

Contribution of religious activities as a faith-based mediation strategy for conflict transformation along the border of Bomet and Nyamira Counties, Kenya

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<https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.6.2.68>

ABSTRACT

Faith-based actors tend to feature less in national and international efforts to transform inter and intrastate conflicts. Their contribution has further elicited less scholarly attention to the extent that policy interventions are less comprehensive and largely exclusive. This study aimed to investigate the contribution of religious activities as a faith-based mediation strategy for conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border, Kenya. Through the transformative theory in the study, it fostered an effective avenue for conflict transformation. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing specific descriptive survey methods along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border zone, Kenya. The target population of the study comprised 140 respondents. The study used a purposive sampling method to arrive at 87 household respondents for questionnaires, 29 respondents for in-depth interviews, 18 respondents for key informant interviews, and 6 focus group discussions from the Kipsigis and Abagusii communities along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border, Kenya. The research was conducted at four sites in the Ekerubo and Raitigo locations of Nyamira County and the Gelegele location of Bomet County. Questionnaires were administered to the identified household respondents along the Gelegele, Ekerubo and Raitigo locations border. Structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions were utilized to gather information from the respondents. The findings indicated that media, teachings, meetings, and motivation were key in transforming conflicts along the border of the counties. It concludes that religious activities had a substantial positive impact on conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira border since it builds mutual trust and promotes peaceful co-existence along the border. However, to enhance the effectiveness of this mediation strategy faith-based organizations should emphasize peaceful sessions along the border. Additional frameworks should be set on continuous training in peace.

Key words: Conflict, Faith-Based, Religious Activities, Transformation

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts have been and continue to be a great concern in the global phenomenon. Several of the conflicts have manifested with violence that is often based on political autochthony, ethnic identity, territorial claims and resource use. Empirically state actors have been presented as key in the transformation in many parts of Europe, eastern, and Middle Eastern thus marginalizing the role played by faith-based mediation strategies.

Developing countries provide vivid experiences on the nature of intrastate conflict and how non-state actors can actively engage in conflict transformation. Most of the conflicts are rooted in resource scarcities. However, other more pertinent causes are linked to cultural and political factors which have forced conflict transformation architects to devise innovative strategies for ending hatred and enmity among their populations. For Haynes (2007) scholarly works in African countries like South Africa, Somalia, Sudan, and Nigeria have focused more on the role state and non-state actors play in conflict transformation. However, his observation has ignored the faith-based mediation strategies employed in conflict transformation. Predominantly, the governmental organizations have been presented to have participated and mediated several conflict transformation processes over the last 10 years (Smock, 2002). Other than using the centuries old African mediation strategies through the institution of elders, some conflict theatres have attracted the role of faith-based organization that have a conspicuous presence on the African continent. Unfortunately, their automatic embrace into this domain has been slow (Smock, 2002)

In Kenya, conflict transformation has been built in the attempts to enhance peacebuilding in the numerous resource-based, cultural and political conflict theatres especially in the arid and semi-arid zones. However, this is not exclusive. Similar phenomena are discernible in the arable zones of the country too. Responding to border conflicts in the area the Kenyan government has initiated decentralization of the 2010 new constitution with boundaries adjustment policies by the Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC) (Greiner et al., 2011). The state has also decided to invest in strategic initiatives that can lead to peace. A good example is in 2002 when the government convened a peace committee chaired by the Rift Valley Provincial Commissioner, members of parliament from the area, and other civil leaders towards dialogue (Elfversson, 2016). Though many initiatives have been made in Kenya to transform conflicts, faith-based mediation strategies have not been given much recognition.

From the conflicts trend as elaborated above it clearly demonstrates the contributions that have been made by the state actors towards peaceful transformations. However, critically observed, other mediation measures have been initiated to restore peace and transform the conflicts in the affected areas. Thus, this concern calls for recognition of the faith-based mediation interventions in the many conflicts that seem to be marginalized. Scholarly we are invited to examine the contribution made by faith-based mediation strategies on conflict transformation. This paper then examines the contribution of the religious activities mediation strategy of faith-based organizations to conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border, Kenya.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Bomet-Nyamira counties border has experienced protracted intercommunal conflicts for a long time that are ethnic, political, and cultural in nature (Hussein, 1998). The recurrence of these conflicts has led to loss of lives, loss of properties and internal displacements. This is despite the state using administrative strategies to transform border conflicts through coercive and other state-centric mediation approaches. As the states' intervention on the border conflicts along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border several security deployments have been carried out in the area to transform violent situations. The government has deployed the Anti-Stock Theft Unit along the border (Nyagwara & Ogutu, 2024). The intention of this was mainly to counter the cattle rustling trend in the area. Another intervention was through the states administration that formed the local District Peace Committee (DPC) (Baú, 2013). The committee contained 15 members from each community who were engaged in peace discussions. For Ombati (2014) the peace meetings by this committee were basically implementing the national peace building and conflict transformation policy, to address issues to do with cross-border governance and insecurity and acted as an arbitrator for disputes that arose from the two communities.

However, the use of religious activities as a mediation strategy of conflict transformation in the study area has, however, not received much recognition. This study interrogated the contribution of religious activities to conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border. It examined the extent it has had impact on efforts to cultivate peace and coexistence among the border communities along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border.

1.2 Research Objective

To examine the contribution of faith-based religious activities mediation strategies to conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border, Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is guided by the theory of conflict transformation. The theory was espoused-by varied authors including, Johan Galtung, Robert Baruch and Joseph Folger, John Paul Lederach, Dietrich Fischer, Johannes Botes, Eleanor Fisher, Maarten Bavinck, and Aklilu Amsalu. For Baruch and Folger (2004) in their seminal work, *The Promise of Mediation*, the theory of conflict transformation can explain the deeper changes among people in conflicts beyond just seeking solutions to short-term problems. Basically, mediation should have the power to deal with the deeper issues of social life and not just stop conflicts. Baruch and Folger (2004) thus said this in reinforcing the premises of the theory of conflict transformation; mediation's greatest value lies in its potential not only to find solutions to people's problems but to change people themselves for the better, in the very midst of conflict.

In his little book on *Conflict Transformation*, Lederach began using the term conflict transformation in the 1980's (Lederach, 2014). This was after an intensive experience he had in Central America that enabled him to re-examine his language amid a conflict. For Lederach, conflict transformation seeks to understand the root causes of conflict to build social structures that can bring solutions without going into violence (Ullah & Inayat, 2023).

Galtung and Fischer have a common definition of conflict transformation. For them it is a way of changing violent attitudes, behavior, and application of creativity to contradictions (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). As a response to conflict globally, socially, and personally, transformation is achieved when hatred, violence, and issues involved are

tackled. Conflict transformation then signifies a continuous process of change in relations, behaviors, attitudes, and social structures from negative to positive (Makonye, 2021). As defined the theory is centered on the quality of relationships that is perpetuated through interactions.

Botes's definition and ideas are almost like the ones of Galtung and Fischer. He begins his analysis by acknowledging that conflict transformation is a new invention in the field of peace and conflict studies (Botes, 2003). Unlike conflict resolution, a term that was commonly used in the field of peace and conflict studies, transformation necessitates a psychic transformation in the attitudes, and relationships of involved parties. This denotes overcoming those sources and causes of conflicting situations. In that case transformation leads to reconciliation and healing.

Lastly, Fisher et al. (2018) define conflict transformation as an act of involving institutions in the settlement of disputes. It means that societal actors like government agencies, academic institutions and organizations have an upper hand in conflict transformation. This goes further into making sure policies used by these institutions are well revised and the parties involved in the conflict are empowered. It is a change that begins from the highest bodies coming down to the affected bodies. Any contribution made by these institutions towards conflict transformation has efforts to stimulate justice for the poor and the marginalized.

Analytically observed the conflict transformation theory is grounded on two limbs, the first being empowerment and the second being recognition. Empowerment according to Baruch and Folger (2004) is enabling the conflicting parties to identify by themselves the issues that underlie the conflict and to bring about possible solutions on their own. Recognition respectively means the capacity for the opposing party to see the point of view of the other party and to recognize the underlying issues that cause the other party to feel and act the way they do that emerges as a form of understanding (Baruch & Folger, 2004). Consequently, the theory shuns the manipulation mediation strategies for the facilitation strategies and other faith-based strategies, religious activities, which are more inclined to preaching and inspiration. Further, it puts the solutions and responsibility for ceasefire and mutual coexistence on the disputants and not the mediator (Baruch & Folger, 2004).

Thus, the theory looks at conflicts as a chance for growth and training for the conflicting parties while the former looks at conflicts as a problem to be solved (Lehti, 2019). Also, it views conflicts as a long-term process unlike the short-term basis of conflict management. Moreover, the mediators under theory of conflict transformation seek empowerment and recognition and act as facilitators.

The theory of conflict transformation is, however, not without its criticism. The main criticism is that it is a new paradigm that has not been empirically exhausted. However, it is considered prudent to give the theory of transformative mediation a chance; considering also that faith-based mediation strategies that seek to empower disputants have shown positive potential. It thus applies to the current study because it is attuned to faith-based mediation strategies that seek mostly to create a situation where mediation should have the power to deal with the deeper issues of social life and not just stopping conflicts but empowering the involved parties.

2.2 Conceptual Review

Religious activities as a faith-based mediation strategy refers to procedures and techniques that play a key role in transforming conflicts among the disputing parties (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2018). Bercovitch & Houston (2000) adopts procedural as a term synonymous to religious activities and defines the strategy as a process that enables a mediator to exert more formal control over the mediation process in respect to the environment of the mediation. This includes means like meetings, media publicity, and distribution of information and communication processes. Though not a direct definition this mediation strategy also focuses on humanitarian relief and development issues in conflict transformation (Zartman, 2007). With deeper understanding of the definitions above, they have a dynamic role in all stages of conflicts and contribute to prevention, mediation, conflict transformation as well as post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation, and advocacy for socio-political change (Bercovitch, 2019).

As observed from the above definitions, the strategy basically supports the individual's and community's emotional and relational needs. As pertaining to religious activities, the mediator here can use the following: religious teachings, doctrines, norms and values and narratives to increase trust, openness, motivation, shared understanding, and focus, as well as to regulate difficult emotions (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2018). The teachings can include scriptural verses and prophetic stories from the bible, Mishna, Quran, and Torah. Further religious values can include peace, reconciliation, forgiveness, mercy, virtue, love, truth, justice, confession, and repentance (Bercovitch, 2019). Lastly other religious activities can include common activities for groups, civic education, workshops, and seminars. The faith-based actors then embraced religious activities as a mediation strategy in conflict transformation worldwide.

2.3 Empirical Review

The faith-based actors have embraced religious activities as a mediation strategy in conflict transformation worldwide. Ireland in the late twentieth century witnessed ethnic and historical divide adversaries between the Nationalists and the Loyalists (Oberschall, 2007). As people were fighting for their rights and ethnic equality there was

violence and tension for almost 30 years. To tame the violent conflicts there was an establishment of a church fora that represented a collaboration between local churches, community relations council and the district council's community relations officers (Power, 2005). The church fora had a responsibility to reassess the role of the churches within the local society as well as a response to its needs in the post-conflict era. For Sandal (2017) their role was paramount because they concretized their purposes through deepening relations, improving understanding, finding common ground on beliefs and actions, promoting common action, and encouraging complementary action.

Also, in the year 1968, the Catholic civil rights movement and Protestants engaged in interreligious dialogue (Oberschall, 2007). As observed by Sandal (2017) the ecumenical dialogue was facilitated to give religious leaders more space to express themselves and launch new conflict transformation initiatives. The peace talks and negotiations with the groups led to common peace-making institutions. However, this transformation towards peace was achieved through focus on Christ's forgiveness of his enemies as a model (Sandal, 2017).

The religious actors also introduced Christian traditions and writings. With their theological innovations they became models of like. As such public courses, workshops and conferences relating to conflict transformation were established (Sandal, 2017). The ideas that they came up with in these meetings led to publication of articles and reports in the Irish Newspapers for easy accessibility to all. The intention of this innovation was that apart from the conflicts that created division there is a unifying factor, Christianity. They had a positive consideration that it is through Christianity that values of peace are highly respected. This then led to the promotion of peace by interdenominational activities and communications.

In Rwanda, the Hutu-Tusti poor relations laid the formulation for the perpetuation of structural violence that subsequently led to the 1994 massacre, displacement of many into expatriate camps, destruction of property and rape (Ikome, 2012). Sodaro (2018) describes the situation nothing short of a horror-story of murder, mayhem, mass rape and forced relocation of between one and two million people. In creating room for reconciliation church-based interventions emerged such as the socio-therapy programmes that the Diocese of Byumba of the Episcopal Church of Rwanda established (Richters et al., 2008). Their mission was to help the victims traumatised to overcome their depressed state of the past. Further the counselling training helped the victims regain the attitudes of dignity and safety. Also, the Diocese created activities of national unity, and traditions of peace taught through radio stations and educational institutions.

The Rwanda churches have also been partnering with the government in the process of peacebuilding and reconciliation (Schliesser, 2018). The churches included the Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Pentecostals. Their positive involvement was experienced through weekly sermons, bible study groups, workshop songs and dances that were aimed at deepening the message of peace and forgiveness. They also introduced an interreligious dialogue for Christians and Muslims (Haynes, 2007). The common agenda for the dialogue was bringing all religions together in the pursuit of transforming the past conflicts.

Ethnicity in Kenya has influenced boundary disputes because of its centeredness on culture, pastoralists searching for grazing grounds for their animals and cattle rustling (Kaimba et al., 2011). This has been experienced for years along the border conflict between Pokot and Turkana who are pastoralist communities (Okumu et al., 2017). Even today we still witness cattle rustling, raiding, violent clashes, and killings (Greiner et al., 2011).

The Catholic Diocese of Maralal that ministers the Pokot, Samburu, and Turkana has initiated conflict transformation efforts (Okumu et al., 2017). The activities conducted by the Diocese regards the transformation on the communities' lives before, during and after conflicts. As a faith-based mediation actor it has maintained the relationships of the three communities through, dialogue, interaction, and reconciliation. Also, it has initiated evangelization, human development and working for justice and peace. These initiatives have transformed young men from their cultural warriors to rebuilding relationships with other communities

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research design relying on descriptive survey research methods to interrogate religious activities faith-based mediation strategy along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border and their contribution to conflict transformation. The descriptive survey method is mostly used for collecting information on extant societal phenomena in a study area (Orodho, 2004).

This research design is appropriate for the study since it has shown the contribution made by faith-based mediation strategies. The information has been collected from identified households, religious leaders, village elders, assistant chiefs, and chiefs along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border on conflict transformation. The information that has been acquired includes the contribution of faith-based mediation strategy, religious activities on conflict transformation. The descriptive survey design currently used has minimized the time and resources used. It has also given reliable results of the research.

3.2 Study Area

The study took place along the border of Bomet County, Gelegele location and Nyamira County, Ekerubo and Raitigo locations, Kenya. The area of study is along the border that starts from Ekerubo sub location to Raitigo sub location of Nyamira County. On the other side the border starts from Kipsimbol sub location to Gelegele sub location of Bomet County. Along the border of Bomet county, Gelegele location, the inhabitants of this area are mainly Kipsigis, one of the Kalenjin communities. The identified area of the study in the Bomet County is Gelegele location that has three sub locations: Gelegele, Koiyet, and Kipsimbol. Administratively it runs by 30.2 square kilometers (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2019). The three sub locations were used as spot areas for the study.

Along the border of Nyamira County, Ekerubo and Raitigo locations, the inhabitants of this area are mainly the Abagusii community. The identified place for the study area for Nyamira County is Ekerubo and Raitigo locations that are composed of the following sub locations: Raitigo, Ekebuse, and Ekerubo. Administratively it runs by 26.9 square kilometers (KNBS, 2019). The three sub locations along the border were also used as spot areas for the study.

The area of study here is of concern for this research because it has witnessed for many years recurring border conflict that is manifested as ethnic, economic, political, and cultural. The conflict witnessed in this area has been and continues to be a threat to the harmonious and peaceful coexistence along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border.

3.3 Target Population

The target population for this study was from Ekerubo and Raitigo Locations of Nyamira County and Gelegele Location of Bomet County. The total number of respondents from the three locations was 140. Of the three locations, 87 respondents for questionnaires were selected. These respondents were based in terms of selected households from the total households in the area of study. The in-depth interviewees were 29 respondents from the three locations that included village elders, assistant chiefs, and chiefs. The key informants' respondents were 18 religious leaders from Ekerubo, Raitigo, and Gelegele locations. Lastly, there were respondents from the 6 focused group discussions from the identified spots of the Ekerubo, Raitigo, and Gelegele locations.

The purposive sampling method was used to select informants that were well informed and exhibited deep knowledge and clear understanding of the religious activities faith-based mediation strategies and border conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border.

3.4 Sample Size

The research design used the purposive sampling to arrive at study households, religious leaders, community leaders, assistant chiefs, and chiefs from the two locations. The households were 42 from Ekerubo and Raitigo locations and 45 from Gelegele location respectively. The religious leaders were selected as 6 from Ekerubo and Raitigo locations and 12 from Gelegele location. The village elders were 8 from Ekerubo and Raitigo locations and 12 from Gelegele location. The assistant chiefs were 3 from the three sub locations of Ekerubo and Raitigo locations and 3 from the three sub locations of Gelegele location. Also, there were three chiefs, 2 from Ekerubo and Raitigo locations and 1 from Gelegele location. There was a total of 29 in-depth interviews, 13 respondents from Ekerubo and Raitigo locations and 16 respondents from Gelegele location.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

The study used purposive sampling. 87 questionnaires were administered to 87 respondents from the three locations. The key 18 informant interviews were guided by KII schedule (Appendix III). The 6 focused group discussions were guided by FGD schedule (Appendix IV). Lastly the 29 In-depth interviews were guided by the FII schedule (Appendix V).

As well elaborated purposive sampling gave an opportunity to the researcher to select respondents that provided required information according to the objectives of the study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019). Jackson (2008) observed that purposive sampling takes into consideration the different small groups in the population and helps guarantee that the sample accurately represents the population on exact characteristics.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

The researcher used questionnaires, key informant interview guide, focus group discussion and in-depth interview guide. According to Orodho (2004), questionnaires and in-depth interview guide can collect a large amount of information in a reasonable space of time. Also, the interview guide and guiding questions enables one to collect data required to meet the specific objective of the study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019).

The collected data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. It was filtered by eliminating outliers and ambiguous items in the variables. Factor analysis has investigated whether different variables have any linear relationship (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019). Further, multiple regression analysis is used to assess the degree to

which the independent variables predict the dependent variable. SPSS Software Version 24 is used to compute and analyze the data.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The researcher observed ethical guidelines to a person of integrity without undertaking research for personal gain or research that has negative effects on others (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019). Permission to carry out research within the study area was sought from the relevant authorities. Confidentiality of the respondents' identity was observed by way of concealing their names and recording only their place, designation, gender, age, educational qualifications, and ranks. Key informants who took part in the research were given respect for their right to privacy. The interview schedules were distributed to respondents and all the data collected from respondents was securely kept by the researcher who assured respondents that the findings of the study were purely for research purposes.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Religious Activities Faith-Based Mediation Strategies to Conflict Transformation

The study examined the contribution of religious activities faith-based mediation strategies to conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border, Kenya. The findings from the respondents indicate that media, teachings, meetings, and motivation are the primary strategies used in transforming conflicts in the study area. These findings are represented in the table below

Table 1

Religious Activities Faith-Based Mediation Strategies to Conflict Transformation

Religious Activities Mediation Strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Media	18	26.1
Teachings	22	31.9
Meetings	15	21.7
Motivation	14	20.3
Total	69	100

The data on religious activities faith-based mediation strategies for conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border reveal insightful variations in how respondents engage in mediation strategies. The most frequently reported strategy is teachings, utilized by 22 respondents, suggesting a strong reliance on religious education and moral instruction as tools for conflict transformation. This approach likely emphasizes the role of ethical guidance and spiritual beliefs in shaping communal relationships and transforming conflicts. It is closely followed by the media strategy, by 18 respondents, indicating that information dissemination through religious media channels plays a significant role in conflict transformation. This reliance on teachings and media implies that households prioritize spiritual enrichment and informed dialogues in their efforts to navigate and transform conflicts.

In addition, the other strategies, including meetings and motivation, account for 15 and 14 respondents respectively, highlighting a diverse approach to faith-based mediation. These strategies point to the importance of communal engagement and encouragement in fostering peace and understanding among communities. Meetings serve as a platform for dialogue and consensus-building, while motivation suggests an active effort to inspire positive actions and attitudes toward conflict transformation. The equal distribution of respondents across these practice areas illustrates a multifaceted approach to conflict transformation that merges spiritual guidance, communal interaction, and proactive encouragement. This mixture of strategies can be seen as a reflection of the complex interplay between religious values, community dynamics, and individual agency in promoting peaceful coexistence along the border of Bomet and Nyamira counties.

In this study area, the findings show that the role of religious institutions and activities in mediation and conflict transformation is significant. The data from respondents reveal that media, teachings, meetings, and motivation are the key religious strategies employed to address and transform conflicts among the communities along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border. The following analysis explores each of these strategies with direct quotes from respondents, providing a deeper understanding of their roles in conflict transformation.

4.1.1 Media as a Faith-Based Strategy

Media plays an essential role in disseminating information related to peacebuilding efforts and conflict transformation. Religious media, including community radio programs, church bulletins, and social media platforms, have been used to spread messages of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. These media outlets often feature religious leaders who speak about the importance of peace and unity. Media, particularly religious radio programs, church-led

social media campaigns, and religious television broadcasts, have been identified as significant tools in the mediation and transformation of conflicts. These media platforms are used to disseminate messages of peace, unity, and forgiveness. Respondents emphasized how religious leaders and organizations have used media to spread messages of reconciliation, often reaching a wide audience across the Bomet-Nyamira border.

Respondent 1 Gelegele location shared, *"Our church leaders have used radio stations to talk about peace and reconciliation. Sometimes this one is done through preaching peace. These messages reach even those in the most remote areas. Sometimes they broadcast programs during conflicts to call for calm and for people to examine their conscience that calls each person to do good."*

This highlights the importance of media in reaching a broad audience, especially in areas where face-to-face communication might be limited or difficult due to geographical and cultural barriers. For Bercovitch (2019) the media has been one of the great procedural methods adopted in conflict transformation. It also became common in Kenya during the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Eldoret. Many faith-based radio stations made great efforts to give information that could lead to transforming conflicts (Shitemi et al., 2013). Also, in response to the conflict of Rwanda the Diocese of Byumba of the Episcopal church of Rwanda gave traditions of peace taught through radio stations (Richters et al., 2008). From these examples media is presented as a tool to spread the messages of peace and reconciliation. Especially radio stations have been identified as a contributing factor toward conflict transformation. These methods are important because they help peaceful messages to reach out to different parts of the affected area. It is the best method because it does not need a face-to-face meeting to receive any message. The respondents go further to express themselves,

Respondent 3 Raitigo location added,

"During the last conflict, we heard messages from the local church via the community radio like Egesa, and Minto Fm. We have even had newspapers like the Mirror that have messages to peace. It has helped to cool down tempers and reminded people of their shared faith, which brought them back to reason."

One respondent noted:

"Religious radio stations, especially when they speak our local languages, play a big role in transforming our conflicts. When there is fighting, the radio broadcasts messages from the church that encourage us to forgive each other. This helps calm down the tension, especially during violent times."

Respondent 4 Ekerubo location explained,

"Radio broadcasts by religious groups have encouraged us to think of our neighbors as brothers and sisters, regardless of the ethnic differences. They have helped share messages of unity that we can't ignore."

This shows that media through radios, particularly community-driven programs, play an essential role in conflict de-escalation by promoting messages of unity and peace. In Ireland media was used through publications or articles and reports that contributed to peace and reconciliation as a unifying factor (Sandal, 2017). It is also a statement which suggests that religious media is not only a source of information but also a platform for spreading values of unity and reconciliation. Another factor we realize from the respondents is that the message of peace was mostly at home when the local languages are used on radio stations. Like in Eldoret the Sayare and Biblia Husema radio stations had programs aired in the local languages that targeted people who could not understand Kiswahili or English (Shitemi et al., 2013). The phones too were of great help, using various applications like WhatsApp to reach people from the two communities to engage in transforming conflicts.

Another respondent added:

"The church also uses WhatsApp groups and radio programs to engage the youth in peace talks. They post scriptures and messages that encourage us to live in harmony, and they call to contribute towards topics that are related to peacebuilding. This helps a lot when there is tension."

However, a few respondents pointed out that while media is an essential tool, there are applications that were newly introduced like WhatsApp and could contribute to spreading the message of peace. However, it has not yet been documented scholarly how this as one of the media methods contributed to conflict transformation. Along the border of Bomet-Nyamira, WhatsApp groups have been formed among the people from the two communities. It is emerging as one of the media mechanisms that must be emphasized because it creates a rapport of peace and transforms conflicts.

One resident remarked:

"Sometimes the messages on radio are too general. What we need are more localized and specific communications that directly address the challenges we're facing, like land conflicts and cattle rustling."

Though the media is important in conflict transformation using radio stations, some residents are reserved because of clarity. It is one of the challenges in media production because people do not get exactly what is communicated. However, the listeners can have problems with the radio stations because the information given to them does not appeal to what they want to hear. Like Eldoret Shitemi et al. (2013) observed that the use of radio as media publicity is commonly accepted but other people feel the ineffectiveness of it. The responses in this section clearly

demonstrated that the message must be clear from radio stations. Though, people have preferences of programs they feel comfortable with, it has proved to be effective in spreading peace and transformative information. Though challenges are there with clarity of information, there is still an appreciation for the contribution of religious leaders in preaching peace using radio stations and other media platforms.

One respondent stated,

"Our local radio station often broadcasts messages from our religious leaders about peace. It helps to remind people of our shared values."

Another participant in group discussion added,

"Social media has become a tool for spreading positive messages. We share stories of reconciliation that inspires others."

The church has used local radio stations to broadcast messages of peace. They invite us to listen to how we should live peacefully with our neighbors, even when there is tension. Female respondent, Ekerubo location.

"Every Sunday, our pastor encourages us to forgive one another and to work together, even if we have disagreements. He sometimes mentions these messages on the radio to reach more people." Male respondent, Gelegele location.

"Religious leaders in our area also send text messages through the church's WhatsApp group, urging us to refrain from violence and find peaceful ways to settle our disputes." Female respondent.

Religious media, including local radio stations, church broadcasts, and social media platforms, serve as powerful tools for conflict transformation. Religious leaders use the media to disseminate messages of peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness, ensuring that these messages reach the wider community (Bercovitch, 2019). For Sandal (2017) the media enlightens people on the shared values, forgiveness, and the positive changes towards conflict transformation. Conflict transformation as explained here, takes place in radio stations, church broadcasts and other platforms like WhatsApp that religious leaders use to disseminate messages of peace.

Media serves as an influential religious strategy that extends beyond physical meetings or teachings. By utilizing radio, social media, and other platforms, religious leaders can broadcast conflict transformation messages that go across community boundaries. As Galtung & Fischer (2013) suggests, communication via media channels can bridge divides, offering peaceful alternatives and guiding individuals toward conflict transformation.

Media, especially religious radio stations and community outreach programs, is an effective tool used in the border region for conflict transformation. Religious leaders have utilized media platforms to spread messages of peace, reconciliation, and mutual understanding (Bercovitch, 2019). The ability of media to reach a wide audience allows religious messages to be disseminated quickly and widely, which is critical in a conflict-prone area. Media as a religious strategy also helps communicate peace messages to a wide audience, fostering broader community involvement in conflict transformation. According to Galtung & Fischer (2013), the media's role in conflict transformation is crucial, as it can shape public perception and mobilize collective efforts for peace. The widespread nature of media allows religious messages to reach people in remote areas where face-to-face interaction may not be feasible.

As examined by the respondents and some scholars, the use of media is an effective tool for extending the reach of peaceful transformation messages beyond the immediate religious congregation. By leveraging platforms like radio and mobile communication, religious leaders have succeeded in making peace messages accessible to a broader audience, especially in remote areas where direct communication might be limited.

4.1.2 Teaching as a Faith-Based Strategy

Religious teachings are a foundational element in conflict transformation along the border region. Religious leaders, particularly pastors, priests, imams, and other faith-based leaders, used biblical and Quranic teachings to encourage peaceful coexistence. Respondents shared that religious teachings about forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation have had a profound impact on their willingness to transform conflicts. Religious teachings form the backbone of conflict transformation in this area. The responses below show how people value teaching as a faith-based strategy in conflict transformation.

One respondent stated:

"Our pastor always reminds us that God wants us to live in peace. Whenever there is a conflict, he quotes scriptures that remind us of the need to forgive and love our neighbors."

A village elder explained:

"The churches and mosques play a big role in teaching us to live without fear of one another. The teachings focus on love, forgiveness, and reconciliation, and this is very helpful when dealing with neighbors from different ethnic backgrounds."

What we realize from the respondents is that religious teachings form the backbone of conflict transformation in this area. Priests, bishops, pastors, imams, and other religious leaders frequently incorporate messages of

reconciliation, forgiveness, and unity in their sermons. This was a common transformative measure in the Congo conflict where religious leaders emphasized on educational teachings at Bandunda, Katanga, Kinshasa, and north and south Kivu (Uzodike, 2009). Their sermons directly addressed issues such as land disputes, cattle rustling, and ethnic conflicts. These teachings were grounded in a religious doctrine that emphasized peace and harmony. Kadayifci-Orellana (2018) affirms that these teachings increase trust and openness leading to forgiveness and reconciliation. The role of religious leaders has been of help in transforming conflicts through their teachings. There is also a clear indication of the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. For communities to live together harmoniously these two elements are necessary.

However, the effectiveness of teachings depends on the receptiveness of the community.

A resident shared:

"Some people don't take the teachings seriously because they believe that religion and politics should not mix. But those who listen to the religious leaders are often the ones who help transform conflicts in the community."

Though with some reservations religious teachings are foundational to many conflict transformation strategies along the Bomet-Nyamira border region. There are some respondents who feel that teachings of the church cannot be mixed with political or cultural issues. We can also realize that teachings were of great help in the conflict that occurred in Kuresoi, north of Kenya where you could not separate people engaged in politics and the people receiving religious teachings. What was important is that core principles of forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation were found in religious teachings (Chepkorir, 2019). This in return provided guidance for transforming tensions and building community solidarity. Looking at the example of Kuresoi, you cannot miss reconciling the church and politics. This is because the very people who are involved in politics are the same people who are Christians and Muslims. Also looking critically at the two they share most values that are from Christianity or Islamic teachings. By their nature, they need to be reciprocal in their way of operation to attain conflict transformation. On the same note many respondents recognized the role played by faith-based teachings in conflict transformation.

Respondent 2 Raitigo location observed,

"Our religious leaders teach us to forgive and reconcile, even when the pain is deep. They emphasize the teachings of Jesus and the importance of peaceful co-existence by quoting relevant texts from the bible"

Respondent 3 Ekerubo location commented,

"The teachings we receive from our religious leaders emphasize the importance of dialogue and reconciliation. They teach us that it is our responsibility to end the conflict, not just wait for others to act."

These quotes reflect the influence of religious doctrine in shaping the moral compass of community members, encouraging them to seek transformative solutions based on their faith's values. Among the values that have been emphasized are forgiveness and reconciliation (Sandal, 2017). They are values that are commonly shared in religious contexts. As such, dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation are religious teachings based on the Koran and bible. The citation of their texts enlightens people to contemplate on the messages of peace that triggers transformation of their ways of life. The teachings also have an impact in changing the mentality of people.

Respondent 4 Gelegele location mentioned,

"The church holds regular services and teachings that speak directly on the conflicts we face. They focus on the importance of loving our neighbors and transforming disputes peacefully. These teachings are important because they influence how we approach conflict."

This demonstrates that religious teachings can shift perspectives by encouraging individuals to prioritize peace over animosity. It also highlights how religious teachings empower individuals to take personal responsibility for promoting peace. For Kadayifci-Orellana (2018) religious teachings brings a shared understanding as well as regulating difficult emotions for a positive transformation. The approach of conflict transformation in churches and mosques addresses the issues affecting the community members. Their main concern is the one of respecting and loving one another as the sacred scriptures say.

The importance of community life of love has also been common especially from the biblical teachings.

A respondent noted,

"Our faith teaches us to forgive one another. This principle is crucial when transforming conflicts." Another participant remarked, *"The teachings of our religion remind us that we are all part of a larger community, and we must work together for peace."*

"Every Sunday, our priest teaches us about unity and reconciliation and how we must love our neighbors as we love ourselves. This has helped us understand the importance of loving one another that leads to accepting the others." Male respondent, Gelegele location.

"The church leaders read to us the Bible teachings on peace. They tell us that we should not let anger or hatred divide us." Female respondent, Ekerubo location

"The teachings encourage us to love and pray for our enemies and seek peace. This has made it easier for us to interact and solve conflicts peacefully." Assistant chief.

Teachings from religious leaders and institutions serve as a long-term strategy for promoting an environment of peace. The message of loving one another is presented as transformative. As such, religious leaders can influence behavior through consistent teachings that promote forgiveness, empathy, and reconciliation (Sandal, 2017). Thus, religious teachings are central to conflict transformation along the border region. These teachings are often rooted in values such as forgiveness, love, unity, and the sanctity of human life, which religious leaders encourage their congregants to adopt in their daily lives. The moral authority of religious teachings can challenge divisions and promote attitudes conducive to peace.

Further, teachings rooted in religious doctrines play a significant role in shaping the ethical and moral framework that guides individual and collective behavior. Religious teachings provide a foundation for conflict transformation by promoting values that encourage peaceful coexistence. Lederach (2014) emphasizes that religious institutions, through teachings, can help create a culture of peace that extends beyond individual conflicts to societal harmony. Teachings then are central to the moral and ethical framework that guides community members in conflict situations. By emphasizing religious values such as forgiveness, love, and peace, and reconciliation, religious leaders provide both the spiritual and practical guidance needed to transform conflicts. These teachings align with the broader community values and serve as a reminder that conflicts should be transformed through peaceful means, often urging individuals to reconcile their differences for the greater good.

4.1.3 Meetings as a Faith-Based Strategy

Meetings facilitated by religious leaders have been identified as essential forums for dialogue and conflict transformation. These gatherings, which often include members from the two communities involved in the conflict, are organized to promote discussion, reconciliation, and the identification of shared interests. Respondents indicated that these meetings are frequently organized by local churches provide a neutral space for open communication. This communication is also done in the form of workshops and seminars. The two communities have also been meeting in ball games that accommodate the youth more. The meetings also may take the form of community forums, reconciliation gatherings, or interfaith dialogues. During these meetings, religious leaders facilitate the meetings by encouraging dialogue, understanding, and cooperation.

One respondent noted:

"Religious leaders organize meetings in the church halls where people from both sides of the conflict come together. They help us speak to one another and discuss the issues. After the meetings, the violence usually stops, and we start living peacefully."

A local leader explained:

"We have used seminars and workshops to discuss various issues, from land disputes to cattle rustling. These forums are very important because they bring people from both sides together, under the leadership of someone neutral, who can guide us to peaceful understandings."

Respondent 5 Raitigo location explained,

"The church calls for interreligious meetings for dialogue during conflicts. We sit together, and the priest and pastors lead us in discussions about the issues that bring us together as a Christian community. Sometimes, we apologize, and other times we agree on ways to share resources. These meetings have helped solve many problems."

From the respondents, religious institutions along the border also facilitate interreligious dialogue that brings conflicting parties together. This was a common practice in Nigeria, Jos-Plateau interreligious crisis, where an interreligious dialogue was organized by the Christian Association of Nigeria (Ilo, 2015). In connection to past events these meetings are often structured as reconciliation sessions where individuals can discuss their differences and the uniting factors, guided by religious leaders who help mediate the conversation. The meeting forums have had a positive impact on conflict transformation.

Respondent 6 Gelegele location shared,

"I recall a time when the church held a special meeting for people affected by cattle theft and the ones whose houses were burnt. Leaders encouraged us to express our concerns and come to a peaceful agreement. Without these meetings, the conflict might have existed even up to now."

One respondent stated,

"When we have community meetings led by our religious leaders, it creates a space for everyone to voice their concerns freely."

Here, the meetings served as a space for expressing grievances and finding solutions in the presence of religious leaders. The community members are encouraged to share issues that affect conflict transformation. Bercovitch & Houston (2000) refers to these meetings as a formal process that religious mediation uses in conflict transformation. It

is a forum where people can freely share issues affecting them which need to be discussed to find relevant transformative solutions.

Another participant in group discussion added,

"These meetings help us to understand each other better and find common ground."

We have regular meetings in one of the churches where we sit together as community members, regardless of our religious and ethnic groups, and discuss how we can live peacefully. These meetings have helped reduce tensions." A respondent.

"Churches in our area organize meetings where they bring together members from different churches coming from the two communities. The leaders talk to us about the importance of peace and getting to know one another better." A respondent, Ekerubo location.

"The meetings create a platform for us to air the problems that divide us, and through them, we can understand each other's perspectives. This has helped us avoid conflicts and promote peace." Village elder.

Meetings are then presented as a central faith-based strategy for conflict transformation. These gatherings offer a safe space for individuals to express their concerns, listen to others, and work together toward mutual understanding. In the Diocese of Eldoret Bishop Korir initiated the peace meetings that helped disputing communities understand one another (Opongo & Elias, 2020). As Lederach (2014) notes on the same, one on one dialogues facilitated by neutral mediators such as religious leaders are essential in conflict transformation, as they allow for empathetic exchanges that promote healing and forgiveness. As a way of coming together, meetings have made conflicting parties have a mutual understanding through their sharing. Listening to one another and understanding the message discussed helps the affected people change their mentality in quest for harmonious co-existence.

Religious meetings, such as prayer sessions, community gatherings, and interfaith dialogues, are also important for conflict transformation. These meetings provide a platform for community members to come together and work toward reconciliation in a neutral and safe space. Religious leaders often facilitate these meetings, offering counsel and mediation to help transform conflicts.

Meetings, especially when facilitated by religious institutions, are essential for bringing people together. These meetings offer a platform for reconciliation and negotiation, helping to mend relationships and reduce tensions. It is highlighted that such gatherings create opportunities for individuals to express their grievances in a controlled environment, contributing to conflict transformation. Religious meetings serve as structured spaces for dialogue, allowing community members to voice their concerns, hear the perspectives of others, and engage in cooperative problem-solving. These gatherings provide an opportunity for religious leaders to mediate conflicts directly, ensuring that tensions are de-escalated before they lead to violence. Furthermore, these meetings promote a sense of community and collective responsibility, making participants feel heard and valued.

However, we cannot fail to discuss the findings that highlight the weak part of the religious meetings as a mediation strategy.

"We don't have these meetings often enough. Sometimes, a conflict may flare up before the next meeting is organized, and people are already in an emotional state that makes dialogue difficult." A respondent Gelegele location.

While meetings are effective, some respondents highlighted challenges related to their frequency and engagement. Many people feel that these meetings to be effective should be frequent. They make the community members engaged with peace communications in meetings that caution them.

4.1.4 Motivation as a Faith-Based Strategy

Motivational efforts by religious leaders aim to inspire individuals and communities to adopt peaceful behaviors, transform conflicts, and engage in reconciliation processes. Motivational strategies often include sermons, personal counseling, and encouragement. Respondents appreciated the motivational messages they received from religious leaders, particularly in times of high tension.

Motivation through religious activities is a strategy that encourages individuals to adopt a peaceful mindset. Religious leaders often motivate their congregations by emphasizing the importance of peace, such as social harmony, economic prosperity, and spiritual growth. This form of motivation is both intrinsic and extrinsic, as it appeals to both personal and communal well-being.

One respondent stated:

"When the church leader preaches to us, he talks about how living harmoniously brings prosperity. He reminds us that our children and grandchildren will live a better life if we choose peace. This makes us want to do better and transform our conflicts."

Another community member shared:

"The talks we receive from religious leaders make us understand that staying in conflict harms everyone, including our children. They inspire us to be the bigger person and take the first step towards reconciliation."

Religious leaders use motivation to inspire individuals to actively engage in conflict transformation processes. This motivation often comes in the form of encouraging personal reflection, reinforcing faith-based values of peace, and offering hope for a better future through reconciliation. In relation to the responses, the motivation strategy has helped with deeper understanding of all stages of conflicts and their contribution to conflict transformation (Bercovitch, 2019). For Kadayifci-Orellana (2018) this strategy supports the individual and community's emotional and relational needs. For conflict transformation, motivations are important because they help individuals and community members to change their attitudes for the better. They also create a better understanding of conflict transformation.

The religious leaders are at the forefront to giving motivational reflections.

Respondent 7 Raitigo location stated,

"The pastor always tells us that peace starts in the heart. He gives reflection on how to forgive those who have wronged us and reminds us that it is only through peace that we can build a better future."

This quote highlights how religious leaders inspire personal reflections to peace by motivating individuals to internalize the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. In Democratic Republic of Congo there was motivational practices that led to peacebuilding activities into transformative development enhancing the affected victims to come into terms (Bouta et al., 2005). Reflections from religious leaders have really motivated the affected communities along the border to enhance forgiveness and reconciliation.

The religious leaders also continue to participate fully in conflict transformation.

Respondent 8 Gelegele location shared,

"Sometimes, our church leaders talk to us by reminding us of the consequences of not solving our conflicts. They talk about how peace brings blessings and prosperity. That is why many of us join in peace initiatives after hearing these messages."

A church member remarked, "Our pastor always encourages us to seek peace and work together. His words inspire us to act."

Another respondent stated, "When religious leaders motivate us, it gives us the strength to overcome our differences."

"Our Father often encourages us by telling us that peace will lead to prosperity. He reminds us that we cannot progress if we continue fighting with our neighbors." A respondent, Gelegele location.

"Through the church, we have been motivated to resolve conflicts because it is the right thing to do. We are told that God rewards peacemakers." Female respondent, Ekerubo location.

"Motivation through religious teachings has made us realize that fighting only leads to suffering. We are encouraged to seek peace so that we can all live better lives." Assistant chief.

Motivation as presented serves as an effective faith-based strategy for encouraging individuals to act positively in conflict transformation. By tapping into individuals' faith and values, religious leaders can inspire communities to overcome challenges and work toward sustainable peace. According to Galtung & Fischer (2013), motivation that appeals to both the emotional and spiritual dimensions of individuals is crucial for promoting lasting peace. The reflections given by religious leaders are motivating the community members to transform their conflicts. They motivate communities to live together as a family that should continue working together in love.

Motivation through religious encouragement and moral support is an essential faith-based strategy. Religious leaders often motivate community members by reinforcing the importance of peace, promoting a sense of hope for a better future, and encouraging positive behaviors that lead to peaceful coexistence. In Eldoret the religious leaders, the Catholic Church, the national council of churches of Kenya and the interreligious forum called for tolerance, forgiveness and cessation of violence (Mwaura & Martinon, 2010). It has since then had a positive impact on the behaviors of individuals to embrace peace. Motivation helps community members to appreciate the importance of peaceful coexistence.

Motivation, as observed by the respondents and the various scholars, is a powerful strategy used by religious leaders to inspire and encourage individuals to take constructive steps toward conflict transformation. Motivational efforts help reduce the emotional and psychological barriers to reconciliation. Then motivation is critical in creating the emotional environment necessary for effective conflict transformation.

Motivation through religious teachings and activities plays a crucial role in shifting attitudes toward peace and reconciliation. By offering spiritual rewards and emphasizing the moral imperative of peace, religious leaders inspire individuals to work toward conflict transformation. This motivation not only improves individual behavior but also strengthens community bonds.

From this section of faith-based mediation strategies, religious activities, including media, teachings, meetings, and motivation play critical roles in conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border region. These

activities, led by religious leaders, have really helped communities transform conflicts and work toward peaceful co-existence.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The examination of the contribution of faith-based religious activities mediation strategy revealed that media, teachings, meetings, and motivation are significant factors in conflict transformation. The study found that faith-based media initiatives played a vital role in disseminating messages of peace and reconciliation, effectively reaching a wide audience and promoting dialogue among conflicting parties. Religious teachings emphasizing forgiveness and reconciliation were particularly effective in changing mindsets and reducing hostilities. Regular community meetings organized by faith leaders provided essential platforms for discussing grievances and finding common ground. Additionally, motivational activities, such as community service and joint religious events, fostered unity and collaboration among different groups.

5.2 Recommendations

To enhance the impact of these strategies, it is recommended that faith-based organizations expand their media outreach efforts to promote peace messages and conflict transformation strategies. Incorporating teachings on forgiveness and reconciliation into community programs and religious services would further strengthen these initiatives. Encouraging regular community meetings to address ongoing issues and promote dialogue among conflicting parties is also essential. Finally, developing joint community service projects and religious events that bring together different groups can foster unity and collaboration, thereby enhancing conflict transformation efforts.

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