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Women participation in peace-building on community projects' implementation in conflict prone areas. A case of Sondu border town, Kenya

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Abstract

It is worth noting that despite the fact that women empowerment is vital in the society, majority of the researchers have only addressed the economic empowerment of women and factors influencing women participation in community development projects implementation. However, there is little empirical literature on how women participation in peace-building influence implementation of community development. This study was carried out to examine how women participation in peace building influences the implementation of community development projects in conflict prone Sondu border town. The study was guided by the participatory development (PD) theory and adopted a descriptive case study design with a sample population of 399 respondents, comprising female household heads and county ministry officials. Simple random sampling was applied to obtain the respondents from the households while a population census was applied to pick all the eleven county ministry officials. Data collection was by use of questionnaires and data was analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics. The study found that women participation in peace building was very important in ensuring peace and development. The study recommends that for sustainable implementation of community development projects in conflict prone areas, women should be involved in creating peace, resolving conflicts and ensuring reconciliation.

Keywords: Community Development Projects; Community Project Implementation; Peace- building, Sondu Border Town; Women Empowerment; Women Participation

1. Introduction

The gendered consequences of war are often not fully realized as women are forced to bear the heavier burdens in post conflict situations yet at the same time are left out of the formal peace process. [1] conducted a study examining 82 formal peace agreements in 42 conflict zones between 1989 and 2011 and discovered that peace agreements that included women as signatories showed an association with sustained peace. Furthermore, according to [2], gender equality and sustainable development go hand in hand. Women are necessary actors, alongside men, in building positive peace and bringing sustainable development. In her seminal research on the post conflict communities, [3] argues that women have a unique perspective and advantage in peace building. Specifically, the dissertation argues that women can be part of the peace process through economic empowerment and self-sustainability, as it becomes a launching pad to greater levels of gender equity.

However, despite the fact that studies in developed countries like the USA, China, Europe and parts of Russia [4; 37- 42] have shown that women empowerment has been accepted and women are involved actively in development projects implementation, a number of countries in the developing continents like parts of Asia, Africa and south America have shown that women are left out due to a number of reasons. In Philippines for example, the participation of women in community development projects implementation in Manila has been and is still pegged at 32% for over 15 years [5] A number of factors for poor participation of women in community development projects implementation have been

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listed to include: poor gender roles and classifications, poor levels of income of the women, poor cultural and traditional subscriptions that deny women rights to own properties, poor levels of education, poor religious subscriptions and classifications that discriminate women over some opportunities in the community among other factors. It has been argued for example, that much of the home based poverty mitigation projects are implemented by women, the decisions on which type of project can be implemented or the models to be used are done by women and the results are better by 30% as compared to cases where men perform these duties.

In Africa, women are very much disadvantaged in all spheres. For example, women are not allowed to own property like land, women never inherit their parents' properties as compared to men, women have not been given chances to sit in major community development committees and never make major decisions [6]. [7] has indicated that in instances where women are allowed to sit in development setting, their ideas are normally brushed off and sometimes they are reminded on their roles in cooking and serving the men in these special gatherings. Women have not been given a chance in Africa as compared to men despite the fact that they contribute more than the men in terms of community resources mobilization, community labor providence etc, [8]. However, in countries like South Africa and Liberia where women have been given some special recognition through various women empowerment programmes, their efforts in community developments are eminent [9]. In Soweto, during the transformation of the slum into a modern peri-urban settlement, women were credited for their roles in: providing cheap labour, solving conflicts on resettlement among various communities, provision of other production materials like land (those who owned land), providing the government with the best housing models that addressed the needs of the city slum dwellers etc [10].

[11] asserts that despite the fact that the various governments have been advocating for affirmative action where a third of the women must be considered in all the spheres of economic developments, the women in the country have been undermined, are undermined and the future trends could indicate the same. In her study that had a sample population of 182 respondents, majority of them strongly supported the idea that women are disempowered and have for a long time been undermined. The research indicated that women in Tanzania are undermined in various ways that include: being denied equal rights to education as men, being denied equal rights to land inheritance, being denied rights to land ownership, being denied equal rights towards property ownership, being denied access to bank credit for development, being back benchers in development decision making and many other forms. [12] has asserted that the wide gap in regional imbalance development in Tanzania can be blamed on poor levels of women participation and empowerment. Poor trends in women empowerment keep them away in participating in development projects implementation despite the fact that they are the majority in the society. In Arusha for example, there has been a recorded development increase in household income since 1998 due to the fact that after independence, the municipal and local governments insisted on the importance of educating the girl child in the society, leading to a population that has empowered women who provide relatively cheap labour in development projects implementation, women who provide the necessary expertise, women who participate on decision making equally as men etc [13].

According to [14], in Kenya there is still a challenge in women empowerment and their role in community development. According to him, women in Kenya are greatly discriminated, undermined and never put on the spheres of development. He for example cited the post-election violence of 2008 where women and children suffered most. The areas where women were most affected included: Nyanza, Coast, Rift valley, Nairobi and other areas. However, during the reconciliation times, there were only two women who sat in the big bench and their views were from time to time opposed greatly by the men who overpowered them. Besides, women don't have access to properties, they do not have access to securities for development loans, they don't inherit land and other properties, and they do not have equal access to education and vocational skills among others.

When women are treated differently from men, their ability to participate in development projects implementation is compromised leading to poor results [15]. Empowered women are able to make decisions on best development projects to be implemented in the society, the best methods and approaches to be used in implementing the projects, they provide readily available labour, and women act as peace builders in cases where communities disagree on some matters [15]. Women in conflict prone counties should be empowered to participate in community projects implementation since most of the times they are the people who are in touch with household chores and needs. According to this report, the government should partner with other organizations to organize more workshops to sensitize the community on the importance of allowing women to participate on development of the community including peace building efforts [16].

[17] noted that level of education, cultural values, lack of finances, lack of information and marital status impacted negatively on rural women's participation in development activities. In cases where women were somewhat empowered and participated in community developments, their impact was very eminent. For example, women were found to be very keen in handling assignments given to them, they provided relatively cheap labour, their ways of

solving project conflicts was relatively fair and all these positively influenced the participation and implementation of projects. The conclusion drawn from this study showed that a lot more needs to be done in sensitizing rural women on the importance of participating in peace building and community development projects.

Other studies have indicated that women in Kenya are still marginalized and have not been effectively empowered to participate in implementation of development projects. According to [18], traditional ideas about the roles of girls and women restrict their contributions to Kenya's economy significantly despite the fact that women are very effective in handling various development projects once allowed to do so. However, these ideas hold women back from contributing to important development goals; especially in the areas of economic growth, nutrition and food security. Women in Kenya for example are underrepresented in decision-making positions. They also have less access to education, land, and employment. Those living in rural areas spend long hours collecting water and firewood; interfering with school attendance and leaving them with little time to earn money or engage in other productive activities [19]. According to [15] the untapped potential of women and girls is gaining greater attention in Kenya. The country's new Constitution, passed in 2010, provides a powerful framework for addressing gender equality. It marks a new beginning for women's rights in Kenya; seeking to remedy the traditional exclusion of women and promote their full involvement in every aspect of growth and development. When Kenyan women have the freedom to reach their potential, all Kenyan families and communities will grow stronger. USAID for example has been empowering women to exercise their rights as guaranteed by the constitution. The results have shown that the women who have been empowered have the capacity to create more assets like land and even financial resources that are used for community projects implementation, the women provide labour and expertise required for various projects, these women have been very vital in conflicts resolution and risks mitigation [18] Due to numerous benefits associated with women empowerment and community development, it is necessary to assess how women participation in peace building influence the implementation of community development projects in conflict prone areas in Kenya, a case of Sondu border town.

2. Literature review

2.1. Women Participation in Peace Building and Implementation of Community Development Projects

A number of studies have shown that sustainable development enshrined in the sustainable development goals is impossible without women's participation and gender equality. Consequently, it is asserted that gender equality is both a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable development [20]. It is also affirmed that gender disparity is prevalent across the cultures of the world and that without serious steps to tackle it, sustainable development cannot be achieved. Therefore, one can understand from such explanations that without the equal inclusion of women in all areas of development initiatives, all the above-mentioned components of sustainable development cannot be achieved. Similarly, in a study carried out by [21] on women participation in peace-building initiatives and reconciliation in Angola Republic, the findings reveal that because women are susceptible victims of conflicts, they can form the best peace agents during the peace building and reconciliatory process.

[8] has indicated that during community conflicts, women and children are the most vulnerable people who suffer the most and when projects fail to be implemented in the community, they are the most affected too. Women in communities are the first people to call their husbands and other close people to calm and compromise situations or come up with solutions to conflicts so that the children and the community at large should not suffer [12]. For projects to achieve their objectives, there must be peace and security at the same time. Conflicts in community push people away from the development agenda, they destroy and stall the already outlaid community development projects, and make people shift their initial development plans into immediate conflicts resolution. Due to these negative associations of conflicts and economic development through community development projects implementation, women are the most affected gender since the women consume much of the services of community development projects like water and sanitation projects, community food security projects, jousting and many other projects [22]. Women in Africa play a very significant role in economic development given a chance. Women not only make peace when things get worse but act as agents of peace between their husbands and neighbors. Women have the ability to identify the volatile points in the community; women have the power to think beyond their present lives and think of their kids and the society in general. This makes them the first people to pray for happiness, peace and reconciliation in the community [5]. Women therefore play a very important role in reconciliation initiation in communities, peace crusading and peace negotiation. While various scholars have emphasized through their diverse literature on women peace building participation and how this initiative influences the implementation of community development projects in various regions across the world, the reviewed literature have contextual gaps given that there is scanty information on how participation of women in peace building initiatives would facilitate optimal implementation of community projects in conflict prone areas within the Kenyan context, particularly the Sondu border region.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on participatory development (PD) theory. According to proponents of participatory development (PD) theory [25:23;24]. The participatory development approach stresses the participation of the majority of the population (especially the previously excluded components such as CBOs, Women, Youth and the illiterate) in the process of development program. This approach views development as a process which focuses on community's involvement in their own development using available resources and guiding the future development of their own community. The wishes of an individual never superimposes on those of a group. This approach emphasises concept such as: capacity building, empowerment, sustainability and self-reliance.

According to the participatory development theory, the answer to the problem of successful third world development is not found in the bureaucracy and its centrally mandated development projects and programs, but rather in the community itself. This needs its capacities and ultimately its own control over both its resources and its destiny [25]. In the present study, the rationale and principles of participatory approach is that the participation and involvement of women in peace building and reconciliation programs of a region develop and strengthen and hasten the objectives of the peace building and reconciliation initiative for optimal implementation of community development initiatives.

3. Material and methods

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive study design. In the social and life sciences, a descriptive design is a research method involving an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of a subject of study as well as its related contextual conditions. The survey research endeavors to explore the existing status of two or more variables at a given point in time [26 and 27]. Descriptive survey attempts to describe or define a subject often by creating a profile of a group of problems, people or events through the collection of data and tabulation of the frequencies on research variables or their interaction as indicated.

3.2. Study Area

Sondu is a small border town in Kenya's Kisumu and Kericho counties. The boundary between Kisumu and Kericho counties has been contentious for years with original boundary posed to have been behind Sondu Police station which was in Kisumu county until 1992 when it was taken back to Kericho County. In the region, there is Sondu market that is situated at the border of the two sub-counties. The market attracts people from other counties including Homabay, Nyamira and Kisii counties. The proximity or central positioning of Sondu market has made inter-communal trade to flourish in the area bringing together three different ethnic communities, namely the Luo, Kisii and the Kipsigis. Sondu is at the border with a section of the market in Nyakach sub-county and the other half in Sigowet sub-county. Population explosion has also seen the area face land issues with people looking for land to settle and the market area is often abuzz with business activities until ethnic conflicts erupt especially during electioneering periods. It is one of the areas at the border that normally faces the greatest levels of violence during conflicts hence hampering community development projects.

3.3. Target Population

The target population of this study included all the women who made up the households as either wives or heads in the Sondu border town. According to the Kisumu and Kericho county reports on households that were documented in 2020 on Sondu border town, there are about 12, 422 households in Sondu border town. In each household, one woman was chosen for the study and therefore the 12,422 women were targeted for the study. Equally, all the 11 county departmental heads (ministers) were considered for the study.

3.4. Sampling Size and Sampling Procedure

The sample size in the study was calculated by using Yamane formula [33]. as shown below;

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where: n is the sample size, N is the population size and 'e' is the level of precision which was 0.05. Therefore, Sample Size;

$$n = \frac{12422}{1 + 12422(0.0025)}$$

$n = 388$ (women household heads)

On the other end, a population census was carried out on the county ministry heads. Therefore, the total sample population was $388 + 11 = 399$ respondents. Simple random sampling was applied to obtain the respondents from the households in Sondu border region while a population census was applied to pick all the eleven county ministry heads that were in charge of overseeing the implementation of various development projects in Sondu border town.

3.5. Data Collection Instruments

The main tool of primary data collection was the use of a questionnaire. A questionnaire is an instrument for collecting data, and almost always involves asking a given subject to respond to a set of oral or written questions [28]. Advantages of using questionnaires include: they are cost-efficient, they're practical, give speedy results, ensure user anonymity and cover all aspects of a topic.

3.6. Pilot Testing of the Research Instrument

A pilot study, pilot project, or pilot experiment is a small scale preliminary study conducted in order to evaluate feasibility, time, cost, adverse events, and improve upon the study design prior to performance of a full-scale research project [29]. In this study, 20 questionnaires were assigned to 20 respondents from various households in Sondu border town. The exercise was repeated after two weeks and these respondents were strictly excluded during the final data collection period.

3.7. Reliability of the Research Instruments

[30] defines reliability as the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results. In this study, a test-retest was done to establish the instrument reliability. According to [31; 66-67] test-retest reliability is a measure of reliability obtained by administering the same test twice over a period of time to a group of individuals. The scores from t_1 and t_2 can then be correlated in order to evaluate the test for stability over time. To have the reliability approved as effective, a Cronbach's alpha relationship was calculated. An alpha value of 0.8 was achieved and the research instrument considered reliable.

3.8. Data Analysis

The received questionnaires were sorted to check for completeness and relevance in the study. Those questionnaires that were relevant for the study were assigned codes. The coded responses were entered into the SPSS software version 23 to facilitate data analysis in a descriptive form. Quantitative analysis employed both descriptive and inferential statistics. Data was then presented by use of frequency tables representing the means, standard deviations, and percentages. The relationship between the variables was tested by use of the chi-square formula.

4. Results

Women Participation in Peace Building and Reconciliation on Implementation of Community Development Projects

Table 1 below shows the responses of respondents in relation to influence of women participation in peace building and reconciliation on implementation of community development projects. When probed on whether women participation in peace building and reconciliation influence implementation of community development projects, the response was as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Women Participation in Peace Building and Reconciliation and Implementation of Community Development Projects

Women Participation	Frequency	Percent
Yes	369	95.0
No	19	5.0
Total	388	100.0

The study found that majority of the respondents at 95% agreed with the statement that women participation in peace building and reconciliation influence implementation of community development projects in Sondu border town. In another question where the respondents were requested to show the extent to which they supported various issues related to women participation to peace building and reconciliation and implementation of community development projects, the results were as shown below: (a scale of 1-5 was used where: strongly disagree =1, disagree=2, neutral=3, agree =4, strongly agree =5).

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Women participation in Peace and Reconciliation and implementation of community development projects

Statement	Mean	Std Dev.
Women participation in peace-building empowers them to play a role in reconciliation initiation that encourages implementation of community development projects	4.53	0.809
Women participation in peace-building and reconciliation makes them peace crusaders which encourages implementation of community development projects	4.22	0.921
Women participation in peace-building makes them play a role in peace negotiations thus influencing the implementation of community development projects	3.99	0.999
Women participation in peace-building and reconciliation empowers women to play a role in seeking sympathy and empathy thus influencing the implementation of community development projects in the county	4.29	0.916

Table 2 indicates that majority of the respondents supported the idea that women participation in peace-building empowers them to play a role in reconciliation initiation that encourages implementation of community development projects. For example, a mean score of 4.53 indicates that a higher percentage of the respondents strongly agreed with the idea that women participating in peace-building empowers them to play a role in reconciliation initiation that encourages implementation of community development projects. Women participation in peace-building and reconciliation makes them peace crusaders which encourages implementation of community development projects (4.22); Women participation in peace-building makes them play a role in peace negotiations thus influencing the implementation of community development projects (3.99); and Women participation in peace-building and reconciliation empower women to play a role in seeking sympathy and empathy thus influencing the implementation of community development projects in the county (4.29).

Table 3 Relationship between Women Participation in Peace-building and Implementation of Community Development Projects

Chi-Square Tests	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Critical chi-square (χ^2C)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.37 ^a	4	.173	9.488 at 4 degrees of freedom and 95% significance level
Likelihood Ratio	5.968	4	.202	
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.015	1	.156	
N of Valid Cases	388			

Analysis done at 95% Significance Level

Since the calculated chi-square value of 16.37 was greater than the critical chi-square value at 95% significance level, it implies that women participating in peace building and reconciliation significantly and positively influenced the implementation of community development projects in Sondu border town.

5. Discussions

The study found that majority of the respondents at 95% agreed with the statement that women participation in peace building and reconciliation influences implementation of community development projects in Sondu border town. This implies that women play an integral function in fostering peace within our society for socio-economic development. Similarly, [17] agrees with these findings when he asserts that women have specific and practical ways of dealing with

conflict for instance women employ gentle, persuasive dialogue, they nurse the sick, they feed and adopt orphans even from the opposing side, and they use informal judicial system that are not punitive but corrective and rehabilitative and through this, the environment becomes conducive for peaceful coexistence for socio-economic development. These findings were also echoed by [21] who also documented that since the 1990s, many of the peace-building initiatives worked on by women in Africa at large have focused on grassroots level of the conflict, and by using their mediation skills and establishing indigenous peace processes, women have worked towards a more peaceful society for optimal implementation of community development projects.

In the same vein, a mean score of 4.53 indicated that a higher percentage of the respondents strongly agreed with the idea that women participation in peace-building empowers them to play a role in reconciliation initiation that encourages implementation of community development projects. This was in agreement with the findings of [20] who also indicated that during community conflicts, women and children are the most vulnerable people who suffer the most and when projects fail to be implemented in the community, they are the most affected too. Equally, it was found that women participation in peace-building and reconciliation makes them peace crusaders which encourages implementation of community development projects. This is in agreement with the findings of [32] which also documented that women play a very important role in reconciliation initiation in communities given that they help in peace crusading, are central in non-formalized peace negotiation stages and are always proponents for peaceful environment that can promote development. It was also established that when women take part in peace-building, it makes them play a role in peace negotiations thus influencing the implementation of community development projects. Moreover, when women are allowed to actively participate in peace-building and reconciliation, they get empowered to play a role in seeking sympathy and empathy thus influencing the implementation of community development projects in the country. These findings were also supported by [18] which claims that women must always be provided with equal opportunities economically so that they can play their roles effectively while championing for lasting peace.

6. Conclusion

From the findings, it can be concluded that women participation in peace, reconciliation and initiation of peace building process is very significant for community development since the influence of women's participation in community peace building programmes highlights the need to move them from the humanitarian front to the peace building front. Women continue to influence peace building processes to ensure they not only define peace as lack of violence but emphasize on justice, principles of inclusion and good governance for community development. Peace is one component that is very important in ensuring that projects are implemented to deliver their mandates. Women are peace initiators, peace ambassadors and reconcilers and therefore, would always advocate for peace to allow implementation of community development.

Recommandations

Based on the study findings, women should be involved in all the strategies that are aimed at creating peace, resolving conflicts and ensuring reconciliation. They should also be trained on the evolution of conflicts and the modern models of solving community based conflicts. Moreover, empowering women can be done through affirmative action and involving them more in peace building initiative programs.

Recommendations for Further Research

A similar study can be done in the other conflict prone areas in Kenya, Africa and other parts of the world on a larger scale with a wider coverage before the generalization of the present study's findings. Other studies should be conducted to examine the reasons for exclusion of women in peace building initiatives and implementation of community development projects.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

That written informed consent was obtained from the participants of the study (and the relevant documents obtained) as well where verbal consent was obtained the reasons are documented and available upon request.

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