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Exploring the Role of Community Participation Approach in the Management of Protracted Conflicts in Africa: A Case of Tana River County, Kenya

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Abstract

The African continent continues to suffer many conflicts resulting from poor management of natural resources. These conflicts have turned into deadly civil wars, and others have become intractable or protracted in nature. For example, conflict over the use of River Tana in the coastal region of Kenya has risen to unprecedented level that requires an urgent attention. It has devastated property, displaced hundreds of innocent civilian populations and has the potential to jeopardize international peace and security as a result of its closeness to the unstable state of Somali. The Tana conflict is an example of a non-linear or multi-causal, inter-communal conflict that cannot be reduced to a single cause. Though, at face value the conflict manifests in the form of competition over scarce resources, such a manifestation masks the roots causes of the conflict. A number of approaches have been employed by different actors to respond to the conflict. However, such approaches have not prevented a relapse into violence. This article seeks to explore the role of community participation approach in the management of protracted conflicts in Africa using the case of the conflict in Tana River County in Kenya. The study established the effectiveness of community participation approach in the management of conflicts. It found out that community participation enhances the sociocultural and economic resources available in the community towards the management of conflict; it fosters community dialogue through mediation, reconciliation, and negotiations; and strategically links the bottom-up empowerment initiatives of the grassroots communities with the top-down protection initiatives of the state. It recommends the recognition and utilization of the potential for community participation available in the grassroots communities in Tana River County. The study used the mixed methods to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The population for the study comprised all residents of Tana River County; NGOs; members of women and youth groups which pursued specific objectives; members of the District Peace Committee (DPC); members of the *Gassa* council of elders; chiefs, the police; and county administrators. It used simple random and purposive sampling techniques to generate a sample of 445 respondents comprising 387 residents of Tana River County, 42 participants in FGDs and 16 in-depth interviews with key informants to supplement the information obtained from the other sources. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and presented in the form of graphs, charts and frequency tables while qualitative data were analysed and presented using narratives.

Key words: Exploring the Role of Community Participation Approach in the Management of Protracted Conflicts in Africa: A Case of Tana River County, Kenya

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By

Rev. Patrick Musembi and Prof. Crispinous Iteyo (PhD)

Introduction

The end of the Cold War Era ushered numerous protracted conflicts in Africa with devastating impact on civilian populations and development initiatives. Many of these conflicts have led to terrible armed conflicts. Armed conflict is a complex process underpinned in a web of socioeconomic and political structures.

The Tana River conflict in Kenya has escalated into unprecedented levels with loss of lives, destruction of property and livelihoods and displacement of hundreds of civilians. A number of approaches have been employed in response to the conflict and to build peace. For example, the government of Kenya has used hard power mechanisms while different Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and grassroots organizations have employed various conflict management and resolution mechanisms to respond to the conflict and to build sustainable peace in region (Mutula, Mula & Muna, 2010; Kacowicz, 2012; Mbondenyi, Asaala, Kabau & Waris, 2015; Kipkemoi, Nyamasyo, Mari, & Musingi, 2017). Nevertheless, despite the numerous initiatives and programmes the area has suffered frequent outbreaks of violence, the latest being the 2012/2013 violence. The various approaches such as hard power by the government, as well as various conflict resolution mechanisms employed by the civil society have either failed to respond to the conflict from its root causes; left intact the opportunities for violence or failed to recognise and tap the potential of the grassroots communities in building sustainable peace.

In order to effectually respond to the conflict in the Tana this article suggests the use of community participation as an alternative approach. Thompson, Elmendorf, McDonough, & Burban (2005) posit community participation approach is particularly effective when resolving intractable conflicts. There is evidence that the approach has been successfully employed in the management of conflicts; for example, it was successfully employed in the management of protracted ethnic conflicts in Northern Ireland in the 1990s (Byrne, 2001). It was also successfully employed in resolving natural resource conflicts, as well as human and wildlife conflicts in the Okavango Delta in Botswana, and was also efficiently used in the management of identity-based conflicts in Cuba (Lepetu, Makopondo & Darkoh, 2008; Chaguaceda, Daubelcour, & González, 2012).

Other cases of the successful application of community participation approach have been documented in Cameroon where the approach was successfully employed in the management of natural resource conflicts involving community forests (McCall & Minang, 2005). It was also successfully employed in Macedonia in the management of inter-ethnic conflicts using dialogue groups and integrated education among members of the grassroots communities (Kelleher & Ryan, 2012). In Ghana the approach was successfully employed in the management of ethnic conflicts in the Bawku traditional area of northern Ghana using the promotion of community-based conflict management and resolution mechanisms (Akudugu, & Mahama, 2011). The method was also successfully employed in the management of ethnic-based conflicts in Armenia where grassroots communities were mobilized for collective action through community-driven development projects and programs which were intended to reduce violence and manage community conflicts (Babajanian, 2008).

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However, although the approach holds potential in responding to conflict and building peace there is insufficient evidence to show that community participation approach has been tried in managing conflicts in Kenya; particularly it has not been tried in the protracted conflict in the Tana. Most of the literature on the conflict in the Tana is concentrated on the analysis of the conflict with regard to its causes and impact; hence, there is limited academic research assessing the effectiveness of the approaches that have been used in its management or to establish why the region has experienced periodic relapses into violence (Kagwanja, 2003; Nyamongo & Mwenza, 2006; Kirchner, 2013; Mbugua 2013).

Therefore, this article explores the role of community participation in resolving protracted conflicts in Africa with a focus on the conflict in Tana River County in Kenya. It highlights the potential of community participation approach in conflict management and its application in the conflict in the Tana. The research question this article seeks to answer is: to what extent is community participation approach applicable in resolving the conflict in Tana River County in Kenya, and how can it help achieve sustainable peace?

The Origin, Rationale and Philosophy of Community Participation

The concept of community participation has its theoretical basis in social development (Wanyama, 2002; Nyende, 2011; Matanga, 2018). The concept is traced to the social reform movement in Britain and North America in the 18th Century (Sanoff, 2000; Wanyama, 2002). The 1950s third world community development movement with its focus on the empowerment of people for rural development has been identified as the most significant influence on the concept of community participation (Sanoff, 2000; Nyende, 2011; Matanga, 2018). Goodson, & Phillimore, (eds.) (2012) trace the concept of participation in social development to the United Nation's popular participation programmes of the 1970s that sought to create opportunities and to involve people in the political and development processes of their communities.

In his first inaugural lecture entitled, "*Conceptualizing peace, security and development: a critical discourse*", professor Matanga (2018) traces the concept of participation in alternative development and argues that alternative development emerged following dissatisfaction with the mainstream development model which emphasised on the state as the key agent of development.

Similarly, Wanyama (2002) argues that the fundamental cause of underdevelopment in Africa is a crisis of governance bolstered by bureaucratic bottlenecks, and widespread corruption leading to unresponsive public institutions and the collapse of service delivery. Moreover, lack of effective people's participation has led to the ruling elites to concentrate power on themselves to manipulate people, institutions, and interest; hence, squandering the development opportunities at the expense of development for the very people they lead (Wanyama, 2002). As a result, many authoritarian regimes in Africa have intensified ethnic conflicts through unfair distribution of development resources between tribes, communities, and regions at the expense of balanced development (Wanyama, 2002). Both Wanyama (2002) and Matanga (2018) insist on the engagement and the empowerment of people to make decisions about matters that affect their lives.

Therefore, according to Wanyama (2002) the answer to bad governance, corruption and inefficient service provision lies in the empowerment of grassroots communities to actively participate in the development of their communities and to demand accountability from the state and its officials. Otherwise, the ruling elites will continue to exploit and marginalize the ordinary people (Nyende, 2011). Community participation presents a chance for the empowerment of the grassroots communities to institutionalize accountability and good governance and to demand democratic reforms; thus enabling debate on public policy issues and gathering and disseminating public opinion (Wanyama, 2002: Nyende, 2011).

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Nyende (2011) particularly highlights the significance of the self-help movement during the decolonisation process of African countries and argues that the cooperative movement in Kenya thrived on communitarian forms of social and economic organization which stressed the values of self-help and self-sufficiency, and advocated the mobilization of the poor and the oppressed to promote socioeconomic progress. The success of the cooperative movement resulted from the empowerment of grassroots communities to be intimately involved in decision making about their development while the role of the state was restricted to facilitating an enabling environment; hence it can argued that participation has its basis in the decolonization process of the developing countries and its philosophy is the nature of community among the African people (Matanga, 2018).

Another basis for participation is drawn from the shortcomings of the liberal internationalism model that has been used to guide the peacebuilding enterprise worldwide (Paris, 1997; Richmond, 2009). According to Richmond (2009) the liberal peacebuilding paradigm is founded on the assumption that the surest foundation for peace, both within and amongst states is a liberal democratic state and a free market economy. Hence, the model promotes efforts to build a liberal democratic state with a market driven economy especially in societies emerging from war (Richmond, 2009; Eichengreen, Uzan, Crafts, & Hellwig, 1992; Paris, 1997). However, the model involves the translocation of the Western model of state and ignores the potential of the local community; hence the failure of many peacekeeping operations (Paris, 1997). Richmond (2009) summarizes the weaknesses of the liberal internationalism model in the words, "it is ethically bankrupt, subject to double standards, coercive and uncultured, unconcerned with social welfare, and unfeeling and insensitive towards its subjects" (Richmond, 2009:557). He therefore suggests an alternative model that recognizes and involves grassroots communities in decision making on matters that affect their lives (Richmond, 2009). Hence, community participation approach is an alternative approach of responding to intrastate conflicts which empowers individuals and local communities to take charge of their own development, peace and security agenda (Paris, 1997; Richmond, 2009; Scirch, 2013; USAID, 2011).

King and Mathews emphasise the role of local communities in peacebuilding by documenting a candid interview with a Somali physician identified as Dr. Hawa Abdi who states:

> The international community should stop making peace negotiations. Somalis themselves can solve their own problems sitting under our own trees. We can make our own peace. We don't want their relief. We don't want their advice. We don't want their political help. The international community—let them leave us. If they leave us, within two years I am sure that we will have our peace among Somali people (King & Mathews, 2012: 290).

Although this lament does not reject external help it serves to emphasize the need to empower locals to participate in making significant decisions on issues affecting their lives.

The Role of Community Participation in the Management of Conflicts

In its simplest definition participation refers to the involvement of people and/or communities in the critical decision-making process about their own affairs (Burns, Heywood, Taylor, Wilde, & Wilson (2004). Therefore, participation is a facilitated process that brings together different stakeholders to exchange information, define critical issues affecting them and to develop common goals and objectives (Selin & Chavez 1995 and Lewicki, Gray & Elliot, 2003).

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Butterfoss (2006) emphasizes the voluntary nature of participation and stresses that in community participation the members of a community exercise free will, as opposed to coercion and voluntariness extends to the willingness and sacrifice to share resources such as personnel, time, money, goods, and services towards the improvement of community life; hence, community participation creates a responsible society that is empowered to take charge of their own future.

On the other hand, Lysack (1995) asserts that the fundamental concern in community participation is the community's ability to exercise control and the power to decide. Accordingly, Butterfoss (2006) links the capacity to decide to the process of empowerment and argues that empowerment is a critical aspect of effective participation. Consequently, community participation recognizes the significance of the sociocultural and socioeconomic assets such as traditional knowledge, skills, empathy, and social networks on development and community transformation; however, these resources have often been ignored in community transformation (Rietbergen-McCracken, & Narayan (1998).

Maphosa, Deluca & Keasley, (eds.) (2014) recognize the role of external support in the design and implementation of empowerment programmes at the grassroots level and argue that successful community participation requires the responsibility of the external actor to be limited to facilitation. McCall & Minang (2005) distinguish empowerment participation and manipulative participation and argue that empowerment participation prioritizes decision-making and the autonomy of the locals whereas manipulative participation rests the power to control and to make decision on the external actor for purposes of achieving their own goals (McCall & Minang, 2005; Donais, 2009; Mitra & Gupta, 2009; Bajpai, 2000; Sebotho & Toteng, 2010; UNDP, 2004; USAID, 2011).

Therefore, this article adopts empowerment participation and emphasises on the empowerment of sociocultural and economic resources (social capital) in communities including the network of social interactions and relationships of trust, shared norms, values, beliefs and reciprocity within a community, micro-economic opportunities and transformative livelihood undertakings (Schirch, 2004).

There are several positive outcomes that have been associated with empowerment participation. For example, Hiader (2009) highlights the capability to address the intangible effects of violence in society including suspicion in government, collapse of social relations, psychological trauma and prevalent fear and emphasizes that community participation exposes such concealed effects of violence. Otherwise unhealed trauma can intensify violent tendencies from one generation to another and that survivors of atrocities are likely to exhibit violent behaviour to future generations (Lumsden, 1997). Accordingly, community participation offers an opportunity for the community to identify the intangible effects of violence through community forums of dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation; hence, it has the potential to break the cycle of violence (Schirch, 2004, 2013; USAID, 2011).

Another positive outcome of community participation is its ability to bring together victims, offenders and the community to interact together in a safe, and co-equal space; hence it facilitates the building of mutual trust and empathy as victims, offenders and the communities envision a shared future and common interests in the community (Lederach, 1997; USAID, 2011). Through community participation victims get the opportunity to express their trauma of loss, and their grief at that loss, and the anger that accompanies the pain and the memory of injustices experienced while perpetrators express the harm inflicted and a ccommitment not to repeat the injury and the community is empowered to embrace both the victim and the perpetrator and to reweave the broken relations so as to support enduring peace (Lederach, 1997; Tilley & Sidebottom (eds.), 2017).

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Haider (2009) identifies inclusivity as another positive outcome of community participation particularly with regard to women in peacebuilding. It has been argued that the peacebuilding enterprise worldwide is driven by the dominant ideology of war and peace which is embedded in a patriarchal bias and models that are gender exclusive and that tend to perpetuate systemic exclusion and dismissive of women's contribution in peacebuilding (Maphosa, Deluca & Keasley (eds.), 2014). However, community participation by its very nature incorporates virtually all players that inhabit a conflict environment; hence, it identifies women's security vulnerabilities and concerns and integrates their views and experiences and how to address them (Haider, 2009). Inclusivity however extends to the configuration of interests beyond geographical boundaries; hence the stakeholders in a conflict include those outside the geographical area and who may have interest and the capacity to influence the conflict and as such community participation provides a comprehensive scanning of security vulnerabilities and comprehensive responses to conflict (Kriesberg, 1995; Meadows, 2008; Bartolucci & Gallo, 2010; Gallo, 2012; Senge, 2012; Muthuri, Chapple, & Moon, 2009).

Finally, community participation strategy has potential to reconnect the state with the grassroots communities by integrating them in the peace and security architecture of their communities. This is achieved through a deliberate safety dialogue connecting 'top' and 'bottom' dynamics (Bajpai, 2000; DDG, 2013; CHS, 2003; Matanga, 2018). For example, community participation facilitates the exchange of relevant security information pertaining to impeding crimes or armed violence activities through a model that mutually reinforces the top and bottom dynamics of peace and security (DDG, 2013; CHS, 2003). Matanga (2018) insists that the role of the state and its bureaucracy should be limited to providing an enabling environment and empowering the grassroots communities to actively identify their needs and to make decisions and solutions to their felt needs.

Application of Community Participation in the Management of the Conflict in Tana River County in Kenya

This section contains findings from the field research. The findings demonstrated that there was an elaborate infrastructure with potential to support the employment of community participation in the management of the conflict in Tana River County. There was a high level of awareness of groups involved in peacebuilding with 73.88 percent of the respondents saying they were aware of groups that were involved in conflict management activities. 70.45 percent of the respondents belonged to at least one grassroots group while 60.14 percent belonged to more than one group. Moreover, the level of representation in the groups was wide and varied; hence, it was possible gather a variety of opinions. Accordingly, 36.43 percent of the respondents indicated that the youth were the most represented interest group while senior citizens, the business community, and professional groups were the least represented groups each cited by less than 10 percent of the respondents.

The groups showed potential for stability and continuity; hence, new members with fresh energy and perspectives could easily be blended with longer-term members. As a result, 63.57 percent of the respondents had been members of their groups for more than 2 years. In addition there was a high level of commitment to the groups' objectives with 99 percent of the respondents saying they were responsible for some kind of activity in their groups while a majority 86.3 percent of the respondents spend between 1 to 9 hours per month in group's activities. Moreover, participation in the groups' activities showed impact on the member's personal knowledge, beliefs and skills with 69.8 percent of the respondents saying they had acquired knowledge to solve personal disputes, 67.7 percent had acquired a sense of community, 51.9 percent had gained the ability to help a group achieve its goals while 84.9 percent had gained the ability to communicate

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effectively in a group. Hence, the grassroots groups had the potential to enhance people's knowledge and skills for societal transformation.

Regarding ownership and involvement in the peacebuilding agenda, 63.17 percent of the respondents felt they did not own the peacebuilding process while 60.48 percent of the respondents did not feel adequately involved in the process. However, 69.8 percent of the respondents said they were involved in responding to other community problems other than conflict management; although, the nature of involvement was questionable as articulated by a participant in focus group discussion who stated:

> How can you build peace in a community when what you do is to sponsor people for conferences in big towns such as Nairobi, or Malindi? These NGOs come here and simply recycle a few popular people, taking them for meetings and paying them handsomely but there is nothing to show on the ground. It is like we are helping these NGOs account for their money (Source: Field Data, 2017).

An overwhelming majority 91.07 percent of the respondents said they had ideas to contribute in the process of peacebuilding, yet, 61.17 percent said nobody had sought their opinion on peacebuilding. On the contrary, a majority 79.39 percent of the respondents perceived their own contribution in the community as positive. These statistics indicate that the region had potential for the employment of community participation; however, the potential was neither recognized nor utilised by the various stakeholders involved in peacebuilding. For example, 70.79 percent of the respondents said the government neither recognized nor involved the grassroots communities in conflict management compared to 64.26 percent of the respondents who said NGOs recognized the capacity and involved grassroots communities in conflict management. In addition, 72.51 percent of the respondents said that local business community rarely recognized nor involved the grassroots communities in conflict management. The lack of recognition and utilization of the available potential for community participation was emphasized by a participant in a youth focus group discussion who lamented saying:

> Sometimes, I wonder why we have to dedicate ourselves to this peacebuilding business. It feels like useless. We come here; we give you information, but nothing happens. We have left our work to come here. What do you call that; is that not commitment. I am disappointed because previously we gave our views about the 2012/2013 violence in our village to a government appointed commission, yet up to now we do not know what happened and have not heard about the report again? The report is yet to be made public. This is like a useless exercise... (Source: Field Data, 2017).

To emphasise the capacity for community participation a majority 77.32 percent of the respondents said they were willing to contribute their personal resources such as, money, goods, and services towards community improvement. However, there were limited efforts to utilise such resources or to empower the grassroots groups towards conflict management. For example, 64.95 percent of the respondents said they were not aware of any empowerment programs towards conflict management. Moreover, the available empowerment programmes were weak. For example, when asked whether the available empowerment programmes were effective 67.70 percent of the respondents said they were not effective.

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The study also established the lack of inclusivity of women in peacebuilding as an impediment towards the effectual employment of community participation in Tana River County. A majority 75.21 percent of the respondents said women were either rarely or never involved in decision making about conflict management activities compared to 24.79 percent who said they were either always or frequently involved in decision making about conflict management. On the other hand, 28.86 percent of the respondents said that women were either always or frequently involved in decision making on other matters in community excluding conflict management. A participant in a focus group discussion of elders who identified himself as an *Oroma* emphasised the role of culture in impeding the involvement of women and said:

> Women are not allowed to speak in a gathering of men, and that is how our culture dictates it. That is the way things are here. If women are present in community meetings, they sit by themselves on one side and the much they can do is to listen to the men. Our culture prescribes that women are bound by whatever men decide. Men have the final say in community matters. A woman's opinion is never taken seriously. A woman's opinion is easily rubbished by men. You will hear men say, "*huyu mwanamke ameongea nini…hio ni upuzi*" (what has this woman said…that is rubbish) (Source: Field Data, 2017).

However, the study proved that things were beginning to change with educated women as emphasized by a participant in the focus group discussion of women, who said:

> Women are slowly being allowed to speak in forums where men are discussing matters affecting the community. As women, we need a voice to articulate our cries and concerns; we need the space to offer solutions to our unique problems. We don't want war and this is what we want our men to know; we want them to know how we feel when we lose our husbands to these senseless killings. But you see the privilege of speaking before men is only reserved for those women who are educated; those who speak from their position of expertise and knowledge. These are the ones who are being listened to by men (Source: Field Data, 2017).

Therefore, although the culture inhibited the involvement of women the empowerment of women through education enhanced the participation of women in matters affecting the community.

In addition, the study confirmed the general perception that the youth were perpetrators of violence. As a result, 57.62 percent of the respondents said the youth were either rarely or never involved in conflict management compared to 42.38 percent who felt that they were either always or frequently involved in peacebuilding. When asked whether the youth were involved in decision making about other matters in the community 66.34 percent of the respondents who said they were involved in decision making about maters in community other than conflict management. In contrast, 57.04 percent of the respondents said the youth had positively contributed to societal transformation compared to 42.96 percent who felt they had negatively contributed to society. Therefore, the findings confirmed the arguments of Mecha (2013) and Ukiwo (2003) that the youth are generally perceived as destructive and perpetrators of violence as opposed to recognizing their potential and utilizing them as agents of transformation in society.

The study established the potential of the youth in peacebuilding through the use of social media. The study found out that the youth constitute the population bracket that was active in the use of social media. Accordingly, 57.04 percent of the respondents said they either frequently or

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always used social media to share security related information compared to 24.74 percent who said they either rarely or never used social media to share information on security. However, 66.67 percent of the respondents described the role of young professional and elites as negative compared to 33.33 percent who described it as either very positive or positive. The study established that there was an opportunity to train the youth particularly the young professionals and elites on the responsible use of social media as a tool to foster peaceful coexistence.

In addition, the study established the possibility to involve victims, perpetrators and the community to together to chart a common future for their community through community participation (Lederach, 1997; Zehr, 2005; Schirch, 2013). Accordingly, a majority 78.3 percent of the respondents said they were willing to participate in forums involving victims, perpetrators and the community compared to 21.7 percent who were not willing to participate in such forums. Willingness to incorporate victims, perpetrators and the community is one of the greatest assets in the management of conflict as well articulated by Mitchell who states:

> Transformation involves, for example, changes such as an increase in empathy on the part of adversaries, with stereotyping, dehumanization and demonization of the other side becoming less common; a decrease in the levels of social and geographical separation of the parties; and major changes in the nature and homogeneity of communications aimed at the others (Mitchell, 2002: 11).

However, in spite of the potential to integrate victims, perpetrators and the community there were limited efforts to bring perpetrators and victims together. A majority 79.8 percent of the respondents said they had not attended any meeting involving the victims, perpetrators and the community; hence inter-communal relationships were not healed. As a result, there was evidence of trauma and deep-seated animosity between the Pokomo and Oroma as was articulated by a participant in the youth focus group discussion who introduced himself as Oroma and said:

> Our enmity goes deep. If a Pokomo from Ngao village comes over to our village (Kipao), I can assure you that no Oroma will offer him a glass of water. We cannot share water with our enemies. These people killed our people at dawn, when we were asleep. 21st December 2012 will remain in my mind forever. I will pass this enmity and bitterness to my children and to my children's children for many generations to come (Source: Field Data, 2017).

The study also established that there was limited capacity for self-mobilization; hence the grassroots groups were not adequately empowered to initiate peacebuilding projects on their own. Consequently, only 28.18 percent of the respondents said their groups had initiated peacebuilding projects on their own after initial empowerment without prompting or coercion compared to 71.82 percent who said their groups had never initiated any peacebuilding projects on their own. Moreover, a majority 83.25 percent of the respondents were not aware of other grassroots groups that had initiated peacebuilding projects on their own. This was emphasised by a participant in a youth focus group discussion who lamented about an NGO that had promised to support the youth in small based business who said:

> In 2013 they gave us some training and promised to return and help us start small-scale business. But they have not come back yet. There is not much happening here. We are simply idle here; the environment is hostile for us youths. Since they left us

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> four years ago, they have never come back as they promised. But we are still waiting for them. We need capital to start businesses; we need training on how to do business; we need a livelihood (Source: Field Data, 2017).

Finally, the study established that there was no collaboration between the state and grassroots communities. Hence, 57.73 percent of the respondents were not aware of any collaboration efforts between the state and the grassroots communities regarding conflict management compared to 42.27 percent of the respondents who were aware of collaboration efforts between the state and grassroots communities. The fact that the state ignored the grassroots communities as was underscored by a lament from a participant in the focus group discussion involving the *Gassa* council of elders who identified himself as a Pokomo elder and said:

> Sometimes we feel like we are left on our own by the government in the midst of this violence. Whenever we report cases of animals trespassing into our farms, the police never seem to take action; they do not act swiftly. We are left to believe that they are bribed by our brothers (the Oroma) on the other side. Now and again, culprits are released from police custody under unclear circumstances without cases being preferred on them and yet the offences they committed are clear and obvious. We always wonder whether the police are with us or against us (Source: Field Data, 2017).

Conclusion

Resolving protracted conflicts is very a very complex process and community participation offers great potential to build a sustainable peace across divided communities in Africa. The approach is founded on the community philosophy in Africa and seeks to empower vulnerable and marginalized communities to take charge of their development, as well as peace and security agenda. Community participation ensures a democratic process down to the grassroots level and recognizes and utilizes the sociocultural and socioeconomic assets available in communities; hence it equips the community with the necessary capabilities to prevent the outbreak of violent conflicts, reduce their escalation, and transform violent forms of conflict into peaceful ones and respond to the opportunities for violence such as chronic poverty and unemployment.

Besides, it has the potential to reconnect the state with the grassroots communities integrating them in a strategic dialogue connecting 'top' and 'bottom' dynamics and has the capacity to break the cycle of violence because it brings together victims, perpetrators and the community to close wounds, heal memories and to promote empathy in the process of building a shared future.

The study established that there was an elaborate infrastructure to support community participation in the management of the conflict in Tana River County. However, this potential was either not acknowledged or utilized. Therefore, there is need for the Kenyan government and other stakeholders to understand the benefits and dynamics of community participation approach and apply it in the management of the Tana conflict.

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