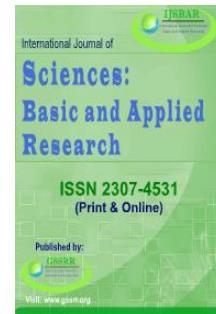




International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research (IJSBAR)

ISSN 2307-4531
(Print & Online)

<http://gssrr.org/index.php?journal=JournalOfBasicAndApplied>



The Role of Mobile Phone Peace Platforms in Conflict Management: The Case of Mount Elgon Sub County of Bungoma County, Kenya. 2007-2017

Winnifred Mwikali*

*PhD student at the School of Arts & Social Sciences - Moi University
P.O. Box 3900, Eldoret-30100
Email: winmwix@gmail.com*

Abstract

Kenya has undergone a remarkable information and communications technology (ICT) revolution. The introduction of mobile phones has radically transformed political landscapes around the world by creating platforms for civic engagement and connecting citizens, political class, international and domestic observers, militia and political. This has mainly been witnessed in Mt Elgon Sub County of Bungoma County where mobile phones have been used successfully to engage the residents in conflict prevention platforms. Thus, the objective of this study was to examine the role played by mobile phone platforms in enhancing peace in Mount Elgon Sub County of Bungoma County between the period 2007 to 2017. The theoretical framework was based on the social conflict theory based on the Marxist-based social theory which argues that individuals and groups within society have differing amounts of material and non-material resources and that the more powerful groups use their power in order to exploit groups with less power. The study targeted all the residents of Mt Elgon Sub County of Bungoma County. Simple random and purposive sampling methods were used to select the respondents. Questionnaire and interview schedules were used to collect both primary and secondary data. Quantitative data was analyzed using charts, frequencies and percentages while quantitative data was analysed in narration form. Quantitative data was used to support the qualitative data. It was established that most of the residents received at least one political message, voice calls and social media messages between the years 2007 and 2017.

* Corresponding author.

The most frequently shared messages among the residents were conflict escalation updates, Peace advocating messages, Voter education messages and Messages advocating for peace. Other messages shared were; Messages that restricted movement. The mobile phone platform was the most commonly used form of spreading peace messages from one person to the next. Recommendations were therefore made that the Ministry of Information and Communication encourages the uptake of mobile telephony platform as it was found to be an effective tool of reaching very many people within a short time. It is expected that the results of this study will contribute to the growing literature on conflict and conflict resolution.

Keywords: Conflict; Conflict Management; Mobile Phones; Mt Elgon; Peace Platforms

1. Introduction

[1] argues that modern ethnicities of Africa originate in the colonial period. He however notes that they are both clearly derived from the character of pre-colonial societies and profoundly influenced in form, scope and content by the social, economic, cultural and political forces of colonialism.

A report by [2] indicates that Kenya has a long history of conflict and violence right from the time it attained independence in 1963. The report finds that between 1963 and 1978, President Jomo Kenyatta presided over a government that was responsible for numerous gross violations of human rights. These violations included the Shifita War, killings, torture, collective punishment and denial of basic needs, political assassinations of Pio Gama Pinto, Tom Mboya and J.M. Kariuki, arbitrary detention of political opponents and activists and illegal and irregular acquisition of land by the highest government officials and their political allies.

In 1982, Kenya's military attempted to overthrow Mr. Daniel Arap Moi. Raila Odinga is among those implicated in the coup attempt, and he spent most of the next decade in prison. Following the coup attempt, the Moi regime amended the Constitution and subsequently Kenya officially became a one-party state. Police and security forces dispersed demonstrations against this move forcefully. The Waki report says that it is only after intense donor-pressure did Moi allow multi-party elections to be held in 1992. The election campaign, the election itself and its immediate aftermath as reported by [3] were characterized by threats, harassments and the occurrence of violent clashes between supporters for different parties, claiming the lives of around 1,500 Kenyans and displacing more than 300, 000.

The focus of the study was Mount Elgon Sub County of Bungoma County. The Sub County has been inflicted by perennial conflict for a long time. The main cause of Mt. Elgon conflict centers on land. Other factors like cattle rustling and power struggle among clan members inhabiting this region also play a significant role. Land in this Sub County is a source of inter-ethnic tension. [4] observes that the conflict is particularly rampant in the Chepyuk area where conflict arises over access to arable land. The government efforts to settle the land issue has proved to be futile as the formation of settlement schemes which was made to settle land disputes was marred by massive irregularities especially political interference and corruption of government officials and land officials causing many bona fide members to miss land allocation. As such, the conflict has affected people's livelihoods negatively. Where conflicts have occurred, solutions have been sought for. The Mt. Elgon Sub-County has not

been left behind. Studies of different nature and objectives have been done with the main aim of finding solutions to ending the undesired results of the conflicts. This study has taken cognizance of the efforts made by the different scholars. At the same time, it sought to contribute to the existing recommendations and other solutions that can be applied to avert explosive conflicts in the area of study. Thus, this study examined the role of mobile phones in resolving conflicts in the study area with the aim of generating mechanisms to bring long term and sustainable peace building in the constituency.[5] has argued that in recent years, mobile phones have drawn tremendous interest from the conflict management community, he observes that in the run-up for the general elections in Kenya 2013, mobile solutions were widely deployed: Political campaigns using mass SMS broadcasts, ringtones and automated calls, SMS application to act as platforms for creating a link between citizens, civil society and the government. she concludes that given the successful, high profile uses of mobile phone-based violence prevention in Kenya in elections during 2010 and 2013 is becoming an area of interest for research.

1.1. *Mount Elgon Sub County*

The study was carried out in Mt. Elgon Sub-County of Bungoma County. As a district, (now re-named sub-county) it was established in 1993 by President Daniel arap Moi's presidential decree. It is located on the south-eastern slopes of Mt. Elgon and rises to about 800 meters above sea level in the south and 1430 meters above sea level in the north. It is bordered by Mt. Elgon to the north, Uganda to the west, Trans- Nzoia County to the east and Bungoma West and Bungoma North Sub-Counties to the south. Thus, it has both internal and external boundaries which have been constructed over the years either by the Europeans or by successive Kenyan governments on grounds of ethnicity and administrative convenience.

It covers an area of 944 square kilometers, of which 600 square kilometers is forested. The Sub-County has rich, loamy soil and a favorable climate with two rainy seasons suitable for agriculture. The area of study is generally underdeveloped with poor transport and communication network and few social amenities (educational and health facilities).The study site has people from different ethnic backgrounds. The Sabaot are the majority constituting about 60% of the total population. Among the minor ethnic groups are the Luhya and the Teso among others. It has eleven wards which elect eleven Members of the County Assembly.

2. Methodology

2.1. *Research Design*

The study adopted the descriptive survey design which is appropriate because it does not manipulate variables or arrange for events to happen [6]. It is an appropriate means of collecting information when both quantitative and qualitative data is required. The design is more concerned with description and narration of facts and characteristics of a given situation. The design was also preferred because it facilitates accurate collection of views, suggestions and opinions regarding impacts of farmer-herder conflict on socio-economic development of the local communities in Kitui East Sub County.

2.2. *Sampling Procedure and Sample Size*

A pre visit study indicated that there are 30 villages affected by rampant conflicts in Mt Elgon Sub County. According to [7], at least 30% of the total population is a representative of the whole population. Thus, 30% of the 30 villages gave a total of 9 villages. Purposive sampling was used to select the County village units that had witnessed frequent conflicts. Using this method, ten villages were selected for the study.

2.3. Data collection procedure

A total of 200 questionnaires were issued. The questionnaires generated information from all three categories. These included the local community members, local community leaders and the officials of the Area Peace Development Committees. Questionnaire administration was done by the researcher assisted by research assistants who were first trained on how to effectively administer them. The Questionnaire was used for the following reasons: its potentials in reaching out to a large number of respondents within a short time, ability to give the respondents adequate time to respond to the items, offers a sense of security (confidentiality) to the respondent [8]. They also allow the respondents to give information independently without influence from the researcher [9].

Apart from the questionnaires, interviews were held with key respondents to gather expert opinion about conflicts from people with special knowledge. The experts formed the key respondents in the study. This included government security agents, religious leaders and officials of Non-Governmental Organizations. The interviewer probed the respondents through conversation and questions. The interview schedules were ideal to the researcher because information was obtained from the respondents directly. The researcher was therefore able to probe the respondents for clarification in case of ambiguous responses. This allowed the researcher to explain the subject of discussion clearly and accommodate both literate and illiterate members of the community to respond to questions. According to [10], interviewing allows the researcher to probe the respondent on desired issues. Unlike other methods of gathering information, interviewing gives a chance to the researcher to make inferences from what the respondent says both verbally and non-verbally. This method solely used to find out the knowledge of the government security agents, religious leaders and NGOs officials about the farmer-herder conflicts.

In addition to the interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) were held. They were held with Community members, Members of Area Peace Development committees and Local Community Leaders. The FGDs provided in-depth information that could not be captured by other instruments. They were used to crosscheck some information obtained through questionnaires and also to save on time. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was used to elicit information from the community members. This is a form of group interview mostly triangulated with more traditional forms of interviewing, questionnaire, and observation [11], observe that this method is good in obtaining several perspectives about the same topic. It facilitates easy conceptualization of the gap between what people say and what they do.

2.4. Data Analysis Procedure

Qualitative approach was used for data analysis. The qualitative data which was obtained from interview schedule and FGDs and reported in narrative form.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Prior to the commencement of data collection, the researcher obtained all the necessary documents, including an introduction letter from Kibabii University to seek the research permit from National Commission of Science and Technology. Audience with the sampled respondents in the study area was also sought to clarify the purpose of the study. Upon getting clearance, the researcher in person distributed the questionnaires to the sampled individuals. Assistance from the local administrative offices was also sought. The researcher explained to the respondents about the research. The researcher assured the respondents that the study was for academic purposes only. The role of the research guides was clearly defined. It was made clear that the participation was voluntary and that the respondents were free to decline or withdraw any time during the research period. Respondents were not coerced into participating in the study. The participants had informed consent to make the choice to participate or not. They were guaranteed of confidentiality of their responses. Permission was also sought from respondents to use their photographs and verbatim captions in this thesis.

3. Findings of the Study

The study was conducted in Mt Elgon Sub County with 200 respondents participating in the study. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire, interview schedules and FGDs. Secondary data was obtained from document analysis.

3.1. Use of mobile telephony based platforms as conflict prevention tool during elections

The objective of the study was to establish how mobile phone peace platforms have been used as conflict prevention tool. To achieve this, sets of questions were posed to the respondents on the content and context of communication over the election period. Firstly they were to indicate when they received any conflict prevention message over the period. Their responses were as shown in Figure 4.9

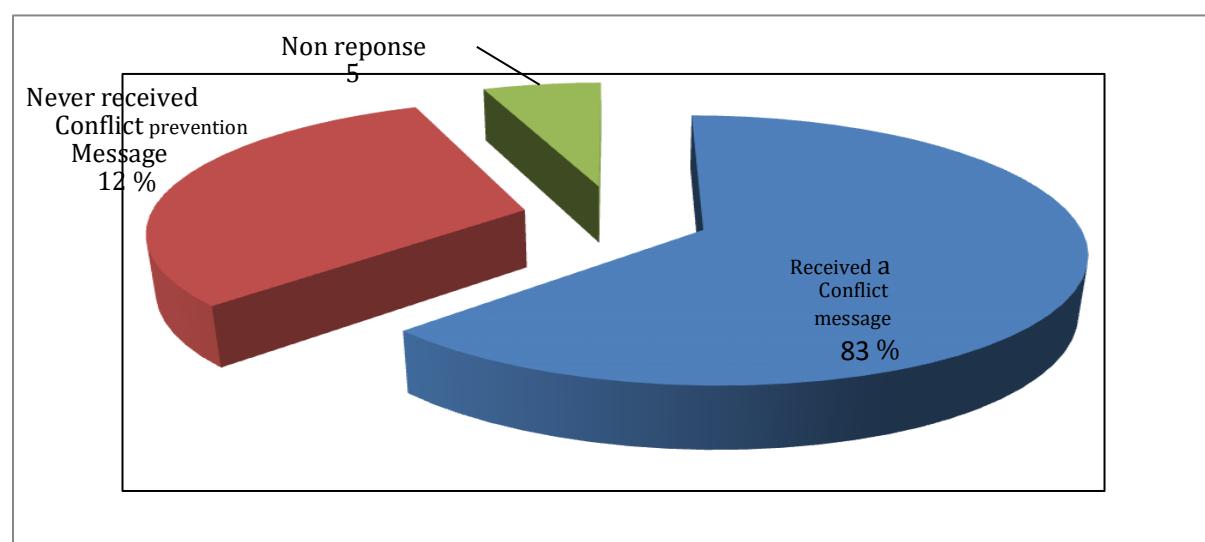


Figure 1. 9: Percentage that received election messages

Findings in Figure 4.4 shows that 83% of the residents received at least one conflict prevention message confirming that mobile phone communication was actively used for conflict management. On the type of the message received, the response was as shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4. 6: Type of election message received

Communication status	Voice Call		Short Message Service		Social Media		others	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent		
Yes	150	75	155	77.5	160	80	10	5
No	40	20	19	9.5	12	6		
Non response	10	5	26	13	28	44	7	3.5
Total	200	100	200	100	200	100		

Findings show that all the three modes of mobile telephony platforms were actively used over the 2007-2017 period. While 75 percent of the residents received voice calls and social media messages, 77.5 percent received SMS suggesting that the highly patronized mobile telephony communication mode was SMS.

Information was further sought on the issues that were discussed in the election messages received. The results were as shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4. 7: Most commonly discussed issues on phone during the election period

Topic of Discussion	N	Freq	%
Update involving potential conflict	200	200	100
Peace advocating message	200	180	90
Vote education message	200	166	88
Message that restricted your movement	200	56	27

From the descriptive statistics, mean scores of more than 2.5 indicated that the topic had a high frequency of discussion while the factors with a mean of less than 2.4 were taken to be low frequency discussion topics. Findings in table 4.9 show that conflict updates, Peace advocating messages, Voter education messages, were most frequently shared messages among the residents.

3.2. Findings from Oral Interviews and Focused Group Discussions

In comparison to interviews with media practitioners and security specialists, they supported the finding that mobile phones were used to spread peace messages. to a large extent due to the fact that, according to a security

specialist, Interview findings further revealed that most social media users used vivid key remarks by politicians and opinion leaders to construct their news. Sometimes with reference to past emotive events, selective reporting and common prejudicial stereotypes about groups. In addition, when the violence broke soon after the announcement of the presidential results on December 30th 2007, the netizens tended to give a lot of airtime and prominence to the violence through spiked and animated descriptions of what was happening. Some respondents corroborated this fact, for instance, a respondent said, “social Media used exaggerations in reporting” while another claimed, “media used favouritism”. These results were also supported by the analysis of media reporting and secondary data. As witnessed during 2007 general election, significant sections of the media houses were co-opted into political schemes of various political parties. They acted as propaganda mouthpieces for getting the messages of preferred candidates out to demonizing the opponents, according to the security specialist.

From the interview results, there are conflicting views. Security specialists believe that media encouraged or promoted controlled propaganda while media practitioners denied so and argued that they objectively reported what leaders said, and this fact could have caused conflicts. In support of his view, a media practitioner upholds that care is exercised in first publication to ensure validity and reliability of information before it's aired to avoid propaganda. Conversely, the security specialist argued that there could be factual accuracy in a single story that could not be substituted for the total truth. He stated that; “...factual accuracy can be misleading and thus can be used to promote political propaganda”. To deter this, one media practitioner says that news coverage and editors should seek alternative voices to a story and confirmation from relevant authorities before broadcasts.

The findings of the study that media fairly promote propaganda corroborate with the findings of [12], in his study of the role of radio in Rwanda. The findings reveal that from the opening days of the war, the government understood the importance of using media to rally Rwandans around the regime and used it to carry out a vigorous propaganda campaign. In support of this, [12] findings reveal how RTLM reported the assassination of the Burundi president in a highly sensationalized way to underline supposed Tutsi brutality and heightened Hutu fear of Tutsi : “RTLM transcripts: 25 October; 20, 29, 30 November 2003” [13]. Other propaganda by RTLM were the repeated themes developed for years by the extremist Hutu that the Tutsis were „foreigners“ hence had no claim to Rwanda aimed at increasing virulent propaganda to justify Tutsi killings.

3.3. Conclusion

The findings of this study confirms that mobile phone peace platforms are effective tools of influence which can be used in the management of conflicts. If positively used, their influences could be used towards prevention of violent conflicts. Mobile phone peace platform was the most commonly used form of incitement, an indicator that it could easily be used to perpetrate violence if not properly monitored. If it was turned around out to be a tool of spreading peace messages as opposed to inciting messages, then it could effectively control conflicts

3.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. That the Ministry of Information and Communication encourages the uptake of mobile phone peace platform as it was found to have an effective reach to very many people within a short time.
2. That the Kenyan parliament enacts a substantive law with punitive penalties on cyber crimes including those perpetrated over the mobile phone networks.

References

- [1]. Berman, J. B., “Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism”, *African Affairs*, 9. (1998).305-341, Downloaded from <http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org>
- [2]. Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, (TJRC, 2013). VOLUME IV.
- [3]. Human Rights Watch (2002), Playing with fire: weapons proliferation,^[1]political violence, and human rights in Kenya, New York: Human^[1]Rights Watch. www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2002/kenya/,^[1]accessed 15 May 2009, 20–21.
- [4]. F. Mwangi, The Role of Youth in Mt. Elgon Conflict: The Case of Sabaot's Land Defence Force 1993-2011. ((2012).<http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/11344>
- [5]. E. Rota, . ‘Mobile Telephony Use And Its Role In Preventing Electoral Violence In Kenya: Case Study Of Embakasi Constituency During Kenya’s 2013 General Election’. Master Thesis. University of Nairobi. (2014)
- [6]. A.J. Orodho, . Essentials of Educational and Social Sciences Research Method. Nairobi: Masola Publishers. (2003)
- [7]. O. Mugenda, and A. Mugenda, , Research Methods; Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches. ACTS, Nairobi. (2003)
- [8]. L.K. Owens. Introduction to Survey Research Design. SRL Fall 2002 Seminar Series. Retrieved May 31, 2013 From [Http://Www.Srl.Uic.EduPublishers](http://Www.Srl.Uic.EduPublishers). (2002)
- [9]. D.L. Kombo, & L.A Tromp. Proposal and Theses Writing: An Introduction. Pauline Publications Africa (2nded) Don Bosco Printing Press, Makuyu: (Kenya). (2006)
- [10]. W.R.Borg, M.D. and Gall,. Educational Research: An Introduction (Fifth Ed.).New York: Longman. (2003)
- [11]. L. Cohen, L. Manion, K & Morrison,. Research methods in education. London: Routledge. (2007)
- [12]. S. Chretien, L. Spurk, L.,& J. Christopher,. Media and Peacebuilding, Concepts, Actors and Challenges. KOFF: SwissPeace. (1995)
- [13]. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Summary judgement in the Prosecutor v. Ferdinand Nahimana, Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, Hassan Ngeze. Arusha, Tanzania: ICTR. (2003, December 3).