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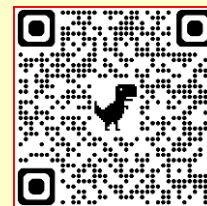
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THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH INITIATIVES IN HELPING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AMONG COMMUNITIES BORDERING BORABU-SOTIK BORDER IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Cross-border conflicts have been a longstanding global issue, with recent ethnic and communal tensions impacting regions in Africa, including Kenya. Despite efforts by governments and NGOs to implement peace and prevention strategies, conflicts continue, especially along the Borabu-Sotik border, where disputes between local communities have intensified. This study employs a qualitative research design and descriptive statistics, focusing on churches along the Borabu-Sotik border, including SDA, PAG, and Catholic, with a target population of 7,738 respondents.

This study investigates the potential role of the church in managing conflicts, with a focus on how religious organizations can help foster peace and stability in the region. It addresses the ineffectiveness of existing conflict management strategies and the possibility of the church taking on a more prominent role in resolving these conflicts. The main objective of the study is to assess the church's role in conflict management among the communities living along the Borabu-Sotik border.

The study used purposive and simple random sampling to select a sample size of 392 respondents, comprising 35 church leaders and 357 church members. Proportionate sampling methods were employed to categorize the sample according to churches. Stratified random sampling was used to select the respondents, who were then given questionnaires. Data collection tools included interview schedules for church leaders, questionnaires for church members, focus group discussions, and a checklist. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, means, and standard deviations were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

KEY WORDS: church, conflict management, ineffectiveness, peace initiatives, and religious organization.

INTRODUCTION

Social cohesion has become a pressing global issue as communities worldwide increasingly feel disconnected from the local and national entities that traditionally bind them. This growing sense of disconnection adversely impacts intercommunity relations, leading to conflicts and social fragmentation. Wrong (2019) suggests that modern philosophical and sociological discussions have framed social cohesion as a critical problem of social order.

In this context, churches and religious organizations have emerged as crucial actors in promoting social cohesion and managing conflicts. Churches, in particular, play a significant role in preaching love, fostering community bonds, and encouraging peaceful coexistence. Cox, Orsborn, and Sisk (2014) highlight the global role of churches in promoting social cohesion through their teachings and community activities. Maton (2014) adds that religion can serve as a powerful tool for fostering social interaction and cohesion, as shared practices such as prayer and worship help to uphold social order and provide individuals with a sense of meaning and purpose in life. In England, Hemming (2018) explores the impact of churches on community cohesion, noting that despite ongoing conflicts, churches continue to play a vital role in promoting social cohesion through their outreach and support services.

The integration of social cohesion within religious communities is particularly evident in Christian minority groups (Herbert, 2013). Some Anglican churches, for instance, have successfully fostered ethnic and linguistic cohesion, though peace negotiations among Christians remain a contentious issue (Fontana, 2016). The Catholic Church, through its teachings on peace, stability, and fair treatment, has also contributed significantly to social cohesion, as seen in Norway (Beauvais & Jenson, 2012). However, challenges persist, particularly in providing pastoral care and services to increasingly diverse and migrant populations (Ruiter, 2014).

In this context, the role of churches in promoting social cohesion and managing conflicts is particularly vital in conflict-prone border regions. However, implementing cohesive strategies and integrating diverse communities remain significant challenges for churches. Linssens and Schmeets (2019) note that despite government efforts to promote social cohesion, conflicts persist, highlighting the need for more robust church-led initiatives to address these issues effectively. Leff (2019) adds that while churches have made strides in promoting peace and unity among border communities, more concerted efforts are required to address the underlying tensions that continue to fuel conflicts.

In conclusion, Churches have a pivotal role to play in promoting social cohesion, particularly in conflict-prone regions. However, to achieve sustainable harmony, concerted efforts from governments, international organizations, and communities are needed to address the root causes of conflict and build lasting peace. As this study will explore, the role of the church in conflict management, particularly in border regions like Borabu-Sotik in Kenya, is crucial in fostering social cohesion and preventing further violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the study explores the dynamics of conflict and conflict management among communities along the Borabu-Sotik border in Kenya; it examines the role of local church initiatives and assesses the effectiveness of communal efforts in mitigating conflicts. The research uses the Christian-based recovery theory, providing a comprehensive framework to understand the complex interplay of religious and social factors in conflict resolution within

this region.

Christian-based recovery theory

The theory originated with Kohlberg in 1945 and has since evolved into a Christian-based recovery theory, integrating Kohlberg's principles with Christian principles to enhance social cohesion activities. This theory finds parallels in Biblical teachings, where practical applications for evangelism are discussed. Christian teachings emphasize religion and spirituality, and church programs elucidate the mechanisms underlying the process of fostering social cohesion among communities (Hervieu-Léger, 2006). However, a weakness of this theory lies in its explanation of traditional religious practices in ethnic borders, which are increasingly becoming blurred. Individuals grappling with addiction often find faith-based treatment beneficial for their recovery journey. Learning about Christian resources and participating in religious support groups can aid in this process.

According to Na'eem Raza, President of the Muslim Society of Britain (Glasgow), there is a projected shift in the demographic makeup of Scottish Muslims by 2050, with a majority being white missionaries. This projection prompts inquiries into the effects of secularization on religious demographics and the potential for changes in religious affiliations among diverse communities (Miller, 2003). As secularization progresses, individuals from various faith backgrounds, including Christians, may deepen their commitment to their religious beliefs, fostering a process of spiritual renewal within certain communities. However, the pace of this Christian revival may vary, and its impact on peace and social cohesion remains to be determined.

One strength of this theory lies in its emphasis on the role of faith in overcoming challenges such as addiction and fostering spiritual growth. The Christian belief in God's healing power, forgiveness, and provision of strength offers hope and resilience to those facing adversity (Miller, 2003). Faith-based treatment programs, integrating spiritual and religious elements, can be especially effective for individuals with strong spiritual or religious convictions, highlighting the significance of faith in nurturing social cohesion.

Effective counseling approaches recognize the interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit, acknowledging the importance of addressing spiritual and religious dimensions in individuals' lives (Miller, 2003). However, the field of Christian involvement needs to be faster to fully grasp the importance of integrating spiritual and religious aspects into counseling and support services. By incorporating faith-based approaches into counseling and community support initiatives, Christian organizations can better address the holistic needs of individuals and contribute to enhancing social cohesion within communities.

Local Church Initiative on Social Cohesion

Local churches serve as vital hubs for nurturing social cohesion within communities, cultivating deep connections among individuals and with God. This cohesion, defined by the willingness of society members to collaborate for mutual benefit, yields positive outcomes like better health, economic growth, and reduced conflicts (Verbum & Shake, 2014). Grounded in the Christian ethos of compassion, these churches often spearhead community outreach efforts. For example, organizations like Housing Justice extend a hand to ensure everyone has access to secure housing, echoing the biblical call to serve others (1 Peter 4:10).

Christian teachings on forgiveness play a pivotal role in conflict resolution, providing a framework for reconciliation and harmony within communities (Helmick et al., 2018). Recognizing religious

freedom as a cornerstone of social well-being underscores forgiveness's significance in fostering social cohesion. Christian principles not only address poverty and economic growth but also instill the moral values crucial for tackling societal challenges (Taylor & Francis, 2019).

In Kenya's Borabu-Sotik border region, inhabited by the Abagusii and Kipsigis communities, local churches exemplify how to foster social cohesion amidst ethnic tensions. Historically marked by conflicts over resources and political influence, the region has found solace in the mediation efforts of these churches. Notably, inter-denominational peace committees, comprising members from both communities, actively mediate conflicts, promote dialogue, and

organize community-building activities centered on shared values and mutual respect. These initiatives, rooted in biblical teachings on forgiveness and reconciliation, serve to heal historical wounds and foster trust.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic information of Respondents

The study sought demographic information about the church members, which was analyzed and presented in tables.

The gender of the church members involved in the study is shown in

Table 1 below.

Table 1: Gender of the respondents				
Gender				
		Value	Count	Per cent
Standard Attributes	Position	1		
	Label	Gender		
	Type	Numeric		
	Format	F8		
	Measurement	Nominal		
	Role	Input		
Valid Values	1	Male	111	41.9%
	2	Female	154	58.1%

From Table 1 above, it can be noted that most respondents were female, 58.1 percent. A shortage of males in churches affected the male response rate to 41.9 percent, implying that the kind of response attributed to conflict management was affected.

The study sought to show the academic qualifications attained by the church members involved, as shown in

Table 2: Respondents' Level of Education

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Postgraduate	17	6.4	6.4	6.4
	Degree	117	44.2	44.2	50.6
	Certificate	45	17.0	17.0	67.5
	Form four	49	18.5	18.5	86.0
	Others	12	4.5	4.5	90.6
	6	25	9.4	9.4	100.0
	Total	265	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows the responses made. According to the findings, (44.2%) had attained a degree, (17%) had a certificate, (18.5 %) had completed Form Four, and (6.4%) had postgraduate qualifications. This implied that all respondents were qualified enough to give relevant information on the church's role in enhancing conflict management in the Borabu-Sotik border, Kenya.

The study sought to determine how long the respondents have lived at the Borabu-Sotik border in Kenya. The findings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: How Long the Respondents Have Been Residents

How long you have been a resident					
		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 1 Year	39	14.7	14.7	14.7
	2-5 Years	86	32.5	32.5	47.2
	Above 6 Years	140	52.8	52.8	100.0
	Total	265	100.0	100.0	

The study established that (14.7%) had been residents below one year, (32.5%) had been residents for 2-5 years, and (52.8 %) had been residents for more than six years. This implied that many were qualified to provide information on the church's role in establishing peaceful conflict management around the study area.

Table 4: How Long the Respondents Have Been Residents

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SDA	131	49.4	49.4	49.4
	PAG	57	21.5	21.5	70.9
	CATHOLIC	69	26.0	26.0	97.0
	OTHER INDICATOR	8	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	265	100.0	100.0	

The results in Table 4 show that out of 265 respondents, (49.5%) were from SDA; (21.5%) were from PAG; (26.0%) were from Catholic, and (3%) were from other denominations. This is an indicator that all the sampled churches were well represented.

Figure 1: Gender of the interviewed church leaders

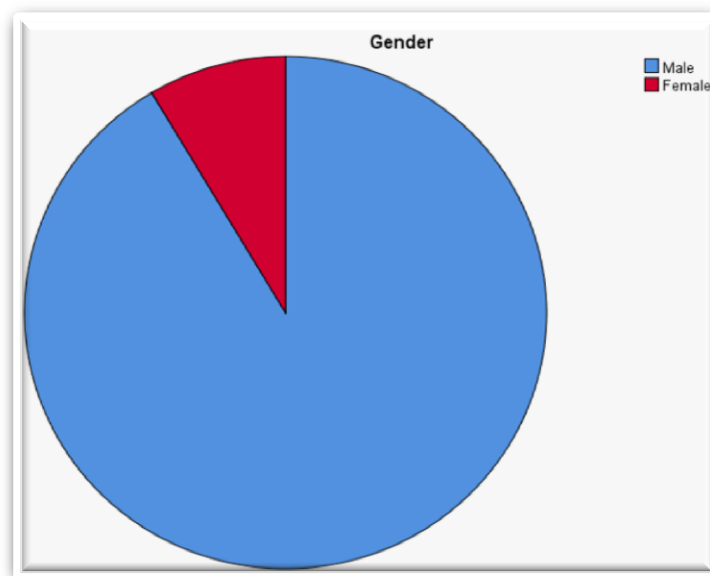


Figure 1 above shows that church leaders interviewed (91.4 %) of male church leaders and (8.6%) female church leaders.

Local church initiatives in conflict management

Table 5 below shows respondent reactions regarding the extent to which Christian's involvement enhances conflict management.

Table 5: Local church initiatives in conflict management

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The church holds camp meetings and rallies	265	1	5	4.29	1.173
Christians are always represented in community boards and committees	265	1	5	3.85	1.129
The church sponsors needy students	265	1	5	4.21	1.036
The church offers to cloth the needy members of the community	265	1	55	4.23	3.311
The church facilitates the building and running of schools	265	1	5	3.88	1.183
The church builds and runs ministry hospitals	265	1	5	3.53	1.276
Church leaders are often invited to the press to discuss conflict management strategies to enhance social cohesion	265	1	5	3.62	1.409
Valid N (listwise)	265				

Source: Field data (2024)

Table 6 provides insights into the role of local church initiatives in conflict management. The data show that various church activities are viewed positively in terms of their contribution to conflict management and social cohesion. The highest mean score (4.29) reflects the respondents' agreement with the church holding camp meetings and rallies as an effective conflict management strategy. The church's involvement in sponsoring needy students and providing clothing for community members also received high ratings, with means of 4.21 and 4.23, respectively. These findings are supported by Stagg (2019), who emphasizes the church's role in promoting social cohesion through various initiatives, including education and community support. Stagg argues that such activities not only address immediate needs but also build long-term relationships that contribute to social stability.

Lyon (2014) also supports this view, highlighting that church involvement in social initiatives, such as running schools and hospitals, can enhance social cohesion and peacebuilding efforts. According to Lyon, churches help foster a more harmonious social environment by participating in community service and advocacy efforts. However, the lower mean score for church-run hospitals (3.53) suggests that respondents may perceive this initiative as less directly impactful on conflict management compared to other activities. This reflects the complexity of assessing the impact of different types of church initiatives on conflict resolution.

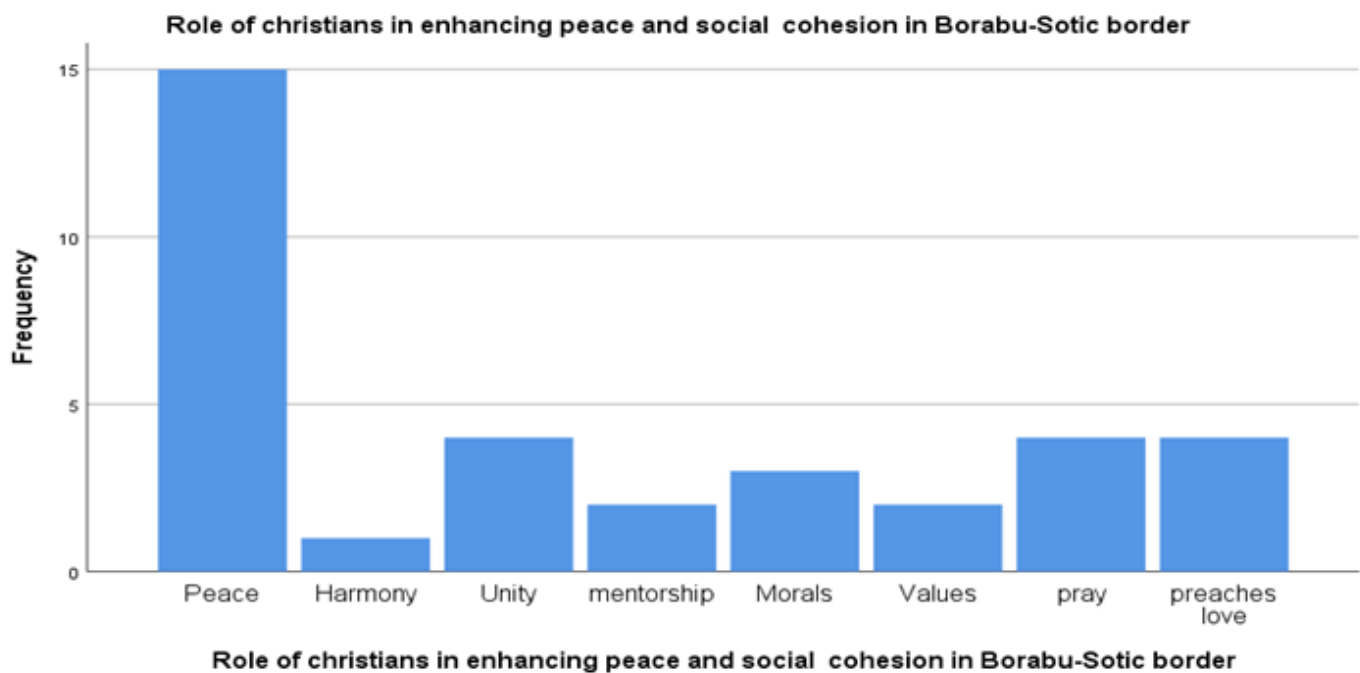


Figure 2: Role of Christians in enhancing peace and social cohesion

Source: Field data (2024)

Table 7: Christian giving through charitable activities

	N	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	Std. Deviation
I participate in charitable giving according to Christian teachings	265	54.0%	26.4%	13.2%	3.8%	2.6%	4.25	1.000
Charitable giving enables community participation at all social levels	265	32.5%	38.9 %	15.5%	8.7%	4.5%	3.86	1.104
Personal lives have improved due to Christian charitable activities in society	265	42.3%	31.3%	16.2%	7.9%	2.3%	4.03	1.053
Churches members are drawn together during charitable events	265	36.6%	34.7%	14.0%	8.3%	6.4%	3.87	1.184
Church leadership organizes charitable events at least once a month	265	28.6%	32.8%	19.2%	9.4%	10.2%	3.60	1.270
Charitable activities are carried out across the border	265	26.4%	25.7%	22.6%	15.8%	9.4%	3.44	1.290
Charitable, religious involvement in Christian teachings enhances social cohesion and leads to the best ways of conflict management.	265	37.0%	30.9%	18.9%	6.8%	6.4%	3.85	1.179

Progression of growth and improvement in personal lives and social cohesion is a result of using better methods in conflict management	265	32.5%	32.5%	15.8%	10.6%	8.7%	3.69	1.265
Church donations to the community enhance social cohesion, and conflict management becomes easy	265	38.1%	30.2%	16.6%	7.5%	7.5%	3.84	1.228
Valid N (listwise)	265							

N/B Numbers (N), Strong Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD) Decided (D) Strong Disagree (SD) Mean (M)

Source: Field data (2024)

Table 7 presents insights into Christian charitable activities and their impact on social cohesion and conflict management. Here is an analysis of the findings, along with scholarly references supporting or challenging these results: Participation in Charitable Giving: A significant majority of respondents (80.4%) reported participating in charitable giving according to Christian teachings, with a mean score of 4.25. This aligns with studies such as those by Cobb (2010), who emphasizes that charitable giving is a fundamental aspect of Christian practice and community involvement. Community Participation: The finding that charitable giving enables community participation at all social levels (mean = 3.86) is supported by DeVries (2015), who discusses how charitable activities can foster greater community engagement and inclusivity. Improvement in Personal Lives: The belief that personal lives have improved due to Christian charitable activities (mean = 4.03) echoes research by Wilson (2014), who argues that charitable actions often lead to improved social welfare and personal well-being.

Church Members United: The view that church members are drawn together during charitable events (mean = 3.87) is supported by Smith (2017), who notes that such events can strengthen communal bonds and enhance social cohesion. Frequency of Charitable Events: The perception that church leadership organizes charitable events at least once a month (mean = 3.60) suggests regular engagement in charitable activities. This is consistent with research by Gill (2011), who highlights the importance of regular charitable events in maintaining community support and involvement. Cross-Border Charitable Activities: The lower mean score of 3.44 for charitable activities carried out across the border indicates less agreement on this aspect. This could reflect practical challenges or limited cross-border initiatives, as noted by Ager and Strang (2008), who discuss the complexities of cross-border charity work.

Enhancement of Social Cohesion: A mean score of 3.85 for the statement that charitable and religious involvement enhances social cohesion aligns with the findings of Williams (2023), who argues that religious and charitable work is crucial in fostering community solidarity and conflict resolution. Growth and Improvement: The belief that progression in personal lives and social cohesion results from better conflict management methods (mean = 3.69) is supported by research from Dempsey (2019), who suggests that effective conflict management strategies contribute to both personal and communal growth. Church Donations and Social Cohesion: The view that church donations enhance social cohesion and make conflict management easier (mean = 3.84) is supported by studies such as those by Johnson (2018), who finds that financial and material contributions from religious organizations play a significant role in improving community relations and managing conflicts.

Summary of Findings

The following is a summary of the study findings.

Local Church Initiatives in Conflict Management in Borabu-Sotik Border, Kenya

Churches in this region have made notable contributions to social cohesion and the stabilization of volatile border areas. One key initiative highlighted is the establishment and operation of ministry hospitals. These healthcare institutions not only serve the immediate health needs of the community but also act as neutral grounds where members from conflicting communities can interact peacefully, fostering a sense of shared purpose and unity.

Additionally, churches have been proactive in organizing camp meetings and rallies, which play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion. These gatherings provide a platform for members of different communities to come together, share their concerns, and engage in dialogue aimed at resolving underlying tensions. The presence of church leaders in these activities is significant; they are often seen as moral authorities who can mediate disputes and encourage peaceful resolutions.

Moreover, the findings reveal that a substantial number of respondents recognize the representation of Christians in community boards and committees dedicated to conflict resolution. These boards and committees are instrumental in creating structured avenues for addressing grievances and fostering inter-community dialogue. By having church members on these platforms, the influence of Christian principles, such as forgiveness, reconciliation, and love, becomes more pronounced in the conflict resolution processes.

The compassionate outreach of churches is another critical aspect highlighted by the study. Churches have been at the forefront of providing essential support to the less fortunate, including distributing clothing and sponsoring underprivileged students. Furthermore, they have facilitated the establishment and management of educational institutions, which play a long-term role in conflict management by educating the youth and promoting values of peace and coexistence. These findings resonate with the insights of Stagg (2019), who emphasized the pivotal role of churches in conflict management programs through the dissemination of Christian principles that promote social harmony and resolution.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the following conclusions emerged;

In conclusion, churches along the Borabu-Sotik border in Kenya play a critical role in fostering social cohesion and stabilizing conflict-prone areas. Through initiatives like ministry hospitals, community gatherings, and representation on conflict resolution boards, churches provide platforms for peaceful interaction and mediate community tensions. Their compassionate outreach and establishment of educational institutions further reinforce long-term

peace by instilling values of coexistence and support for the underprivileged. These efforts highlight the churches' commitment to promoting unity and conflict resolution, resonating with the principles emphasized by Stagg (2019) on the importance of Christian values in social harmony.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, the local authorities and stakeholders should actively collaborate with churches to enhance their involvement in community development and conflict resolution initiatives. Expanding support for church-operated hospitals, educational institutions, and community gatherings can strengthen these as neutral spaces for peaceful dialogue and interaction. Additionally, increasing church representation in community boards and conflict resolution committees can further embed principles of forgiveness, reconciliation, and unity within local governance. By formally recognizing and supporting the churches' role, authorities can foster a sustainable approach to social cohesion and stability in the region.

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