

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN REFERENCE TO TANA DELTA

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Abstract: The study was designed to examine the factors that aggravated conflicts within communities, taking a specific focus on the Orma and Pokomo communities in the Garsen and the Tana Delta in Tana River County. The study focuses on the role the women in these two communities can play in peace building and the roles they have played so far. The Ormas and Pokomos have been facing quite dramatic challenges posed by various socio-economic indicators. In spite of the fact that there had been increased deaths, loss of property and displacement of people within the area, there still exist significant differences ethnicity and the level of articulating of the fundamental issues still remain wanting. There are a large number of members of the community within Tana Delta who still live under fear not knowing the next move that will be undertaken, thus failing to make maximum utilization of their available resourced for their socio-economic well-being.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's efforts in peace processes and conflict resolution are seldom recognized. Their initiatives in peace building throughout history have been portrayed as marginal. Often in conflict situations, the dominant narrative revolves around the vast impacts and suffering encountered by women and children. Every so often these accounts of women as the victims of violent conflict override the role women play as actors in conflict situations and as peace agents. (Amedzrator, 2014) This article therefore aims to analyze this phenomenon with particular focus on the Tana River Delta region protracted conflicts. The article seeks to identify the contemporary state of conflict in this region and identify the agency of women in the conflict and peace building processes. It seeks to identify the capacity in which women have occupied as actors in conflict management and mitigation.

Protracted conflict along the Tana River Delta predates the colonial period. The delta is a melting pot of multiple ethnic groups including the Wardei, Orma, Somali, Malakote, Munyoyaya, Bajuni and Pokomo. Of these the dominant ethnic groups are the Orma, Wardei and Pokomo of which the Pokomo and Orma ethnic groups form approximately 68% of the total population county. The Orma whose origins are from Ethiopia are Cushites who inhabit the hinterland and traditionally practice nomadic pastoralism. The Pokomo are Bantus whose livelihood relies on the river for farming and cultivation and are settled in the wetlands and along the river bank. Rainfall in the area is erratic and unreliable in the hinterland and therefore during these periods, the Orma try to access the river to water their livestock but the river banks have been occupied by farmers who leave no space for livestock to pass.

The underlying cause of conflict is the differing cultural notions held by the two communities on land ownership which brings about the recurring conflict on ownership of land versus access to the river. The Orma are traditionally pastoralists' who's belief and customs recognize communal land ownership. The Pokomo on the contrary are Bantu who believe in individual land ownership. This conflict of traditional ideals and over natural resources are among the key drivers of conflict in this region. The effects of these conflicts affect the women and men differently (Erzurum & Eren, 2014). There arises the need therefore to examine to what extent the women are affected in the conflict. Although they bear the brunt effects of violent conflict they take up alternative roles to ensure that conflicts do not reoccur. This article aims to determine the extent to which women have been at the forefront of bridging the conflict between the two rival communities.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM (SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY)

The Tana Delta is an ethnically and socially diverse region of Kenya that is home to multiple tribes each of whom practice varying religions and differing livelihoods. Their exploration of differing livelihoods is often the trigger of eruption of violent conflict between the two predominant communities of the Orma and Pokomo residing in Tana River Delta region. These conflicts are for the most part on a small scale in the form of retaliatory village attacks when livestock from Orma villages trespass and destroy Pokomo farms located on the banks of the river. These small scale rivalries contribute to growing tensions that lead to largescale surges of conflict that result in devastating deaths, displacement of people and destruction of property. Such conflicts also stagnate development efforts in the region and hamper economic growth.

The effects of these conflicts are borne differently by men and women. Women often bear the severest brunt of the conflict from losing husbands, sons and daughters to filling the roles left behind due to fatalities. These factors are among the many that motivate women to spearhead peace building and peace negotiation efforts in such communities. Their efforts however are often informal and gain no recognition. Women take up the roles of peace promoters by reaching across warring sides to other women, being peace-builders by helping victims and survivors of conflict to readapt themselves into society and as mediators and negotiators.

In the case of Tana River Delta, this study will seek to analyze women's' interventions in conflict management and mitigation in the Tana Delta Conflicts between pastoralist Oromo and the Pokomo farmers. In order to achieve this, the study will be guided by the following questions:

- i. Factors that influence the conflict in the Garsen, Tana Delta area between the Orma and Pokomo?
- ii. What are the effects of the lingering conflict in the area to women, children and sustainable development?
- iii. Who are the major actors in peace building and what they are doing to involve women more in the process?
- iv. What is the effect of women's contribution to the peace building processes?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Approach to the agency of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peace Process:

Over the years, the aspect on the role of women in peace building and conflict management has gained quite some traction among researchers. This is as a result of the initiatives of women in peace building throughout history being portrayed as marginal. Previous studies and research conducted on conflict, international relations and peace building disregarded the plight of women in conflict situations and their contributions towards peace processes (Amedzrator, 2014). It was not until the 1980's when women scholars through their written works and the feminist movement created awareness of the imperative role of women in conflict management and peace building thus advancing their plight. (Gonzales, 2016) Contemporary studies regard women not solely as victims of violent conflict but as capable actors engaging in conflict and peace processes in varying capacities such as inciters, informants, peace agents, mediators and advocates. (Shackel & Fiske, 2016)

There has been a global shift in approaching conflict and peace processes using a holistic approach which includes the necessity of including perspectives of all actors affected. (Casabonne, 2013) Divulges that the nature of conflict is heterogeneous often has varying degree of effects on girls and boys, women and men. This therefore emphasizes the need for the application of a gendered perspective in these processes (Olofsson, 2018). (Speake, 2013) However notes that while a gendered approach is imperative it should also address the structural underpinnings and power dynamics that are the root cause of women's exclusion from peace and mediation processes. In an African context particularly, the patriarchal nature of our societies gravely contributes towards this exclusion. Women often perform the roles of being peace promoters by reaching across warring sides to other women, being peace-builders by helping victims and survivors of conflict to readapt themselves into society and as negotiators and mediators. Despite their brave initiatives, women often take up these roles informally and seldom receive acknowledgement for their efforts.

Among the key milestones on the advancement of women's agenda on peace and security was the unanimous adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on 31st October 2000. (Olofsson, 2018) Previous concerns on women, peace and security were not adequately addressed as they were cumbered with bureaucracy and decisions taken lacked proper policy directives. (Wamae, 2013) This resolution was therefore pivotal in that it formally recognized the

need for the inclusion of women in peace processes and the vital relationship between women, peace and security. It was groundbreaking in that it acknowledged the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and called for actors to incorporate gender perspectives at all levels of the peace processes

A research conducted by (Paffenholz, Ross, Dixon, & Schluchter, 2016) reported that women's influence in peace processes and negotiations positively correlates with a high probability of agreements being reached and implemented during peace processes. They cement the notion that the involvement of women has significant contributions and contrary to people's beliefs, their involvement does not weaken or stagnate peace processes. This was evident in the post conflict dialogue held in 2008 after the Post-Election Violence whereby a group of women under the Kenya Women's Consultative Group (KWCG) actively participated in the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation Process (KNDR). KWCG was successful in that it was the first time in Kenya's history that women were formally present at the negotiating table and their efforts were born into fruition. They presented a memorandum which highlighted the gender dimension to the conflict, women's rights and the mainstreaming of gender-responsive language in the negotiation agenda and agreements (IPTI, 2016) They also led discussions on Sexual Based Gender Violence (SBGV) that occurred during PEV which ultimately led to the forming of Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission that addressed this dimension in the cohesion and reconciliation process. The efforts of women are therefore important and should not be overlooked, whether formally or informally.

4. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

It was not until the 1980's when women scholars through their written works and the feminist movement created awareness of the imperative role of women in conflict management and peace building thus advancing their plight. (Gonzales, 2016) The instrumental role of women in conflict situations is significant because women know the cost of violence, having lost husbands, brothers, sons and even daughters, women are affected gravely by protracted conflicts thus they are also often well equipped to act in various capacities when violence erupts.

Women often perform the roles of being peace promoters by reaching across warring sides to other women, being peace-builders by helping victims and survivors of conflict to readapt themselves into society and as negotiators and mediators. Despite their brave initiatives, women often take up these roles informally and seldom receive acknowledgement for their efforts (Luchsinger, 2010). In an ideal peace building situation, men and women would enjoy equal rights and opportunities across all sectors of society including economic participation and decision making. The diverging needs of women and men would also be of equal value. Contrary to this, women are rarely involved and when this happens, they tend to occupy peripheral and informal roles that are rarely receive recognition. Cumulatively, these issues led to the rise of the Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory (FPCT) whose agenda focuses on the need for the visibility of women in conflict resolution as their needs are seldom met in these gendered processes (Weber, 2006). (McCarthy, 2011) suggests that their inclusion would in the long run lead to the attainment of sustainable peace as their exclusion only diminishes the possibility of attaining this goal.

5. HISTORY OF TANA RIVER DELTA CONFLICT DRIVERS AND DYNAMICS

Tana River County is among the six counties that encompass of the Coast Region of Kenya. It is host to one of Kenya's most extensive water resource, the river Tana from which the country derives its name and it covers a distance of over 1,000 km flowing from the Nyandarua Range (Abardare Ranges) to drain in the Indian Ocean. The expansive county covers an area of 38,862.2 km² and has a population of 262,684 people as per 2009 census. (Sentinel Project, 2013) The river is instrumental in influencing the livelihoods of the residents of the county. The region is situated in a semi-arid to arid environment as depicted in fig 1 whereby fertile land is located in the wetlands and arid area in the hinterland.

The nature of conflict in the region, particularly involving the two communities is no new phenomenon. The Pokomo are Bantu speakers are traditionally agriculturalists who settled along the banks of the river. They cultivate on the rivers banks and rely on this resource to grow their food crops such as maize and rice. The Orma have their origins in the larger Oromo tribe who are located in Ethiopia. (Guyo, 2009) They migrated in conquest of newer territories and settled in the Tana River area in the 17th Century occupying the hinterland area where they found extensive pasture for their livestock. Here they found the Pokomo and lived in symbiosis with them. In times of drought, the Orma would negotiate with Pokomo elders to gain access to the river. (Kirchner, 2013) (Temper, 2015)

Records on conflict in the area claim that they began to sprout sporadically in the 19th Century. (Guyo, 2009) Conflict revolved around the dynamics of access to the river and Orma livestock destroying Pokomo farms. It is however recorded that these were rare and often resulted in customary and traditional regulations that helped resolve these conflicts. During the colonial period the conflicts intensified and to curb this the British colonialist initiated *malka* or 'water corridor' whereby the Pokomo had to leave paths in between their farms for passage of livestock by the Orma (Mwangi, 2015) With the increase in population cumbered by scarcity of resources, the wetlands along the banks of the river have been extensively used for subsistence farming in comparison to the colonial period. The *malka* corridors are no longer instituted and this has resulted in fueling the tensions in the region.

Clashes between the two Communities have intensified in the 21st Century. Between 2000 and 2002 the region experienced skirmishes which resulted in the death of over 130 people as well as displacement of over 3,000 people. (Kirchner, 2013) (Guyo, 2009) In this period, there was a shift in the dynamics of conflict experienced owing to the proliferation of small arms among the Orma and Wardei communities that fought alongside one another. The most recent of these explosive clashes occurred in 2012 (Baron, 2015) where over 100 people lost their lives. Women and children were not spared and there was burning of valuable property and farms. The nature of conflict in the delta has also been linked to other contemporary factors such as late and inadequate interventions by police and administrative officers as well as political influence which pits these communities against each other due to perceived discrimination. (Asaka, 2012) Proliferation of small arms from the porous border of neighboring Somalia also contributed to the intensity and mass fatalities during conflict. (Temper, 2015)

6. FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE CONFLICT

In this section we will have a look at the clashes from different angles. The section will provide a range of explanations of the conflict, with special attention to the Orma and Pokomo views on natural resources, poor governance and links to the election.

A study conducted by Miller (1981) has tried to explain the tensions that has existed between farmers and pastoralists were recorded from the beginning of the 19th century. The study found that conflict occurred when herdsmen moved to the delta in search for water for their livestock. Some animals would then stray into farms and start to graze and trample the fields. However another study by (Townsend 1978) also mentioned occasional Pokomo attacks on the Orma, which were rare, and usually resulted in a peace agreements, in which the Orma promised to reform. And the ever growing threat of climate change which were are experiencing in the country seems to exacerbate the situation, since the pastoralist are forced to go further and further into the delta in order to nourish their livestock.

This attacks usually end with a lot of casualties on both sides, but majorly affect the women and the children of both communities the most. A UN study done on the effects women more than men, cause the presence of gender based violence and but it also hinders their access to essential services such as health care (United Nations Population Fund, 2001). This has necessitated the need for women to be more involved in matters that concern their wellbeing.

A study by (Shadrack Kipkemoi, 2017) that interviewed the locals, indicated 6.8% of the respondents said there was closure of the health facilities in the area and health personnel had fled the area. Also 97.4% of the respondents had seen an increase of reports of injured people in the local health centers, while 24.8% of the respondents indicated that there was withdrawals of health Personnel. This puts the women and children of the area at risk due to lack of adequate personnel and facilities to cater for their healthcare needs.

The study also found that majority 92% of the respondents owned less than an acre of land. The remaining 8% owned between 1-3 acres of land in Tana River County. This indicates scarcity of arable land in Tana River County. This is one of the major factors of the conflict and also exposes the lack of ability of the women of the area to gain enough agricultural farm land in order to provide for their families. House hold statistics show that most of the families, 25.6%, had at least two members in their households. The rest of the households were as follows, 13.7% had 4 members and 12.0% had 6 members. Families with 9-11 members and above represented 3.4% of the respondents each. With majority of their income in these households coming from domesticated animals at 75.2% and 24.8% indicating otherwise (Shadrack Kipkemoi, 2017).

This is why there is even a greater push to have more women in the peace building process since they seem to be carrying the heaviest burden as regards to the effects of the prolonged conflict between the two waring communities.

7. EFFECTS OF THE LINGERING CONFLICT TO WOMEN, CHILDREN AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Conflict always lingers around this area and has become a huge part of the residents' lives. The done by Kipkemoi finds that the majority of the residents, 55.6%, the last time they experienced conflict was 3-5 years ago, 21.4% of them claim they have experienced conflict this year and 13.4% last year. A small section of 9.4% say they last time they experienced conflict was 5-10 years ago. The study also tried to ascertain how long people stayed in the area and a majority of 55% had lived in the area for more than 5 years. This shows that the respondents had lived in the area for long period. Thus they have experienced the heights of violence in the area. This has had a devastating effect on the lives of the people in the area, especially to the main economic activities of the communities.

For instance according to the findings of (Shadrack Kipkemoi, 2017), 12% of the respondents indicated that there was a shrinkage of the livestock market, with a majority 94% indicating that grazing land was abandoned. A majority 80.3% also said that the safe areas of the region had been overgrazed, while 94% of the respondents indicated that due to this practice there was destruction of the biodiversity of the area. The 50.45% of the residents also worryingly indicated that produce was rotting in the field in the farms, while 96.6% of the respondents indicated that arable crop land had been abandoned.

With such staggering figures it's only natural to that the economy of an area will suffer a major setback. A majority (55.6%) of the respondents indicated that socio-economic infrastructure not was adequate for the needs of the community. This is further to increase the competition for resources in these areas. The areas sustainable development is severely crippled since most of the crops are left to rot in the field and farmlands abandoned. This has limited the women's ability to provide for their families.

In terms of education all the respondents indicated the presence of closures of schools and low enrolment rates in the existing schools. Respondents also indicated, 71.8%, that teachers had been forced to relocated to safer places. This has plagued the area with poor performance on national exams arena since they cannot hope to compete with other students in other areas of the country. This also puts the women and children due to the increased chances of child marriages with the Tana Delta having one of the highest statistics in that sector compared to the national average.

8. MAJOR ACTORS IN PEACE BUILDING AND WOMEN INVOLVEMENT

There has been a concerted effort in the area in regards to peace building, As study by (Shaiye, 2012) showed a majority of the respondents represented by 63.3% retorted that chiefs and village elders within the community were very strong when it came to peace building. When asked how they thought the chiefs were strong. Others in the community also believe that devolution plays a major role in peace building.

Most of the respondents in (Shadrack Kipkemoi, 2017) indicated that the devolution of powers to the county had helped the residents in dealing with conflicts in the manner that fits them most without using the central government. Different counties deal with conflicts in different means and this was given an upper hand by devolution. Some indicated that devolution brought "*majimbo*" system which helps the residents concentrate on their issues without central government interference. Others indicated that devolution granted significant autonomy to the counties in terms of executive power, especially on functions that often cause inter-group conflict such as cultural preservation and local development planning.

The second major player in peace building were religious leaders, 45% of the respondents reported that they had been involved in forums called upon by the religious elders to reconcile the two communities while a significant proportion of 32% indicated that the religious leaders had been an important partner in sensitizing the community on the fear of God to solve conflict the religious leaders took part in manage conflicts within the Tana Delta area. Some of the efforts made by the religious leaders were recorded below. It was important to note that 23% of the respondents had not seen any effort made by the religious leaders in the conflict management in Tana Delta.

As per the findings, majority (70.9%) of the respondents indicated that Schools, Hospitals, roads and transport were the infrastructures that were available to enhance resilience, 28.2% indicated Safe and clean water while 0.9% of the respondents indicated markets as their infrastructure that was available to enhance resilience. Further analysis of the findings revealed that other partners including the local organizations help in mitigating the conflict by organizing forums

and meetings to discuss on lasting solution on the conflicts. This include civil society groups and multinational non-governmental institutions which work in the area.

The foregoing analysis indicates that religious leaders formed a very key component in the community governance especially in conflict management. The study sought to find out if the government policy had contributed to the conflicts in the area. 40% of the respondents confirmed that the government was to blame but a majority of 60% declined. Those respondents who declined, 55% were of the opinion that the government could not contribute to any conflict since it had mechanisms of protecting its citizens and that firing conflicts would be unconstitutional.

As shown by the statistics there is very little involvement of women in matters of security in the Tana delta. This need to change, civil society groups, religious leaders and the government should make an effort to increase the part women play in the managing of their own security and that of their families.

9. EFFECT OF WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE PEACE BUILDING PROCESS

There is a lot of importance in involving women in the peace building process. A good example would be the case of Wajir County. A study by (Mwangi L. N., 2015) goes to great lengths to show the role of women in peace building in Kenya and around the world. Wajir is a district in north-eastern Kenya bordering Ethiopia and Somalia. Most of the inhabitants in Wajir are nomadic pastoralists who depend on animals for their livelihood. Due to insufficient and unreliable rainfall, these pastoralists require expansive land for grazing, this leads to competition for the limited resources of water and between the clans.

Wajir was hit by a drought 1992 which left more than 80% of their animal stock died, and leaving hundreds of people displaced due to the search of food and provisions. This situation was worsened by a general state of insecurity due to the refugees who were fleeing war in Somalia and who came carrying arms to Kenya. As a response to the refugee influx, the government declared a state of emergency which further made conditions worse, creating a preamble to a disaster. Consequently, the situation exploded. Following the December 1992 elections, fierce fighting erupted in several places.

The conflict drove the women of the area to create the Wajir Women Association for Peace. The group sought acknowledgement from the local administration after which they embarked on an advocacy and a recruitment drive. They visited other women within the municipality of Wajir and sought their support. With time they drew 15 volunteers from a cross-section of the community. The volunteers were teachers, health workers, community workers, one local Oxfam staff, and elders. The culmination of their efforts was the Alatz Declaration for Peace. This declaration provided the guidelines for the return of peace in Wajir District.

In order to aide in the reconciliation effort, meetings and workshops were organized for religious leaders, both Christian and Muslim. The vanguard group of women ensured that the peace wagon accommodated people from varied fields. Wajir was experiencing a window of peace by 1994, this is because the group employed both traditional and administrative channels. The peace movement broke the cycle of violence and began nurturing peace. Women had cultivated peace across the various sectors of the community and sparked off peace activities at different levels.

This is a gleaming example of the work women can do to bring peace to a community. The people of the Tana delta have borrowed a leaf from their neighbors and are also employing women participation in peace building efforts. For example during one of the deadliest acts of violence on the Tana Delta which left over 100 people dead, some daring women stepped forward to promote dialogue peace and between the warring communities. (Nyagah, 2018)

The leader of Tana River women is Doris Godhana, of the Sauti Ya Wanawake (Voice of the Women) organization. She acts by promoting dialogue and village monitoring of conflict through a committee. It's mainly made up of volunteer women who have helped to forestall the spread of conflict and bloodshed during the clashes. Godhana's organization has been fighting for the rights of women and girls since 2002, and has launched campaigns for women rights after realizing that women in the area have been neglected.

She accounts that when the fighting started she endeavoured to create peace committees from village to district level, all which tried to bring all stakeholders and workers through volunteers from the Pokomo and the Wardei communities to monitor. Those who were considered foreigners from the Tana Delta where monitored to ensure that conflicts were not imported to the District. Looking back, the women leader is proud that they gave dialogue between the Wardei and the Pokomo, the two predominant communities in the Tana River a chance and succeeded.

The neighbors have a long history of conflict over grazing ground and access to the waters of Tana River especially for livestock. She admits that the training workshops being offered give a lot of guidance on issues of peace building. Godhana says that what became even more consolidated from her earlier skill is the great need for stakeholders in conflict prone areas to first identify the cause of conflict and through team work to find ways to handle issues of such conflict.

She has held successful forums to build peace; she had learned that partnership is needed in order to be build between all stakeholders and especially the youth who are mostly used to promote violence. In order to promote peace, it is important to involve all stakeholders including non-governmental organizations, community based organizations and even the media. She says that organizations from outside conflict areas are able to provide guidance on how to deal with conflict without bias hence the need to include them in peace building efforts.

10. CONCLUSION

Women's peace building interventions play a significant role in the cyclic resource based conflict experienced in Tana River region. Testimonials of women involved in peace building processes as depicted by (Guyo, 2009) demonstrate that their initiatives have evolved over the years reflecting their contemporary complementary role as opposed to traditional gendered processes. Despite various socio-cultural issues that affect gender relations in traditional African societies, women in the region have endeavored to rise above the stereotypes to leave their mark in peacemaking and conflict resolution processes. Marginalization however remains an immense challenge to the women as they are often excluded from formal decision making processes. Although women exercise their initiatives through structured committee models, disarmament efforts and even through traditional means their inclusion is rather limited. The mediatory and advisory roles they occupy within these capacities should not be taken for granted however. The experiences of women in this region however are proof of the capability of women and we suggest that given more implimentary roles, the dynamics of conflict in the Delta could possibly be a concept of the past.

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