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## The Role of Non-State Actors in Enhancing Peacebuilding Among Women in Mount Elgon Region, Kenya

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 The Concept of Peacebuilding

Achieving sustainable peace is the goal of all stakeholders whether international, national or grassroots organizations. This goal is due to numerous conflicts especially in Africa where the conflicts range from inter-state, intra-state to intra-ethnic conflicts. While studies such as Abdulrahman & Tar (2008), Kyriakou & Kaya (2011) and National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management [NSC] (2009) have focused on the role of state actors in peacebuilding at national and international level and have also analyzed the role of non-state actors in fostering peacebuilding among communities affected by conflicts, few studies have examined peacebuilding within a homogenous community. More so, there has been little focus on grassroots peace initiatives among women and specifically, peacebuilding initiatives among women from a homogenous community such as the Sabaot community in Mt Elgon region where the *Soy* and *Ndorobo* clans were involved in a land conflict that lasted three years. Thus, to promote healing in Mt Elgon region various non-state actors participated in grassroots peacebuilding initiatives among the women who were affected by the 2006-2008 intra-ethnic conflict.

Peace is the absence of widespread physical violence (Galtung's, 1976). The term is derived from Galtung's (1976) idea of positive peace where non-violence, social justice and ecological sustainability remove the causes of war by addressing its roots. This is contrasted with negative peace which is characterized by the absence of war and other forms of direct violence (Sandole, 2003; and Tschigri, 2003). Hence the aim of peacebuilding is to normalize relations, and to build institutions that can manage conflicts without resorting to violence. Peace is further held to be an unqualified goal in terms of orderly politics and the sanctity of life (Boaduo, 2010; United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 2011).

Peacebuilding is a set of activities to create and sustain a peaceful society characterized by structures which promote long-term justice, diversity and the healing of relationships and the ongoing transformation of conflict (National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding [NSC], 2009; SAIS, 2006).

Peacebuilding is thus an umbrella term encompassing long-term activities in the conflict cycle aimed at addressing the root causes of the conflict and includes other short-term initiatives like peacekeeping and peace-making (Jeong, 2003; Dulic, 2008; Matemba, 2008). Matemba (2008) also notes that peacebuilding aims to move a given population from conditions of extreme vulnerability and dependency to one of self-sufficiency and well-being. According to Lederach (1997) the creation of such an environment has three central dimensions: addressing the underlying causes of conflict, repairing damaged relationships and dealing with psychological trauma at the individual level. Lederach (1997) further posits that peacebuilding can either be driven from the above by international bodies and national governments (Track One). Conversely, it can take the bottom-up approach by non-state actors (Track Two and Track Three).

### **1.1 Genesis of the land conflict in Mount Elgon region**

The conflict in Mount Elgon region, similar to other conflicts in Kenya, dates back to the colonial alienation of land for white settlers which displaced many natives (Nyukuri, Huggings & Wakhungu, 2008). However, after independence, the land resettlement for the displaced populations was never completed hence the frequent conflicts in the Coast, Rift Valley and Western Kenya (Oyugi, 2006). Simiyu (2008), Kamoet (2007) and HRW (2011) indicate that the land conflict in Mount Elgon region started with the government effort in 1971 to resettle the Ndorobo in Chepyuk settlement scheme. This led to the creation of Chepyuk Phase I in 1989, Chepyuk Phase II in 1989-1994 and Chepyuk Phase III in 2005. However, these resettlement processes were never completed leading to conflicts between the *Soy* and *Ndorobo* clans of the Sabaot community with each claiming ownership to the settlement scheme. The land allocation processes were marred with corruption by land brokers, meddling by the local politicians and failure by the government to expedite the resettlement process and issuance of land title deeds (Simiyu, 2008; Kamoet, 2011; HRW, 2008; HRW, 2011). For instance, in 1993, Chepyuk III was set aside for resettlement 1, 732 families who would each receive 2-hectare plots. However, the process was never expedited leading to political manipulation of the resettlement process by the local politicians. When the government revisited the issue in 2005, the number of applicants had increased to 7,000.

After the 2005 vetting exercise for phase III, those who were not successful put claim on their original allotment letters that had been cancelled. This led to the formation of the Sabaot Land Defense Force (SLDF) by members of the *Soy* clan who faced eminent relocation from Chepyuk. The SLDF and the security forces were accused of killings and abductions, displacement of populations, mutilation and inhuman treatment, rape and sexual violence, destruction of property, theft, torture and forced recruitment of the youth into the SLDF (Kenya Red Cross Society [KRCS], 2007; Kenya National Commission on Human Rights [KNCHR], 2008). In 2008, the government deployed the Kenya Defense Force in the region to help quell the violence. Although the 2008 military intervention led to a forced ceasefire, it raised questions on alternative dispute resolutions and peacebuilding mechanisms that can be attained without great loss of lives and property. Furthermore, the military intervention left the residents traumatised as a result of the human rights abuses meted out on them. On the other hand, the military intervention enabled the state and non-state actors to initiate peacebuilding in the region as will be discussed in the paper.

### **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The 2006-2008 conflict in Mt Elgon region had adverse effects of the women. The Sabaot Land Defense Force (SLDF) and the security forces were accused of massive destruction of property, forceful displacement of residents, deliberate killing, abduction, mutilation and rape. The conflict left the women vulnerable and psychologically traumatized since both the SLDF the security forces targeted the male members of the society. The conflict further led to feelings of animosity and hatred among the *Soy* and *Ndorobo* clans since the perpetrators of the conflict were perceived to be from the *Soy* clan of the Sabaot community.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The Purpose of the study was therefore to examine the role of non-state actors in fostering peacebuilding among women in the Sabaot community following the 2006-2008 conflict in Mt Elgon region.

### **1.4 Theoretical framework**

The study was based on conflict transformation theory. This theory draws on the concepts of conflict resolution and conflict management through contributions of many scholars such as

Miall (2004), Lederach (1997) and Vayrynen (1991). Conflict transformation is a holistic and multi-faceted process of engaging with conflict. It is a process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourse and the very fabric of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict (Miall, 2004; NSC, 2009). The aim of conflict transformation is to pursue non-violent social change by transforming relationships and social organizations into long-term peace. Lederach (1997) and Dudouet (2006) contribute to the understanding of the actors and their role in conflict transformation. They identify three actors which include actor I (international organizations and foreign governments), actor II (development and humanitarian agencies) and actor III (Diasporas, transnational grassroots initiatives, criminal networks and others) levels. Lederach further contributes to the idea of a pyramid consisting of elites, leaders and decision makers at the top; leaders of social organizations in the middle with the base being occupied by local leaders. This helps one to locate the actors at every level and their role in the conflict transformation. The strength of the theory lies in its emphasis on organic peacebuilding as opposed to a top-down approach.

## **2.0 Research Methodology**

The research adopted a phenomenological approach in data collection and analysis (Baxter & Babbie, 2003; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Hart, 2005). According Creswell (2007), a phenomenological study describes the meanings for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon. The phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to see phenomena through the perception of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Daymon & Holloway, 2011). This study sought to analyze the perceptions of the subjects regarding the role of non-state actors in enhancing women in peacebuilding among women in Mount Elgon region.

The study was conducted in Mt Elgon region in Bungoma and Trans-Nzoia counties. Although Mt Elgon region extends to Uganda, the study only covered the Kenyan side of the region.

The sampled Sub-Counties were Mt Elgon, Cheptais, Bungoma North, Bungoma West in Bungoma County as well as Trans Nzoia West in Trans Nzoia County. The target population was 20,000 residents of Mt Elgon region who were affected by the 2006-2008 intra-ethnic conflict.

This was based on the 2009 population census report where the total population of Mt Elgon (Cheptais Sub-County) was 172,377. To get the actual sample size from 20,000, a table for determining needed size (S) of a randomly chosen size from a finite population (N) was used (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Hence, 377 community members who were purposively selected for study. The sample distribution was categorized along delineated sub-locations. The sub-locations were allocated samples based on intensity of the effects of the 2006-2008 conflict.

Purposive sampling was used in selection of sites and individuals for study. From the wider Mt Elgon region, the counties, Sub-Counties, divisions, locations and sub-locations that form key sampling units were purposively sampled. For qualitative interviews, 60% per cent of the faith-based organizations (FBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) were sampled. From the 8 NGOs<sup>1</sup> in the region, the researcher sampled 4 NGOs. Hence 3 NGO field workers were purposively sampled based on their positions in the NGOs. From the 10 CBOs in the region, the researcher randomly sample 6 CBOs for study. Thus 4 CBO workers in each of the CBOs in the region were purposively selected for study. From the 5 FBOs in the region, 3 FBOs were sampled and 3 people working for each of the FBOs were purposively selected for study. From the 10 CSOs in the region, 5 were purposively selected with 4 people working for each of the CSOs being randomly selected for study. Similarly, the researcher purposively selected the District Peace Committee (DPCs) members, peace monitors, opinion leaders and county and Sub-County administrators who participated in the in-depth interviews.

Out of the 90 respondents who had been sampled 40 of them were purposively sampled for qualitative interviews. From the 2 County Commissioners, the researcher purposively sampled 1 County Commissioner for study.

The researcher further sampled the following subjects for inclusion in the study: 2 Sub-County Commissioners, 2 peace monitors, 6 District Peace Committee Members, 3 members of the faith

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<sup>1</sup> This is based on the baseline survey conducted by the researcher in 2015 which identified 8 NGOs, 5 FBOs, 10 CBOs and 10 CSOs in Mt Elgon region

based organizations, 4 members of the community based organizations, 5 members of civil society organizations, 4 members of NGOs , 5 chiefs and 8 opinion leaders.

The main data collection method was qualitative structured interviews and in-depth interviews with key informants, document analysis and observation of ongoing peace projects. The use of document analysis entailed search for information in records especially minutes of peace meetings and district security committee minutes, newspapers and government policy documents. The second approach was non-participant observation which included observation of the peacebuilding projects in the region under study. The researcher took photographs of the peacebuilding projects in the region. Information obtained from observation was used to verify and confirm information obtained during focus group discussions (FGDs) as well as interviews and responses from the key informants. The responses from the interviews were recorded on digital voice recorders and later transcribed and translated from Kiswahili and/or mother tongue (Sabaot) into English. Data collection was done in three months where the researcher interviewed the key informants. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. Focus group discussions were also used for consensus building regarding the peacebuilding efforts by the non-state actors among women in the study area. Four FGDs comprising of 2 members of the DPC, 2 members from each of the CBOs, FBOs and NGOs, elderly men, women and youths were conducted in the two divisions of Cheptais Sub-County, that is Kopsiro and Cheptais; in Mt Elgon Sub-County, the FGDs were conducted in Kapsokwony and Kaptama divisions. The participants were randomly assigned to four focus groups with eight members per group so that everybody got ample opportunity to talk in order to get new insights into the topics under discussion. The FGDs were conducted in Kiswahili because the participants were from different tribes. Each FGD took an hour

A total of 38 respondents participated in the interviews. The key informant interviews were thematically coded in order to establish emerging themes for interpretation purposes. These involved giving textural and structural description of how the participants experienced peacebuilding in the region. According Creswell (2007), textural description entails a description of what participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon while structural description

shows how the experience happened. This did not take place in one discrete stage after all the data had been collected but was an iterative continuous cycle (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). The major part of analysis was done after data collection where field notes and transcribed interviews were analyzed. The NVivo 2.0 computer software program was used in analyzing the qualitative data.

## **2.1 Results and discussion**

Findings from the key informant interviews show that the non-state actors included the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). Among them were the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS), Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), PACT Kenya, USAID, the Western Kenya Human Rights Watch (WKHRW), Peace Tree Network (PTN), Amani Peoples Theatre (APT), Mount Elgon Peace initiative (MEPI), the Free Pentecostal Fellowship of Kenya (FPFK), Mount Elgon Residents' Association (MERA), *Maendeleo ya Wanawake organisation* (MYWO), *Vijana Umoja Pamoja* 'Youth together in unity' (VUP), Rural Women Peace Link (RWPL) and the Sabaot Council of Elders among others.

The findings show that the non-state actors participated in reconciliation of the sabaot clans by fostering community dialogue, demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of the ex-militia into the community, offering psychosocial counselling to the violence victims, addressing human rights abuses and promotion of inter-community dialogue and rebuilding of the economy of the region.

The findings show that the non-state actors engaged women in Mt Elgon region in peacebuilding in a number of ways. This included promoting psychosocial healing among the affected residents, initiating economic empowerment initiatives, fighting for human rights and resolving the contentious land issue in Chepyuk settlement scheme.

## **2.2 Psychosocial healing**

The findings further indicate that there were efforts to promote healing among widows in Mt Elgon region. The Afrika Study Centre (ASC) organized six negotiations aimed at addressing the

issues confronting widows in the society. The first dialogue took place on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2013 at the Marcus Garvey University, upper Mooni campus, in Mbale, Uganda. It brought together widows and women from around Mt Elgon region. Most of the widows were drawn from Cheptais Sub-County since they were adversely affected by the SLDF and military operations. The dialogue provided a psychological healing to the widows as they were able to share the challenges they face in the community.

*'I noticed that we had similar challenges as widows of the Janjaweed<sup>2</sup>. I realized that there were widows who were younger than me...we agreed not to allow the sins of our husbands affect us and our children. We agreed as widows to support each other' (Anne<sup>3</sup> Personal communication, November 4, 2014).*

MERA also organized a peace tour for the ex-SLDF members, SLDF widows, and leaders to Lira, Uganda to witness the human atrocities inflicted on civilians by the LRA. In addition, widows of former SLDF members formed the ambassadors of peace movement comprising over 500 women mainly focused on agricultural activities and preaching peace in the region. According to a participant:

*'The sight of the bones of those killed by the LRA in Lira filled me with horror...I vowed that none of my children will join ever SLDF... We interacted with widows of the LRA. They encouraged me to be a peace agent in my community...' (Jane<sup>4</sup>, personal communication, November 4, 2014).*

Information from KII indicates that Action Aid Kenya donated Kenya shillings 460,000 to *Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO)* to promote psychosocial counselling among widows and women in general. 40 women across the region were trained to counsel the affected

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<sup>2</sup> The local name for the members of the Sabaot Land Defense Force (SLDF) was Janjaweed. It was believed that the weapons used by the members of the SLDF were acquired from Sudan, hence the name Janjaweed.

<sup>3</sup> Anne is not the real name of the interviewee. This was used to protect confidentiality of the interviewee

<sup>4</sup> Jane is not the real name of the participant. This was done to protect the confidentiality of the interviewee

women and rape victims and refer the ones who had been infected with HIV/AIDS for Comprehensive Care Centre (CCC) in Eldoret. For example, two girls from Kibuk Girls High School in Kapsokwony Division were gang-raped by the SLDF in 2006 on their way to Kopsiro. When they got pregnant they were chased from their homes for fear of delivering *Janjaweed babies* (the local name for the SLDF was *Janjaweed*). These and other traumatized girls were taken out of Mt Elgon to Eldoret for counselling and they went back to school after delivery. Some however, refused to be associated with the Sabaoth even after counselling and resorted to changing the identity due to the trauma they had undergone. The counselling sessions which were conducted in every location in Mt Elgon and Cheptais sub-counties were meant to restore unity through forgiveness for the wrongs committed by the SLDF.

The findings from KII also indicate that Action Aid Kenya sponsored women for exposure trips to Garissa, Nakuru and Siaya to learn from other communities which had little land or living in arid areas. The trip to Garissa was however meant for cultural exchange since the two communities were grappling with similar challenges which included FGM, early marriages and high school dropout rates among girls. Through the counselling sessions, the women learnt to promote education especially of the girl-child since most of them were affected by the conflict and forced into early marriages and prostitution in neighboring towns like Kimilili, Chwele, Kitale and Bungoma. The trips also provided an opportunity for them to learn new farming techniques like fish farming in Siaya and horticulture in Hidayia in Garissa.

The findings further show that Peace Tree Network (PTN) in conjunction with Feminenza International conducted counselling sessions for girls who had dropped out of school due to the conflict. The programme mainly targeted school dropouts and rape victims. This endangered the girl-child in particular due to exposure to gender-related abuses such as early pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), rape and early marriage.

The findings indicate that by 2014, 9 girls from Cheptais Sub-County were given bursaries and according to the Peace Tree Network Coordinator for Cheptais Sub-County:

‘We also visit rape victims in their homes to encourage them go back to school. They have overcome their fear and 9 girls have gone back to school and some to polytechnics’). Hellen Makoe, Personal Communication, 13 October, 2014).

The PTN also had school visitations for the orphans and affected girls which were meant to provide psychological healing as a result of the SLDF menace and the military intervention which exposed many girls in the region to sexual abuse.

To reach women who faced sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), PTN in conjunction with Women and Development against Distress in Africa (WADADIA) used rape victims to counsel women experiencing similar challenges. WADADIA had a gynecological center in Eldoret where rape victims were referred for free treatment and counselling in order to overcome fear and trauma. Thereafter, they were given a chance to go back to school or polytechnics. Findings from KII show that the District Peace Committees in partnership with the Free Pentecostal Fellowship of Kenya (FPFK) conducted counselling and reconciliation of the ex-SLDF with the community in Cheptais and Kopsiro. This was followed by dialogues with the youth, widows, women and elders. Thereafter, dialogue meetings for the entire community were held at International Christian Ministry (ICM) in Kopsiro, while others were held at KTC in Kitale and Mabanga ATC in Bungoma. In 2011, the widows from both *Soy* and *Ndorobo* clans were taken to Malaba to share their experiences. The session further promoted healing since it provided a forum for interpersonal communication between the victims and the perpetrators of the conflict. The findings from KII and document analysis further indicate that as a result of the stigmatization that the widows of the ex-SLDF were facing in the society, Widows Network was formed in 2012. The group was funded by Action Aid Kenya to start income generation activities like poultry keeping and small-scale farming. Membership to the group provided a forum for the widows to share their challenges, interact with other members of the community and to fend for their children. Similarly, Chesikak Widows Network was formed in 2013 to accommodate all widows in Cheptais Division.

The widows are engaged in small scale business, merry-go round (table banking) and farming. In January 2014, they were given one incubator per ward by Consolidate Crown Company to start poultry projects in an effort to empower them economically.

*The income I get from our onion farm has enabled me to send my son to school. Action Aid Kenya has greatly rescued us from poverty. We do not have time to brood over the past since we are busy in our farms... (Mary<sup>5</sup>, personal communication, 8 November, 2014).*

The findings further show that the government, through the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Arts, gave 30 sheep to the *Keewaap Ngē'tuny* women group; each woman in the group got two sheep. After the sheep had bred, the firstlings were given to the Deputy County Commissioner (DCC) to fund other groups. The sheep were meant to promote self-reliance among the women. Similarly, Kaimugul youth group was given five cows to be shared among three members on a rotational basis where one member would take care of the cow until it breeds then give it to another group member when the calf was old enough. The firstlings were again given to the DCC to fund other groups on a rational basis. The project was meant to promote self-reliance among the youth. The findings show that the programmes were successful in promoting self-reliance among the youth and women in Cheptais Sub-County.

### **2.3 Economic empowerment of the women**

The conflict in the region had economic implications in the region since most lands were left fallow. In addition, most of the residents had their property destroyed by either the SLDF or security forces leaving them impoverished. The County Government of Bungoma also supported the widows and the most vulnerable members of the society in the region by donating maize seed and fertilizer as a way of empowering them economically. For example, in April 2015, widows from Chesikak, Cheptais and Chepyuk Wards were given seeds and fertilizer. These were the areas which were greatly affected since most of the SLDF were from these regions.

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<sup>5</sup> Mary is not the real name of the interviewee. This was used to protect confidentiality of the interviewee.

As a result, during the military intervention, most young men from these areas were either killed or forcefully disappeared by the military leaving the women to fend for the families. A similar initiative was launched by the Justice and Peace (JPC) Commission in Trans Nzoia County. According to the JPC spokesperson:

*'We bought 10 donkeys for women leaders to transport their produce from Chepyuk to Gituamba market since access to the markets was through feeder roads. We identified five women groups and supported them' ... (Peter<sup>6</sup>, Personal communication, 13 October 2014).*

Interviews with key informants show that *Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation* (MYWO) in collaboration with Action Aid Kenya initiated women empowerment programs for the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region. For instance, it provided funds for life skills training, small scale farming and business opportunities for women. Through mobile phones and local radio stations, MYWO linked up women with financial institutions such as *Faulu Kenya*, Micro Finance, Kenya Women Enterprise Fund and the Poverty Eradication Fund. This enabled women in the region to start small-scale businesses and even buy plots as a way of improving their livelihood and promoting economic independence.

The findings further indicate that Rural Women Peace Link (RWPL), a network of grassroots women's organizations in rural areas affected by armed conflicts in western Kenya participated in peacebuilding in Mt Elgon region. RWPL created a forum to enable women to share experiences and access information in order to enable them to become change agents in the communities affected by ethnic and GBV violence. One such network was Cheptais Rural Peace link which initiated economic empowerment programmes for widows of the ex-SLDF in Cheptais and Kopsiro. The widows were involved in income generation activities (IGAs) in order to be self-reliant. The findings reveal that the widows used the forum to instill peace messages among their sons in order for them not to fall prey to political manipulation.

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<sup>6</sup> Peter, not is not the real name of the interviewee. This was used to protect confidentiality of the interviewee

As mentioned earlier in the study, the youth who took up arms were mainly from Cheptais and Kopsiro hence the grassroots initiative in reaching them. The chairlady of the group was Mrs Salome Ndiwa, the wife of the SLDF leader. She was also elected as the chairlady of the *Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization*, Chesikak Ward as one way of integrating her and other SLDF widows to the community. However, according to the wife of the slain SLDF leader:

*'We face many challenges as widows of the SLDF. People do not welcome us to their homes. They openly criticize us that we preach peace yet our husbands were the Janjaweeds. It is very traumatizing since we are made to carry the sins of our husbands. They even chase away our children and openly call them Janjaweed children...'* (Salome Ndiwa, *Personal communication, October 13, 2014*)

## **2.4 Human rights**

Interviews with key informants revealed that various organizations advocated for respect of human rights for the residents in the region. Among them were the Western Kenya Human Rights Watch (WKHRW), Coalition for Peace Africa (COPA), *Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization* (MYWO) and Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), among others.

Findings from the key informant interviews show that one of the groups advocating for human rights was Dynamics Rights Care (DRC) based at Cheptais. Its members were trained by Coalition for Peace Africa (COPA) and Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya (FIDA) on how to identify the indicators of domestic violence, communicating with the victims of 2006-2008 violence and empowering vulnerable groups on legal matters. The issues addressed included disinheritance for women in the event of loss of their husbands and the rights of women, orphans and IDPs. In addition, community health workers had been trained on health issues including how to deal with cases of fistula among women.

As a result of the advocacy campaigns in Mt Elgon region, gender-based violence (GBV) victims had been empowered to visit hospitals within 72 hours and report defilement cases to the police. In the past, such cases were never reported. It can therefore be concluded that through these advocacy campaigns, the women could stand up for their rights.

However, the greatest challenge to according justice to women in the region was the Sabaot culture which did not allow women to inherit land. In addition, the patriarchal nature of the society had made many women to suffer in silence.

Findings from KII and questionnaires show that *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* (MYWO), Kenya Female Advisory Organization and other local community based organizations (CBOs) had been sensitizing girls and women on their rights such as resisting FGM, forced marriages, early pregnancies, GBV and land disinheritance especially after the death of their husbands. These actors also offered legal aid to the vulnerable groups on succession, inheritance and children's rights. In an effort to empower the vulnerable in the community to get justice, the Free Pentecostal Fellowship of Kenya (FPFK) identified 30 widows (35 years and below) per division for psychosocial counselling and life skills training. The women were enlightened on legal inheritance of land and their right to remarry. As a result some widows who had been disinherited had repossessed their lands through the state agents in the region. Findings from KII further show that the FPFK gave each group Kenya shillings 150,000 to start IGAs for self-reliance. Consequently, the widows held regular meetings to identify challenges and make referral cases since they had been empowered to demand for their rights.

Other initiatives included the advocacy for the rights of the girl-child. The findings from KII show that anti-FGM campaigns were organized in the region every December to offer girls an alternative rite of passage (ARP). This was meant to coincide with the Sabaot traditional circumcision ceremonies which were conducted every December. The findings reveal that although the government had banned FGM, it was still being conducted secretly especially in Kopsiro Division and areas bordering the forest. *Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation* (MYWO) in collaboration with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had conducted four ARP sessions from 2011 for girls aged 12-22 years. The four-day training sessions which were conducted on a rotational basis had been held in Cheptais High School, St. Teresa's Girls Cheptoror, Kaptama Boys Secondary School and Kibuk Girls' High School. At the climax of the training, all leaders and community members attended to witness the ARP graduation ceremony and used the forum to denounce FGM.

The researcher also found out that MYWO also rescued girls from FGM, early marriage and school dropouts. Some cases like rape and early marriages were referred to the children's department and the police. As a result of these campaigns, some girls and single mothers had gone back to school. It further emerged that MYWO did not rely on FIDA Kenya since their cases took too long hence failing to accord immediate justice to the victims.

The findings from KII show that Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA) in partnership with Peace Women across the Globe (PWAG) carried out women empowerment programmes on radios and public *barazas* in Trans Nzoia, Mt Elgon and Uasin Gishu in order to enhance women participation in the 2013 general elections. This was done in collaboration with local community-based organizations and advocacy groups in the region who conducted civil education on local radio stations, public forums, school debates and radio shows. During radio presentations, women were allowed to call or send SMS for clarification of issues. This was due to the realization of the negative impact of culture which did not allow women to exercise their democratic rights such as voting or taking up leadership positions. The gender and governance programmes presented by these groups strengthened the capacities of women in leadership and decision-making at the community levels in these areas.

Data from KII further show that the *Tears of Women Organization* had six programs in *Imani Radio*. The programmes were meant to provide women with information in order to empower them into leadership positions and also to promote cultural values in Mt Elgon, Turkana, Trans Nzoia, Pokot and Marakwet. These were regions with poor representation of women in leadership positions (COPA, 2011). As a result of these media advocacy campaigns, women had taken up leadership positions. For instance, there were two female assistant chiefs in Kaptama Division and eight women in the Mt Elgon and Cheptais District Peace Committees.

The findings from KII further indicate that the Western Kenya Human Rights Watch (WKHRW) had been advocating for justice for the people in Mt Elgon especially on the disappearances and inhuman treatment. The WKHRW had also been advocating for justice for the widows of the Mt Elgon conflict.

According to the findings, 228 widows had legal problems due to lack of death certificates as, some, even at the time of data collection, had not accessed the bodies of their husbands in the mortuaries nor traced the bodies of their loved ones. The findings from the HRW (2008) also show that in order for the hospitals to release the body without a post mortem, the relatives were forced sign an affidavit stating that they would not lodge any claim against anyone. As a result, the widows could not send their children to school since they could not access their husbands' money in the banks. Lastly, they faced succession problems due to lack of land title deeds since the government had not issued title deeds for Chepyuk settlement scheme.

## 2.5 Resolving land issues

Interviews with key informants however, revealed that Kaimugul Sub-location in Chepyuk settlement scheme had successfully dealt with boundary disputes as a result of the efforts of a CBO known as *Keewaap Ng'etuny* Women Group. In 2012, the group, in conjunction with PACT Kenya embarked on planting *siikoowēēt*<sup>7</sup> seedlings for 49 families which had boundary disputes. The *siikoowēēt* was preferred since it was cheaper than buying barbed wire. The group also extended the seedlings to other community members outside their sub-location in order to avert future boundary conflicts. This was done in order to promote peaceful co-existence among all the beneficiaries. Interviews with key informants revealed that mobile phones facilitated information sharing among the women in the group as well as for mobilization to attend weekly meetings. Thus, *Keewaap Ng'etuny* Women Group had promoted peace among neighbors by resolving boundary conflicts. In this grassroots peace initiative, mobile phones and SMSs contributed to information sharing and mobilization for meetings among villagers. The women often involved the chief, village elders and the entire village in resolving disputes and they also encouraged communal resolution to conflicts instead of litigation. As a result, all who had been displaced from Kaimugul location had gone back to their farms and reconstructed their homes. The women in the group also advised their sons to desist from criminal activities. This indicated that women acknowledged the role played by their sons in the conflict. It also shows the importance of grassroots initiative to peacebuilding.

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<sup>7</sup> *Siikooweet* is a drought-resistant thorny shrub with yellow fruits found in Mt Elgon region. It is mainly used for fencing compounds and is also believed to be medicinal.

### **3.0 Conclusion**

The study established the non-state actors actively engaged in promoting peacebuilding and healing women who were affected by the 2006-2008 land conflict. The non-state actors which participated in the healing process in the region included the Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya, Justice and Peace Commission, the Western Kenya Human Rights Watch and Mount Elgon Peace Initiative among others. The non-state actors facilitated the healing process among women by offering psychosocial counselling, promoting economic empowerment, resolving land issues and advocacy of human rights.

### **3.1 Recommendations**

The study recommends that for sustained peacebuilding in the region, there should be local peace initiatives by the community members. This was because most non-state actors in the region relied on donor funding and their programmes were bound to be short-lived.

Secondly, the peacebuilding initiatives in the region should be all-inclusive by involving men since they are perceived to be perpetrators of conflict and gender-based violence. The study further recommends that the actors should come up with peace programmes for children since they were also affected by the conflict.

It is also recommended that the non-state actors involved in peacebuilding in Mount Elgon region should use ICTs for networking and collaboration in order to avoid duplication of peace programmes in the region. The study further recommends that the non-state actors should avoid misusing the media for their selfish gain such as giving false reports in order to continue receiving funding from donors. Lastly, since the local politicians were blamed for instigating the conflict in the region, they should also be actively involved in preaching peace in the region using the various ICTs tools instead of being passive players in the peace process.

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