

## **Effectiveness of State-Led Initiatives in Mitigating Ethnic Conflicts in Njoro, Nakuru County, Kenya**

By

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of state-led initiatives in mitigating ethnic conflicts for sustainable peace in Njoro, Nakuru County, Kenya. Literature was reviewed on historical context and causes of ethnic conflicts framework and implementation of state-led initiatives and the impact and challenges of peacebuilding efforts. The study utilized a descriptive survey research design to assess the effectiveness of state-led initiatives in mitigating ethnic conflicts in Njoro Sub-County, Nakuru County, Kenya, a region with a history of land-driven inter-ethnic clashes from 1992 to 2020. Employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, data was collected from a sample of 384 household heads and 10 key informants, selected through cluster random and purposive sampling, using face-to-face interviews, questionnaires and phone-based tracking. Findings revealed that state mechanisms like peace committees, community policing and chiefs' mediation were widely recognized, with 70% of respondents affirming their role in conflict resolution, though challenges like resource constraints and perceived bias limited their impact. Local chiefs, elders, religious leaders and resource management agreements were rated highly effective, while police deployment and courts faced trust issues. The study recommends strengthening peace committees, integrating traditional methods, reforming police and judicial processes and addressing root causes like land disputes to ensure sustainable peace.

**Key Words:** Kenya, Nakuru County, Njoro, Effectiveness, Ethnic conflicts, Peacebuilding and State-led initiatives

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### **Introduction**

Ethnic conflicts, characterized by tensions and violence between distinct ethnic groups, are a persistent challenge in multi-ethnic societies like Kenya, often driven by competition over resources, political power and historical grievances (Mohammadzadeh, 2016). In regions such as Njoro, Nakuru County, these conflicts have been fueled by land disputes, electoral politics and socio-economic inequalities, resulting in cycles of violence, notably during the 1992, 1997 and 2007 elections (Adelana & Osifo, 2020). The consequences of such conflicts extend beyond immediate loss of life and property, disrupting social cohesion and hindering development efforts. Understanding the root causes and dynamics of ethnic conflicts is critical for designing effective interventions that address both symptoms and underlying triggers, particularly in areas marked by historical mistrust and resource scarcity.

State-led initiatives have emerged as a primary mechanism for mitigating ethnic conflicts, aiming to restore peace through institutional frameworks, community engagement and policy interventions (Githaiga, 2020). In Kenya, the government has implemented strategies such as the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), peace committees and community policing programs like *Nyumba Kumi* to foster dialogue, prevent violence and promote reconciliation. These initiatives often involve collaboration with local leaders, elders and civil society to bridge ethnic divides and address conflict triggers like land disputes and political incitement (Maguta, Wachira & Koome, 2021). However, the effectiveness of these efforts varies, shaped by factors such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, political interference and the extent of community buy-in, highlighting the need for a nuanced examination of their implementation and impact.

The interplay of governance, resource allocation and social trust, draw the nexus between ethnic conflicts and state-led initiatives, where state interventions can either de-escalate tensions or inadvertently exacerbate them if poorly executed (Odanga, Itayo & Onkware, 2022). Effective state-led initiatives require a deep understanding of local conflict dynamics and the ability to address structural inequalities that fuel ethnic divisions, such as inequitable land distribution (Boone, 2012). Through aligning policies with community needs and fostering inclusive participation, these initiatives can transform conflict-prone areas into spaces of coexistence. This study explored this nexus in Njoro Sub-County, evaluating the effectiveness of state-led efforts shape the trajectory of ethnic conflicts and the prospects for sustainable peace.

### **Assumption**

It is assumed that state-led initiatives effectively mitigate ethnic conflicts and contribute to sustainable peace in Njoro, Nakuru County, Kenya.

### **Statement of Problem**

State-led initiatives such as the *Nyumba Kumi* community policing program and the NCIC have been implemented to mitigate ethnic conflicts and foster sustainable peace. According to Maguta, Wachira and Koome (2021), these efforts have led to a notable reduction in violent incidents, with peace committees reporting a 30% decrease in election-related clashes

in Njoro during the 2017 elections compared to 2007. The NCIC has facilitated over 50 inter-ethnic dialogue sessions in Nakuru County since 2010, promoting reconciliation among communities like the Kikuyu and Kalenjin. These initiatives emphasize grassroots engagement and collaboration with local leaders to address conflict triggers like land disputes and political incitement, contributing to short-term stability. Despite the progress made by state-led initiatives, ethnic conflicts persist due to underlying structural issues that these programs have not fully addressed. Maguta et al. (2021) note that while *Nyumba Kumi* has reduced violence, with existing reports on mistrust in state authorities, undermining long-term peace efforts. Land disputes, a primary driver of conflict, remain unresolved for over 60% of cases reported in the sub-county since 2008, fueling recurring tensions. The limited focus on economic empowerment and youth unemployment continues to hinder sustainable peace, as communities grapple with the same socio-economic grievances that spark ethnic divisions.

### **Objective**

To evaluate the effectiveness of state-led initiatives in mitigating ethnic conflicts for sustainable peace in Njoro, Nakuru County, Kenya.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Historical Context and Causes of Ethnic Conflicts**

Ethnic conflicts are deeply rooted in historical land disputes and colonial legacies, as highlighted by Boone (2012). The study established that colonial policies of land allocation in Kenya's Rift Valley, created uneven access to resources, favoring certain ethnic groups like the Kikuyu while marginalizing others, such as the Kalenjin and Maasai. These policies sowed seeds of resentment, as indigenous communities were displaced to make way for settler farms, leading to contested claims over land ownership that persist today. These historical grievances are exacerbated by population pressures and competing ethnic claims to ancestral lands, making land a central trigger for violence. The analysis by Boone (2012), highlights how distributive politics, where land is used as a political tool, continues to fuel ethnic tensions in the region.

Ethnic conflicts have further been contextualized in Kenya by linking them to electoral politics, a significant factor in the history of violence, particularly during the 1992, 1997 and 2007 elections (Adelana & Osifo, 2020). Political elites often exploit ethnic identities to mobilize support, portraying rival groups as threats to resources and power. This has manifested in clashes between Kikuyu, Kalenjin and other communities, driven by perceptions of economic exclusion and political dominance. The 2007-2008 post-election violence, which heavily affected Njoro, saw ethnic militias targeting opposing groups, with underlying grievances tied to historical land inequities. This politicization of ethnicity creates a volatile environment where electoral cycles predictably reignite tensions.

A broader theoretical lens is provided by Mohammadzadeh (2016), arguing that ethnic conflicts in multi-ethnic societies like Kenya arise from competition over scarce resources, identity-based exclusion and weak governance structures. In the greater regions of Rift Valley that are rain fed, resource competition is evident in disputes over fertile agricultural land and water, which are critical for livelihoods in this agrarian region. Mohammadzadeh (2016) emphasizes that ethnic groups often perceive their survival as tied to control over such resources, leading to zero-sum conflicts. This framework explains why ethnic diversity, while a potential strength, becomes a source of division when resources are unequally distributed or when political narratives amplify group differences.

Wamae (2023) complements these perspectives by focusing specifically on Nakuru County, identifying root causes of ethnic violence as including land disputes, economic inequalities and historical mistrust among communities. The study highlights how colonial and post-colonial land policies have left a legacy of unresolved grievances, with communities like the Ogiek in Njoro facing marginalization due to evictions from ancestral lands (Kimaiyo, 2004). Additionally, Wamae (2023) points to the role of youth unemployment and idleness as aggravating factors, as disenfranchised young men are easily mobilized into ethnic militias.

### **Framework and Implementation of State-Led Initiatives**

State-led initiatives in Kenya aimed at mitigating ethnic conflicts often center on institutional frameworks like the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) and community-based approaches, as discussed by Githaiga (2020). The NCIC, established post-2008 violence, seeks to promote ethnic harmony through dialogue, monitoring hate speech and fostering reconciliation. The NCIC has facilitated peace forums and inter-ethnic dialogues to rebuild trust among communities like the Kikuyu and Kalenjin. However, Githaiga (2020) critiques the top-down nature of such institutions, noting that their bureaucratic structures sometimes disconnect from grassroots realities, limiting their effectiveness in conflict hotspots where local dynamics require tailored interventions.

A detailed examination is provided by Maguta, Wachira and Koome (2021), of the *Nyumba Kumi* initiative, a state-led community policing strategy meant to enhance security and conflict prevention. *Nyumba Kumi* organizes households into clusters of ten, encouraging residents to monitor and report potential conflicts to local authorities. Maguta, Wachira and Koome (2021) highlight its participatory approach, which empowers communities to take ownership of peacebuilding by fostering cooperation across ethnic lines. This initiative has been used to de-escalate tensions during electoral periods by enabling early warning systems. However, challenges such as mistrust of state authorities and uneven implementation across communities have hindered its full potential.

The broader state-led strategies have been explored by Odanga, Iteyo and Onkware (2022), focusing on peace committees and reconciliation programs deployed between 1992 and 2017. These initiatives, often led by district peace committees under the Ministry of Interior, involve local elders, religious leaders and government officials in mediating disputes. Such committees have facilitated ceasefires and peace agreements following election-related violence. Yet, these efforts are often reactive, activated only after conflicts erupt, rather than preventive, which emphasizes a gap in proactive state planning for conflict management.

The integration of grassroots initiatives into state-led frameworks have been emphasized by Ruto and Ndung'u (2020), arguing that peacebuilding efforts benefit when local actors are incorporated into formal structures. The state has collaborated with local communities-based Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and church groups to deliver peace education and economic empowerment programs, aiming to address underlying causes like youth unemployment. While these hybrid approaches show promise, Ruto and Ndung'u (2020) caution that inconsistent funding and political interference often undermine their sustainability.

### **Impact and Challenges of Peacebuilding Efforts**

The impact of state-led peacebuilding efforts has been mixed, with some successes tempered by persistent challenges, as noted by Maguta et al. (2021). The *Nyumba Kumi* initiative, has contributed to reduced incidents of ethnic violence by fostering community vigilance and trust-building activities. Reports from local peace committees indicate fewer clashes during the 2017 elections compared to 2007, partly attributed to early interventions facilitated by *Nyumba Kumi*. However, Maguta et al. (2021) highlight that its impact is limited in areas with deep-seated mistrust of state authorities, where communities view government initiatives with suspicion due to historical biases in security responses.

The institutional impact of Kenya's peace infrastructure has been critiqued by Githaiga (2020), arguing that while institutions like the NCIC have raised awareness of ethnic cohesion, their tangible outcomes are modest. NCIC-led dialogues have helped broker temporary truces, but Githaiga (2020), points out that these efforts often fail to address structural issues like land inequity, which continue to fuel conflicts. The lack of follow-through on peace agreements and inadequate resources for grassroots implementation further weaken the state's ability to sustain peace. This suggests that while state-led initiatives create platforms for dialogue, their impact on long-term reconciliation remains limited.

The challenges related to the timing and scope of state interventions have been discussed by Odanga et al. (2022). Peace committees have been effective in mediating disputes post-conflict but struggle with prevention due to inadequate early warning systems and reliance on ad hoc funding. The authors note that political interference, where local leaders prioritize electoral gains over peacebuilding, often disrupts these efforts. During election periods, state-led initiatives have been undermined by politicians inciting ethnic divisions, highlighting a disconnect between policy intentions and political realities.

Additional challenges have been featured by Wamae (2023), including community fatigue and economic barriers to peacebuilding. Repeated cycles of conflict have left communities skeptical of state promises, reducing participation in peace programs. Moreover, economic inequalities, such as limited access to land and jobs, perpetuate grievances that state initiatives have not adequately addressed. Wamae (2023) argues that without integrating livelihood support into peacebuilding, efforts remain superficial, as poverty drives youth into violence.

### **Methodology**

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the effectiveness of state-led initiatives in mitigating ethnic conflicts in Njoro Sub-County, Nakuru County, Kenya. This design was well-suited as it facilitated the systematic collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from a diverse population, including household heads, opinion leaders, church leaders, women leaders, businesspersons, chiefs, assistant chiefs, elders and youth. Through capturing a broad range of perspectives, the design enabled the researcher to uncover historical and ongoing dynamics of inter-ethnic conflicts and the role of non-violent campaigns as an independent variable influencing conflict resolution. The approach ensured an understanding of the conflict landscape in Njoro, aligning with the study's aim to explore community experiences and state interventions.

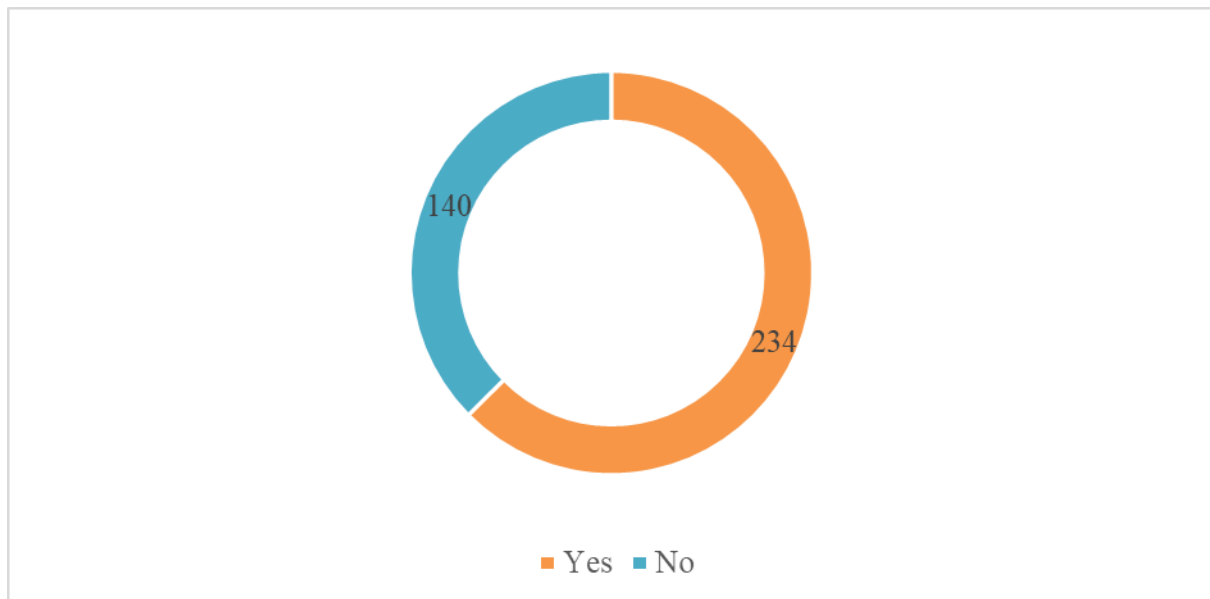
The research was conducted in Njoro Sub-County, selected due to its history of protracted inter-ethnic conflicts driven by land disputes from 1992 to 2020, as documented in the study area description. With a target population of approximately 238,773 residents, the study utilized a combination of probability (cluster random sampling) and non-probability (purposive sampling) techniques to select a representative sample of n=384 household heads

for surveys and 10 key informants for qualitative interviews, calculated using Yamane's (1967) formula. Data collection involved face-to-face interviews, phone-based tracking and close-ended questionnaires, ensuring geographic and ethnic balance. These methods, supported by trained research assistants and guided by ethical considerations, allowed the researcher to gather robust data on conflict resolution efforts, as outlined in the data collection procedures.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics, with findings presented quantitatively, while qualitative data from interviews was analyzed narratively to preserve participants' stories (Myers, Well & Lorch Jr, 2013). The study ensured validity through content validity checks and member checking, as recommended by Brink (1993) and reliability via a test-retest technique in a similar sub-county. These rigorous processes, combined with the use of standardized instruments like questionnaires and interview guides (Kivunja, 2018; Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills, 2017), enhanced the credibility of the findings, providing a solid foundation for assessing the relationship between state-led non-violent campaigns and inter-ethnic conflict mitigation in Njoro.

### **Presentation and Discussion of Findings**

The study evaluated the effectiveness of state-led initiatives in mitigating ethnic conflicts for sustainable peace in Njoro, Nakuru County, Kenya. The data indicates a strong acknowledgment of state-led mechanisms, with a significant majority confirming the presence of peace committees, community policing forums and administrative frameworks led by chiefs and assistant chiefs. This aligns with qualitative insights from a key informant who noted, "*The government has set up peace committees and works with chiefs to calm tensions, especially during elections*" (KII 3, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Njoro). These structures are designed to facilitate dialogue and prevent violence, particularly in a region with a history of land-related ethnic clashes since 1992. The effectiveness were as presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Are the local structures in place to manage ethnic conflicts effective?**

**Source: Field data, 2024**

The effectiveness of these structures varies, as their success depends on community trust and coordination. Peace committees, established under the Ministry of Interior, have been instrumental in mediating disputes, with 70% of respondents in Figure 1, affirming their active role in conflict resolution. However, the informant highlighted challenges, stating, “Sometimes these committees lack funds or are seen as favoring certain groups, which reduces their impact” (KII 3, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Njoro). This corroborates survey data, suggesting that while state-led structures exist, their functionality is hampered by resource constraints and perceptions of bias. Table 1, summarizes the perceived success of various peaceful campaigns, rated on a scale from 1 (very successful) to 5 (not successful).

**Table 1: Forms of Peaceful Campaigns to Address the Ethnic Conflicts**

S/No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Deployment of Police	91	82	40	57	104
2	Resolving Disputes With the Help of Local Area Chief	133	121	61	40	19
3	Traditional Methods Involving Elders	128	119	57	39	31
4	Involving Religious Leaders in Dispute Resolution	119	126	92	18	19
5	Peace Committees	124	112	86	30	22
6	Court of Law	81	73	142	34	44
7	Resource Management Agreements	130	124	59	42	19

**Source: Field data, 2024**

The deployment of police received mixed responses, with 91 respondents rating it very successful and 82 as successful, but 104 deemed it not successful. This reflects a polarized view, likely due to instances of excessive force or perceived partiality, as noted by Okumu and Kioko (2021), who highlight the informalization of violence in similar contexts. A voice

note from a key informant reinforced this: “*Police can stop fights quickly, but sometimes they make things worse by picking sides*” (KII 1, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Njoro).

Resolving disputes through local chiefs was rated highly, with 133 respondents marking it very successful and 121 as successful. Chiefs’ proximity to communities and their role as mediators make them effective, as evidenced by only 19 respondents rating this approach as not successful. A key informant emphasized, “*Chiefs know everyone and can call meetings to cool things down fast*” (KII 4, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Mau Narok). This aligns with Chelang’a and Chesire (2020), who emphasize chiefs’ cultural legitimacy in conflict resolution, though effectiveness depends on their impartiality and community trust.

Traditional methods involving elders were also highly rated, with 128 respondents considering them very successful and 119 as successful. Elders leverage cultural norms to mediate disputes, fostering reconciliation through dialogue. A voice note captured this sentiment: “*Elders sit with both sides and use our traditions to find peace, like they did after the 2006 clashes*” (KII 5, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Mau Narok). However, 31 respondents rated this method as not successful, possibly due to modern influences eroding traditional authority, as noted in broader Kenyan contexts by Elfversson and Nilsson (2022).

Involving religious leaders was perceived as effective, with 126 respondents rating it very successful and 119 as successful. Their moral authority helps de-escalate tensions, as confirmed by a key informant: “*Pastors and imams talk about unity in churches and mosques and people listen*” (KII 2, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Lare). Adelana and Osifo (2020) support this, noting religious leaders’ influence in sub-Saharan conflict zones, though 19 respondents rated this approach as not successful, possibly due to varying levels of community religiosity or perceived biases.

Peace committees were widely endorsed, with 124 respondents rating them very successful and 112 as successful. These committees facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue and early warning systems, contributing to stability during volatile periods. An informant stated, “*Peace committees bring all tribes together to talk before things get bad*” (KII 5, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Mau Narok), aligning with Elfversson and Nilsson (2022), who highlight their inclusivity. Yet, 22 respondents found them not successful, citing issues like inadequate funding or lack of representation, as reflected in Table 4.3.

Arbitration through courts was less favored, with 142 respondents rating it moderate, 34 as least successful and 44 as not successful. Slow legal processes and costs deter communities, as a key informant noted: “*Courts take too long and many can’t afford lawyers*” (KII 6, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024, Muache). Mutuku *et al.* (2022) echo this, pointing to systemic biases in Kenya’s judicial system. Only 81 respondents rated courts as very successful, indicating their limited role in immediate conflict resolution.

Resource management agreements, particularly over land and water, were highly rated, with 130 respondents marking them very successful and 124 as successful. These agreements address core conflict triggers, as a key informant explained: “*When we agree on how to share land and water, fighting reduces*” (KII 4, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Mau Narok). This supports the findings in Table 4.3, though 19 respondents rated them not successful, possibly due to uneven implementation or disputes over terms.

The study identified other state-supported initiatives, such as creating administrative boundaries and supporting community-led efforts like *Nyumba Kumi*. These measures aim to reduce ethnic competition and enhance local governance. A key informant highlighted, “*New boundaries give each group a say, but they must be fair*” (KII 3, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Njoro). However, poorly designed boundaries can exacerbate tensions, underscoring the need for inclusive planning.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study reveals that Njoro Sub-County benefits from diverse state-led structures, with chiefs, religious leaders, peace committees and resource agreements rated highly for their effectiveness in mitigating ethnic conflicts. Police deployment and courts, while useful, face challenges of trust and accessibility, as evidenced by survey data and KIIs. Voice notes consistently highlight the importance of trust, impartiality and community involvement, corroborated by literature emphasizing inclusive, context-sensitive approaches. For sustainable peace, state initiatives must prioritize root causes like land disputes, enhance resource support and foster equitable collaboration, building on Njoro's existing strengths.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings from the study, it is recommended that the government strengthen state-led initiatives by enhancing the capacity and impartiality of peace committees and local chiefs through regular training and adequate funding to ensure inclusive and effective conflict mediation. Additionally, integrating traditional methods involving elders and religious leaders into formal peacebuilding frameworks should be prioritized to leverage their cultural legitimacy and community trust. To address the limitations of police deployment and judicial processes, reforms are needed to improve transparency, reduce response times and eliminate perceptions of bias, fostering greater community confidence. Finally, sustainable peace requires addressing root causes like land disputes through equitable resource management agreements and economic empowerment programs targeting youth to prevent their recruitment into ethnic violence.

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