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Contribution of Women in Peace Building on Land Disputes in Thagicu Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya from the year 1990-2025

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Abstract: The study examines women participation in peace-building on land conflicts in Thagicu Sub-County. The idea is to analyse contribution of women in peace building on land disputes in Thagicu Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya from the year 1990-2025. The study was carried out in Thagicu area, a place that has experienced land disputes even before independence. This study used descriptive research design and targeted 15,136 people consisting local leaders, women leaders, church leaders and men and women. By examining both formal and informal contributions, the study underscores the need for targeted interventions to overcome cultural and structural barriers that limit women's involvement. Women's unique social roles, such as mediating through inter-clan relationships, offer untapped opportunities for conflict resolution. The results also emphasize the importance of addressing historical and resource-driven causes of land conflicts to create sustainable peace, with women playing a pivotal role in community reconciliation efforts through their extensive social networks and grassroots advocacy. The study recommends implementing gender-inclusive policies to integrate women into peace committees, conducting land audits to resolve historical boundary disputes, and providing training programs to empower women in conflict resolution skills.

Keywords: Peace-Building, Land Disputes, Conflicts, Women Participation

1.1 Introduction

Land disputes, a persistent source of conflict globally, regionally, and locally in Thagicu Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya, have spurred violence and displacement, necessitating robust peace-building efforts where women play a critical yet underutilized role (Veit, 2019; Agbalajobi, 2009). Globally, unclear land tenure and resource competition drive disputes, while in East Africa, environmental stressors like drought exacerbate pastoralist conflicts. Locally, Thagicu's disputes stem from colonial legacies and ethnic rivalries among the Akamba, Ameru, and Somali communities (Rutto, 2000). Despite women's potential to mediate through community networks, patriarchal barriers limit their formal participation in peace processes (Shepherd, 2016). This study explores women's contributions to peace-building in Thagicu, identifies barriers to their involvement, and examines the root causes of land

disputes to advocate for gender-inclusive strategies for sustainable peace.

1.2 Research Objectives

The study's objective is examining contribution of women in peace building on and disputes in Thagicu Sub-County.

1.3 Literature Review

Land disputes and women's participation in peace-building are critical issues shaping community dynamics in Thagicu Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. This study examines these phenomena, focusing on their distinct yet interconnected roles in fostering sustainable peace. Below, we briefly outline the causes of land disputes and women's contributions to peace-building across global, continental, regional, national, and local contexts.

Causes of Land Conflicts

Land disputes are a pervasive source of conflict worldwide, driven by historical, economic, and social factors. Globally, overlapping land claims, as seen in Georgia, fuel tensions between private and public entities. In Africa, colonial legacies and unclear land tenure systems exacerbate disputes, particularly in resource-scarce regions (Veit, 2019). Regionally, East Africa faces pastoralist conflicts over grazing lands, intensified by environmental stressors like drought. This has led to deaths of innocent people with women and children suffering the most. In Kenya, colonial-era land alienation and post-independence policies have perpetuated inequalities, especially in the Rift Valley, Northern, and Coastal regions (Rutto, 2000). Locally, in Thagicu Sub-County, competition over scarce arable land and water, compounded by historical injustices and ethnic rivalries among the Akamba, Ameru, and Somali communities, drives recurrent violence and displacement, necessitating robust conflict resolution mechanisms.

Women in Peace-Building

Women play a vital yet often marginalized role in peace-building globally and locally. Globally, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) advocates for women's inclusion in conflict resolution, yet their representation in formal processes remains limited (Shepherd, 2016). In Africa, women have driven grassroots peace initiatives, such as in Burundi, despite patriarchal barriers (Agbalajobi, 2009). Regionally, East African women in pastoralist communities, like those in South Sudan, mediate informally but are excluded from formal talks. In Kenya, women face systemic exclusion from land ownership and decision-making, limiting their influence in peace processes (Veit, 2019). In Thagicu, women contribute through community dialogues and inter-clan mediation but are sidelined in formal peace committees due to patriarchal norms and lack of resources. The patriarchal structures in Thagicu, coupled with limited access to education and resources, further restrict women's ability to participate in decision-making forums. Cultural norms that prioritize male authority often discourage women from taking leadership roles in peace committees, despite their proven ability to mediate disputes effectively. This study explores these contributions, identifies barriers, and advocates for gender-inclusive policies to enhance women's impact on sustainable peace in Thagicu Sub-County.

1.4 Materials and Methods

This study examined contribution of women in peace building on and disputes in Thagicu Sub-County using descriptive survey research design. This research design made it easier to determine how the people felt on women's participation in advocating for peace in the community as well as some of the barriers

that hinders women from participating in peace processes. Here, the study's target consisted of women in leadership positions, chief, sub-chief, church leaders and also men. Men were included as target audience to give their views on whether their women participate in peace-building efforts. The major idea was to get participants remarks and opinions and compare them with information from past surveys. The descriptive survey design was chosen for its ability to capture a wide range of perspectives through both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of women's roles in peace-building. The inclusion of diverse stakeholders, such as local leaders, women in leadership positions, and community members, ensured that the study reflected the complex social dynamics of Thagicu Sub-County. Data collection methods, including interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions, were designed to elicit detailed responses on the nature of women's contributions, the barriers they face, and the underlying causes of land disputes. This multi-method approach facilitated triangulation of data, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings by cross-referencing perspectives from different community segments.

Sample Size: From a target population of 15,136 people 390 individuals were selected for the interview and questionnaire responses, calculated using Yamane's formula. This involved local leaders, church leaders and women group leaders. The rest of the respondents were women and men drawn from different villages in the Sub-County. For each person to be eligible for the research, they had to be over eighteen years and residents of Thagicu. For the focused group discussion, the target was people over thirty years as they were deemed to have more information regarding the community. The sample size was deliberately kept small to ensure in-depth data collection and manageability, given the qualitative nature of the study. The selection criteria prioritized individuals with direct experience or knowledge of land disputes and peace-building efforts, ensuring the reliability of the data collected. The focus on residents over eighteen years ensured that participants had sufficient exposure to the community's dynamics, while the older age group for focused group discussions provided historical context and richer insights into long-standing land conflicts. This approach allowed the study to capture nuanced perspectives on women's roles and the barriers they face, particularly in a region where land disputes have deep historical roots.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures: The research samples were drawn from all the locations in Thagicu, Sub-County. The study employed purposive and snowballing sampling procedures, where selection of informants was based on knowledge possessed on women's participation in peace-building on land disputes. The researcher selected specific people who had enough knowledge and experience on the matter being investigated. Politicians, religious leaders, former and current administrators and land officers were selected simply because they were knowledgeable on women's influence in peace contribution in the region. Snowballing was used because it's a good research technique where a small number informants are recruited in order to provide the desired results, and then recruiting more participants with the same characteristics. Purposive sampling ensured that participants were selected based on their relevance to the study's objectives, while snowballing allowed the researcher to access hard-to-reach individuals with specialized knowledge. This dual approach was particularly effective in Thagicu, where community networks are tight-knit, and trust is a critical factor in data collection. The involvement of diverse informants, including land officers and religious leaders, provided a holistic view of the peace-building landscape and women's roles within it. Snowballing was especially useful in identifying women leaders who were actively involved in informal peace-building efforts but not formally recognized, thus enriching the study's findings. The combination of these sampling methods

ensured that the data collected was both representative and detailed, capturing the diverse experiences of Thagicu's residents.

Data Collection: In the community, scheduled interviews with the target population were conducted. The data collection aimed to better understand if women participate in peace-building, and if not, what are some of the barriers that hinder them. Based on this, more information was obtained on contribution of women and causes of land disputes, and how they have affected the people of Thagicu, especially women and children. The first part of the interview addressed respondent's pertinent information and their role in the community. The second part addressed whether women participate in peace-building process in the area. Lastly, the last part of the interview addressed some of the challenges and barriers that hinder women from participating in peace-building on issues related to land disputes. Questionnaires were distributed to targeted women and women who filled out the forms and handed back to the researcher. The data collection process was designed to be participatory and inclusive, ensuring that respondents felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Interviews were conducted in local languages where necessary to accommodate participants' preferences and enhance the quality of responses. Questionnaires were structured to include both open-ended and closed-ended questions, allowing for a mix of qualitative insights and quantifiable data. Focus group discussions were particularly effective in eliciting collective perspectives, especially among older participants who provided historical context on land disputes. The data collection process also incorporated measures to ensure cultural sensitivity, such as engaging community gatekeepers to build trust and facilitate access to respondents. This approach was critical in a region like Thagicu, where historical grievances and mistrust can hinder open communication.

Validity and Reliability: In order to choose questionnaire measuring items, an operational framework was used which resulted in content validity. To complete the pre-test, an additional 10% of the chosen population for study area but not included in the study population was used. Therefore, by analyzing pilot study's results was vital in helping to determine research's instruments validity. From this, the variables that were obtained matched fully those in the conceptual framework by guaranteeing construct validity. Composite coefficient, individual coefficient and Cronbach alpha threshold values were anticipated not to surpass 0.5, 0.7, and 0.8 in that order. To further ensure validity and reliability, the study employed triangulation by cross-referencing data from interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. This approach helped to validate findings by identifying consistent themes across different data sources. The pilot study was conducted in a neighboring sub-county with similar socio-economic characteristics to Thagicu, ensuring that the instruments were tested in a comparable context. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the wording of questions and improve the clarity of instructions, enhancing the overall quality of the data collected. The use of standardized statistical measures, such as Cronbach's alpha, ensured that the questionnaire items were reliable and consistently measured the intended constructs, such as women's participation and barriers to peace-building.

Ethical Approval: Prior to starting the study, the National Commission for Science and Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) had to be notified in order to get a consent letter. Leaders of the local government had to give the researcher authorization to conduct the study in order to comply with the law. To ensure that no one was coerced into participating in the study, the researcher also gave the participants an explanation of the specifics. As a result, each participant attested their willingness to take part in the study by signing a consent form. To preserve their privacy, participant descriptions and other relevant information were kept anonymous. In general, the researcher made it apparent that involvement in the

study was entirely voluntary. Ethical considerations were central to the study's design and implementation. The researcher ensured that participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and potential impacts, fostering transparency and trust. Anonymity was maintained by assigning codes to participants instead of using their names, and all data was stored securely to protect confidentiality. The researcher also took steps to minimize any potential risks to participants, such as emotional distress from discussing sensitive topics like land disputes. Community leaders were consulted throughout the process to ensure that the study respected local customs and norms, further enhancing its ethical integrity.

1.5 Results and Discussions

Response Rates

The response rate was higher than expected. The group of respondents yielded an impressive 80% rate for the researcher. This indicated that out of the 390-sample chosen, 380 the randomly picked demonstrated good interest in study participation, which resulted in almost 100% turnout.

The high response rate reflects the community's strong interest in addressing land disputes and the role of women in peace-building. The willingness of participants to engage in the study suggests a recognition of the importance of these issues and a desire for solutions that involve all community members. The near-100% turnout for interviews and questionnaires indicates that the data collection methods were well-received and accessible, likely due to the researcher's efforts to build trust and ensure cultural sensitivity during the process.

Descriptive Results

The results of this research demonstrated the importance of including women in peace-building efforts in Thagicu Sub-County. Women are part of the society, and thus they need to be involved in peace processes in the Sub-County. However, according to the majority of the respondents, most women involved in peace-building was through unofficial ways like community dialogues and mediations. Only a small percent of women contributed to peace-building formally. The study finds that even though women were willing to be involved in peace processes in the Sub-County, it's only a few that were considered. Patriarchal norms were the biggest hindrances to women participation in peace-building, followed by lack of formal training. Men believed that women have little or no role to play when it comes to peace-building. Other factors included limited resources, under representation in committees, and lastly cultural stereotypes. Most of the women who participated in the study confirmed that little has been done in training women on matters peace. People of Thagicu therefore, needs to be culturally sensitized and this involves empowering women in different capacities. All the responses abstained from the study indicated the need to include women in peace-building. The role of women in society should not only be limited to giving birth and taking care of the family. The descriptive results also revealed specific patterns in women's contributions to peace-building. However, their lack of access to formal platforms limited their ability to influence broader peace processes. The study found that 70% of respondents acknowledged women's informal contributions, such as organizing peace meetings and facilitating inter-clan dialogues, but only 10% reported women's involvement in formal peace committees. This discrepancy highlights the need for structural changes to integrate women into decision-making bodies. The barriers identified, particularly patriarchal norms, were reinforced by cultural practices that view men as the primary decision-makers, often sidelining women's expertise. The lack of formal training was cited by 65% of female respondents as a significant obstacle, suggesting a need for capacity-building programs tailored to women in peace-building roles.

Descriptive Measures

The response from the participants, based on the data collected demonstrated the significance of involving women in peace negotiations. This includes empowering women, doing away with cultural stereotypes, and providing formal training for women. Lack of formal education was one factor why women in Thagicu lagged behind men in almost every aspect. While boys continued with their education, girls underwent female genital mutilation and married off at a young age. From the focused group discussion, the study showed that women were involved peace-building informally through intermarriages. One woman from the Weru Women Group noted that “As a woman married from a different clan, I can talk to both sides and help them see the need for peace”. From the study respondents, 80% of female respondents (28 out of 35) in Thagicu took part in peace negotiations in different ways. Mediations was the most common method used by women in peace-building at 60%, followed closely by community dialogue at 50%. However, in future further studies should use a more diverse and bigger sample sizes to enhance transferability and generalizability. The data also highlighted the role of education as a barrier to women’s contribution in peace building. Approximately 55% of female respondents reported having only primary-level education or less, compared to 30% of male respondents, indicating a significant gender gap in educational attainment. This gap contributes to women’s limited confidence and skills in formal peace-building settings. The focus group discussions further revealed that women’s informal peace-building efforts often go unnoticed because they are not documented or recognized by formal institutions. For instance, women’s roles in organizing community peace forums were cited as critical in preventing escalation of disputes, yet these efforts were rarely acknowledged in official reports. The study also found that 45% of respondents believed that cultural stereotypes, such as the perception that women are unfit for leadership roles, were perpetuated by both men and women in the community, underscoring the need for widespread cultural sensitization campaigns.

Discussion

Land disputes in Thagicu Sub-County emanates from a variety of factors. Based on the evidence gathered from the research, there was a consensus that the role of women in peace-building in Thagicu Sub-County cannot be undermined. Women just like men have the capacity to get involved and solve problems when it comes to conflict. In Thagicu, women contribute a lot in peace-building through advocacy and mediation dialogues at the grassroots level. However, the women’s potential in peace-building processes is constrained by limited access to resources, patriarchal norms and lack of training. The major causes of land disputes according to the study are resource scarcity, historical injustices and ethnic tension. The findings therefore, highlights the need to include women in peace-building in Thagicu Sub-County. Women’s role in society is not only limited to taking care of the family alone. Once empowered and included in peace-building committees, women have the capacity to contribute positively and make sure society is a safe place where people can work and realize that best in them. The discussion of these findings aligns with broader literature on gender and peace-building. For instance, Yadav, (2020) argues that women’s involvement in peace processes leads to more sustainable outcomes because they often prioritize community welfare and long-term reconciliation. In Thagicu, the study’s findings suggest that women’s informal mediation efforts, such as those facilitated through inter-clan marriages, have prevented numerous disputes from escalating into violence. However, the lack of formal recognition and support for these efforts limits their scalability. The study also identified resource scarcity as a key driver of land disputes, with 75% of respondents citing competition over water and

grazing land as a primary cause. Historical injustices, such as colonial-era land dispossession, were mentioned by 60% of respondents as a root cause, highlighting the need for land reforms that address these grievances. The ethnic tensions noted in the study are consistent with findings by Rutto, (2000), who argues that land disputes in Kenya are often exacerbated by ethnic-based political mobilization. To address these challenges, the study suggests integrating women into formal peace structures and providing them with training in conflict resolution and negotiation skills.

1.6 Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that in Thagicu Sub-County, women are indispensable when it comes peace-building arising from land disputes. Despite having full potential, the women are limited due to various reasons. Data from FGDs highlighted women's unique contributions, such as leveraging inter-clan marriages to bridge divides between conflicting groups. The causes of land disputes in Thagicu Sub-County, therefore requires comprehensive solutions that will address both systematic and immediate triggers. The recommendations provided, therefore will provide a platform to empower women, structure land reforms and reform the local institutions. Stakeholders can enhance women participation in peace-building by implementing gender inclusive policies as well as challenging cultural barriers. Generally, the study advocates for an approach to peace-building where women's voice is integral, contributing to cohesive and peaceful Thagicu Sub-County. Once women are included in peace processes, the whole community stands to benefit and move forward. The study's findings reinforce the importance of recognizing women as key actors in peace-building, not only in Thagicu but also in other conflict-prone regions.

1.7 Recommendations

For the policy makers, the study recommended gender inclusion policies. The Kenyan government should ensure there are policies that guarantee women inclusion in land resolution bodies and peace committees. Another recommendation is having advanced land reforms (Community Land Act of 2016) in order to secure communal land rights and reduce land disputes in the community. Along with that, the National Land Commission is recommended to conduct land audits, and this will help to resolve historical boundary disputes. Lastly, to the policy makers the government is required to allocate resources for trainings in peace building not only in Thagicu but also in different parts of the country especially those prone to community disputes. The study also challenges community leaders to change social-cultural barriers. Women are supposed to be integrated into peace structures where their voices will be heard. However, this can only be achieved if women are empowered. Community leaders are also required to support local women organizations as part of the ongoing peace processes. On future research, the study recommends both longitudinal studies and comparative analysis from other communities. The Kenyan government could also partner with NGOs to implement peace-building training programs specifically designed for women, focusing on skills such as negotiation, mediation, and advocacy. For land reforms, the National Land Commission should prioritize digitizing land records to reduce disputes over boundaries and ownership, a strategy that has shown promise in other parts of Kenya, such as Laikipia County. Community leaders should collaborate with women's organizations to create platforms for dialogue, such as regular peace forums, to amplify women's voices. Future research should explore the long-term impact of women's participation in peace-building and compare Thagicu's experiences with other regions, such as West Pokot, where women have played a significant role in resolving pastoralist conflicts. These steps will ensure that women's contributions are not only recognized but also institutionalized for sustainable peace

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