

## **Community-Based Approaches to Peace Committee Formation: Lessons from Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya**

By

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to analyze the factors contributing to the establishment of community-based peace committees in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya. Literature was reviewed on the theoretical frameworks of community-based conflict resolution, historical context and evolution of peace committees in Kenya and case studies on community engagement in peacebuilding in Elgeyo Marakwet County. The study utilized a cross-sectional survey design to explore their role and effectiveness in managing inter-ethnic conflicts, particularly between the Marakwet and Pokot communities. Primary data was collected through questionnaires distributed to 193 randomly selected participants across Marakwet East and West sub-counties, supplemented by Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with 15 purposively chosen stakeholders, including government officials, elders and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) representatives. The findings revealed high community awareness and perceived effectiveness of peace committees, driven by frequent engagement and alignment with local needs, bolstered by the inclusion of respected community figures and NGO support. However, challenges like political interference and funding shortages were noted as barriers to neutrality and sustainability. The study concludes that this hybrid model of traditional mediation and modern support offers a replicable framework for peacebuilding, recommending enhanced funding, protection from political influence and increased training and inclusivity to strengthen these efforts..

**Key Words:** Kenya, Elgeyo Marakwet, Community-Based, Formation, Lessons and Peace Committee

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### **Introduction**

Efforts to halt violence have long been at the core of peace initiatives globally, with mechanisms ranging from ceasefires to decisive victories or peace agreements (Clayton *et al.*, 2019). In conflict-ridden regions, peace committees have emerged as vital tools for managing disputes and fostering sustainable peace, particularly at the grassroots level. This study focused on the role of government-supported peace committees in ending violence in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya, a region marked by persistent inter-ethnic tensions between the Pokot and Marakwet communities over resources like livestock and land. Unlike top-down interventions, these committees emphasize localized solutions, drawing on community participation to address root causes such as historical grievances and resource competition (Ejdus, 2021). Through examining their formation and effectiveness, this study contributes to the broader discourse on community-based peacebuilding in conflict-prone settings.

Peace committees have proven instrumental across diverse global contexts, offering lessons that inform their application in Kenya. In Nepal, post-Maoist uprising peace committees facilitated ethnic reconciliation through community dialogue, while in Sri Lanka, similar initiatives bridged divides between Sinhalese and Tamil groups, reducing local violence (D'Souza, 2019). In Africa, Sudan's Darfur region saw local peace committees mediate land and resource disputes, significantly curbing hostilities in targeted areas (Castro, 2018). Likewise, in Uganda, peace committees addressed community conflicts linked to the Lord's Resistance Army, fostering trust and reintegration (Omolo & Njenga, 2016). In Kenya, peace committees have tackled inter-ethnic violence in volatile regions, with Elgeyo Marakwet serving as a key example where such mechanisms mediate cattle rustling and promote social cohesion (Njogu, 2021). However, their success hinges on factors like community buy-in, resource availability and state support, variables this study explores in depth (Moler, 2022).

The historical backdrop of global peace efforts further contextualized this study. The Dayton Accord in Bosnia and Herzegovina, signed in 1995 to end the civil war, reduced ethnic clashes by restructuring governance and fostering dialogue, offering a macro-level parallel to the micro-level work of peace committees (O'Brien, 2010). Conversely, Yemen's United Nations (UN)-mediated peace talks since 2015 have faltered, highlighting the limitations of externally driven efforts absent strong local mechanisms (Wolf *et al.*, 2020). In Africa, political unrest and resource-driven conflicts have plagued nations like Nigeria and Rwanda, yet peace committees have emerged as resilient responses (Babatunde, 2013). Kenya's experience mirrors this, with peace committees evolving to address inter-ethnic strife exacerbated by colonial legacies and modern governance challenges (Olivier & Odendaal, 2008). This study thus investigated how such committees in Elgeyo Marakwet adapt traditional mediation to contemporary needs.

African examples highlight the transformative potential of peace committees, despite persistent challenges. In Ghana, the District Peace Advisory Council mitigated the Dagbon Chieftaincy Crisis through community-led mediation (Issifu, 2016), while in Burundi, the Kabimba Peace Committee fostered peace between Hutus and Tutsis by promoting joint community projects (Tongerren, 2013). These cases illustrate how peace committees can

bridge divides and rebuild trust, a model relevant to Elgeyo Marakwet where cattle rustling and small arms proliferation fuel violence (Leff, 2009). Yet, despite their promise, gaps remain in understanding their long-term efficacy and scalability, particularly in Kenya's pastoralist regions. This study analyzed how government peace committees in Elgeyo Marakwet navigate these complexities, offering insights into their role as sustainable peacebuilding tools amidst entrenched conflict dynamics.

### **Assumptions**

Community-driven initiatives in Elgeyo Marakwet County have shaped the establishment of peace committees that foster local conflict resolution.

### **Statement of Problem**

Community-based approaches to peace committee formation in Elgeyo Marakwet County builds on a growing body of work examining local peacebuilding mechanisms in Kenya, with studies indicating their increasing relevance amid persistent conflict. The National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management (NSCPBCM) reported that by 2013, peace committees had facilitated over 300 community dialogues nationwide, reducing violent incidents by approximately 25% in pastoralist regions like Elgeyo Marakwet (NSCPBCM, 2013). Odendaal (2013) found that in Wajir, a comparable context, peace committees resolved 70% of inter-clan disputes through mediation between 1993 and 2010, highlighting their effectiveness in leveraging traditional authority. Similarly, Kipkorir (2009) noted that in Elgeyo Marakwet, traditional elders within peace committees mediated 60% of cattle rustling cases successfully between 2005 and 2008. Despite these achievements, the lack of systematic data on long-term outcomes and the variability in committee structures across regions suggest that while progress has been made, the full scope of their impact in Elgeyo Marakwet remains underexplored, necessitating further investigation into their sustainability and adaptability.

### **Objective**

To analyze the factors contributing to the establishment of community-based peace committees in Elgeyo Marakwet County.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Theoretical Frameworks of Community-Based Conflict Resolution**

Community-based conflict resolution has emerged as a pivotal approach in addressing local disputes, emphasizing grassroots participation over top-down interventions. Schelling (1960) provides a foundational theoretical lens, suggesting that conflict resolution hinges on strategic interactions where local actors negotiate mutually beneficial outcomes. This aligns with the idea that communities, when empowered, can leverage their inherent social capital to mediate disputes effectively. Similarly, Druckman (2005) highlights the importance of negotiation as a dynamic process, adaptable to cultural and contextual nuances, which is critical in community settings where traditional norms often guide interactions.

The application of these theories to African contexts is well-documented. Kwaku and Rankopo (2007) argue that indigenous systems, rooted in communal values, offer sustainable frameworks for peacebuilding. They highlight how traditional leaders and local customs facilitate dialogue, a principle that resonates with community-based approaches in Kenya. This perspective is reinforced by Oyugi (2002), who notes that traditional authorities often

serve as mediators, bridging modern governance with historical practices to resolve conflicts like cattle rustling or land disputes.

A key theoretical debate centers on the balance between local agency and external influence. Tongeren (2013) posits that while community-driven efforts are essential, their success often depends on supportive structures from national or international actors. This introduces a hybrid model where local initiatives are bolstered by resources or policies, as seen in Kenya's NSCPBCM (2011). However, Elfversson (2013) in her comparative study cautions that over-reliance on external third parties can undermine local ownership, a tension that theoretical frameworks must address.

The gendered dimension of these frameworks cannot be overlooked. Juma (2000) argues that women's inclusion enhances the efficacy of community-based resolution, a view supported by UN Women (2021). Integrating feminist perspectives into negotiation theory, as Druckman (1986) suggests, enriches the process by ensuring diverse voices shape outcomes. These theoretical insights provide a robust foundation for understanding how peace committees in Elgeyo Marakwet might operate within broader conflict resolution paradigms.

### **Historical Context and Evolution of Peace Committees in Kenya**

The evolution of peace committees in Kenya reflects a response to recurring communal conflicts, particularly in pastoralist regions. Mkutu (2008) traces the origins of such conflicts to colonial land policies and post-independence governance failures, which exacerbated tensions over resources like grazing land. In this context, peace committees emerged as localized mechanisms to address violence, such as cattle rustling, that state institutions struggled to contain. Kipkorir (2009) notes that these committees often built on pre-existing traditional councils, adapting them to modern peacebuilding needs.

The formalization of peace committees gained momentum in the 1990s, with the Wajir Peace and Development Committee serving as a pioneering model. Odendaal (2010) details how this initiative, sparked by women's advocacy amid inter-clan violence, blended indigenous mediation with structured dialogue, reducing conflict significantly. This success prompted the Kenyan government to institutionalize peace committees under the NSCPBCM (2013), integrating them into national policy frameworks (Republic of Kenya, 2015). The evolution thus marks a shift from ad hoc community responses to state-supported structures.

Despite their growth, peace committees have faced challenges in adapting to changing conflict dynamics. Greiner (2013) highlights how political manipulation and resource competition have tested their efficacy, particularly in areas like Elgeyo Marakwet where ethnic boundaries are contested. Olivier and Odendaal (2008) argue that while early successes relied on community trust, scaling up risked diluting this grassroots legitimacy, a historical lesson relevant to current formations.

The historical trajectory also reveals a growing recognition of inclusivity. Issifu (2016) emphasizes the gradual incorporation of youth and women, spurred by evidence of their impact (Gordon & Stuenkel, 2022). In Elgeyo Marakwet, this evolution likely mirrors national trends, with committees adapting traditional roles to address modern challenges like devolved governance and inter-ethnic strife, as explored by Moler (2022). This historical context emphasizes the adaptive resilience of peace committees in Kenya's peacebuilding landscape.

### **Case Studies on Community Engagement in Peacebuilding in Elgeyo Marakwet County**

Elgeyo Marakwet County offers a compelling case for studying community engagement in peacebuilding, given its history of inter-ethnic and resource-based conflicts. Schilling *et al.* (2011) document how cattle raiding between the Marakwet and Pokot communities has long fueled violence, necessitating local interventions. Peace committees in this region, as informal yet influential bodies, have sought to mediate such disputes by fostering dialogue among elders, a practice rooted in traditional authority (Kipkorir, 2009). These efforts highlight the county's reliance on community-driven solutions amid limited state capacity.

A notable case is the role of women in peace initiatives, which mirrors broader Kenyan trends. Juma (2000) illustrates how women in conflict zones, including Elgeyo Marakwet, have transitioned from victims to peacemakers, organizing forums to de-escalate tensions. This is echoed by Mason (2020), who argues that women's cooperatives in pastoral areas often bridge divides that male-dominated structures overlook. In Elgeyo Marakwet, such groups likely complement peace committees, enhancing their reach and legitimacy within fragmented communities.

Comparative case studies provide further insight. Odendaal (2013) examines a similar initiative in Wajir, noting its success in reducing violence through community consensus, a model potentially replicable in Elgeyo Marakwet. However, Elfversson (2013) warns that local conditions such as the intensity of ethnic rivalries or availability of small arms (Mkutu, 2008) can limit transferability. In Elgeyo Marakwet, the interplay of devolved governance and historical land disputes (Moler, 2022) adds complexity, suggesting that peace committees must tailor strategies to these unique dynamics.

Youth engagement emerges as a critical factor in the county's peacebuilding narrative. Davis (2019) highlights how involving younger generations can sustain peace efforts, a lesson applicable to Elgeyo Marakwet where unemployment and marginalization often drive conflict. The NSCPBCM (2021) reports on localized training programs that empower youth within peace committees, potentially reducing their recruitment into violence. The case studies collectively feature the county's role as a microcosm of community-based peacebuilding, offering lessons on adaptability and inclusion.

### **Methodology**

The study on community-based approaches to peace committee formation in Elgeyo Marakwet County adopted a cross-sectional survey as its research design, a subset of qualitative research well-suited for capturing a snapshot of current phenomena (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). This design facilitated the collection of primary data through fact-finding inquiries, focusing on respondents' perceptions, attitudes, behaviors and beliefs about peace committees. By employing this method, the researcher could describe the study population effectively, gathering insights into the role and effectiveness of peace committees at a single point in time. The choice of a cross-sectional survey was particularly apt given the sensitive nature of inter-ethnic conflicts in the region, as it allowed respondents the freedom to express their views without prolonged engagement, thus respecting the emotional and social context of the subject matter.

Data collection under this design was executed through a combination of questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), ensuring a robust mix of quantitative and qualitative insights. Questionnaires were distributed to 193 randomly selected participants from clusters within Marakwet East and Marakwet West sub-counties, determined using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error from a population of 245,714 adults (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This random sampling within clusters

ensured diverse representation across the conflict-affected areas, while the questionnaires featuring both closed and open-ended questions captured a broad spectrum of public sentiment on peacebuilding initiatives. Concurrently, 15 purposively selected key informants, including government officials, elders, religious leaders and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) representatives, participated in KIIs, providing in-depth perspectives on the strategies and challenges faced by peace committees, enriching the study with expert knowledge.

The study area, Elgeyo Marakwet County, was deliberately chosen due to its history of recurring inter-ethnic conflicts, particularly between the Marakwet and Pokot communities and its established peace committees (KNBS, 2019). Covering 3,029.9 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 454,480, the county offered a unique lens to explore community-based conflict management, given the intensity of its social and resource-based disputes. The methodology leveraged this context by focusing on Marakwet East and West sub-counties, where peace committees have been active, using cluster random sampling to select respondents and purposive sampling for KIIs to target influential stakeholders. This dual approach ensured that the data reflected both grassroots experiences and the perspectives of those directly involved in peacebuilding, aligning with the study's aim to assess effectiveness and draw transferable lessons.

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

The study analyzed the factors contributing to the establishment of community-based peace committees in Elgeyo Marakwet County and revealed that peace committees were established as a grassroots response to persistent inter-ethnic conflicts, particularly between the Marakwet and Pokot communities, driven by resource disputes and historical tensions as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Levels of Response on the Establishment of Peace Committees in Elgeyo Marakwet County**

S/No. statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. Are you aware of any peace committees operating in this region led by the government, community-driven initiatives, or supported by NGOs and civil society organizations?	107	69	0	0	14
2. Are government-led peace committees actively operational in this region and how do they collaborate with other stakeholders?	64	80	12	14	14
3. How often do peace committees, whether government-led, community-driven, or NGO-supported, convene to address conflict issues?	64	104	1	4	12
4. How effective are peace committees formed by the government, local communities, or NGOs in resolving inter-ethnic conflicts?	61	112	1	4	12
5. Do peace committees, regardless of their formation (government-led, community-driven, or NGO-supported), align with the specific needs and priorities of the community and what challenges are faced in their establishment and sustainability under these different approaches?	63	110	0	3	14

Source: Field Data (2023)

Quantitative data from Table 1 shows strong community awareness, with 56.3% of respondents (107 out of 190) strongly agreeing and 36.3% (69) agreeing they are aware of peace committees, totaling 92.6% affirmative responses (Field Data, 2023). This high awareness reflects effective outreach by government, community and NGO-led initiatives. However, perceptions of government-led committees' operations are less uniform, with 33.7% (64) strongly agreeing and 42.1% (80) agreeing they are active, yet 12.6% (24) expressing disagreement or uncertainty, suggesting gaps in visibility or trust (Field Data, 2023). Corroborating this, Elfversson (2013) notes that government involvement can sometimes be perceived as top-down, potentially undermining local legitimacy unless well-integrated with community structures.

The effectiveness and frequency of peace committee activities further illuminate their role. A significant 89.5% of respondents (64 strongly agree, 104 agree) affirm that committees convene regularly, indicating consistent engagement (Field Data, 2023), a finding aligned with Odendaal's (2013) observation that frequent dialogue is critical for sustaining peace efforts. On effectiveness, 32.1% (61) strongly agree and 58.9% (112) agree that peace committees resolve conflicts successfully, totaling 91% positive responses, though 8.4% (16) express dissent or uncertainty (Field Data, 2023). This largely positive perception is supported by Kipkorir (2009), who found that Kenyan peace committees, leveraging traditional mediation, often achieve high resolution rates in pastoral conflicts. Qualitative insights reinforce this, with a key informant highlighting government-led initiatives' strategic use of local leaders like chiefs to enhance legitimacy: "*The government ensures that the committees comprise respected community members, enhancing their legitimacy and effectiveness*" (KII 2, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2023, Marakwet East). However, the dissenting minority suggests areas for improvement, possibly in inclusivity or resource support.

Community-driven formation and NGO contributions significantly bolster these committees. Respondents overwhelmingly (91.6%) agree (63 strongly agree, 110 agree) that peace committees align with community needs (Field Data, 2023), reflecting their adaptability to local priorities, a trait Issifu (2016) identifies as key to African peacebuilding success. Elders, women's groups and religious leaders enhance credibility and inclusivity, as noted by an informant: "*The inclusion of women's groups and religious organizations promotes diverse perspectives, ensuring a comprehensive approach*" (KII 5, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023, Marakwet West). This echoes El-Khoury and Hachimi's (2021) findings on women's roles in peacebuilding, emphasizing their bridge-building capacity. NGOs complement this by providing training and innovative techniques, with an informant stating, "*Their introduction of innovative peacebuilding techniques... enhances the committees' effectiveness*" (KII 8, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023, Marakwet East). Tongeren (2013) corroborates that civil society's resource support amplifies local efforts, though the study notes challenges like political interference and funding shortages, with 8.4% (17) dissenting on alignment (Field Data, 2023), hinting at underlying tensions.

Challenges such as political interference and inadequate funding temper the committees' success, a finding consistent with broader literature. An informant lamented, "*Political interference and local rivalries significantly undermine the neutrality and effectiveness of peace committees*" (KII 14, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023, Marakwet East), aligning with Odendaal's (2010) observation that political agendas can skew peace processes. Funding limitations further restrict outreach, as Wanyama (2000) notes resource scarcity often hampers sustained efforts. Despite these, the committees' resilience is evident, with 91% of respondents affirming their effectiveness (Field Data, 2023), suggesting a robust foundation that adapts to adversity. This resilience mirrors global practices where inclusive, culturally sensitive approaches like those involving youth and women (UN Women, 2021) sustain peacebuilding amid challenges. In Elgeyo Marakwet, the blend of traditional elder mediation and modern NGO support creates a hybrid model that, while not flawless, offers valuable lessons for scalable conflict resolution in pastoralist regions.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that peace committees have emerged as a vital mechanism for managing inter-ethnic conflicts between the Marakwet and Pokot communities, driven by a blend of government-led initiatives, community-driven efforts and NGO support. Quantitative findings reveal a strong community awareness and perception of effectiveness, underpinned by frequent engagement and alignment with local needs. Qualitative insights further highlight the legitimacy gained through the inclusion of respected elders, women and religious leaders, as well as the capacity-building role of NGOs, which together foster trust and social cohesion. However, challenges such as political interference, local rivalries and inadequate funding threaten neutrality and sustainability, with dissenting opinions signaling areas of concern. These findings align with broader research, which emphasizes the resilience of local peace structures despite systemic obstacles, suggesting that Elgeyo Marakwet's model offers a replicable framework for grassroots peacebuilding when adequately supported.

## **Recommendations**

Based on these findings, several actionable recommendations emerge as targeted actions by specific stakeholders can strengthen the peace committees' capacity to mitigate conflict and promote lasting peace in Elgeyo Marakwet County and beyond. First, the NSCPBCM and

county government officials should enhance funding and logistical support for peace committees, addressing the resource gaps that limit outreach and sustained efforts. Second, local chiefs and assistant chiefs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, must work to insulate committees from political interference by establishing clear operational guidelines that prioritize neutrality and community representation. Third, NGOs and civil society organizations should expand training programs for committee members, focusing on innovative conflict resolution techniques and inclusivity, particularly for women and youth. Finally, community leaders and elders are urged to deepen engagement with women's groups and youth to ensure diverse perspectives, reinforcing the committees' legitimacy and long-term impact.

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