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ASSESSMENT OF SUPPORT FROM USAID TOWARDS WOMEN'S PEACE BUILDING ACTIVITIES IN NAKURU COUNTY BETWEEN 1991 AND 2013

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Abstract

Conflict in Nakuru has been studied throughout the years. It has attracted the attention of several international and local scholars. However most studies have focused on general factors that have contributed to the conflict and few studies have looked at the role of International Non-Governmental Organizations in promoting women peace building activities. The main objective of this study was to examine the role of USAID in promoting women's peace building activities in Nakuru County – Kenya between 1991 and 2013. The study was based on the conflict and feminist theories and employed the descriptive research design in examining the role of the USAID in promoting women's peace building activities in the study location. Discourse analysis was used to analyze written and spoken information. Trend analysis was used where the researcher analyzed patterns of behavior and sequence of events narrated and identified common or repeated occurrences.

Introduction

In a world marred by conflict and violence, peace building is becoming increasingly important as a means of preventing continuing hostilities. The nature of international conflicts has been altered by influential changes taking place in international relations coupled with the end of the Cold War. The main threat to global peace and regional peace since the late 1980s has not come from major inter-states confrontations, but from another source: internal conflicts and conflicts occurring within the borders of states (Lifongo, 2012). Yilmaz, (2006) argues that internal conflicts often involve cultural and ethnic tensions, struggles for domestic power governance as well as tribal and religious rivalries. The African continent has been characterized by a number of internal conflicts, to the extent that about 60 per cent of the deaths from armed conflict have occurred in the region (Prah, 2004). In the recent past, countries in Africa have had numerous conflicts and presently the problem is far from being abated. The civil wars in countries such as Liberia, Sudan, Angola, Democratic republic of Congo, Somalia and Sierra Leone have all raised the problems of human rights violations, ethnicity, lack of respect for the rule of law and political corruption, as the root causes of these conflicts (Lifongo, 2012). These have caused untold suffering on the people and also taken a huge toll on the development of the continent. The conflicts have resulted in hundreds of thousands being killed and close to 10 million being made refugees (Shah, 2005). The horn of Africa, particularly the Great Lakes regions, have become locations for some of the deadliest and most protracted of these conflicts. Kenya has also been characterized by violent inter-ethnic and political conflicts over the last two decades. Governed by the Kenya African National Union (KANU) since its independence in 1963, Kenya enjoyed

relative political stability and prosperity until the late 1980s (Lund et al. 2001; Mkutu, 2001). Then, the consequences of single-party rule and the mismanagement of the economy became increasingly felt. Since the first multi-party elections in 1992, there has been a marked increase in violence – ethnic clashes, land and water conflicts, cattle rustling and criminality all over the country. It is estimated that between 1991 and 2000 several thousand Kenyans have died in political clashes alone, while some 400,000 people were displaced (Leonhardt et al., 2002). Actual gains in terms of democratic rights and economic progress have remained small and were largely offset by the consequences of violence and instability. The dominant conflict pattern in the more developed and fertile regions of Kenya, particularly the Rift Valley, and the Coast, have been politically motivated ethnic clashes. The fighting reached its apogee around the 1992 and 1997 multi-party elections and erupted after the 2007 general elections, commonly known as the 2007/2008 post-election violence (PEV). Internationally, the 2007/2008 PEV is known for its horrific atrocities such as the death of about 1,300 people, displacement of over 300,000 civilians and raping of women, which have since become the subject of the prosecution of Kenya's current head of state and his deputy at the International Criminal Court (ICC). In the wake of the numerous conflicts across the globe, the importance of women's engagement in peace processes has been recognized through numerous international institutions, resolutions and Member State commitments over the past decade (Ayo and Kavitha, 2010). In October 2000, the UN Security Council through Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 formally recognized the relationship between women, peace and security and the critical importance of women's participation as reflected in leadership, empowerment and decision-making. The Security Council further continued the participation theme in October 2009 with Resolution 1889, urging the international community:"to take further measures to improve women's participation during all stages of peace processes, particularly in conflict resolution, post conflict planning and peace building, including by enhancing their engagement in political and economic decision-making at early stages of the recovery process, through promoting women's leadership and capacity…supporting women's organizations and countering negative societal attitudes about women's capacity to participate equally"(United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1889, 2009). Various international organizations have been involved in peace building activities in Kenya's Rift Valley region since the advent of ethnic clashes in 1992(CCR-K,2008). However, their efforts in implementing the foregoing international Resolutions and commitment in relation to enhancing women's participation in peace building remains unaccountable due absence of documented empirical evidence. The lack of accountability structures for implementation of these international commitments continues to leave women with minimal support structures for their many important activities in peace building. Without women's meaningful participation in all aspects of the peace process, we will continue to see startlingly low numbers of women in leadership roles; women's rights will continue to be violated in conflict and post conflict situations; and impunity will continue to be the response to crimes of sexual violence (NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. 2009).Given the above analysis, it is important to examine the role of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO's) in promoting women's' participation not only at the national level but also at the local levels. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was established in 1961 by an executive order from President John F. Kennedy. The executive order joined several separate foreign assistance programs under a single agency. USAID is charged with furthering U.S. foreign policy, while assisting developing countries to create stability and improve their economic, health, and governance sectors. Throughout its five decades of existence the agency's development focus has evolved from "technical and capital assistance programs" in the 1960s; assistance in basic human needs in the 1970s; "stabilizing currencies and financial systems" in the 1980s; sustainability and democracy in the 1990s and in the 20th and 21st century, rebuilding after war (USAID, 2012). The agency does work at all stages during the conflict cycle - from

prevention to post - conflict peace building. Through cutting edge research, training and field support, USAID analyzes conflict dynamics and invests in peace building and reconciliation to build stability and public security in conflict-affected areas. The Agency seeks to strengthen moderate voices and rebuild ties between divided communities through "people-to-people" reconciliation programs and activities which bring together individuals of different ethnic, religious or political backgrounds from areas of civil conflict and war; trains development professionals in the skills necessary to integrate a peace building approach into conflict-affected environments and mainstreaming conflict sensitive programming into development assistance portfolio across sectors, including economic growth, democracy and governance, education, and health. To date, the USAID has supported over 135 peace building projects in 35 countries and awarded over $115 million in grants for "people-to-people" reconciliation programs and activities. USAID is investing in gender equality and female empowerment in crisis and conflict-affected countries to promote the rights and well-being of women and girls and to foster peaceful, resilient communities that can cope with adversity and pursue development gains. However, the role of USAID in promoting women's peace building activities in Kenya is not well understood since no known study has systematically investigated and documented the same.

Results and discussion

The USAID supports peace building through "people-to-people" reconciliation programs and activities which bring together individuals of different ethnic, religious or political backgrounds in conflict areas. These programs provide opportunities for adversaries to address issues, reconcile differences, promote greater understanding and mutual trust and work on common goals with regard to potential, ongoing, or recent conflict (USAID, 2015). As earlier indicated, USAID's contribution to women's peace building activities was not well known, at least among the study participants. However, since 2008 when the USAID's OTI began to support peace building programmes/activities in Kenya through funding of non-state actors, a number of activities that did not specifically target women but which had gender mainstreamed into their execution seem to have contributed to women's peace building efforts. Among the organizations whose activities were funded under USAID's OTI is the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC), whose programmes are implemented in Nakuru County by the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru.

According to a male key informant who worked for a local peace-building organization, to address the political context and enable local actors to more fully exercise their capacity to manage instability and promote recovery from the 2007 – 2008 election-related violence, USAID's – KTI activities were designed to among other things, support grassroots advocacy campaigns to foster peace, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence among members of different ethnic communities, mobilize the public and key change agents to promote alternative voices and support peace-building and enhance livelihoods opportunities for youth, many of whom are unemployed and easy targets for ethnicity–based manipulation by politicians. These views were supported by female FGD participants in Nakuru town who indicated that the initiative had enhanced the participation of female youth in peace building activities in the country thus magnifying the role of women at large in peace building activities.

According to FGD participants whose views were largely supported by the key informant peace builders and well as male key informants, during 2007-2008 post election violence women in Nakuru County, as mothers, acted as peace builders by teaching their children and talking to their husbands about learning to live peacefully with their neighbors. They demonstrated this by helping children from the warring communities who needed refuge, food and clothing. This showed that their nurturing role is part of their natural duty and it makes them love peace so as to create an enabling environment to take care of their children well. Priorities of women in peace building in post conflict situations are very elaborate: provision of basic security, repatriation of

displaced people, recovery of property and livelihoods, and support to women's economic activities (Klot, 2007).

Recognizing that criminal acts have a potential of escalating into conflicts between the tribes, most Women Peace Groups in Nakuru County created permanent Rapid Response teams. As found in Nakuru Town, this team drew its members from women, youths, the district security committee and elders. Their mandate was to "listen continuously and act immediately" in potentially volatile situations. After an incident is reported to them, they visit the place where the crime has occurred, secure evidence, meet with all sides involved, and act appropriately. Actions might include mediation, reporting to security forces, or facilitating the arrest of the perpetrator of a crime. The issue may also be referred to a subcommittee. For instance, the Rapid Response Team calls upon the Women for Peace subcommittee to deal with matters concerning women.

Education security campaigns targeting the various groups, particularly government officials were also organized within the major Towns within the area. This was mostly done by the NGOs such as the NCCK, LEAP *II (*Mercy Corps), save the children, World Vision and the Kenya Red Cross. Each workshop identified the next target group depending on whom the participant viewed as requiring exposure to civic education. Chiefs and sub-chiefs with leadership training were among the beneficiaries of these workshops. Their training focused particularly on the repealed Chief's Act and the exercise of authority within a multiparty framework. These helped them appreciate the changing political landscape and the need to.

Women from the sides of the conflict managed to come together to share their common experience of suffering and to foster healing and reconciliation in the County. For example, *Rural Women Peace Link* (a well informed gender sensitive society that values and practices peace, promote coexistence and a culture where women's contribution matter and make an impact) began education all women on peace issues regardless of their tribal background. Through this organization, women realized that each side experienced similar suffering and this consciousness of their shared pain helped them to develop an understanding of each other

The Rift Valley Local Empowerment for Peace funded by the USAID is a peace building and reconstruction program that began in 2009 in the wake of post-election violence in 2007-2008. The program works to bridge interethnic divisions and prevent violence from recurring. Rift Valley Local Empowerment for Peace works with youth to enhance their economic opportunities, strengthen local mechanisms and skills for conflict management, and promote social connections among youth across ethnic and other lines of division. Rift Valley Local Empowerment for Peace strengthens the capacity of local actors and institutions in targeted counties to develop and advance sustainable peace, reconciliation and norms of nonviolence based on justice, accountability and equality. Focusing primarily on expanding and deepening inclusive peace networks that foster dialogue and reconciliation, the program utilizes local and village peace committees to increase knowledge and amplify peace messages.

Youth Mentoring & Income Generating Activities - Over 700 hundred youth are participating in income generating activities, 481 of whom have completed leadership, consensus building and economic skills building training. The mentorship of youth groups by the program's Youth Development Committees has been very successful, particularly in empowering female youth. For many years women have been underrepresented in leadership roles in their communities, but now, women in Nakuru, particularly Molo who have been mentored themselves are now mentoring others.

Kenya is a priority country in the United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. The Plan advances women's participation in making and keeping peace. In line with these goals, USAID is working with the Government of Kenya to galvanize national commitments and actions that: Strengthen women's participation and protection in the peace-building process; Promote women's roles in conflict prevention; and Address the distinct needs of women during and after conflict. USAID supports the many roles women play as peace-

builders. In 2013, over 2.3 million women took part in peace-building and reconciliation events. Women built bridges across ethnic lines; acted as mediators to foster compromise; and helped other women cope with trauma. Overall, their contribution was critical to a peaceful 2013 election season.

Today, Kenya is in the midst of transitioning to a new system of governance. Devolution, or the shifting of certain powers and resources from the national to the county level, creates opportunities for women in leadership. USAID will help women creatively use this space and establish themselves as full and equal partners in the promotion of a peaceful society. The activities include promoting the participation of women in peace committees nationwide; equipping women leaders with practical skills and tools to design, implement and influence peace-building processes; helping communities better understand how women are harmed by conflict; and ensuring women's needs are considered in peace and reconciliation processes.

A USAID-supported broadcasting project of the popular radio drama *Gutuka* throughout Kenya was another innovative project that supported women's peace building activities. The project was launched by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and was produced with the support of USAID as part of a joint venture entitled Peace Initiative Kenya. *Gutuka* – meaning "awaken" in Swahili – aired both before and after the March 4th elections and aimed to disseminate messages of peace, specifically encouraging women to actively participate in the promotion of a peaceful society. This gender-specific approach to conflict prevention was novel in Kenya, as few initiatives between 2007 and 2013 explicitly acknowledged the specific contributions which women and girls stand to make, as well the particular risks that females are faced with in conflict.

The Institute for Peace and Transitions is working for local target groups such as provincial administration, local professionals, community leaders, women and youth as well as other local organizations. These target groups show that IPT is working with leaders in one or the other way to reach a wider range of people to assure a peaceful and respectful society, to stretch out to rural places and to promote peace all around Nakuru area. The projects that they support and conduct are based on values like respect for all, empowerment of women and other oppressed groups, accountability, openness and partnership between different tribes and social groups. But here it is important to mention that since they are such a small NGO they depend on donations and support by bigger Organizations. They cooperate with USAID, World Vision and other NGO's, who support them technically, financially and with the knowledge they got from their own projects.

Conclusion

Kenya as a country is strategically important to U.S. national interests. Given the window of opportunity to support peace building and increase the chances of a successful transition during the post election violence of 2008 as well as ensure smooth transition during the 2013 elections, the USAID through its Office for Transition Initiatives funded various peace building activities in the country particularly Nakuru county which had suffered the ills of ethnic violence that started around 1991 culminating in the post-election violence of 2008. Thus, the factors that influenced the USAID – OTI to support peace building activities the USAID-Kenya Transition Initiatives in 2008 included the national elections in March 2013 which raised concerns of the election violence and mass displacement that had been witnessed in after three out of the previous four national elections; the ICC trials of four Kenyans charged with crimes against humanity for their involvement in the 2007 post-election violence that threatened to exacerbate ethnic tensions and the challenges facing the effective and efficient implementation of the provisions of the 2012 Constitutional Referendum. Traditional peace building focuses on four main areas: security, governance, relief and development and reconciliation. However, developments in these need to make room for women, as demonstrated drawing from the Nakuru case study. Women worked to make known their needs and concerns regarding security,

governance, relief and development and reconciliation in Nakuru County. They also responded to their own needs during times of conflict, peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction, and in many instances worked to ensure the needs of other communities were addressed as well. Specifically, women's groups and organizations worked to demystify gender-specific violence, challenged impunity, demanded justice, organized collectively to make their demands and concerns known in the political arena, played a pivotal role in health delivery and relief efforts, spearheaded reconstruction and development initiatives, and both supported and contributed to post-violence reconciliation. Kenya is a priority country in the United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. The Plan advances women's participation in making and keeping peace. In line with these goals, USAID is working with the Government of Kenya to galvanize national commitments and actions that: Strengthen women's participation and protection in the peace-building process; Promote women's roles in conflict prevention; and Address the distinct needs of women during and after conflict. USAID supports the many roles women play as peace-builders. In 2013, over 2.3 million women took part in peace-building and reconciliation events. Women built bridges across ethnic lines; acted as mediators to foster compromise; and helped other women cope with trauma. Overall, their contribution courtesy of USAID's support was critical to a peaceful 2013 election season.

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