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## **Women Transcending “Boundaries” in Indigenous Peacebuilding in Kenya’s Sotik/Borabu Border Conflict**

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# **Women Transcending “Boundaries” in Indigenous Peacebuilding in Kenya’s Sotik/Borabu Border Conflict**

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## **Abstract**

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Opinion and understanding on the consequences of violent conflict on women, and the importance of their participation in peacebuilding processes is varied. What exactly are women’s roles in violent conflict transformation and peacebuilding? What can be done to enhance women’s role and contribution to peacebuilding processes? This study addresses these and other questions concerning women’s experiences of and responses to violent conflict. Drawing from the human needs approach, the study explores grassroots women’s engagement of peacebuilding through the promotion of social capital as both a public and private good. Based on an ethnographic case study of Kenya’s Sotik/Borabu cross-border conflict, the study explores how women have (re)discovered, (re)formulated, (re)framed and (re)adapted their traditional gender roles for peacebuilding, empowerment and development. The adopted indigenous conflict resolution approaches, knowledge and citizen peacekeeping are playing a prominent role in reappraising and building sustainable peace. Individually and collectively, women contribute to peacebuilding in many ways; though their contributions are often neglected because they take avant-garde forms, occur outside formal peace processes or are considered extensions of women’s existing gender roles.

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**Keywords:** women, cross border conflicts, peacebuilding.

# Mujeres Trascendiendo Límites en el Proceso de Paz de Sotik/Borabu (Kenia)

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## Resumen

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La opinión y comprensión de las consecuencias de los conflictos violentos entre las mujeres y la importancia de su participación en los procesos de paz es variada. Este estudio aborda las experiencias de las mujeres y sus respuestas ante conflictos violentos. A partir del enfoque de las necesidades humanas, el estudio explora el compromiso de las mujeres de base en la construcción de la paz a través de la promoción del capital social. A partir del estudio etnográfico del conflicto transfronterizo Sotik / Borabu (Kenia), se explora cómo las mujeres han (re)descubierto, (re)formulado, (re)enmarcado y (re)adaptado sus roles tradicionales de género para la consolidación de la paz, el empoderamiento y desarrollo. El enfoque, conocimientos y mantenimiento de la paz ciudadana tomados en la resolución del conflicto indígena adoptado están desempeñando un papel destacado en la nueva valoración y la construcción de una paz sostenible. Individual y colectivamente, las mujeres contribuyen a la consolidación de la paz en muchos aspectos; aunque sus contribuciones a menudo no se toman en cuenta porque toman formas vanguardistas, realizan procesos formales de paz o se consideran parte de su rol de género.

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**Palabras clave:** mujeres, conflictos fronterizos, construcción de la paz.

Strides and efforts continue to be made to bring women to the forefront as agents of peace and positive societal change, the world-over. Injecting women's voices in peace processes not only assures that their needs will be met, but also that underlying social issues that might have contributed to the outbreak of the conflict will also be addressed. The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 adopted in October 2000 calls all actors involved in peace processes to adopt a gender perspective for stronger prospects of sustainable peace. The resolution specifically reiterates the important role of women's participation, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding. The Resolution holds out a promise to women across the globe that their rights will be protected and all barriers to their equal and full involvement in the maintenance and promotion of sustainable peace and security will be removed. Further, UNSCR 2106 passed on 24th June 2013, highlights sexual violence and other atrocities including rape, sexual slavery and torture, forced pregnancies and other forms of sexual abuses committed against women in conflict-prone regions. The resolution affirms the centrality of gender equality and women's political, social and economic empowerment to efforts to prevent sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.

However, women remain mere token presences within peacebuilding processes. They continue to be absent from formal peacebuilding processes. In Sub-Saharan Africa, "women and girls are repeatedly excluded when ceasefires and peace accords are reached" (Mazurana & Proctor, 2013, p. 16), in countries which have been characterized by violent conflict and state failure in the past. Increasingly, for women to begin to play a significant and a major part in formal peacebuilding processes and decision-making, they should be empowered to be less of victims and onlookers, and instead take concrete steps against violent conflict. What exactly are women's roles in violent conflict transformation and peacebuilding? What can be done to enhance women's role and contribution to peacebuilding processes? This research explored perceptions, values, opinions, practices and attitudes concerning violent conflict, response and coping mechanisms, women's roles as agents and/or victims and their contributions to peacebuilding processes. The research focuses on grassroots peacebuilding efforts of

women of Sotik/Borabu border, a rural region to the south-western part of Kenya, where violence dominates.

### **Research Methodology**

The isolated, marginalized and silenced voices of women in Kenyan society necessitated the researcher to institute trust, mutual respect and a sense of intimacy with the participants. These argued for the use of qualitative methodologies, which enabled the researcher to interact with the participants, in both designed and natural settings, through flexible conversations, meetings and activities.

### **Durkheim's Solidarities**

Drawing from Durkheim's twin approaches of mechanical and organic solidarities, the study explores women's engagement in peacebuilding on Kenya's Sotik/Borabu border, through the promotion of social capital (Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1983), as both a public and private good. Durkheim (1893) delineates the societal functions that lead different types of societies to maintain their integrity, coherence and more importantly, order. He examined differentiation of divisions of labour between traditional and modern societies, upon mechanic and organic solidarities:

Social life comes from a double source, the likeness of consciences and the division of labour. Individuals are socialized in the first case, because, not having any real individuality, they become, with those whom they resemble, part of the same collective type. In the second case, because, while having a physiognomy and a personal activity which distinguishes them from others, they depend upon others in the same measure that they are distinguished from the others, and consequently upon the society which results from their union. (p. 226)

According to Durkheim (1893), traditional societies are knit together by the mere fact there is very little differentiation in the type of labour or occupation held by their members. Therefore, their solidarity emanates from the similarity and sense of community and mutual likeness.

Consequently, while each individual is highly autonomous, the social norms leading to collective consciousness are prevalent and powerful. In fact, legal systems in traditional societies do not allow deviant behaviour and encourage uniformity in behaviours and beliefs. Thus, interrelations are bound to common consciousness and punitive law (Turner, Beeghley & Powers, 1998). On the other hand, high levels of labour differentiation, foster organic solidarity and individual consciousness. Because the division of labour lead members of a given society to specialize and undertake different social roles, they become united through their dependence upon one another. It is this mutual dependence, which arises from the division of labour that provides sustainable social cohesion.

While traditional mechanical societies are mostly kinship based, modern societies enjoying organic solidarity are more diverse and dominated by economic and governmental relations (Turner, Beeghley & Powers, 1998). Through their interdependence, people participate in high levels of interaction, which increase solidarity and the formation of norms. Quoted by Halpern (2005, p. 5), Durkheim states that, “a nation can be maintained only if, between the state and the individuals, there is interposed a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individuals to attract them strongly in their sphere of action and drag, in this way, into the general torrent of social life.” There, therefore, needs to be a balance between the individual and the community. When labour differentiation and individual consciousness are pushed to the extreme, anomie occurs, which is when the division of labour ceases to produce solidarity (Durkheim, 1893). The motivations for cooperation between members of a modern society a la Durkheim are clear: organic solidarity is based on the principle of interdependence, norms and interaction networks. Interdependence implies a certain level of trust that other members of the community will not defect.

Popularized by Coleman (1988) (who is credited for the expression “Social Capital”), and Putnam (1995), social capital has been defined as the rules, obligations, norms and sanctions of cooperation, reciprocity and trustworthiness embedded in social networks, social relations, social structures and a society’s institutional arrangements. Social capital governs a society’ character, and allows for the facilitation of collective action (Halpern, 2005; Woolcock, 2000; Putnam, 2000). The many variables of social capital are embodied in formal institutions and informal networks. It

is manifested through membership in social networks, density of membership, heterogeneity of groups, extent of meeting attendance, capacity of networks, participation in decision-making, trust and reciprocity, strength of norms, extent of external ties, and/or types of networks (Grootaert, Oh, & Swamy, 2002; Fukuyama, 1995). For its valued “resources embedded in social networks and, as accessed and used by actors” (Lin, 2001, pp. 24-25), social capital is a key ingredient for collective action, and institutional efficacy leading to sustainable socio-economic development. Therefore, as a resource for facilitating the acquisition of human capital (Coleman, 1988), for building “civic virtue” (Putnam, 2000), and as a form of interpersonal trust, social cohesion and norms of reciprocity, social capital, is an essential indicator, condition and pillar of successful peacebuilding.

### **Social Capital as a Public Good**

Social capital as a public good is conceptualised as the virtues embedded in the norms, networks, and trust shared by a community (Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000). It is the investment in mutual recognition, and acknowledgement manifested by levels of solidarity, associational memberships and reproduction of groups. The group level analysis stems from Durkheim’s view of social relations as it “explores the elements and processes in the production and maintenance of the collective asset” (Lin, 2001, p. 32). As a public good, social capital, enables people to overcome collective action problems and to work together towards a common goal (Rothstein, 2000).

### **Social Capital as a Private Good**

Social capital as private good is premised on institutions and networks, allowing individuals and communities to share information, reduce transaction costs and access resources such as informal credit (Knowles, 2006; Grootaert, Oh, & Swamy, 2002; Isham, 2002; Barr, 2002; Van Bastelaer & Howard, 2006). Social capital as private good acknowledges the potential positive externalities of social trust for the group. It is conceptualized as the investment in social networks, which allow individuals to access and use resources embedded in those social networks (Lin, 2001). The social networks facilitate flow of information, reduce

transaction costs, exert influence on individuals, give individuals social credentials, and reinforce identity and recognition. Social capital as a collective good confounds norms and trust as capital and is divorced from the individual interactions. The focus is on networks instead of other components of social capital, such as trust and norms. As a private good, social capital focuses on whom people know; the strength, character and intensity of the ties, and what access those relationships provide. For example, the size and density of an individual's network, and also the resources (material or emotional) that the network makes available to that person (Halpern, 2005).

### **Social Capital as both a Private and Public Good**

Social capital as both a private and public good is crucial for the demarcation between bonding and bridging. Bonding (integration or strong ties) refers to the strength of reciprocal ties between individuals in a community, while bridging (linking or synergy) refers to associations across social cleavages (Halpern, 2005). Societies have different levels and combinations of bonding and bridging, and clearly societies with high bridging and bonding have higher levels of development and democratization (Woolcock, 2001).

Fukuyama (2001, p. 5) argues that, “in-group solidarity [bonding] reduces the ability of group members to cooperate with outsiders and often imposes negative externalities on the latter”. He claims that traditional groups lack “weak ties” which would allow them to participate in multiple groups. Both bridging and bonding (density and closure) are important characteristics of social capital as a collective good as problems of collective action for development cannot be solved with bridging alone (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001). In the case of Sotik/Borabu region which has suffered the negative externalities of violent conflict, the very fabric, or bond, of the communities has often been shattered.



### **Linking Bonding and Bridging**

Bonding and bridging are linked in a strategy that begins with the rational person receiving incentives to contribute to collective action (O'Brien, Phillips & Patsiorkovsky, 2005, p.1042). Bridging takes a variety of forms and “public policy decision-making is important in influencing the advantages or disadvantages of indigenous social capital “(bonding).” “Linkage” (or synergy), refers to relations between different strata of society such as state-community or relationships between communities or institutions with unequal resources or power (Colletta & Cullen, 2000; Szreter, 2004). This for example, recalls Durkheim’s call for the filling of space between the individual and the state. While bridging and bonding refer mostly to horizontal relationships, linking addresses vertical relationships such as civic engagement and political responsibility. Putnam (1995) and Woolcock (2001) emphasize the impact of horizontal engagement on vertical synergy and, political and economic institutions efficiency.

### **Social Capital and Peacebuilding**

The goals of peacebuilding are not merely the cessation of hostilities, but geared towards more sustainable, participatory and associative peace (Jeong, 2005). Sustainable peace is grounded in support for economy-centred peacebuilding (Collier, Hoeffler, Elliot, Hegre, Reynal-Querol, & Sambanis, 2003; Woodward, 2002; Verkoren & Junne, 2004), polity-centred peacebuilding (Sambanis & Doyle, 2006; Paris, 2004), and society-centred peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997). Pragmatically, all different aspects of stabilization and development such as security, rule of law, governance and democracy, economic development, and social well-being must be promoted and prioritized (USIP, 2007). Social networks within communities are instrumental institutions in conflict transformation and peacebuilding, allowing for the alleviation of collective action problems, the improvement of welfare through the diffusion of economic and social benefits on multiple levels, and most importantly for the reconstruction of social fabrics and reconciliation. Peacebuilding frameworks must address the “restoration and rebuilding of relationships.” Contending parties, (perpetrators and victims), have to (re)learn how to coexist and cooperate,

(re)build their society, and foster solidarity, without which institutions, whether formal or informal, cannot be sustained.

### **Drivers for Violence**

Boulding (2000) describes a form of dialectical tension as present in any society, with the manner in which people negotiate or manage that tension determining whether they live in a peace or a warrior culture. For Boulding (2000, p. 2), every person is born with the need to bond with, be close to, and be accepted by others. Equally, every person is also born with the need for autonomy and to be separate from others. When people hold ‘the need for bonding and autonomy in balance—nurturing one another, engaging in many cooperative activities, but also giving each other space’—then they form and find the conditions for peace culture. However, when the situation is characterized by power struggles and/or by patterns of domination, then warrior cultures take primacy. Boulding further argues that neither culture exists in a ‘pure’ form. What then are the conditions or events on the Sotik/Borabu border that shift the culture of apparent peace to that of a warrior?

Despite sharing different dialects, traditions and cultures, and notwithstanding the simmering tensions, the Kipsigis and Abagusii (or Kisii) who live on the Sotik and Borabu border, respectively, have co-existed in relative harmony ever since. Even so, the precise roots of the intermittent border conflicts have multiple and interconnected triggers and underlying contributors, running into years or even decades old. However the immediate triggers of the violence, on the Sotik/Borabu border in particular and Kenya in general, are the real and/or perceived political contest differences (electoral politics), often exacerbated by the frequency of the historical cattle-rustling along the common border. Cases of cattle raiding on the Sotik/Borabu border continue to take lives, undermine livelihoods, and discourage both public development and private sector individual investment.

Electoral politics in Kenya is largely about competition between ethnic groups, as campaigners emphasize the ethnicity of the candidates and their parties (Tostensen, 2009). Political elites are known to stoke ethnic tensions to mobilize political support among their ethnic kinsmen. They capitalise on ethnic, tribal and/or clan nationalistic identities to advance their

aggressive policies of inciting ‘their people’ against their neighbours on a ‘we-versus-them’ socio-political-economy of classification. Deepened local grievances, like cattle-rustling, are used by these politicians to cause and strengthen ethnic divisions and animosities in their electoral constituencies. Mokua (2013a) argues that frustrations from unmet expectations (real or perceived), combined with ethnic identity rivalries and consciousness, strongly influence political activities and therefore justify and fuel existing tensions on genuine community grievances and trigger violence. These motivations are lent fertile ground by the prejudices of stereotypically branding each other’s culture as less of a civilisation, which have evolved and escalated over time, into perceptions of mutual distrust and suspicion, deliberate disinformation and misinformation.

Many of the long-standing grievances and failures of governance are linked to, among others, a culture of impunity, land grievances, corruption, ethnic tensions, weak institutions, and regional and socioeconomic inequality. Many of these tensions have remained inadequately addressed, by the successful post-independence governments, leading to violent explosions. At the dawn of independence, African leaders not only ascended to government structures which had been intended to preserve the colonial administrative legacy but also inherited from the colonialists scarce national resources, inadequate infrastructure, inadequate human resource capacity, inadequate capital, inadequate education and health facilities, among others, as tools to govern the newly independent state. As the scramble for the control of scarce national resources and facilities intensified, ethnicity and patronage became the main vehicles through which the dominance and preservation of power as well as resources could be achieved (HRW, 2008).

This has meant that political contests are all the more charged because of what is at stake. Those who achieve political power benefit from widespread abuses including impunity for political manipulation and sanctioning of violence, criminal theft of land, and the corrupt misuse of public resources—indulgences which occur at the expense of groups who are out of power. After gaining power, political elites are known to reward their ethnic kinsmen and supporters, through appointments to political offices and with jobs in the public service, the military and with the allocation of public land as political patronage (KNCHR, 2008). For the

communities involved therefore, their candidate and/or party gaining political office is understood as ‘a struggle for their survival.’ If political power is obtained, the perception is that access to sparse resources is guaranteed, and if not, marginalisation and exclusion is reckoned to follow.

This has led the public to believe that a person and/or political party associated with their own ethnic tribe and/or clan must be in power, both to secure for them benefits and as a defensive strategy to keep-off other ethnic groups, should these take over power, from taking jobs, land and other entitlements. All of these has led to the acquisition of political power being considered both by politicians and the public as a zero sum game, in which losing is seen as hugely costly and is not accepted. Ethnic clashes are accordingly, fomented and sanctioned during election-times, when political opponents need to be intimidated, displaced or murdered, so that they are rendered unable to vote freely, or not at all. This gives electoral advantage to the ethnic group and electoral candidate sponsoring the violence (Hansen, 2009).

Despite some reforms in the country and international judicial proceedings against suspected organisers of the 2007/2008 post-elections violence, including the current President, Uhuru Kenyatta, and his deputy, William Ruto, high-ranking politicians who have been consistently implicated in organizing political violence have never been prosecuted in a Kenyan court of law and continue to operate with impunity. Widespread failures of governance are therefore at the core of the violent explosives expressed in the wake of every electoral cycle (HRW, 2008). Consequently, the urgent need for coordinated responses from all stakeholders and at levels for support of point-of-conflict capacities and intervention strategies.

### **Women and Violent Conflict**

Men and women experience many of the same or similar phenomena during violent conflict; loss of livelihoods and assets, displacement, physical and mental injury, torture, the death and injury of loved ones, sexual assault and enforced disappearance. Nevertheless, how they experience these phenomena and the levels of vulnerability are influenced by their gender roles. This is because men and women are differently embodied, symbolize different things to their communities and those that attack them, are targeted differently and their injuries have different social and livelihood

impacts, have different responsibilities in their families and communities and thus end up to be harmed differently. They also have different livelihood opportunities, access to the cash economy, and ability to claim, own and inherit property, all of which impact the resources they can access to aid their survival and recovery. All of these factors influence women's (in)ability to survive and recover from violent conflicts.

Consequently, while women remain a minority of combatants and perpetrators of violent conflicts, they increasingly suffer the greatest harm. Women's marginalization, coupled with the violence of conflict and its gendered dimensions, often leads to increased women's vulnerability, reduced access to resources, livelihood inputs and basic services, increased family and social responsibilities, restricted mobility, unequal access to protective services and legal mechanisms, inadequate political power, and particular kinds of loss, violence and evils.

Documented cases of terrible abuses against women during periods of violent conflicts in Kenya abound. From the numerous women who suffered sexual violence and other forms of abuse, to the many killed, maimed and systematically raped during the 2007/2008 post-election violence. The Commission of Inquiry into the 2007/2008 Post-Election Violence (CIPEV, 2008, p. 248), reports that of the 653 victims of sexual violence whom the Nairobi Women's Hospital was able to offer comprehensive services, "524 or 80% suffered from rape and defilement, 65 or 10% from domestic violence with the remaining 10% from other types of physical and sexual assault. The majority of the patients were women, even though the hospital treated a small number of males who had been sodomized and subjected to other forms of sexual brutalization".

This is not to suggest that women are passive victims of conflict. Rather, it is the very fact of violent conflict and the impacts on women, their families, their community and the society that spurs women to take peacebuilding actions. Natsios (2001, par. VII), writes that women "are not passive spectators in civil wars, rather, they are active participants. They assume new roles and responsibilities both during and after conflict." They, "valiantly look after their families in the most trying of circumstances. They shoulder new economic burdens and responsibilities and play vital roles in the community." Women are faced with the overwhelming task of keeping families together after displacement, sustaining livelihoods by providing

food, clothing and shelter for their families, in what is in most instances destroyed infrastructures. Many women are left widowed and their children orphaned after conflict. Women who survive these atrocities often live with the vivid and terrifying images in stress and trauma for the rest of their lives (Maja, 2006). In these estimations, women are survivors, demonstrating remarkable perseverance and initiatives in the tragic conditions of violent conflict.

### **Women in Peacebuilding**

Violent conflict and the ensuing repercussions make it of imperative importance that women play a significant role in curbing the effects of violence, not only for themselves, but their families and communities. Women need to be actively included and involved in societal transformation and be the agents of change for peace, development, security and human rights. Yet, women have the least amount of access to resources and decision-making systems in order to make or even influence the decisions that would avert violent conflict. The difficulty of accessing formal peacebuilding inevitably leads women to tap into informal sectors where they are both creative and innovative in developing effective peacebuilding strategies. Their primary peacebuilding options are limited to working outside the formal system and influencing peace outcomes through the formation of connections, maintaining old and developing new social networks, sharing across ethnicities and interacting beyond geographical boundaries. It is the creation of these informal linkages and webs that lead women to play active roles toward peacebuilding. Through these initiatives women work not only to end violence but also address the underlying social, cultural, economic and political dynamics that contribute to the outbreak of violent conflicts.

### **Grassroots People-to-People Peacebuilding**

This grassroots, citizen-based, people-to-people approach to peacebuilding brings attention to the need to end violent conflicts in a way that is perceived as less threatening to the dominant ethno-political culture. The approach does not challenge the dominant socio-political perspective, but rather accepts women's customary/traditional roles in society. By so doing, the approach provides women with confident spaces for engagement that

are not openly acknowledged and revealed in the dominant culture. Women are propelled to act within the confines of the role-zones that they know best and in which they are most comfortable. In their primary roles as wives, sisters, daughters and mothers, women interact with the people at the grassroots and build situations of trust. Yet, this does not preclude them from taking leadership positions and roles that are more overtly political. However, this traditional route seems to be the best option open to women engaging and influencing decision-making for peacebuilding. Their activities in those roles provide additional avenues within which women influence and do indeed exert pressure on the decision-making structures for peacebuilding. As Patrick and Aida (2003) admit, men may often still make the decision to go to war, but the extent of the constraints they face because of women's potential involvement in political processes can influence when they do so. Because of their traditional customary roles, women have a unique insight into the needs of a community and a special role to play in promoting the interests and aspirations of the citizenry.

The grassroots, citizen-based, people-to-people approach provides a women-centric perspective, on which women mobilise, assume and engage in peacebuilding activities based on their traditional cultural roles. Since every culture has unique strengths when compared to other cultures, attention to diverse peace traditions and contexts have the capacity to enrich practical peacebuilding. As Fry, Bruce, Bonta & Karlina (2009) contend, comparing the peace traditions of other societies contributes to the discovery of cross-cutting themes as well as positive precedents that help reinvigorate peace practices in other contexts. The Sotik/Borabu women achieve these through informal cross-border visits and/or exchanges, interactions, networking, connections and conversations, in which they share experiences, collaborate, relate, bond and dialogue. Through these informal peacebuilding processes women address the motivations, grievances and injustices that trigger violent conflict, work directly to change relationships and alter negative behavioural stereotypes, beliefs and attitudes.

### **Cultural Peace Resources**

Culture, though not static, monolithic, or deterministic, is the matrix within which peacebuilding practices take form. In many respects, peacebuilding

is a process of cultural introspection and reconstruction a process of generating social dialogue that encourages critical reflection on existing realities, re-evaluation of present value priorities, and initiation of new shared meanings. An essential part of peacebuilding, therefore, is the meaning, relevance and applicability of known practices, values and beliefs. Every cultural community has its own 'local exceptionalisms'. These are distinctive ways, values, insights, and practices that contribute to the development of peace, human dignity, communal solidarity and harmony within cultural milieus, and which donate to a larger, 'mosaic' approach to peace based on inclusive intercultural dialogue (Mokua, 2013b). MacGinty (2008, pp. 128-129) argues for the potential of traditional and indigenous approaches of peace to engage the 'affective dimension of peacemaking' in a culturally appropriate manner, balancing the top-down, elite-focused aspect of conventional intervention programmes with a more genuinely participatory and bottom-up dynamic.

Being Africans, the Sotik/Borabu community take their beliefs from traditional African spirituality and cosmologies. The community's gender symbolic systems infuse women (and men) with cultural, religious and political meanings. In addition, different types of objects, rituals, beliefs, practices, traditional ideologies, actors and resources, are bequeathed with appropriate transcendental power, which remain significant if accessed. There are traditional African rites and practices in which people respond to, prevent, resolve and manage conflicts. These rituals, rites and practices invoke invisible powers and social sanctions in influencing behaviour, norms and character. One significant cultural belief and practice, is the sacredness, sanctity, awe and reverence of the woman's body and sexuality. Women through their bodies and sexual behaviours represent families, clans, ethnicities, civilisations, and therefore, delineate identities. Their sexual purity defines the honour and integrity of the community, the violation of which serves as a direct attack on and 'stains' the entire group.

The sacrosanctity of women's sexuality symbolized by the practice of tying their undergarments to a string and placing them strategically on the pathways to the war-fields are of vital cultural import. Lethal repercussions, predisposed in the form of a curse are spelt out for those who disregard and circumvent the paraphernalia/objects. In the objects are bestowed deep religio-cultural-psychological symbolic connotations. The general belief is



that none of the combatants who disregard the tools will come back from the war-field alive. For, they will have seen their mothers naked which is regarded as taboo in the local cultural context. The community believes in the invisible divine powers of these objects, and often this powers are exercised by apportioning rewards to those who show respect, reverence and awe, and vengeance and punishment, to those who disregard. The religio-socio-psychological symbolism of elder people's undergarments, for peacebuilding in an African cultural setting is one of significant value and meaning therefore.

Women's maternal roles and attachments are also exploited to produce peace and resolve conflicts. Women are often seen as vital to the production of the rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity and trust embedded in social relations, social structures and society's institutional arrangements that enable its members to achieve their individual and community objectives, which are in turn critical to the daily maintenance of communal life. Women, through labour as well as maintenance of day-to-day cooperative relationships and informal social networks, are indispensable to the maintenance of this order, both materially and socially. As Mostov (2000) emphasises, women are mothers, daughters and wives—symbols of purity, nurturers and transmitters of national values, and reproducers of a nation's warriors and rulers, but also symbols of territorial vulnerability and national defilement, as victims vulnerable to sexual, and physical invasion and contamination.

### **‘Peace Markets’**

Significant impetus is given to the women's informal peacebuilding activities in what Abdalla (2012) represents as ‘peace markets.’ Peace markets are market centres established in optimum locations along the Sotik/Borabu common border. For years they have represented ingenious cross-border commerce, trade, relationships, bonding and commodity exchange model, of how the two neighbouring communities preserve their common interests by circumventing the border's (in)security pressures, even in the intensity of a conflict. These common markets, from Chepilat, Tembwo, to Ndanai, are not only arcades and fairs of trade and commerce, but also epicentres of cultural civilisation, bonding, networking, sharing, discussions, dialogue and conversation. The market days of the peace

markets are always bubbling with activity as market-goers, mostly women, trade in goods and services, interact, and exchange pleasantries and friendships oblivious of their community's animosities. They all observe and respect each other's diversities, codes of conduct, practices, protocols and belief systems. The peace markets, therefore, provide an outstanding example of how the facts of geography, humanness and context remain superior and more sustainable to those of ethnic politics and identities.

### **Cross-Border Peacebuilding Committees**

Evolution of the model of Peace Committees in addressing conflicts is perhaps one of the main successes of the peacebuilding processes in Kenya. Initially started as an informal structure composed of both male and female elders, the model has since been replicated in the whole country. This is a local community owned, low cost, socially acceptable, peacebuilding model that recognizes and appreciates the role of the citizenry, indigenous knowledge and expertise in conflict management, development, governance and peacebuilding.

The Sotik/Borabu Cross-border Peace Committees constitute representatives of both genders elected from both communities and the local state security actors. The committees are created not only to improve on cross-border governance and (in)security management through detailed border surveillance, but also to minimize conflicts. The committees act as arbiters for disputes between the rival ethnic tribes and groups, and provide a platform for cross-border community coordination and cooperation. The committees undertake regular cross-border conferences (baraza) that allow relationships and friendships to develop, establishing a “constructive dependency” among individuals, the two communities, cultural leaders, administrators and political authorities (Mokua, 2013a). The cycle of dependency so built, is relied upon for continued and potentially more meaningful partnerships, collaborations and cooperation.

A significant constituent of the Cross-Border Peacebuilding Committees are the gender and age specific peace meetings components, where women are making a prominent presence. The Sotik/Borabu Women Peace Drive and the Sotik/Borabu Women's Peace Meetings are case groups of such peace mediums formed and founded by women from both the Kipsigis and the Kisiis in response to the intermittent violence. In attempts to bring

women from both sides of the common border together, the forums do organise frequent cross-border peace meetings among and between women. During these meetings they discuss development, leadership, governance and (in)security concerns, and propose intervention programmes that would promote sustainable peace and development between and among the two neighbouring communities. Among the intervention activities proposed include, the advancement of cross-border commerce and trade, participating in cross-border religious and education activities, and promoting peace education in families and thus, making the family the foundation of peacebuilding. All of these efforts help to restore and sustain peace.

### **Microfinance for Peacebuilding**

An essential part of enhancing peoples' welfare comes from increasing their economic opportunities and resources. Increased welfare improves people's possibilities to reach real freedom and enhances their capabilities to function (Sen, 1999). The use of microfinance in peacebuilding and in enhancing society's welfare is often seen as an effective strategy to advance development. Microfinance can help conflict-ridden societies rebuild their economies, families decrease their economic and food insecurity, and empower both women and men (Cheston & Kuhn, 2006; Woodworth, 2006). Microfinance provides resource opportunities to the poor (Marino, 2005), primarily women, who often have less access than men. Further, by targeting women, a less political client group is promoted providing opportunities for their increased role as peacebuilders (FDC, 1999). Targeting women is also more beneficial since increased women's income benefits the household and the community more than a corresponding increase in men's income (Snow & Woller, 2001). The Norwegian Nobel Committee in its motivation for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 acknowledges:

Micro-credit has proved to be an important liberating force in societies where women in particular have to struggle against repressive social and economic conditions. Economic growth and political democracy cannot achieve their full potential unless the female half of humanity participates on an equal footing with the male.

**Merry-go-rounds as Peace Actors**

Informal savings and credit economies are increasingly essential tools and instruments for women's peacebuilding efforts, socio-economic and political empowerment and development on the Sotik/Borabu border. The vitality and burgeoning of Rotating and Savings Associations (ROSCAS) popularly known as Merry-go-rounds (Chama in Swahili), can be attributed to the fact that they are owned and controlled by operators who are at the same time the beneficiaries. Formulated and given credence mainly at the 'peace markets,' the informal savings and credit economy are not a business strategy per se, but a way of life. The economy is interwoven into the web of the daily life of the participants, reinforcing deeply a sense of the spirit of community that binds individuals, ethnicities and communities together and promotes peaceful co-existence.

For the women, the merry-go-rounds are not only forums for savings and credit, but also spaces for encouragement, meeting and exchanging ideas, socialising, training, teaching, sharing and discussing common concerns and challenges. They enable women diversify livelihoods, connect, and discover help and strength from others with similar experiences. They are a 'moral community' whose economic activities are not defined and governed by market values and principles but by the interests of community, family and kinship society. The economy is guided and driven by the norms and values of reciprocity, mutuality and fairness, which are predicated, on the principles of high degrees of strengthening the spirit of community, feelings of ownership, trust, social capital (wealth) and quality of life. The economy is based on building up long-term relationships, and networks made up of families, friends, kinships, acquaintances and business associates that are grounded and cemented on the values of trust and reciprocity, as a way of banking on the future. The larger the network, the greater the accumulation of social wealth that the people can bank on. The 'moral community' emphasizes good neighbourliness and respectability, as highly valued and integral to the cohesion of families, clans, tribes and society.

The economy serves as a kind of rotary club, allowing members to network, exchange knowledge and information, and goodwill. The increased social networks strengthen social relations and understanding, facilitate reconciliation and contribute in the establishment of relationships

of trust and peace outside one's family, clan, tribe and community. As foundational spaces for training, learning and socialisation, the economy significantly boosts the independence, confidence, socio-status, courage, self-esteem and skills of women. This is because as Cheston and Kuhn (2006) contend, beliefs in ones' capabilities are noteworthy steps for increased equality and empowerment. Further, if this is followed by changed perceptions on stereotypical beliefs and behaviour on a peoples' cultural roles and capabilities, traditional discriminatory sensitivities might be redefined.

Another feature of the moral economy is that it combines income generating projects with other social welfare functions such as caring for the disadvantaged in society like, orphans, the disabled, the aged, the widows, pregnant teenagers etc. Thus, the economy's canons are a poignant statement of re-stating one of the common threads running through African philosophy of mutual sharing and co-dependence. Accordingly, the economy goes beyond culture, geography, history and societal identity, to be the platform upon which people, commerce and culture connect.

### **Cattle Rustling**

Cattle-raiding across the common border continues to take lives, threaten (in)security, undermine livelihoods, and discourage both public development and private sector investment. Women across the border have through conferences (barazas), unanimously condemned the vice and appealed to the state law enforcement agencies to identify, apprehend and judge cattle-raiders as individual breakers of the law. Cattle-rustlers must take individual criminal responsibility for their actions, which are often used to generalise and stereotype on all members of a group, consequently drawing the two communities into wider ethnic violent conflict. They have also identified diversification of income generation opportunities as another important mechanism to safeguard and sustain peace, for cattle-raiders will find viable alternative sources of supporting their livelihoods.

### **Conclusion**

The study has reaffirmed that violent conflicts are extremely gendered with women and men experiencing conflicts differently. Also, the role that

women play as peacebuilders is, in large measure, unacknowledged, undervalued and ignored. This limited perspective reinforces existing traditional gender inequality values and practices, positioning women as necessarily 'passive' and 'subservient' in the peacebuilding and development arenas. However, in addition to the unique organisational and leadership traits, a comprehensive gendered perspective also plays a crucial role in conflict response efforts, including fostering an empowerment approach and assisting in the alleviation of gender-centred violence.

For women's peacebuilding activism to endure and their agenda to continue to be felt, it is incumbent upon societies to create structures that provide spaces for women's on-going input, and for women peacebuilding activists to adapt to and participate in the existing male-dominated decision-making structures. In some cases, this might be through formal peacebuilding processes. In other cases, however, it might involve lobbying or finding ways to influence the peacebuilding processes from outside through informal organizations and grassroots people-centred mobilizations. Similarly, it is important that peacebuilding advocates enlist women in much more numbers, who will continue to crusade for peace and, participate in peacebuilding processes. In order to advance the causes of peace and women empowerment, women themselves must connect with, empower, equip and inspire one another at all levels of society. In these ways society will not only show commitment to peace, but will also create holistic responses to violent conflicts.

Developing appropriate models of peacebuilding must of necessity be rooted in respect and draw from indigenous knowledge, understandings and aspirations of peace, if the authenticity, commitment and worthy of peacebuilding are to be feasible. Viable and enduring peace springs from local cultural milieus and meanings. Tapping into the local mutual set of cultural attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and standards which give the concept of peace substance and legitimacy, provides the 'deep context' of eliciting shared visions and value priorities, and relating them to realities of conflict in a manner that is conducive to action on the ground.

Cultural eclecticism (Lederach, 1995) presents many opportunities for creativity and dynamism, through foundational concepts, values, knowledge and practices that can be understood and applied in new ways, and in different peacebuilding settings. Intercultural cross-fertilization therefore

presents workable solutions for sustainable peacebuilding. Bringing more voices to the table of peace, including women, is itself a process of acknowledging and respecting the many cultural diversities of peace, without which a greater whole in peacebuilding cannot be envisioned nor realized.

### **Lessons**

Women make a qualitative difference to peacebuilding by enabling access to and fostering trust within and between communities. One of the most important lessons and experiences, from the case of Sotik/Borabu border, is the notion of people involvement, participation and inclusiveness that gives the silent majority of peacebuilders – women – a voice, and therefore, which needs to be more systematically and widely embraced, and integrated into peacebuilding practices. The creation of socio-political spaces for women to engage and to become empowered agents creating and reclaiming peace, are positive characteristics of the ways in which women can be integrated into peacebuilding processes.

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