

*Participation of women in peace building and reconciliation after 2007 post election violence in Rift Valley Kenya.*

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**Abstract**

The Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation (KNDR), under the auspices of H. E. Kofi Annan and the African Union (AU) Panel of Eminent African Personalities successfully resolved the violent dispute over the results of the presidential elections of December 2007 through signed a power-sharing agreement between the contesting parties, bringing to an end the violence that had caused loss of property, human life and displacement of population. This ushered a new chapter in the history of Kenya of peace building and reconciliation. Every effort by the government, the civil society and the citizenry women inclusive have been focused on establishing ways that contributes to sustainable peace. It is now widely recognized that men and women play different roles in peace building and reconciliation processes. Scholarly research reveals that participation of civil society and women in particular in peace building is a critical element for sustainable peace. Women have been found to strengthen peace building and reconciliation processes. Participation of women in conflict prevention, peace building processes and post-conflict community recovery processes is imperative. The paper examines participation of women in peace building and reconciliation processes after 2007 post election violence in Kenya Rift Valley. It based on a survey of 9 CSOs and extensive review of publications on peace and reconciliation in Rift Valley. The broad objective of the survey was to identify the level of participation of women in peace building and reconciliation in Rift Valley Kenya and generate information on various local indigenous approaches to peace building and reconciliation processes by women. Some organizations included were not having active programming on peace building but provided platform for community cohesion and integration. The survey used focused group discussion method to collect information from participants. A Focused Group Discussion Guide was used to facilitate sessions. Data was collected on transcripts and analyzed to identify the role played by women in peace building and reconciliation. The survey identified various levels of participation of women in peace building and reconciliation including in peace building and structures, socio economic empowerment of victims of violence, support in resettlement program for internally displaced and psychosocial support of victims of violence among others like monitoring of violence early warning signs, advocacy for peace and reconciliation, provision of humanitarian emergency assistance, protection of targeted ethnic groups, building a culture of peaceful co-existence between members of warring communities, support for economic integration of IDPs and livelihood support for victims. The study recommended capacity development of women players, structured coordination of peace initiatives and increased inclusivity of women in democracy, leadership and governance based on the one third gender rule

## **ACRONYMS**

AU	African Union
CBO	Community Based Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
GOK	Government of Kenya
IEC	Information Education & Communication
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
H. E	His Excellency
KNDR	Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation
ODM	Orange Democratic Movement
PNU	Party of National Unity

## **1.0. Introduction and Background**

One of the eight provinces in the Republic of Kenya, Rift Valley experienced the highest scale of effects of post election violence.

Demographically, Rift Valley has an estimated 10 million residents of varied ethnic extraction. The Kalenjin, who are spread across the region, are the majority. Other numerically significant groups include: the Kikuyu, Kisii and Luhya who are scattered in various parts of the province. Migrants from many other communities from around Kenya have over the years also moved into Rift Valley to make it a truly multi ethnic province.

The province is an agricultural hub, with about 70% of the population directly or indirectly eking a livelihood from farming, implying that land is the basic and primary economic resource. The rest are involved mostly in off-farm informal sector activities, with only a small proportion working in the formal sector. Politically, the province is considered the hot-bed of Kenyan politics having the highest tally of registered voters. It has produced a former president and has been a strongly involved in formation of succeeding governments

In the 2007 elections majority of the voters supported Hon. Raila Odinga of ODM. The province was polarized between the ODM and PNU supporters. This political rivalry occasioned raised political temperatures that did not portend well for social harmony after the announcement of the presidential results.

Rift Valley has had a history of conflicts of various forms that have played out in various magnitudes with varying outcomes and consequences. Conflicts over land, political competition, social prejudice, skewed manner in which resources and economic opportunities are (perceived to be) distributed, natural resources, administrative boundaries and historical inter ethnic scuffles have been reported time and again within the province.

Land-based conflicts have particularly had devastating consequences in terms of loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of populations, and social disintegration. Indeed, the issue of the return of IDPs has itself been a subject of dispute within communities of resettlement.

Whereas a variety of conflict management and peace building initiatives and structures exist participation of women in peace building and reconciliation is imperative.

### **1.1 Objectives of the survey**

Cognizant that there can be no meaningful development without peace this survey was intended to identify the level of participation of women in peace building and reconciliation in Rift Valley

Kenya and generate information on various local indigenous approaches to peace building and reconciliation processes by women.

The specific objectives of the survey were:

- To generate qualitative and quantitative data on participation of women in 2007 post election peace building and reconciliation processes in Rift Valley.
- To identify productive programmatic strategies and interventions by women towards peace building and reconciliation in Rift Valley.
- To make recommendations to integrating women participation in peace building and reconciliation processes in Rift Valley.

## **1.2 The approach and methodology**

This survey identified and analyzed levels of participation of women in peace building and reconciliation spaces and the dynamics involved, including their roles in existing structures and processes. The study involved a survey of 9 randomly sampled civil society organization in rift valley distributed across the province. Focused Group Discussions were conducted involving women members of the sampled organizations. Focused Group Discussion Guide was used to facilitate sessions. Data was captured on transcripts and analyzed for reporting.

## ***1.3 Discussion***

### ***1.3.1 Peace building and Reconciliation structures***

The survey identified various peace building structures where women reported active participation. There was participation on the peace committees established by The Ministry of Interior and Co-ordination of National Government through the National Steering Committee on Peace building and Conflict Management. The peace committees are based on various administrative units – i.e. Location Peace Committee (LPC), Ward Peace Committee (WPC), Sub-County Peace Committee (SPC), and County Peace Forum (CPF). The membership of peace committee includes women. The committees coordinate peace and reconciliation processes within their areas of jurisdiction.

Elderly women have an advisory role in the council of elders more so on matters of peace and security.

### **1.3.2. Economic and Social Empowerment Role**

Rift valley being an agricultural area offered an opportunity to women to use agribusiness activities to foster peace and reconciliation processes. The survey revealed a deliberate intension by women to establish common agribusiness venture to help in creating unity and community cohesion. Local small enterprises and microfinance programs bringing together a number of women were perceived to cultivate peace and reconciliation.

### **1.3.3 Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons Role**

Some people who were displaced went to towns and have since changed their lifestyle though find it difficult return to their homes but have kept in touch with their former friends through phone communications helping erase memories of the violence meted against them.

Other IDPs sold their land with the help of their local friends raising money to buy land and resettle elsewhere.

The women have facilitated surrender of farms forcefully occupied by the perpetrators in a retribution process by helping re-establish land boundaries, homesteads and other markers and beacons of demarcation.

Some elderly women have been co-opted in the council of elders to negotiate the return of IDPs

They have been involved in psychosocial counseling of the victims who felt abandoned, neglected and discriminated against by the state and relevant authorities.

They help in identifying genuine IDPs for profiling by the state and as such they are recognized and considered for compensation or any other assistance for that matter.

They facilitate local peace building and reconciliation processes by directly reconciling perpetrators with victims.

### **1.3.4 Women Gender Roles in Peace Building and Reconciliation**

Women transmit traditional norms, rules and practices that abhor violence and conflict confrontations.

They report offering psychosocial support to victim of rape, property loss, and rights violation in the aftermath of the 2007 post election violence.

All the CSOs accessed reported playing a role in reestablishment of family ties in cases where a spouse had rejected another due on difference ethnic backgrounds

### **1.3.5 Politics, Leadership and Governance Role**

Politicians and political leadership is an important factor in peace building and reconciliation. Politicians can subtly and inadvertently initiate and promote peace processes due to their influence on the electorate by preaching peace and dismantling drivers and actors in conflicts. In fact the 2007 post election violence was as a result of a political contest.

Participation of women in politics, leadership and governance is certainly a way of strengthening peace and reconciliation. The Constitution of Kenya 2010 established positions of County Women Representative and one third gender rule that has increased the number of women participation in politics, leadership and governance. The impact of this is yet to be examined but can point at chances of increased stability in the Country.

Women indeed have overall positively impacted the peace building process in the area. Through monitoring and advocacy for peace and reconciliation, provision of humanitarian emergency assistance, protection of targeted ethnic groups, building a culture of peaceful co-existence between members of warring communities, support for economic integration of IDPs and livelihood support for victims.

These positive results have not been achieved without a number of noted undercutting challenges that if addressed could lead to realization of greater outcomes on participation of women in peace building processes.

- Most CSOs implemented peace initiatives over only short durations often with limited resources.
- They lacked a framework for co-operation and coordination of their activities on peace building and reconciliation.
- Their operations were restricted in the small administrative units with no plans to identify areas un reached with peace building programs.
- The primary and short-term motivation for some CSOs reviewed was to access grants rather than to be involved in the implementation of peace interventions *per se*.
- Some CSOs manifested with weak sustainability plans for their peace building programs

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The survey concluded that there is proactive participation of women in peace building and reconciliation processes in Rift Valley following the post election violence of 2007. The survey

identify various levels of participation of women in peace building thus at household level, village level, sub county level, county level, community level and regional levels both in formal and non formal structures. The various roles played by women in peace building and reconciliation as indentified by the survey were, resettlement of IDP, emotional support to the victims, psychosocial counseling of victims, mediation, retribution, advocacy, dialogue, social mobilization and sensitization, monitoring and

Women participation in peace building and reconciliation will fast truck progress toward achievement of Long Term Issues and Solutions set in the peace accord to forestall repeat of violence popularly known us Agenda Four which provided for Undertaking constitutional, legal and institutional reform, Tackling poverty and inequity, Combating regional development imbalances, Tackling unemployment, particularly among the youth, Consolidating national cohesion and unity, Undertaking a Land Reform and Addressing transparency, accountability and impunity.

The study recommends more aggressive multi-sectoral capacity building of women players involved in peace building, reconciliation, leadership and governance, establishment of a structured framework for coordination of civil society organizations involved in peace building and reconciliation, full implementation of the one third gender rule by the national and county governments to create more space for women involvement and participation in democracy, leadership and governance for advancement of peace and sustainable development.

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