

## **An Investigation of Church Based Peace Building Models in Selected Churches in Kericho County**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Peacebuilding with all members of the community in view of stemming potential and existing tension has become a necessity. In majority of politically and ethnically instigated violence, such as in the Kenyan post-election violence of 2008 and 2017, the Church was a major player in peace building processes as well as in the reconciliation process. This paper endeavoured to explore the available peace building models adopted by the Church in Kenya since 2008. To attain the mentioned objectives, the study engaged the Fowler theory of faith development. This was a qualitative research that applied the use of interviews and Focus Group discussions in the collection of primary data while secondary data used in this research was acquired through the review of documents and other relevant literature in public libraries and Church archives. Purposive sampling techniques were used to identify respondents, and the data analysed using context analysis. The study established Peace building models used by the Church were Mounting of Humanitarian Response Model and Policy advocacy which were done through Dialogue, Seminars, Evangelism, Sports and cultural events. These approaches to some extent helped to mitigate tension and violence in the region. Youth mentorship programs by the Church contributed to instilling the values of unity, honesty, peaceful co-existence as well as self-reliance among youth in the region and the society at large. The study recommends that religious organizations such as the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK) and leaders should pursue peace building by ensuring that justice to all is achieved through methods that have respect for the people and also allow for the restoration of relations that foster and seek to correct injustices in regard to the fundamental values of human rights. The Kenyan Church should join many other faith-based peace advocates who endeavour to put into practise the principles of their belief in a manner that enables the building of local, regional, nationwide, as well as global machineries favourable for peace.*

**KEY WORDS:** peace building models; conflict, violence

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## INTRODUCTION

Conflict in the many parts of the world has elicited activities and academic discourses regarding the best approaches to mitigate such conflict through peace building and reconciliation where possible. Peace building goes beyond the management of conflict as well as its settlement and prevention. By definition, it can be said to be an activity that seeks to identify structure and support them in making strong and sustainable peace so as to eliminate the reoccurrence of conflict (Ghali, 1992). The concept was further boosted by the Former UN secretary general's decision to systemize and synchronize peace building activities. It was during the time of Koffi Annan that the terms peace building and conflict prevention were used interchangeably (Annan, 2014). Peace building was seen as any action not only meant for seeking peace but also geared towards making of structures that seek for peace. Marwan (2012) stipulates that since 1992 the United Nations has shifted its simplistic linear understanding on the change from violence to peace, to one that is more integrated and comprehensive. Peace building efforts currently therefore require variety of skills and capabilities ranging from military to humanitarian, security to political and social as well as economic among others. Due to this paradigm shift, the process is viewed as a holistic method for the transformation of structures and conditions among communities that may cause violence caused by political, social, economic, religious or other factors.

In Kenya, since early 1990s, communities' peaceful and harmonious coexistence has been disrupted almost predictably every election cycle. Violence mostly involving the youth has rocked most parts of the country with Kericho County being one of the most affected through tribal clashes and violence. In order to enable employment of the right peace building models one needs to first understand the type of conflicts that are found in Kenya. Barbero (2003) has categorized main types of conflicts into four touching ethnic, resources, politics and religion. In Kericho County the main conflicts are ethnic, political and resource based. This has led to perpetual conflicts especially when the country is nearing a general election.

### Research Objectives

The broad objective of the study was examining the effectiveness of Church based peace building models in promoting peace and reconciliation in Kericho County. The specific objectives were:

- i. To investigate the model(s) of Church based Peace building initiatives in Kericho County.
- ii. To establish the effectiveness of the church-based peace building models face

### Peacebuilding efforts and approaches by the church

Various literatures highlight various efforts and approaches by the church in diverse places in the world. First is an examination of proposals by the World Council of Churches. Then it is followed by a discussion of the Columbian model peace building as it relates to some extent to context of this paper. This section also looks at peacebuilding by the church in Africa. According to the UN World Population Prospects statistics there is an estimate of 1.3 billion person aged between 15-24 years in the world with approximately one billion

dwelling in developing countries prone to frequent conflicts. Youth have multi-faceted roles and can be heroes, perpetrators as well as victims, yet, as a category, they are mostly seen as a fixed group or demographic cohort. In the discourse of conflict, the youth are mostly regarded as 'othered' and are branded as potentially dangerous as well as a problem. The young people in this discussion fall between two extremes. On one hand, they are the victims and on the other they are the perpetrators. However, recent literature has drawn a shift on the role of youth in conflict underlining them as agent and acknowledging their transformative role in peacebuilding. The positioning of youth in society has a bearing on their leadership potential and their possible role in peacebuilding. The tension between young and old has been one of the key features of inter-generational shifts pertaining to the control over power, resources and people. The societal dynamics, challenges and opportunities that drive and define the roles of youth in conflict and peacebuilding differ depending with the cultural contexts such as Africa, Europe, Asia or Latin America. The social, political and economic navigation of the young persons in search of their identity as well as the negotiation of societal norms, values and structures in pursuit of a voice and significant position in the structures underline and define their role. It vital that they are recognized and comprehensive understanding of their conflict and political trajectories, mores so those who have taken direct participation in an armed conflict as combatants. Effective engagement of the youth in peacebuilding requires first an understanding of youth mobilization and reintegration factors, secondly their involvement in non-violent politics, and from a wider perspective, the enablement of their political agency, thirdly the challenges they tend to face due to the armed conflict and fourthly the provision of training opportunities so that they can meaningfully and actively take part in peacebuilding.

Various studies have been conducted on peacebuilding models. The need for the Church in Kenya to develop her peacebuilding models is crucial. Gurr (2010) states that though many people ignore the Church, tragedy at a personal level or national level such as the 9/11 and Covid19 has caused people to change their view of the church. During serious problems many individuals run to the church. The church keeps individuals and the society grounded, helping them face challenges of life by offering them a solid foundation of faith and attending to their deepest spiritual, psychological and economic among other needs. The modern church plays a significant role in the life of a believer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by filling voids resulting from life situations. The church then becomes a place of refuge and a pillar of hope for all in society especially in the face of war and conflict.

According to World Council of Churches [WCC] (2013), participating churches and ecumenical groups started to reflect on their positions concerning war and peace, violence and nonviolence in 2001, with the aim of developing new theological approaches to the pursuit of peace, justice, and reconciliation. The report further states that to achieve this task, a proper study of scriptures, a revisit of church history and reflection on the existing peacebuilding practices is necessary in order to determine afresh what it means to be church in a violent world. The WCC developed proposals at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC), held in May of 2011, in Kingston, Jamaica, which were then presented in the form of a declaration, "An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace." Composed of a supporting document that covers extensive biblical, theological, plus ethical content, suggestions for

additional exploration, as well as examples of good practice, the resources represents the current mind of the WCC on issues that have engaged its member churches since its inaugural assembly in 1948 at Amsterdam (WCC, 2013).

The WCC (2013) states that peace par excellence is at the heart of the good news the Christian faith proclaims. The prophets of the Old Testament proclaimed that the Messiah who was coming would be referred to as the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6); that people would live in the knowledge of God and peace with one another (Is.54:13), no longer making war against one another (Is. 2:4; Micah 4:3-4; Hos. 2:18; Jer. 23:6; Zech. 9:10). God's reign is portrayed under the image of a holy mountain, where the "wolf shall live with the lamb" and the "child shall play over the hole of the asp," for "they will not hurt or destroy" (Is. 11:6-9; cf. Ezek. 34:25). Even with nature will people be at peace (Hos. 2:21-22; Ezek. 34:26). Thus, a new world of peace that embraces all things is the promise of the messianic kingdom. When Christ was born, peace on earth was announced by the angels (Luke 2:14). In Jesus Christ, God is revealed decisively as a God who wills peace. God chose not to deal with His enemies by destroying them, but rather by reconciling them to Himself through the death of Jesus Christ His son (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:19-21).

Further in scripture, Christ is also described as "our peace," having "broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Eph. 2:14). In raising Jesus from the dead, God revealed that death does not have the last word (1 Cor. 15:54-57), that God is on the side of life. Moreover, in the resurrection of Jesus is revealed God's final purpose for all creation, to liberate it from its bondage to decay into the new life that God has destined for all God has redeemed in Christ (Rom. 8:21). The world that we live in today is constantly faced with Conflicts some which turn violent leading to the deaths of many human beings. The Church is a very important actor when it comes to establishing peace and promoting harmony among human beings. In looking at the bible, we find that in the last chapters of the Apocalypse of John (Revelation 21:4) depict a new creation in which "death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." What the above scriptures says is that there will be perfect peace which shall come from there being no Conflicts and wars that cause pain to Humanity.

Churches and faith-based organizations have variously participated in many ways in peacebuilding initiatives in many parts of the world and in Africa as well. Among other activities, they have provided opportunities for conflict resolution, humanitarian aid, safe havens for the displaced and those traumatized by conflict (Ferris, 2005). Churches have been instrumental in facilitating reconciliation between the warring parties and also engage in peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict. Various examples include the activities of the World Council of Churches and the All Africa conference of Churches in diverse places one example being in Sudan (Appleby, 2006).

The church and other faith-based organizations have been involved variously in peacebuilding initiatives, for instance, Colombia, where the peacebuilding work was carried out, had been in armed conflict for more than four decades. According to the National Centre of Historical Memory, the conflict left an approximate number of 220,000 dead, of whom

176,000 were civilians, while 25,000 disappeared (CMH, 2013) and another 800,000 victims wounded and mutilated, among combatants and civilians and some 5 million displaced persons. Besides this, many deaths were reported, according to the INML, in 2012 16,033 people died as a result of fights, domestic violence, crime and conflict between gangs. The violence in the Columbian society were a consequence of many societal problems such as lack of definition of private ownership rights, social injustice, inequity or inequality, domestic violence, corruption, abuse of the rights of the unprotected, lack of access to social, economic and political rights. In addition, there are frequent natural disasters, which cause displacement and poverty. There exist other problems of endogenous nature, such as domestic violence and ill-treatment, family break-ups, fathers leaving their children, loss of values, intolerance, bullying in schools or communities, which taken together generate conflicts (William, 2018).

The cumulative result of violence in Colombia includes deaths, torture, deaths of parents or relatives, violations of families or of themselves, forced displacement, with deep wounds, indelible memories. Forgiveness therefore in a society like Columbia can be seen as an element of Reconciliation. According to Melo (2001) a question is asked as follows: "Is it possible to forgive?" especially where there have been homicides in the family. Derrida (2001), also supports the thought that forgiveness emerges as the result of a prerequisite to reconciliation. Society renounces sanctions, to reduce the cost of violence, without even having genuinely accepted the responsibility. Nevertheless, it is necessary that everyone, both victim and victimizer, should be able to consider using this tool. The model of forgiveness and reconciliation is paramount here. This model was proposed in 2001 by a group of interdisciplinary professionals of the University of Harvard and they called it the theory of forgiveness and reconciliation. They defined it as the effective means of cleansing from hatred and desire for vengeance, considering that it gives priority to the victims over the victimizers and that being forgiving is indispensable to thinking in a culture of peace. Thomas More (Marius, 1999) said that a social being is a being that forgives, which teaches us those human beings must have the capacity to forgive. To achieve this, the Columbian church emphasized Promotion of a culture of peace, through the doctrine of Non-violence, using the tool Participative Action Investigation (PAI). This tool was developed for the Christian Association of Mennonites for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action (JUST PEACE), which works in the districts of Cauca, Chocó Cundinamarca, Córdoba, Bolívar and Sucre. It is a source of power for the processes of the construction of a just, complete and lasting Peace since it is itself the work of the churches and communities.

Narváez (2003) proposes another strategy, which he considered important to be that of follow up. This was developed by CTAP (Christian Teams Acting for Peace), belonging to the Christian entity Peacemaker Teams (CPT), a body which began its work in Colombia in 2001, responding to the invitation from the Colombian Mennonite Church and accompanying threatened communities in Río Opón; it supports rural communities and human rights organizations in the Magdalena Medio region, promotes the building of peace with justice along with other peace-makers; they associate with non-violent groups around the world, and have influence in communities concerned with the love of God. They offer care to the population and legal services for organizations and communities, teaching them that justice

should prevail before peace can stay within reach. It is interesting to replicate the strategy adopted by the Diakonia ministry of the Church in Sweden, which has contributed to strengthening the capacity of local organizations, including basic organizations, to promote agendas of peace in the regions and in the country, in favour of armed conflict negotiation and peaceful handling of various conflicts.

In Africa, the church actively participated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Shore, 2008). Their roles included “investigating alleged atrocities committed in the apartheid era, granting amnesty where feasible as well as recommending compensations to victims” (Githigaro, J. M. 2012)

## **METHODOLOGY**

A review of selected relevant literature was adopted for this paper. Discussion of some literature was done and, in the process focusing on approaches/models used in addressing peace and reconciliation. The study has majorly built on studies already done by others as captured in the Literature review. This was qualitative research that applied the use of interviews and Focus Group discussions in the collection of primary data while secondary data used in this research was acquired through the review of documents and other relevant literature in public libraries and Church archives.

## **DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

From the study carried out it was established that in Kenya the Church has used the following several peacebuilding models to advance her mission.

### **Humanitarian Response Model**

Post-election violence of 2007 and 2017 resulted in serious humanitarian crisis touching deaths, psychological trauma and displacement among others. Humanitarian responses were mounted by the church to addressing immediate needs. First was the provision of humanitarian support by offering food and non-food material. It included assessing the needs of those displaced. Second was the rallying of leaders in the church and the community to restrain the young individuals from engaging in any violent acts. Third was the provision of psychosocial support to deal with matters of trauma caused by the death as well as those brought about by harm emotionally or physically. Gradually, church leaders were involved in community forums so as to restrain the young people from aggression and stop them from participating in violence.

The report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Post Election Violence [CIPEV], (2008) through interviews and media reports, indicated occurrences of sexual violence. The report included accounts of rape such as gang rape, sexual mutilation and atrocious deaths. In addition, the Commission also heard accounts whereby members of the family were forced to witness as their parents, siblings and little children were raped, maimed and brutally killed. Some victims contracted sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS due to lack of immediate access to medical care. The Commission also reported that the sexual violence left

scars so deep not for a moment but some that could last an individual's life time, such as wives who were abandoned by their husbands because of they had been defiled and some victims suffered psychological trauma making them feel powerless, hopeless, alone, lonely and unable to cope.

The displacement of people also created a serious humanitarian crisis needing immediate response. One of the public inquiries set up to address the problem unearthed diverse responses from those affected especially women (Truth, J. & Reconciliation Commission, 2011). The churches also participated in the process in attempts to find the root cause and ways to deal with the problems.

### **Policy Advocacy Model**

As a result of the National Accord of 2008, a power-sharing plan was adopted between the two political factions of ruling party, Party of National Unity (PNU) and the opposition part of Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). The agreement was pivotal not only in stopping the post-election violence but also in the setting up of the framework that would guide the reforms agenda in the country. The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) points out that policy advocacy, has been and will continue to be their long-term strategy for healing and reconciliation process. The Council also participated in inspiring the making of various legislation including The Constitutional Review Act 2008, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Act, the Witness Protection Act, and the National Cohesion and Integration Act (NCCCK, 2008). The Council also participated in also participated in the development of transitional justice.

Numerous publications and reports indicated extensive violation of human rights in the violence during and after the 2007 election (KNCHR 2008; Human Rights Watch 2008; International Crisis Group 2008). In response the NCCCK recommended that the bearers of the greatest responsibility as concern the violation of the human rights be taken to the Hague based International Criminal Court (ICC) in Netherlands.

### **Dialogue Model**

The Church has used Dialogue as a model of peacebuilding tool between warring as well as conflicting communities. The model has been identified as very crucial in peacebuilding. The church has put considerable effort into bringing not only the youth together but also the other members of the society who together participated in identifying the root causes of conflicts and also came up with ideas and possible solutions to the cyclic problems in many parts of Kenya including Kericho County.

### **Seminars and Workshops Model**

There was also reported use of Seminars and workshops to empower the youths with skills in peacebuilding. The approach however called for serious financial investments in Professionals to engage and equip the youths with relevant peacebuilding skills. Most of the Churches had not set aside finances and logistics for this kind of activity.

### **Sports Evangelism Model**

Sports if coupled with other activities, has been fronted as one way of promoting peaceful co-existence and establishing friendships among/across communities (Audrey, 2013). The Church recognizes that the youth can use sports to advance peace because sports cuts across boundaries evidenced in other parts of Kenya (Mutubwa, 2014). Through sports different communities make teams that compete creating opportunities of friendship and these have helped people to realize that no one can exist alone. Kericho County has over time grown to appreciate the contribution of the sport-based approaches in regards to objectives of development and peacebuilding (Svensson and Levine, 2017). Traditionally the church only engaged in preaching as a way of evangelizing. It is however being seen that there is change that the Church is embracing and this is known as sports evangelism. Mariga, (2021) supports this and notes that sports in the community is views as an significant intervention that promotes peacebuilding initiatives by playing the role of a convener as well as an enabler especially among the youths who mostly become the nucleus of violence in times of instability.

### **Development and employment program model**

Development and employment seek to engage the youth to lessen idleness and thus less prone to violence. In Kericho county attempts have been made especially in providing the youths means of personal development (Too, 2015).

### **Challenges Facing the Church based peacebuilding Models**

One of the biggest huddles identified as hindering the Church based model as a tool for peacebuilding is insufficiency of financial resources in light of its high demands. Funding for peacebuilding programs is usually on short term basis and this therefore negatively impacts the endurance of those gains and efforts made over time.

An additional challenge is the possible division in the church prior to and even after the conflict has taken which means the church itself may need to heal internally before it can effectively purse building of bridges and peace amongst communities that are severely divided. As reported by a senior NCKK official, "The church was divided and therefore it needed to go through internal healing. One of the first responses to this crisis of legitimacy was to apologize to the nation and put in place processes to undergo healing." The Council in August of 2008 prepared a National Pastor's Conference that was held at Kabarak University, in Nakuru, Kenya, as one of its strategies to address the challenges in the church. About 1500 church leaders came together seeking internal healing amongst its members including both clergy and lay leaders. This period allowed for deep reflection in respect to what part the church would be playing in the nation's healing and reconciliation process (NCKK, 2008).

Appleby (2006), states that among other huddles that the church has to deal with in peacebuilding and reconciliation is the failure of their leaders in understanding and/or endorsing their potential roles in the peacebuilding process in their local community. For example, several leaders in the church do not know how to take advantage of the strategic capacity that they possess as transnational actors. Appleby (2006) goes on to state that peacebuilding could succeed if and when: (1) their reach is international or transnational; (2) they constantly emphasize on peace and by all means use other means of resolving conflict



other than through application of force; and (3) they create and maintain good relations in times of conflicts mainly among different religions, for it enable for positive contribution in the process.

Another important hindrance is the lack of the right tools for peace-making. A United States Institute of Peace report pointed out that there exists a gap in knowledge and skills for religious groups in their pursuit of commitment coupled with little or no articulated approaches of peace making. Mwangi (2000) who highlights that the roles of the churches in the management of conflict management does not have broad theoretical base to guide and direct execution; for instance, stakeholders do not have the technical know-how of the terms applied in in this field, as well as they do not appreciate history forgetting that all conflicts have deep running memories which impact greatly on the current and future occurrences. Appleby's relates the above and states a dire need for training as well as undertaking of more studies and testing for theoretical development even as he describes the peace-making process to be inchoate and uncoordinated.

Fear according to Macaulay (2013) is one of the challenges that peacebuilders face and this includes; fear that their response may not be appropriately, fear that they may upset the lay members as well as the uncertainty what kind of response will be right. Furthermore, the lack of or little commitment shown by some Priests in the parishes is of concern according to Macaulay (2013) who argues that as they rightfully prioritise their internally pastoral work whilst leaving very little or no time at all for peacebuilding. When little focus is given to peace building, Macaulay (2013) observes that training and engagement of the necessary Church leaders especially in peacebuilding and community development falls behind. Macaulay's opinions were very instrumental in this study accentuating the need for commitment by religious leaders and religious organizations in their activities designed to maintaining peace and seek reconciliation as Jesus Christ expects of his true followers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Attaining reliable and sustainable integration still requires much to be done and there is a call for relevant religious stakeholders at the individual level and organization level to tactically collaborate with each other in the religious peacebuilding process for optimum outcomes. The challenges that have been highlighted, if and when objectively dealt with will enable the religious peacebuilding processes in getting satisfactory and sustainable result

## **Recommendations**

From the finding of the study religious organizations especially churches and leaders should pursue peacebuilding by ensuring that justice to all is achieved through methods that have respect for all people while also seeking to restore relationships by identifying and improving injustices adherence based on the fundamental values of human rights.

To have a positive impact, the Church leadership should articulate a theological framework for her role as peacemaker. The contribution of religious peace makers all over the world in peace-making as well as peacebuilding efforts are recommendable. The Kenyan Church

should join many other faith-based peace keepers who endeavour to achieve the goals of their faith in ways that assist their communities have conducive environment to peace.

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