



ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CONFLICTS IN MACHAKOS COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: Youth comprises the highest segment of population in the developing nations and are considered the beacons of hope and future leaders. The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of socio-economic factors on youth engagement in conflicts in Machakos County, Kenya. The study was carried out to examine the nature of conflict incidences and the influence of income inequality on youth engagement in conflicts activities in Machakos County. Descriptive survey design using both probability and nonprobability sampling techniques were used. Simple random sampling was used to arrive at the sample of 234 youth respondents and 20 police officers while Purposive sampling was used to get probation officers and police officer commanding station. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires and interview schedule. The quantitative data was analysed quantitatively aided by Statistical Packages for Social Sciences Version 23(SPSS), while thematic approach was used to analyse qualitative data. To test for relationships between the variables, Chi-Square was applied. The analysed data was presented in frequencies, percentages, charts and graphs. From the study findings, results indicates that there is a statistical significant relationship between the income disparities and youth engagement in conflicts as illustrated by ($P > 0.05$). The study recommends that counties to come up with income generation activities the youth in Machakos County and a similar study to be all counties in Kenya for comparison purposes.

Key Words: Conflict, Development, Inequality, Youth

1.1 Study Background

Globally, youth comprises over 18 percent of the world population and this translates to more than 1.8 billion of people below 35 years. Out of the 1.8 billion youthful population, 89% of them live in developing countries (United Nations Development Programme, 2006). Violent conflicts and recurring insecurity have been among the issues that undermine the stability essential for achievement of long-term sustainable development (The World Bank, 2006). During violent and protracted conflict, public institutions and operational environments become weak, and hence, development work get dangerous and arduous (The World Bank, 2006). Youth and violent conflict has been regarded as a global phenomenon (Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, 2005). In fact, it has been established that youth violent conflicts resulting to war would be impossible without youth involvement (United Nations Development Programme[UNDP], 2006).

Conflict has captured a lot of attention among scholars over the last decade (Amason, 1996). Muste (2000) views conflict as a state of affairs characterized by the existence of incompatible aspect of relationship between people, groups and nations. The causes of conflicts among the youth has been explored from different approaches. For instance, the UNDP report (2006) shows that from the demographic approach, youth engage in conflicts because they are many. Other approaches focuses youth conflicts on coercion where they are forced to get involved in civil war while in other cases, youth fight for survival.

According to Cuhadaroglu (2007), conflicts among the youth involves the undesirable harmful behaviours inflicted to other people in society. Derkyi(2012), Adams, Brockington, Dyson and Vira(2003)opines that conflict can be regarded as a disagreements among or within individual or within groups which could result from beliefs or divergence in interests in a society Conflicts has had devastating social and economic effects on humanity and environment.

The World Bank report (2006) shows that the effects of conflicts destroys social fabric. Some of the devastating effects of persistent conflicts in the community include the disruption of the social cohesion within which development processes evolve, consequently disrupting livelihoods and markets and all that results to high levels of displacement. Conflicts further leads to decreased quality of health and education services, destruction of social capital and even threatens the psychological well-being of citizens, especially so in the less developed low-income countries. Conflicts magnifies sexual exploitation, despair, violence and destruction of the environment, economic costs and loss of lives as witnessed in Rwanda in 1994 genocide where more than 500,000 people lost their lives. A notable example of devastation brought about by conflicts is the Sudan in Africa ere, the over 20 years of civil war and within-country conflict left the country with limited institutional capacity and service delivery, widening the gap between the haves and the most vulnerable in society (The World Bank, 2006). Conflict has been described as ‘development in reverse’ (Collier, Paul, Elliot, Håvard, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol and Sambanis (2003.P.4).

Anderson and Whiston (2005) views conflicts as exhibited in different ways such as inter-group conflict, intra-group conflicts, inter-personal conflicts and intra-personal conflicts. It is widely alluded that security maintenance, peaceful and harmonious physical and social environments are pre-requisite for the achievement of sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number eight (8) aims at provision of decent work and economic growth with expectation that the citizens of each country would get paid employment for the sustenance of their families.

However, the United Nations of Youth Foundation report (2009) points out that the growth of job opportunities has hardly kept pace with population growth. The United Nations of Youth Foundation (2009) indicates that half of the more than three (3) billion people living slightly above poverty line are the youth, mainly living in developing countries and from research, poverty can either be a consequence or cause of conflict. In the developing world more than 60% of the youth are neither in paid employment nor in any training. Globally, research indicates that more than 500 Million youths are struggling to make a living earning a daily wage of less than two Dollars.

A study by Rayand Esteban(2017) Bahgat, Barrett, Dupuy, Gates, Hillesund and Nygård(2017) found a close relationship between social inequality and conflicts especially where employment, land, or business resources are scarce, a notable example being Rwanda where land conflicts was disguised as ethnic hatred. The persistent high levels of unemployment among the youth indicates the failure of education systems to equip the young adults with the relevant skills for the labour market (The World Bank, 2020). According to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development ([UNRISD], 2005), there is a close link between inequitable resource distribution and rebellion in communities. UNRISD (2005) report indicates that income disparities make lower middle group to experience disappointments as they feel unfairly treated by the economically well-off and this has promoted dysfunctional behaviour such as engagement in conflicts. A study carried out in the London and South Yorkshire cities of by Whitworth (2013) found a close link between income disparity and conflict occurrence. Sirimal (2004) in his study in Sri-Lanka similarly found a close relationship between economic deprivation and outbreak of conflicts among the youth in Sri Lanka.

The youth in Africa grow within unstable governments in presence of deteriorating economies, lacking basic needs such as security and means of earning a decent livelihoods, and this has made them to engage in unceasing violent conflicts. According to Bakken (2018), conflict trends in African countries has continued to escalate over the years. Since the last decade, Africa has recorded some of the worst conflicts in the world among which include Nigeria and the Biafran War in the 60s and 70s, the 1994 Rwandan genocide, Somalia, the Ethiopian and Eritrean war in 1999-2000, to mention but few (Bakken, 2018). Between 1980 and 1990, more 550 million people were directly affected by conflicts in Africa, recording the highest number of conflicts resulting to both political violence and protest Report from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project ([ACLED], 2017) indicate that 33% of all violent conflict that occurred across Africa in 2015 and 2016 could be traced from Libya, Somalia, South Sudan and Nigeria. Evidence indicates that marginalization of the youth in terms of resources, social fragmentation and breakdown of social norms has resulted to grievances that is manifested in constant conflicts (Collier and Hoeffler,2002; Rohwerder,2015).

In Kenya, the youth population within 18-35 years make 75% of the total population where most of the group feel marginalised as they earn less than two dollars a day. According to Rohwerder (2015),the marginalization of the youth in terms of employment and participation has led them to get engaged in violent activities such as inter-communal violence and continuous election-related conflicts whereby records indicates that those linked to such crimes are those within the ages of 16 and 25 years. Although peace building and conflict management is one of the strategic areas of the political pillar of Kenya Vision 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2008), conflict scenarios are still common. The Government of Kenya is determined to improve security in order create attractive

investment environment and enable secure living environment through a variety of strategies such as adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) in crime detection and prevention and reduction of the number of suspects in remand homes. The overall ambition for the security sector under Kenya Vision 2030 is “a society free from danger and fear” (Republic of Kenya [RoK], 2007. p. ix).

However, Halakhe (2013 cited in Rohwerder, 2015) notes that incidences of conflicts and insecurity in Kenya has been on the rise especially during national election period. UNICEF report (2012) shows that vices such as violence and conflicts in Kenya has been on the upward spiral, affecting most parts of the country. For instance, during 2007/08 post-election violence, more than 1,133 people’s lives were lost through conflicts and violence, with more than 600,000 people displaced while more than 3,000 women and young girls were assaulted in form of rape. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) (2012) indicates that conflicts led to increased levels of criminal activities from 61,826 to 73,786 during the period 2008-2011. A baseline survey carried out by Kituku (2012) showed that most of the 47 counties experienced some form of conflict associated with ethnic-intolerance, border conflicts, inequitable resource distribution and high corruption rates has further compromised the institutions of security. In fact, Kenya has been rated as seventh most violent country in ACLED, with over 3,500 conflict occurrences recorded between 1997 and 2013 (Rohwerder,2015).

The data in Table 1.1 shows the current scenario regarding the number of people convicted for various types of conflicts and other crimes committed in Kenya within 2013-2018.

Table 1: Age Cohorts and Criminal activities in Kenya (2013-2017)

Age Cohorts							
Year	Under 16	16-17	18-20	21-25	25-50	Over 50	Total
2013	236	2,313	14,929	22,672	31,383	5,203	76,736
2014	152	3,303	19,450	32,294	45,939	8,491	109,629
2015	120	2613	16514	25958	37130	5780	88115
2016	111	1,876	13,383	25,262	34,813	6,988	82,433
2017	114	1,424	12,751	27,119	32,233	6,763	80,404
Total	733	11,529	48,051	133,305	181,498	27135	437,317

Source: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2018)

From table 1.1, the age group comprising of the youth (18-25) are more involved in criminal activities and conflicts. The table indicates that out of the total criminal activities committed in the years 2013-2017, the youth were more involved than any other age group. Rohwerder (2015) asserts that the high rate of youth engagement in conflicts emanate from social fragmentation, politicised ethnicity and political partisanship, inequity in land distribution discrimination and marginalisation groups. The study therefore sought to assess the influence of socio-economic factors on youth engagement in conflicts in Machakos County, Kenya.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Conflict in society and among individuals is an inevitable aspect of human interaction. Youth engagement in conflicts has globally been a major concern. Over the last decade, conflict occurrence in developing countries has been a common phenomenon. Although the government of Kenya have put in place a variety of strategies such as community policing, rehabilitation and employment creation to counter the ever escalating incidences of conflicts in the country, data shows that within-country conflicts perpetrated by the youth has persisted over the years. Evidence shows that the constant recurrence of conflicts within the society over the last decade has made Kenya to be rated the seventh most violent country in ACLED. It is well documented that country's development highly depends on the level of peaceful co-existence among its citizens. Despite the high level of conflicts occurrence among countries in developing world, the available information on conflicts among the youth has been carried out in countries such as the United States of America, Europe. Research done on issues of conflicts in Africa mainly focuses more on child soldiers and impact of conflicts, with little attention given to the influence of socio-economic factors and youth involvement in conflict (Mooney & Young, 2006). From literature reviewed, there is dearth of information regarding the nature of conflicts and the influence of income inequality on youth engagement in conflicts in Kenya, and especially in Machakos County. Therefore, the objectives of the study were to examine the nature of conflicts that youth engage in and the influence of income disparity on youth engagement in conflicts in Machakos County. The study is essential for it generated knowledge on issues that escalate conflicts in the county and further generated data that is useful for informing different stakeholders on the nature and causes of conflicts that can be used to curb the spread of conflicts in future.

1.3 Literature review

Theoretical framework

The study was guided by Conflict Theory. Conflict Theory whose proponent is Karl Marx (1818–1883) views society as an entity which have unending conflicts associated with competition for scarce resources (Sears & Alan, 2008). Conflict theory examines the social phenomenon closely and postulates that it is human nature to lean towards conflict and Marx says that conflict is unavoidable among human beings. Marxism posited that capitalism socioeconomic systems inevitably produces internal conflicts which eventually results to self-destruction (Sears et al., 2008). Sears et al. (2008) posits that conflicts can be seen within the following spectacles where societies are defined by inequality that produces conflict, rather than that which produces order and consensus. According to the theory, the conflict based on inequality can only be overcome through a fundamental transformation of the existing relations in the society.

Empirical review

There is hardly any universal consensus on what constitutes the concept of youth. Traditionally, youth refers to the period of transition from childhood to adulthood. The concept of youth as regarded by different societies vary across time and space as it has been defined based on functional capability (adult or children functions), chronological in terms of age and in terms

cultural individual roles (Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery [BCPR], 2005). Different countries such as Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa use the youth terminology to refer to the population within 15 and 35 years of age, while Nigeria and Swaziland lowers the age to those people in the ages between 12 and 30 years, Botswana and Mauritius likewise define the ages of youth as those individuals ages lying between 14 and 25 years. In Kenya, Article 260 of the 2010 Constitution refers youth as a person aged between 18 and 34 years, hence, the target population for the research.

Nature of conflicts found among the Youth.

A variety of factors has been highlighted as the major *cause* of conflicts among groups among which include socio-economic and political issues. For instance, ideological position, unemployment, poverty and rise in food prices, lack of accountability, poor governance and weak judicial systems often results to conflicts (Machel, 2009, World Bank, 2011). Other factors that influence conflict occurrence include inadequacy of resources and unfair resource distribution, exclusion from decision making process, perceived differences values and aspirations (Dirks & Parks, 2003; Putnam & Poole, 1987). Dirks et al. (2003) concurs with earlier scholars such as and Putnam et al. (1987) and Baron (1990) that ignoring human rights and divergent interests among different groups may act against each other resulting to conflicts.

According to Rohwerder (2015), Kenya has witnessed immeasurable violence and conflicts lately. The conflicts ranges from tremendous levels of gender-based violence among groups including persistent cycles of politically related election conflicts including terrorist attacks. In fact, rampant theft and robbery is currently treated as a normal burden by the Kenyan citizens.

The conflict results to unrepairable damage to communities some of which include disruption of livelihoods and markets, high levels of displacement, loss of government capacity, the destruction of social networks, and the threat to psychological well-being. In Mindanao for instance, three decades of intermittent conflict have destroyed infrastructure, displaced populations, deferred development and engendered mistrust within communities and between communities. Similarly Timor-Leste experienced a wave of violence that left widespread destruction of infrastructure and population displacement. During the violence, transportation, supplies, and commercial warehouses were looted and destroyed, and the commercial distribution system was demolished (The World Bank, 2006).

Influence of income disparities on youth engagement in conflicts

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number eight (8) aims at provision of decent work and economic growth with expectation that the citizens of each country would get paid employment for the sustenance of their families. Pervasive poverty makes societies vulnerable to violent conflict, while conflict itself creates more poverty. Furthermore, the grievances caused by social inequalities trigger conflicts under three major conditions: First, there is evidence of well-defined separate groups of people in society. Secondly, the groups' compares themselves regarding economic status and thirdly, the groups must share the information about their situation and hence, frame the situation as unfair and blame, politicising the inequality (Bahgat, Barrett, Dupuy, Gates, Hillesund & Nygård, 2017). Conflict and insecurity undermines the stability required for sustainable long-term development (The World Bank, 2006).

Worldwide, the unemployment rate for young people between the ages 15 to 24 is up to three times higher than for adults (UNDP, 2006). Youth engagement in conflicts has been associated with economic factors such as the inability to satisfy basic needs, where young people spend days without food, water and other basic needs. A United Nations (2008) report points out that where job opportunities exist, the youth face discrimination in terms of pay for similar work requiring same skills, although they are the people exposed to hazardous environmental conditions at workplace, hence, deficiencies in job opportunities lead to lack of economic empowerment. Studies indicate that unaddressed political grievances easily leads to conflict in society and that is highly aggravated by presence of poverty and inequality (Abadie, 2004). According to Ross (2004), resource distribution and state governance plays a vital role in a nation's economic and structural vulnerability to conflict. Similarly, Blattman and Miguel (2010) points out that due to recession, economic shocks normally leads to inflation and that leads to unrest resulting to individual conflicts escalation and vulnerability.

Various empirical studies support the claim that inequality is an important factor towards conflict related activities. In the United States of America, inadequate job opportunities led young people to indulge in violent conflict and terrorism attacks. A research carried out Okpokwasili (2016) in USA found a significant relationship between income disparity and criminal activities such as rape, murder and assault perpetrated by the youth. From the study findings, Okpokwasili recommends for inequality reduction to eliminate conflicts in society.

Hicks and Hicks (2014) study further emphasis on the effects of inequality goes beyond simple income inequality but also consumption. The study found a direct correlation between conspicuous consumption and violent crime hence contradicts the traditional economic theory that supports the notion that income disparity positively correlate with high conflict prevalence. Durante (2012) while using United States state-wide panel data for the years 1981 to 1999 examined whether there was any relationship between income disparity and conflicts. After controlling for demographics and the rates of poverty and unemployment, the researcher found that there is a strong negative relationship between income inequality and the violent and property crime rates. The scholar concludes by asserting that a rising income inequality over the two decades led to a concomitant increase in crime during the same time period.

In Tanzania, a report by Africa Commission (2010) found a close link between deterioration in access to better livelihoods and youth engagement in conflicts and violence. In Kenya, the problem of youth deprivation is compounded by corruption and tribalism which have locked out the youth deserving employment from getting job opportunities. Furthermore, the violent ethnic conflicts that occurred in 1992, 1997 and 2007 were also associated with market dominance of some ethnic groups, thereby marginalising others. Ngutu (2014) examined the link between different socio-economic factors and criminal activities in Emuhaya district of Western Province of Kenya. The researcher used survey research design with a likert scale rating of 5, where a questionnaire was administered on 124 respondents. In the study, researcher observed a significant relationship between level of education and tendency to commit crime among the people of Emuhaya district. Other variables that influence engagement in conflicts activities include financial standing, employment, family structure and social support. Since little has been done in Kenya, the study therefore sought to fill the existing knowledge gap regarding influence of income disparity on youth engagement in conflicts in Machakos County.

1.4 Methodology

Research methods include all the approaches employed in carrying out research (Kothari, 2012). The study was carried out in Kenya, Machakos County which is located in the Eastern part of the country about 60 kilometres from Nairobi city centre. The study adopted descriptive survey design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Descriptive survey discusses the characteristics of a particular individual or a group in a given setting with the intention is to describe, record, tabulate, present data and to give report on the nature of a situation (Orodho, 2005 cited in Kiilu and Mugambi, 2019). According to Creswell (2012), survey design helps the researcher to study a large number of variables in a given universe or population and is less cheap compared with other approaches and generates quantitative as well as qualitative data.

The study targeted the youth offenders between the ages of 18-34 years due to the fact that the Article 260 of the 2010 Constitution of Kenya refers youth a person aged between 18 and 34 years who were incarcerated in both male and female prisons in Machakos town. Further, one County police officer in charge of Machakos Police Station (Officer Commanding Police station) and two Probation officers in charge of the two prisons and 20 police officers based in Machakos County were included, making a total population of 589 people.

The study made use of both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to obtain the required samples. purposive sampling techniques was used to get the probation officers and the officer commanding police station in Machakos town police station, while use of Krejcie and Morgan tables(1990) was used to obtain sample for the youth incarcerated in the two Prisons located in Machakos town constituency.

Questionnaires and interview guide were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The instruments were piloted to establish validity and reliability. The respondents involved in piloting were not included in the main research. From the pre-test results, the grammatical errors found in the instruments were corrected for the improvement of the instruments.

1.5 Data analysis and Interpretation

The process of data analysis involves looking at the data more closely in order to get information which is useful decision-making (UNESCO,2003). The researcher examined the collected data to understand the trends, edited the data to establish whether it was complete and, accurate and also ascertained its uniformity as recommended by Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister, (2012). Quantitative data was cleaned up, edited and reduced appropriately to eliminate potentially the incomplete or inaccurate questionnaires. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were used. Quantitative data was analysed by use of descriptive statistics such as mean scores, standard deviation, frequencies, and percentages. A computer statistical package for social sciences (SPSS, version 23) was used to aid in processing of quantitative data. The analysed quantitative data results were presented in frequencies, percentages, charts and tables that were suitable for variable under the study. The analysed data was used to draw conclusions. Qualitative data analysis results were presented in prose and narrative format.

1.6 Research findings

The research sought to establish the nature and types of conflicts prevalent among the youth in Machakos County. To get the information 168 structured questionnaires responses were analysed

and findings presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Nature of conflict committed by Youths in Machakos County

Nature of conflict	Frequency	Percentages
Individual versus individual	115	68.7%
Individual verse group	30	18.1%
Group verse Group	20	12.0%
Individual verse Government	2	1.2%
Total	168	100%

Source: Source: Field data, 2019

The results in Table 2 present the nature of conflict among youths in Machakos County as given by the respondents. The results showed that majority of conflict among youths were individual to individual conflicts as indicated by 68.7%. The others types of conflicts revealed were individual verse group conflicts happened at 18.1%, group verse group conflict happened at the rates of 12.0%. The findings also showed that the conflict some of youths (1.2%) of conflicts were mostly caused by disagreement among community members.

To establish the reliability of the findings from youth respondents, information was sought from the police officers by use of a questionnaire and the results were summarized and presented as illustrated in table 3.

Table 3: Police officer responses on nature of conflicts among the youth

Nature of conflict	Frequency	Percentages
Individual versus individual	7	43.75%
Individual verse group	5	31.25%
Group verse Group	3	18.75%
Individual verse Government	2	12.5%
Total	16	100%

Source: Field data, 2019

From table 3, majority of the youth engage in individual to individual conflicts as observed by 43.7% of the police officers. The findings concurs with the results obtained from the youth participants. Further data analysis showed that only few people were recorded in to engage in conflicts with the government (12.5%).

The triangulated findings from the youth respondents and interview from probation officers concurred that conflicts among the youth presented itself in a variety of ways, the most recurring being hat of individual to individual in nature. Similarly, the police officers confirmed what the results obtained from the youth the individual to individual conflicts were the most common, where even loss of life was witnessed in some cases. The probation officer likewise agreed with the officer commanding police station that individual to individual conflicts were the most common

among the youth.

The findings resonates with a previous research by Mushanga (1976) whose study classified criminal activities as comprising two categories as involving person to person violent conflicts as well as economic crimes. Similarly, Odufuwa (2012) study in Nigeria found physical harassment/assaults, sexual harassment, raping, pick-pocketing, and kidnapping and robbery as the most rampant among the youth and such could be categorized as individual to individual conflicts.

Furthermore, the youth respondents pointed out that some conflicts emanated from the political engagements. The results were presented as indicated in table 4.4.

Table 4: Relationship between nature of conflicts engagement and political involvement in Machakos County

	Frequency	Percentage
Political cases are delayed in courts thus conflicts	42	25
Unfulfilled Politicians promises causes conflicts	25	14.8
Politicians causes conflicts for their own gains	49	29.1
Politicians bribes youths thus causing conflicts	52	31
Total	168	100

Source: Field data, 2019

Findings in Table 4 indicates that majority of youths argued that politicians causes conflicts for gaining political mileage as shown by 59.2% of the responses. Further, the findings indicated that the politicians bribing the youths to engage in conflicts was common. The rest of the youth respondents (38%) were not sure whether politicians had any influence on conflicts occurrence in Machakos County. The interview from the two probation officers regarding politicians and causes of conflict was neutral. Although the youth indicated politics as a determinant of the conflicts, the probation officers were non-committal as one of them was recorded saying ‘I cannot commit to say that politics plays a part in youth engagement in conflicts, although sometimes they fight over the handouts given by the politicians, especially if they fail to share equally’.

The study results concurs with earlier studies, especially those carried out in developing countries. For instance, a study carried out by Rohwerder (2015) in Kenya found a close relationship between high occurrence of sexual and gender-based violence among groups, low levels of violence persistently and even cycles of political election-related conflicts which resulted from political-zoning. However, the findings from the youth clearly concurs with an earlier study by Rohwerder (2015) regarding conflicts and politics that partisan politics were among the reasons which made conflicts to escalate among different communities in Kenya.

Income inequality and youth engagement in conflicts in Machakos County

The second objective examined the influence of income inequality on youth engagement in conflicts in Machakos County. To get the essential information, the study first sought information regarding sources of income among the youth. The youth were asked to state the sources of income

and findings were summarised as indicated in figure 1.

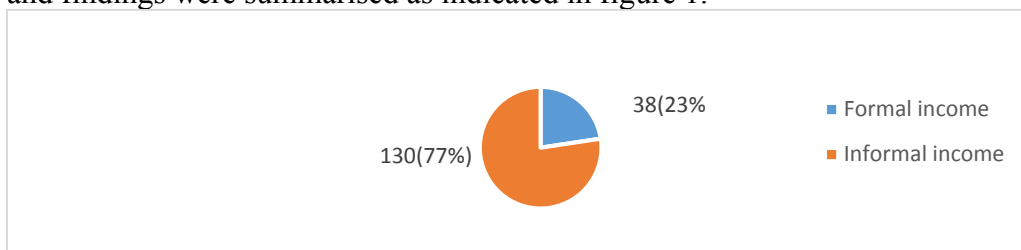


Figure 1: Sources of income among the youth in Machakos County

Source: Field data, 2019

From figure 1, majority of the youth(77%) earned their income informally, meaning that there was no steady income but depended on the available manual activities such as sand harvesting, being used as porters to transport goods during market days among others. From the respondents, such activities hardly earned them two dollars per day, the expected minimum wage according to United Nations Development Programme (2006). The findings concurs with the United Nations (2008) report that inadequate employment opportunities for the youth make it difficult for them to earn a living or sustain themselves, and this has been seen as some of the causes of youth engagement in conflict activities. The interview from the officer commanding police station had similar findings that majority of those incarcerated were either self-employed. The probation officers were of the opinion that ‘ unemployment is making our young people in all sorts of illegal activities to earn a living, or even to get money to enable them to buy illegal drugs and substances, and as a result they find themselves here even without understanding how they reached here’. From the interview guide, it can be seen that low economic status were among the reasons for youth engagement in conflicts in Machakos county.

The Researcher also sought to establish whether there was any relationship between conflict occurrence and income inequalities in Machakos County. Data from the youth respondents was collected by use of questionnaires, analysed and interpreted .The findings were presented in the Figure 2

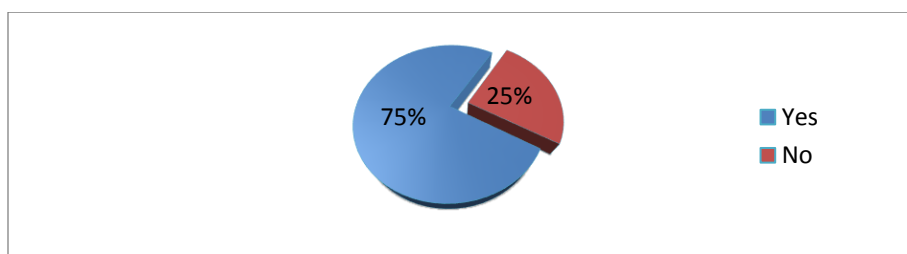


Figure 2: Income Inequality and youth engagement in conflicts and Crime

Source: Field data, 2019

Figure 2 present answers given by the respondents on the influence of income inequality on crime rates among youths in Machakos County Kenya. The 75% of the respondents agreed that inequality in income distribution influence conflict among the youth. These results concurs with Whitworth (2013) who found a close relationship between income inequality and conflict occurrences. Furthermore, the study results are supported by scorzafava and Milena (2012) who found a significant relationship between income inequality and conflicts in Brazil.

The finding on the relationship between income inequality and youth engagement in conflicts are illustrated in table 5.

Table 5: Responses on Income Inequality and Conflicts occurrence among the Youth.

Statement	SD		D		N		A		SA	
	F	%	f	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Rich people are less likely to engage in conflicts	13	22.0	10	16.9	7	11.9	15	25.4	14	23.7
The low income earners are more likely to engage in conflicts	7	12.1	6	10.3	8	13.8	17	29.3	20	34.5
Poverty leads to conflict engagement	6	10.5	9	15.8	7	12.3	12	21.1	23	40.4
Valid N	86									

Source: Field data, 2019

The findings in Table 5 indicates that majority of respondents agreed at 49.1% that rich people are not likely to steal from others. However, 38.9% of youths disagreed with the statements. Further, results indicated that 62.8% agreed that those with low income are more likely to engage in criminal offences compared to those with high incomes. Moreover, most of respondents at 61.5% agreed that people from poor families result to crimes to earn their daily bread. These findings are concur to Neumayer (2011) that any rise in income corresponded with rise in the conflicts and violent crimes over a range of income but a decreasing rates. These results are supported by Sirmal (2004) that in Kenya, the problem of youth deprivation is compounded by conflicts and tribalism which lock out youths deserving employment from getting job opportunities.

1.7 Conclusion

From The study findings, the research concludes that high level of conflicts occurring in Machakos count involve the youth ages 18-35 years. The most occurring conflict is individual to individual as illustrated by 68.7%. Other forms of conflicts such as individual verses group or group to group conflicts were uncommon (18.1%).

On the income inequality and youth engagement in conflicts, the study concludes that income inequality is a major reason for youth engagement in conflicts as revealed by 75% of the respondents. Furthermore, the high income gaps and rampant poverty among the youth is detrimental to peaceful co-existence, where majority of the youth are in informal casual employment earning less than two dollars a day and thus they engage in illicit activities leading to conflicts among themselves and the community as a whole.

1.8 Recommendations

The study recommends for increased surveillance of youth activities to reduce recurrent conflicts occurrence in Machakos County. This can be done through constant engagement in youth forums to get information on those involved in conflicts and also find strategies for engaging youth in

productive activities. The counties need to come up with training programmes to equip the youth with self-employment skills so as to improve their income earning ability, which eventually will eventually dissuade them from engagement in conflict activities. The county governments should come up with income generating activities to engage the youth to reduce the youth gatherings around shopping centres, where they plan the atrocities. Further, the study recommends for similar research to be done in other counties so as to compare and come up with solutions for problems affecting the youth not only in Kenya, but globally.

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