Women Groups in Peace and Security.Mathare Informal Settlement, 2008 Election Violence.

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ABSTRACT

Women groups have been identified as an important tool in peace building in many countries experiencing conflict. In Kenya, women groups have been reported to facilitate peace in many regions including Samburu and Trans Nzoia counties. While Mathare informal settlement is one of the biggest slums in Kenya, and among the most prone to violence, in addition to having been highly affected by the 2008 post election violence, there appears to be very few empirical studies carried out on the same. This study, therefore, aimed at filling in this knowledge gap by carrying out the current study on the role of women groups in peace building in Mathare informal settlement. The study targeted women groups involved in peace building in Mathare informal settlement. The study used descriptive research design case study research design and while data was collected through the use of questionnaires, scheduled questions, documented information from the women groups' data base and focus group discussions. A total of 30 respondents were targeted. Data was analyzed through the use of SPSS package. Findings indicated that women groups in Mathare used various strategies to initiate peace including peace forums, peace committees, counseling, fundraising, women leadership, open forums and exchange programs. The study also found that women peace groups faced challenges that hampered their effectiveness and the extent of involvement including lack of access to information, gender stereotyping, lack of involvement in decision making and political interference. However, the peace initiatives have managed to build relationships and unite different ethnic groups and also improve lives of those affected by post election violence. The study recommends that government, NGOs and other interested bodies be more involved through training and dissemination of information on women and peace building. The government should also take action against groups which exploit the residents of Mathare in the name of peace building.

Key Words: Peacebuilding, conflict, women groups, informal settlements,violence,elections

Background of Study

According to Toure (1994) war and armed uprising are responsible for exhausting financial resources and human potential on in Africa. This hinders development, in addition to the suffering imposed on people as well as environmental degradation. The inability of the governments to ensure security and stability undermines citizens' trust in political institutions and leads to militarization of societies. Many countries have incurred huge debts in endless conflicts and face immense problems of repatriation of refugees, reconstruction, resettlement of displaced populations, demobilization and social integration of a considerable number of soldiers. Areas facing war experience disorganization of health and education services either directly through destruction of infrastructure or indirectly through reduction of public expenditure. Rupesinghe and Anderlini (1998) argue that there is a crucial economic dimension to any conflict. War destroys property and agriculture; it destroys houses, schools, hospitals, industry and trade. It destroys the very infrastructure that keeps the society together.

Peace building assumes a situation in which there is lack of peace that requires to be 'built', that is, a situation of conflict. Azar (1990) writes that 'conflict is an inescapable part of social interaction; and Doucet (1996) observes that it is a 'multi-dimensional social phenomenon'. The process of peace building, therefore, is not to eliminate conflict, but to transform conflicts that are destructive into a constructive form (Kriesberg, 1998). The social nature of conflict also indicates that this is a relationship between opposing parties or communities, so it is transformation in the social sphere that requires to be achieved. Burton (1996) notes that it is for all parties to redefine that relationship. In order to move beyond conflict, therefore, relationships between all of those involved need to be re-aligned.

Kenya has had its fair share of conflicts since the 1990s (Juma, 2006). Conflicts in Kenya can be classified in four broad categories characterized by the socio-economic status of the communities at war. These conflicts

include conflicts within pastoral communities, conflicts between pastoral and agricultural communities, conflicts linked to the presence of refugees and ethnic clashes (Juma, 2006).

The outbreak of violence following the Kenya's 2007 general elections after unexpected declaration of President Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu, to be the winner ahead of his rival Raila Odinga, a Luo, led to far reaching consequences (Ksoll, Macchiavello and Morjaria, 2009). According to Wanyeki (2010) the violence initially took three forms, with sexual violence cutting across all three. First, in the low income areas of Nairobi as well as the coast and Nyanza, there were spontaneous protests, expressed violently. Second, the Kenya Police Force and the GSU responded with extraordinary use of force. And third, there was organized violence in the Rift Valley, involving forced displacements and the destruction of property. All three forms soon mutated. As the spontaneous protests in the form of attempted demonstrations which involved the destruction of property died down or were violently suppressed by police and informal militia allied to the Party of National Unity (PNU) (Wanyeki, 2010).

The Kenyan women's movement responded to the violence with attempts to document women's experiences and respond with increased services, as well as with advocacy to ensure that those involved on the humanitarian relief effort did the same (Wanyeki, 2010). According to USAID (2010) women group were involved in peace building and reconciliation during and after the conflict. This was through encouraging intermarriages amongst the parties involved in conflict, instilling positive values in children, participating in peace forums and development of trade. Women groups also transform according to situations, they can start as merry go round groups to empower the members financially, later they transform to addressing emerging issues like HIV/AIDS and some further transform to peacebuilding and conflict resolution outfits. They are driven by the societal needs.

Problem Statement

Many studies show that conflict occurs with the involvement or acquiescence of women. Women groups generally show a keen interest in peace processes. However, the formal peace building processes often preclude their full participation (Klopp, Githinji and Karuoya, 2010). Chowdhury (2005) further observes that though women groups struggle to initiate peace processes at the grassroots, such processes and groups are seen as peripheral to the formal mechanisms and have received little attention. Increasingly, studies are demonstrating that women groups play a big role in peace building process.

This study therefore sought to find out the role of women groups in peace building in Mathare informal settlement, during and after 2008 post election violence The study also sought to fill in this knowledge gap by establishing the strategies used by women groups in peace building, analyze the challenges they have faced so far and the impact they have made in the process of peace building in Mathare slum, a volatile area, even before the onset of the post election violence.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following research objectives to:

1. Examine strategies used by women groups in facilitating peace building during the 2008 election violence in Mathare informal settlement.

2. Assess the impact of the strategies employed by women groups in Mathare in achieving peace during the post election conflict in Mathare informal settlement.

3. Identify the challenges women groups faced in their peace building initiatives in post election conflicts in Mathare informal settlement.

4. Make recommendations on how to strengthen women's groups' peace building initiatives in Mathare informal settlement.

Limitations of the Study

One of the major challenges anticipated by the researcher was insecurity during data collection. According to Mathare Outreach (2011), Mathare is classified as one of the most volatile areas in Kenya and, therefore, not safe for "outsiders". This was counteracted by involving residents, especially the youths in accompanying the researcher during the period of data collection.Another limitation anticipated was that of getting reliable information as the post election violence is a sensitive topic. In addition, the researcher was unable to acquire a large target population to involve in the study as some areas were not accessible due to the issue of security. This was counteracted by carrying out extensive desk reviews in the selected women groups to complement the results from the exercise. Mathare informal settlement has low levels of literacy thus filling of questionnaire was a challenge,this was counteracted by engaging the women groups members who were literate to assist and also through Focus Group Discussion.

Theoretical Framework

This study relied on the theory of change. The theory of change as developed by Anderson Care international (2012)is a tool for developing solutions to complex social problems. A basic theory of change explains how a group of early and intermediate accomplishments sets the stage for producing long-range results. A more complete theory of change articulates the assumptions about the process through which change will occur and specifies ways in which all of the required early and intermediate outcomes relating to achieving the desired long term change will be brought and documented as they occur. Theory of Change defines all building blocks required to bring about a given long-term goal. This set of connected building blocks–interchangeably referred to as outcomes, results, accomplishments, or preconditions is depicted on a map known as a pathway of change/change framework, which is a graphic representation of the change process (OECD, 2008)

Research Design

This study involved data collection at two levels. The researcher employed the use of case study method to collect data from the selected women groups, while descriptive research was used to collect quantitative data. Creswell (2002) observes that descriptive research is suitable when the researcher does not intend to influence the results of the study in any way.

Study Population

The study population included women groups engaged in peace building in Mathare informal settlement. A total of 300 women were selected to form the population of the study. They were from five women groups which have been active during and after the 2008 election violence (Mathare Outreach, 2011)**.** The five women groups were drawn from the larger women organization operating in Mathare known as Groots Kenya. Groots Kenya has 26 women groups operating within its umbrella. The study selected five women groups which have been involved in peace building in Mathare. Since the women in Mathare are many, a sample of 300 respondents was convincing enough as a true representation and this has been considered for the purpose of the study. 300 respondents were in conformity with Bailey (1994) who indicates that sample size of 100 is sufficient and Roscoe's (1995) rule of thumb, sample size between 30 and 500 being sufficient.

Sampling Procedures And Data Collection

Simple random sampling was used in collecting data whereby respondents were randomly picked. this study adopted the non-probability sampling method.From the sample of 300, a sample size of 30 women was selected where 6 women were picked from each group. Mugenda and Mugenda (2008) recognize a 10% sample size to be appropriate for such a study. The names of group members were retrieved from their membership register.

Data was collected through questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion, scheduled questions and desk reviews. Questionnaires were developed to cover the four objectives under study.

Data Analysis

Data capturing was done using Excel software. The data from the completed questionnaires were cleaned, re-coded and entered into the computer using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) for Windows for analysis. Descriptive statistics were computed for presenting and analyzing the data. Descriptive statistics enabled the researcher to describe the aggregation of raw data in numerical terms (Neuman 2000). The descriptive statistics used involved the use of univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses. These methods incorporated the use of frequency distributions, percentage tables and measures of central tendency. They also incorporated the use of measures of variation such as: ranges, percentiles and standard deviations for univariate analysis. Data was presented in the form of frequency distribution tables, graphs and pie charts that facilitated description and explanation of the study findings. Qualitative data analysis was analyzed thematically.

RESULT FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategies Employed by Women Groups in Peacebuilding

Based on analysis of research findings, the study indicated that majority of the respondents were of the view that there were peace initiatives in Mathare while a minority were of the contrary opinion. It is therefore evident that there existed peace initiatives including those spearheaded by women peace groups in Mathare which were formed after 2008 post election violence. This is supported by the fact that majority of respondents were also aware of women groups involved in peace building. The study findings showed that there were five peace groups in which women were active participants. These groups included Groots Kenya, Maji Mazuri, Idhike Women's Group, Salama Women's Group and Mwiyukirie Women's Group.

The study further revealed that women involvement in peace building initiatives was considerably low given the fact that majority of them indicated that they participated in peace building to a low extent. However a significant proportion of respondents indicated that they were highly involved in peace building initiatives through their women peace groups. Analysis of the study findings also indicated that the initiatives championed by women towards peacebuilding included counseling of victims of post poll chaos, fund raising to offer financial support for peace building initiatives, open forums to sensitize residents on importance of peace which encourages peaceful coexistence amongst communities, peace activism and occasionally holding peaceful demonstrations in times of conflict. A considerably high number of respondents agreed that women leaders were in the forefront to ensure that peace is maintained in Mathare informal settlement.

According to the analysis of the study findings, it can therefore be deduced that women employ various strategies in an effort to initiating peace building in their communities. The study findings concurs with Zedriga (2006) who argued that women groups involvement in peace building takes many forms including rebuilding their lives through social rehabilitation, trauma counseling and peace education among other strategies.

Challenges Facing Women in Peacebuilding

From the findings, the study revealed that there was likelihood that women peace initiatives in the area faced challenges that hindered effective peace initiation. It can therefore be inferred that women peace groups are not accorded the necessary attention in relation to restoring peace despite the fact the crucial role that such groups play in peace building. The study revealed that the challenges faced by women groups greatly affected achievement of peace initiation to a great extent. The study findings highlighted several challenges faced by women groups in their peace building efforts which included but not limited to gender stereotypes, inability to gain access to vital information regarding peace building, lack of women involvement in decision making regarding peace issues, political interference though to a small extent among others. The study findings corroborates the African report No112 (2006) which propounded the argument that women who seek to build peace are faced by a number of challenges including lack of access to justice, high rates of HIV/AIDS, lack of access to reproductive health care, limited information, cross border issues, high levels of male aggression against them and the existence of small weapons and fire arms that threaten their security. These challenges put a limit to how women groups can be involved in peace building and also hinder full utilization of their talents. Sharing the same sentiments, Mutamba and Izabiliza (2005) found out that in Rwanda, women groups could have contributed more to peace initiatives after the genocide if only they were empowered by eliminating all the obstacles hindering their achievements.

Impact of Peacebuilding in Mathare

According to the findings, majority of the respondents felt that it was likely that peace intiatives by women groups in their area have had an impact in peace achievement while a considerably large proportion indicated that it was very likely. The study further indicated that a minority disagreed. Based on the study findings, it can be deduced that women group peace initiatives have had some impact in Mathare and hence it can generally be termed as successful. The study further revealed that majority of the respondents felt that women peace initiatives lead to the achievement of peace in Mathare to a high extent. This implies that the peace initiatives in Mathare informal settlement had a positive impact in peacebuilding in the area and restoring normalcy by ensuring peaceful community amongst the conflicting communities.

The study findings also indicated that respondents were generally feeling that the peace building had not decreased the possibility of recurrence of violence in Mathare. This implies that people are still skeptical about the temporary peace women groups have managed to initiate. Equally important to note is that the study revealed that peace building had enabled reconciliation among victims and perpetrators of post election violence thus allowing harmonious interactions.

Approaches to Strengthen Peacebuilding Initiatives

In relation to what could be done to strengthen the peace building initiatives by women groups to ensure that their goals were achieved, the respondents felt that the government should be more involved in peace initiatives through training and that NGOs and civil society groups operating in the area should increase information dissemination. Women should also be encouraged to join peace groups in order to play their crucial role in peace building. This can be achieved by creating awareness on the existence of women peace groups and ensuring ease of access to information to enhance awareness. According to Wanyeki (2010), the Kenyan women's movement responded to the violence with attempts to document women's experiences and respond with increased services, as well as with advocacy to ensure that those involved on the humanitarian relief effort did the same.

On what could be done to ensure that the challenges facing the peace initiatives in the area were dealt with, the respondents were of the view that the government should set aside funds in the form of a kitty to enable the women groups carry out their activities without financial constraints. Existence of such funds would ensure that the women peace groups reach a wide audience and also be able to accommodate more women. The respondents also recommended that there was need for creation of more awareness on the existence and operations of such women initiatives so as to see more women being involved in peacebuilding. It was also suggested that the women peace groups should be devoid of political interference. However support, material or moral advanced by the political class was welcomed. The respondents further indicated that men should be in the forefront in encouraging women to participate in peace building. This includes a creating an equal platform where women occupy their special place in peace building initiatives The respondents suggested that measures should be taken to curb corrupt peace groups while heavy punishment to be meted to those politicians who cause violence through incitement. The respondents further suggested that more organizations lobbying for peace should come on board so as to increase the impact of peace building initiatives. This concurs with Shekhwat (2010) who recognised that many other organizations, like the Gender Violence Recovery Centre (GVRC), had offered free medical services, counseling and referral to legal services for the victims of sexual violence.

Conclusions

Based on research findings, it was concluded that there were peace initiatives in Mathare. The peace initiatives includes women peace groups geared towards reconciling members of various communities and building lasting peace in the area. Additionally, women involvement in peace building initiatives was considerably low given the fact that majority of them indicated that they participated in peace building to a low extent. It was further concluded that the initiatives championed by women towards peace building included counseling of victims of post poll chaos, fund raising to offer financial support for peace building initiatives, open forums to sensitize residents on importance of peace which encourages peaceful coexistence amongst communities, peace activism and occasionally holding peaceful demonstrations in times of conflict. Based on the study findings, it was also concluded that the various strategies employed by women were successful in initiating peace however new and innovative forms of peace building initiatives should be developed.

In relation to the challenges women groups faced in their peace building initiatives in post election conflicts in Mathare informal settlement, the study concluded that there was likelihood that women peace initiatives in the area faced challenges that hindered effective peace initiation. The challenges faced by women groups greatly affected achievement of peace initiation to a great extent. It was further concluded that the challenges facing women peace groups in their peace building efforts included gender stereotypes, inability to gain access to vital information regarding peace building, lack of women involvement in decision making regarding peace issues, political interference though to a small extent among others. The identified challenges hindered the groups from meeting their desired goals as effectively as possible.

The study concluded that peace intiatives by women groups in their area have had an impact in peace achievement and therefore peace initiatives undertaken by women peace groups in Mathare were successful. The impact of the the strategies had also restored peace in the area since it had brought together different ethnic communities and facilitated the formation of healthy relationships. Initiatives by women peace groups acted as a catalyst for change and socio-economic regeneration in Mathare. In general, the women groups in Mathare started a peace building process they used various strategies to successfully bring desired results- peace in the area. They identified various peace building interventions some of which contributed significantly to peace while others were not successful. Women groups recognised that they were responsible for the change they wanted to see in Mathare and they were successful to a large extent in ensuring that lasting peace reigns again and normalcy returns in the area.

Recommendations

The study recommended that the women groups operating in the area should diversify the strategies they use to initiate peace in the area. This is because the study found that women groups concentrated more on counseling, neglecting other strategies that would have had a greater impact. It is also recommended that women groups use media as part of peace processes, or to educate the public about armed conflict generally and its impact on women. Women should be encouraged to become peace activists and community leaders so that they can fight for the plight of other women most of whom are usually victims during armed conflicts. As peace activists and community leaders, women will be involved in peace and community activities aimed at ending violent conflicts and to help families overcome the emerging economic and social problems resulting from the conflicts. The study also recommends that the government, NGOs and other agencies should raise funds for victims of post poll chaos to enable them set up meaningful business ventures in so that they can earn a decent living or at least restore their previous economic status. In addition, the women groups should ensure that the mechanisms they put in place to facilitate peace are able to sustain the same for long periods of time. Moreover, there should be forums/mechanisms that enhance feedback to allow for corrective measures. The study also recommends that more women leaders should come out strongly and vie for elective posts in order to give the women group a voice in political platforms like the parliament, county assemblies and more recently formed portfolio of women representative.

With regards to challenges facing the women groups in Mathare, the study recommends that men should be sensitized on the role of women in peace building in order to avoid gender stereotyping. People should be sensitized in a bid to change their perception towards the female gender. Too often, the perception of women as victims obscures their role as peace builders in reconstruction and peace building processes.Women should therefore be involved in official negotiation processes pertaining peace issues.They should however also seek to empower themselves in order to gain respect from both men and the community at large. In this regard therefore, the study recommends that women should seek specialized training in specific skills and access to resources and institutional support so that they can be able to participate in formal negotiations. The women should be educated and given the requisite support to build confidence and self esteem. This will ultimately act as an eye opener which will give them new ideas needed for survival and new perspectives for justice and peace. The government should also ensure equal representation of women in the peace processes; similarly, other agencies operating in the area should sensitize women on the importance of engaging in peace building. Moreover, the government and the NGOs operating in the area should jointly come up with mechanisms to disseminate information on peace building initiatives and create centres which would act as reference points for women who want to engage in peace building initiatives.

In relation to the impact of peace building in Mathare, the women groups should diversify their strategies as earlier mentioned to ensure that they reach a wide area and also meet the different needs of the residents in the area. In order for peace initiatives to have a positive impact, women should be represented at all levels of

discussions and negotiations. The study also recommends that all peace building initiatives should integrate gender equality because women play a pivotal role and their participation can make a tangible and substantive difference to peace processes. Moreover, groups leaders and politicians who are exploitative should be dealt with accordingly by the government by putting in place punitive measures which will deter such malpractices.

Suggestions for Further Studies

    i)   A similar study should be carried out to determine the role of men in peace building for purposes of comparison, identifying the gap as well as making recommendations.

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