

Church Strategies in Conflict Management Among Communities Bordering the Borabu-Sotik Border in Kenya

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Abstract

Cross-border conflicts remain a persistent global challenge, with recent ethnic and communal tensions significantly affecting African regions such as Kenya. Despite initiatives by governments and NGOs to promote peace and implement preventive measures, conflicts persist, particularly along the Borabu-Sotik border, where disputes between local communities have escalated. This research adopts a qualitative approach and descriptive statistics, concentrating on churches in the Borabu-Sotik border area, including SDA, PAG, and Catholic congregations, with a target population of 7,738 participants. This study explores the potential of church strategies in managing conflicts, emphasising how local community efforts can foster regional peace and stability. It highlights the limitations of existing conflict management strategies and examines the possibility of communal actions playing a more significant role in resolving these disputes. The primary objective of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of communal initiatives in conflict management among the communities residing along the Borabu-Sotik border. The research utilised purposive and simple random sampling techniques to determine a sample size of 392 participants, which included 35 church leaders and 357 church members. Proportionate sampling methods were applied to classify the sample based on church affiliations. Stratified random sampling was employed to choose the respondents, who were then provided with questionnaires. Data collection instruments consisted of interview schedules for church leaders, questionnaires for church members, focus group discussions, and a checklist. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations, were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Keywords: Communal, Communal Initiatives, Conflict Management, Peace and Stability

Introduction

In the verdant highlands straddling Kenya's Borabu (Kisii County) and Sotik (Bomet County) regions, a history of ethnic tensions between the Gusii and Kipsigis communities has often flared into violent conflict. Rooted in land disputes, political incitement, and resource competition, these clashes have disrupted livelihoods and deepened mistrust. Local churches, leveraging their moral authority and community trust, have become pivotal actors in conflict resolution. This article explores the innovative strategies employed by religious institutions to foster peace along this volatile border. According to Wrong (2019), contemporary philosophical and sociological debates have identified social cohesion as a key challenge to maintaining social order.

In this context, churches and religious organisations have become key players in fostering social cohesion and mitigating conflicts. Churches, in particular, contribute significantly by promoting love, strengthening community ties, and encouraging peaceful coexistence. Cox, Orsborn, and Sisk (2014) emphasise the global influence of churches in enhancing social cohesion through their teachings and community initiatives. Similarly, Rizwan (2023) argues that religion can be a powerful force in strengthening social interactions and unity, as shared practices like prayer and worship help maintain social order while giving individuals a sense of purpose and belonging.

In England, Wafula (2014) examines the role of churches in promoting community cohesion, highlighting their continued importance in outreach and support services despite persistent conflicts. The connection between social cohesion and religious communities is particularly evident among Christian minority groups (Mbangu, 2017). For example, some Anglican churches have successfully nurtured ethnic and linguistic unity, although peace negotiations among Christians remain complex (Novy, Swiatek, & Moulaert, 2012). The Catholic Church has also played a vital role in strengthening social cohesion through its teachings on peace, stability, and justice, as seen in Norway (Beauvais & Jenson, 2012). However, challenges persist, especially in providing pastoral care and services to increasingly diverse and migrant populations (Doehring, 2014).

The issue of social cohesion extends beyond the Western world. It has been a longstanding concern in Britain, as cultural and ethnic diversity has sometimes hindered societal interactions (Laurence, 2011). Likewise, the Netherlands has witnessed a decline in social trust, prompting policymakers to prioritise social cohesion (Novy, Swiatek, & Moulaert, 2012). In Asia, ethnic conflicts pose a significant obstacle to social cohesion, driven by economic, political, and social factors. Similarly, Australia's multicultural society presents distinct challenges, particularly regarding religious and ethnic integration (Jupp et al., 2007). Despite these difficulties, the church remains a powerful institution capable of fostering trust, equality, and mutual understanding among diverse groups, ultimately strengthening social cohesion (Kesler & Bloemraad, 2010).

In conclusion, social cohesion remains a critical global issue, with communities facing increasing disconnection from traditional institutions. Churches and religious organisations have emerged as essential actors in addressing this challenge by fostering unity, promoting peaceful coexistence, and supporting diverse communities. While religious institutions have significantly enhanced social cohesion across different regions, challenges persist, particularly in multicultural and migrant contexts. Nevertheless, the

potential of churches to build trust, encourage social integration, and bridge divisions highlights their enduring relevance in strengthening societal bonds.

Literature Review

Ethnic conflicts, such as those along Kenya's Borabu-Sotik border, have long been a focus of scholarly inquiry, particularly regarding the intersection of resource competition, historical grievances, and identity politics. Existing literature underscores the pivotal role of non-state actors, including faith-based organisations, in mitigating such disputes. Studies by scholars like Coward (2004) and Flanigan (2013) highlight religion's dual potential to exacerbate or resolve conflicts, emphasising the importance of grassroots peacebuilding rooted in moral authority and communal trust. Within the African context, works by Ongaki (2016) explore how churches leverage social capital to mediate disputes, promote reconciliation, and advocate for justice. However, localised analyses of church-led strategies in hyper-specific conflict zones, such as the Gusii-Kipsigis borderlands, remain sparse. This review synthesises existing research on faith-based conflict management, situating the Borabu-Sotik case within broader debates about religion's capacity to foster social cohesion. It identifies gaps in the literature on culturally adaptive peace frameworks and evaluates how churches navigate political, economic, and ethnic complexities to sustain fragile truces. By bridging theoretical insights and empirical findings, this review aims to contextualise the innovative strategies employed by Borabu-Sotik's religious institutions and their implications for conflict resolution theory.

Church Strategies on Mitigation of Conflicts

The church has employed several strategies to mitigate conflicts, but this study will focus more on Christian giving through charitable and Interdenominational activities.

Promoting Interfaith Dialogue and Collaboration

Promoting interfaith dialogue and collaboration is a strategic approach that harnesses the power of religion to foster understanding and reconciliation among conflicting groups. Facilitating partnerships between different religious communities enables the church to play a pivotal role in addressing shared concerns and bridging divides. Skura (2024) highlighted the transformative potential of interfaith initiatives in promoting peace and trust among conflicting groups. These initiatives provide a platform for dialogue, where members of diverse religious backgrounds can explore common ground and seek solutions to shared challenges.

In the Borabu-Sotik border region, where tensions between Abagusii and Kipsigis Christians may be high, interfaith dialogue offers a valuable opportunity for building mutual respect and understanding. Joint prayer sessions and peace forums organised by churches serve as platforms for members of both communities to engage in constructive dialogue, fostering empathy and reconciliation. Additionally, interfaith collaboration amplifies the voices of religious leaders advocating for peace and reconciliation. By working together, clergy from different backgrounds leverage their moral authority to promote messages of tolerance, forgiveness, and coexistence (Verbum and Tshaka, 2014).

However, the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue depends on various factors, including the willingness of conflicting parties to engage genuinely and the presence of conducive environments for peaceful

interaction. Moreover, while interfaith initiatives can foster grassroots understanding, sustainable peace requires broader structural changes addressing underlying grievances and inequalities (Verbum and Tshaka, 2014).

In evaluating the strategic importance of promoting interfaith dialogue and collaboration, it's essential to recognise potential limitations and challenges. Despite its transformative potential, interfaith dialogue alone may not suffice to address deep-seated conflicts rooted in political, economic, and social factors (Doehring, 2014). Scholars and practitioners emphasise complementing dialogue efforts with broader peacebuilding interventions, such as inclusive governance, economic development, and social justice initiatives. By addressing structural drivers of conflict and promoting interfaith dialogue, the church can build sustainable peace and reconciliation in the Borabu-Sotik border region and beyond (Wafula, 2014).

In conclusion, promoting interfaith dialogue and collaboration strategically leverages the moral authority of the church to foster understanding and reconciliation among conflicting groups (Wafula, 2014). While interfaith initiatives offer valuable opportunities for bridging divides, their effectiveness hinges on addressing broader structural factors perpetuating conflict. The church can play a transformative role in promoting sustainable peace and reconciliation in diverse communities by complementing dialogue efforts with comprehensive peacebuilding interventions.

While the potential of interfaith dialogue to promote peace and trust is well-documented, empirical evidence on its specific effectiveness in regions like the Borabu-Sotik border, where the Abagusii and Kipsigis Christians conflict, remains limited. This study will provide empirical data on the outcomes of interfaith dialogue initiatives in the Borabu-Sotik region, assessing their impact on reducing tensions and fostering mutual understanding between conflicting groups.

Advocating for Justice and Reconciliation

Advocating for justice and reconciliation is a strategic imperative for the church in conflict management. It addresses the root causes of conflict and promotes healing and accountability. Drawing upon biblical principles of forgiveness and restoration, the church can play a vital role in fostering peace and reconciliation among conflicting groups (Wafula, 2014).

Wafula (2014) highlights the significant role of churches in Kenya in advocating for truth and reconciliation commissions to address historical grievances and promote national healing. These commissions provide a platform for acknowledging past injustices, fostering accountability, and promoting reconciliation. In the Borabu-Sotik border region, churches have similarly facilitated dialogues between Abagusii and Kipsigis Christians, advocating for inclusive and transparent conflict resolution processes.

Additionally, the church's commitment to justice and reconciliation transcends formal channels, encompassing grassroots endeavours to tackle grievances and foster healing within communities (Verbum and Shake E., 2014). By facilitating dialogues and providing spaces for reflection, churches enable individuals to share experiences, seek forgiveness, and mend relationships fractured by strife. However, the efficacy of the church's advocacy hinges on its adeptness in navigating intricate socio-political dynamics and engaging conflicting parties in a manner that nurtures trust and inclusivity. Furthermore, to sustain the drive for reconciliation, continual dedication and investment in forging enduring peace at the community

level are imperative (Wafula, 2014). To bolster the effectiveness of its advocacy, the church can forge partnerships with civil society groups, governmental bodies, and international stakeholders to magnify its influence and instigate systemic changes. Moreover, by investing in grassroots peacebuilding initiatives and capacity-building endeavours, communities can be empowered to spearhead their reconciliation processes and cultivate sustainable peace organically (Fairey, 2017).

In conclusion, championing justice and reconciliation is a strategic priority for the church in conflict resolution. It addresses the underlying triggers of discord while promoting healing and accountability. By anchoring actions in biblical principles and engaging with conflicting factions, the church is pivotal in nurturing peace and reconciliation within communities. Through persistent advocacy and grassroots interventions, the church contributes to forming resilient and unified communities capable of resolving conflicts peacefully.

Providing Humanitarian Assistance and Support

Providing humanitarian assistance and support is a strategic imperative for the church in conflict management, as it addresses the immediate needs of communities affected by violence while fostering resilience and solidarity. Churches exemplify compassion towards vulnerable populations by offering food aid, healthcare services, and psychosocial support initiatives, fostering a sense of community and belonging. These efforts are crucial in conflict-affected regions, addressing not only physical needs but also providing emotional and practical assistance to those grappling with violence in the aftermath. In the Borabu-Sotik border region, churches have set up relief programs and counselling services, serving as a lifeline for displaced families and trauma survivors.

Furthermore, churches go beyond immediate relief, investing in long-term initiatives to promote resilience and recovery. By empowering individuals and communities, they contribute to sustainable progress (Lawson, 2005). However, the success of these efforts hinges on factors like resource accessibility, coordination, and security. Recognising the strategic importance of humanitarian aid, it's evident that churches play a pivotal role in alleviating suffering and upholding human dignity in conflict zones. Strengthening partnerships with local entities, governments, and international donors can enhance the effectiveness of these endeavours. Additionally, investing in capacity-building and community-led programs empowers affected regions to chart their recovery path.

In conclusion, humanitarian assistance is integral to the church's conflict management strategy. By extending compassion and solidarity to vulnerable populations, the church alleviates suffering and instills hope in affected areas. Continued collaboration and stakeholder engagement ensure the church is influential in promoting peace and recovery worldwide.

Facilitating Conflict Transformation and Peace Education

Facilitating conflict transformation and peace education is a strategic approach that empowers individuals and communities to address conflicts peacefully and promote reconciliation. By providing training programs and workshops on nonviolent communication, conflict resolution skills, and reconciliation techniques, the church equips its members with the tools and resources needed for constructive engagement (Kraybill, 2015).

Kraybill (2015) emphasises the effectiveness of peace education initiatives in fostering sustainable peace and preventing violence in diverse contexts. These initiatives create opportunities for individuals to learn about conflict resolution strategies, develop empathy and understanding toward others, and explore pathways to reconciliation. In the Borabu-Sotik border region, churches organise peacebuilding workshops and seminars, engaging community leaders, youth, and women in dialogue and capacity-building activities aimed at fostering understanding and reconciliation.

In conclusion, facilitating conflict transformation and peace education is a strategic approach that empowers individuals and communities to address conflicts peacefully and promote reconciliation. By providing training programs and workshops on nonviolent communication and conflict resolution skills, the church equips its members with the tools needed to build resilient and cohesive communities capable of resolving disputes through dialogue and cooperation Kraybill (2015). Through sustained engagement and collaboration with other stakeholders, the church can continue to make a meaningful impact in promoting peace and reconciliation in diverse communities affected by conflict.

Engaging in Mediation and Reconciliation Process

Engaging in mediation and reconciliation processes harnesses the moral authority and teachings of the church to resolve conflicts and foster social cohesion. Church leaders, acting as mediators and reconcilers, facilitate dialogue and negotiation between conflicting parties, promoting mutual understanding and forgiveness (Lederach & Appleby, 2010).

Lederach and Appleby (2010) underscore the significance of church-mediated reconciliation in Africa, drawing upon biblical principles of peacemaking and forgiveness. In the Borabu-Sotik border region, churches have played a pivotal role in mediating disputes between Abagusii and Kipsigis Christians, organising reconciliation meetings and arbitration sessions to address grievances and restore harmony within the community.

The church's involvement in mediation is instrumental in promoting peace and reconciliation within diverse communities affected by conflict. While its mediating role is recognised, detailed case studies on church-led mediation processes' mechanics and long-term impact are lacking. By documenting and analysing church-mediated reconciliation efforts in the Borabu-Sotik border region, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of their dynamics and efficacy.

Results and Discussions

Demographic information of Respondents

The study sought demographic information about the church members, which was analysed 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

| | | 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 per cent. A shortage of males in churches affected the male response rate to 41.9 per cent, implying that the kind of response attributed to conflict management was concerned.

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.

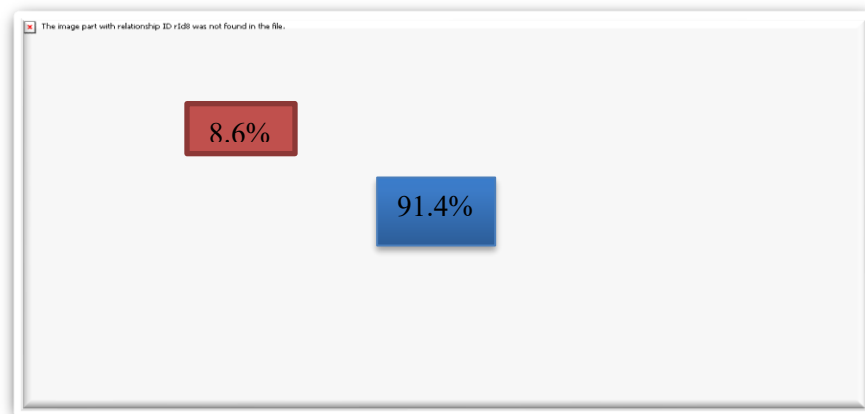


Figure 1: Gender of the interviewed church leaders

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

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 5 provides insights into the role of local church initiatives in conflict management. The data show that various church activities are viewed positively regarding 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 emphasises the church's role in promoting social cohesion through various initiatives, including education and community support. Stagg argues that such activities address immediate needs and 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 church initiatives on conflict resolution.

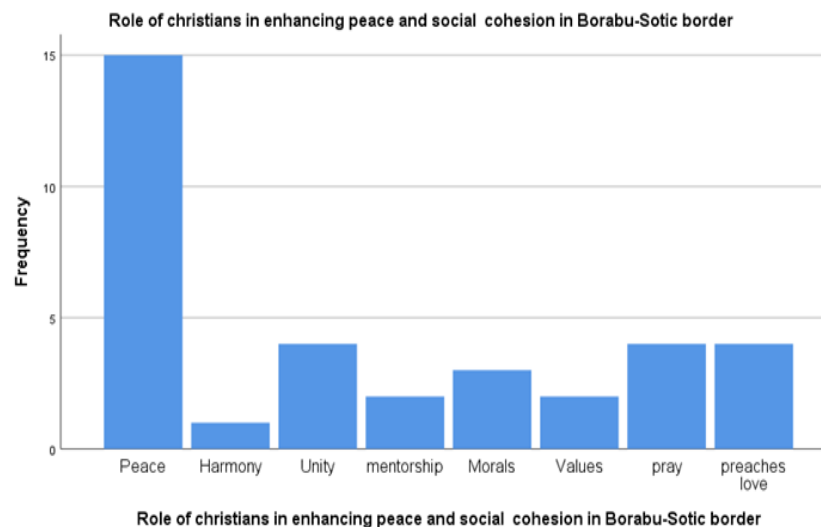


Figure 2: Role of Christians in enhancing peace and social cohesion

Source: Field data (2024)

Table 6: 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 organises 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 6 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 emphasises 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 organises charitable events at least once a month (mean = 3.60) suggests regular engagement in philanthropic 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 philanthropic activities across the border indicates less agreement on this aspect. This could reflect practical challenges or limited cross-border initiatives, as Ager and Strang (2008) noted, 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 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 organisations play a significant role in improving community relations and managing conflicts.

Summary of Findings

The following is a summary of the study findings.

Church Strategies in Conflict Management along the Borabu-Sotik Border, Kenya

The study also highlighted churches' proactive role in managing and mitigating regional conflicts. A higher percentage of Christians are actively involved in charitable giving, which has proven to be an effective strategy for fostering community involvement across various social spheres. This is supported by (71.4%) of respondents who agreed that such charitable activities, often spearheaded by church leaders, draw members from diverse backgrounds and positively impact individual lives. These initiatives provide material support and create opportunities for dialogue and interaction among community members, thereby reducing tensions.

Churches have been instrumental in organising charitable events beyond their local communities, as indicated by (67.9%) of respondents. These events foster social cohesion by bringing together individuals from different communities and backgrounds, promoting unity and shared purpose. This finding aligns with previous research by Babin, Carr, and Griffin (2012), underscoring the role of church donations and

charitable activities in promoting social cohesion and conflict resolution. These activities help bridge divides, create common ground, and reinforce the church's role as a mediator and peacemaker in conflict-prone areas.

The study demonstrates that while numerous underlying causes of conflict exist in the Borabu-Sotik border region, churches play a crucial role in managing these conflicts through various strategies, particularly charitable giving and community engagement. However, the findings suggest that churches can enhance their conflict mediation efforts, particularly in addressing religious differences and fostering inter-community dialogue.

Conclusions

The Borabu-Sotik border region exemplifies the transformative potential of faith-based strategies in mitigating ethnic conflicts. Churches have employed multifaceted approaches—interfaith dialogue, justice advocacy, humanitarian aid, peace education, and mediation—to address immediate and structural conflict drivers. Churches foster reconciliation, bridge divides, and empower communities by leveraging their moral authority. However, while these strategies demonstrate promise, gaps persist in localised empirical evidence and long-term evaluations of church-led mediation outcomes. Existing studies, such as those by Lederach and Appleby (2010), underscore the value of grassroots peacebuilding, yet challenges remain in sustaining peace amid political manipulation and resource inequities. The dual role of religion—as both a catalyst for unity and a potential divider—highlights the need for culturally adaptive frameworks that integrate spiritual and socio-economic interventions.

Recommendations

Strengthened Interfaith and Cross-Sector Partnerships. To amplify their impact, churches must prioritise collaboration with NGOs, government agencies, and international donors, fostering cross-sector alliances that address shared challenges. Joint initiatives, such as cooperative water projects or community resource management programs, can mitigate competition over scarce resources while building trust between divided groups. **Integrating Dialogue with Structural Reforms** is equally critical; interfaith efforts should be complemented by systemic advocacy for equitable land policies and inclusive governance to dismantle the root causes of conflict, such as historical land grievances. **Capacity Building** remains essential—training clergy and lay leaders in advanced conflict-resolution techniques, and trauma-informed care will enhance their mediation skills and cultural sensitivity. **Expanding Peace Education** through scaled-up workshops on nonviolent communication, mainly targeting youth and women as catalysts for change, can empower communities to resolve disputes constructively. **Conducting Longitudinal Studies** to evaluate the long-term efficacy of church-led strategies in hyper-local contexts like Borabu-Sotik will refine best practices and ensure interventions remain adaptive.

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