence following the disputed presidential election results. The former President Mwai Kibaki of Party of the National Unity (PNU) was declared winner, and this prompted Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Party (ODM), and his followers who were dissatisfied with the results to claim rigging. As a result, supporters of each party turned against the other in most parts of the country leaving about 1500 people dead and 250,000 displaced (Maja, 2009).

Kakamega County was one of the regions that experienced severe post-election violence. According to the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commissions Report (2008), in Kakamega County 31 people were reported dead in Kakamega Central Sub-County, 18 in Lugari, 12 in Mumias West and many were reported injured. Businesses were destroyed and quite a number of people were internally displaced ending up in camps in and police stations. According to Maja (2009), there were also Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) flocking back from other parts of the country where violence was taking place. As a result various stakeholders came up with ways of peace building, for instance the Government formed Peace Commissions in all the Provincial Headquarters whose role was to ensure peace and reconciliation in the regions and organize counseling services for the traumatized victims of PEV. Further, the National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management formulated a Draft National Policy on Peace Building and Conflict Management (GOK, 2009).

According to KNHRC (2008), NGOs like Peace Unit Programme which targets the youth in Higher Learning Institutions and Women Peace Link which deals with women in peace building among others have strived for sustainable peace in these regions. Based on this background, the study sought to establish the role of women conflict management following the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kakamega County with an aim of coming up with Intervention strategies of

improving women participation in conflict management.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

The focus of the study was restricted on the role played by women in conflict management following the 2007/2008 post-election violence. This study was specifically on women because women as child bearers seek conditions that enable society to be peaceful for the sake of their children (Odongo, 2004). It is important to note that the key informants and respondents for the study were both male and female since both had knowledge on the role of women in conflict management following the 2007/2008 PEV. The study was confined to the three Sub-Counties of Kakamega County, Kenya which were extensively affected by the 2007/2008 PEV thus, Kakamega Central, Mumias West and Lugari.

In this study, exploratory and descriptive survey research designs were adopted to evaluate the impact of the 2007/2008 PEV on women in Kakamega County. The research also adopted exploratory research design, which is also referred to as formulative research design whose main purpose is to formulate a problem for more precise investigation. The major emphasis in such studies is on the discovery of ideas and insights. According to the 2009 census, the three sub-counties (Kakamega central, Mumias West and Lugari) of had a total population of 616,335 and a total of 203,282 households (KNBS, 2009), the total population of the age range 20 to 49 was 315,513. Kakamega central had a total of 50,605 male and 54,862 female, Lugari had a total of 43,044 male and 50,929 female while Mumias West had a total of 53,322 male and 62,798 female.

A total of 384 household heads was utilized as the sample size. The study focus having been on women, out of the 384 household respondents 60% were female while 40% were male thus 230 female (kakamega central 76, mumias west 78, lugari 76) and 154 male (kakamega central 51, mumias west 52, lugari 51). The 384 were not sampled in the category of key informants and this was meant to avoid double responses cases. Therefore, a total of 464 respondents/key informants, comprising of 384 household heads, 38 head teachers of primary schools, 33 heads of CBOS and 9

Assistant Commissioners formed the sample size for this study hence the total sample size was 464. On observation method, the researcher physically visited the three Sub-Counties and divisions under study and observed various variables of the study guided by an observation checklist. The study collected secondary data published and unpublished, on the role of women in conflict management from libraries of the

various universities, publications, and reports from organizations. To enhance validity and the researcher conducted a pilot study by which pretesting of tools was done on a few respondents in a non-targeted region for the research which also experienced the 2007/2008 post-election violence. Using test/retest method the researcher administered questionnaires and interview schedules to the pilot respondents to fill and were

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to understand their perception of conflict management, the 384 household heads were asked to indicate their perception of conflict management and from their responses, most respondents 39.0% (150) perceived conflict management as a way of settling disputes, 26.6% (102) as conflict resolution, 19.8% (76) as an act of making peace and 13.8% as solving disagreement. Hence majority of the respondents had knowledge of what conflict management entails. This is in line with Werner, (2010) who indicated that conflict management aims at promoting peaceful ending of social conflict or war. It is a process of coming to an agreement and ending a conflict thus intervention aimed at alleviating or eliminating discord through reconciliation.

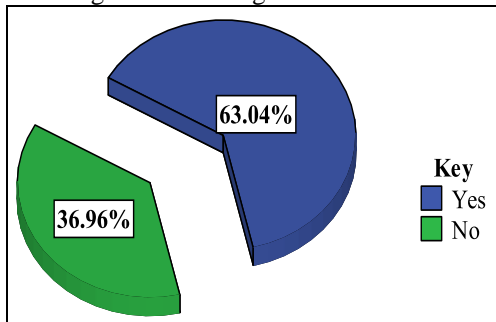


Figure 1: Knowledge of Women Participation in Conflict Management  
Source: Field Data

The study sought to establish whether women participated in conflict management following the 2007/2008 PEV in Kenya and therefore the respondents were asked whether women had participated in conflict management. The results were summarized in figure 1.

collected, after two weeks the same respondents were given the same questionnaire again to fill. The pilot study was done in Busia County a non-targeted region for the study. The qualitative data collected through the use of in-depth interview were coded, thematized and discussed as a report. The findings of the questionnaire were presented using descriptive statistical tools such as frequency, tables and graphs.

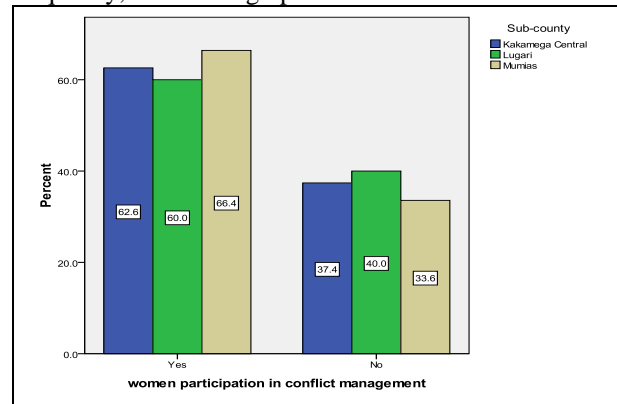


Figure 2 Participation of Women in Conflict Management Across the 3 Sub Counties  
Source: Field Data

The results show that in all the three sub-counties, women were involved in conflict management following the 2007/2008 PEV. From the results in figure 2, most household heads 63.04% (242) had witnessed women participate in conflict management; while only 36.96% (142) had not witnessed. This shows that most women were active participants in conflict management following the 2007/2008 PEV. House hold heads were further asked to categorize women participation in conflict management following the 2007/2008 PEV and the results were as follows; 60% (230) indicated that most women peace builders were aged between 26 and over 40, as evidenced from the table 1.2 below. 5% (19) indicated less than 18 years, 30% (116) 19-25 years and 5% (19) plus 40 years, this is partly because most of the women falling in the 26–40 age bracket have become mothers and they feel the pain strongly when they or others lose their children and husbands in conflicts. Biologically, it is women who give birth and nurse babies. In most societies, women are the primary care givers responsible for the children and the family. The role of women in nurturing, building relationships and maintaining the family is central to their identity. Table 1 summarizes the views of the 384 household respondents on female peace builders per age bracket;

Age range	Below 18	19- 25	26 – 40	Above 40	Household Heads Total
Respondents	19.2	115.2	230.4	19.2	384

Source: Field data

As Gnanadason observes women play the role of peacemakers within their families and their communities (Gnanadason et al., 1996). Mitchel (2000) supports the above by indicating that women generally are more collaborative than men and thus more inclined toward consensus and compromise. Women often use their role as mothers to cut across international borders and internal divides. The results further support those of Mohamed (2003) who indicated that, in Kenya women in the Rift-valley province during and after the 1992 land clashes played a major role in conflict resolution.

marches, shared projects, open forums and negotiation. Deciding which method to use depends on the nature of the conflict and disputants attitudes. Data obtained through interviews with the provincial administration represented by the nine Assistant Commissioners indicated that women were in the forefront in offering civic education, peace talks' encouraging peaceful co-existence, provision of moral support and assisting those in need; especially those whose property had been destroyed, advising the youths, initiating peace groups and visiting victims in communities.

**Conflict management strategies used by women in conflict management**

Household heads indicated that peace dialogue meetings was the most used strategy with 294 (77.5%) of the respondents affirming this position. Table 2 illustrates this position. Korir (2009) explains that peace dialogue meetings play a key role in conflict management. He emphasizes that dialogue has the ability to stimulate change by bringing together partners in order to discuss ideas, shared experiences and agree on new approaches to work in conflict affected and fragile contexts. Peace dialogue meetings therefore help to reconstruct relationships between conflicting communities. The strategy is therefore social in nature addressing the relational aspects of people who have been in conflict. This emerged in the interview session with CBO heads and Assistant Commissioners. Dialogues provide a forum for discussion and innovations that lead to improved interactions and peaceful coexistence.

Mohamed, (2003) indicated that the major methods of conflict management are peace dialogue, peace

**Table 2 Conflict Management Strategies used by Women**

Approach		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Peace dialogue	F	5	5	80	294	<b>384</b>
	%	1.3	1.3	20.8	77.5	<b>100.0</b>
Peace marches/Tournaments	F	5	5	84	290	<b>384</b>
	%	1.3	1.3	21.9	75.5	<b>100.0</b>
Shared collaborative projects	F	1	9	94	280	<b>384</b>
	%	0.26	2.3	24.4	72.9	<b>100.0</b>
Open Forums	F	2	8	93	281	<b>384</b>
	%	0.52	2.08	24.2	73.4	<b>100.0</b>
Negotiation / reconciliation	F	2	11	90	280	<b>384</b>
	%	0.52	2.86	23.4	72.9	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field data**

Korir (2009) affirms that peace meetings created a sense of freedom and confidence. A facilitator would moderate the discussion and a member at the floor speaking would be allowed to speak without interruption. The issue was discussed by the two groups until a solution was found. This paved way for opportunities for forgiveness and reconciliation.

The findings of this study as illustrated by table 2 indicates that 290 (75.5%) of household heads pointed out that peace matches was a strategy that was used in conflict management in the region. The interview with CBO heads and Assistant Commissioners indicated that women used peace



matches and tournaments in conflict management in the County. This indicates that both the household heads and the CBO heads recognized that peace marches played a significant role in creating awareness on the need to maintain peace in the county. UN (2012) indicates that the United Nations invites all nations annually to honor cessation of hostilities and commemorate the international day of peace through education and public awareness on issues related to peace. In quest for sustainable peace, the Universal Peace Federation and its ambassadors world-wide celebrate international day of peace annually, the women's role in conflict management is highlighted as they are encouraged to promote a culture of peace through sports, music, drama, peace walks and marches. Following the UN practice, the women peace builders in Kakamega County organized peace marches and other events to remind people that they should cultivate a culture of peace. This is still done on international day of peace through organizations like Peace Unit Program and Women Peace Link. During these activities women invited members of the conflicting communities to sports, games and music competitions and this eased existing tension between them.

Further interview sessions with CBO heads revealed that peace tournaments involved special teams whose admission to participate either in football, netball, volley ball or any other team depended on the composition of the players. A team was required to have an equal number of players from the formerly conflicting ethnic communities, giving them a chance to interact during the preparations and the actual marches. The CBO heads indicated that this strategy was recreational in nature, giving the participants a chance to have fun as well as interact with each other. This strategy was therefore social and recreational in nature. Research Consortium of Kenya (RCK, 2013) agrees with this position and explains that activities that integrate conflicting communities are essential in promoting peace. Further, RCK indicates that the playing teams have representatives from each warring community. During the tournaments, talks on peaceful coexistence are conducted hence making peace tournaments popular because they are interesting and entertaining.

The findings of the study show that 280 (72.9%) household heads highlighted that joint or shared projects are a key strategy women used in conflict management in the region as illustrated in table 2. Korir (2009) indicates that it is helpful for groups to initiate collaborative joint projects, events or activities. These are aimed at solving common problems faced by both communities and build experience of working

together for common goals. The initial shared projects or activities should be short term and fairly simple such as management of local efforts or sports day. As the group gains experience they should be encouraged to take more complicated projects as building schools, roads, bridges or destroyed homes. Korir argues that the experience of working together reduces tension and builds solidarity across ethnic lines.

Findings from the study as seen in table 2 indicate that 281 (73.4%) of household heads identified open forums as a strategy that women used in conflict management. On the other hand, 59(40.4%) of CBO heads both those directly affected by PEV and those not directly affected by PEV agreed that open forums were used by women as a strategy in conflict management. Open forums initiated by women involved members of the local community, local leaders and the female peace builders. Discussions, music, drama and sports were the activities used to pass on messages of peace. Findings from the interview session with the assistant commissioner in Lugari revealed that open forums were popular. He also indicated that it was meant to give an opportunity for peace to do peace themed activities together. So these activities caused them to interact and appreciate each other's cultures. Hence open forums were social cultural in nature.

Interview with Assistant Commissioners revealed that women used open forum as a strategy for conflict management following the 2007/2008 PEV. Owen (2003) agrees with the use of open forums as a strategy of conflict management. He indicates that peace initiatives can be made simple by just providing venues or "open spaces to open minds to peace". This, he explains, creates the open forums where community members, peace educators and peace builders, all come together to dialogue, network and plan through drama, dance and music. The emphasis, he argues is not to worry about spending time organizing an agenda, since according to him as long as there is an identified venue and a general theme, the activities of the day will self-organize and the theme of the day will be adequately articulated through the various activities during the open forums. The researcher is of the opinion that open forums can work well in conflict management, however it is vital to know that forums without an agenda could also lead to waste of time.

Table 2 indicates that 280 (72.9%) of the household heads identified negotiation and reconciliation as a strategy used by women in conflict management following the 2007/2008 PEV. Pruitt & Carnevale (1993) explain that when there are incompatible goals, a state of social conflict exists. As a result, according to them, negotiation is a way of

dealing with social conflict as well as a root to win solutions. They indicated that the concept of negotiation addresses some of the largest problems faced by human kind and also presides over much of the changes that occur in the human society.

Lerche (2000) concurs with the findings of the study that reconciliation plays a key role in conflict management. He argues that both the theoretical and the praxis oriented literature on contemporary conflict resolution acknowledge that the hearts and minds are as ravaged by war and violence, and in as much need reconstruction on burnt out towns and villages. He notes that, the success of conflict management depends in part, on assisting antagonistic communities to put their past of violence behind them through negotiation and reconciliation. The interview session with an assistant commissioner in Kakamega Central indicated the usage of negotiation by women during the peace dialogue meetings following 2007/2008 PEV. Person to person contact also emerged as a method that was used by women in conflict management following the 2007/2008 PEV in the county. Household heads respondents, 138 (76.7%) of them as it emerged from table.2 indicated that women used this method as a strategy for conflict management in the region. Interviews with CBO heads identified this as a method that was use by women in conflict management following the 2007/2008 PEV in the region. Assistant commissioners indicated that person to person strategy for peace was not used as much by women in conflict management, with only 16(21.9%) indicating the usage of person to person contact as a strategy for peace. In his study Mohamed (2003) indicated that, in Kenya women in the Rift-valley province during and after the1992 land clashes played a major role in conflict resolution. They used the following methods in conflict management; negotiation, traditional method mapping out the routes warriors follow, curses, solidarity visits, organizing exchange programmes, peace exhibitions, sports, merry-go-rounds, and women as witnesses in courts.

The results are in agreement with those obtained from interviews which showed that women participated in conflict management by trying to solve disagreements with neighbors, praying for peace in the community, carrying out negotiations for conflicting parties, giving food donations to those in need as well as offering guidance and counseling to fellow women that had been affected. The interview session with Assistant Commissioners and CBO heads indicated that person to person contact was not very popular especially to the people who were directly affected by the PEV as they were cautious about their security. The Assistant Commissioners during the interview indicated that this strategy sought to reach out to more and more

people in the community in order to improve relationships therefore social in nature.

Korir 2009 indicates that person to person contact is one to one meetings with individuals from either side of the warring groups. He explained that no matter how ferocious the fighting in any clashes is, there are always some people in every community who feel uncomfortable with the violence and have a yearning for peace and are open to making contact with the other side. The individuals, according to Korir, want help in finding a way out of the conflict. Once they are identified, this two people one from either side of the divide meets at a personal level. They then undergo a personal transformation for peace through one to one discussions with each individual about possible alternatives of restoration of peace to warring communities. The one to one dialogue helps erode the suspicion and skepticism of these few people and thereafter they are asked to become messengers of peace. The research findings show that income generating activities were used by women in conflict management after 2007PEV, with 203 (52.8%) of the household respondents indicating its use as shown in table 2. The research finding is in agreement with RCK 2013 that income generating activities contributed towards restoration of peace in a region where there is conflict. RCK indicates that lack of livelihood opportunities play a large part in escalation of 2007 PEV especially to those who were idle and jobless. They argue therefore that it is important to address the socio-economic concerns of post conflict populations to ensure that they have vested interest to sustain peace and stability. One motivation for this is to empower them economically and RCK indicates that activities such as tree planting and knitting are good examples. The researcher is of the opinion that those without jobs should be encouraged to take advantage of the existing structures such as their local community funds to improve capacity for finding livelihoods.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

Basing on the study objective on the role of women in conflict management following the 2007/2008 PEV in Kakamega County, from the findings the study confirmed that indeed women played a major role in conflict management and they achieved this through civic education, peace dialogue, exchange programmes, mediation and provision of moral support. The most popular methods were peace dialogue meetings, peace marches, peace tournaments, and shared projects. Sporting events were also used and these were popular as the conflicting communities mixed freely and interacted during the sports exchanging ideas on fostering peace. To achieve this,

they undertook the following activities additional activities; negotiation, counselling, adjudication, dialogue and charity work. Data obtained through interviews with the Assistant Commissioners indicated that women were in the forefront in offering civic education, peace talks' encouraging peaceful co-existence, provision of moral support and assisting those in need; especially those whose property had been destroyed, advising the youths, initiating peace groups and visiting victims.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the second objective which was to evaluate the role of women in search for peace following the 2007/2008 PEV, the researcher recommends legislative and other barriers for women's participation in conflict management be removed to allow them to participate fully. Provision of education, technical and financial support to women's organizations is key if they have to participate fully. In post-conflict societies, this support is critical and institutions should be redefined, restructured or newly created and new laws and regulations on this be developed. It is important to increase the number of women legislators in post-conflict elections, including revisions of constitutional and legal frameworks to remove discriminatory provisions; reform of electoral systems; specific targeting of women in voter registration; provision of security during elections; training of women candidates, and introduction of temporary special measures such as quotas. Measures should be put in place to ensure attention to women's rights and gender equality issues. Gender training should be provided for all the commissioners; preparatory workshops be held, particularly for rural women; and gender-sensitive reparations policies be developed (for example, providing compensation for work in the home). In addition to these, for women to contribute to peace processes and decision making about security they need safety, resources, political space and access to decision makers. Sometimes regard them as a nuisance or even a threat to their interests. Activists who have had an opportunity to meet with decision makers at the national or international level told me how crucial it was to share information and to build relationships. As Secretary General Kofi Annan has called non-governmental organizations 'the conscience', the voices of women's organizations must be heard and heeded by governance structures in which they are fully and consistently represented.

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